

Draft

Best Practice

**THEEKRI PEHRA in Haryana –Effective Community Monitoring to contain
COVID-19**

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WHO declared Novel Corona virus Disease (COVID-19) outbreak as a pandemic on 11 March 2020., It reiterated the call for countries to take immediate actions and scale up response to treat, detect and reduce transmission to save people's lives. Necessary steps have been taken to ensure to face the challenges and threat posed by the growing pandemic of COVID-19 the Corona Virus by government of India and state governments.

Haryana has been able to contain the spread of the virus in the state with strong and unified command at state level, effective implementation at district level and active support of its people across towns and villages. The most important factor in preventing the spread of the virus locally is to empower the citizens with the right information and making them aware about their roles and responsibilities . Once community takes ownership to drive the state agenda, the results are extremely positive.

Haryana has effectively utilized its age-old practice of "Theekri-Pehra", which is supported by **Section 3 of the Punjab Village and Small Town and Patrol Act, 1918** to contain the spread of the highly contagious virus .The Act empowers the Deputy Commissioner of a district to direct villages and towns for community patrolling for purposes of public safety. *"If Deputy Commissioner is of the opinion that in a village, special measures need to be taken to secure public safety, he has the power to make an order requiring all "able-bodied adult male inhabitants" to patrol the village. The time period of the applicability of the order is up to the Deputy Commissioner and the maximum time period is up to one year. Those who do not follow the provisions will be liable under sections 9 and 11 of the Act, which means they may have to pay a fine imposed by the village panchayat or a fine imposed by the deputy commissioner."*

The department of Revenue and Disaster Management , Government of Haryana issued a Memo no ER-DMC-PO 111- 2020 dated 31/03/2020 to all district Magistrates of the state for organising TheekriPehra in villages under their jurisdictions and ensure isolation of persons returning from other states to their homes (Annexure A.) By effectively observing this old age practice local people have taken upon themselves the community policing role and practiced patience and self-control during the lockdown. Self -discipline combined with the effective arrangements made by the administration have gone a long way in preventing the spread of virus in the state

TheekriPehra (Community Vigil) is the round the clock activity performed by the selected able bodied male volunteers from the village for the Community Policing. Before the Theekri-Pehra is implemented a proper Munadi (announcement) is made to this effect in the area. Volunteers are identified as per the requirement and they are assigned the patrolling of area as per the roster prepared by the Gram Panchayat or Nambardar. Village Chowkidar is actively involved in the process. Volunteers are assigned the area and duties to be performed under the guidance of Gram Panchayat and elder men of the village.

The volunteers are required to perform their duties selflessly and without any remuneration. They can do door to door survey to procure required information and do Nakabandi to check entry to untoward elements or outsiders.

Haryana has 6848 villages under 6222 Gram Panchayats. Highest number of villages are in District Ambala, (486) followed by Bhiwani, (450) including CharkhiDadri. Most of the Gram Panchayats complied with the orders of District Magistrates, issued under **Section 3 of Panjab Village and Small Town Patrol Act 1918** under the active supervision of the concerned Gram

Panchayats and under the guidance of field functionaries. People living in the rural area welcomed this step of the government and rendered whole hearted support for the community vigil. Even the volunteers who were put on duty felt privileged to be associated with this onerous duty.

A case study of Ambala district is given below to explain the process followed and results achieved:

Ambalahas four sub divisions; four Tehsils, three Sub-Tehsils and six development blocks. There are 397 Gram Panchayats in the district with a population of around 11 lakh as per 2011 census. TheekriPehras (community vigil) were introduced by Deputy commissioner Ambala by invoking Section 3 of the Punjab Village and Small Town and Patrol Act, 1918 (Annexure –B) in order to ensure that all villages meticulously monitor the movement of people ,enforce social distancing norms ,spread general awareness of do's and don'ts of COVID-19. In compliance with the orders of the Deputy Commissioner DDPO with the help of BDPOs issued orders to all the Panchayats in their jurisdiction to ensure the norms prescribed by the authorities are followed. The copy of the letter issued by the BDPOs to the Panchayat is placed at Annexure C.

Photographs showing the volunteers on TheekariPehra (Community Vigil) in various villages:



Villagers are at THEEKRI PEHRA



Villagers are at TheekhriPehra by maintaining social distancing



Theekhripehra is being observed at the another village by following instructions

The patrolling points /places are identified in such a way that every person on duty has an eye to eye contact with another party and on the hearing distance of the another party .Their job role is to check any person entering / going out of the village. They may ask about the whereabouts, Adhaar number, purpose of visit to village etc. to the intruder/ stranger/ guest who wants to enter the village. Then contact is established with sarpanch /Nambardar/ man / person whose guests have come. They are stopped on the phirni i.e. the circular pathway around the village habitation which has entry point of the village. After proper verification guest record is maintained in a register. These Theekri-Pehra volunteers are also equipped with necessary items with them like whistle, torch, stick lantern etc. This is a kind of community police of the village, which empowers villagers with the right to intervene to ensure safety of their villages.. It is a pure voluntary service to the village

Following important points emerged from the TheekriPehra being observed in the villages of Ambala.

- All Villages in Ambala are maintaining and making people aware of the social distancing through TheekriPehra, according to norms prescribed by authorities.
- The villagers are also patrolling in their villages themselves and ensuring that all social distancing is strictly maintained.
- All villagers are following safety precautions which include wearing masks, using sanitizers or washing their hands regularly and proper cleaning of all common areas.
- Villagers take shifts to ensure that no outside vehicles or people enter the village without required permissions.
- In view of these patrols, movement in the villages is restricted and people leave their homes only for emergency services or essential needs.
- Strict vigil is kept on all intra and inters village travel.
- In order to ensure that no villagers are required to leave the geographical boundaries of the village during lockdown and economic activities do not suffer arrangements for supply of essential provisions are also routed through people on patrol duty linked to ward level committees.
- All precautions are being taken by the villagers through community mobilization with adequate support from all the authorities in order to ensure that there is no spread of Covid-19 in the area.
- The vegetables grown in the village are offered to village members first then can be sent out for selling
- A vendor coming from outside needs to carry Aadhar card, and is allowed to enter only when he is wearing mask and has washed his hands or sanitised.
- Any person who is coming from outside (abroad/other state/cities) will be home quarantined for 14 days
- For the quarantine purposes, Govt Schools and Community centres are being used which are properly sanitized and maintained
- Though villages are self sufficient, the Mask, Sanitizers, Torches for night have been provided by respective BDPOs for patrol duty.
- Six villages namely Kala-Amb, Bhuni, Tepla, Panjokhara Sahib, Kashierakalan and Patvi have been considered as best villages from the six blocks on the basis of their effective performance. These villages have also managed to get an exemption of rents of nearly 150 migrant labourers to check their movement from the villages by convincing the landowners about danger to public safety and to follow government advisory on the subject. Their names have been recommended to Government for due recognition.
- Panjokhara Sahib and Bhuni villages are being sanitized three times a day with sodium hydrochloride and also arranged free food for 150- 200 people every day for migrant labour (Annexure- D)

Similarly, DDPO, Kurukshetra has reported that “Theekari-Pehra” has been ensured in all 393 GramPanchayats to keep round the clock vigil and maintain record of everyone who enters and leaves the village. They also monitor the vendors coming to the villages to sell essentials. 8 to 12 volunteers have been identified and are equipped with masks and sanitizers. In all 985 volunteers have been put on duty in the district. *As a result of these efforts 306 persons with travel history were identified and timely quarantined.*

- DDPO, Hissar has reported that as many as 579 volunteers have been put on duty in 115 villages of various police stations as per requirement for “TheekariPehra”.
- DDPO, Gurugram has reported that all 75 villages in Pataudi Block of the district are under community vigil by the volunteers from these villages under “TheekariPehra.”

- District Rohtak reports that all the 71 Gram Panchayats falling in Blocks Meham, LakhanaMajra and Kalanaur have been directed to depute at least four volunteers in each village for “TheekariPehra”. DDPO, Sirsa has also reported that “TheekariPehra” is being ensured in all the 338 Gram Panchayats of the district.
- Sonapat and Panipat districts have also made similar arrangements in their panchayats.
- DDPO, Jhajjar has intimated “Theekari-Pehra” has been ensured in all 250 villages of the district. Volunteers are patrolling in the villages to ensure social distancing, following safety precautions and taking all measures to avoid the spread of disease. It has raised the level of awareness of both the disease and its prevention among the residents.



Villagers are at THEEKRI PAHRA

It is worth mentioning that due to this state wide community vigil, there has been social distancing in rural areas, people could be persuaded to stay in and a number of Covid-19 suspects could be identified and quarantined. People were educated to wear mask, wash their hands frequently and maintain personal hygiene.

Needless to add that the orders for “TheekariPehra” or Community Vigil proclaimed under the Panjab Village and Small Town Patrol Act 1918 have proved this age old and time tested practice as a significant instrument to bring about a change and also to achieve what could not have been achieved even through coercive measures..

- As on date seven districts of the State are Covid affected. There are only 108 active Covid patients with 56.7 percent recovery rate against 16.38 per cent of all India rate and with 0.79 death rate against national average of 3.15, Haryana is certainly in comfortable zone. Further more tests per million of population in Haryana are 548 against all India average of 304. Doubling rate of Haryana is also 13.15 days against all India rates of 7.5 days. These facts amply prove that due precautions have been taken by the people at large and “TheekariPehra” has been of great use.
- Accordingly contribution of the community vigil in bringing about this satisfactory state of affairs can hardly be undermined. It is also needed to be stated that this endeavour of the state has been applauded by the media. It has also been adopted by the Khap Panchayats on call of Convener, Rashtriya Maha Khap Maha Panchayat. Khaps have told the people to postpone the marriages. They have been advised not to bring cattle on the village ponds for drinking water and not sit and talk with each other in a group (Indian Express 30th March). Similarly

Tehelka Web Desk 16th April states “Jhajjar in Haryana is one such district where the local people have practised patience and self control during the lock down with discipline combined with the effective arrangements made by the district administration during the first phase of lock down, resulting in not a single Corona Virus positive case here as yet”.

The purpose of associating rural community and activating common man in the village was achieved and objectives mentioned below were achieved

1. The residents in the village stay in the houses during the lock down and come out only to buy essentials or in acute emergencies.
2. They maintain social and physical distancing.
3. They help in identifying the Corona suspects and report to authorities and also to take preventive measures to avoid the spread of disease.
4. They help in identifying the outsiders coming to their villages from other states especially with travel history.
5. They make due compliance of the stipulations proclaimed under Section 144 in letter and spirit

It became a true example of responsible self governance. State was able to motivate community to take ownership of the task and relieved government agencies to engage in other tasks of disaster management It is a sustainable model for any disaster management as it scores very high on building awareness and inculcating correct desirable behaviour pattern among people at large.

The Way Forward

Last but not the least, it requires to be mentioned that Punjab Village & Small Towns Patrol Act 1918 is applicable only to the Gram Panchayats and Small Towns of the State whereas it is equally relevant and required for bigger towns and metros in such eventualities. “TheekriPehra” can very well be envisaged and implemented by Municipal Councillors with the help of the R.W.A’s or similar associations in HUDA sectors, Group Housing Societies, localities and urban areas on the similar lines. Hence, the need of hour is to amend the Punjab Village and Small Town Patrol Act 1918 accordingly to bring the bigger towns and metros in its ambit.

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Department of Revenue & Disaster Management

(Govt. of Haryana)

New Secretariat Building Haryana, Sector 17, Chandigarh-160017

URGENT

Memo No.ER-DMC-PO-III-2020/ *Spd-III*
Chandigarh, dated *31-3-20 20*

To

All the District Magistrates in the State.

Subject: To organise Theekari Pehra in Villages under their jurisdiction & ensure Quarantine/Isolation of persons returning from other States to their homes.

Kindly refer to the above subject. In view of the ongoing lockdown on account of Corona Virus Disease-19, it is essential that residents of village who were living outside the State/India and have returned to their homes are put in 14 days quarantine/isolation. Further no unauthorized persons, should not enter the village in view of COVID-19 related lockdown.

You are, therefore, directed to organize Theekari Pehra at all villages of your district till the lockdown period upto and including 14th April 2020. Daily report must be received in your office from the village Chowkidar (s) and Numberdar (s). A consolidated report must also be sent to this office on the official e-mail covid19.sdma@gmail.com

If any untoward incident/activity is noted, it may be informed to the nearest Police post/police Station. Similarly, if any suspicious person/unauthorized person is noticed trying to enter the village, he/she may be handed over to the nearest Police Post/ Police Station

These instructions must be strictly followed.

Sandeep Sharma
Superintendent (DM Cell)

for Additional Chief Secretary & Financial Commissioner to Govt.,
Haryana, Revenue & Disaster Management Department

A copy is forwarded to :-

1. Secretary to the Hon'ble CM, Haryana
2. PS to Hon'ble Dy. CM, Haryana
3. PS to Hon'ble Home Minister, Haryana
4. PS to W/CS
5. PSCM
6. ACS, Home
7. PS, Development and Panchayats
8. All Divisional commissioners in the State
9. CP/IGPs
10. Director, Development and Panchayats
11. All SPs in the State
12. DGIPR for wide publicity