Preface

Though the activities of thieves and robbers plagued the life of the ancient Indian people and many records offer us accounts thereof, unfortunately no serious attempt has yet been made to make a comprehensive work on theft and robbery, without which no history of our ancient times can be complete.

Apart from satisfying purely academic curiosity, an authentic study of the subject will also help officers of today in their operations against the unsocial elements.

In the present thesis, I have tried to present, as vividly as possible, probably for the first time, a systematic and exhaustive account of ancient Indian thieves and robbers from the earliest times up to about 1000 A.D. They formed the bulk of the criminals, and I have discussed such topics as their training and ways of stealing or robbing, their habitat and organisation, their rules and regulations, the charms and spells they used, qualities of their head and heart, the seamy side of their character and their private life and patron deities. I have also dealt with the protective measures taken against them both by the people and the State, the methods of detecting them by the spies and policemen and their trial, including kinds of torture and punishment, penances, etc., the police organisation and jails. Incidentally, reference has been made to the possible causes of the wide prevalence of theft and robbery and also attempts at the rectification of the culprits.

I have also tried to say something about the manuals on Theft and their authors. If the readers of my work get some idea about the Cauresastra, mentioned in many a work but unfortunately no longer available in a complete form, my labour will be amply rewarded.
I have also put emphasis on the fact that theft and robbery formed a part of the Kṣa-yauddha (unfair fight) in ancient India and were adopted to harass the enemies and fill the coffers. The rulers often maintained a brigade of these criminals or gave assistance and protection to them in lieu of a decent share of their spoils. Thus theft and robbery formed an important part of the military system of ancient India.

Though painfully aware of my limitations, I have spared no pains to make my work interesting and useful.

Information has been gathered from the various fields of early Indian literature, from the Vedic downwards, including the canonical and non-canonical literature of the Buddhists and the Jainas, historical and semi-historical works (like the Rajatarangini and Harsacarita), literary works, inscriptions, folktales, foreign accounts, etc.

Inscriptions contain valuable information regarding the implements of thieves, protective measures taken against them by the individuals and village assemblies, delegation of power by the king to the villagers to punish the thieves and robbers drastically when caught, ordeals, punishments, police and protection taxes, privileges of the donees of rent-free holdings to punish thieves, to appropriate the fines extracted and things recovered from them, steps taken by kings to reform the character of these criminals, etc.

Romances and dramas have yielded valuable information. The story literature has been fully utilised.

I have also used the Saṃbhakalpa, a Tantric work of unknown authorship and date and some other works of the Tantra
literature and quoted some charms and spells traditionally believed to be used by thieves and robbers.

I have received very considerable help from a number of papers written on various aspects of the problems of theft and robbery by scholars like Maurice Bloomfield, D.C. Sircar, R.G. Basak, B.C. Law, U.N. Ghoshal, R.C. Hazra, Chintaharan Chakravarti, and others. P.V. Kane's *History of Dharmasastra* has been of immense help for my study.

I must acknowledge my gratitude to Dr. D. C. Sircar, Carmichael Professor and Head of the Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture, Calcutta University, under whose supervision and guidance I have prepared this thesis. I am also thankful to various scholars including Janaki Ballabh Bhattacarya, Pran Bellav Bhattacharya, R.C. Hazra and K.K. Dutta for their advice and suggestions.

I also thank Sri Jamini Ganguli who has ably typed out the pages within a very short time.

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