CHAPTER FOUR

BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE DISTRICT
NORTH 24-PARGANAS, WEST BENGAL -
The Venue Of The Present Investigation

4.1. Historical Background:

In India, between 1930 and 1940, the third phase of Colonialism saw the
ripening of pre-requisites for the formation of a national capitalist economic
mode which personified a denial of colonialism per se from the political economic
perspective. At this juncture, there appeared socio-political and ideological
pre-requisites for national liberation. "New social forces emerged such as the
proletariat, the petty bourgeoisie, the national bourgeoisie, and the national
intelligensia; and, along with, political currents and organisations, and the
'press' were formed" (Simoniya, 1987). The said nexus generated a strong urge in
a national bourgeois to have a separate kingdom by exploiting religious belief,
superstitions and stereotypes of proletariat and petty bourgeois classes of the
country. Their heightened emotionality overpowered the good sense of national
intelligensia and through a violent communal riot, during 1946-1947, the country
became partitioned - from India, Pakistan came out. Thus, the Province of Bengal
was divided into East Pakistan (Capital: Dhaka) and West Bengal (Capital:
Calcutta). In a freedom fight, later, East Pakistan became free from Pakistan
domination and named as Republic of Bangladesh (Capital Dhaka and National
language Bengali). The undivided district 24-Parganas was located at the Western
border of East Bengal and as the South-eastern border of West Bengal, India - upto
1986.
Between 1948-1958 there was incessant flow of East Bengal Hindu refugees in West Bengal - those million of migrants entered West Bengal through border districts, viz., 24-Parganas, Nadia, and Murshidabad mainly - on foot and as pauper. Their unauthorised entries were not checked on humanitarian grounds for shelter and rehabilitation in India.

In the subsequent years, from mere refugee camps, virtually several unplanned colonies were built-up in the undivided district 24-Parganas without giving due consideration to the inadequacies of different social systems concerned. The concerted effect of those inadequacies via resource deficits reached a miserable stage in certain areas of the district when administrative machinery failed to control the growth of grave social problems in the affected areas - particularly in the slums of unplanned settlements along both sides of the railway track, connecting those places with Calcutta city and suburbs. In due course, those areas became the breeding grounds of sociopathic conditions and which polluted the social hygiene and pulled down the law and order quality of the district, as a whole.

The effect of population influx (Table 1, Fig. 1) in the district and other consequent sociopathological problems in the slums and of slum sub-culture was studied by Bose (1985) in the light of "poor environment hypothesis" (Rutter and Madge, 1976) to probe in the etiology of crime and juvenile delinquency in the reported risk areas concerned. In the year 1986, ultimately, the district 24-Parganas were divided formally into North 24-Parganas and South 24-Parganas. The North 24-Parganas got two administrative units, viz. (i) Barrackpur and (ii) Barasat.
TABLE 1: Population Growth in the Undivided 24-Parganas District  
(Compiled After Census, 1981)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Decade Variation</th>
<th>Percentage of Variations %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>36,10,896</td>
<td>+ 7,46,678</td>
<td>26.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>44,59,492</td>
<td>+ 8,48,596</td>
<td>23.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>62,80,915</td>
<td>+ 18,21,423</td>
<td>40.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>84,49,482</td>
<td>+ 21,68,567</td>
<td>34.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>107,26,751</td>
<td>+ 22,77,269</td>
<td>40.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5 yrs) 1986*</td>
<td>130,04,020(atleast)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*When the district was divided into North and South 24-Parganas.

According to 1961 Census Report, a total of 78,661 displaced persons settled in the district as refugees from East Bengal (Pakistan) and of whom only 37,781 settled in the uninhabited rural areas of the district. Since then in the following two decades 34.52% and 40.48% increase in the population (Table 1) speak in favour of a steady and uninterrupted population growth in the district. The influx took place in the refugee colony areas, in the unplanned settlement areas, and in the fringes of old township areas of the district (Fig. 1).

In 1986 when the district 24-Parganas was divided into two separate administrative districts, entitled as South 24-Parganas and North 24-Parganas, study was undertaken by a scholar at the Department of Geography, Calcutta University to probe in the ecological aspects of antisocial behaviour in the townships of South
POPULATION GROWTH
(UNDIVIDED 24-PARGANAS, 1941–'81)

Fig. 1

YEAR

POPULATION IN TERMS OF LAKH

110
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0

1941 1951 1961 1971 1981

Fig. 1
24-Parganas (Ghosh, 1988). The said study left a scope for undertaking the present project, particularly with reference to the following objectives:

1. To understand post-fact influences of ecological variables on the criminogenesis in North 24-Parganas.
2. To ascertain crime-sensitive areas in North 24-Parganas with reference to reported crime rates over a span.
3. To verify poor environment hypothesis with reference to influence of selected ecological variables over crime rates.
4. To explore public opinion about the risks in their residential areas.

4.2. Rationale for Selection of North 24-Parganas for Study:

It has been observed that during implementation of community development programme in the district, 1953 onwards, main emphasis was given on urbanisation of rural areas without scrutiny on the improvement of quality of life of rural area dwellers, in general. As a result, under the exposure of the said programme, the quality of life of the dwellers improved along a dimension of 'accomplished' to 'not accomplished' groups - particularly in the areas where refugee population was significantly high. Under such peculiar circumstances, the 'accomplished group' developed aspirations for further enrichment in life style while the 'not accomplished group' remained devoid of that urge and was compelled to live with a fallen standard of living and follow a sub-culture which suited to their life-style. Thus, in certain areas of the district, the same built-in macro-environment became the dwelling place for both the 'accomplished' and 'not accomplished' groups -
having common socio-cultural mores and history of habitation. Any locale of
above description has been considered in the present study as the 'space' for
investigation.

North 24-Parganas district is found composed of a number of such 'spaces'
consisting of both historically important and unimportant areas, planned and
unplanned localities, and advantaged along with disadvantaged dweller groups. The
above combination of contrast characteristics are found simultaneously present in
the penumbral region of almost all township areas of the district.

Accordingly, the district towns and their surroundings were considered in
the present study as 'state' (ecological space) which was expected to influence
over the rate of criminal incidents, by involving the social and cultural life
of the inhabitants concerned. The said causal relationship between the state and
rate has formed the rationale for present study in the district North 24-Parganas,
West Bengal.*

4.3. Venue Of The Present Investigation :

(i) Location : The district North 24-Parganas, the north-eastern part of the
undivided district 24-Parganas was mapped out originally by the British rulers

*The administrative district North 24-Parganas has attained special security
importance since 1986 to prevent trespassing of foreigner, smuggling, extremists
movement, white trafficking, drug trafficking, and different nefarious activities
of the border area. The Government of West Bengal have restricted the free use
of its facts of administrative importance, figures, maps showing locations of
police stations, under Sec. 5(1)(d) of the Official Secret Act and its violation
is a criminal offence under appropriate Sections of the Indian Penal Code.
Барасат Unit has only one subdivision and its H.Q. is also Барасат; while
the Barasat Unit has three subdivisions, viz., Bongaon, Basirhat and Barasat with
H.Q. in Barasat (Fig. 1). The Map has been drawn after Chatterjee (1949).
(Chatterjee, 1949) in the seventeenth century. To control the growing administrative problems of the undivided district, the State Government created in 1986 two administrative districts, viz., North and South 24-Parganas.

**Location**: The North 24-Parganas district is located, between 22°15' N and 23°15' N latitude, and 88°20' E and 89°00' E longitude, within the territory of West Bengal. It covers a geographical area of 3896.36 Km, approximately. It consists of two administrative units: (i) Banakpur and (ii) Barasat. They are bounded by the district Nadia to the north, Eastern Calcutta to the south, river Hooghly to the west and Bangladesh Border (Jessore district) to the east. There are altogether 30 police stations in the district (Fig. 2).

(ii) **Physiography And River**: The district is rich in arable lands formed of alluvial soils of distributaries of Ganga river - Hugli/Bhagirathi, Ichamati, Kalindi, Raimangal, and Bidyadhari. Besides, there are many small streams spread over mainly on Southern tail-end of the district, close to Bay of Bengal - forming a network (Fig. 4). Around this area there are relics of few dried out streams, water-logged areas and swampy lands. Some of them are under reclamation for different types of landuse - by removal of salts from the soil, drainage of accumulated water from the low land and erection of banks to protect arable lands, railways, roads for transport and communication, and for residential purpose (Fig. 3) The range of elevation from south to north lies within 2 meters to 9 meters while the average is 3.5 meters only.

(iii) **Climate**: The climate of North 24-Parganas is sub-tropical type with high humidity, heavy downpour and occasional cyclone during monsoon over the southern
24-PARGANAS (NORTH)
RELIEF AS SHOWN BY CONTOUR

INDEX

- Above 9 m
- 6 - 9 m
- 3 - 6 m
- Below 3 m

*7* Triangulation Points

Fig. 3
end mainly. The district remains within the range of a temperature variations between 14°C to 36°C along winter to summer seasons.

(iv) Agriculture, Livestock and Pisciculture: Rice and jute are the main crops in this district. Besides, the cultivators and gardeners select special plots of land for producing grams, leguminous seeds, betel, and different kinds of seasonal fruits and garden crops. The yields are sold at a wholesale price in weekly or bi-weekly rural market centres partly and partly through Calcutta open market daily by the local vendors. Barasat Unit has an additional importance for meeting the requirements livestock and fish market of several big daily markets of Calcutta city and suburbs. Cattles, goats, sheeps, dogs, fowls and ducks of local breeds are found almost in every household in rural area of Barasat. Fodder and grazing grounds are gradually becoming inadequate in and around township areas of the district. Milks and eggs are also marketed by a number of local villagers against a handsome margin of profit. Local fishermen community of Barasat Unit play an important role to meet the demands of largest fish market of the State in Calcutta city - by daily supply of fresh river-water and pond-water fishes.

(v) Industry: In the history of Indian industry the industrial belts on both banks of river Hooghly has occupied a leading position, since British period. Of the two banks of Hooghly river, the eastern bank practically covers the eastern side of Barasat Unit of North 24-Parganas. Due to availability of raw materials, transport facilities by road, river, railways and air, power supply, labour force and proximity to Calcutta the following industries have originated and flourished in different places of the district, as given below:
(i) Jute, Cotton, Paper, Cigarette, Power, Transport, Machine tools, Hosiary, and Auxiliary Small-scale industries within BaraKpur Unit.

(ii) Rifle factory, Heavy machine tools, Chemical, Fertiliser, Transport, Pottery, Leather craft, Agricultural product, Prawn processing, and Auxiliary Small-scale industries within Barasat Unit.

(vi) Transport And Communication: There are two national highways and several link roads within two Units along with second oldest Bridge across the Ganga river (Fig. 5). Local ferry services are also available to daily passengers and trade men from and to west to east banks of Hugli river.

Besides, there are three major railway routes to carry lakhs of daily passengers and vendors along the main lines from Sealdah Railway Station - connecting different townships of North 24-Parganas and border areas (Fig. 6) - with main bifurcation at Dum Dum Railway junction.

Dum Dum International Airport and Port For Domestic Service has increased the commercial importance of this district for national and international commercial and trade traffic links. It has a very busy Customs check-post and vigilance administration with the help of local police (Fig. 6).