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Policing in a District of the Early Colonial Bengal: Nadia 1793-1860

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Abstract:

Policing is the most vital need of any state and ruling class. If the state is colonial or foreign one it is absolutely necessary. In the early nineteenth century when the colonial state in India was its formative period, effective policing was essential for the expansion of the colonial authority in the remotest part of the country. It was urgent for the control of the criminal elements of the society. Colonial government in Bengal had established modern police department for controlling crime and to apprehend criminals in the rural Bengal. Although in the early stage, policing was in the state of infancy. Its prime aim then was to protect the colonial establishment from internal insecurity. Therefore it lacked detective power. This paper has tried to argue that the performances of the police of the district of the Nadia were far from satisfaction of the higher authority of the government. The efficient policing was almost absent in Nadia. The failure of Nadia police was manifold. Detection of crime, apprehension and conviction of criminals, recovery of stolen property in every parameter of the policing, the story of Nadia police was a story of failure. The paper has discussed in some extent the reasons of this failure also.

Keywords: *Crime, Police, colonial Nadia, Bengal*

Policing is an essential criterion for the ruling elite from time immemorial in every society and in every country. It was also true for a group holding power in a foreign land. Collection of revenue is most important for running Government but that also depends on the proper arrangement of police system. Therefore, the East India Company from the very beginning took control of these two vital organs of the state power. Initially the Company was reluctant in taking control of local police and was happy to leave it in the hands of the native *zamindars*. But gradually it realized that so important an organ of the state should not be left out to a power which had potential to revolt against the infant colonial state. Besides, *zamindari* police failed miserably to curb the rising crime graph and maintain law and order in the remote areas. It was a vital precondition for the survival of the company to collect revenue from the interiors of Bengal and by the year 1793, the thought and planning about this issue was completed and a scheme of new police force came into light. A new police system known as the *thanadari* system started to operate. This scheme was not confined to a particular district but was operative in the whole Bengal Presidency.

Police was, moreover, the most important and visible face of the Company rule in the countryside. It therefore attracted serious attention from the scholars in Bengal. They have seen it as a lever of state control. It was an agency of discipline which was vigorously used by the colonial state to pacify the antagonistic elements against the foreign rule.¹ It was an instrument of torture used by the people of power and influence. It was also a force which helped the Company Raj to penetrate its authority even in the remotest area of the country.² Its function was to be the eyes and ears of the colonial regime, acting as a channel and conveyed to the Government and also as a responsible force, capable of replacing troops in suppressing minor disturbances.³ The police was to curb the criminal section of the society and thereby ensure the safety of the infant colonial regime. It was the defender of the rule of law and of maintaining new order in the interior. All are partially correct but the most vital and declared goals of establishing the police system by the colonial state were to control crime and criminals. How effective was it in dealing with crime and criminality? This paper seeks to answer the question by exploring the police system of the Nadia district.

As we have already noted that by the regulation XXII of 1793 state control system of police came into being in Bengal. This regulation specified what should and what should not be done by the police. By referring to this regulation we can assess the performances of the police and also how far the expectations of its founders had been fulfilled. First we can revisit the provisions of that regulation where the duties of the *thana* officers especially the *darogahs*, had been specified. According to the regulations, the

¹ Ranjan Chakraborty, *Terror Crime and Punishment: Order and Disorder in Early Colonial Bengal 1800-1860*, Kolkata, Reader Service, 2008, pp. 60-63

² Basudeb Chattapadhyay, 'The Penetration of Authority in the interior: A Case Study of Nakashipara Zamindari', *Peasant Studies*, 12 (2), 1985, pp. 157-165

³ David Arnold, 'Police and Colonial Control in South India', *Social Scientist*, 4(12), July 1976, p.5

landholders were required to discharge their police force and were prohibited from entertaining in future. They were relieved of their responsibility for *dacoities* committed within their estates unless their complicity in the crime could be detected. They were, however, required to assist the Government in the apprehension of criminals. The police power was henceforth, to be vested in the magistrate who directed to divide his district into police jurisdictions or *thanas*. Each *thana* area, about twenty *coss*⁴ square miles, was to be policed by a *darogah* with an establishment of police officers to be appointed and were given the power of releasing persons apprehended for petty offences of a bailable nature. But a report of all such releases had to be made to the magistrate. They were appointed by the magistrate and paid by the Government. The magistrates were to appoint the *darogahs* who were required to give security in the sum of rupees 1000. *The darogahs* could not be removed without the sanction of the government. The number of police force and their stations were left to the discretion of the magistrate. The duty of the *darogah* was apprehension and production of the accused before the magistrate by 11 o'clock in the morning. *The darogahs* had no power of fining or passing sentences. *The darogahs* were entitled to receive 10% of the value of stolen property recovered by them.

The police *thana* came to symbolize the authority, the primary unit of the alleged rule of law, its attendant terror and exploitative nature of foreign rule. The local policemen remained as the key intermediaries between the company raj and the village society throughout the colonial rule. The police was a key source of information about the local conditions on which policy implementation had to rest. The police, an agency of cardinal importance, was created for surveillance of the society. It enabled the rulers to exercise some amount of control in the countryside. It strengthened the hands of the colonial ruling class by identifying the friends and foes of the alien regime. It was to register popular behavior, attitudes, possibilities and suspicions.⁵ It was to explore some trades and people from some regions that were more prone to violence, more anarchic, and more easily provoked than those from another trade and another region. The function of the British police establishment in the first half of the nineteenth century was designed more to maintain order and to impress the population than to investigate crime. The rural police was conceived of as an intrinsic component of the apparatus of control designed to bring down the rate of heinous offences and to restore order in the rural society. It is increasingly being admitted by the researchers that obsessive preoccupation with the problems of the law and order was characteristic of colonial rule in general.⁶

Setting up thanas

According to the above regulation, the then magistrate Mr. Redfearn divided Nadia district into 29 police *thanas* in 1793.⁷ Nadia was then a very large district. Later the number of *thanas* seemed to be reduced. In 1809 there were 14 *thanas* in that district.⁸ Arrangements of *thanas* were very defective and unreasonable and also inadequate. Initial setting up of *thanas* reflected the lack of knowledge about the interior and inexperience of the English magistrate. *Thana* was established in an unimportant place whereas no *thana* was erected in a place of importance. The anomalous fixation of the *thana* jurisdiction was attributed as a weakness of the police by the Magistrate W.W. Massie as early as 1803. He pointed out that the *pergunas* were compact parcels of land comprising contiguous villages or other subdivisions. But the component parts of a *pergana* were often scattered all over a district at a considerable distance from each other. The magistrate furnished a statement which exhibited that 30 villages of this district were located much nearer to other *thanas* than to those to which they were actually attached.⁹ For instance, the village Bhagol of Kotechandpore *thana* was 19 miles away from that *thana* but it was just 2 *coss* from Hurdee *thana*. The village Napadah of same *thana* was situated 22 miles away from the same *thana* but its nearest *thana* was Hurdee which was only 3 *coss* away. Again two villages, namely Gobberpore and Kamdebore of Nawparah *thana*, were situated 19 *coss* away from that *thana* but the first village was just ½ *coss* and second just 1 *coss* away from Meherpore *thana*.¹⁰ These anomalies in the distribution of villages were more clearly reported by James Shakespeare, the Magistrate of Nadia in 1812.¹¹ He submitted, after touring the various *thanas* of the district, an extensive report to the court of *Nizamat Adalat* in which he cited many defects in *thana* arrangements and made recommendations for rectification. According to this report, the defects were 1) many *thanas* were very large and extensive but police personnel small in number. He proposed for increasing of *burkandazes* in the *thanas* of Santipore, Basirhat, Lubsah, Bagdaha and Meherpore, 2) quite a number of villages that fell under a *thana* that was located far away from these villages. For example, many villages of Kotechandpore *thana* were situated at 20 to 30 *coss* distance from that police station. Four villages of Hurdee *thana* were situated more than 40 miles away from the police station. 3) Many villages situated in such way under a *thana* jurisdiction which was very difficult for effecting efficient police control; for instance, 6 villages of Takee *thana*, 30 *coss* away in Jessore district, were situated within the boundaries of the Suksagur *thana*. 4) There was no *thana* establishment in an important and crime-prone place like Nuddea (Nabadwip) but there was one in an unimportant place like Oolassae. He then proposed to set up a police chowkee at Nabadwip with a police establishment of one *darogah* and five *burkandazes* and recommended for shifting the *thana* establishment from Oolassae to Kaguzpohorea. Sometimes boundaries of the *thanas* were so ambiguous that the magistrate was entirely ignorant about it. J. Shakespeare, the magistrate of Nadia acknowledged in 1812 that he had no knowledge about the boundaries of the Augurdeep *thana*. Moreover many

⁴ 1 *coss* equal to 2 miles

⁵ Suranjan Das and Basudeb Chattopadhy, 'Rural Crime in Police Perception: A Study of Village Crime Notebooks', *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 1991, pp.129-135

⁶ Basudeb Chattopadhyay, *Crime and Control in Early Colonial Bengal: 1770-1860*, Kolkata, K.P. Bagchi, 2000, p.34-36

⁷ *Revenue Judicial Proceedings*, 15 March, 1793, No. 20

⁸ *Bengal Judicial Criminal Proceedings(hereafter BJCP)*, 22 September, 1809, No. 46

⁹ *BJCP*, 28 April, 1803, No. 5

¹⁰ *Ibid*

¹¹ Report of the Magistrate and Judge of Nuddea, James Shakespeare, *BJCP*, 7 November, 1812, No.30

new *thanas* and police *chowkies* were established without defining their proper boundaries. Both Bally and Dewanganj *thanas* were set up during the magistracy of James Elliot¹², but their boundaries were not defined until 1812.¹³ Besides, many important places and centres where the police picket was necessary had no such arrangements. The rivers Jellingee and Ichamati were the general thoroughfare of this district. All the cargo boats from the upper provinces and particularly from the eastern districts used to go to Calcutta through these rivers. Yet not a single *thana* had been erected on the banks of either of these rivers to protect these cargo boats.¹⁴ Consequently, the magistrate recommended for setting up of the two new *thanas* and four *pharee* divisions depending on the other *thanas*.¹⁵ The Magistrate Elliot recommended that there should be new arrangement of allotment and at the rate of average 200 villages to each *thana*.¹⁶ But most of the *thanas* had more than 200 hundreds villages under its jurisdiction. *Thanas* like Basirhat had 507 villages under its control in 1809.¹⁷ Other *thanas* which had huge number of villages were Kotechandpore which had 448, Sreenergore 439 and Meerpore 315. In 1836 the average number of villages under each *thana* jurisdiction of Nadia was 180.¹⁸ Even in 1825 the distribution of villages to each *thana* in this district was very defective and previous suggestions of the several magistrates did not attract sufficient attention of the higher authorities.

Srl. No.	Name of Thanas	No. of villages	No. of houses
1	Hurdee	232	11013
2	Meherpore	237	15666
3	Dumdumma	426	14643
4	Augurdeep	146	8424
5	Hannah	187	14130
6	Hanskaully	207	12993
7	Dowlutgange	227	12753
8	Baugdaha	305	12110
9	Deogaon	185	10710
10	Kakuzpookoorea	328	15366
11	Subsah	391	21345
12	Busseerhaut	371	14832
13	Sooksaugar	320	14268
14	Santipore	124	13263
15	Katwallee	90	8928
16	Bally	68	6114
17	Dewangange	188	17715
18	Goverdangah	316	13149
Total		4348	237432

Table 1

Source: Bengal Judicial Criminal Proceedings, 10 November, 1825, No. 55

From the above table it is legitimate to assume that the distribution of villages in each *thana* jurisdiction was entirely unreasonable and defective. Some *thanas* had very large number of villages under its control. *Thanas* like Dumduma Kakuzpukurea, Bashirhat, Sooksagar were some of them. However, *thanas* like Kotwali and Bally had less number of villages compared to other *thanas*.¹⁹ Apart from the ambiguities and divisions of *thana* jurisdiction, another problem in policing was the shortage of manpower. In 1817 there were 445 officers who had to police over 6335 villages.²⁰ In 1825, 270 police personnel had to police over 4343 villages and 1187160 populations.²¹ In 1836, 338 square miles area came under each *thana* jurisdiction and 21.51 square miles area to each police officer in Nadia. A comparative statement with neighboring districts of Nadia in regard of *thana* extent, population is given in the following table:

¹² BJCP, 30 October, 1810, No. 30

¹³ BJCP, 7 November, 1812, No. 30

¹⁴ BJCP, 30 October, 1810, No.24

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ BJCP, 22 September, 1809, No. 46

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ G.T. F.S.Barlow Speede, *The Criminal Statistics of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1847, Appendix, p. Lii

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ *Judicial Civil Proceedings*, 12 August, 1817, No. 20

²¹ Ibid

District	Area of each thana	To each officer	Population to each thana	To each officer	No. of villages to each thana	To each officer
Nadia	338	21.51	52302	3334	180	12
Jessore	495	32.11	74419	4872	305	19
Baraset	598	23.92	56124	2245	344	13
24pergunnas	149	4.42	45176	1393	--	--
Burdwan	378	20.52	33469	1841	253	13
Hooghly	139	5.70	83769	3429	234	09

Table 2

Source: G.T Speede, *the Criminal Statistics of Bengal, Appendix, pp. Lii-liii*

In 1853 Nabadwip had an establishment of one *darogah* and only five *burkandazes*. It is unbelievable that this thana had not even a *jemadar* or sergeant.²² Although this *thana* was established in 1812 and was infamous for residing of the receivers of the stolen property. Girish Chandra Bose who was appointed as the *darogah* of this *thana* in 1853 observed that the position of this *thana* was vulnerable and attracted large number of criminals as it was situated in the boundaries of two districts. After accomplishing their perpetration the criminals could easily hide themselves in another district. Even after the police reforms of 1861 the police force in this district remained small and inadequate. In 1871, the total strength of the regular police force in this district was one man to every 5.73 square miles or one man to 3046 inhabitants on an average.²³

Whatever were the anomalies in the establishment of police jurisdictions, the matter was complicated by the inefficiency and corruption of those who were in the management of police agency. Magistrate was the key and head of the criminal administration of the district. He was, on the one hand, head of the district police department and chief justice of criminal court, on the other. Efficiency of police, therefore, largely depended on the energy and zeal of the magistrates. In this aspect, magistrate had many limitations due to his inadequate knowledge about a particular district. Performance of the Nadia magistrates in this regard was mixed. The court of *Nizamat Adalat* often criticized the Nadia magistrates for their failure of apprehending criminals and containing heinous crimes. The most glaring example was the transfer of W.W. Massie from Nadia district to Mymensing for his failure to arrest enough dacoits. In 1840 the report of the superintendent of police also castigated the magistrate for his inefficiency to control district police properly. In 1836 the Commissioner of Nadia division directly alleged that due to the supine attitude of the magistrate large number of criminals was acquitted in the trial. The magistrates were also helpless for not reporting of crime from the *darogahs* in time. One such incident was mentioned by a magistrate of this district in his memoir which is indicative of the circumstances in which a magistrate had to work. One day, the said magistrate informed privately that a terrible *dacoity*, in which many were wounded, had taken place in a village which was not far away from the Krishnagar, the residence of the magistrate. Yet the magistrate did not receive any intimation from the *darogah*. After a long time the *darogah* finally came and reported a minor case of burglary. The magistrate asked him some questions related to the case which he answered without hesitation. The *darogah* replied it was merely an ordinary burglary, my lord; very little property stolen, & c & c."The magistrate then asked him specially "are you sure no one was injured? "Oh dear no" he said with an oily smile, "no one".²⁴ Then the magistrate proceeded with the *darogah* to an adjunct room for showing him the exact incident. Mr. E.T. Trevor had been seriously criticized in the two successive police reports of 1847 and 1848, respectively. In the first report he was described as not sufficiently prompt and energetic for control and management of the police in this troublesome district and the second report concluded that the police under Mr. Trevor was in 'an almost complete state of disorganization'.²⁵

On the other hand, the magistrates were ever ready to transfer their failure on their subordinates, e.g. police *darogahs*. *Darogah* was the first officer of the *thana*. The magistrate had to appoint a *darogah* to manage the police in the *thana* or police circle. But effectiveness of the *darogahs* in law enforcement was minimal because it depended on the co-operation and intelligence provided by village watchmen, a force over whom they had little control.

Colonial police in the early years were oppressive, tyrannical and extortive. The allegations of police atrocities were very common. Bribery, intimidation, breach of trust and extortion of money constituted the bulk of the charges. The magistrate of Nadia district reported in 1793 that business of *Dewani Adalat* had become multiplied by suits instituted by persons against the *darogahs* of the police jurisdiction for extortion of money.²⁶ From the common people to farmers and European residents residing in this district alleged the high-handedness of police *darogahs*. Radhakishen Babu, a farmer, petitioned²⁷ to the magistrate of this district against the *darogah*'s tortures in 1793. This petition contains wide ranging complaints generally alleged by the common people.

According to the petition, Ramsunder Ghosal, a thanadar of Krishnagar, went to the farm of the petitioner, seized the *naib*, the *muhurers*, the *kutkinadars* and the *ryots* of the *perguna* Dhulinpur and put them under the charge of *Mofussil* peons and had taken by force large sums of money from them. The *thanadar* also levied *tolahs* from the shopkeepers of the *bazar* and collected coconuts and greens. He kept a woman in confinement under the charge of theft and demanded money from her. He also collected one or two

²² Girish Chandra Bose, *Sekaler Darogah Kahini*, Kolkata, Pastak Bipani, reprint, (first published in 1888), p. 15

²³ W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, Vol. II, London, 1875, pp. 116-117

²⁴ William Taylor, *Thirty Eight Years in India*, London, 1875, pp. 375-376

²⁵ *Report on the State of Police in the Lower Provinces of Bengal (hereafter RSPLPB)*, for the year 1846, Nuddea, p. 58 and for the year 1847, Nuddea, p. 52

²⁶ *BJCP*, 11 October, 1793, No. 8

²⁷ Petition from the Radhakishen Baboo, *Revenue Judicial Proceedings*, 19 April, 1793, No. 47

rupees from the people who went to take bath in the Ganges. The fishermen *ryots* were compelled to furnish their boats to the *thanadar* as beggars or without pay. He also took one *gunda* of woods from each boat loaded with wood going out from the *pergana*. The *thanadar* used to beat the pykes of the *cutchery* for earthen pot and had fixed a *tripol* in his thana to which he tied people hand and foot and punished them. The *thanadar* also proclaimed by the beating of tom tom in the *pergana* that whoever went out of their houses after 6 ghouries of the night shall be confined and pay a fine. The police regularly used to collect *tolahs* even from the boats loaded with goods passing through Nadia rivers. The Bhagirathi River was the chief river-route. Even 1000 boats stopped in one place during the month of December due to lack of navigability of the river. There was generally a police *darogah* with some *burkandazes*, but their presence added mischief, they extorted money and robbed as much as possible. No boat could attempt to get through without paying these people, observed an officer whose testimony revealed it before the select committee of the parliament.²⁸

The administrative response against such allegations was the dismissal of the *darogahs*. Goluck Majumdar, the *darogah* of Daulatgange was dismissed from his service for extortion of money.²⁹ Debinath Chatterjee, the *darogah* of Santipore *thana* was dismissed for the charges of apprehending and releasing persons said to be dacoits, without authority or report to the magistrate, cutting down trees on the sides of the road and for extorting money.³⁰ Ignoring of the order of the magistrate led to the dismissal of a *darogah*. In 1797, George Cumming, the acting magistrate issued orders to different police *darogahs*, directing them to use utmost exertions to discover the parties who had committed a daring robbery. The magistrate alleged that Sachinarayan Choudhury, the *darogah* of Bassurhat had not only disregarded the orders but had taken no step to secure the dacoits. He had a dispute with the magistrate's *Chuprassy* who carried out the order and refused to give him the necessary assistance in effecting the principal object of his mission. The *darogah* also allegedly gave permission to Haron sirdar and others who were persons of bad character and suspected of crimes to reside at the *thana*. The Governor-General in Council confirmed the dismissal of the *darogah* in consideration of the magistrate's allegations.³¹ Baidanath Sein, the *darogah* of Santipore, contrary to the regulations of the government, had taken security from and released two persons charged for cattle stealing and had delayed for several days to send the parties concerned in the said case to the magistrate. He made false entry in his monthly report with the view of preventing the detection of the foregoing offence. He also neglected to insert of his official proceedings in his *Sud-Bundee*³² for a period of three months. He was suspended by the magistrate in 1804.³³ Concealment of crimes was another method regularly practised by the *darogahs*. The police took bribes and presents from the criminals and sometimes even offered shelter to them. Nabai Ghosh, a dacoit, in his confession mentioned a river *dacoity* on 16th August, 1850, at Tilokpur, on Monmohan Roy's boat. After this *dacoity*, Chhutor Singh, *jemadar* of police and Naik Sing *burkandaz* took Rs. 25 and Rs. 7 respectively from Nabai as their fees to hush up the crime.³⁴ Again a few dacoits were arrested in connection with a *dacoity* at Belpukur, in 1851. They were all acquitted by the magistrate as Madan Roy, a police *barkandaz*, gave evidence in favour of the *dacoits* in lieu of money.³⁵ Jadunath Ganguly, a first grade *darogah* harboured dacoits and regularly received plundered property from them.³⁶ Many *darogahs* were involved with the court *amlahs* in various kinds of corruption and malpractices. In the second six months of the year 1840, the superintendent of police found that 3 *darogahs* and 6 *mohuries*, out of 16 *thanas* were connected in a greater or less degree with sudder *amlahs*.³⁷ In 1845 police report identified that the *darogah* of suksagar *thana* had not reported a *dacoity* with torture committed in his jurisdiction. Mr. William Tayler the magistrate traced out the systematic concealment of *dacoity* by the police. In that year two *darogahs* were removed from the police.³⁸ Girish Chandra Bose, a *darogah* himself, admitted before the Indigo Commission in 1860, that the *darogahs* in Nadia in 10 out of 16 cases took bribe and were purchased by the rich. The *burkandazes* and *Jemadars* were all corrupt.³⁹ The superintendent also commented in his report for the second six months of 1841 that the *mofussil* police were generally bad. He blamed partly for this to the residents *zamindars*. He observed that the *thanas* of Santipore, Ranaghat and Balee had never retained a *darogah* unbribed by the powerful *zamindars* residents there.⁴⁰ The *chowkidars* or village watchmen were never incorporated officially as an important element of crime control agency of the state. They were under the control of the *thana darogah* but appointed by the local landholders. This dual system of control produced disastrous results. Badly paid, uncertain job prospect, low moral character made them the member of the most unscrupulous state organ in the lower level of the administration although their duty was enormous. They had to report all kinds of offences commissioned in their locality to the *thana*. They had to keep watch on the people of bad character residing in their village. Therefore,

²⁸ Sir Erskine Perry, Minutes of Evidence before the Select Committee, *Second Report from the Committee on Colonization and Settlement*(India), Vol. VI, Part-I, 1857-1858, p. 5

²⁹ *BJCP*, 19 April, 1799, No. 8

³⁰ *BJCP*, 19 April, 1799, No. 12

³¹ *BJCP*, 1 September, 1797, No.8 and 9

³² *Sud bundee* was the name of a book passed, and attested by the magistrate, with which every *daroga* in Nadia district was furnished for the purpose of according to his daily official proceedings therein regularly as they occur and from the *sud-bundee* the *darogah* ought to form his monthly reports to the magistrate, *BJCP*, 26 July, 1804, No. 18

³³ *Ibid*

³⁴ Confession of Nabai Ghosh, Selections from the confessions of *Nuddea Gowala Gang*, Calcutta, 1857, p.15

³⁵ *Ibid*

³⁶ *Report of the Commissioner of the Suppression of Dacoity*, for 1857-1857, p. 22

³⁷ *RSPLPB*, for the Second Six Months of 1840, *Nuddea*, p. 97

³⁸ *RSPLPB*, for the year 1845, p. 57

³⁹ Report of Indigo Commission, *Parliamentary Papers*, Vol. Xiv, 1861, Q.3471

⁴⁰ *RSPLPB*, for the Second Six Months of 1841, p., 81

on the one hand they had huge duties to be performed, but on the other, they had no power to resolve any dispute of local origin nor had any official recognition either in cash or in kind. In this situation they engaged themselves in all kinds of mischief in the village. The origin of *chowkidari* system in Nadia was a late phenomenon compared to other districts of Bengal.⁴¹ From the very beginning, however, they established their link with the robbers, dacoits, burglars and other people of bad character. Mr. Oldfield, the magistrate of this district in his reply to the questionnaire sent by the Governor General Mr. Wellesley, categorically told that the *chowkidars* of this district were either dacoits themselves or were in league with the dacoits.⁴² In 1809, three dacoit sirdars of Nadia district who were convicted in the Calcutta court of circuit were *chowkidars*.⁴³

The main reason behind the involvement of *chowkidars* in various offences was lack of regular payment either from the landholders or from the villagers as government had no provisions for paying them. At Augurdip thana a *chowkidar* complained bitterly of receiving nothing by his collection from the *ryots*. He, therefore, extorted money from the *ryots* by other means. He collected from peasants on the occasion of festivals and so forth 40 rupees annually. At Moonshurah under Nawadip thana a *chowkidar* legitimately collected from two rupees twelve *annas* to three rupees, but their fee on every marriage was fixed at one rupee and that *pujas* they received from *annas* to a rupee at the pleasures of the parties; the whole making an income of five to six rupees monthly.⁴⁴ The security of the job for the *chowkidars* was none. They could be dismissed at the whims of the *zamindars*. Between the years 1835 to 1837, 265 *chowkidars* were dismissed in Nadia.⁴⁵ The reasons for huge number of dismissals were multiple: 21 for old age, 163 for neglect of duty, 61 for bad character or suspected of crime, and 2 for sickness, 1 for accessory to crime, 12 for robbery or theft and 4 for burglary and the annual rate of dismissal in this period was 2.36 in Nadia.⁴⁶ This rate for neighbouring districts of Nadia was this in Hooghly 0.85, in Burdwan 0.66, in 24 Parganas 0.45, in Barasat 1.56 and in Jessore 3.98.⁴⁷ The percentage of dismissal was much higher in Nadia and Jessore than in other districts.

The police establishment heavily depended on the spies or *goindahs* to apprehend offenders in Bengal in general. Nadia was, however, no exception. The information provided by the *goindahs* were, most of the time, questionable. "These people are the encourager, supporter and paymasters of perjury; it is not one in twenty trials they are lest use and nineteen times in twenty they are the means of artifice the evidence. Truth from them always come in questionable shape, a *goindah* engages to prove the crime against a set of people, he gives in charge against them, and a long list of witnesses, he goes into the country, armed with warrants and subpoenas, he exacts money from the villagers under threat of including them in charge, he takes money from them not to name them as witnesses, he accuses others to compel them to save as witnesses in support of his charge" observed the registrar of the *Nizamatal Adalat* in one of his reports in the year 1800.⁴⁸ One of the earliest conspiracies of the *goindahs* against innocent people was reported by the third judge of Calcutta court of circuit, Krishnagar, on 10 June, 1800. The judge stated that the *goindahs* conspired against 11 persons and the main object of this conspiracy was to implicate Gudadhar Mukherjee and his two brothers.⁴⁹ He further observed "... in fact I have experienced conspiracies against the people which came forward in shape of charges for murder and robbery

The Governor-General in Council, on the recommendation of the *Nizamatal Adalat* enacted the Regulation VI in 1796. By this regulation the magistrate could employ a robber as a *goindah*, on the sanction of the court for arresting criminals. A *goindah* in general was a man to have been connected with the gang, able to find them out, and gave hints to conviction although it was not necessary for the *goindah* always to be a gang member. There were actually two types of *goindahs*--professional and occasional.⁵⁰ The professional *goindahs* were in general highly pernicious. They were responsible for the ruin of many villages. It was chiefly of their exertions that the jail of Krishnagar or Nadia was filled up in 1808-1809.⁵¹ In this Zillah, the *goindahs* were employed indiscriminately in the peak hour of robbery. They were given enormous power; suspected offenders were apprehended solely depending on the information of the *goindahs*. No one could be secured against the *goindahs*. By this means Nadia was cleared of dacoits in the 1809-1810 periods. The Court of Circuit severely criticized the district administration for wholesale using of this system. Court was aware about the conspiracy of *goindahs* against the innocent people. District administration defended their adopted measure by saying that it was a necessary evil. The magistrate argued that *goindahs*' life was sometimes sacrificed in the public service which was rarely the case with a *darogah*.⁵² Tytler who was well aware of the false accusations of *goindahs* was of the opinion that *goindahs* were like poison which would be used to deter the crime of others.⁵³ In spite of such trust on the *goindahs* neither the performances of police remarkably improved nor the number of crimes diminished. Only innocent persons suffered at their hands.

Detection Apprehension and Conviction

⁴¹ D.J. Mcneile, *Report on the Village Watch*, Calcutta, 1866, p. 4

⁴² Replies to interrogations of Henry Oldfield, Magistrate of Nuddea, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1812-1813, Vol. IX, p.52-56

⁴³ BJCP, 29 September, 1809, No. 1, *Fifth Report of House of Commons of 1812*, Vol. II, Madras, 1866, p. 865-866

⁴⁴ G.T. Speede, *op.cit.*, Appendix, p. Lxxiv

⁴⁵ *Ibid*

⁴⁶ *Ibid*

⁴⁷ *Ibid*

⁴⁸ Enclosure in Nizamatal Adalat's letter to the Secretary, Judicial Department, 22 October, 1800, BJCP, 6 November, 1800, No. 2

⁴⁹ BJCP, 6 November, 1800, No. 13

⁵⁰ Alexander Tytler Fraser., 70, *Consideration on the Present Political State of India*, second edition Vol. II, London, Black, Purbury&Allen, p. 70

⁵¹ *Ibid*

⁵² Letter from the magistrate of Nadia to Secretary Judicial Department, BJCP, 17 November, 1809, No. 20

⁵³ Alexander Tytler Fraser, *op.cit.*, p. 70

Large *thana* jurisdiction, huge area of the district, ambiguities in the boundary, small number of police force, corruption, etc, created structural weakness in the police agency. Its impact had been felt in the performance of the police which affected proper and efficient policing. Its weakness was revealed in all respects for which it was established. Detection of crimes, apprehension and conviction of criminals, recovery of stolen goods---everywhere the deficiency in the performance of police force were clearly evident. The early colonial police lacked investigative and detective power. By all standards it was a preventive criminal agency. The detective inability revealed itself clearly if we take into consideration that a large number of offences were never investigated at all. Offences like burglary, thefts always remained outside the detective capabilities of the police. Even *dacoity* which was catch-all-category crime to the administration was not regularly detected. Consequently a large number of offences were never reported by the police. A classic example is the confession of Bishtu Ghose. Bishtu confessed that he was engaged in some one hundred river *dacoities* but he was given the details of only 25. He also described the circumstances of 22 *dacoities* committed on land. Of these 47 committed, 16 were investigated at the time, 8 were reported as attempts, and 23 were concealed. In six cases only of those investigated were the police successful in apprehending the perpetrators, but not more than 10 offenders were finally convicted. If we calculate that the gang for each land *dacoity* was 25 strong and 15 for each in river *dacoity*, this gives $(25 \times 22 + 15 \times 25)$ 925 individual offences, of which 10 only had been punished. A half of these offences, however, were not brought to light.⁵⁴ The history of Gopal Jogi is another case which illustrates the incompetency of local administration in convicting of criminals. Gopal was arrested in 1834 on the charge of *dacoity* but was released by the magistrate. In 1836 he was in jail for six months in a case of oppression but after his release he immediately involved himself in a case of affray with murder in which he was sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment. After that nothing was heard about him until 1850 when he was committed to the session on a charge of *dacoity*. He was, however, released for lack of evidence. In the beginning of 1853 he was arrested in a *dacoity* case but managed to escape. Within a few months he was again implicated in a *dacoity*, was arrested and detained in *Hajut*. By failing to prove him guilty, the magistrate detained him as a *badmash* in default of security for twelve months. In 1855 he was apprehended in a *dacoity* but got out of this scrape but before the end of the year he was again implicated in a fresh *dacoity*. Consequently he was arrested and committed to the session's court. Here once again good fortune followed him and he got release. This time after successive failure to convict him the magistrate imprisoned him as bad character, but he was released on appeal. In 1857 he was arrested by the police of Karimpore *thana* in a *dacoity* and several of his accomplices had denounced him. The joint magistrate could do nothing again. On this occasion, Gopal was sent in custody to the office of the anti-*dacoity* commissioner. Here finally the judge sentenced him for three years as bad character. The commissioner hoped that in that time he "shall be in a position to prove legally that Gopal is a *dacoit*" and might be then transported.⁵⁵

An important aspect of the efficiency of police is their success rate in proportion of persons arrested to persons involved in different criminal activities. Then the rate of conviction in proportion to the arrested persons involved allegedly in criminal activities is another important indicator of police's efficiency. As the commissioner of the 18th Division Mr. H. Pigou remarked in his divisional police report for first half of 1835 that "the comparative number of heinous crimes is certainly one great ground from which to form a judgment of the efficiency of a magistrate and his police, but the relation of numbers apprehended to those concerned and of the numbers convicted to those apprehended, is an infallible touchstone to discover the real condition of the police of a district".⁵⁶

In one of the earliest reports on the police of this district, *Nizam Adalat* observed that "there are strongest grounds for believing the police of this Zillah to be in the most inefficient state".⁵⁷ The court found that out of 494 persons who were concerned in the *dacoity* with murder, only 28 were arrested. Similarly 3363 persons were supposed to have been involved in robbery without murder, only 172 persons were apprehended. Further, among the suspected men involved in the perpetration of 17 murders, only 8 persons were arrested by police.⁵⁸ In case of other forms of crime like burglaries, thefts, affrays the result was not better. If one carefully studies the report of the superintendent of police with care it would be very clear that the above claim is presumably not incorrect. It is not an assumption and perception of district administration but something that can be measured statistically. The following table proves it.

⁵⁴ J.R.Ward, Commissioner of the Suppression for *Dacoity* to the Secretary of the Government of Bengal, Judicial Department, 27 July, 1855, *Selections from the Records of the Bengal Government* (hereafter *SRBG*), , No.21, p. 55

⁵⁵ *SRBG*, No. 31, Nuddea, pp.23-24

⁵⁶ Police Report from the Commissioner of 18th Division for the first half of the year 1835, *BJCP*. 30 August, 1836, No. 40

⁵⁷ Letter from Dowdeswell, Secretary, Judicial Department, Government of Bengal, to the Magistrate of Nadia, *BJCP*, 18 March, 1807, No. 5

⁵⁸ *Ibid*

Year	Period	No. of cases	Persons concerned	Arrests	Convicted	% of convictions in proportion of arrests
1829	1 st half	74	461	138	44	31.82
	2 nd do	74	462	174	7	4.02
1830	1 st do	77	939	347	56	16.13
	2 nd do	64	700	192	54	28.12
1831	1 st do	280	758	192	24	12.5
	2 nd do	250	960	239	42	17.57
1832	1 st do	208	1022	363	62	17.07
	2 nd do	126	399	194	18	9.27
1833	1 st do	237	923	452	157	34.73
	2 nd do	242	558	420	179	42.71
1834	1 st do	231	1956	585	223	38.11
	2 nd do	250	1782	877	295	33.63
1835	1 st do	307	1647	719	169	23.5
	2 nd do	308	1429	843	93	11.03
1836	1 st do	294	1462	1049	177	16.87
	2 nd do	370	1328	1042	658	63.14
1837	1 st do	312	1782	1232	719	58.36
	2 nd do	286	1016	837	566	67.62
1838	1 st do	305	1173	894	253	28.29
	2 nd do	309	1560	724	249	34.39
1839	1 st do	320	1112	856	263	30.79
	2 nd do	317	1109	705	203	28.72

Table 3: Police operations in Nadia 1829 - 1839
Bengal Judicial Criminal Proceedings, 24 November 1840, No. 15

The above table is the statistics of 22 sessions e.g., half-yearly reports of the police operations in Nadia district in which is exhibited the success rate of convictions of persons concerned in various crimes in this district. In these years only three sessions e.g., one session of 1836 and two sessions of 1837, the rate of conviction was above 50% of the arrest. Lack of detecting power of the rural police was revealed to a great extent in case of recovery of stolen property. It was considered an important parameter in gauging of police performance. Success and performances of the police officials of this district, in this regard, were below par. The police establishments were so incompetent that they seldom succeeded to recover stolen property. The *darogah* was entitled to 10 per cent commission of recovered property. In spite of this incentive, the consequence was hardly encouraging. Their performances were very dismal in this regard. In 1820 in this district the value of property, stolen or robbed, was 40790 rupees and out of it only 760 rupees were recovered by the police. The following table speaks for this claim.

Year	Property stolen	Property recovered	Year	Property stolen	Property recovered
1812	17129	354	1821	11993	242
1813	11841	517	1822	15533	600
1815	6591	451	1823	9169	986
1816	14064	774	1824	10920	682
1817	8727	586	1825	6279	347
1818	10147	1239	1826	10120	270
1819	12554	387	1827	5948	182
1820	44790	760	1828	4566	375

Table 4

Source: This table has been compiled with the data extracted from the following sources : BJCP, 13 May, 1814, No. 23, 23 May, 1817, No. 34, 25 June, 1819, No. 23, 16 March, 1821, No. 41, 6 November, 1823, No. 44, 9 March, 1826, No. 62, 6 March, 1828, No. 98, 27 October, 1829, No. 32 & 38

This capability greatly decreased when the police were at connivance with the dacoits. On many occasions it was found that the police directly patronized and encouraged the dacoit gangs to commit robbery. Two police *Jemadars* of Chandoreea pharee were in league with the Doloo sirdar gang. The result was that the offenders were traced in only one of the twenty three *dacoities* committed by this gang, and in that case four only were punished. The most remarkable fact was the direct involvement of the police officials in the *dacoity* in this district. Goluck Roy *Jemadar* was the head of this gang. Two approvers and two other members of this gang confessed and agreed that this *jemadar* was their patron. One spoke of him in the following term "Goluck Roy *Jemadar* and Ishwar Roy *Burkundaz*, of the chandoorea pharee, in Zillah Krishnaghur (Nadia), were connected with the dacoits. I have never known the *jemadar* himself go out on an expedition, but he used to make us give him a share of the spoil-he used to take ten *annas* and leave us six *annas*. When we did not commit *dacoities* sufficiently fast for him, he used to send his own *peadahs* to collect people and make us

go. He further told that on one occasion, Himmayt Mussulman went out on a *dacoity*, and he concealed his intentions from the *Jemadar*. Somehow or other, Goluck Roy discovered this and set people at the Chandoorea Ghat to waylay him, and Himmayt was caught there with property. The *Jemadar* took all the mal (plundered property) and gave him five rupees and released him, promising always to get him off if he was arrested in a *dacoity*. Not only that in Madunpur *dacoity*, Iswar Roy *Burkundaze* himself went with the gang. The *jemadar* sent him to see that the gang did not conceal any of the property.⁵⁹ The *Jemadar* was never happy with the head of the gang and always asked for money. Goburdhun and Bholai Sirdar were arrested in the Sultanpoor *dacoity* case. Goburdhun was found with some of the stolen cloth, but the *Jemadar* through some of his own people got him off. He told the villagers not to mark him a bad character. When the gang wanted money the *Jemadar* used to provide a rupee or two to keep them going, and paid the expenses of the road, when they were going on an expedition. These depositions seemed true as Goluck Roy served only a very few years in the police, yet he resided in a comfortable *pucca* house in easy circumstances near Krishnagar. He found not the slightest difficulty in giving two sureties in 250 rupees each to appear whenever called to do so.⁶⁰ Police seldom arrested the real offenders. Many instances of this allegation could be found in the various police report and it was an all India phenomenon, and not limited to any particular region. H. M. Pigou observed that the real criminals were so rarely apprehended that it seemed that the police *darogahs* were either inefficient or in connivance with the offenders.⁶¹

The police were supposed to protect the common people and their life and property. And this had been uttered by the colonial officials very frequently. In this context, we can examine people's perception about the role of police. The image of the police before ordinary man is never positive in any society. It is true in case of the colonial society too due to various reasons. Colonial documents as well as contemporary European and native observers were united in passing comments about negative role of the police. The Government officials in the criminal administration often indulged in the practice of lowering the image of native police before public. Why did they do it needs further enquiry which is not under the purview of this work. However, the image of the police before public was horribly negative and for that none but police themselves were to blame. General inhabitants had hardly any trust upon the police. Even people preferred robbing rather than to inform the police. Villagers out of fear deserted en masse in anticipation of coming of the police. Romesh Chandra Dutta wrote, it is not perhaps an exaggeration to say that in those days *dacoity* was less feared on its own account than the investigation that was to follow. Old men of the present day remember the time when shops were closed, treasures buried, cattle driven into jungles; village deserted, when a police investigation was anticipated".⁶² "People concealed heinous crime like robbery, murder in order to avoid a visit from *darogah*. People believed that the robbery was the beginning of their losses. A dacoit victim, who was discovered to have failed to report a robbery, commonly stated that "I am a poor man. All my property was taken. My wife was burnt. I could not attend a thing. Besides if I had reported, the *darogah* would have come to make [an investigation] and I could not bear the expense."⁶³ An instance would be sufficient to prove the public's fear of the police. A dead body was discovered in a village. Towards evening the rumour ran from house to house, and the inhabitants, assembling together, carried it to the next village, the unhappy villagers, on whom the body was thrown, roused by similar dread, carried it to the next village, where, on the discovery of the transaction, a similar transportation was made, and on the approach of morning it was thrown into a neighbouring marsh. These extraordinary precautions were adopted to avoid domiciliary visit of the *darogah*, with all its concomitant vexation.⁶⁴

When the magistrate asked the people why they did not report the crime to the police, their answer invariably was that the oppression of *thana darogahs* was such that people preferred their first loss than ask for the aid of the *darogahs*, whom they would be compelled to pay him and his attendants an enormous expense of subsistence. Further when they did attend the *darogah* did little in tracing out the perpetrators. Actually the colonial administration had its limitations. It had to rely on the subordinate police, though corrupt it might be, to maintain law and order in the interior and as a source of gathering knowledge from the remotest parts of the country. As there was no fundamental incompatibility between police corruption and imperial interest, the colonial rulers always approved every action of the police as long as it did not run counter to their interest. The police was intimately connected with the evolving needs of the Empire and its administrative realities. Police power was strengthened and reformed to meet each major threat to the colonial rule and the relation between rural violence and evolution of the police was very direct. The growth and development of the police system should, therefore, be viewed as the result of continuous British experimentation and experience. The weakness of the police force can be partly explained by the attitude of the authorities. After all, it was a colonial state and here the priorities were different. As in case of Nadia, the performance of the police in bringing down the number of crimes, making arrests and convicting offenders and in recovering stolen property or detecting crimes was not at all satisfactory.

⁵⁹ SRBG, No. 26, p. 16

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.17

⁶¹ Police Report for the first half of the year 1835 for the 18th Division, BJCP, 30 August, 1836, No. 37

⁶² Romesh Chandra Dutta, *The Peasantry of Bengal*, New Delhi, General BooksLLC, 2009, p. 2

⁶³ Quoted in John McLane, *op.cit*, p. 41, Basudeb Chattopadhyay, *op.cit*, 2000, p. 78

⁶⁴ *Essays Relative to the Habits, Character and Moral improvement of Hindoos*, London, 1823, p. 312-313

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