

## **Small Firearms in Police Domain & Days of 'Anarchists' in Bengal, 1905-1915**

**Anasua Dutta**

***Abstract:** Today, nations across the world face the challenge of 'terrorist attacks', separatist movements and fundamentalism. To effectively tackle it authorities are investing energy, wealth, and law and order controlling apparatuses of uniformed forces. Anarchists having sophisticated arms and force states to invest in sophisticated weapons. Careful planning goes towards the upkeep of armouries to prevent arms and ammunition from falling into the hands of revolutionaries. The Arms Act of 1878 of British India amended existing laws regarding license, retail arms business stopped zamindars from possessing arms, aided arrest of revolutionaries, and curbed gun-running and confiscation. Strict vigilance by policemen, however, made them targets of 'revolutionary bullets'.*

***Key Words:** Arms, License, Crime, Dacoits, Revolutionary.*

### ***Introduction***

Today, nation states around the world around are facing relentless challenges in the form of 'terrorist attacks', separatist movements, and growing power of different fundamentalist forces. To effectively tackle such a disturbed socio-political situation they are investing money and strengthening their laws, police, and intelligence. Weapons used by terrorists within Indian territories have

involved the use of sophisticated guns. And, to counter ‘anarchists with sophisticated arms’ government forces have used state-of-the-art weapons including ‘night vision’. The 26/11 episode of Mumbai saw the birth of National Security Agency too.

During the British Raj the government’s policies in respect of organising the police were influenced by socio-economic and political situations in rural and urban areas. As Ranjan Chakrabarti writes, ‘the police was intimately connected with the evolving needs of the empire and its administrative realities’. The evolution of the police force was directly related to rural and urban violence considered a threat to colonial state, the basis of colonial rule.<sup>1</sup> Sumanta Banerjee, in his discussion on crimes in colonial Calcutta, said that it was a traditional British practice to interpret crime as an act committed or omitted in violation of a ‘public law’ either forbidding or commanding it. ‘Public Law’, according to Banerjee, is a set of rules built upon the political power and authority of the ruling socio-economic class which formulates legal statutes to protect its interest. So, very often certain collective acts of protest by the ruled i.e., gang robbery, looting, affray, rioting etc., were considered as ‘dangerous’, challenging the power of the ruling class. State authority described these acts as ‘crime’ and those associated with such activities as ‘criminals’ and ‘anarchists’.<sup>2</sup>

‘Armed revolutionaries’ of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Bengal (identified as ‘anarchists’ by the British Indian administration), in their protest movements against alien rule, resorted to various ‘dangerous’ methods which involved ‘traditional crimes’ like gang dacoity, arms looting, burglary, theft etc. The Lt. Governor, other high ranking government officials, and their Indian representatives very often became the target of bomb attacks and bullets. In their armed protest and activities, the revolutionaries often took the help of the ‘lower classes’ i.e. *chhotolok*, who were already labelled ‘criminal; this entailed ‘*Bhadrolok Armed Revolutionaries*’ to establish contacts with smugglers, ‘gun runners’ and imitating the modus operandi of seasoned and established gang of dacoits, burglars etc. It is interesting to note that these veterans often masqueraded as revolutionaries, infiltrated revolutionary ranks, and sought refuge in patriotic groups hoping to perpetrate their own crimes. Reports on the Administration in Bengal however, distinguished between crime committed by professionals and ‘revolutionary crime’.

Amalendu Bagchi, in *Agniyuger Agneotra*, has cited one of the great revolutionaries of the day, Satish Pakrashi (*Agnidiner Katha*), to show that the only way of procuring guns was stealing, buying secretly, smuggling, and snatching arms while carrying out dacoity. Armed revolutionaries had to take recourse to dacoity to loot wealth as huge amounts of money were required to procure arms. ‘The principle objects of these outrages were to obtain money for

revolutionary purposes and to terrorize the police'.<sup>3</sup> The first attempt of 'Swadeshi Dacoity' took place in Rangpur.<sup>4</sup> 'Kushangal Dacoity' was carried out to get hold of guns possessed by the Government, and 'Beliaghata Chalpatty Dacoity' was committed with the sole purpose of collecting money to import German arms, especially Mauser pistols.<sup>5</sup> All these were the work of young boys from educated middle class Bengali families. Indeed the administration was very much concerned regarding rampant 'bhadrolok dacoities' of the days.

The *bhadrolok* identified itself as 'good legal subjects', but its faith in the British sense of justice received a jolt in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when they became victims of planters' harassment and government injustice under various circumstances. This often led to a convergence of *bhadrolok* and *chhotolok* interests, as both were victims 'of the control apparatus of the alien government'. In course of time, amendments of certain Acts, e.g. the Criminal Tribes Act (1871), blurred the differences between the two as far as criminal activities were concerned by bringing 'anti-British revolutionary gangs' within the ambit of the Act.<sup>6</sup>

During the 18<sup>th</sup> and the early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, dacoities that occurred in rural areas were generally identified as the handiwork of the poor and the lower castes, i.e. Mussalman, Bagdi, Chandal, and Goala. The latter were recruited by zamindars as the *lathial* to commit dacoities at night, and in obvious connivance of their employers; the zamindars themselves often engaged in looting the

property of their rivals. Interestingly, such acts of dacoities were often upheld by the Bengali literati – branded as effeminate by its colonial masters – not as acts of ‘criminality’ but as feats of ‘bravery’.<sup>7</sup>

The passing of Arms Act in 1878 was viewed as a mechanism of depriving the 'emasculated Bengalis' from showing their bravery in the face of danger.<sup>8</sup> The revolutionaries' adaption of 'dacoity' were inspired by characters in Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's novel *Anandomath*; it includes two saffron clad armed *sanyasis* in Bhabananda and Jibananda along with Mahendra, the son of a local zamindar, with firearms in their hands pledging to fight back their 'mother land' from foreign enemies. Howard Pyle's Robin Hood and his band and Walter Scott's depiction of robbers fighting against injustice to the poor were also stories of inspiration.

An important step taken during the five years of Sir Andrew Fraser's administration was establishing a body of police to prevent and detect crime on the waterways of Bengal. Crime was common practice for centuries past, especially in the labyrinth of woods and water known as the Sundarbans. The first Jesuit missionaries visiting Bengal in 16<sup>th</sup> century described this tract as infested by dangerous dacoits and tigers. Dacoity and gang robbery are described in Hamilton's *Description of Hindustan* too.<sup>9</sup>

According to F. Brewster, Deputy Superintendent of Police, I.B. and C.I.D. (*History of the Political Agitation and Crime in the District Of Dacca from*

1905 to 1912), since 1903-04 and Viceroy Lord Curzon's scheme of partitioning Bengal saw the district of Dacca gaining notoriety as the scene of violent crime, including pillage and murder. It became the major area of operations of Anushilan Samiti, one of the most dangerous secret societies in the country.<sup>10</sup> This was true not only for Dacca, but for nearly the whole of Bengal. Members of different 'Samitis' no longer confined themselves to anti-government protests and agitation, but a large number of them got involved in 'armed terrorist activities'. Government reports identified them as 'anarchists'. As pointed out by Charles Tegart, 'the terrorist movement was worked up on top of what is known as the Anti-Partition Agitation, though the foundations were laid in fact before the partition took place...'<sup>11</sup>

### ***Gunrunning in Chandernagore***

As one goes through brittle old records, archived police files, newspaper clippings of the times, maps, old photographs, sketches and displays at the Calcutta Police Museum, a fascinating world of 'police versus revolutionaries' game unveils much like 'who gets on top' as in comic strip *Tom & Jerry*. Exchange of letters between the Home Department, the Foreign Department (Government of India), and the Director and Deputy Director of Criminal Intelligence expressed the anxiety prevailing within British administration regarding gun smuggling through the French Post Office.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Stolen arms and Culprits behind arms theft***

After searching the Krishnagar house of Jyoti Prasad Chatarji and his son Dwija Prasad Chatarji, the police arrested them under the Arms Act for possessing unlicensed guns, pistols, and ammunition. They became prime suspects in connection with a revolver theft case at Krishnagar. The pistol belonged to Ashutosh Banarji who was a 'muharrir' of pleader Shamapada Mukharji, the father of Bejoy Mukharji, who was initially arrested with Dwija Prasad Chatarji. The pistol's number was erased. Jyoti Prasad, Bejoy Mukharji, and another boy had gathered and perhaps made the plan of stealing the revolver. Bijoy was the member of a 'terrorist gang'.<sup>13</sup>

In January 1911, a police officer of Manikganj at Ramnagar noticed a young group comprising of Surendra Mohan Ray, Nibaran Chandra Nath, Biraj Mohan Ghosh, and Shaikh Fatik in a boat with a double-barrelled breech loading gun and fifteen cartridges. In October 1911, Surendra Mohan Ray and Nibaran Chandra Nath were sentenced to eighteen months and one year rigorous imprisonment respectively under the Arms Act for the habitual use of a gun belonging to Mahendra Pal. The accused were members of the *Anushilan Samiti* and believed to have been involved in Barrah dacoity of 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1908.

On 24<sup>th</sup> July 1911, when some students of the Routhbhog High English School were looking for pigeons, they discovered three bundles containing arms above the ceiling in the school building. The bundles when opened by police revealed a smooth bore breech loading 12 bore gun, a double barrelled breech

loading 12 bore gun, a pin fire gun, a smooth-bore snider carbine, a 5-chamber 500 bore Colt repeating rifle, a 22 bore Winchester rifle, a Martini Henry sporting carbine, and several other miscellaneous items such as cartridges bullets, wads, and bullet moulds etc.etc.<sup>14</sup>

Quite a number of 'gun theft' cases were reported during the years under review indicating involvement of 'the anarchists'. Calcutta Police adopted theatrical means to track culprits behind these arms theft cases and charge them under Arms Act violation. One such plan saw a detective head constable disguising as a member of 'Surhid Samiti' to become trustworthy of 'revolutionaries' following which Surendra Nath Mukherji was caught and charged under Arms Act for selling a tin of gunpowder to a disguised police .

On the morning of 11<sup>th</sup> May 1910, Nilapada Ghosal, cook to Babu Hari Charan Mukharji, a TTE on the Eastern Bengal State Railway, reported the theft of a leather handbag belonging to his master from a tramcar on Harrison Road. Mukharji's statement indicated the bag contained one Webley's patent six-chambered revolver purchased from Messrs A.T Daw & Co., some unused cartridges and license for the revolver. Initially, police suspected that the cook had disposed of his master's revolver and reported it as stolen. However, Nilapada's connection with the 'revolutionaries' could not be established.<sup>15</sup>

It was seldom that 'terrorists' were directly involved in arms theft; rather, it was often 'gun smugglers or runners' who through their men carried out such



activities only to sell the arms to the 'bhadrolok anarchists', 'ordinary dacoits', and burglars. Exceptions were those who purposely became 'gun runners' to help the 'armed revolutionaries' to free the country from foreign rule. Dearth of evidence made it absolutely difficult for the I.B. Department to ascertain if 'a particular culprit' had any revolutionary links. Haridas Dutt alias Atul Chandra Nag was charged under Section 19F of the Arms Act for keeping under his control at 34, Sib Thacoor's Lane, Calcutta, nine boxes of cartridges without license, although the police failed conclusively to prove his 'revolutionary' connection.<sup>16</sup> A police spy detected Nakuleswar Bhattacharjee's connection with a number of 'political dacoities' to supply guns to his compatriots.<sup>17</sup>

The Administrative Report of Bengal 1914-1915 highlighted a broad daylight dacoity in Calcutta in August 1914 when a consignment of fifty Mauser pistols and 46,000 rounds of ammunition consigned for Messrs Rodda & Co. were stolen on the way from the docks. Nearly half the consignment was recovered. Mauser cartridge cases were found with nearly all 'revolutionary dacoits' of the time indicating wide distribution of stolen weapons and ammunition among revolutionary parties.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Gunshot Cases***

During the years under review, several gunshot cases took place in which victims were associated with the administration rule and culprits connected with 'revolutionary groups'. On 10<sup>th</sup> February 1908, the Public Prosecutor of Alipur,

Babu Ashutosh Biswas, appearing on behalf of the crown in the Alipore Bomb Case before the Sessions Judge, was gunned down within the premises of Alipore Police Court. 'Kushtia Gun Shot Case' took place the same year, which saw an attempt made on Mr. Hickenbotham, a member of the Church Missionary Society on the night of 4<sup>th</sup> March 1908.<sup>19</sup> The year 1910 witnessed an attempt to shoot Mr. Forrest, the District Magistrate of Howrah.<sup>20</sup>

The British Raj, to combat all 'anti social' activities of armed freedom fighters in Bengal, took recourse to introduction of various Acts or further strengthening laws like Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, Defence of India Act and Regulation of 1818, Explosive Substances Act of 1908, Explosive Rules of 1912, 1914 and so on. The Arms Act of 1878 was going through amendments from time to time. Reforms were introduced in Police administration. The Crown equipped its police force with atrocious laws to get to any length in suppressing 'enemies of the state', resulting in retaliation making police natural targets of anarchists' bullets.

### ***Killing of police personnel by gun***

In Dacca on 27<sup>th</sup> November, 1912 police search seized certain documents, clearly indicating existence in Eastern Bengal of an active and dangerous society imbued with advanced revolutionary ideas. Methods used by

conspirators to achieve their objective included assassination of Police Officers , the “removal” of any member or any person assisting Government , the procuring of arms, the commission of dacoities to obtain funds, winning over recruits “by tampering with the student's loyalty in schools and colleges” !21

On 9<sup>th</sup> September 1908, Sub-Inspector Nanda Lal Banerjee of the Bengal Criminal Investigator Department was deliberately murdered with fire arms when he left house at about 7 p.m. to post a letter. He had not gone far when several shots fired at him from behind. He had shadowed Prafulla Chaki one of the assassins of Mrs. and Miss Kennedy wife and daughter of Muzaffarpur based European advocate till the Mokama railway station where Chaki shot himself , Banerjee received a reward of Rs. 1,000 for his good service. Also gave evidence in the Alipore Bomb Case.<sup>22</sup>

Amrita Bazar Patrika March 1, 1915. Page-7 brought out report “Calcutta Horror”. It described in north Calcutta a young man about eighteen years assisted by four others whose identity were unknown shot CID Inspector Suresh Chandra Mukherjee and his orderly. A year ago, Inspector Nripendra Nath Ghose was shot dead under similar circumstances near the same spot.

### ***Police administration, arming of police, and issue of licenses***

Keeping in mind these 'criminal activities' the administration decided to strengthen the 'tooth' of the police. Effective policing was not restricted the city

i.e., Calcutta and Dacca Police , but Military Police , Armed Reserves , Armed Volunteers , Railway Police came into its gamut. River and sea channels became an important route for smuggling arms other than petty crimes and dacoities, thus River Police was made important. All these alertness started during the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 when Police Battalions were raised in Bengal. Police Department was designed to be a distinctly separate entity of the administration.<sup>23</sup>

Various official documents, letters exchanged between the Police Commissioner of Calcutta, Commissioners of different Divisions, Government of Bengal and Government of India suggested administration's initiative in proper arming of the police. Roy Ingleton an expert in the 'Arming of British Police' has pointed out that 'New Police' that was formed during 1829-30 in London was generally unarmed apart from a truncheon, while the 'burkandazes' and the 'horse patrol' in Calcutta carried swords and pistol. 1836 saw the first uniformed and armed police in London. Their weapons were pistols.<sup>24</sup>

Calcutta riots of 1890s made the police department and the administration more concerned regarding use of firearms by the police as ordinary baton clad mounted policemen could not stand before the weapons of the 'rioters'. Charles Elliot, Lt. Governor of Bengal during 1893 was in favour of firing one round of blank cartridges before resorting to buck shot. Large scale violence against the police during Tallah riots in 1897 compelled the police to resort to extensive

firing.<sup>25</sup> Lord Curzon was worried about 'grave abuses' that had crept into it and considered reform of Police should be a major preoccupation of the Government even 'marking of guns'. Bengal was fortunate to have Sir Andrew Fraser as Lieutenant- Governor, an ex-President of the Police Commission. His predecessor, Sir John Woodburn, was convinced amongst all branches of the administration in Bengal none required improvement as imperatively as police taking precedence over every other project in Bengal.<sup>26</sup>

During 1906-1907, the district armed police was strengthened and placed under efficient European Inspectors, who had served in the British army. The force of town *chaukidars* in municipalities was being replaced by constables of regular force. Perhaps the most important administrative reform necessary was the establishment of Criminal Investigation Department (CID). The duties of which were the collection and dissemination of information regarding professional crime and criminals, assisting in the local investigation of crime and the detection of criminals, etc. The investigation of Alipore Bomb Case was controlled by the Bengal Police, but members of the Calcutta Police also bore their share in the work.<sup>27</sup> In the Annual Report of 1908, the Calcutta's Police Commissioner points that not altogether free from political outrage it however, looked deceptively relaxed on the surface.<sup>28</sup>

***'Repairers of guns should have licenses'***

The Government of Bengal's proposal dated 10<sup>th</sup> June, 1908, was that arms repairers were required to have licenses. Sub-Inspector and above would inspect all repairing shops to ascertain that except repairing of guns, conversion of old guns into new no fresh manufacturing of guns should be carried out within such workshops. Commissioner of Police F.L. Halliday suggested each repairing shop to have two registers, 'one containing information as to arms received for repairs and the other containing information as to the parts of arms purchased or acquired as a stock-in-trade by the license -holder; the register would show how the stock was disposed of and the balance'. His letter attached draft forms of both these registers and also a draft form of license for the consideration of the government.<sup>29</sup>

F.W. Duke, Chief Secretary, Government of Bengal, had communicated on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1910 to the Inspector General of Police, the Commissioners of different divisions and Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, 'that it is now proposed to define a 'repairer as 'one who maintains premises for the repair of firearms and receives weapons into his possession for that purpose or who stocks spare parts of firearms'.<sup>30</sup>

### ***Proposal for marking of guns***

During May 1909, the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta was instructed to prepare and submit a practical scheme for the marking firearms, which if erased would make the gun unserviceable. Commissioner Halliday held a meeting

attended by Mr. Dundas, Inspector-General of Police, representatives from Messrs. Manton & Co., Messrs Walter Locke & Co., and Messrs. Lyon & Lyon and Messrs. Rodda & Co. agreed to the point that a weapon could only be stamped effectively at the time of manufacture and the stamping should be done as far as possible 'on the face of the action'. The Lieutenant Governor wanted the rules should impose on manufacturers the necessity of marking their weapons. No arms should be imported or sold without such marking. All arms manufactured in India should be marked in a prescribed manner. So no one could possess arms by license which did not conform to the same conditions. In the case of exempted persons, under schedules to the Indian Arms Act , would enjoy exceptions only in respect of such arms as had been marked in a prescribed manner. The penalty for the breach would be the withdrawal of the exemption.

The gun-makers in Mr. Halliday's committee expressed a wish that notice to this effect should be given before new regulations came into force. It was found that rules for marking guns could not be made under the Arms Act; an amending section was necessary, in which rules required manufacturers to stamp the name and serial number on specified parts of the arms. A copy of draft must be sent to Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam confidentially before issuing the rules. On 19.1.1910 F.W Duke insisted upon the tightening of procedure under the Arms Act, 'the necessity of the efficient marking of the firearms' . The old system followed in districts to stamp numbers on the wooden

part of licensed arms, but this system was not applicable to the arms in the possession of exempted persons. As a rule, imported firearms of good quality were stamped with either the maker or the importers name with a serial number. Duke said, 'This is always done on the metal and to some extent it supersedes the necessity of placing a district number on such arms, as they can always be traced by X-referencing. One difficulty being such numbers, if not placed on a vital part of the arm, could be erased and this was found out in several case of revolvers used in political offences. Further certain descriptions of European and American firearms are not stamped with a serial number'. In the census of arms carried out in Eastern Bengal and Assam during the cold weather of 1908-1909, saw arms being numbered by stamping on the metal parts. On further enquiry it appeared that this could not be done without injuring either the appearance or the reliability of the weapon. In the meeting of June 1909, Halliday, the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, and Mr.Dundas, Inspector General of Police came to the conclusion that numbers could only be impressed on some vital parts of the weapons effectively and if that was done in the time of manufacture then they could not be removed. They were in favour of recommending this method of numbering 'because the surface in that position could not be reduced by filing or grinding without rendering the weapon unsafe or at least unreliable'. Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam were not satisfied with the system of numbering they adopted in their census, they were disposed to accept the conclusion of Mr. Halliday's meeting in Calcutta.<sup>31</sup>



### *Disturbances in the Lower Provinces*

A letter (No. 2219F, dated Calcutta, the 11<sup>th</sup> May 1910) sent by Mr. L.F. Morshead, Officiating Inspector-General of Police, Lower Provinces to the Chief Secretary, Government of Bengal, revealed that the Government of India was fearfully apprehensive of disturbances brewing in different areas of the Lower Province:

- (1) Disturbances amongst the Mundas, other aboriginal races in ChotaNagpur and the Santhal Parganas.
- (2) Disturbances at the mills in Howrah, Hooghly and the 24 Parganahs.
- (3) Disturbances at Big railway centres, specially Asansol, Jamalpur, and Kharagpur.
- (4) Disturbed situation in certain 'disaffected districts' i.e., 24 Parganahs, Nadia, Jessore and Khulna, in the Presidency Division, and Midnapore, Hooghly, Howrah, Bankura and Burdwan, in the Burdwan Division. Since the Bettiah disturbances in 1908, there was always the danger of anti-indigo disturbances in Bihar.

L.F. Morshead pointed at the last serious aboriginal disturbance in 1899. There had been no disturbance since, but signs of a renewal of agitation

amongst the Mundas in two thanas in Ranchi were reported in March. Disturbances in the mills were common fomented by political agitators. Serious riots occurred at Titagarh in December 1908. Steady growth of mill population owing to increase in the number of jute mills. Disturbances on the railways included strikes amongst guards and drivers, other classes of railway employees and riots in the workshops. There was a serious disturbance in the Jamalpur workshops in 1906, a strike on the East Indian Railway in 1907 for which the military had to be called out. Apprehensions of strikes at Kharagpur and Samastipur, however subsided.

The disturbed conditions in 'disaffected districts' involved political dacoities, boycotting social matters and trade, intimidation with violence, along with the danger of attacks on sub-treasuries or depositories of Government money which were the avowed objective of the violent revolutionary section. These conditions had necessitated the doubling of guards at night at sub-treasuries, the strengthening of escorts of Government money, the provision of special armed guards for prisoners and approvers, provision of plain-clothes and other special guards for individuals who had been threatened.

There were broadly two classes of police—(i) civil and (ii) military. 'Civil' again might be divided into Armed Police and Ordinary Civil Police. Mr. Morshead laid down the detailed account of the Armed Reserves in province:

Military Police was constituted of three companies of 100 men and officers each and armed with Martin-Henry rifles; they also knew how to fire the ordinary army course of musketry and were taught signalling with Helios and lamps. They were enlisted as Military Police and remained such throughout their service. Kept intact and ready to move within a short notice to the scene of any disturbance which the Armed Reserve might not be able to cope.

The Armed Police were small bodies of Civil Police trained in drill and rifle exercises at the head-quarters of each district. They were armed with smooth-bore Martini-Henry muskets.

The District Armed Reserves consisted of bodies of 20, 25, or 50 men and in the case of the 24 Parganahs of 100 men. They were kept at the head-quarters of each district in readiness for dealing with any local disturbance. They were armed with muskets of .476 bore. Each Reserve was under a European Inspector. If there was a force of 50 men, then the European Inspector was assisted by a Sergeant and Head Constables in the proportion of 1 to every 12 constables

### ***Recommendations and proposals***

The various classes of Police appear to be as follows:

1. Police employed on investigation of cases and prevention and detection of crimes.
2. Police employed in prosecuting cases in courts.
3. Police for doing guard and escort duties.
4. Police for doing orderly and miscellaneous duties.
5. Ordinary reserve police for filling up leave vacancies, etc.
6. Armed police kept at head-quarters stations for quelling local disturbances.
7. Village or rural police (chaukidars) for reporting or preventing the commission of certain offences in their villages, etc.
8. Town police employed on watch and ward duty in towns.
9. Military police to assist in preserving and restoring order in the event of any interval disturbance taking place. There are at present three such companies in Bengal, viz., one at Ranchi, one at Bhagalpur, and one at Hooghly.
10. Railway police employed on prevention, detection, and prosecution of offences within railway limits.
11. Higher rates of pay for two Hindustani companies especially for service in unpopular localities i.e., Punjabi and Muhammadan, who formed a most valuable contingent in the Bhagalpur Company. Poor pay scale was affecting the recruitment badly. Anguish was

aggravated by the pay hike of the Military Police and recently formed Gurkha Company at Ranchi.

12. Increase in the number of weapons allotted to the force for the training from the present limit of 15 rounds a year to 30 rounds.

13. To increase the armament of the province by 720 muskets and by ammunition in proportion.

The Inspector-General further asked:

(i) For the armament of men ordinarily needed for guards and escorts;

(ii) For the arms required by the Armed Reserves as proposed to be increased;

(iii) For the arms needed by the mobilized companies.

Owing to political pressure the work of the District Armed Reserves in these districts has been largely increased, (i) To provide armed guards for political prisoners, approvers, exhibits, etc. And (ii) To supply detachments for subdivisions in order to ensure against the danger of raids upon sub-treasuries. At that time it appeared to be impossible to mobilized forces in each district with arms during annual recruitment. The question was whether some further reserve of arms should not be provided in each district, but it was held that the

provision of arms ordinarily needed for guards and escorts covered the requirements in this direction.<sup>32</sup>

***Custody and safekeeping of arms and ammunition***

The Inspector General of Volunteers mentioned safeguards and pointed out that inspecting officers for both railways and others should always pay particular attention to –

(a) Condition of armouries and their location, i.e., if possible armouries should be kept where Europeans were on duty night and day, failing this the armoury must be visited night and day.

(b) Schemes should be undertaken for the care and disposal in times of trouble about the unissued arms and ammunition. The first step should always be the provision of a guard. It was necessary to see that the corps did not entirely depend on chaukidars.

(c) The conditions under which arms in an armoury were kept must be cleaned and checked regularly. It should be done in the presence of a European.

So the location of armouries was considered to be very important and should be attended to.

(d) In most corps the arms 20 rounds per rifle remained in the possession of the individuals for the best part of the year and stored in the armouries for some six months during the slack season.

(f) Smaller station, where arms could be kept in arm chests or grille cupboards in the Assistant Station Master's quarters necessitated an European should be on duty night and day.

In the opinion of the Inspector-General of Police, Bengal rifles could not be issued to railway volunteers freely because many of them were away on night duty; besides railway corps composed of mixed population, so it probably be unsafe to entrust arms and ammunition except 'picked men'. They would be given strict instructions to keep the breach blocks of their rifles separately locked up.

Almost all the important government officials including Mr. H. L. Allanson ,the Section Commander of the Behar Light Horse at Dumka, Mr. Streatfield, the Commissioner of the Darjeeling Division and Mr. Hammond, the Collector of Bhagalpur shared the idea that that unless volunteers in a station were allowed to keep their weapons and ammunition at all times they would not be in a position to render effective service in the case of sudden emergency. Each volunteer should retain a carbine with twenty rounds of ammunition. The office of issue should furnish the District Magistrate with a list of the holders of such weapons and it would presumably be the duty of the local officer in charge or

the Sergeant Instructor to see that the weapons and ammunition were produced periodically for inspection. This could be the only way of checking the risk of the weapon falling into undesirable hands.

In the opinion of Mr. R. T. Dundas, Officiating Commissioner of Police, Calcutta the risk of arms falling into wrong hands was no less in Calcutta compared to smaller stations. The Head Quarter's of Arms Depot near Chandpal Ghat contained a large store of rifle and ammunition. Alarmingly, such a store was particularly unprotected against a sudden attack at night, since it had no regular guard. However, in corps where volunteers were recruited from the superior or the middle classes, from persons living in European quarter or from a particular class of persons living in close proximity to one another, there was practically no risk of the arms falling into wrong hands. Hence, for the efficiency level of these volunteers, thirty rounds of ammunition per man were always be left in their possession. However, it was unsafe to allow the poor European, Eurasian Infantry Volunteers (whose homes were scattered in the non-European quarters of the city) to keep arms and ammunition at their home since they had no 'darwan' or reliable servants. Although in cases of emergency these volunteers would be of extremely effective.<sup>33</sup>

At the Conference of the Commissioners at Darjeeling, R.B Hughes-Buller, Inspector General of Police, Bengal addressed the Chief Secretary to the Bengal Government in a confidential letter dated the 19<sup>th</sup> August, 1912 regarding the



supply of firearms to the thanas of certain districts of the Bengal Presidency. The question of arming 'mufassil' police stations and villages were discussed. In the conference it was agreed that as a matter of principle thanas should be armed throughout the Presidency. The total number of muskets required according to the proposals was 1,215, including a reserve to allow for replacement of arms out of order, calculated at 5% of the total number of muskets required for each district. Government of India had already approved 10 rounds of ball, 10 rounds of buck-shot per annum for each musket. Mr. Hughes-Buller pointed out that 'the total cost on account of muskets and ammunition will amount to Rs 8172.

On the issue of supply of firearms to certain police stations, outposts and villages in the Bengal Presidency with a view to the prevention of dacoity and other organised crimes of violence. Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Mr. C.J. Stevenson-Moore had established correspondence with the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department. In a letter dated the 5<sup>th</sup> March 1913 former had pointed out that the Government in the Home Department through telegram No. 92, dated 11<sup>th</sup> July 1912 sanctioned the arming of certain thanas in Eastern Bengal at the rate of 3 muskets for each 'thana' i.e., police station, and 2 muskets for each 'phanri' i.e., outpost with a moderate quantity of ammunition.<sup>34</sup>

Before this, on February 28<sup>th</sup> 1910, H.G. Stokes, Deputy to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, sent a letter to Messrs R.D. Rodda & Co., Calcutta: 'In the event of a license in Form XVI, XVII, XVIII, to the Arms Rules an arms vendor should refuse to supply any ammunition to the licensee and should return the license properly filled in, in cases when the quantity of ammunition is not well defined'.<sup>35</sup>

### *A curious case of a single barrel gun*

The authorities tried their best to keep itself informed regarding the activities of the arms dealers and purchasers while debates were making rounds among various government authorities regarding issuing license of automatic guns. Whether gun dealers following all the norms could sell those guns to the purchasers who had licenses for single barrelled breech loading guns? Simultaneously, authorities also tried to rectify loopholes in the Act through amendments. Stringent rules set both dealers and purchasers from taking undue advantage. Thus preventing arms falling into the 'anarchists' lap. Vigilance increased on transaction carried out by native dealers who out of sympathy could hand over sophisticated weapons to the 'native' purchaser tactically supporting armed revolutionaries.

A license for possessing a Single-Barrelled Breech Loading gun had been granted to one Ashutosh Jana. However, under the cover of this license he purchased a fine shot automatic Browning Gun from Messrs A.C. Coondoo &

Co. and produced for numbering it. On examination of the endorsement on the back of the license and of the receipt granted by Messrs. A.C. Coondoo & Co., it appeared that they professed to have sold 'One single-barrelled breech loading Gun'. W.A. Marr, District Magistrate, Midnapore in a letter dated 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1910 to the Commissioner of the Burdwan Division that he was confused whether the gun produced for numbering was the one actually sold by Messrs Coondoo & Co. An enquiry in this regard was also sent to the dealer. From the reply that came from the dealer's end it appeared that Messrs A.C. Coondoo & Co. did sell a shot Browning Automatic as a single barrelled breach loading gun. In the opinion of W.A. Marr this was somewhat a serious perversion of the natural meaning of 'single barrel' as he had no intention for granting a license for shot automatic Browning gun. According to Mr. Marr this deal was against the spirit of the Arms Act Regulation. He wrote, 'In my opinion a single barrelled gun should be a gun from which only one shot can be fired without reloading. License for Automatic Repeating Guns should be obtained on a separate special form i.e., addition of the words "Browning Automatic Magazine" and in the meantime I have placed the weapon in the '*malkhana*' i.e., armoury.' He further wanted to know from the Commissioner whether the latter was in favour of granting licenses for such weapons to ordinary applicants.<sup>35</sup>

Through a notification No. 236, Calcutta 9<sup>th</sup> February 1911 of the Indian Arms Act 1878 certain amendments were made as follows: 'the license at the time of Purchasing any new arms or ammunition, shall cause the following particulars to be endorsed upon his license under the vendor's signature, namely a) the name, description and residence of the person who takes delivery of the articles purchased, b) the nature and quantity of articles purchased c) the date of purchase. Another condition which was to be inserted: he shall not purchase ammunition in excess of the maximum which may from time to time be fixed by the local government'.<sup>37</sup>

According to the 'Report on the Administration, Bengal 1913' there was an increase in the number of recruits in Police service. Musketry training continued for better part of year. The Government of India sanctioned the supply of twenty Webley Mark IV revolvers for the use of officers and cadets under training in the Police Training College in Bengal.<sup>38</sup>

### ***Granting of free license to rich merchants***

The Government of Bengal order dated 20<sup>th</sup> May 1913 directed that gun license should freely be granted to rich merchants provided they kept ex-sepoys as retainers. On 28<sup>th</sup> July 1913 the Commissioner of Police communicated letter to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal that he had received applications from merchants those living in Calcutta for licenses to be issued to the pensioned sepoys whom they intend to retain and utilize to escort

remittances to Eastern Bengal, protect against dacoits in that area. Commissioner apprehended that a large number of rich Indian and European merchants would apply for the same in especially during the jute season. Net result would see large increase in the number of weapons held by non-exempted persons (under the Arms Act Rules in Calcutta). The Chief Secretary explained on 20<sup>th</sup> August, 1913 that such a provision was done keeping in mind that except for a few large farms and banks that had armed retainers to escort their treasure to the mofussil, all other farms in Calcutta used to send remittances with unarmed guards unless the amount was exceptionally large. Till that time such farms and banks that belonged to these rich merchants would be issued with temporary journey licenses for guns. In the opinion of the Government 'journey license in Form XIX of the Arms Act' and for those others employed ex-sepoy retainers should be granted in 'Form XVI of the Arms Act'. Great rush for licenses ensured special care taken to ascertain the character and the antecedents of the retainers.<sup>39</sup>

Report on the Administration in Bengal 1914-15 showed that certain members of the State police received rewards from the British authorities for the arrest of some notorious dacoits from British India.<sup>40</sup> In the opinion of Mr. Stokes Deputy Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, there should be strict vigilance of the police, moreover a system of liberal rewards must be instituted with the object of encouraging people to offer information

leading to the detection of 'weapons of a fairly modern type should not be given without proper lawful documents, and in cases of possession of obsolete arms, such as muzzle-loading muskets and the like'.<sup>41</sup>

Activities of the revolutionary party were stimulated by the outbreak of the war and seditious leaflets were circulated in unusually large numbers during the years 1914. Cases connected with revolutionary crime included six dacoities, one attempt at assassination. Two of the men assassinated were police officers, an Inspector of the Calcutta Police and a Head Constable of the Bengal Police. Arrests were made in connection with three of the murders, but the accused persons were eventually acquitted.<sup>42</sup>

A complete reorganisation of the Military Police was sanctioned during the year 1914. The detective ability of the investigating agency did not reach a high general level, but a scheme for special training in this matter had been drawn up by the Inspector-General. Sanction was received during the year to the formation of a new Deputy Inspector - General's Range for the Burdwan Division. The River Force was mobilized in August 1915 for the protection on the great rivers of this Presidency was much appreciated. The same year, the outbreak of the First World War crime rate increased which called for energies of the oldest officers to concentrate on the fight with the revolution and anarchy. The Commissioner of Police was empowered to grant rewards up to Rupees 500 for the apprehension of offenders and for the intelligence leading to the

discovery of crime in and around the city of Calcutta. During this time the Calcutta Police Force was strengthened by formation of a third company of civil armed police and the Commissioner of Police was relieved of much detailed administrative work by two semi independent Deputy Commissioners.

According to Intelligence estimates of 1915 crime were more prevalent than in the pre-war days. The energy and the skill of the Criminal Investigation Department (C.I.D.) assisted the district Police in cracking dangerous gangs. Valuable assistance extended by Detective Department to the ordinary police was successful in breaking up a band of Europeans and Anglo-Indians who had been engaged in arms trafficking.<sup>43</sup> In Calcutta Certain European gentlemen were appointed special constables to render service in surveillance work. Under the Foreigners Act of 1864 the movement of hostile foreigners were restricted. The exemptions enjoyed by them under Indian Arms Act were withdrawn and arms in their possession were deposited.

The work of the Special Branch of Calcutta Police was to keep track of every retail sale of arms as well of the ammunition by maintaining copies of ledgers of the dealers and regularly cross checking them as such data and information was useful for the Intelligence. Outbreak of the First World War increased activities of the revolutionaries stretching both the C.I.D and Intelligence Branch of Calcutta Police to gather information on flow of arms and ammunitions from Germans and other Europeans with links in Bengal. The annual report on the

working of Arms Act was initially prepared by the District Magistrate then submitted to the Divisional Commissioner. Commissioner prepared a consolidated report for his division with quarterly returns on the loss and theft of arms was incorporated by the Intelligence Branch and submitted it to the Government through Inspector General of Police.<sup>44</sup>

Owing to outbreak of World War I, Ghadr activists in USA and Europe got active. Har Dayal based in Constantinople used German diplomatic contacts to send arms via Persia and Afghanistan. The vessel 'Kamagata Maru' returning to India in 1914 was suspected of smuggling arms into Budge Budge. In May 1915 German steamer 'Maverick' sailed from USA with alleged illegal German Arms of 7000 rifles and 2000 revolvers to finally reach them to Indian revolutionaries. But, two detailed anonymous letters reached Mr Beckett, His Majesty's Consul-General in Batavia who the Police Intelligence in India. The vessel 'Helfferich' intercepted 'Maverick' at Anjer only to report back 'no arms now on board'. Suspected illegal cargo got transhipped to vessel "Henry S" in midsea.<sup>45</sup>

Reading between the lines of letters exchanged among senior police and senior administrative officials one can decipher condition of arms with the Armed Reserve, Armed Volunteers and ordinary police with emphasis on quality, location and protection of armouries safe from rioters and armed revolutionaries. Arms Act 1878 saw amendments on 'License', format to establish retail firearms business, restrictions on the exemptions enjoyed by the



Zamindars. British government used various 'Acts' to their convenience to arrest revolutionaries, curb gun running and confiscating 'illegal' arms.

***Endnotes:***

1 Chakrabarti, Ranjan, *Terror, Crime and Punishment: Order and Disorder in Early Colonial Bengal 1800-1860*, Kolkata, 2009, pp.92-93.

2 Banerjee, Sumanta, *The Wicked City; Crime and Punishment in Colonial Calcutta*, Orient Black Swan, 2009, 'Introduction' Pp 5-7.

3 Bagchi, Amalendu, *Agniyuger Agneotra*, 1389 BS, Kolkata, pp.78.

4 Quanungo, Hemchandra, *Banglay Biplab Pracheshta*, Kolkata 1928, Chirayata Prakashani, pp.101.

5 Bagchi Amalendu, *Op.Cit.*

6 Political (Political Department) Confidential File No. 408 / 14 (1-3)

7 Basu Girishchandra, 'Sekaler Darogar Kahini', 1295 Bangabda, Kolkata, pp122-129 and also quoted in Mukhopadhyay Anindita, *Behind the Mask: The Cultural Definition of the Legal Subject in Colonial Bengal (1715-1911)*, OUP, New Delhi 2006, pp 108-200

8 *BNNR 1886, Sanjivani*, 12th June, No.25 pp 707; quoted in Mukhopadhyay, Anindita, *Behind the Mask: The Cultural Definition of the Legal Subject in Colonial Bengal (1715-1911)*, New Delhi, 2006, pp 201.

9 'The Administration of Bengal under Sir Andrew Fraser', K.C.S.I 1903 - 1908 pp78

10 IB File No: 119 / 13, S. No: 52, 1913

11 Compiled and Edited Amiya Kumar Samanta, 'Terrorism in Bengal, A Collection of Documents' Vol III, Government of West Bengal, Calcutta 1995, pp XXXVI.

12 Political Deposit, April 1910, No.2 : National Archives of India, New Delhi

- 13 Secret IB CID Bengal Weekly Reports 1910, Report for the Week ending the 4<sup>th</sup> July 1910.
- 14 I.B. File No.119 - 13 SL No.52, 1913
- 15 Secret I.B. , CID Bengal Weekly Reports 1910 , Report for the week ending the 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 1910.
- 16 Political (Political ) Confidential File. Police File No. 171 / 1914 (1-3)
- 17 Secret I.B. , CID Bengal Weekly Reports 1910 Progress Report No. 3, 19th September, 1910
- 18 Report on the Administration of Bengal 1914-15 , The Bengal Secretariat Book Report , Calcutta 1916, Chapter III, Pp17
- 19 Report on the Administration of Bengal; 1908-1909, The Bengal Secretariat Book Report , Calcutta 1910, Chapter III, Pp18-22
- 20 Secret I.B. , CID Bengal Weekly Reports 1910, Report for the Week ending 26th February 1910.
- 21 Report on the Administration of Bengal ; 1912-1913 , The Bengal Secretariat Book Report , Calcutta 1914, Chapter 111 Pp 15
- 22 Report on the Administration of Bengal ; 1908-1909 , The Bengal Secretariat Book Report , Calcutta 1910, Chapter 111 Pp ix
- 23 Gourlay W.R., Contribution Towards a History of the Police in Bengal , Calcutta Secretariat Press 1916 ,pp78-79
- 24 Ingleton Roy, Chapter 3"Pistol- Packing Policemen" in 'Arming of the British Police : The Great Debate' , Frank Crass, London , Paris. Pp36-38 .
- 25 Banerjee Sumanta, "The Wicked City; Crime and Punishment in Colonial Calcutta", Orient Black Swan, 2009, Part 11 Chapter 2 Pp 426
- 26 "The Administration of Bengal under Sir Andrew Fraser, K.C.S.I. 1903-08", 'Police'.

27 Report on the Administration of Bengal 1906 - 1907, The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot , Calcutta 1908 Chapter 111 Pp 18-22

28 Report on the Administration of Bengal 1908 - 09 , The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot , Calcutta 1910

29 Proceeding Volume February 1910 , Political Department Progs No. 16 File No. P. 5-A / 40 (3)

30 Proceeding Volume Lt. Governor of Bengal , June 1909 , Political Department Police , Progs No. 27 File No. P. 5-A / 11 (5)

31 Home (Political ) Confidential File No. 3 / 10 (1-4)

32 Home (Political ) Confidential File No. 12 / 10 (1-4)

33 Home (Political ) Confidential File No. M / 1 / 10 (1-16)

34 Home (Political ) Confidential Police File No. 47 / 13 (1-3) & (4-9)

35 Proceeding Volume April 1910 , Political Department Progs No. 4&5 File No. P5A / 32 (1-2)

36 Proceeding Volume April 1910 , Political Department Progs No. 6 , File No. P 5- A / 22 (1)

37 The Calcutta Gazette No. 17 of 1911, April 26 , 1911. \*41 Proceedings No.6, File No. P5-A/22 (1)

38 Report on the Administration of Bengal 1913 -14 , The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot 1915 , Chapter 111 Pp 16

39 Home (Political ) Confidential Police File No. 205 / 13 (14-15)

40 Report on the Administration of Bengal 1914 -15 , The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot 1916 , Chapter 111 Pp 16

41 Proceeding Volume April 1910 , Political Department Progs No. 8 , File No. P 8 - R / 2 (1)

42 Report on the Administration of Bengal 1913 -14 , The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot 1915 , Chapter 111 Pp 14

43 Report on the Administration of Bengal 1914 -15 , The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot  
1916 , Chapter 111 Pp 15

44 Report on the Administration of Bengal 1915 -16 , The Bengal Secretariat Book Depot  
1917, Chapter 1X Pp 133

45 Political Deposit October 1915 , No. 43, The National Archives of India, New Delhi.