

ASSAM POLICE: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

During the time of the Ahom kings, policing did not exist in Assam. Army and various officers of the kingdom were responsible for maintenance of peace. The Police in Assam is the result of continuous process of development since the Britishers occupied Assam in 1826. After taking over the administration of Assam, no such revolutionary changes are taken by Britishers in this respect and they employed army for maintaining law and order. They also set up army outposts at different places. There was the involvement of high expenditure in maintaining a large body of troops and that was at a time when the country had just settled down. This compelled the government of the time to undertake a review of the situation and a policy of gradual reduction of the forces was adopted. By 1839-40 the number of troops was reduced to only four regiments in Assam. They also took various steps to increase the armed component of the Civil Police in the province. There was also the necessity of raising a separate force under the civil government apart from the armed civil Police and the first unit of this new organisation was formed in 1835 by one Mr. Grange, the Head of the civil administration of Nowgong District at that time.

Before the coming of Britishers, police force was not a separate organisation entrusted with specific functions. The British created police organisation to serve its colonial interests, and therefore, its loyalty was towards the British Government. But after independence, it has undergone a drastic change and today loyalty of police is not merely to the Government, but also to the State, laws and constitution of the country.

During the reign of Kamaleswar Singha (1795 -1811), an armed force on the British model was raised for the purpose of serving the functions of maintenance of law and order and border defence. But, it was not a regular and fully organised police force. After 1862, the British deployed regular troops in various parts of Assam in order to consolidate its occupation and a police establishment of one *Darogah*, one *Jamadhar* and a number of constables was maintained at each of the district headquarters. The most important development in this process was the raising of the "Cachar Levy" in 1835 by the Civil Service Officer, in-charge of Nowgong district, Mr. Grange, to guard new settlements and tea estates. It was comprised of 750 officers and men of different ranks, viz., Inspectors, Head

Constables and Constables. After three years, a similar body, called "Jorhat Militia", was formed in order to protect the border areas against frequent border transgressions. This Jorhat Militia was also known as the "Shan" militia because majority of the recruits were from the Shan community. Eventually it was merged with the Cachar Levy and was subsequently renamed as Frontier Police in 1883 and then as Assam Military Police in 1891 and then again as Assam Rifles in 1920. The duties of the levy included the guarding of the Eastern Frontier of Assam from the Brahmaputra River to Cachar. It was of semi military nature. In Police, men were poorly paid and therefore the local Assamese people were not interested in joining police service. . At the initial stage most of the recruits were from Bengal. But the Government found that police personnel recruited from outside were not only inefficient but also oppressive. Therefore, it decided to attract the Assamese youth towards police to improve its efficiency. In October 1843, the Government increased the salary of Darogah from Rs. 25 to Rs. 100 and a hike of salary of other police personnel was also made. After this development, there was gradual increase of Assamese youth in police force.

Assam was a part of the British-ruled province of Bengal till 1874. An agent of the Governor-General was responsible for the administration of Assam. The Police officers were from the Bengal Cadre and the control and supervision of the Police Department were done by the central administration. The Police Act of 1861 was introduced in Assam in 1862 and in the same year, Criminal Procedure Code was also brought into operation.

Together with this, there were new administrative developments, and one such was in the sphere of law and order and prevention of crime. Eleven Police Districts were created in Assam under the Police Act of 1861. These were: (1) Goalpara, (2) Kamrup, (3) Darrang, (4) Nagaon, (5) Sibsagar, (6) Lakhimpur, (7) Garo Hills, (8) Khasi and Jaintia Hills, (9) Naga Hills, (10) Cachar and (11) Sylhet. The police administration was run from the provincial capital i.e Shillong. Chichele Plowden, was the first Inspector General of Police who was a civil servant. The police was divided into four branches (i) *Civil Police*, which is employed in the districts in order to maintain law and order and for the prevention of crimes and other miscellaneous duties generally entrusted upon the police (ii) *Frontier Police*, which is a quasi-military force and entrusted with the responsibility of protection of the border (iii) *Municipal Police*, which is created to look after the law and order in the towns, and was subsequently amalgamated with the Civil Police in 1882, and (iv) *Rural Police*, which is a security force to maintain the law and order in the villages. It may be mentioned that the Civil Police was the principal Police force in the Province whose total strength at the time of constituting Assam as a Chief Commissioner's province in 1874 was 3,352 and the detailed composition can be found in the following table.

TABLE I

RANKS	NUMBER
District Superintendent of Police	5
Assistant Superintendent of Police	6
Inspector of Police	26
Sub-Inspector of Police	86
Head Constable	354
Constable	2,884
Total	3,352

SOURCE: Information collected from Assam Police Headquarters

While the Rural and the Municipal police were having an insignificant position, the backbone of the police force in Assam was the Civil and the Frontier Police. This was done according to the decision of the Government of India on March 5, 1878 and it was a part of its reorganisation of the police force. The force was classified into two categories (i) Civil Police which is created for the discharge of ordinary civil functions and (ii) The Frontier or armed Police for quasi-military work. Although the Frontier Police (which was, as stated earlier, renamed as Armed Police in 1891) was created in order to defend the frontiers, it was often used in order to assist the civil police.

At the beginning of 1881, Municipal Police was present at Goalpara, Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Sylhet, Sibsagar, Silchar and Shillong but from the 1st April of the year, the Municipal Police were merged with the ordinary Civil Police except at Sylhet and Shillong. Together with these two broad categories, a new police force was formed in 1880 under the Police Act of 1861 which was called "Punitive Police" and was deployed in Sylhet and Goalpara in order to handle the repeated occurrence of disturbances there. Later it was deployed in the Khasi Hills. It was called "Punitive" because it realised its maintenance cost from the erring inhabitants. After five years, the Railway Police Force was created in April 1885 with one Head Constable and 4 Constables in order to assist the Railway Survey Party. Another important development was the provision for the maintenance of proper discipline in the force and fixed the terms and conditions of service in the Assam Frontier Police by the Assam Police Frontier regulation of 1882. In 1883, further changes were witnessed when there was the re-organisation of the Frontier Police to give it a distinct military role and it was given the defence of the entire Frontier line. The Frontier Police was organized into four corps stationed in Cachar, Lakhimpur, Garo Hills and Naga Hills. Except these four districts the duties of guarding the Jails and Treasuries were taken over by the Civil Police.

In 20th century no significant increase is seen in the strength of the civil police force. The table II will show the comparative strength of civil police for the period of 1874-1900.

TABLE II

RANK	1874	1880	1900
District Superintendent of Police	5	7	11
Assistant Superintendent of Police	6	6	17
Inspector of Police	26	29	20
Sub-Inspector of Police	86	91	221
Head Constable	345	392	187
Constable	2,884	3,471	3,719
Total	3,352	3,996	4,175

SOURCE: Information collected from Assam Police headquarters

However the province had a quantitative growth in the number of police stations. By the end of the 20th century, Assam had 94 police stations and outposts which covered an average of 294 square miles of jurisdiction. The districts like Darrang, Lakhimpur, Nagaon and Sibsagar had only 7 police stations each, Sylhet had a record number of 29, followed by Goalpara which had 19 police stations implying thereby that these were the two districts where there was the need for a greater degree of policing in order to deal with crimes. In comparison to that, other districts were comparatively free from disturbances and crimes, and therefore, these could be maintained by a smaller number of personnel and stations.

In 1912, the new Province of Assam came into existence. During that year, Government sanctioned the formation of a new battalion for the North-East Frontier and a scheme to re-organise the whole Military Police Force into four uniformed Battalions having equal strength was drawn up and submitted to the Government. At the same time, a Finger Print Bureau was also set up at Shillong. In 1913, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) was established under the special Superintendent of Police and A.E.H. Shettleworth was the first to occupy this position. He had three branches under his jurisdiction-the Special Branch, concerned with Intelligence and extremist activities, the Investigation Branch, the Finger Print Bureau. In 1935, the post of Deputy Inspector General of Police (CID) was created and R.R.Cuming became its first DIG. After the creation of the state of Meghalaya in 1972 Its headquarters was shifted from Shillong to Guwahati in 1974.

The burden of additional duties like control over foreigners, maintenance of internal security, vigilance over lines of communication etc. were given to Police with the progress of war during 1940. The dangers of the underground activities were dealt with by a small Intelligence Staff. During 1941 there was the creation of a temporary force to meet the demands of war both in the gazetted rank and the subordinate Police service. It also fell to the Police to administer the Motor spirit rationing scheme which was introduced in 1941 as well as the licensing of tyres.

The Assam Police faced an entirely novel set of circumstances during 1942. It became very clear in the early part of that year that the triumphal march of the Japanese armed forces could not be stopped and so the fate of Burma was hanging in the balance. The flow of

refugees from Burma commencing towards the end of 1941 gathered its momentum. The requisition of motor transport to use on the Imphal-Dimapur Road was suddenly thrust on the Police and Superintendents of Police were to produce a large number of motor vehicles for the transport of supplies, labour, etc., to Manipur as well as for the purpose of evacuation of Burma refugees to the railhead at Dimapur. With these, it soon became clear that the police force was not adequate to meet the new situation and there was request for various sanctions and the same were received during the year for raising of forces. As a result, there was an increase in the Police force by nearly one half of its original strength.

During 1942-43 refugees from Burma began to decrease but the danger of infiltration by enemy agents increased. Therefore, security measures were further tightened and extra force was sanctioned. The preparation by the Japanese forces for the invasion of India created new problems of internal security. The Naga Hills and Manipur were the main targets of the Japanese forces and the Assam Police supplied officers and men to add in the local Police forces and it helped in the establishment of intelligence screens in these areas. Apart from the actual dangers of war, there was increase of incidental work of the Police and police officers had to deal with the armies of both the American and Chinese allies. Up to the end of 1944, the total additional temporary staffs sanctioned were 5113 and the cost of the Department rose greatly.

In 1947 with the constitutional changes there were two important changes in Assam Police. These are the transfer of the Sylhet district to Pakistan and the complete separation of the administration of the Assam Rifles from the Police. The Assam Civil Police Committee was constituted in 1929 under the chairmanship of Sir Syed Mohammad Saadullah which gave a few important conclusions after making a detailed study and seeking the opinion of various sections of the public. Firstly, it was felt that there was a wide gap between the police and the public, which was the main reason of unpopular police force. This was because of the frequent abuse of power by policemen. Secondly, the presence of inefficiency and corruption in the police administration is there which could be tackled only through the recruitment of educated youths. For attracting educated persons to the police department, the salary structure should be raised. Thirdly, there was the neglect of the training of the constabulary which too had affected the quality of the police administration. Therefore, the committee recommended for one year thorough training of this class of police personnel through well-staffed training school. Fourthly, fifty per cent of the subordinate ranks should be filled in by promotion after a departmental examination. Fifthly, there should be the replacement of the traditional red turban by a hat and emphasis should be given to a smart and tidy turn out. Although some of these conclusions received the attention of the Government, such as the increase of the salary, departmental promotion through examination etc. there was hardly any step taken towards qualitative improvement of the police administration.

The Government never gave proper attention to the River police and the rural police during the British rule in Assam. The anti-terrorist operation of 1950-51 with the help of the Army and the Assam Rifles cleared both the weaknesses and the strengths of the Police organisation and indicated clearly the measures to be taken. To make the Police suitable to the changed circumstances a Police Reorganisation Committee was set up in 1952 but due to financial problems most of the recommendations of the Committee could not be implemented. Some urgent items like establishment of more Police Stations and Outposts increase in the armed and unarmed police and construction of buildings were however accepted. In this period, there was the creation of the posts of Dy. 1. G., Range D. 1. G., Armed Forces and Training and Dy. 1. G. Administration.

The activities of the followers of A. Z. Phizo claiming independence for the Nagas posed a new problem to the Assam Police in 1956 and in the following years. There was the need for reinforcement of the Police force in the Naga Hills and a large number of platoons of the A. P. Battalions were sent to cope with the situation. It is a matter of pride that the Assam Police gave a good account of them and proved to be as good as any armed force deployed in the area. With the separation of the Naga Hills district from Assam in 1958, the Assam Police was withdrawn but they continued to be present in the outposts on the Naga Hills border.

It could be stated that the Police Administration consisted of the Inspector General of Police at the apex and 2 Deputy Inspectors General, one for the CID and the other for Administration created in 1935 and 1945 respectively. A large number of police personnel went to then East Pakistan with the transfer of the Sylhet district which had been with Assam since 1874. There were two important developments with a far reaching impact. Firstly, after the British rule in the state, all the positions of the Britishers were occupied by Indian officers. During colonial rule, all the high positions in the police administration were occupied by the British and after their departure; a vacuum was seen in the administration because of the absence of experienced and qualified officers. Secondly, complete separation of the Assam Rifles from the Assam Police was also seen. During 1949, police was busy with the various problems seen after independence and they had hardly any time to attend to proper training in professional skills and discipline and the control of crime. Therefore, the force proved to be inadequate. Because of the gaps in the cadre of superior officers there were rapid promotions of inexperienced or old officers. There were also demands on the armed reserve of the state. Together with this, the appearance of violence propagated by certain elements made the situation more difficult. However, in spite of all these difficulties, the Assam Police, by and large, managed to handle this difficult period.

At the time of independence, the strength of police force was around 8,000. For just 3,352 officers and men in 1874 to the strength of 8,000 at the time of independence is not a spectacular development. But the British were responsible for the creation of a disciplined force which provided the basic foundation of the present police administration in the state.

After independence there was growth in the police administration in Assam from strength to strength. During the first three decades of independence, the growth of number of Police personnel was given by figures in Table III.

TABLE III

Broad Category	1950	1960	1970
Armed	3821	9832	16205
Unarmed	5117	6937	12635
Total	8938	16769	28840

SOURCE: Information collected from Assam Police Headquarters

In the 60's and 70's, there were changes in the organisational structure effected by creation of new branches like SB, BIEO,CID, APBO, APRO, SFSO, All Woman Police Station and Training Institutions like PTC, APTC, RTS, BTC. New Police Stations buildings, vehicles and state of art equipment have also been done. There was also the creation of specialised units in order to tackle problems like insurgency, maintenance of law & order etc. In the post-independence period, several new branches have been created in order to take care of the needs of the state.

The Assam Police has grown from strength to strength. In 1980 it had a force of 40,290 and at the end of the 20th century it increased to 61,263.

During the course of the past decades, the Assam Police has proved to be a well-organised and disciplined force and it developed healthy traditions of service and conduct. Though it had its shortcomings, it has been able to performance as good and as worthy as that of any other police force in India. The Assam Police is adjusting itself to the changing circumstances and it is working for the creation of a ideal Police Force whose service will be to serve the interest of the people.

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