

Administrative Activities in Maintaining Law and Order in North Bengal in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century: A Historical Review on Malda District

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Abstract: *Crime is an “illegal act or activity that can be punished by law”. Police, law, and British forces were used to strengthen and expand the British Empire in this country. In colonial North Bengal, there was existence of various types of crimes. To curb the crime and to establish peace in the second half of the nineteenth century the colonial government took various administrative measures in the districts of North Bengal. The district of Malda was a unique example of colonial crime control policy, where various methods were used. The main purpose of this discussion is to analyze the nature of the crime of the district which had gradually changed its form and to discuss the steps taken by the colonial government to control the characteristic changes of crime. A class of educated intellectual citizens came forward against this British exploitation and oppression of the regime that was able to spread the form of British exploitation to the masses in every canopy.*

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Introduction

The foundation of the historic police law of 1861 in the hands of the colonial rulers was involved in the efforts of the establishment of the rule of laws in the history of Bengal. It is

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not historical truth to say that there was no policing system in Bengal Presidency before the establishment of colonial power by the British East India Company. There were the existences of armed sepoy, thanadar or chowkidar or some professional post from the Sultanate period before the coming of the British. Even to protect law, discipline, the administrative boundary called '*Thana*' claimed by many researchers was created in the Sultanate period. During the Sultanate period *thana* was created by the division of provinces in various parts. But, after the coming of the new government, i.e., the colonial government, the numbers, activities, complicity, and form of the crime were also increased. As well as the diversity and complexity of the crime continued to grow. As a result, an orderly and strict law structure is needed¹.

From its starting year, the colonial administration had tried to catch the original criminals and focused on the possible investigation process, and side by side they laid emphasis on police promptness and to reduce the rate of criminality, they gave importance to the patrolling system in the towns as well as the interior of Bengal Presidency. But in the early East India Company's rule in Bengal, many complex problems were faced to protect law and order. First of all, there was no vast knowledge of the conquered territory by the company's employees. Secondly, there was no distinct knowledge about the local laws of this country. Thirdly, due to lack of acquaintance at the local level and there was no proper identity about the modern investigation process of the police employees, the British government had to be sufficiently inconvenienced to carry administrative system or to build a skilled police administration early under the company's rule². However, in another important reason, particularly in 1793-94, according to various governmental reports, the investigation process of multiple criminal cases in Bengal was interrupted due to the special involvement of corrupt administrative officers and *Sepoy, Darogas* with the criminals. Whether it was investigating the crime or arresting the culprit at the ground level, all such efforts would have been ruined as a result of such evil activities. The real culprits would get out of hand and often the officers of the police administration would harass the common man. Many times the police were slow to catch the real culprit. At the police station or ground level, the magistrates often had to take action against such culprit officers³. However, in addition to such misfortunes, the honest activism of the police in curbing crime during that period also came to the fore. There were also instances where the information provided by local

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informants to police and administrative officials came in handy in investigating crimes. Collecting relevant information from the administration and the police for crime suppression and reporting system in determining informative duties originated during the colonial period. It was then that the administration realized the need to document and analyze the information needed to correct criminals, starting from crime suppression. How the various changes in the society changed the level and pattern of crime that was captured in various police and administrative reports of that time⁴. In the context of the great Bengal famines of the 1770s and *Fakir-Sannyasi* revolts started in the late eighteenth century the English administration saw signs of increasing crime in Bengal. Multiple government reports suggest that the increase in looting was due to insurgent activity and food shortages in rural areas. After the *Sepoy* Mutiny, the Company's rule came to an end when the direct English rule came, and a new brutal crime was reported in the police report of that time. This was the killing of a child. Although the police reports of the past are dry and sticky on the outside, the crime scene of the past that comes to the fore when they are submerged was sometimes quite sensational. It is also an interesting element of historiography. About a century and a half ago, police officers realized that there was a connection between rising commodity prices and increasing crime rates⁵.

The written official-unofficial statements we get from the administration and police officials about the criminal world of colonial Bengal are very unique. Indeed, they have not been able to disclose all the information openly as they are 'insiders' of the administration, but what we get by filtering is not less interesting or less diverse. There are many grey narratives hidden in the fact that the world of Bengali crime was not confined to a mere black and white map — various clues found in the documents of the police administration and the personal memoirs of the officers. When it comes to composing a history of the criminal world of Bengal, the researcher of the recent time has no choice but to look at these written accounts⁶.

North Bengal and Crime

North Bengal or the northern part of West Bengal now consists of Malda, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, and Darjeeling districts. At present, the name North Bengal is widely used but the name North Bengal does not or did not have any territory. The name has

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got different identities at different times, such as Pundravardhana, Pragyotishpur, Barindbhumi, Gaur, Kamatapur, Gaubanga, and North Bengal⁷. Focusing on the term though some attempts have been made to detect North Bengal as an administrative unit since the unknown past it is not beyond suspicion⁸. It is assumed that the term had been invented as a geographical definition. There was also a British version of Northern Bengal (including Purnia) which meant for the country, 'bounded on the north by the lower Himalayan ranges, on the west by the river Koosee (Kosi), on the east by the Juboona, (Jamuna) a branch of the Brahmapootra (Brahmaputra), and on the south by the Ganges, locally called Pudda (Padma)'⁹. The periphery of modern North Bengal more or less suits best with that geographical definition.

With the acquisition of 'grant of Diwani' in 1765 AD, the whole of Bengal, including North Bengal, came under the direct control of the British except Cooch Behar and Baikunthapur. But they did not take the initiative to organize this vast territory for proper governance. Rajshahi, Rangpur, and Dinajpur were the only three districts in which attempts were being made to rule not only the vast territory of North Bengal but also parts of the Bhagalpur Division, parts of South Assam, and Southern parts of the Ganges. The British government had such unrealistic thinking because they wanted to govern this vast territory at the lowest possible cost. Their main goal was to collect as much revenue as possible. Not only did they set out to create their administrative apparatus for revenue collection, but they also adhered to the rules of revenue collection through those old middlemen. But what was the new and more serious thing is that they were hiring permanent *Izaredar* and not to collect revenue through permanent intermediaries. The introduction of the *Izaredari* system in the hope of making an extra profit by leaving the loose and expensive Nawabi bureaucracy or by abandoning the meager income of the *zamindari* feudal system brought a severe defeat to the peasants. Because the temporary *zamindars* were very much interested in raising any amount of extra money by promising additional auctions. The condition of the peasants became miserable as they went to meet other demands besides rent¹⁰.

On the other hand, the reluctance of the British in the administration and the incompetence of the Nawab completely broke the general law and order. The old system of government was destroyed but no establishment of a new system of government. As a result,

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the whole of North Bengal at that time, thieves, robbers, murders, harassment by the criminals, looting of fakirs and monks, insecurity of property, and life made public life unbearable¹¹. In this situation came the terrible famine of 1770. This famine was the result of the wrong revenue policy of the English East India Company. About one-third of the people of Bengal died in this famine; many areas became depopulated and forested. Many areas in North Bengal also became depopulated, and several people joined in the thefts, robberies, dacoit, and bandits. Dacoity in Bengal was an organized system, an unavoidable and direct outcome of the Company's terrible fiscal policy. Banditry was significant in Bengal because it provided livelihood to the paupers and compensation to the rich who otherwise suffered under the terrible fiscal squeeze of the state¹². During the early days of the East India Company's rule, there was tremendous agrarian unrest in many parts of Eastern India which found expression in the chain of the uprising¹³. Escaping from this oppression, the peasant revolt broke out in the various districts of North Bengal. Among these important were the Rangpur Rebellion, Sannyasi and Fakir Rebels, Wahabi movement, Indigo Revolt, etc. Although the English East Company did not attach much importance to such criminal activity in the early stages, they gradually became alarmed as the level of crime increased. Because the main target of the criminals was the English merchants, indigo factories, or the zamindars and moneylenders who were loyal to the British government.

Administrative Measures

From the beginning, the colonial government thought that dacoity was a serious problem for law and order. To stop the criminals, Cornwallis introduced the *thanadari* system but the police system of Cornwallis had been unsuccessful in apprehending bandits and convicts. In early 1801, Lord Wellesley instituted inquiries regarding the cause of the governmental failure to maintain peace and order in Bengal¹⁴. Meanwhile, in 1808, an important step was taken; this was the appointment of a Superintendent of Police for the Calcutta, Dacca, and Murshidabad. This office was constituted to concentrate information obtainable from different parts of the country. The results were so satisfactory that in 1810 the system was extended to the Divisions of Patna, Benaras, and Bareilly. But the heavy expenditures involved in police administration throughout the country proved a serious financial burden

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and in 1860 the Government of India appointed a commission to inquire into the whole situation of police administration in British India and to submit proposals for increasing the efficiency and reducing the excessive expenditure¹⁵. The constitution and recommendation of the Commission of 1860 was a landmark in the history of police administration in India. Practically the modern police administration of India was based on the recommendation of 1860. The Commission recommended the abolition of the military police as a separate organization and constitute of a single homogeneous force of civil constabulary for the performance of all duties. The Commission submitted a bill, based on the Madras Police Act, to give effect to these recommendations, and this was passed into law as Act V of 1861.¹⁶ Accordingly, the police forces of various provinces were organized on the general line laid down by the Police Commission of 1860, though there had been some differences of minor importance between province to province¹⁷. Before the introduction of the Police Act (Act V) of 1861 in Bengal, there was no uniformity of practice in crime reporting by the District Magistrate who was also the District Police Chiefs. From May 1863 the IGP introduced with Government approval, a set of new forms for crime reporting. By about 1864-65, some semblance of uniformity in crime reporting could be achieved mainly due to the coordinating efforts by the newly introduced Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG)¹⁸.

The police establishments in Colonial Bengal mainly were three kinds' viz., (1) the regular district police which was paid entirely from the imperial revenues. (2) the Municipal police which is paid partly by the Government and partly by Municipal funds and (3) the Village police which was appointed either by the zamindars or the village community, and paid, as was explained in the report for 1864-65, either in money, or in kind, or the assignment of lands held on condition of service¹⁹ and (4) railway police (5) the special or detective police, including establishment for the prevention of opium smuggling²⁰. However, with the strengthening of law and order at the provincial level and the strengthening of the police system, the colonial government moved towards the formation of strong police systems in the municipalities also. The important consideration is that the municipal police must form an integral part of the provincial police force and be under the undivided control of the provincial authorities.

During the colonial period in the nineteenth century, various types of crime were found in the areas of North Bengal²¹. Six major crimes have dominated the crime scene of

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India as well as North Bengal during the past two hundred years i.e., Rioting, Murder, Dacoity or river Dacoity, Robbery, Burglary, and Theft. An isolation case of rape may be a serious offense, but it is not a major crime in the overall volume and context of criminality²². However, in the criminal scenario of North Bengal, almost all of these six major crimes could be seen. There were several special features to increase the crime rate within these boundaries of North Bengal. First, the pressure of the British government to pay hefty revenue was causing the anger of the people in the region to become involved in various movements and criminal activities against the Colonial Government. So, in the nineteenth century, many revolts against the oppression of the colonial government spread in this territory. Secondly, it can be said in the nineteenth century there were so many natural calamities or famine spread in North Bengal. But even in these miserable times, when the colonial government pressed for revenue, the common man had no choice but to indulge in criminal tendencies. Thirdly, most of the areas of North Bengal were forested during this period due to the low population. So the criminals had the advantage of hiding in that forest by committing crimes. So the colonial government began to think about how to control the escalation of crime. The colonial government takes various steps to control the tendency of crime. Such as the creation of new districts²³, reduction of the size of large districts²⁴, change in the jurisdiction of a district²⁵, creation of new police stations, reduction of areas under large police stations, increase in the number of police, increase in the number of spies, etc. Fourthly, the spread of nationalist attitudes and movements as a result of the spread of western education from the second half of the nineteenth century was the cause of the annoyances of the colonial government.

Crime scenario of Malda district

The special reason for choosing Malda district in this discussion is that Malda district has a strange connection with the crime, crime tendency, and administrative efforts to curb it. The emergence of the separate identity of this district, which is the gateway to the Northern Bengal and the southernmost district of this geographical area, and the subsequent change of boundaries and administrative changes in this district may have been due to the tendency to organize crime. The district has a long association with cracking down on criminals and maintaining law and order. During colonial rule, the district was repeatedly plagued with

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problems of maintaining law and order. With the emergence of Malda as a separate district was the question of maintaining the extended commercial connection of the English East India Company with this district. Throughout the second half of the eighteenth century and the first decade of the nineteenth century, the security of the lives and property of the owners and employees of the English trading houses and indigo factories located in different parts of the district was disturbed by various criminals, robbers or looters. So the director of the East India Company was very scared. But at that time, theft, robbery, or the incident of evacuation were more frequent in this district due to the low population of this area and because most of the areas were covered with thick jungle²⁶. Even up to the middle of the nineteenth century, most of the district was covered with dense forest, and the various wild animals roamed in it, as learned from the description of Pemberton²⁷.

Before the formation of Malda as a separate district, the greater part of the area comprised within Maldah was divided pretty equally between the Collectors of Dinajpur and Purniah, the river Mahananda then forming the boundary between those two Districts. In February 1813 the Superintendent of Police of the Lower Provinces laid before the government an unfavorable report on the state of crime in this tract of the country. He stated that the number of burglaries was very great in the following *thanas*, viz. in Sibganj, Kaliachak, Bholahat, and Gargariba, which were then included in the Purniah District and Maldah and Bamongola within Dinajpur and in Rohanpur and Chapai within Rajshahi. This condition of things attributed to the extreme distance at which those *thanas* were situated from the Magistrate's headquarters at Purniah and Dinajpur –Kaliachak for instance being more than 100 miles from Purniah. These representations seem to have at once produced their effect; for in March 1813 the *thanas* which correspond to the present district of Malda were placed under the charge of a Joint-Magistrate and a Deputy Collector²⁸. Since then the separate identity of this district has been established. It was thought that the district has moved towards a lasting solution to the impasse over the jurisdiction of the police and officers to crack down on criminals in the Malda district.

But the problem of jurisdiction did not solve permanently, because the powers of the Joint Magistrate and Deputy-Collector were anomalous, and hence originated the confusion which for a long time overhung the criminal, revenue, and civil jurisdictions of Malda. This officer seems at first to have been a certain extent under the control of two collectors of

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Purniah and Dinajpur, all communications from the Board of Revenue being transmitted to him through one or the other of the treasuries²⁹. In his capacity, however, of Joint-Magistrate he was practically independent. Certain *thanas* had been carved out of the Districts of Purniah and Dinajpur and placed under the charge of the Joint-Magistrate of Malda district, but he was not controlled in any way by the Magistrate of those districts³⁰. In 1870, the Collector reported that there was much intermingling and confusion between the criminal, revenue, and civil jurisdictions of Dinajpur, Purniah, or Murshidabad while for criminal and revenue purposes they belonged to Malda. In other portions, only the criminal jurisdiction rested with Malda and both the revenue and civil jurisdiction were with one or other of the three above-mentioned districts. Thus the confusion in jurisdictional power was the main obstacle to reducing the criminal tendency. However, despite the emergence of a separate district in 1813, the number of crimes in this district had not decreased in that sense. The J.J. Pemberton Report in the 1850s mentioned various incidents of robbery in most parts of the district³¹. In the same way, various contemporary government and police reports mention various types of crimes in this district. To remove the confusion that existed in the past about the jurisdiction and also to suppress the criminals, this district was included in the Bhagalpur division from the former Rajshahi division in 1876. In this case, of course, the proximity of the district to the Bhagalpur division served as an important factor, as well as the cultural relations of the district with Bihar.

However, due to the incorporation of the Bhagalpur Division from the Rajshahi Division in 1876 AD, the number of robberies in this district gradually increased. Because of the inclusion of the Bhagalpur division and the improvement of the railway system up to Rajmahal, a large number of robbery gangs would come to this district, loot, and return to their home or district. Many times they used the river to return. The police could not reach most of the gangs because at first, the roads were inaccessible. On the other hand, they could not chase the gang due to the small number of the police force. For example, a report of 1880 has given an account of such an incident. According to this report,

“The increase of dacoity cases in Malda is marked. It is said that facilities now afforded by the railway for traveling bring down large numbers of up-country and Behar men, who commit dacoity and make off with the property beyond the limits of the district. Two of

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the cases have been traced to Purneah gangs, and the Kanaurias, a thieving tribe of that district, are suspected of having had a hand in more than one of the cases".³²

However, the lack of adequate crime control in the district administration has been acknowledged in government reports. Adequate infrastructure to apprehend and punish criminals may not have developed in the district until the 1880s or the last decade of the nineteenth century. J Munro, Esq., C.S., Inspector General of Police, Lower Provinces of Bengal, remarked,

The only district in which the state of this crime calls for any remark is Maldah. As regards this district the Commissioner remarks, the steady increase in Maldah is bad. The district officer has not been able to assign any reason. He seems to think however that a few old hands instigated the decoities if they did not themselves take part in the committal of crimesprior to this the crime of decoity for a long time went unpunished in Maldah.³³

However, the police were active enough to curb the crime in the Malda district. Their activism made it possible to reduce the crime rate by 1881. According to the Police Commissioner Report of 1881,

In Malda, there is one case less than last year, and police operations have here been successful. The Commissioner remarks, in the last annual report it was mentioned that some old hands were undoubtedly at work. This has proved true, as some of the old dacoits have been reconvicted this year. I am glad to report that the convictions of the year have had a very salutary effect. The Magistrate reports that during the last seven months of the year the district had been free from dacoits. The Maldah police deserve credit for their exertions.³⁴

The district of Maldah had a rich heritage of protest against the colonial rulers and their Indian compatriots. The district witnessed from the very beginning of the colonial rule the primary resistance movement. The earliest of these was the Sannyasi and Fakir rebellion, which rocked northern Bengal and adjacent areas of Bihar between 1763 and 1800³⁵. In the

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second half of the nineteenth century, there was so many mass movement spread in this district against the exploitation of the colonial government. The peasant uprising that took place on the indigo plantations in Bengal in 1859-1862 had its impact in the district as well³⁶. The Wahabi³⁷ Movement, one of the most formidable protracted and remorselessly anti-British uprisings also had a deep-rooted connection with the Malda district. The prevailing socio-religious degradation and increasing loss of political power to the non-Muslims were the driving factors behind this religious revivalist movement.

There were also some indigenous and exogenous criminal groups operating in Malda during this period. Figures of crimes are to be found in the statistical appendices. In the Malda district, the most common forms of series crime were burglary, theft cattle-lifting, and rioting over newly formed chars. Decoity on the Purnia border was not uncommon as also highway robbery in the *Barind* region during the paddy cutting season and the seasons of fairs³⁸. Dacoities remain a recurrent theme in the crime map of Malda. Houses of local notables and rich people were the usual targets. River dacoity was a very common feature in Malda crime records by this group³⁹ and it is very much possible that Sanders was also involved in this. The Superintendent of Police of Pabna in 1894 reported that nine or tenths of river dacoities were purely and simply committed by Sanders. They were excellent oarsmen and pursuit of them by boat is practically hopeless⁴⁰. There was some reference to villagers of the Gazole police station gaining access to the booty from river dacoities⁴¹. The district was a common resort of wandering gypsies, known as Nats, or Kanjars, who were habitual thieves. There were no professional criminal classes in this district, though the Shershabad Mahomedans have the reputation of being turbulent and lawless⁴². According to Lambourn, it was the prevalence of robbery and dacoity in the police station of Shibganj and Kaliachak even in the last decade of the nineteenth century⁴³. Malda appears to Chhapparbands as a base of operation for their Dinajpur and Mymensingh raids. They committed dacoity, burglary, pocket-picking, ornament snatching, etc⁴⁴. Malda districts also witnessed the criminal activities of the Bhurs. However, due to its proximity to Bihar, Malda district had long faced the problem of crime committed by exogenous criminal groups. In this case, the Bhurs community must be mentioned,

There are certain villages in Gazeepore, and perhaps one or two in Shahabad, inhabited by Bhurs, which supply men who committed this

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crime in Bengal even so far down as Mymensingh, but they were well known, and for information received from the North-West authorities certain parties who had perpetrated decoities in Maldah, Purneah, &c., were arrested in Rajmahal and also in Mymensingh⁴⁵.

Thus, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Malda district witnessed a variety of crimes. The high crime rate was a very serious concern for the colonial administration in this area. After the creation of a separate district, the area was under the good supervision of the colonial police system. Because the protection of the lives and property of a large number of Europeans involved in the East India Company's expanded silk and indigo trade was an initial priority. After the Great Revolt of 1857, the British government took over the direct rule from the East India Company, but the situation did not improve much in the first few decades after the 1850s. The British government took over the administration of the district in 1858, but they did not want to neglect peace. They were responsible for saving the lives of several Europeans living in the district for administrative works. However, in the middle of the nineteenth century, it was difficult to suppress criminals in this district. This was because gangs of criminals from this district would steal, rob or commit other crimes in various neighbor or border districts. After that, they hide in the dense jungle or hiding under the guise of farmers. At that time, most areas of the district were covered with dense forests, which had the advantage of committing various crimes from the surrounding district and hiding in the district. That is why the official reports showed less crime in this district. As it can be seen from an official report from the forties of the nineteenth century,

It is to be observed however that it is well known though they do not commit their ravages in the Malda jurisdiction that it is made the retreat of whole gangs of Moorshedabad and other neighboring districts, keeping up in Malda the appearance of mere ryots..... may account in a great measure for the small amount of crime committed in this district⁴⁶.

Criminal control policy in Malda district

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However, after the formation of a separate district in 1813, the total numbers of police stations in this district were 8. However, at that time there was no separate English Bazar Thana, later known as the district headquarters. But instead, it was Shibganj police station that was situated near the English Bazar during this time. The old Malda town, on the other hand, was recognized as the district's main town in the early nineteenth century and had a separate police station. But in the seventies of the nineteenth century, it increased to 9 police stations or thannah.

List Showing that the Thannahs in each District under the Several Divisions of the
Bengal Presidency, Malda District

Number of thannah (1813)	Number of thannah (1872)
1. Maldah	1. English Bazar
2. Jugdullah	2. Maldah
3. Gowgurriah	3. Gargariba
4. .Bholahaut	4. Kharba
5. Kalleachuck	5. Gajol
6. Rohanpore	6. Kaliachak
7. Sheebgunge	7. Gumasthapur
8. Chuppe	8. Sibganj
	9. Nawabganj

Source: - W.R. Baillie, Circular orders issued from the late office of the superintendent of Police in the Lower Provinces, to the Magisterial and other Criminal Authorities and the Ferry Fund Committees from November 1837 to February 1854, J. Thomas Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta, 1854, & W.W. Hunter, A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol. VII, 1876, D.K. Publishing House, 1974, p.111.

But since the end of the nineteenth century, the situation had been changing. As the population grows, the number of police stations also increased and so does the character of the crime. The personal police force of Malda district consists of three distinct bodies, namely the regular or District police, municipal police for the protection of the towns, and a village

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watch or rural police⁴⁷. However, a statistic of the seventies of the nineteenth century shows that the tendency of crime has increased a lot since the sixties. In 1872, 1,016 cognizable crimes were reported in which 209 cases were discovered to be false and 150 were never enquired into only 657 cases were true. Others crimes such as trespasses into house or property and housebreaking with intent to commit cases, ordinary theft, dacoit, unlawful assembly, and rape were noticed⁴⁸. At the end of 1872, the regular police of the districts consist of (1) the district Superintendent of Police (2) 3 subordinate officers, and (3) 230-foot police constable⁴⁹. According to Hunter's computation, the total strength of the regular police in the district amounted to one man to every 6.61 square miles or one man to every 2,468 of the population⁵⁰. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, for police purposes the districts is divided into 10 police stations, one police station increased from the previous one with four out-posts, viz., English Bazar (Kotwali), with the beat house at Bholahat, Ratua with outposts at Manikchak, Kaliachak, Shibganj, Nawabganj, Gomastapur, Old Malda with an outpost at Habibpur, Gajol with outposts at Bamongola, Kharba and Tulshihata.

In the early years after the formation of the Malda district, most of the criminal cases were related to theft and petty crime. The most common forms of crimes were burglaries, theft, cattle-lifting, and rioting over newly formed chars. But over time the variety of crimes increased in this district. A statistic found from 1900-01 to 1910-11 shows that among the crimes committed in the Malda district during this time significant offense was an offense against public tranquillity, murder, culpable homicide, rape, grievance hurt, hurt, criminal force, and assault, decoity, robbery, cattle theft, other theft, other offenses against the panel code, bad livelihood, salt law, excise, forest, stamps, municipal, other offenses. The below figures also show the highest number of crimes committed in the above-mentioned field and other offenses against the Indian penal code⁵¹. However, the number of robberies and decoity was decreasing more than ever. This was because the population in this district was increasing and the forest was gradually decreasing, As a result, the robber's hiding places were gradually reduced in the first half of the twentieth century. However, to increase the population as well as increase the literacy rate of the educated people, in the Malda district the resident of this district associated themselves with the anti-British nationalist movement at the local and national levels. Maybe that's why the tendency for crime to break British law or the Indian Panel Code was increasing.

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The colonial government was much concerned about the maintenance of law and order in this district. In the first half of the twentieth century, the government took various steps to curb the criminal activities in this district. First of all, recognition of the special branch of the office of the Inspector General of Police, Bengal, and the formation of a department to deal with political crime⁵². To suppress the nationalist movement with a strong hand the colonial government wanted to introduce a strong police system. The government took strict measures to curb all these crimes. One such move was to strengthen the government telegraph system in North Bengal so that crime could be easily reported. It is known from such a government secret report that the government proposed extension to the telegraph system in Bengal so that greater facilities may be afforded for the prevention and detection of dacoities and violent crime in the Presidency, especially in North Bengal⁵³.

Statement showing the number of Police stations and their distance from the Telegraph office
in each district

Name of district	Number of Police Stations and distance from nearest telegraphy office						Total number of the police station	The total number of telegraph offices opened for paid traffic
	Within 1 mile	Within 2 miles	Within 3 miles	Within 4 miles	Within 5 miles	Over 5 miles		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Jalpaiguri	9	-----	-----	1	-----	5	15	55
Pabna	5	1	-----	-----	1	8	15	18
Malda	1	-----	-----	1	3	7	12	14
Rajshahi	4	4	1	-----	-----	11	20	34
Dinajpur	6	-----	1	-----	-----	13	20	19

Source:- Shimla Records, Government Confidential Report, Government of India, Home Department, Political-A, Proceedings, March 1914, nos. 70-71, National Archives, New Delhi, p.4.

Now, it is to be discussed how the colonial masters maintain the law and order of the towns of this district. As the district headquarters, the English Bazar town gets priority from the colonial government in maintaining the law and order. In 1869 English Bazar town police consisted of 1 Head Constable and 28 constables. The only jail of the district of the third class category was located in English Bazar. As far as the police administration of the English

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Bazar town was concerned, the Municipal force at the end of 1872 has consisted of 2 officers and 32 men, maintained at a total cost of Rs. 235.5.4 a month. The Census Report containing a population of 12,859 informed an average of one policeman to every 476 of population. In 1872 annual cost of the municipal police, amounted to 2 annas 5 pies per head of the population⁵⁴. In 1869 English Bazar Municipality spent Rs. 2043 and in the year 1881-82 it rose to Rs. 2073⁵⁵.

However, the colonial government gave more priority to the district headquarters to maintain peace and control crime. Because many Europeans or Englishmen used to live in the English Bazar, the district's headquarter town or old Malda town for administrative or business purposes. Thus the main goal of the colonial government was to protect the inhabitants of their country from theft, robbery, or murder. So they recruited more troops mainly for the protection of the towns. However, statistics show that in the first decade of the twentieth century, the British government paid close attention to maintaining peace in the Malda district. So, in 1872, where the number of police stations in Malda district was only 9, but in the first decade of the twentieth century, the number of police stations and outposts were increased to 16. This is a testament to the fact that the colonial government was keen to reduce the crime rate in the Malda district. And the importance of the Malda district was growing to them. The statistics also show that the number of Inspector, Sub-Inspector, Head-Constables, and Constables were also increasing in this district.

Serial No.	Name of the <i>Thanna</i> or Outpost	Inspector	Sub-Inspector	Head-Constables	Constables
1	English Bazar OP	.....	.....	.....	.....
2	Old Malda OP	.....	.....	.....	.....
3	Gumashtapur thana	.....	1	1	9
4	English Bazar thana	1	.....	.....	16
5	Bholahat Beat House thana	1	2
6	Nawabganj thana	1	1	9
7	Kaliachak thana	2	11
8	Sibganj thana	2	1	12

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9	Kharba thana	1	1	9
10	Ratua thana	1	1	9
11	Tulshihata thana	1	9
12	Malda thana	1	1	1	10
13	Habibpur thana	.....	.....	1	2
14	Gajol thana	.....	1	1	9
15	Bamongola thana	.....	1	.....	4
16	Manikchak thana	.....	1	.....	4
Total(At Thanna and Outpost)		2	16	9	115

Source: - *Malda District Gazetteer, Statistics 1901-02*, The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot, Calcutta, 1905, p.20

Conclusion

The British government followed various measures to reduce the crime rate in this district, like the creation of the new district, reduction of the size of Malda district, change in the jurisdiction of a district, the introduction of the strong police force and telegraph system, creation of new police stations, increasing in the police force, etc. So it can be seen that after the formal introduction of the Malda district under colonial rule in 1813, the Malda district could not become an independent and full-fledged district in that sense. Although Malda district was formed as a separate district in the first half of the nineteenth century it could not become an independent and full-fledged district in that sense as it was administratively, judicially, and economically dependent on other districts or provinces for a long time. Because in the early stage of district formation this district was surrounded by water and forest. Moreover, the population was very low. The people here did not have much political awareness at that time. For this reason, it was very safe, profitable, and easy to build this place as a penal settlement for political prisoners. After the formation of the district, there was no permanent or full-time district magistrate in this district. William Burden, a Joint magistrate, and deputy collector were in charge of governing the district. The jurisdiction and governance of his area were not well-organized. Because at that time the area from Rajshahi, Dinajpur, and Purnia districts which were included in Malda district, important documents

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about land revenue, civil, judicial were being transferred to newly created Malda district. Therefore, the district magistrate of Malda district had to rely on the aforesaid three district magistrates for revenue collection, land reform, and civil court work. Therefore, although a separate Malda district was formed to reduce crime, in that sense the crime rate of this district could not be controlled. One of the reasons was administrative ambiguity. As a result, there was undisciplined complexity in the work of the concerned district magistrates. However, when the treasury of Malda district was established in 1832, the task of depositing and collecting revenue became much easier. Before that, the economic activities of this district were conducted from the treasury of Dinajpur district. In 1859, for the first time, a full-fledged District Magistrate and Collector were appointed for this district. Thus this district enjoys the status of an independent and sovereign district like the other districts of undivided Bengal. Why did the reconstruction of this district take so long? This reason may have been hidden between the needs of the colonial requirements and the contemporary situation. The primary reason for the formation of the Malda district was to improve law and order and bring remote areas under control to reduce the possibility of commercial and financial loss to the British government and to bring the disturbing police stations under one roof. The administration was simply a trading partner. They wanted to the reduction of government expenditure, and this may be the reason why the formation of a full-fledged Malda district had been going on for so long. However, just as there were different types of crime in this district, there were different ways of suppressing crime.

However, the situation may change a lot when the British colonial government directly took control of the district administration. However, by the time the British government took direct control of the district along with the entire province of Bengal in 1858, the district of Malda had become quite self-sufficient in the administrative machinery. However, the first and foremost objective of the colonial government's policy of peace and order in the Malda district was to protect European workers and officers from various crimes committed in this district. As in this case, just as the old police stations were demolished and new ones were formed, new police stations were added, in the same way, the number of police officers and constables was also increased. Another point to note in the crime scenario of Malda district is that the inclusion of the Bhagalpur division from the Rajshahi division in 1876 increased the number of crimes in this district. This is because when the communication

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of railways and waterways improved, the criminals of the neighboring district were using this district as a corridor to commit offenses. At the same time, it is worth mentioning that the increase in the number of violations of the various rules of the Indian Penal Code in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was indicative of a mystical significance. Although the number of thefts, robberies, and burglaries increased at first, later on, the growing tendency to break the statutory laws of the Indian Penal Code proves that the people of Malda challenged the colonial authority and succeeded. However, a class of educated intellectual citizens came forward against this British exploitation and oppression of the regime that was able to spread the form of British exploitation to the masses in every canopy.

Notes & References

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15. *Ibid.*, p.7.

16. *Ibid.*, p.28.

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18. Third Annual Report of the Working of the Civil Constabulary, Lower Province Bengal, (1864), p.33, cited in, Mukhopadhyay, Arun Prosad, *Some Aspects of Crime and Public Order in Bengal 1861 to 1912*, last retrieved on 16.01.2022, from <https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/handle/10603/154679>.

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20. *Annual Report on the Administration of the Bengal Presidency for 1868-69*, Bengal Secretariat Press, Calcutta, 1869, p. 26.

21. During the colonial period the area of North Bengal at that time covered the area of undivided Rajshahi Division, (Dinajpur, Pabna, Bagura, Rangpur, Rajshahi, Jalpaiguri, Maldah, Darjeeling), Cooch Behar Princely state, some parts of Purnia District in Bihar, some parts of undivided Nadia District. Moreover the Districts of Goalpara and Kamarupa (partly) of Assam were situated within the geographical jurisdiction of North Bengal. Cited in, Oahab Abdul Mahmud (Ed) *Itihas Anusandhan*, 7, p.532, Akshay Kumar Maitreya have mentioned that the Rajshahi Division is known as North Bengal comprising the Districts of Rajshahi, Maldah, Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Rangpur, Bagura and Pabna

22. Mukhopadhyay, Arun Prosad, *op.cit.*, p.54.

23. Bogra district took its birth in 1821. It was created principally to provide supplementary facilities for the administration of criminal justice in the far-flung eastern police divisions of Dinajpur, Rangpur and Rajshahi which had disrepute for robbery and other violent criminal activities. A good number of European indigo and silk planters residing in the banks of the rivers in the east of the district also were in search of safety and protection. In 1813, separate Malda district was created to stop the antisocial activities in the Kaliachak region, to bring peace and order, and to protect the life and property of the silk traders, indigo planters employees of the East India Company recruit in this district.

24. Rajshahi District was the most significant and largest district of Rajshahi division i.e. North Bengal. Till 1793 it was the largest district of North Bengal. Thus complications arose to govern it properly by one singular authority. As a result numerous areas were subtracted from the district for the undergoing of its smooth and efficient administration, Cited in, W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, Vol. X, Districts of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri and State of Kuch Behar, Trubner & Co, 1876, London, P. 217.

25. The jurisdiction of Dinajpur has 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; it was notorious for the lawlessness of its inhabitants. In order to enable administration to cope successfully with the *dakaitis* 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.

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He put down crime and established a night watch, cited in, Hunter, W.W., *A Statistical Account of Bengal, Volume VII*, Trubner and Co. London, 1876, p. 356.

26. Pemberton, J.J., *Geographical and Statistical Report of the District of Maldah*, Calcutta Gazette Office, Calcutta, 1854, p. 38, Pemberton mentioned that, numerous hordes of dacoits infested the country; and it was no unusual occurrence, for small bodies of predatory horseman to make incursions from the mountains directly North of Maldah and Dinajpur.

27. In order to give details of this district in the 1850s, J.J. Pemberton described that, Two-thirds of the district is covered with jungle,forest trees of various kinds, are thickly inter mixed with the other jungle there is also much brushwood, and several sorts of gigantic reeds, in many places the jungle is absolutely impenetrable, every kind of wild animal abounded from the fierce tiger to the timid hare, and the sportsman is well rewarded, should be only have preference sufficient to trace them to their lairs.

28. Hunter W.W., *A Statistical Account of Bengal, Volume VII, District of Maldah, Rangpur, & Dinajpur*, Trubner & Co. London, 1876, p.18.

29. *Ibid.*, p.19.

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