Chapter 6

Conclusion

Mu chapters show that in colonial period the district of Nadia witnessed very high rate of criminal activities, though not the most crime affected district as compared to several other districts of Bengal. In a society under foreign rule nothing can normal because the ruling class, who had hardly any compassion for the suffering of the poor, was a class of conqueror. They enacted numerous laws with the intention of evincing their seriousness to provide a rule which would be distinctively different from the traditional rule. To the colonial rulers; the traditional rule of India was a rule of despotism. They established instead, as they used to claim, a system of administration which would be guided by the written, fixed and certain statutes that came to be known as the rule of law. The biggest threat might come as an obstacle in implementing the notion of rule of law from the people of lower order; the people who were anarchic and devoid of all moral virtue. The colonial government, therefore, took all steps to ensure its control over the rural society.

Alarming rate of criminal activities was detrimental to ordering the society. The tools of control and order were overwhelmingly indigenous. The district administration was more concerned to exploit the rural surplus rather than to provide adequate security to the inhabitants. The thesis hopefully demonstrated that at the local level, different types of crime were beyond the control of administration; though Nadia
was a moderately crime-prone as indicated by the crime graph. But in case of serious and heinous crime it stood always above many other districts. Serious crimes like murder, dacoities, affrays, burglaries, dominated in Nadia’s crime map during the period of our study. The high rate of serious crime created a kind of tension in the rural society engendering distrust and division among the people. It explicitly demonstrated the failure of local administration to preserve peace and order. The chronic growth of crime rate was a reflection of exploitation of the poor as they were predominantly the persons who had been apprehended. Phenomenal increase of offences, ignoring even the stringent administrative measures, was the indicative of people’s desperation wanting to get rid of the shackles of poverty, oppression, exploitation and inequality.

It is also a fact that Nadia was infested by gang dacoity and the local administration failed to control the depredations. This sort of crime created huge law and order problem in Nadia. The competency and efficiency of the magistrates of the districts were measured by their success in curbing this sort of crime. In fact it was a test for the local criminal administration to prove its efficiency. But in reality the situation was different. Performance of the district administration in curbing dacoity was always below par. Whenever there was an increase in this crime the district administration sought the help of the central government. But it needs to be said that the district administration hardly paid any attention until the situation became alarming.

Therefore, it would be fair to conclude that the weakness of the district administration was the principal cause of the
occasional alarming rise of gang robbery. It is also proved that
the local administration completely failed to provide adequate
security to the common people. Although security and peace of
the state was a prime plank of the colonial propaganda and
justification of foreign rule but robbery thwarted this very
notion of peaceful rule. Security of the common people in the
interior was entirely neglected. They had to live at the mercy of
the local man of power. Assistance from the administration
was a day dream to the majority of the inhabitants of this
district. To the administrator, the priority was to collect the
revenue and security of the subjects they ruled was secondary.
The dacoity crime also indicates another angle of the colonial
rule. To the colonial rulers, the inability of the local rulers to
suppress the crime was synonymous to the inability of the
central government. That was the reason why the government
established the centralized anti-dacoit agency for cracking
down dacoity crime.

The police acted as a tool of torture which was legitimimized
through laws and regulations. Its sole purpose was to protect
the colonial state from any internal threat posed by dangerous
crimes. It had been established to show the strength of the
state’s power and authority to the ordinary inhabitants of the
country. But it failed miserably in controlling crime and
criminality. The greatest deficiency of the colonial police in the
early part of its rule lay in its lack of investigative ability. The
police had to depend on a series of sub-agents of questionable
character for gathering information about crime and criminals.
Therefore it created an inherent weakness in the system. Police
darogahs’ villainy and ineptitude was the result of the reluctant
attitude of the authority. No major initiative had been taken, at
least in our period of study, in this regard. They transferred all
the defects of the system on the shoulder of subordinate native police. The Police system in Nadia was extremely inadequate as has been discussed in the third chapter of the thesis. Improper arrangement of thanas was the proof of the lack of knowledge of colonial officers who were appointed for supervising the district administration. The number of police personnel was always small and it was a deliberate decision taken for gaining maximum service out of minimum investment in the police department. Therefore, any sign of improvement in crime situation in any particular region prompted the government to reduce the expense. Downsizing in police department used to take place frequently. It was almost a routine affair. Consequently, the performances of police in prevention and detection of crime and criminals, apprehension and conviction of offenders or recovery of stolen and plundered goods were always unsatisfactory. Instead, police was much more successful in intimidating general inhabitants. The corruption and oppression of police officers made them unsuitable for providing security and upholding the rule of law. The common people could never trust the police officers because of their predatory nature.

In spite of all the negative sides of subordinate native police, it was not fundamentally detrimental to the colonial interests. Corrupt but skillful police officer in catching offenders was welcomed by the administration. All villainies and arrogances were tolerable if he could demonstrate his ability in upholding the interest of the colonial government. Dismissal of a corrupt darogah was an option but not necessarily pursued. Educated and honest police officers were sought but it was a
policy not strictly followed in practice. Therefore, early colonial police system was organized in such a way that it protected the interests of the colonial government.

The failure of district police administration was most explicitly revealed in dealing with the criminality of the landholders. Both native landholders and European planters had close connection with criminals and police. Both of these elements were utilized fully by the landholders. Although district authority had full knowledge about it they were still unable to take action against them. This inability certainly belittled the notion of superiority of colonial rule at least in relation to rural crime. Landholders’ complicity with the outlaws was deliberately ignored by the local administrators as long as it did not run against the interest of the government. Landholders’ dual mode of behaviour with district administration had been frequently cited in the various reports, but in taking action against them was a far flung thought. The government’s purpose was to protect the road of revenue collection. It had to think twice before taking any action against the landholders because they were the prime source of government revenue. It is noticeable that in every report of the police the superior officers always enquired about the security of the government treasury. Even a judge had to recommend the government for taking action against certain landholders of this district by assuring that it would not reduce the government revenues.

They had intimate and very close relationship with the local government officials of the judicial and police administration. This close link broke the vitality of the local
administration in delivering fair justice to the inhabitants in
general. The inhabitant had more trust and faith on the quick
justice of the zamindars rather than on the delayed and
expensive judicial system of the government. People, in general,
depended on the zamindars cutchery than on the Government
institutes in order to resolve petty criminal cases. In spite of
such enormous power applied by the landholders, local
administration was reluctant to take serious steps against the
landholders.

This policy of non action against the landholders was
apparently deliberate one. Cost was a great factor to deliver
justice to all inhabitants for which government needed huge
man-power and financial support. The government was
unwilling to bear such huge burden. In such a situation the only
option left to the state was to depend on the landholders for
delivering services. The colonial state ignored its duties and
relied on the landholders. Naturally the state had to recognize
the power and influence of this class.

The criminals of this district came overwhelmingly from
the lower order of the society. Majority of them was dacoits. The
dacoits came primarily from the Gowala caste and Muslim
communities. They walked into the dangerous world of
criminality not by protesting or revolting against the
administration or the wealthy community. Almost all of the
dacoits indulged in crime for sake of instant gain. Some of them
had joined in crime by accident, some for poverty and some for
mere curiosity. At the same time they had been continuously
used by the local influential men as means of torture to those
people who opposed them. They came from the poorer community themselves, but hardly bore any compassion for the fellow people. It is futile, therefore, to search any noble purpose in their thoughts and actions. Certainly they did not belong to the category of social bandits.

To sum up, it would not be unfair to draw a conclusion that the district Nadia, in the colonial period, was endemically infested with all kinds of heinous crimes. The local administration was too poorly equipped to provide good governance to the rural people. Presence of European representatives in government’s institutions was low in the district. It was a well thought out plan that local affairs would be maintained by the native non-governmental agencies, as long as it was not counterproductive to the colonial interests. The colonial superior officials always blamed the native subordinate officers, like police and court clerks, for the failure of government in the countryside. On the other hand, they pretended that the foreign rulers actually intended to work for the welfare of people but owing to the incompetency and corruption of the native officers they failed. They continued to blame the native officers and denied their own responsibility in the matter of eradication of crime.