

UNDERSTANDING HUMAN BEHAVIOUR SERIES- 19

Lecture-19

(Duration: 1 hour)

CROWDS: TYPES AND MOBS

A traditional definition of crowd may show that "a crowd is a gathering of a considerable number of persons around a centre or point of common attraction" (imball). This would say that physical proximity of the members is very essential to form a crowd. Sociologists may now say that physical proximity of individuals is not at all necessary or essential to crowd behaviour in a society where means of communication is very fast. "What is crucial to the understanding of the crowd is the highly emotional responses of individuals when they are released from the restraints that usually inhibit extreme behaviour". A communal issue that may take place in one part of the country or a political tension that may erupt in a city in India may create a lot of complications and law and order problems in many parts of the country. The crowds are formed and they show their behaviour in many ways.

POLICE AND THE CROWDS

In a country like India, the police may see a number of crowds which are harmless and as such they do not call for police attention. While patrolling is conducted, it is possible to see people collected on the foot-path or on the road-side. On foot-paths, there are a number of way-side sellers, people who promote their products, who preach religion, who sit as soothsayers or who perform magic etc. The curious people just go there, look at them to know what is going on, make some comments and push off there. This sort of crowds are

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called casual crowds and the police may show their goodness in permitting such harmless crowds in cities, if they do not create obstructions for the people to freely use the foot-path. Sometimes, policemen come in groups and pressurise such people to quit the spot immediately. Since such crowds are formed temporarily it is upto the police to decide whether or not police action is necessary in such occasions. In front of the theatres, markets, schools etc. one may notice this sort of casual crowds.

HOSTILE CROWD (MOB)

A few years ago, a boy caught by the police was tortured to death in police custody. Knowing the death of a boy in custody a number of people gathered in front of the police station. The people were an unorganised throng willing to be led into lawlessness. Such crowds may compose of few determined leaders, active participants and a

number of spectators. Often, such crowds turn into mobs and create police problems. In the above incident, police had to lathy-charge and finally to fire at people which in turn created very several law and order problems. The individuals who constitute a hostile crowd are intensely emotional and therefore no amount of reasoning may work with them.

ESCAPE CROWD(MOB)

A few years ago, there was a heavy flood in the sub-urbs of a capital city in a south Indian State. A radio-broad cast was given and the people were instructed to evacuate. Terror-stricken by the radio-broadcast, people left their homes and their villages. Some police officers too were found responsible for giving the radio-broadcast. but later they were blamed by the press and people for creating such as scene. The crowd evacuating from some real or imagined threat becomes not only a police problem but also

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problems for many others including the health, municipal/ co-operation authorities etc. The crowd in such occasions will be disorganised. There is no sense of responsibility for anybody. Survival instinct is found very powerful operating in the members of the crowd. People show these symptoms when they turn away from a scene of a lathy-charge or firing by police.

ACQUISITIVE CROWDS (MOB)

An acquisitive crowd is motivated by a desire to acquire something. Examples are foot-riots and looting. In connection with a communal riot. in a city people belonging to one community rushed into the shops of people belonging to their hostile community and started looting. It became a big law and order issue so much so that the army had to be called to re-establish peace in the disturbed area.

EXPRESSIVE CROWDS(MOB)

Strikes, rallies, processions, political conventions, religious revivals etc. are seen everywhere. People participating in such crowds express their emotions in very many ways- slogans, by dancing, by chanting, etc. There is no need for any police action in any such situations. "O.K., please proceed" should- be the mature police attitude as the desire for violence is not generally seen in the members constituting expressive crowds. But, in order to create problems, some anti-social elements may throw stones at the crowd or cause tension among the members so that the crowd may turn into a mob which is a lawless crowd.

Police may remember that an expressive crowd can cause havoc if not managed properly. Some misbehaviours on the part of

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policemen or tactical errors on their part have turned expressive crowds into riotous mobs. Police had to fire at people to calm down the situation. A policeman belonging to a different religion made an unwanted comment on people conducting a religious procession. It resulted into a very serious law and order issue, which could be put down only by firing. The news about the police comment, riots and police - firing flew to other areas and resulted in the worsening of further law and order situation. The police have to develop ego-strength to tolerate even damaging comments against the police. The people are expressing their emotions and pent-up energies and let us not stop it. This should be the attitude of the police towards people involved in expressive crowds, ours is a democracy which allows associations and as such conducting a procession or making some noise when they do so are not offences. Take a tolerating attitude to such activities of the people unless they create real law and order problems.

CROWDS AND MOBS

Police action becomes inevitable in the case of mobs, because mobs are different from crowds. The essential difference between a crowd and a mob is that the crowd is law abiding while the mob is not. The mob takes law into their hands. A mob has been defined as "a crowd whose members, under the stimulus of intense excitement or agitation, lose their sense of reason and respect for law and follow leaders to lawless acts" Another definition of mob is that "it is an assemblage of many people acting in a violent and disorderly manner, defying the law, committing or threatening to commit destruction or personal violence. A mob is an unlawful assembly of persons who are gathered together to commit or attempt to commit an unlawful act". Thus, it may be noted that a mob has (1) organisation, (2) leadership (3) common motives for actions and (4)

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control of actions by emotions. The mobs are characteristically emotional and frequently irrational.

POLICE, CROWD AND MOB

A crowd is not, a mob, but has a potentiality to turn into a mob. Mishandling of a crowd by the police can convert a crowd into a mob. Police are trained to handle crowd and are taught lathi-drill and mob-operation techniques. The British wanted to suppress the crowd which raised voice against the foreign rule in India. They introduced jobs and cuts in the lathi-drill. Cuttings are made on the jugular veins and on the head and jabs are to the stomach and to the mouth. One wonders whether or not such cruel cuts and jabs can be given to the citizens by the democracy's police ! A jab in the way suggested by the British can cause serious injury to the Jabbed and

so do the cuts. Hence, it is upto the police to use the minimum force during crowd control operations. Again, bayonet-training is given in some of the police training institutions although the Central Committee on police Training has already recommended that such training should be stopped. Yet, the bayonet-training is still imparted in training colleges. Use of excessive force on a crowd / mob may invite adverse criticisms against the police and surely will damage the police image in public's eye. In the code of conduct for the police in India, it has been laid down "that the prime duty of the police is to prevent crime and disorder and the police must recognise that the test of their efficiency is the absence of both and not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with them". Again, the code of conduct puts down "In securing the observance of law or in maintaining order, the police should, as far as practicable use the methods of persuasion, advice, and warning. When the application of force becomes inevitable, only the irreducible

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minimum of force required in the circumstance should be used". In fact, the police should be guided by these principles when they deal with crowd and mob in the society.

CLASSROOM EXERCISES

1. Discuss the strategies which should be taken/ adopted by police to handle a crowd/ mob.
2. What actions will be initiated to extend police support in natural calamities?
3. How do a casual crowd turn into a hostile crowd in the following situations-
 - a) lock- up deaths.
 - b) custodial violence.
4. Discuss the use and misuse of the crowd-control tactics taught to police trainees to manage a crowd / mob in society.

NOTES

1. William F. Ogburn and Mayer F. Nimkoff, A Handbook of Sociology. Eurasia, Publishing House (Pvt) Ltd. New Delhi, 55, 1972.
2. James Vadckumchery and John Kattakyam. Human Behaviour and law Enforcement. Ashish, Delhi, 1995.
3. Raymond M. Momboise, Riots Revolts and Insurrections. Charles C. Thomas, Springfield. 1970.
4. Raymond M. Momboise, op.cit.
5. Raymond M. Mombise op.cit.
6. James Vadackumcherry, Criminology and Penology. Kariali, Thiruvananthapuram, 1983.