



A Study of Police Administration and Its Functions under British Rule in Assam.

Raja Doley

Assistant Professor, Dept. of History, R.G. Baruah College

Abstract

With the end of six hundred years of Ahom rule in 1826, a new regime of administration was initiated by the British began in the province. They pursued different policies at different times in order to serve their colonial interests. In this regard, they introduced various policy and administrative measures in the spheres of polity, social, and economy. Among these, police administration emerged as one of most significant administrative unit. The Police function was considered the key to any administration, and the province was no exception during the British. The main organization of the police in the province began with application of the Polic Act of 1861. Thereafter, the force was categorized into Civil Police, Armed Police, Military Police, River and Railway Police, Rural Police, and Choukidari Police each entrusted with specific functions. In the course of time, several administrative changes were in the police administration. In addition to their main function, the police also performed different roles at different times to serve broader interest of the state. The aim of this paper is to study the administrative structure and various functions of the police under the British government.

Keywords: Police administration, British government, police station, outpost, crime, law and order.

Introduction

After the end of Ahom rule with the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, the administration of the province passed into the hands of the British government. At that time, the entire province was depopulated, impoverished, and faced a critical law and order situation. It was the result of prolonged uprisings, internal dissensions, and frequent Burmese invasions. In view of the prevailing situation, the British did not introduce any significant administrative changes, except for minor changes wherever necessary. However, in due course of time, they began to implement new administrative measures. Accordingly, a new system of administration was introduced, which include land revenue, justice, and police administration.

With respect to Police administration, during the Ahom rule, there was no organized police force. It was the responsibility of the local authorities to maintain law and order. Whenever a law and order situation arose, an

officer under the king, who was responsible for both civil and military affairs, looked after the matter. Moreover, each village had a village headman, called the *Gaonbura*, who adjudicated all petty disputes. There was no police administration to detect or prevent crime. Therefore, the introduction of police system by the British government was a completely new concept in Assam.

The British Police Administration in Assam

When the British occupied Assam, the law and order of the entire province had collapsed under the pressure of internal rebellions and external aggression. The first priority of the British was to restore peace and security. Hence, immediately after the annexation of Assam, the entire province was put under Martial Law to improve the situation. During this period, the predatory hordes were frightened and were compelled to remain quiet. Disturbing elements such as highwaymen, robbers, and burglars were suppressed. As the danger of imminent hostilities with Burma had subsided, the regular troops were withdrawn from Assam in March 1828. For the purpose of defence, the Assam Light Infantry Battalion was constituted. It was formed from the Rangpur Crops and was augmented by two Companies from the Sylhet Local Crops, consisting of Gurkhas and Hindustanis, later became the known as the Assam Light Infantry. A permanent cantonment was set up at Biswanath, while a garrison was stationed at Sadiya.

However, after the withdrawal of Martial Law, David Scott, the senior commissioner of the province, did not wish to bring into existence an organization because of the high cost its maintenance. Nevertheless, for the suppression of violent disturbances, a police force was created. Accordingly, some police station were established in each district and in some strategic parts of the province. These police forces were organized under one *Daroga* or *Thanadar* assisted by a *Jamadar*, *Mohurrer* and a few constables. The revenue officers entitled *Chaudhuries*, *Patgiris*, and *Mouzadars* were instructed to help them. In case of major disturbances, a military force was to be dispatched and a poll tax was realized from the people of the locality for its maintenance.

In 1837, regulation of 1817 was introduced in Assam for the purpose of Police administration. After extension of Police Act of 1861 to Assam, the entire police force of Assam was put under the charge of the Inspector General of Police. The police administration was required to assist the Deputy Commissioner of each district of Assam in carrying out the function of district administration.

When the administration of the province was placed under Chief Commissioner, the police force of the province was brought under the Police Act of 1861. However, no separate officer was appointed as Inspector General of Police. In case of Assam, the Chief Commissioner himself served as the Inspector General of Police. However, it was impossible for a single person to inspect a police force spread over such vast and wild region as Assam. Consequently, it became difficult for the Chief Commissioner to devote adequate attention to the police administration, which comprised not only Civil and Armed forces of the province but Military and Rural Police. Therefore, in 1876, a separate officer was appointed as the Inspector General of Police to relieve the Chief Commissioner of Assam. The Inspector General of Police was responsible not only for the maintaining law and order but also entrusted with subjects such as the administration of Jail, Excise and Stamps.

The police forces of Assam consisted of the Civil Police, Armed Police, Military Police, River Police, Railway Police and Rural Police and Chaukidari Police. The duty and responsibilities of the Civil Police were to maintain law and order, and to detect and prevent crime and criminals. A reserve force of Armed Police was stationed at the headquarters of each district to provide escorts, suppress disturbances, and respond to any emergency. The Railway police was responsible for the prevention of crime.

To govern the police administration, the entire province was divided into districts, and each district was placed under a Superintendent of Police. Each district was further divided into Sub-Divisions, each under the charge of an Assistant or Deputy superintendent. The Sub-Division was again divided into circles, each placed under an Inspectors of Police. Each circle was further divided into Stations under the supervision of Sub-Inspectors. A station might have Outposts and beats in towns. According to available records, there were 114 Police stations and 10 outposts in 1920 across all twelve districts of Assam.

The police stations had several functions, such as maintaining law and order, preventing and detecting crime, and arresting of criminals. Each police station was under the charge of a Sub-Inspector, who was assisted by one or more Assistant Inspectors, Moherrier, and several Constables. According to the Criminal Procedure Code, offences were divided into cognizable and non-cognizable. The police dealt with cognizable crimes. The Officer-in-Charge of the police station was responsible for visiting the spot and investigating serious cases. He was required to maintain a record of the statement of the persons, whom he examined, in his diary. He had the authority to search the residence of an accused person to recover stolen property. If a crime was detected, he had to take the accused person to the Magistrate. However, no person could be detained for more than 24 hours without the prior order of a Magistrate. If no evidence was found, the Magistrate recorded it and dismissed the case. Head constables or literate Constables could investigate cases of minor importance. Within the jurisdiction of police stations, there were two categories police outposts, namely the Independent Outpost and the Subordinate Outpost. In addition to the prevention and detection of crime, the police had the authority to regulate public assemblies, processions, ceremonies, and festivals held in public places. Another important responsibility of the police administration was the maintenance and supervision of cattle ponds. These ponds were usually placed under the supervision of a literate police personal.

The River Police was responsible for preventing crime and maintaining law and order in the *beels*, *ghats*, *hats*, river banks, and boat stopping places. As a result of the constant patrolling by the River Police, the crime rate in the riverine areas declined.

The Railway Police were responsible for preventing crime by patrolling in the trains. Policemen used to travel in plain clothes and keep an eye on suspected individuals. If a person was found guilty of violating the railway regulations or committed crime, they were arrested. Such Railway Police was first employed in the Assam Bengal Railway and Jorhat State Railway. The responsibility for watch and ward in the town was under the Municipal Police. The Village Police were responsible for observing the movement of suspicious individuals and inform the officer anything that might affect the peace and tranquility of the locality. They were also required to report all serious crime to the police officer in charge of the village Police Station. However, in the Assam Valley, *Goanbura* or village elder was also responsible for maintaining law and order in their respective areas. He was recognized

as the representative of the village and provided relevant information to the police. For this service, he was not paid any remuneration but was given rent free land. Besides him, the Mouzadars and Mandals were also responsible for providing information and assisting the police officer in the prevention and detection of crime.

Conclusion

The administration of Police in Assam evolved out of the exigencies of the situation. In the beginning, police station were set up based on the model of the Bengal Administration. One Police Station was set up for a large area. However, as troops were gradually withdrawn from the different part of the state, more police station had to be established and outpost were setup in many places.

In Assam proper, crime was rare and professional crime was almost negligible. However in the hill districts and frontier areas tribal dispute occasionally took violent shape. Therefore, in such areas, armed police had to be stationed. Thus, besides civil police some quasi-military forces were also created for the police purpose. The Police Act of 1861 introduced in Assam laid the basis of police administration of the province. After Assam became a Chief Commissionership, ensuring security became essential for the development purpose, particularly to prevent the predatory hordes from hill tracts. Therefore, to protect the border, Frontier Police Force was reorganized in 1882 and constitute as a Military Police. Subsequently, the terms of service of the Military Police were assimilated with those of the Indian Army, and in 1920 it was renamed as Assam Rifles.

With respect to the police administration in Assam proper, that is, in the Brahmaputra Valley and the hills, no Village or Rural Police was provided. Policing in these areas was the responsibility of local communities. The Government recognized the village chiefs to serve the function of the police. However, Rural Police was established through the enactment of the Chowkidari Acts in the permanently settled areas of Sylhet and Goalpara. Chowkidars were also provided for policing purpose by some municipalities.

In addition to preventing and detecting crime, they also undertook various other responsibilities, such as management of roads, regulating market places of public meeting, fairs, and protecting even the crops of the people by managing cattle pounds.

References:

1. Barpujari, H.K. (1994) *The Comprehensive History of Assam* (vol. III). Guwahati: Publication Board of Assam.
2. Baruah, S.L. (2007). *A Comprehensive History of Assam*. New Delhi: M.M. Publishers Pvt. Ltd
3. Borthakur, A. K. (2019). *The administration of justice in Assam (1826-1874)*. Routledge.
4. Bose, M. (1985). *Development of Administration in Assam*. Concept Publishing Company.
5. Chaudhuri, B. (1956). *British Rule in Assam 1845-1858*. University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies (United Kingdom).
6. Gait, E. (2001). *A History of Assam*. Guwahati: Bina Library,
7. Goswami, P. (2016). *The History of Assam from Yandabo to Parliton, 1826-1947*. New Delhi, Orient BlackSwan,