



ISSN : 2350-0743

www.ijramr.com



International Journal of Recent Advances in Multidisciplinary Research

Vol. 08, Issue 08, pp. 7211-7215, September, 2021

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### CRIME, CONTROL AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE FROM DINAJPUR TO WEST DINAJPUR DISTRICT: A HISTORICAL OUTLINE

\*Ram Krishna Biswas

Assistant Professor of History (W.B.E.S), Government General Degree College, Dantan-II, Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal, India

#### ARTICLE INFO

##### Article History:

Received 15<sup>th</sup> June, 2021  
Received in revised form  
10<sup>th</sup> July, 2021  
Accepted 24<sup>th</sup> August, 2021  
Published online 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2021

##### Keywords:

Dinajpur, West Dinajpur, crime, dacoity, murder, police, criminal justice

#### ABSTRACT

The history of the district of Dinajpur is very old one. From very old time this district was ruled by several rulers up to the coming of the British in India. After the advent British in Bengal, the district came under the control of the East India Company in 1765. From the advent of British in Bengal and even up to the post colonial phase the entire district was under some offensive activities. In this context the now question comes in your mind that what crimes activities occurred in those days and how the administrative authority controlled these criminal offences and what was criminal justice of this district? My intention is to find out the crime activities of the district of Dinajpur and West Dinajpur and how the police administration controlled these crimes of Dinajpur district and West Dinajpur and justice, over all. However, we find from the reports of Major Sherwill, the revenue surveyor of this district that various crimes like dacoity, river dacoity, river pirates, murder, arson, theft and petty burglaries, were occurred in Dinajpur during the colonial period. In 1860, there were native officers and foot constables, with village watchmen were employed. The Police forces for the protection of person and property consisted of native officers and foot constables; with some village watchmen. The district police force was constituted in 1861. In this situation, Dinajpur was divided into fifteen police circles or thanas or police station to look after the matter of the local areas. After creation of West Dinajpur in 1956, criminal activities were there. Criminal justice was administered by the District and Sessions Judge, the District Magistrate and the Deputy and Sub-Deputy Magistrates stationed at Dinajpur.

#### INTRODUCTION

The district of Dinajpur, which forms the extent of the jurisdiction of a Judge and Magistrate and of a Collector, was situated in the northern part of Bengal. Its greatest length from its southern extremity at the junction of the Punarhaba with the Mahananda, to its northern extremity, on the Nagor, is 105 miles. Its greatest breadth, near its southern and between the Korotoya and Nagor, is 82 miles. Its boundary on the south, with Rajshahi, on the east separated from Rangpur (Hamilton, 1833; 1). District was finite on the north-east by Jalpaiguri; on the north-west and west by Purnea; on the east by Rangpur; on the south-east by Bogra; on the south by Rajshahi; and on the south-west by Malda (Imperial Gazetteer of India, Eastern Bengal and Assam, 1909; 210). The district came under the control of the East India Company in 1765, the year in which the East India Company obtained the *Diwani* of Bengal (Sengupta, 1965; 39).

When the District first came under British rule, it was notorious for the lawlessness of its inhabitants; and in order to enable the administration to cope successfully with the dacoits who infested it, its limits were gradually circumscribed and large portions of the modern District of Malda and Bogra were carved out of it. It was not, however, until it was reduced to its present proportions by the transfer in 1896 of the Mahadepur *thana* or police station to Rajshahi (Imperial Gazetteer of India, Eastern Bengal and Assam, 1909; 213). The jurisdiction of Dinajpur had undergone considerable changes. When, by the transfer to the East India Company of the *diwani* or financial control of Bengal, this district came under British administration, district was notorious for the lawlessness of its inhabitants. In order enable the administration to cope successfully with the *dakatis* or gang robbers who infested the roads and rivers, the limits of the district were gradually circumscribed. Mr. Sisson, who administered Dinajpur in 1814, has left his name as the first founder of order. He put down crime and established a night watch (Hunter, 1875; 356). On the other, the district of West Dinajpur as it exist to-day was constituted in 1956 with the addition of portions of Purnea district in Bihar. A few villages to the north of the Mahananda were transferred to the Phansidewa police station of the

\*Corresponding author: **Ram Krishna Biswas**,  
Assistant Professor of History (W.B.E.S), Government General Degree College, Dantan-II, Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal, India.

Darjeeling district in 1959 but otherwise the size of the district had remained unchanged since November, 1956 (Sengupta, 1965: 171).

**Crime of Dinajpur District:** Long past, the district of Dinajpur was notorious for dacoits and river pirates and every type of violent crime was common. From the remarks of Major Sherwill, the Revenue Surveyor of Dinajpur district, in 1863, it was apparent that even then the character of the district had undergone a considerable change. He says that although murders were common and *dacoities* not infrequent the general character of the people was peaceable. In those days cases of heinous crime were rare. A few murders were committed every year and an occasional case of *dacoity* occurs, but these *dacoities* were rarely accompanied by murder and the amount of property looted was generally small. Some of the worst *dacoities* had been perpetrated inside measurable distance of the Purnea and Malda borders, the unhealthy characters of those districts being rather found of committing depredations on the a lot of peaceable inhabitants of Dinajpur. In 1908-09 *dacoities* were exceptionally various owing, it had believed in nice live, to the insufficiency prevailing during this and the neighbour districts. Cases of rape were rare and serious rioting, so common in some of the eastern districts, was practically unknown. Arson was fairly common, especially in the southern portion of the district. The offence was, however, seldom brought home to any one, and there was some reason to suppose that a good many of the cases reported were the result of accident. Theft and petty burglaries were numerous, though the amount of property stolen was generally small. Disputes about land with their inevitable accompaniment of forgery, perjury and the fabrication of false evidence were common as was the case elsewhere, and the cultivator showed the usual tendency to try and drag what were really civil disputes into the criminal courts ( Strong, 1912; 114-115).

**Crime of West Dinajpur:** Statistics relating to crime in the district would therefore relevant only from the year 1957. The statement below gives in a nutshell the incidence of crime in the district during the year from 1957 to 1960 so far as some principal types of crimes are concerned (Sengupta, 1965:174). It appears from the reports that theft and burglary between them accounted for as much as 75 per cent of the cases that were reported during the four year 1957-60. Rioting comes next in order of frequency followed by robbery, smuggling, *dacoity*, sex crimes and murder. The pattern of crime had been more or less the same during these four years, although the number of cases of each type had varied. The people appear generally law-abiding and cases of theft and burglary may be due to poverty. *Dacoity* and robbery on the other hand, cannot said had organized solely from a motive of gain as these crimes offer to the offenders opportunities of showing their daring and recklessness ( Sengupta,1965: 174). Judging from the figures relating to robbery and *dacoity*, it was reasonable to assume that there were a few gangs of desperadoes in the district who required lying by the heels in order that these two types of crimes may bring under control. These crime figures also show that on an average 33.8 burglaries take place in a month in the whole of the district. The corresponding numbers for theft, *dacoity*, robbery, murder, sex crimes and smuggling were 47.4, 3.9, 6.1, 1.7, 2.6 and 4.2 respectively. For a district with a population of approximately 13 lakhs, 47.4 thefts or 33.8 burglaries per month cannot considered to abnormally high, but the figures of 1.7 murders, 3.9 *dacoities* and 6.1 robberies a month which provide cause for worry.

The number of cases of smuggling was almost insignificant when one takes into account the length of the border with Pakistan which was 338 miles (Sengupta, 1965: 174).

### Control of crime in Dinajpur

**Establishment of Police forces and Police Station:** Police protection had been rendered more completed. In 1840, the force for the protection of person and property consisted of native officers and 242 foot constables, with 7224 village watchmen. In 1860, there were 60 native officers and 242 foot constables, with 6501 village watchmen. The district police force was constituted in 1861 (Hunter, 1875; 422-23). Dinajpur was divided into fifteen police circles or *thanas* or police station. For police purposes the district was divided into 15 *thanas* or police circles, viz, in the head-quarters Sub-division- Kotwali (394 square miles), Kaliyaganj ( 300 square miles), Raiganj ( 243 square miles), Parbatipur ( 166 square miles), Bansihari ( 257 square miles) and Nawabganj (238 square miles); in the Thakurgaon sub-division- Thakurgaon (441 square miles), Ranisankali ( 189 square miles), Pirganj ( 237 square miles), and Birganj ( 304 square miles); and in the Balurghat sub-division- Balurghat ( 291 square miles), Gangarampur (262 square miles), Porsha ( 160 square miles). Besides these there were eight independent out-posts, namely Atwari, Baliyadangi, Khansama, Hemtabad, Itahar, Chirirbandar, Kumarganj and Ghoraghat. There were thus 23 centres for the investigation of crime.

The regular police force consisted in 1909 of one Superintendent, one Assistant Superintendent, four Inspectors, 50 sub-Inspectors, 55 Head-constables and 387 constables, a total force of 496 officers and men or one policemen to every 7.9 square miles and to every 3, 147 of the population. The cost of maintaining this force was Rs.1, 44,133 (Strong, 1912, 115). There was, in addition, a rural police of 319 *daffadars* and 3,687 *chaukidars* (Imperial Gazetteer of India, Eastern Bengal and Assam, 1909; 217). The rural force for the watch and ward of villages in the interior was composed of 3,686 *chaukidars* and 324 *daffadars*. There were also ten towns *chaukidars* employed in Dinajpur town. With the exception of these town *chaukidars* and one *chaukidar* employed at the head-quarters of the Thakurgaon Sub-division, who drawn Rs. 6 per mensem, all the other *chaukidars* in the district were paid at the rate of Rs. 5, *daffadars* getting Rs. 6 ( Strong, 1912, 115).

**Municipal Police:** The Municipal Police was small force, which consisted at the end of 1872 of two native officers and 40 men, maintained at a total cost of Rs. 278 per month. This force was for the protection of the municipality of Dinajpur, the head-quarters town of the district; and its cost was defrayed by means of house rate, levied upon the householders and shopkeepers carrying on business within municipal limits. The population of Dinajpur was returned at 13,042, giving one policeman to every 310 inhabitants. The cost population amounted to 4 *annas* per head of the population (Hunter, 1875; 424).

**Rural Police or Village watch:** The village watch or rural police numbered 5297 in 1872, maintained either by the zamindars or by service lands held rent-free, at an estimated total cost of Rs. 81,088. Compared with the area and population, there was one village watchman or *chaukidar* to every .77 of a square mile of the district area, or one to every 283 of the population, maintained at an estimated cost of Rs.

19.10 per square mile of area, per head of the population. Each village watchman had charge of 37 houses on an average, and received an average pay in money or lands of Rs. 1.43 a month (Hunter, 1875; 424). Therefore, the regular district police, the municipal police, and the village watch, the machinery for protecting person and property in the district of Dinajpur at the end of 1872 of a total force of 5727 officers and men, equal to an average of one man to every .72 of a square mile as compared with the District area, or one man to every 262 souls as compared with the population. The estimated aggregate cost of maintaining this force, both Government and local and including the value of the rent-free lands held by the *chaukidars*, in 1872 amounted to Rs. 13,097 a month, per square mile of the district area, or Rs. 1.8 per head of the population (Hunter, 1875; 424).

**Cognizable cases:** During the year 1872, cognizable cases were reported to the police of 2884, of which 351 were discovered was false, besides 193 which the police declined to take up. Convictions were obtained in 1726 cases, or 73.76% of the true cases; the proportion of true cases being as one to every 641 of the population. Of non-cognizable cases, 850 were instituted, in which process issued in 742, in which 453 persons were convicted; the proportion of persons convicted being as one to every 3315 of the population (Hunter, 1875; 425).

**Control of crime in West Dinajpur:** For the prevention and detection of crime, the West Dinajpur district had been divided into 15 police stations. These police stations were, counting from the north, Chopra, Islampur, Goalpokhar and Karandighi in the Islampur subdivision, Raiganj, Hemtabad, Itahar, Kaliaganj, Gangarampur, Tapan, Kumarganj, Balurghat and Hilli in the Balurgaht Sadar sub-division (Sengupta, 1965: 175). For supervision of the police work in the police stations, the district had been divided into 5 circles. The Islampur circle consists of the police stations of Goalpokhar and Karandighi, the Raiganj circle consist of Raiganj, Itahar, Hemtabad and Kaliaganj police stations, the Gangrampur circle consists of the police stations of Gangarampur, Kushmandi, Tapan and Bangshihari and the Balurghat and Kumarganj. Each circle was under an Inspector of Police. There was a Sub-Divisions Police Officer at the headquarters of each of the sub-divisions of Raiganj and Islampur. There were two Deputy Superintendents of Police attached to the office of the Superintendent of Police at Balurghat. The work of the district police was supervised by the Superintendent of Police with headquarters at Balurghat. The Superintendent of Police was also in charge of the Intelligence Branch and was assisted by an Inspector of Police and a number of Sub-Inspectors, Assistant Sub-Inspectors and other ranks (Sengupta, 1965: 174).

**Rural Police:** The above force was not sufficient to maintain law and order in every corner of the district, *Chowkidars* and *Dafadars* were maintained by the Union Boards. These *Chowkidars* and *Dafadars* later termed as the rural police. In 1962, there were 1,467 *Chowkidars* and 212 *Dafadars*. The Superintendent of Police exercised control over the *Chowkidars* and *Dafadars* through the Officers-in-Charge of the police stations. *Dafadars* and *Chawkidars* worked in a police station were required to attended weekly parades at the headquarters of the police station. The Officer-in-Charge of a police station was thus provided with the opportunity of keeping track of bad characters in various parts of the police

station and was able to take preventive measures in advance in suitable cases for the prevention of crimes (Sengupta, 1965: 176).

**Village Resistance Groups:** Village Resistance Groups were first organised in the district in 1951 in compliance with the directive of the Inspector-General of Police. According to this scheme, able-bodied men of villages and towns were formed into groups for warding off attacks of dacoits in particular and in general for the prevention of thefts. The members of these Village Resistance Groups were required to keep watch at night by turns over the village and organise counter-attacked if the village was attacked by dacoits. Every such group had one of its literate members as its Information Officers who kept the local police informed of the presence and movements of suspicious characters, suspicious circumstances pointing to the possibility of crimes committed and prevalence of tension in the area. Representatives of active groups formed a *Thana* Committee which seek to keep all the groups active and works under the guidance of the Officer-in-Charge of the local police station. There was also a District Committee consisted of representatives of Thana Committees, to help the Superintendent of Police in co-ordinating all the groups was arranged by the Officer-in-Charge of the police stations concerned. Then they were sent by batches to one of the fifteen-day training camps held from time to time at different places in the district. There were approximately 4,000 such Village Resistance Groups in the district covering almost all the villages. In 1960, 23 instances of good work done by these Village Resistance Groups came to the notice of the Superintendent of Police (Sengupta, 1965: 176-77).

**Criminal Justice in Dinajpur:** In 1780, a *Mufassal Diwani Adalat* was established at Tajpur having jurisdiction over Haveli Pinjarah or Dinajpur, a part of Purnea, the district of Malda and a part of Rajshahi east of the Ganges. This *Diwani Adalat* was presided over by a Covenanted Civil Servant of the East India Company styled Judge. These *Diwani Adalats* functioned under the supervision of the *Sadar Diwani Adalat* at Calcutta which was presided over by Sir Elijah Impey (Sengupta, 1965; 41). Acts of general application were passed in the Council of the Governor-General for making Laws and Regulations and come into force in Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam as in other parts of India. Steps had also been taken to provide for initiation of measures of purely local interest, and the Lieutenant-Governor had been authorized to form a Council of fifteen members for making laws and regulations. Bills passed by this Council require the assent of the Lieutenant-Governor and also of the Governor-General (Imperial Gazetteer of India, Eastern Bengal and Assam, 1909; 10-11).

The civil court included those of the District and sessions Judge, of a Sub-Judge at Dinajpur, who was also additional Subordinate Judge of Jalpaiguri, where he holds periodical sittings, and of five *Munsifs*, of whom two were stationed at Dinajpur and the others at Balurghat, Raiganj and Thakurgaon. Criminal work was disposed of by the courts of the Sessions Judge, District Magistrate and the Deputy-Magistrates. Dinajpur had an evil reputation for gangs of dacoits and rioting arising out of disputes about land were common ( Imperial Gazetteer of India, Eastern Bengal and Assam, 1909; 216). Criminal justice was administered by the District and Sessions Judge, the District Magistrate and the Deputy and Sub-Deputy Magistrates stationed at Dinajpur, Thakurgaon and Balurghat.

The sanctioned staffs at Dinajpur, consists of District Magistrate, four Deputy Magistrates of the 1<sup>st</sup> class, one Deputy Magistrate of the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> class and a Sub-Deputy Magistrate of the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> class. The Sub-divisional Magistrates of Thakurgaon and Balurghat were always vested with 1<sup>st</sup> class powers and the former generally had a Sub-Deputy Magistrate with 3<sup>rd</sup> class powers to assist him.

To punish these criminals, criminal justice was administered by the District and Sessions Judge, the District Magistrate and the Deputy and Sub-Deputy Magistrates stationed at Dinajpur, Thakurgaon and Balurghat. In the post colonial phase, we observed that the crime cases in the West Dinajpur were remaining unchanged.

**Table of Crime in West Dinajpur**

Year	Dacoity	Robbery	Burglary	Theft ( excepting cattle theft)	Cattle theft	Murder	Rioting	Sex crimes	Smuggling
1957	52	102	474	519	74	30	102	38	87
1958	64	112	495	550	67	15	108	32	35
1959	42	37	364	499	59	20	77	34	28
160	28	43	288	428	81	18	98	23	54
Total	186	294	1,621	1,996	281	83	385	127	204

Sources: J.C. Sengupta, West Bengal District Gazetteers, West Dinajpur, p-174

Besides these stipendiary Magistrates, there have been at Dinajpur two unearned Magistrates with 1<sup>st</sup> class powers sitting separately and a bench of unearned Magistrates with 3<sup>rd</sup> class powers. At Balurghat and Raiganj there were benches of Honorary Magistrates with 3<sup>rd</sup> class powers (Strong, 1912; 114).

**Criminal Justice in West Dinajpur:** The administration of criminal justice was concerned, the Session Judge and the Assistant Sessions Judges try cases committed to their courts by the Magistrates who were competent to do so. The Session Judge also heard appeals and motions against the judgements and orders of Magistrates. The Magistrates who, although he could not entertained appeals against the judgements of the subordinate Magistrates, exercised concurrent jurisdiction with the Session Judge in the matter of disposal of revision applications. There was a Sub-Divisional Magistrate in each sub-division for the disposal of cases trial by Magistrates. He was assisted by one or more Magistrates, the number of Magistrates at each sub-division determined by the Government in the light of number of cases registered in each sub-division. In 1958, some Magistrates were assigned exclusively judicial duties by an executive order and this separated the judiciary from the executive in the district. It had not been possible to bring about the real separation of the judiciary from the executive because that would require amendment of the Criminal Procedure Code itself which defines the duties of the District and Sub-Divisional Magistrates and the subordination of one Court to another, as also for some administrative difficulties (Sengupta, 1965: 179).

## Conclusion

From the above discussion it appears that the crimes like *dacoity*, river pirates and murder, sex crime, smuggling, rioting were occurred in this district very long past. Major Sherwill, the Revenue Surveyor of this district writes that murder rape and *dacoity* or river pirates were common in those days. The Police forces for the protection of persons and property consisted of native officers and foot constables, with some village watchmen. In this situation, some Police stations were established in the various parts of the district to control the crime activities. Mr. Sisson administered Dinajpur in 1814, which put down crime and established a night watch there. Criminal work was disposed of by the courts of the Sessions Judge, District Magistrate and the Deputy-Magistrates. Dinajpur had an evil reputation for gangs of dacoits and rioting arising out of disputes about land was common.

The crimes like theft, robbery, *dacoity*, murders, rioting, burglary, sex crime, and smuggling were there. To control these crimes, the administrators of the district were set up police circles and some outpost to curve the graphs of the crimes cases in the district and even rural areas. Some rural polices, *dafadars* and *chowkidars* were appointed to keep watch, and even Village Resistance Group were kept for watch of the local areas with the help of the polices. The administration of criminal justice was administered by the Judge Magistrates of the district.

## Acknowledgement

Author would like to sincerely thank the officers and staffs of the State Archives and records keepers, where the documents preserved by them, and those who have done a commendable job by compiling the State reports and publishing in public domain and also sincere thanks to the Staff of State Archives of West Bengal, and their cooperation to prepare this work. I have followed the official spelling of names such places. However, in reference portion the original spelling of the same has been retained for convenience. Non-English words have been given in Italics forms.

**Declaration of Conflict Interests:** The author declared no potential conflicts of interests of with respect to research, author and or publication of article.

**Funding:** To carry out of this research article, author received no financial support or any fund from any Institutions or Government or public sector and publication for prepare this article.

**Research Data:** To prepare this article I have used the primary sources which lay in the Archival records of West Bengal, some District gazetteers of the district of Dinajpur and West Bengal and some colonial reports like statistical accounts of the district which related to this issue. Some time I have used the internet archival materials from public domain and sources to access the data.

## REFERENCES

- Hamilton, Buchanan, 1833. A Geographical, Statistical and Historical Description of The District or Zila of Dinajpur, Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta
- Hunter, W.W. 1875. Statistical Account of Bengal, District of Dinajpur, vol.VII, Trubner & Co, London

Imperial Gazetteer of India, Provincial series, Eastern Bengal  
and Assam, 1909. Government printing , Calcutta  
Sengupta, J.C. 1965. West Bengal District Gazetteers, West  
Dinajpur, Calcutta

Strong, F.W. 1912. Eastern Bengal District Gazetteers,  
Dinajpur, The Pioneer press, Alahabad

\*\*\*\*\*