

## UNDERSTANDING HUMAN BEHAVIOUR SERIES -18

Lecture - 18

( duration: 1 hour)

### CROWD BEHAVIOUR: UNDERSTANDING CROWD BEHAVIOUR FOR POLICE WORK

**W**hy does the study of crowd behaviour deserve serious attention by the police ? This is because

1. The police have to deal with crowds at every now and then during law order management.
2. They should have a clear understanding of crowds, crowd behaviour and police action to deal with them. They should have fresh insights into the limits of their power in handling crowds/mobs. Some of the police station actions which seem to have gone beyond the range of police powers and authority have created further complications in law and order management.
3. Crowds, riots and social movements are not to be viewed with contempt by the police. They have their roles both as catalysts and indictors of historical changes and human progress. The narrowly conceived police techniques to manage crowds and crowd behaviour cannot yield good and positive results in the changing and changed social political environments in a democracy.

### CROWDS IN THE CHANGED SOCIAL- POLITICAL MILIEU AND THE POLICE

Just take, a newspaper and enumerate the crowd incidents reported in the press during a period of one year in a particular

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state in India. Riots, mobs, crowds, processions, Jadhvas, dhamas, bundhs, strikes, rallies etc. organised in a South Indian State during a period of one year (1994) show that they number several hundreds and in every such occasion, the police were present to control and manage them. A crowd, according to police understanding of the term, is a gathering of a number of people so closely together as to press upon each other. Accordingly, there can be street crowds. There may be mobs, riots, or panic etc. The nature of these crowds, mobs etc. will be discussed in the lecture that follows. Here a taxonomy of crowds is given below.

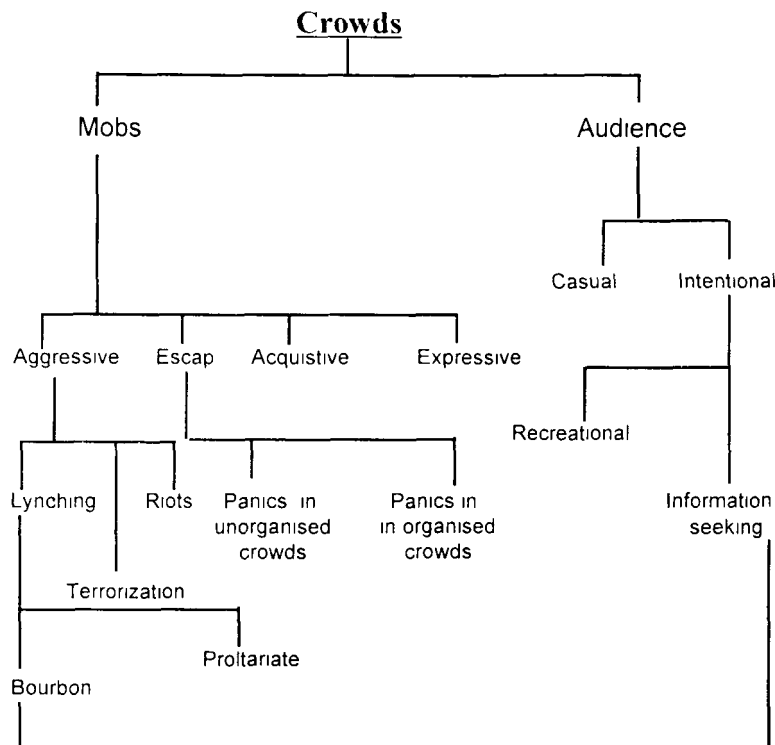
### BROWNS TAXONOMY

(Fig: 17)

Out of 68 crowds, mobs, riots which appeared in the media and in which the police had to play a crucial role, it was found that they originated on issues, grounds or causes on which the police had neither any control nor any say. In other words, the police action was not to solve the basic problems connected with the formation of crowds/ mobs / riots, rather, crucial it was just to put down the energy and heat generated by the situations. Police had to perform no less or more functions in a mob situation. They have the duty to impose some sort of control. For this, at times, the police take some precautionary steps and at other times they take some action - steps and most of the time no precautionary or action- steps at all will be taken by the police. For most of the crowds do not require positive police actions.

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### BROWNS TAXONOMY



### EXPLANATIONS

- 1 Crowds - Large number of persons collected together at a common point of interest
- 2 Mob - A tumultuous crowd liable to acts of lawless and outrage
- 3 Riot - Violent disturbance of the peace by an assembly of persons and frequently involving the attack of one group upon the other

## **BOUNDARIES OF THE CROWD**

### **CROWD BEHAVIOUR AND POLICE BEHAVIOUR**

A group of policemen facing a crowd of men man show the characteristics of a crowd. Police consists of a group of well trained and organised persons and therefore, it is presumed that they should not show crowd characteristics in their behaviour when they face a crowd situation. Some ill- informed policemen, as the allegations goes, behave sometimes just like the members of the crowd so much so that their (mis) behaviour caused serious law and order problems. Researches conducted on police behaviour at the spot of a mob violence ( mob b is a crowd) shows-

1. every policeman, just like a member in the mob, feels a sense of invincible power. Here the policeman's sense of responsibility disappears and he behaves with surcharged energy and over packed emotionalisms. He wants to be anonymous in the crowd so much so that he uses excessive force in suppressing the mob. He is not bothered about the after-effects of his action as he knows that the responsibility for the excessive use of force will be fixed only on use some specific members in the police. He is anonymous and is not concerned with anything.
2. Once the police initiate their strategy to suppress a mob every one in the police behaves just like all others. The mental state possessed by one person spreads to others like an infectious disease. A lathy - charge with a mental state to cause minimum force is not usually seen. rather what is seen is a likely charge to suppress the mob and nobody is bothered about the amount of force used. They use any amount of force to suppress the mob.

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3. Policeman involved in a mob control operation is suggestible just like a member who is involved in the mob. The policeman loses his conscious personality and he obeys all suggestions which he receives from his colleagues/ superiors. He behaves in a mob- control operation may be in utter contradiction to his character and habits. Yet he does. Suggestibility is what works here in the policeman.

An understanding about the crowd, behaviour and police behaviour in controlling crowds etc. becomes essential for establishing good police- public relationship. The lectures that follow will deal more about the crowds and crowd behaviour.

### **CLASS ROOM EXERCISES**

1. Collect the news paper reports about crowd behaviour and hold discussions about how the press has reported about police strategies in managing and controlling crowds.
2. The only antidote for poisonous rumour is fact. Get the facts promptly and circumstances as widely as possible. This is an advice given by International Association of Chiefs of Police. Discuss the applicability of this advice to the police behaviour during a mob- control operation.

## **DISCUSSION**

1. Police accountability after a mob- control operation.
2. Take a report of an Inquiry Commission and study how did the police behave in the situation. Discuss the plus and minus aspects of police strategies.

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## **NOTES**

1. Taken from Collective Behaviour: Crowds and Social Movement by Stanley Mullgram and Hans Toch, from the Handbook of Social Psychology. Amerind Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd. Delhi, 1975.
2. Oxford English Dictionary, 1993