

Structure and Development of Police Force in India

Jerin Philip

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The police is one of the most important branches of public service in India. The nation, over years has been witnessed policing systems of varying effectiveness. Through this paper, the specific period of decline of local powers, rise of crime and how a system formed improving slowly over years to more or less the present day system prevalent in the country is brought into larger focus.

The Transition

System before the British

During the initial years of the English East India Company gaining momentum in the country, the system prevalent was similar to that of Saxon England[1, p. 5], with the role of the policing authority assumed by the Zamindar ruling the land. Further division into a village headman appointed with the responsibility and watchmen under him constituted the complete structure. The watchmen, along with the power was also responsible to track and identify violators, failing which they were obliged to make up for the item, along with the villagers[1, p. 5]. An excerpt from Akbar's times[1, p. 6] records the presence of "kotwals of cities, kusbahs, towns and villages", "royal clerks" who kept record of houses, spies who kept journal of arrivals, departures and occurrences.

Connivance existed at all levels of the aforementioned system and village watchman and headmen, in league with criminals exploited the villagers in several regions, as recorded by the British who were gaining power and looking into establishing a functioning police.

Developments during British: Formation of Structure

The decentralized system with Zamindar's in power was replaced by[1, p. 8] Magistrates of Districts, who had *darogas* under them, with subordinate officers and a body of peons. Rewards were put in place to honour good work, one example being Rs. 10 for every dacoit apprehended and convicted, and 10 percent of stolen property recovered.

Not much improved[1, p. 9], but a spike in crime rates were noticed, attributed to the inadequacy of force, removal of assistance from local community and tribes who helped in policing before and a higher scrutiny for conviction from Courts which if acquitted fetched only limited term of imprisonment compared to extreme beatings before. Further rounds of inquiry were conducted under the orders of Lord Wellesley followed by Lord William Bentick. An 1814 Court-issued order condemned the new

system and insisted upon maintenance of village police. The failure of such a system in Bengal prompted the British to deliberate further and the Court compromised on shift of duties from Zilla judge to the Collector [1, p. 11]. The village headmen-watchmen system was brought under tahsildars of district and the Collector and Magistrate of the province. *Darogas* couldn't be disposed of completely in Bengal in a short span of time, his powers were stripped off progressively. In 1808, the first attempt to introduce specialized and expert control was made by the establishment of the Inspector General, as a Superintendent for Calcutta, Dacca and Murshidabad [1, p. 12]. This system was further expanded and improved appointing deputies and additional staff and used spies very effectively [1, p. 12]. The first regular police was organized by Sir Charles Napier after the annexation of Sind - modelled after the Irish Constabulary, a semi-military police force. Inspired by the system, Sir George Clerk, the Governor of Bombay remodelled its police to a similar structure. Every district has a Superintendent who came under Magistrate but had exclusive control over the police [1, p. 14]. Madras adopted a new system next, following unearthing of abuses done by police in presidency [1, p. 14]. A superintendent of police was appointed in each district and provision for two was advocated for large districts. A commissioner for the entire state was also proposed. After annexation of Punjab, a police structure consisting of military preventive police and civil detective police was put forth, but had to be altered later owing to increased costs in maintaining both under the same shed. The commission assigned recommended a "homogeneous force of civil constabulary for all the duties which could not be properly assigned to the military arm" [1, p. 16]. The police in a district was headed by a District Superintendent under whom there were inspectors, head constables, sergeants and constables. Head constable was in charge of a station, inspector several stations [1, p. 16]. Provisions for deputies were also set in place.

The Police and the Policed

The cooperation and enforcement of responsibility to maintain law and order to the village authorities and villagers was a requirement British had to learn the hard way. The village police, which was scrapped citing connivance had to be reinstated in some form due to backlash. The police-policed dynamic indicated the police to be an unwanted intrusion creating a disturbance in village life [1, p. 22]. Accounts of this has entered popular culture. "In Moulmein, in Lower Burma, I was hated by large numbers of people" [4], remarks George Orwell who was sub-divisional officer in Burma at the time. This dynamic at times pops up even today, people of the country approach the police only if involving them is absolutely necessary. Regressions even visible in present day - the police is viewed as an authority, addressed as 'Sir', while him being a servant of the people. A parallel is visible to how the colonial teacher's mindset has regressions from the colonial period [2].

Also, native people were remarked as not active on the law and order front, unless an issue concerned them directly somehow [1, p. 22]. All this pointed to a broader lack of the idea of "public interest" and "public duty" among the country's population.

Economics of maintenance

A force for the maintenance of law and order required funding. The early deliberations, done way before 1857, when the rule was transferred to the crown, had to convince the East India Company whose primary motive was exploitive trade of "the necessity for throwing away good money after the bad". Proposed by the same commission which

looked into reinstating village police, along with the reasoning that a village authority would reduce the costs and effort by a significant amount.

Village police and State

How the old system integrated into the colonial hierarchical police organization is a thought interesting to ponder on. Reports indicate variations across regions even within provinces. The British government had invited local governments to review the village system and render them efficient agents in maintenance of law and order[1, p. 20].

In Bombay, village police came under District Magistrate. Sind had the zamindars dissociated from policing largely, and settled on the compromise of having a body of influential landowners to be utilized for investigation and disposal of petty cases, again under the District Magistrate. United Provinces had landowners based on the *mahal* unit of land prevalent in the region. The revenue collectors under landlords also fulfilled police duties given the land they were managing was large. In central provinces, similar system was followed - revenue collection agents or village headmen assuming the duty of policing depending on availability. Punjab had powerful zamindars named *lambardars* charged with the responsibility of peace and reporting crimes, with a superior called *zaildar* or *inamdard* supervising headmen in a group of villages who had the authority to dispose petty cases and otherwise assisted the police. North West frontier province saw establishment of a tribal council to settle dispute and punish offences. Burma had the office undermining the village headmen, so Chief Commissioner had to enforce integration through an act which insisted on every village having a resident headman who is responsible for collection of revenue. Duties got expanded to reporting offences, arresting certain offenders and disposal of petty cases. These headmen came under the Deputy Commissioner, another title for the Collector. Assam had mixed systems fitting the same roles, village headmen taking up the mantle if they're powerful enough, else appointed watchmen.

In Bengal, however the system is stated to have failed due to the power of landholders over local agents. While parts of Bengal had the old system functioning, *Chutia Nagpur* had military officials, Northern and Eastern Bengal required village watchmen setup by the British.

A common pattern is visible across the colonial ruled regions in how emoluments, grants and cut from the collection were provided to the staff of the village police who were brought under the Collector and recognized. Reports states that Commission regarded the man discharging village police duties as revenue head "most satisfactory"[1, p. 38].

Duties of the Police

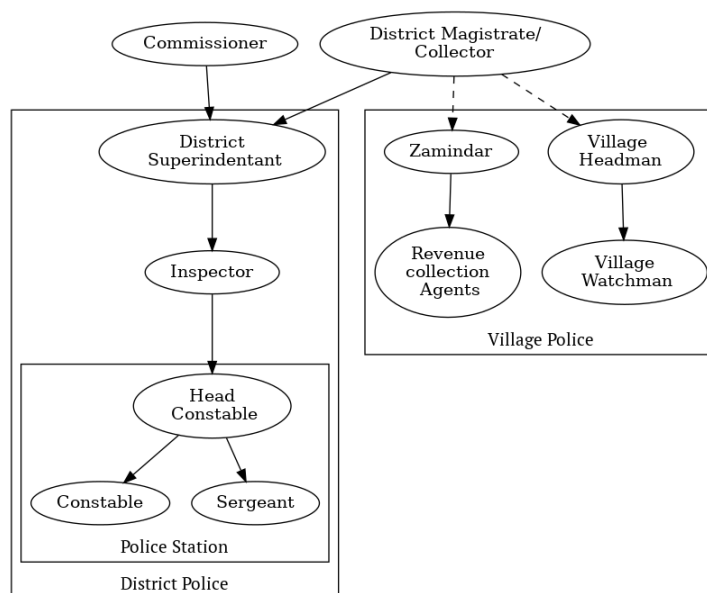
The British rule considered prevention of crime as the most important duty of the police. The police had to do patrols, especially in the night. This was to prevent road dacoities which were frequent in south, considered a blotch to an administration which claimed to be civilized [1, p. 48]. Town beat work was specified separately from rural beat work with meeting adequate force being more strict and also advising a watch on dangerous criminals. British brought forward the system of lighting of streets in town as a preventive measure to crime happening in the night. Police were to take "vigorous action" [1, p. 49] against people who received stolen property, but records indicate this

duty was not fulfilled due to lack of knowledge. Cattle thievery is reported [1, p.52] as one of the extremely common crime in India, coupled with blackmail for restoration of stolen property.

Rounding criminals up, interrogating and managing reform of criminals was another duty of the police. Orwell[4] writes : “The wretched prisoners huddling in the stinking cages of the lock-ups, the grey, cowed faces of the long-term convicts, the scarred buttocks of the men who had been flogged with bamboos”. Another story containing his account, *The Hanging*[3] describes a man being hung. The superintendent of the jail makes the final call and after the condemned die, the Burmese Magistrate and the European police staff are indicated to be laughing together at a joke.

Conclusion

A rough structure of the police is illustrated in the following figure:



The above hierarchy is very similar to the present day system, with the village police slowly phasing out as an unofficial body. The deputies have been excepted in the above figure, but provisions considering the population under the police is set in place and implemented today across police forces in states.

The cooperation between the native population and the police force can be concluded as a necessity for the maintenance of law. The idea that a trade company like the East India Company saw the setup of a police organization as a priority with compelling reasons itself indicates its importance. and order. It is also interesting to note how the British kept the pre-existing system to some extent. The patient and persistent effort to improve and develop the village police system is commendable. Also, it can be understood that the head of the district - who today enjoys the title of “District Magistrate”, “Deputy Commissioner”, “District Collector” all of which comes from British times for a good reason. It’s also possible that police and revenue structure played an important role into converting villages into the units of governance, as seen today.

References

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- [2] Krishna Kumar. *Politics of education in colonial India*. Routledge, 2005.
- [3] George Orwell. *A hanging*. 1931.
- [4] George Orwell. *Shooting an elephant*.