CHAPTER V

THE MORPHOLOGY OF THE THUG ACTIVITIES IN THE DECCAN
India is a vast country with different ethnic groups. Throughout its long history, communication through the length and breadth of the territories was always a serious problem. It was possibly due to this reason, sometimes rulers restrained themselves in expanding the territories beyond a particular river bank or a mountain. In fact Mohamed Bin Tughluq won the wrath of his subjects when he got his capital city transferred en masse from Delhi to Daulatabad and later on retransferrence from Daulatabad to Delhi. This caused untold miseries and physical exhaustion to travel a distance of about 750 miles. Until the advent of automobiles and railways, horse was the chief and the fastest mode of transportation.

Except a few dynasties during whose period the country enjoyed the fruits of stable and orderly rule without crime and dacoity. Fa hein, a Chinese Buddhist pilgrim who visited India during the period the Guptas gives a vivid account of the total absence of crime and thefts in the entire country. People could move about freely without any fear of personal danger and and loss to their belongings. But contrary to this, Hieun T'sang gives a different account about himself. It is said that during his return journey, he was
waylaid by a group of bandits somewhere in the North-west Frontier of India. Such incidents were not uncommon even in the subsequent history of India. In fact the Buddhist narratives are full of such incidents.

The picture of India during the nineteenth century was not altogether different. While a major part of the country was brought under the direct rule of the East India Company, there were a large number of independent princely states. Most of them did not maintain regularly trained and paid armies. The Jagirdars and other feudal lords used to supply the fighting force at times of wars to their overlords. As soon as the war was over these soldiers were disbanded. Naturally such people became idle and unruly. Some of them took to highway robbery and other means of violent activities.

In the Deccan, like other parts of India, during the nineteenth century, there was widespread violence and organised robbery carried out by certain communities. There seem to have been several factors for this and the most plausible reason was perhaps due to their religious beliefs and also possibly the social boycott on grounds of minor village factions. Among the criminal tribes, the name of the Thugs sends a shrill through the spines of people, not due to their farcious
appearance, but due to the cold blooded murders of the
most unsuspecting victims specially the travelling
business community. The Thugs were a clannish and
closely knit body who were governed by a set of secret
code of conduct. It was a nomadic predatory with a
touch of cunningness in their dreadful acts. The Thugs
were either guided by certain superstitious religious
beliefs or an instable urge for endless blood letting
murders. The criminal tribes in the Deccan have been
studied in detail and the type of activities have been
recorded in the District records maintained by the
British officials. It is confirmed that there was a
tradition of these professional offenders. In any case
there has been a secret injunction in support of this
practice.

In this chapter an attempt has been made to high-
light the Thug activities on the basis of evidence
gathered from the official records and chronicles. This
is further supplemented by the exhaustively written
works of Col.Meadows Taylor and Col.Sleeman, who were
intimately connected with India and also the Thuggee
problem. The 'Confession of a Thug' by the former and
'Thugs or Million Murders by the latter are the two
important works which are at once informative and interesting. They have not only tried to give details of individual acts of crime but also traced the fundamental causes for this endemic practice of Thuggery. Thugs were the organised groups of robbers who believed murder and robbery as their hereditary profession. Thus gradually the Thuggery became institutionalised and the number of victims ran into several thousands and went on increasing year after year. It is evident that small bands of unruly and disgruntled people in the society took to such lawless activities. While it is difficult to associate any particular group of the above mentioned bandits, it is evident that the Thuggee elements came to the surface during the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries and gradually its sociological fabric became more complex. It is also difficult to pinpoint the period when this kind of crime originated. Zia-ud-din Burney in his history of Firoz Shah Tughluq (1229-1269 A.D.) refers to the Thugs who were dreaded by the travellers in India. He mentions that in 1290 A.D. about one thousand Thugs were captured, but the Sultan feared that the Thugs were endowed with certain supernatural powers and refused to issue orders for their execution and instead shifted them to Bengal. It was
possibly due to this that later on Bengal became the centre of Thug activities. Inspite of Burney's evidence about the prevalence of thuggery, we do not have sufficient evidence about its widespread activities. On the other hand during the nineteenth century the Thug activities were well known through the country though their modus operandi was extremely secret and their organisation was monolithic, yet it was revealed that hundreds and thousands of travellers and traders who left their houses hardly felt that they would never return to their dear homes.

The word Thuggee means a deceiver. It is derived from the Hindee word 'Thugna', to cheat or deceive. Whereas the Sanskrit root Sthag means to conceal and its derivatives are thug and thuggee. Thus a thug is a member of large and yet invisible set up which indulged in murder and rapacity of the unsuspecting merchant whom they lured and convinced of their safe journey from one place to the other at a time when the communication system was hopelessly bad and the personal safety of the travellers and the merchants was nobody's concern. The Thuggery was given a religious colour as they believed that they have a divine sanction to kill and no other class of bandits could call itself by this name. Thuggery became a hereditary profession
as the younger members of the family acquired the technique and skills of the profession. This was effected as a matter of routine and the youngsters did not feel the cruelty of their blood chilling murders. In fact they took at this crime in the way in which the professionals of the cremation grounds and the butchers treated their professions.

The origin of the Thugs is sometimes traced to 'Sagaric' and thus seem to have descended from Persia and spoke a typical language more in the form of codes. Further they did not possess any dangerous weapons of offence and defence except small daggers. This was possibly to avoid any recognizable evidences which would have put them in difficulties especially by the investigating authorities. Generally the society considered the Thugs as respectable men and innocent, 'Bhula Admee' and they also commanded status in the society. In reality they took pride in their exploits and were boastful of their wealth. They secretly assembled and lured the travellers to go with them in large groups in order to ensure their safe journey. But their real devilish qualities were shown the moment the weary travellers were found in lonely places with thick vegetation, river beds and sometimes mountain passes. They bounced upon
them and carried out their well orchestrated work, the details of which will be explained with the help of some of the illustrations. In short the travellers were strangulated with a big handkerchief or a scarf which acted as a noose. To quote Kaye 'They assumed many different parts. The work was quietly done. The body was then strapped and properly secured and very soon the corpse was buried. They dug grave for the body.'

To explain briefly about the whole operation of the Thugs, they adopted the division of labour as they were skilled in different roles. When they used a long cotton role of cloth for strangulation, not even a drop of blood was shed and their lives were taken away without even raising their voice. The Thugs were of different class of robbers who not only destroyed the lives of the victims but also robbed of their wealth. They spoke a peculiar dialect 'Ramase' and they usually conversed in such language as 'Tobacco Laow', 'Jay Kalee'. The words and the material which were commonly used during travel. The victims did not have time to suspect the Thugs as the whole job was done in a matter of few seconds.

The Thugs were proud of their clans. 'I am a Thug of the royal records' said one of the professional strangulators. I and my fore-fathers have been Thugs for twenty generation.' Interestingly the Thugs were
governed by a code of conduct. They did not murder their neighbour. By and large they also did not kill the lady travellers. The Thugs have been generally classified into 4 categories, viz., a) Inveiglers b) Stranglers, 3) Helpers, 4) Undertakers.

The above classification of the Thugs is based on the special roles they played in the execution of murder and robbery. The first category of Thugs were entrusted with the duty of winning the confidence of the traveller and as a sequel to this they fall a trap to their tricks. The inveiglers were endowed with the rare gift of convincing the travellers. In other words they play the role of tricksters or jugglers. Sometimes the Thugs, seeing the situation tried to terrorise the victim into parting with the valuables. Otherwise they committed the usual heinous crime of strangulating the victim by silencing him permanently. The stranglers normally employed the rough coir or jute ropes and their methods were crude and barbarous. The third category of Thugs designated as helpers were merely the functionaries who assisted the final performance of crime by holding the and immobilizing the victims and finally carrying the dead bodies to be hurriedly burried in the neighbourhood.
The undertakers generally performed the jobs concealing the evidence of crime. They either bury the dead bodies in the sand of a river bed or else out open the abdomen so that the buried bodies would not swell. Generally the murder spot and the graves were selected well in advance.\textsuperscript{12} They avoided the burying of bodies near the tents.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{Faith and belief :}

The Thugs had a firm belief in good and bad omens and would never embark an expeditions if the omens were inauspicious. They studied different omens before they started their expedition.\textsuperscript{14} For example, if a snake crossed their path they would not undertake any journey or for that matter if a lizard chirped then also they would not travel. But the cawing of a crow was taken to be a good sign. The donkey and jackal were considered to be the most important members.\textsuperscript{15}

Normally after completing the entire business of murder and burial, the Thugs would buy some jaggery (Gur) and ate it as a good Thug was required to do that because by doing that their powers would increase.\textsuperscript{16} In fact they also used three dice and when they went out they threw the dice to find out what days were favourable or unfavourable.\textsuperscript{17} Interestingly Monday was considered to be
a lucky day, while Friday was an unlucky one. This conclusion was drawn on the basis of their own experience. Once a group of 16 Thugs went to the city of Lucknow in pursuit of 7 travellers. It seems out of 16 Thugs 9 of them were captured and taken into the city. That day happened to be Friday. Since then they considered Friday to be a bad day. On the other hand the Thugs, at the instance of one Hoormut assembled at Sauger on their expedition which was quite successful as that day happened to be Monday. Since then they considered Monday as a fortunate one.

The Thugs seem to have been drawn from both the Hindu and Muslim communities who were under the influence of their respective religions. The Thugs, irrespective of their religious affiliation had a strong belief in the Goddess Kāleē. They offer prayers to Maha Kāleē and sought blessings from her. In fact, they started off their expedition only after offering worship to the Goddess Kāleē. The Thug activities continued regime after regime and it made no difference between the British rule and the Native administration, or for that matter between Berar and the Deccan and the Central Provinces. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, no ruler nor the British administrators took any effective steps to eradicate the Thuggery.
Before attempting a detailed analysis of the main areas of operations of the Thugs and their principal targets, or brief description of the deities of Goddess Kali which was worshipped by the Thugs and the stages of their operations as shown in some illustrations is warranted here. Plate I represents a typical form of Goddess Kali whom the Thugs hold in great reverence. Goddess Kali is one of the manifestations of Parvati, the consort of Lord Shiva. It is interesting to note that Kali has not only been the most favourite Goddess among the urbanites but also among the rural and tribal populace. While it is difficult to give any anthropological explanation to the evolution of the Goddess Kali. It is evident that she assumed certain totemic qualities so as to be a popular deity among the villagers. Tradition avers that human sacrifices were made to this deity. In this way certain amount of Tantric practices have been associated with this goddess. It is due to this belief the Thugs, Muslims and Hindus alike worshipped this Goddess. They had a firm belief that she would protect them and also give courage in their murderous activities. It would be of some interest to note that the present day Calcutta city was earlier known as Kalee-Ghat, obviously named after the Goddess Kali.
As per the mythological story Shiva's wife Parvati assumed the ferocious form of Durga in order to destroy the demon Mahisasura. As per the story each drop that fell from the demon produced thousands of demons in order to overcome this problem. Goddess Durga devised the method of collecting each drop of blood in a bowl. In this way she destroyed the mighty buffalo demon. It seems the Thugs have associated their modus operandi to Goddess Kali who is said to have given a handkerchief to strangulate the victims, initially the demons so that not even a drop of blood would fall on the ground. This tradition became an accepted one among the Thugs. The Thugs believed in performing Tantra, Mantra, Bhakti, Karma, Tapasya and Tyaga as a part of their rituals to seek the blessings of the Goddess Kali. It may be noted here that the Kali temples are found in the outskirts of every village in India. She is generally depicted in anthropomorphic form, ferocious and dreadful in appearance. One would also notice a large number of human skulls either in the form of a garland put around her neck or individual skulls tied to the branches of a nearby tree. It is needless to go into the details of the tantric form of rituals performed by the primitive and the nomadic people. Suffice it to say that the practice of human sacrifices persisted till modern times. During the famine
of 1866, in the neighbourhood of Calcutta a boy was found with his neck cut, the eyes staring open, and the stiff clotted tongue thrust out between the teeth. In another case near Hughli, a human head was placed in front of the goddess Kali attired with flowers and vermillion. But it is difficult to associate, such human sacrifices (Purush Vadha) with the religious beliefs adopted by the Thugs.

Plate II depicts the grove of Mundesur, possibly the present day Mandalgar, historically a well known place which yielded the famous inscriptions of a Greek envoy and king Yasovarman. In modern times it is famous for opium cultivation. From the illustration it will be seen that the place was peaceful and isolated and the thick vegetation had facilitated their murderous activities. Col. Sleeman is inclined to believe that the Thugs encamped there for days together and inconvenience with the owners of the grove, they carried out their activities. From this it appears that the Thugs did not always accompany the travellers, but sometimes they laid trap of them and destroyed evidence by burying the victims. Col. Sleeman personally visited the spot and satisfied himself about the suitability of it.

Plate III illustrates the cruel torture inflicted on the victim through a peculiar method. They strangulated
the marked victim with a piece of cloth or a ruhal. This technique seems to be in vogue even in modern times. One end of the ruhal is wound into a knot sometimes by inserting a piece of silver or other metal. The knot end is generally held in their left hands while the plain end in the right hand and allow as much space as possible to cover the victim's neck. When they threw the cloth from behind and start tightening it by thrashing their back head and also two thrashings on either side of their chest, the victim also is immobilised by the other helpers. The entire job, so artfully and masterly manner carried on by the experienced Thugs. The Thugs seem to have been carried away by a blind faith which decreed bloodless murders.

Ordinarily the ruhal was of 30 inches long with a knot at one extreme end for providing the Thug a firm hold. As soon as the victim is brought down to the ground the knot is loosened and the Thug makes another fold round the neck and by applying force of his leg on the knot side the ruhal was further tightened. Thus, the two simple but deadly objects used for committing their heinous crimes consisted of a strip of cloth for taking away the breathe of the victim and the pickaxe for digging their graves. To quote one of the Thugs
'just as if packing a bundle of straw.' The whole affair seem to be a child's play for the Thugs, like a fish in the fisherman's net, they eagerly watch the growing number of human deaths.

During the 1830's Thuggery was at its feverish pitch which drew the attention of some of the law enforcing authorities especially the British military officers. Some commentators of a later time have recorded Meadows Taylor as one of the principal British officers to be instrumental in suppressing Thuggery, but it is revealed that Meadows Taylor did not play that eminent role directly in eradicating Thuggee activities. It is possible that he was as an young officer in the service of the Nizam of Hyderabad, aware of the depredations caused by the Thugs. His active participation in dealing with the Thug activities is ruled out for the following reasons. During the period of 1834-37 he was away in England on sick leave, and during 1838-40 he was mostly travelling in England, Egypt and Ireland. In effect his association with the Thuggee problem was peripheral. Therefore his name hardly figures in the reports of the Thuggee department. However, it is to the credit of Meadows Taylor that the brutal and inhuman activities of the Thugs have been highlighted
in the most dramatic manner in his famous novel entitled 'The Confession of a Thug'. It is this novel which brought home the seriousness and the gravity of the problem. Otherwise this social problem and the steps initiated by the Government would have remained a valuable document kept in the official records. On the other hand Meadows Taylor's novel in all its graphic description brought to light this problem throughout the English reading public. The sole credit of tackling the problem goes to Col. Sleeman who in 1832 assumed the charge of the Department which was entrusted with the task of suppressing the Thuggee activities. He took upon himself the responsibility of restoring the law and order in the entire country which was infested with the Thugs. To start with, Col. Sleeman studied the social background of the Thugs, their method of carrying the crimes. Then he formulated a strategy for putting a stop to this frightening social menace. It is evident that he viewed the entire problem from sociological angle. He came out with a concrete proposal of rehabilitating the criminals for which he exerted himself to change the mental attitudes of the criminals by exhorting them on the importance of the dignity of labour. He instilled in them a feeling of self-confidence and social awareness among the Thugs vis-a-vis the common men folk. It is through the
the untiring efforts of Col. Sleeman that an old Thug prison at Jubulpur was later on converted into a vocational school where the reformed Thugs were engaged in gainful professions. It may not be out of place to remark that the recent dacoits operating in the Chambal valley and in the bordering states of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh have possibly the same social background but unfortunately no serious attempt has been made to evolve the system of reforming these dacoits. Here the past history does not seem to have any impact on the present day administration. The posterity, particularly the law abiding people are indeed grateful to Col. Sleeman's women service who, as a police officer did not view the Thuggee activity just as a law and order problem and did not punish them for their crimes as per the prevailing laws. In Col. Sleeman one would find the noble qualities of a thinker, scholar, administrator, diplomat, a social reformer and a proven police administrator.

True to his creative instincts, Meadows Taylor during his long stay in the Deccan grasped the tales of Thugs and the terror they struck among the people. These stories were passed on from generation to generation. Added to this Meadows Taylor himself confronted one of
the Thugs by name 'Ameer Ali' who later on turned into an approver. In his novel, 'Confession of a Thug' Taylor portrayed Ameer Ali as the chief character. Thus Ameer Ali represents not only an individual creation but a type himself. Naturally Taylor has woven round Ameer Ali all the exploits and atrocities of the Thugs. Since it is an historical novel we cannot dispense the events as the frigment of imagination. Also matters pertaining to the habits, customs and manners as described in the novel seem to be quite authentic. Therefore much credence should be given to the contents of the novel.

As early as 1815, it was Dr. Richard Sherwood of Madras Medical service, who, for the first time brought to the notice of the scholarly world through his study of the Thugs. While examining the Thugs in jail he gathered information on their customs, practices, beliefs and prejudices and also their methods of killing the victims and their subsequent disposal of the dead bodies. It is he who identified their secret vocabulary called as 'Ramas'.

His research paper entitled "Of Murders called Phansigars", in Madras Literary Gazettee. However, the vital information on the Thuggee activities still remained enigmatic. No British administrator or for that matter
any Indian made a serious attempt to unravel the Thug menace. The Britishers felt that no serious investigation on this matter was warranted for they felt that the Thuggee practice was purely a religious activity which should not be interfered with. Secondly, it was rather difficult to get any solid evidence against the Thugs. Because they commit crimes far away from their residences and the victims were also not from the same places where crimes were committed. In many cases the Thugs were released for want of witnesses and even the stolen property could not be identified. Further the witnesses were reluctant to go to distant places for recording the evidence. Lastly, the police machinery was not sufficient. They were primarily concerned with the general law and order. It may be recalled that the district police establishment consisted of a Magistrate, Thanadars with some Jamadars under them. According to Sleeman (Rambles and Recollections) these Thanadars were inadequately paid which ultimately lead to large scale corruptive practices among them.

Col. Sleeman also owes to hevenot whose travels were published in 1687. He refers to the Thugs as 'The cunningest robbers in the world in that country between Delhi and Agra. They used a certain sling with a running noose which they cast with so much slight of hand about
a man's neck. When they are within reach of him they never fail so they strangle him at once. In this way Col. Sleeman seem to have evinced a keen interest in this matter. He seized upon every opportunity to gather information on the activities of the Thugs. During the year 1825 while he was serving at Jubbulpur, accidentally he apprehended a gang of Thugs who were released by the Magistrates. It was per chance some of the members of the gang turned as approvers who revealed vital information. They have shown the places where the dead bodies were buried who were killed by the gang. Thus Sleeman was able to collect substantial evidence against the gang and thus succeeded in getting the gang convicted.

Col. Sleeman marshalled voluminous data on Thugs and their activities and finally published a lengthy paper in Calcutta Literary Gazettee in October 3, 1890. This paper aroused public interest and many law abiding people viewed it seriously. It also attracted the attention of the Governor General, Lord William Bentick. Realising the gravity of the situation he directed Col. Sleeman to take over the responsibility of suppressing the Thugs. Incidentally the tenure of William Bentick coincided with a favourable situation in India when many natives also expressed their concern on the prevailing obnoxious
socio religious practices in India. The British early policy of benign neglect was given up and they decided to join hands with the Indian Social Reformers in eradicating social abuses which were perpetrated under the guise of religion or certain age-old religious usages.

Thus Colonel Sleeman was appointed by Lord Bentick as the first Superintenden to deal with the Thuggee problem. He was also asked to prepare a blue print on the basis of which the future plans of this problem should be executed. As a result Col. Sleeman made a permanent provision for the creation of a post of Superintendent. In its implementation Sleeman's plans provided for a regular police establishment of which the Superintendent was the over all authority. Adequate powers and resources were placed at his disposal. A special commissioner to try the Thug convicts was also appointed. Col. Sleeman's total and all round involvement with the Thug problem was evident through his writings. His book 'Ramaseana' is an outcome of his mastery on the vocabulary of the Thugs which he attained. From 1830 onwards started a sage of captures and the trials of the Thugs under the general supervision of Sleeman. He caught hold of a notorious leader of a Thug in Central India.
by name Feringea. Through him a good deal of important information on the Thug activities was recorded. By about 1832 nearly 300 Thugs were already undergoing trials. 31 Sleeman was meticulous in recording the evidences. He included geneological tables, the names of their nearest relatives, friends, and if possible details of the ancestors. This information was further verified with the help of the chief revenue record. Such a painstaking and exhaustive report prepared by Sleeman was greatly appreciated by the Governor General. By 1835 Sleeman had on record 1500 Thugs who were sent for trials. Out of which 380 were executed, 900 were given life imprisonment and 148 were given long punishment. In this way Colonel Sleeman brought down the incidence of crime by the Thug to the minimum. However, it became difficult for Sleeman to arrest the river Thugs who operated mostly in Bengal. They operated in boats which were used by the travellers. In the course of their journey at some convenient place they were strangulated. After robbing their belongings the dead bodies were thrown into the river. Naturally they were carried away by the water currents and it was difficult to gather any evidence. The great services rendered by Colonel Sleeman are cherished by
by the posterity. He achieved an impossible task which
can be very well judged if we realise that India did
not have telegraphs and wireless facilities which would
have made their job easy. On the other hand the nature
of crimes committed by the Thugs was always mobile as
they moved from one place to another in search of their
prospective victims.

Colonel Sleeman's name goes down in history for
another farsighted policy of starting an industrial school
in 1837 for reforming the convicts. It shows that he was
not contented in capturing the Thugs and punishing them.
He was equally concerned about rehabilitating them for
he thought that these Thugs were forced to take to such
professions due to circumstances. Obviously he looked in
them the human qualities which could be reshaped and put to
more productive jobs. Please

Plate IV represents a spacious building at Jubulpur
wherein these convicts were housed. Here they were taught
various skills like carpentry, smithy and other cottage
industries which enabled them to earn their livelihood
and realize the dignity of labour.

This was indeed a modern approach towards the
settlement of the convicts. It had the prospect of
becoming 'a soldier of arts and manufacturers' and was
worthy of emulation. We get some more details about the functioning of this school. It had a large number of Thugs as well as other dacoits. They worked from 6 A.M. to 5 P.M. every day, with an interval of one hour in the noon. The convicts were paid different wages depending upon their conduct and the help they render to the establishment.

In the foregoing discussion, it has been shown that Col. Sleeman was instrumental in highlighting the criminal activities of the Thugs. However, Meadows Taylor's contribution towards this problem cannot be underestimated. It is a fact that his historical novel 'Confession of a Thug' was published slightly later than Sleeman's tenure as a Police Superintendent.

Yet the manner in which he presented the incidents, situations, the areas of Thug operation is amazing. While on one hand his creativity as a Novelist was fully exhibited, it should be remembered that he has a historian of repute of his times. In short he succeeded in all walks of life. He dealt with all subjects with the same amount of facility and versatality. It is true that Taylor did not claim any originality for the plot of the novel. At one point he states that he merely recorded the confessions of an approacher. He states that "I myself heard it told." This statement has been unquestioned by some scholars. They feel that a
plethora of information in the novel is a reflection of E.Sleeman's account. Be that as it may, Taylor's own original contribution, cannot be undermined. His greatness lies in the portrayal of lively characters, sometimes putting apt words into the mouths of his characters.

Ameer Ali was the principal character in the novel. He was originally from Saugor, but later on was sent to the Nizam territories. He was directly connected with the murder of 719 persons. He is said to have remarked once 'Ah! Sir, if I had not been in prison 12 years, the number would have been a thousand.' Taylor's effort in making the principal characters speaking in singular first person has appealed to the general reading public. It is also through his novel the reader comes to know the psychic and the motives of the Thugs. For example 'When Ameer Ali's father directed him to accompany the group to Sheopeor, he feels thrilled about it and says this event as a very fortunate and 'it was the will of Allah, else what power had boy like me to do such a thing?' Such statements gives us an idea about the way the youngers were groomed into this profession. Yet at another place, we get to know the details of AmeerAli's personality. Even the jailors took him to be a respectable man, who had a
religious bent of mind, offered Namaz five times a day. He always preferred green clothes and like a true Syed he would beat his breast and tears his hair. He was a man of medium height (5' 7") and of moderate built bordering on slenderness. He was always neatly dressed.

It's again from Taylor's novel we get more details about their code of conduct, their interaction with the society, their devious methods of duping the travellers etc. They were also guided by a set of superstitious religious beliefs. While referring to the fate of the victims, one of the Thugs remarked 'who can protest against or resist the degree of providence. It is fate which sends victims to the Thugs and as soon as travellers falls into their company the Thugs regard them in much the same light as we regard persons awaiting the hangman.

'Further Ameer Ali says, 'It is fate and who can withstand it?' To him Thuggee was one of the means by which Allah works out with his own ends. Therefore, Thuggjee was an outcome of ignorance, fatalism, superstition, brutatism and a sprinkling of adventure and excitement.'

Ameer Ali believes in the ceremony 'Taopani' after each venture was over it should never be overlooked. The Thugs had a firm belief that they were above the law and if they are punished by somebody the goddess Kali would punish them. One of the approvers of Col. Sleeman
told him that the Raja of Jhalone became a leaper because he caused two Thugs to be trampled to death by an elephant. Taylor also tells an identical story about the Raja of Jhalone who died of leprosy caused by Ismail’s death. The Thugs were also governed by certain ethics. They excluded some categories of persons from scavengers, leapers, dancers, musicians, sweepers, washerman, oil-vendors and brahmins were excluded. But there was no general convention as such, Amanoolah, a Thug murdered a Muslim fakir and burnt a copy of his Koran in order to destroy the evidence. The available evidence shows that the Hindu Thugs were more sincere in adhering to the norms. For instance when a traveller was taking a cow with him, the Thugs, before killing him bought the cow from him and then killed him. Similarly travellers carrying Ganges water were often spread. But here too there were exceptions to the general rule. The Thugs in the Deccan strangled a large number of Sikhs while they were returning from Nander after paying a visit and homage to the Gurudwara of Guru Govind Singh.

Interestingly women were not excluded from the death noose of the Thugs, though some Thugs were considerate towards them. It is more in the form of escaping from the after effects of such compassionate
actions. Sherfun the lady who threatened to expose Ameer Ali's action had to pay with her life.\textsuperscript{42} As a matter of general rule, females were not admitted into the Thug fraternity barring a few exceptions. Sleeman refers to Bhuktwari's life as the only woman. He knew as having gone out on the Thuggee expedition into the Decoan\textsuperscript{43}. There is yet another example of a female Thug name Jargdumah had kept a gang about two hundred Thugs near Bangalore.\textsuperscript{44} She seem to have been the overlord of the gang but never undertook any expedition. She amassed a huge wealth accruing as her share. The available evidence shows that the Thugs did not have any hard and fast rule for admittance into their gangs. Thus caste and creed and to some extent even sex did not figure in their scheme of things which was possibly the main reason for their general success. As already stated that the Thugs adopted a variety of tricks to lure and kill the travellers. One such method as recorded by Taylor was about a beautiful women sent with dishevelled hair to attract the attention of passers by. As soon as she saw some people, she walled and wept on her misfortune. Then the traveller would take her on his horseback. \textbf{Ne} sooner she sat on the horseback than she strangled the traveller. Sometimes she called her companions who hid in the neighbouring bushes.\textsuperscript{45}
The geographical distribution of the Thug operations:

The available evidence shows that the Thug activities were spread over the entire country especially Central India, Gangetic Valley, some parts of Bengal and the entire Deccan. There were different groups operating in different parts of the country. Their composition differed from region to region. While there is no concrete evidence on the existence of an apex body, it is reasonable to assume that they operated in close liaison among themselves. The groups never worked at cross purposes nor they betrayed each other. In case a Thug was banished by the authorities from a particular area, he found a comfortable shelter with another group of Thugs. At one place Ameer Ali remarks that "we have friends wherever we go, we bribe all we can and we have agents in every parts of the country in the disguise of fakirs and merchants."46

Here an attempt has been made to reconstruct the areas of operation by the Thugs and this would help us to form an idea about the extent and magnitude of the crimes committed by the Thugs. It seems Sheopoor in Central India was the main centre of Thug activities.47 They dispersed from here and also reassembled at this place. Sometimes they form into three or four gangs and moved in different directions. One of such groups covered
the entire Northern Deccan which included prosperous cities like Nagpoor, Ellichpur, Comraotee, (Amraoti), (Paithan) Akola, Berar, Mungrool, Aurangabad, Pyeun, Bheer, Mominabad, Nandair, and then Nirmul. They would camp at a place like Nagpoor and roughly identify an area where they could possibly figure out their targets. While proceeding, sometimes they select some suitable spots to bury their victims. Otherwise in the normal course of time they created an impression among the general public that they were innocent people who were primarily concerned with their routine life which included offering of prayers in temples and mosques, whenever they came across such places in the course of their journey. Generally they selected a central point and watched for the travelling public and befriended with them by showing lot of personal concern for their safety and profitable business. While their main area of operation ranged from Gwalior to Hyderabad, they generally joined the travellers from Delhi to Hyderabad at some important point. For example, Boorhanpur was the main junction where the Thugs encamped and then accompanied the travellers. So the itinerary of the Thugs invariably included Nagpur and Hyderabad with a slight provision for flexibility, on the sub-routes. For example if the travellers were going up to Aurangabad, naturally the route would be via Berar...
and sometimes even Khandesh. Aurangabad did not always become the destination point. Some parties proceeded up to Poona and if necessary went as far as Surat. Sometimes heavy monsoons made it difficult for them to travel on the west coast. In that case they would return to Sheopoor via Boorhanpur. From Nagpur they followed the shortest route via Guneshpur and reached Mangrool which inhabited by Mahammedans which is also famous for a shrine of Meer Hyat Kalundur where the Thugs offered prayers for their success in their contemplated enterprises. Then they would proceed to Bassim (Washim). Here a Thug by name Bhudrinath strangled a sahoukar and got from him a good quantity of gold and silver and Rs. 3500 in cash. Whenever the Thugs get gold and other valuables, they found it difficult while distributing their booty.

Some of the Thug gangs followed a circuitous route by including Benaras and then touch Sagar (Sagour) Neerbudda country and make a halt at Guneshpoor. From these to Oomraoti in Mangrool, then proceeded to Oomarkhed and touch Nirmul and Nursee and finally reach Hyderabad. Here the Thug concentrated mostly on Cha derghat, Karavan, Begum Bazar, Goshamahal, and Charminar. It is interesting to note that Meadows Taylor was familiar with the above
referred areas in the present day Hyderabad city. In fact he has sketched a street of Karavan where rich businessmen lived. The houses were built out of wood and the shops were provided with a wooden projection. The marauding gangs proceeded upto Beedar. On their way Bhudrinath met a traveller, lured him to accompany him and killed him near Golconda and after looting Rs. 70 and a piece of gold, he was sent the same way but with a difference as the kings of Qutubshai dynasty were buried as one could see a cluster of tombs in the neighbourhood of Golconda. These gangs also proceeded towards Beedar via Hoornabad, a flourishing city only comparable to that of Omraoote. From Hoornabad the Thugs proceeded with a big following of 300 Kuiliane (Kalyani) and then reached Chincholli. After plundering that place they proceeded southwards and reached Koolburgah (Gulbarga). The plunder was possible as they realised that the town was garrisoned. From there they went Northwards and reached Sholapur and then passed through Barse (Barsi) and Wyras. Then they moved towards Bheer (Bhir) and Pyatun (Paithan). It will be seen from the routes they followed that they had always an eye on the prosperous and busy trading centres. Thus Paithan was well known for its fine quality of brocaded
muslins, which were in great demand in all parts of the country especially Hyderabad and Poona. It may be noted here that Faithan, till recent times, was known for its wealth. The Sahoukars of this place used to lend money to the Sardars and the Peshwas during the late eighteenth century. On their way back they passed through Ajuntah (Ajanta) Ghat, then cross the Nizam territories and after touching ojum (Ujjain) and Indoore they reached Sheopoor. It will be seen from the above description that most of the Thugs touched Oomraottee on either way because it was one of the richest towns in the Deccan. Some estimates show that it is richer than Hyderabad city and its wealth was counted not by lakhs but by crores. The Thugs in the Deccan also covered places like Nasik, Poona, Sholapur and Hyderabad.

The incidents, places and the characters narrated in Taylor's novel do not appear to be imaginary. There is no doubt that his narrative is partly based on the data made available by Colonel Sleeman and other British officials. It is not unlikely that Taylor had also an access to the foreign political Department as the routes described by Taylor appear to be identical to those given in foreign Political Department records. While the Foreign Political Department covers the entire sub-continent. Taylor's work confines itself to Central India and the Deccan. But what is interesting to these
is the common beliefs and omens in both works. For example, when a gang of Thugs proceeded from Jeypoor (Jaipur) they heard the partridges call which was considered to be a good Omen. Similarly Taylor describes about the good and bad omens. We get an interesting record listing the names of Thugs, age and their residences. To illustrate:

a) Salee Khan had 50 followers lived in Dhotuna in Nizam territories.
b) Survar Khan in the village of Dhona in .
c) Rajah Khan lived in Bhar and had 50 followers.
d) Shogahul Khan lived in Telingana and had 20 followers.
e) Mauzdar Khan in Nandair and had 25 followers.
f) Hoseyn Khan in Kasuja and had 40 followers.
g) Himmat Khan in Khandesh and had 30 followers.
h) Bolu Khan in Bhar and had 15 followers.
i) Chumma in Bedur and had 20 followers.

It is possible that such details helped Taylor to weave an interesting story after adding all the ingredients required for that purpose.

Meadows Taylor has highlighted the criminal and spinechilling murderous activities of the Thugs. This was a very serious problem before the British government for which all possible steps were taken during the
Governor Generalship of William Bentick. It has been shown in this chapter as to how Thug problem involved social, religious and economic matters. For this purpose all available source material has been utilised and the veracity of Meadows Taylor's account in his novel 'Confession of a Thug' has been examined. In conclusion it may be said that Taylor's novel contains a good deal of recorded evidences found in the foreign political department, Sleeman's works and the official police and revenue records of the British administration.

We come across an interesting piece of information about the mode of dress and other accompanied of the Thugs. This is pertaining to a gang of Thugs mostly Musalmans from Arcot region. They usually tied a handkerchief around their heads. They put on scarlet jackets and white trousers or lungis. They generally allowed their hair to grow long and carried small and short sticks in their hands. They also equipped themselves with bags of betel and pan for their constant use. For all intents and purposes they resembled the sepoys of those days.
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23. Ibid., p. 130.
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29. Taylor, Meadows, Confession of a Thug, p. 43.
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