**Behind the Veil of Acquittals**

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The dynamic between criminals and the police can be likened to a perpetual cat-and-mouse game. While lawbreakers engage in mischievous activities, attempting to evade arrest and detection, law enforcement strives to apprehend them and place them behind bars. In Pakistan, the police frequently boast about capturing numerous dacoits, robbers, and thieves, yet the evident question remains: if these claims are accurate, why does the overall crime rate not exhibit a noticeable decline? Incidents of dacoities, robberies, and thefts persist with unwavering regularity. The crux of the issue lies in the fact that many apprehended criminals are subsequently acquitted. Upon regaining their freedom, these individuals resurface with increased determination, enhanced technical skills, and fortified networks of seasoned criminals. Not only do they re-offend, but they do so with a strategic approach, having learned from their past mistakes and ensuring that their modus operandi avoids prior pitfalls that led to their apprehension. The subsequent question that arises is: why do these criminals consistently get acquitted? The prevailing view attributes this issue to a widespread problem with the investigative process conducted by the police. Investigation officers often find themselves held accountable for these acquittals, facing punitive measures as a consequence.
Upon closer examination, a significant revelation emerges: in the majority of cases, criminals secure acquittals due to the non-pursuance of cases by the complainants. When individuals fall victim to dacoities, robberies, or thefts, their level of engagement remains high until the criminals are apprehended. However, a noteworthy shift occurs when the criminals are indeed apprehended. The complainants, now eager to see the recovery of their looted or snatched possessions, place a heightened emphasis on swift action by the police. At this juncture, a candid confession emerges: as complainants, there is a tacit expectation for the police to employ assertive tactics, even resorting to third-degree measures, to expedite the recovery process. Paradoxically, this expectation creates a delicate dilemma for law enforcement. If the police utilise forceful methods, there is public outcry against the perceived brutality, with accusations of human rights violations. On the contrary, if the police refrain from such tactics, they are openly accused of colluding with criminals.
The observed phenomenon, where complainants’ interest in a case diminishes significantly after a successful recovery, is further complicated by a prevailing practice and cultural norm. In this context, influential figures, often referred to as ‘Noteables,’ actively intervene in the aftermath of a crime. Their role involves persuading the complainant to forgive the accused, asserting that forgiveness is a virtuous trait. Leveraging their power and influence, these Notables employ various tactics, including emotional manipulation, to sway the complainant’s decision. They emphasise the moral high ground of forgiveness, portraying it as a noble and benevolent act. However, when such persuasive efforts prove insufficient, a more coercive undertone emerges. Veiled threats are employed, insinuating potential repercussions if the complainant persists in pursuing legal action. The implicit message conveyed is that it is in the complainant’s best interest to forgive, as the alternative may result in the criminal’s eventual acquittal, and in such a scenario, the complainant could face the added burden of the criminal’s enmity. This intricate interplay of power dynamics, societal expectations, and potential consequences places the complainant in a challenging position, where personal safety and the pursuit of justice become entangled in a complex web of social pressure and influence. Consequently, criminals get acquitted. This cycle of arrest, acquittal, and resurgence perpetuates a resilient criminal ecosystem, contributing to the ongoing challenges faced by law enforcement in curbing crime effectively.
A critical realisation emerges: the effectiveness of law enforcement in controlling crime hinges significantly on the active support of society. The prevalent practice of forgiving criminals, particularly those involved in property crimes, raises concerns as it seemingly grants a tacit license for offenders to repeat their transgressions. It becomes imperative for society to reconsider this culture of forgiveness towards criminals and actively stand against it. The act of forgiving individuals responsible for crimes against property may inadvertently perpetuate a cycle of criminal behaviour. It sends a message that such actions will be met with leniency, potentially emboldening offenders to commit similar offences with impunity. Shunning this culture of forgiveness is crucial in order to break this cycle and create an environment where criminal activities are met with unequivocal disapproval. Offences are classified into two fundamental types within the legal system: compoundable and non-compoundable. In the context of compoundable offences, typically crimes against persons such as quarrels, conflicts, and disputes among individuals, forgiveness is regarded as a virtue. Conversely, for non-compoundable offences, forgiveness is perceived as a vice. For law enforcement to effectively combat crime, a collaborative effort between the police and the community is indispensable. This involves fostering a collective commitment to upholding the rule of law and holding perpetrators accountable. By rejecting a culture of forgiveness and advocating for the consequences of criminal actions, society can play a pivotal role in creating a safer and more secure environment for all.