Chapter Five
General Characteristic Features of the District North 24-Parganas, West Bengal—The Study Area of the Present Investigation
Chapter Five

GENERAL CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF THE DISTRICT NORTH 24-PARGANAS, WEST BENGAL—
THE STUDY AREA OF THE PRESENT INVESTIGATION

5.1 Background Information

In India, during the period 1930 to 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 and the national bourgeoisie, and the national intelligentsia; and, along with, political currents and organisations, and the 'press' were formed. The said nexus generated a strong urge in a national bourgeoisie to have a separate kingdom by exploiting religions belief, superstitions and stereotypes of proletariat and petty bourgeoisie classes of the country. Their heightened emotionality overpowered the good sense of national intelligentsia 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 : the then 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.
After Independence of India during the period 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 viz., 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 Kolkata (the then Calcutta) city and suburbs. In due courses, 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 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 & 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.
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 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.

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 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.

5.2 Reasons for the Selection of North 24-Parganas as the Study Area

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.
This district consists of 24 towns and 1571 inhabited villages as well as 1857020 households accommodating 8934286 people of which 57.92 males and 48.08 females. The percentage of rural population is 45.70 and of urban population 54.30. The percentages of total workers 33.44 and non-workers 66.56.

(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 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.

Figure 1: Map of North 24 Parganas with locations of the study centres—Barrackpur & Barasat.
The district North 24-Parganas consists of five subdivisions – Barrackpore, Barasat, Bongaon, Bidhannagar and Bashirhat, bounded by the district Nadia to the North, Eastern Kolkata to the South, river Hooghly to the West and Bangladesh Border (Jessore District) to the east. There are altogether 36 police stations in the district.

(ii) Climate: The climate of North 24-Parganas is sub-tropical type with high humidity, heavy downpour and occasional cyclone during monsoon over the southern end mainly. The district remains within the range of a temperature variations between 14°C to 36°C along winter to summer seasons.

(iii) 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 Barrackpur Subdivision 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 Kolkata the following industries have originated and flourished in different places of the district, as given below:


(b) Rifle factory, Heavy machine tools, Chemical, Fertiliser, Transport, Pottery, Leather craft, Agricultural product, Prawn processing and Auxiliary Small-Scale Industries within Barasat Subdivision.
(iv) **Transport and Communication** : There are two national highways, two state highways, several linkways and several link roads within two subdivisions along with second oldest bridge across the Ganga River. Local ferry services are also available to daily passengers and tradesmen from and to west to east banks of Hooghly 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 – with main bifurcation at Dum Dum Railway junction.

Dum Dum International Airport and Port for Domestic Service have 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.

(v) **Antecedents** for the present study relates to undercurrent of some ongoing social change caused by dysfunctions in the social system of the selected area under study – the Northern Administrative Division of 24-Parganas district which became a separate administrative entity about two decades only. The area earned notoriety for overpopulation, high rates of illiteracy and unemployment in the settlement areas occupied by East Bengal refugees, and steady rise of cognisable and Special Act offences.

Thus an urgently built-in environment for a growing community life, with certain typical ecological features, became the dwelling places for both socially accomplished and unaccomplished groups having common cultural and geographical histories of living in undivided Bengal.
Under the whirlpool of swiftly changing patterns of social life in the modernised physical setting, in course of time, the advantaged group is gradually developing with all social accomplishments while the disadvantaged group is gradually nurturing in them antisocial habits, tendencies and practices. In brief, the former aspires to live with a better ‘quality of life’ while the latter remains deprived of such perception and aspirations (Bose, 1985).

(vi) **Spatial Characteristics** of the North 24-Parganas, upto the end of the fourth decade of current century remained predominated by a vast ‘not built-in’ rural territory – particularly on the north-eastern and eastern sides. Its western periphery was well-known as oldest industrial belt and the fringes between the said industrial belt and Kolkata City remained occupied by the garden-houses of Wealthy Kolkata of early 20th Century for their weekend resorts and parties for enjoyment.

Amongst a good number of such ‘Spaces’, in West Bengal, North 24-Parganas district is a significant one and selected for the present study.

After political independence of India, under Community Development Projects of 1953, efforts to convert undressed rural environment into properly dressed one could not pay due consideration to some important infrastructural reconstruction for developing an ecology for healthy community life. As a result, gradually a disharmony in the local community life grew up in the newly built-in Space and gave rise to a dimension of socio-cultural dichotomy with two extremes. Along the said dimension there were pockets where in the permissible social climate antisocial attitude and behaviour got indulgence in the dwelling places of under sophisticated section of the new settlers – living in a least modified
ecological condition, not befitting to need-based welfare or quality of life of a minority group, irrespective of caste, creed, and religion. As the unhealthy ecological conditions varied spatially so the nature and distribution of crime rates varied also with reference to spatial peculiarities both at the macro and micro levels.

Herein lies the significance of the selection of North 24 Parganas as the study area of the present study.