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VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

I salute my good old Punjab Police

The part played by cops during the lockdown has temporarily obliterated the negative image born of the deprivational role assigned to law-enforcers. My fond wish is that the 'temporary' mutates, like the virus mutated, into permanent!

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Dinkar Gupta joined the Indian Police Service in 1987. He was allotted the state of Punjab. I was the Punjab Police chief in 1987 but I met Dinkar, as he now reminded me, only in 1988 when he and his fellow probationers arrived in the state's Police Training School at Phillaur to learn how terrorism was being dealt with.

Today, Dinkar Gupta is the state's Director General of Police. What has warmed the cockles of an old policeman's heart is that this young man, who joined the service as I was retiring, was shaped in the mould of a social service provider! I read in The Tribune about the compassionate work the Punjab Police under Dinkar's leadership was doing, feeding the hungry and the distressed during the Covid-19 lockdown. I phoned Dinkar and commended his efforts and his approach to policing.

The Punjab Police had suffered a sudden jolt when SI Harjeet Singh lost one of his hands to a Nihang attack on policemen enforcing the lockdown. Dinkar and his colleagues ensured that the best surgeons were assigned to the case. The SI's hand was restored to his arm! But Dinkar did not stop there. He asked each officer and man to sport a badge that read "I am Harjeet". And policemen went around distributing meals and dry rations and ended up feeding more than nine crores of the hungry and the distressed.

One policewoman opened a 'langar', a tradition associated with the basic principles of Sikhism, in her own home in Amritsar. She fed countless residents who were rendered hungry because of the coronavirus and the unavoidable lockdown that followed. Since the population of Punjab is three crores, mathematically it works out to three meals served to each resident by the police till the end of April!

In Punjab, my old friend, Capt Amarinder Singh, needs to be recognised because of his unstinted support to Dinkar in his endeavour. Different social and religious organisations, including NGOs and gurdwaras, supported the police in this mission of mercy.

In Mumbai, too, my young friend (I have known him since his boyhood), Nitai Mehta of the NGO Praja approached me for police help to distribute 11,000 dry ration kits because he rightly felt that the police network covered the entire city and the police would be the best judges to decide which family was in dire need. My own NGO, the PCGT, works closely with Praja throughout the year. At the time of the pandemic, the need to join forces assumed greater urgency.

My co-trustee in the PCGT, Sanjeev Dayal, a former DGP of Maharashtra, got into the act and ensured that the police got on board. Vinay Choube, the Joint CPL&O, appointed Deputy Commissioner Prabhakar Kadam to be the pointperson in the police head office and Kadam did a marvellous job fixing responsibility for the distribution of kits in each of the 95 police stations, each of the 13 police zones and the five regions. My daughter, who represented the PCGT in the venture, tells me that Kadam's model can be a case study for future MBA students!

Mumbai is the worst affected city in India. The city's policemen have been on the road ever since the lockdown was announced, bravely enforcing the curfew. In the process, 147 police personnel have tested positive for the coronavirus and three have died. But the part these men played in identifying and distributing kits of dry rations has given such a big boost to the police image that it has temporarily obliterated the

negative image born of the deprivational role assigned to law-enforcers in the scheme of things.

My fond wish is that the 'temporary' mutates, like the virus mutated, into permanent! That is a really tall order. Even as the Delhi Police struggles to improve its negative image, magnified during the recent forced march of migrant labourers back to their homes, the government has goaded it to target Muslims, particularly Muslim women activists who led the protests at Shaheen Bagh against the CAA, NRC and NPR. Tales of high-handed behaviour, even one of torture, are circulating in the media. Pity the Delhi Police! If it had reported to Arvind Kejriwal and not to Amit Shah, it could have been spared this image-destroying pressure to which it feels obliged to succumb!

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