CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF DACOITY

Dacoity is probably as old as society itself. Its present form is probably the result of a long historical growth, and, hence, the various stages of its development are interesting. In ancient India mention has been made of 'Dasyus', similar to the present day dacoits in the Rigveda and the Maha-Bharat. The 'dasyus' used to rob the property of the rich and they resorted to physical violence also. The 'Arora Parva' of the Maha-Bharat mentions that they robbed a powerful king named Sanjaya and kidnapped him. Later on he was put to death. Balmiki, the original poet of the Ramayana, led the life of a 'dasyu' originally. While references to dacoity are to be found in all ancient literature, it is useful here only to consider the history of the Chambal basin, which is the area under study, with special reference to dacoity or actions similar to dacoity such as Thugi, Pindari etc.

The history of the Lower Chambal Basin is the history of her devastation by the attacks of foreigners and inter-tribal wars, which created social and political disorder. With the capture of Kanauj in 1019, Mahmud, opened the way into Hindustan and Gwalior fell to him, and, hence, the Bhadurias spread themselves in Agra, Etawah and Bhind districts for the reason of safety and for the maintenance of their guerrilla warfare.

From the time of Mahmud's death (1030), until the
appearance of Kutub-ud-din (1193), according to the Imperial Gazetteer of Central India (1908), "The history of Central India is that of the incessant petty wars, which went on between the various Hindu clans." Tomar Rajputs, living in the Towarghar region of the Lower Chambal basin, have ruled Delhi. They were driven out by the Chauhans. According to Sharma (1959), "The early Chauhan Rajputs moved northwards and conquered Delhi from the Tomars." Raja Anangpal of the Tomar dynasty, who ruled Delhi during the later part of twelfth century, had taken shelter in the ravines of the Lower Chambal basin. He collected his lost strength and occupied the low land known as Towarghar. He created a rebellious tendency among the Tomars against Delhi rulers who defied them throughout the Indian history. In 1196 Kutub-ud-din took Gwalior. But after his death, the Rajputs regained their lost territories through their guerilla warfare tactics. The Imperial Gazetteer of Central India (1908, p.20) mentions, "A period of confusion followed his death (1210) during which the Rajputs of Central India regained the greater part of their possessions." In Muhammad-Din-Tughlak's reign (1325-51), a severe famine broke out, which caused a great disorder and anarchy. In the text of the Imperial Gazetteer of Central India (1908, p.20) it is mentioned that 'Distress and anarchy reigned in all the country, while the anarchy was augmented by the despatch of Asis Hanir, as governor of Malwa, who by his tyrannous actions, soon drove all the people into rebellion.'

Bir Singh Deo Tomar attacked Gwalior and captured it. The decline of the Tomar rule of Gwalior began after the death of
Man Singh (1495-1525) and the petty land lords took up their foothold in this large tract of Towarghar.

During the reign of Akbar, the Rajputs of Central India were dissatisfied with the policy of the former. They rebelled against him. For example, Madhukar Shah, the then ruler of the Orchha State, rebelled against the Moghul Empire, and spread a great terror. Akbar took army-action and Orchha was captured by him. Bir Singh Deo murdered Abul Fazal near Antri (Datia district) in 1602 and avenged his father’s death. He joined his hands with Emperor Jahangir but it was temporary. He rebelled against Shah Jahan too. Champaat Bai helped him. They were attacked by the Moghul forces from Agra, Allahabad and the Deccan but they continued a guerrilla warfare near the Betwa river. In 1634-35 Jhujar Singh, the ruler of Orchha, went into open rebellion against the Moghuls and the whole of Bundelkhand plunged into anarchy after his death. The Rajputs of the Lower Chambal basin were always a helping hand to the Thakurs of Bundelkhand. Thus, the rebellious tendencies created internal revolts in Central India. Not only the Rajputs but other martial clans also were creating disorderly conditions and lawless elements thrived on all sides. Singh (1936) observes, “Marathas, Bundelas and Afghans out of employment were creating disturbances in the province and the spirit of anarchy was increased by the various raids on the province.”

In this open rebellion and lawlessness, these martial clans began to plunder the masses for keeping their guerrilla warfare alive. But, with the passage of time they became professional robbers. “In 1666 the French traveller Therenot” wrote,
mentions Sleeman (1933), "Though the road, I have been speaking of, from Delhi to Agra, be tolerable, yet hath it may inconveniences. One may meet with tigers, panthers and lions upon it, and one had best, also have a care of robbers and above all things not to suffer any body to come near one upon the road. The cunningest robbers in the world are in that country."

Ronditsy was flourishing during the reign of later Mughuls. Aurangzeb destroyed the Rajput kingdoms of Central India, which had acted as buffers between Delhi and Maharashtra. It made the Rajputs his implacable foes. Many Rajput kingdoms openly rebelled against him, and a love for freedom has arisen in the hearts of people. Tiwari (1933, Samvat 1990) remarks, "Maharaja Ghatmakar and Shivaji are pioneers in freeing people from the unjust rule of the Mughals." The Moghal Empire could not suppress internal revolts and the whole of Central India plunged into anarchy.

In the warlike Rajputs' blood feud was common for petty enmities. They waged war against one another also for gaining temporary advantage. They, thus, exhausted their resources and energies and cleared the way for the advance of the Marathas.

Mahadji Scindia seized Gwalior territory and formed his own independent state. In 1794, Baulat Rao Scindia became all powerful. The Rajputs continued to wage against him desultory warfare and increased committing dacoities under the designation of Grassiaks. Sleeman (1869, p.112) expresses, "Grassiaks and Sondias, the local, as the Finkaries, were the general pests of the country, their whole subsistence being obtained by violence.
and marauding."

From 1794 to the end of eighteenth century, the period of unrest, known as 'Gardi-ka-Wakt' broke out, when the leaders of the Maratha Confederacy entered a struggle for territory and power which reduced the whole of Central India to anarchy and hordes of plunderers devastated the whole of Central India.

With the fall of the Moghal administration, the Pindaries, have spread up chaotic and disorderly conditions in the Central India. The designation Pindary expressed the operation of a mounted robber associated under different leaders for the purpose of general depradation. They had a leader of tried courage and conduct. Their favourite weapons were bamboo spears. Sometimes firearms were also used to attack villages. They carried out very active pursuit by regular troops and spread vast devastation and baffled every attempt to overtake them. In this context Prinsep (1825) says, "They pursued the old method and the wonderful impunity and success with which they engaged in the most distant expeditions, passing the most formidable barriers of nature and of military-art, and baffling every attempt to intercept their return, how-so-ever well concerted."

The cruelties of the Pindaries towards their victims were beyond belief. They burnt and destroyed the property and ravished and murdered woman and children under the eyes of the husband and parents. In the words of Hastings (1907), "The horrors perpetrated by these demons at other places made the poor villages, totally unarmed and incapable of resistance, fly to the desperate resolution of burning themselves with their wives and
children. All the young girls are carried off by the Pandaries, tied three or four, like calves on a horse, to be sold." By the year 1817, this maladjustment had reached a climax. Forsyth (1859) remarks, "The country came to be distinguished by the title of 'the country of robbers'."

During this period of unrest various ruling chiefs appeared. In the text of the Imperial Gazetteer of India, the Indian Empire, (1909), we read, "Almost all ruling chiefs in this part of India are of modern origin, sprung from the anarchy." It (1909, p.65) further mentions, "Scindhias who became ruler of Gwalior, Holkar of Indore, the Ponwars of Dhar and Dewas, were the most successful commanders of such colonies, while many petty states and mediatised estates are also relics of these plundering and lawless immigrants." The petty chiefs and Zamindars used their adherents to ravage and plunder the lands of their neighbours. Sleeman (1843) calls, "There is hardly a single chief of Hindoo Military clan in Bundelkhand or Gwalior territories, who does not keep a gang of robbers of some kind or the other and consider it as a very valuable and legitimate source of revenue." The Imperial Gazetteer of India, The Indian Empire (1909, p.396) mentions, "They extorted and amassed wealth which was dissipated in a jealous rivalry of magnificent pageantry. The weapons which were intended for the enemies of the state were turned against the state itself and against each other and were used for plans of personal aggrandisement, mutual revenge or public plunder." The East India Company took advantage of this awe and unrest for its own selfish motives.
Lord Hastings rapidly forming alliances with all the native chiefs ordered the three Presidency armies to close in Central India. Scindia made an alliance with him and the middle of October, 1817, the Pindaries, the Marathas and the Pathans were broken up and substantial security was diffused through Central India. In 1818, this unheard of anarchy was terminated by British success against the Marathas and the extermination of the Pindary bands.

Now, thugs played a great role in plundering masses. The term Thugi expressed the operations of the murderers and assassins holding themselves under a leader of tried fraud. Their favourite weapon was a handkerchief (a running noose) for strangulation. Thomson and Garret (1958) mention, "The Phansidar or 'noose holder' was unusual between his invariable method of procedure to murder before robbing. Working in gangs, which were bound together by strict religious vows to the goddess Kali, the phansidars would ingratiate themselves with travellers, and then strangle them and bury them."

Unfortunately, the Thugi also centred round the lower Chambal basin. As, Malcolm (1924) expresses, "Their (Thugs) principal residence is on the banks of the Chambal and Kuwary, North East of Gwalior, where they have villages and usually maintain a connexion or at least an understanding with the manager of the district." The growth of Thugi might have been the result of the suppression of Pindaris. In this connection Majumdar (1965) mentions, "The suppression of Pindaris had an obvious effect upon the growth of this kind of highway robbery. Poverty and desti—
tution were the real and proximate causes of the origin and growth of the Thugi." Sleeman gradually put an end to Thagi. "An
enormous evil," mentions Dodwell (1932), "which had for centuries oppressed the people and from which it was long supposed that no efforts could relieve them."

Dacoity, then, played a devastating role in the lives of the villagers. It also centred round the lower Chambal basin. Sleeman (1849, p. 94) remarks, "The Bagoreesahs or Budhuk, spread over the country from southward of the Chambal to Alwar, and the Rajpeets of the Toour and Kachhwaha tribes, whose ravine fastnesses line the right banks of the Chambal from Jignaee due north of Gwalior to Bhawnmpoor and Bhind, east of Gohud in the same country." Harvey views, "Dacoits are another predatory class. Unlike the Thug, however, the Dacoit, though to all intents and purposes a Knight of the road, will form a band and raid a house, known to contain valuables. Further, he is not actuated by any quasi-religious motives or obligations, he plunders simply for the sake of plunder." Walsh (1929, p.191) aptly remarks, "Thagi, in its original form, had been stamped out. But as often happens, one form of crime disappears only to be succeeded by another. The pride of first place must now be concealed to dacoity, or gang robbery. Its first essential to success is an efficient leader, and its modern growth has provided plenty of them."

In 1822, Bankaji, a Bundela Thakur of Naigon (Jhansi), started his marauding activities with his associates. His gang along with others committed 93 dacoities, besides those unreported.
The British Government forced the Gwalior State to take large scale action against these dacoit-gangs.

In Bundelkhand, in 1867, Diwan Deshpat, a rebel, fled away from Nownigao judicial lock up and took shelter in Chhatarpur forests. Col. Thomson encountered him and killed him in 1868. His nephew Raghunath Singh rebelled against the British Government and looted Chhatarpur district as a revenge.

In 1869, the Gujars of Pivra Nuwar rebelled against the Scindia rule. With 500 strong, Junmaird proclaimed himself as 'Kunwar-Raj Junmaird Singh Bahadur'. The Durbar troops took military action against him and captured four positions taken up by the rebels. Junmaird escaped but was captured and executed at Pivra on October 8, 1869.

In 1887, dacoity also spread up to a large extent in Bundelkhand and five gangs of the dacoit leaders, Durga Singh, Jagat Singh, Vikrama Jit Singh, Pratap Singh and Raghunath Singh and Maharaj Singh continued their depredations in the Chhatarpur State. In the Report on the Administration of Central Provinces ( Upto August 1862 ), Temple ( 1923, p.21 ) mentions, "Dacoitee continues to occur in a very aggravated form on the Saugor Frontier, the robbers coming from the wild hilly country belonging to the Bhopal state and to Maharajah Scindha's dominions in that quarter. These expeditions are probably headed by one Deboo Singh, a Boondela ( of Bundelkhand ) and an ex-leader of rebels in 1857." Thus, till now, dacoities were largely committed by rebels who were at large in the fastnesses of Central India.
The Lower Chambal basin and some parts of Bundelkhand were under constant famines at the end of the nineteenth century. The hunger and starvation conditions, perhaps, forced the poor to resort to Thagi and dacoity. According to Curzy, "The unsettled conditions of the country after the break up of the Moghul Empire, the general anarchy, which prevailed later and which favoured the spread of Thuggee, also contributed in some measure to the formation of homogeneous groups which glorified crime and adopted macabre rituals to sanctify their chosen profession. Even after a long time after the suppression of Thuggee, bands of criminals were wandering over the country side specialising in the gory avocations of poisoning and looting."

The conditions of the Rajput Chiefs, Jamindars and feudal lords became deplorable in these famine years. This compelled them to loot than to 'steal' because stealing was against the prestige of the Thakurs and they started to extort money by the use of force, and thus maintained the spirit of a 'Bagi' (rebel). As they were rebels, they committed robbery only for sustenance. But, with the passage of time and circumstances, they resorted to dacoity. The Imperial Gazetteer of India, Indian Empire (1909, p. 316) reports in this connection, "During recent years there has been a considerable increase of serious crime such as murder, dacoity and robbery. Repeated seasons of famine and high prices have exerted an important influence on the statistics of crime."
Dacoity continued to flourish early in the 20th Century in the lower Chambal basin. Mohan Lal Tomar of village Konthar and Nawab Singh created a reign of terror. Nawab Singh continued his depredations for twenty two years. He surrendered to Maharaja Jiwaji Rao Scindia and was pardoned. He was followed by Heta and Tantia. Tantia of Ruar carried on his dacoity excursions for fifteen years. After his arrest in October 1929, Mahar Singh, Dulla and Balwanta became notorious. The criminal activities of the dacoits increased tremendously. Brown (1940) remarks in this connection, "Dacoits were a definite menace to the villagers. Cattle had to be driven home during the middle of the afternoon and schools regularly closed early so that the women and children could all be within their villages before dusk."

Donger Singh and Batri Sahai took up Tantia's place and committed daccities for twenty years. In 1940 Donger Singh was shot dead and his gang was eliminated. The vaccum was soon filled up by Man Singh, a gentleman turned dacoit, who was respected throughout the lower Chambal basin, not because of his brutal force but because of cleverness and tactful dealings. Radha-Krishan (1957) mentions, "The villagers looked up to him as a friend and a guide and had their disputes settled by him. The poor received generous help from him and the legend about his charities and lavish gifts spread far and wide. Stories were told of him in voices of admiration of how he helped good causes, killed informers and policeman only when pursued, attacked only men who had money to spare, respected pious Brahmans who gave him blessing,
and occasionally coerced zamindars to contribute to desirable objects. His admirers often remarked that he represented the high water mark of dacoity nobly practiced. Mansingh had deep religiousness that attracted people. Not a day passed without his offering worship to his deities."

"All times, he behaved with incredible bravado when pursued hotly by the Police still it was not possible to kill him without adopting any foul means. In 1965, he was shot dead by the Police. The History of Dacoits and Dacoities in the Chambal Ravines (Government Publication 1965) remarks on his death, "With Mansingh ended all that was romantic in the history of organised banditry in the Chambal ravines. Hence forth, the Chambal ravines, have only brutal murders indiscriminate pillage and cunningly executed kidnappings to record."

The end of Mansingh did not give any relief to the citizens. The later dacoits were a band of murderers, who terrorised the people by their nefarious activities more seriously than ever before. They wanted to suppress the rural masses by fear only. As they lost their rebellious tendency, they lost rural sympathy also. Hence, they were shot dead within a short time. Roopa, Lakhon, Amrit Lal, Sultana, Kalla,Putli, Fakura, Devi Lal Shikari, Fana and all other immoral gangs were wiped out. Modi (1965) calls, "Mansingh's death did not clear up the Chambal Valley. Every single dacoit gang that existed has been wiped out again and again and either a new gang has arisen or the remnants have started operations again." Thus the factors affecting dacoity were always working at the roots and giving
birth to the new dacoits are discussed in detail in Chapter V. These may be summoned up as - The Martial Tradition, Honour of Women, Rebellious tendencies, Bagi traditions, Dacoity tendency, Famines, Extradition, Merger of States and abolition of Zamindari, Land Reforms, Smuggling, Elections, Deteriorating economy of people etc.

OTHER CRIMINAL ORGANISATIONS:

The Lower Chambal basin and Bundelkhand have been the homes of the Pindaries, thugs, dacoits and other criminals. All such criminal organisations are not a new phenomena to India but have been common in other countries too. A brief reference to such gangs in other countries may be of interest at this place.

From the early 17th century, Chinese Secret Societies, posed severe problems in Malaya. These were engaged in extortion and other criminal activities. These were in a minority among the southern Mongoloid people and soon were forced to organise themselves for defence against local mobsters. These protective societies are universal among the Chinese. Adkins (1962) remarks, "In Malaya, as elsewhere, they degenerated to become organised groups of gangsters and extortionists. Society members wore formal costumes at their meetings and maintained rigid internal control, sometimes convening courts to exact penalties for misbehaviour or failure to obey orders."

In Sicily, the Mafia gangs are well-organised and notorious. Allen (1961) mentions, "The elusive gossamer mesh of Mafia is thrown over all the island. Many people in the
highest offices of all kinds have been and still are, part of
the network; and because nothing important is possible without
Mafia cooperation, still more have threads connecting them directly
to it. Whereas the organisation may have lost some of the unity
shown during the first years of this century, there is every
reason to suppose that it is today a society of more potential
power than ever before, for the two world wars and Fascist attempt
to bring Sicily finally to heel were disturbances from which the
Mafia is only now finding leisure to recuperate and reorganise."

In United States such criminal organisations are posing
a great threat to the peace and security of the nation. Barnes
and Teters (1964) write in this connection, "The United States
witnessed Black-Hand or Mafia (Unione-Siciliana) who terrorised
hundreds of communities during the early new immigration period."
But, Allen (1961 A) expresses, "The Mafia is still naturally
real a shadowy international organisation lurking behind America's
organised criminal activity—it has scarred the face of America with
almost unconceivable type of criminality and violence, including
murder, mayhem, robbery, traffic in narcotics, gambling, smuggling,
blackmail, extortion, white slavery, counterfeiting, kidnapping
and racketeering."

During the early decades of this century the gangs of
the Owney Maddens, the Daniel O'Barions, the 'Bugs', Morans and
the Roger Toukys had spread a reign of terror. Barnes and Teters
(1964, p. 51), writes, "The 1930's and 40's were conspicuous for
the Dillinger gang, the Purple Gang operating around Detroit, the
Tri-State gang that terrorised Pennsylvania, Maryland, and New-
Jersey and the Barker gang-headed by the notorious "Ma", Barker and her ruthless sons." In this connection Allen (1961 b) remarks, "These marauding and thieving thugs were as much a disgrace to their mother country as the prevalent Mafiosi."

**DACOITY AS A REGULAR INSTITUTION IN THE LOWER CHAMBAL BASIN:**

The Lower Chambal basin witnessed a number of dacoit gangs. They sprang up, nourished and formed a society of their own. In the early 19th century, Sleeman (1849, p. 6) remarked: "Dacoitee had been the trade of their families for twenty generations and they could think of no other 'pigrum, quin-immo etiners videtur, sudore adequi rere, quod posses.' 'Sanguine par are', and neither after this, nor after any other disaster, did they dream of relinquishing the 'imperial trade of their ancestors' or seeking food, drink and raiment by the sweat of their brow'.

Adamr comes to the same conclusion. He (1909) observes, "It is a form of hereditary crime, and has been carried on from time immemorial."

Dacoity was not centred in the Lower Chambal basin alone but had been a wide-spread phenomenon since the long past. The river pirates of Bengal were equally notorious. In this regard Majumder (1960, p.52) expresses, "In particular, the Jungle mahals, never acknowledged the authority of the Mahomedan Government. Having the years carried their depredations with impunity, the inhabitants thereof used to regard robbery and murder scarcely criminal. The waterways of Bengal always afforded dacoits easy means of escape from the hands of justice."
The Thugs, the Pindaries and the Muslim raiders from the outside India were all a class of dacoits, throughout the Indian History. Sleeman (1849, p.112) comes to conclusion, "Alexander, Jungeczhan, Tymour, Nadir Shah, the Peshwa himself, Scindia, Holcar, Ameer Khan and their armies, were all in reality 'as much robbers indeed' and in motive as Bukses as his gang from the Cude forest." At present the Pakistani Muslim raiders and infiltrators, the Naga and Neso rebels are the most dangerous dacoit gangs, like those of the Lower Chambal basin, posing a great threat to the security of our motherland. In this context Cox (p.31) says, "There have always been gradations amongst these evildoers, each class in turn despising the next beneath it in the criminal scale."

In the Lower Chambal basin, the gang dacoity took the shape of a regular institution since the beginning of the 11th century. Every gang of dacoits consisted of a certain number of persons, organised under a particular leader and associated for plundering the general masses. The knowledge to move in these ravines and adjoining forests has been handed down from one dacoit gang to another. They have their own gangs and these gangs often combine when faced with greater danger from within or from without. Each gang has its own organisation, control and modus operandi. No gang either intrudes upon the scheme of the other, nor does it come into other's way. They have developed a kind of vagabond loyalty towards one another. They have been virtuous; prone to perform religious functions, visit holy places. In their texts the rich, the police and the betrayal of their confidence are
considered to be the most heinous crime, they commit murders if anybody tries to encroach upon their powers. Their trials have been spontaneous, decision quick and execution immediate. They grant membership to any murderer possessing all criminal qualities. The absconder, having joined their fraternity, remain an apprentice till he becomes a confirmed criminal. They move during night but take rest during the day time. They have been found in police uniforms equipped with deadly weapons. Materially they can and do afford to have all the amenities and luxuries of life at their command but mentally they are constantly under tension.