

## UNDERSTANDING HUMAN BEHAVIOUR SERIES - 20

Lecture-20

(Duration: 1 hour)

### CROWD BEHAVIOUR : POLICE APPLICATIONS AND CROWD CHARACTERISTICS

A crowd has a number of characteristics, the understanding of which may enable the police to manage and manipulate crowds. They are the shape, internal structure, rates of growth and dispersion and boundary conditions." Any crowd can be seen as a group of points coming into aggregation, growing in size at specifiable rates, evolving new shapes and possessing certain self-distributing dynamics, coalescing out of larger throngs in a specifiable manner, with boundaries that are sharp or diffuse, permeable, closed to points laying outside the boundary".

Think about a traffic accident. Immediately after the accident, people collect there and they do it in a circular form- i.e. a ring. There cannot be a square crowd, for a spontaneous grouping a people can take only a ring shape. People who come first go to the centre and those who come late tend to be at the fringe. The same thing happens in any scenes of crime. Since the people who collect at the spot are not interested ones, they do not create any special problems for the police. Usually an appeal made to them to clear the spot does not often work and as such the investigating officers usually ask the people gathered there to furnish to them their names and addresses. When such a request is made. the people are not interested to aid the police, vacate the place and thus enable the police to guard and protect the scene of crime.

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#### **BOUNDARIES**

There will be a boundary for every crowd and it defines the limit or extent of the crowd. Boundaries of the crowd has two major characteristics and they are:

1. permeability and 2. sharpness.

Think about a street corner meeting organised by a political party. In such a meeting the crowd boundary is open (or closed) to new persons.. People want to listen to the speaker come closer to the centre. This is called penetration. These may be accretion as well and it refers to the clustering of persons at the fringes. Police need to interfere in such crowds only if it causes traffic problems or problems for pedestrians to use the road.

Sharpness means that the crowd boundary is clearly demarcated. This takes place in a procession which comes to a particular place and the police are prepared to stop the members from further

proceeding. When the police stop them, the clash is largely a boundary confrontation. Most of what is dramatic takes place at the interface. Here the police catch hold of people, their flags and sometimes there may be exchange of heated expressions and blows. Usually it is done with the front rank of demonstrators. As a rule, the crowd gets dispersed after an initial encounter. Sometimes, it so happens that the demonstrators cross the boundary and if this takes place, there is the possibility of the clash becoming worse. In such a situation, the crowd becomes a mob and there may be stone throwing, destruction of property, lathi-charge etc. Hence, it is advisable that the police guard the boundary before they reach the area where the confrontation is likely to take place. Stopping the demonstration much ahead of the spot of confrontation may also yield good result.

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### **INTERNAL STRUCTURES**

In a place where large number of people gather or expected to gather, it is advisable to divide the internal boundaries into several sub-groups or sub-structure. In political conventions or in gathering addressed by V V I P s, this arrangement is made and sufficient policemen are posted to guard the sub-groups. Both policemen in uniform and mufti will have to be posted inside the sub-group and at the boundaries of these sub-groups. People collected in a place may be engaged in various activities. Some may be attending the speaker, some may be interested in private conversation, some may be hauling shouting slogans or making noises. Police need not be bothered about any of those things particularly when they do not create any law and order problems and are not a threat to the speaker.

### **POLARISATION**

Polarisation refers to the mental unity of the crowd. Attention of the crowd is an aspect of polarisation. If all the members of a crowd are listening to a speaker or attending a funeral (cremation) function facing an object, it is said that the crowd is highly polarised. On the other hand if the members of the crowd face many different directions it is not polarised.

Researches may show that polarisation is the centre of a crowd than the fringes.

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### **DENSITY**

The number of people within a specified area is called the density of the crowd. The police may have to send reports about the density of people in gatherings particularly during election campaigns. The density is usually calculated as follows.

$$\text{Density} = \frac{\text{Number of persons present}}{\text{Area which the crowd occupies.}}$$

Usually it is seen that one person may require 4 sq. feet of area when there is no loud speaker and 5.7 sq. feet per person when there are loud speakers. It may vary from 6.5 to 8.5 sq. feet depending upon some factors - physical, ideological etc. For example, in a crowd consisting of men and women mixed, there may require more space for a single individual to occupy and that is what one may see in a convention ground where families (instead) of individuals may form units in the crowd..

### **RATIONALISING THE CROWD**

Police may have to make rationalising crowds in many occasions. This is to regulate the relationship of crowds to physical constraints. Many methods are used "First come, first served, women and children first and then the male population" etc. are some of the ways rationalisation of the crowd is made.

### **CROWDS IN MOTION**

Processions arranged during religious festivals, political conventions etc. may have crowds in motion. It is estimated that people walk ordinarily at 4 feet per second. The speed may be lower

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if the density of the crowd is more (rises) Researches show that there exists a relationship between walking speeds, crowd density and time of the day.

### **ANONYMITY IN CROWDS**

In a crowd, anonymity becomes a projected characteristic. Since there is the coverage of anonymity it is possible that some people release many of their anti-social impulses. This is what the policeman faces when he manages a crowd. While he manages a crowd, somebody may pelt stones at him. Surely, it irritates the policeman and he may immediately react back which ultimately results in lathi-charges or firings. A member in a crowd cannot act individually as he is expected to behave only collectively with the crowd. If he behaves individually, he may be singled out from the crowd.

Since there is the anonymity, police may find it extremely difficult to identify the individuals who participated in the crowd.

Police in the west spray a fluorescent powder over the participants so that an examination of their dress under UV lamp may aid them to confirm the fact whether or not he is present in the crowd. Of course, video-camera, movie-camera, photography etc. can be used for making identifications.

### **MORE CHARACTERISTIC OF CROWDS**

Police officers/ men may understand that a crowd exercises dramatic levelling effect on its members. In a political rally or a religious procession, there may be people from different walks of life

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with a lot of individual differences in education status, role, financial position etc. But all of them become alike in a crowd.

A member in a crowd has a conscious part in his personality. The conscious layer of his personality is found to be superficial -of course it is the layer which makes the people to think about their differences among themselves- and in a crowd, the conscious layer gets evaporated. The result is that differences among the members are forgotten. The same thing happens in police as well. The police is a group and when they face a crowd, some of the crowd characteristics creep into the police personality where the superficial differences between the officers and men get themselves evaporated and they become one in the police crowd.

Crowds are found intellectually inferior to the members who make it. They manifest all the properties of a retarded mind. A crowd is influenced by suggestion and swayed by slogans. This may not be the behaviour pattern of the individuals if they were not in the crowd.

Ordinary, peace-loving and fair-minded people become capable of violent actions when they are in a crowd. Exaggerated emotionalism and surcharged energy also come to play in members who constitute crowds.

### **CLASS ROOM EXERCISES**

1. Enumerate the characteristics of the following crowds and suggest police strategies in dealing with each one of them.

- a. Crowd in front of a theatre.
- b. Crowd in a bus station.
- c. Crowd in a bazaar.
- d. Crowd in a labour dispute area.

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- e. Crowd in a college campus.
- f. Crowd in a place of worship.
- g. Crowd in a national festival.

## **DISCUSSION**

1. Bandobust arrangement for a V.V.I.P.
2. "Policemen posted to manage crowds and crowd behaviour behave worse than the members constituting a crowd behave in all circumstances."
3. CROWD CONTROL Techniques.

## **NOTES**

1. Stanley Milgram and Hans Toch. Collective Behaviour Crowds and Social Movements, form The Handbook of Social Psychology by Gardner Lindzey and Elliot Aronson (eds.) Amerind Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd. Delhi, 1975.