

## Railway Police Force in Madras Presidency-A Historical Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

*This research paper intends to study the origin and the services of the railway police in the Madras Presidency in historical perspective with the help of archival sources such as crime reports, administrative reports and other published books. The British introduced the railways for the first time in the Madras Presidency for their administrative convenience. The erstwhile Madras Presidency was an important administrative, military and economic division of the British India, consisted of the present Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Odessa. The railways existed to serve the British interest and with the expansion of railways in the Madras presidency, they had ordered for the creation of Railway Police Force for the security of the railway property and railway tracks from criminal gangs. A number of crimes and offences were handled by the railway police and prevented the law and order within the railway limits.*

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### INTRODUCTION

With the introduction of railways in India by the British had brought significant transformation in the indigenous transport system and culture. i The British political and commercial interest made them introduce railways to consolidate their power and to increase their trading activities. For the first time railways were introduced in the Madras Presidency which was an important administrative, military and economic division. This presidency comprised of the present Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Odessa. The railways existed to serve the British interest and with the expansion of railways in the Madras presidency, they had ordered for the creation of Railway Police Force for the security of the railway property and railway tracks from criminal gangs. ii The Railway Police were recruited to deal with crimes within the Railway Districts and functioned directly under the control of the Deputy Inspector General of Police.

### ORIGIN OF THE RAILWAY POLICE FORCE

Several railway companies such as Madras Railways, East India Railways, Great Indian Peninsular Railways, Madras Guaranteed Railways Company were incorporated which connected the interior areas of the Madras Presidency for the supply of men and material. For the purpose of security, *Chowkidars*, the Company Police were organized on the recommendation of Railway Police Committee for Watch and Ward duties. iii The Railway Police Force was created in 1866 in India under the resolution of the Indian Police Commission of 1860. With the expansion of railways in the Madras presidency, the British government had ordered for the formation of Railway Police Force, entirely at the disposal of a separate Railway Police Force which was established in 1893 with the recommendation of the Inspector General of Police of Madras Presidency. The Railway Police was employed for the preservation of law and order within the railway limits. iv The administrative control was under the charge of Deputy Inspector General of Police of Madras Presidency through which the railway lines passed. v The Superintendent of Police of the railway district was not under the control of the District

Magistrate unlike the regular Superintendent of Police. A scheme was introduced in the Madras Presidency in 1895, the Inspectors were recruited under control of Superintendents for the maintenance of discipline on the platform and also inside the trains to keep passengers secure and railway accidents were also handled by them. vi On the recommendation of the Indian Police Commission 1902-03, a separate Railway Police Districts was formed as the railway passes through various districts. The Railway police force consisted of District Superintendent, Inspectors, Sub-Inspectors, head constables and constables. The railway police districts were divided into police circles, police stations and out-posts. There were several railway police stations in the districts with jurisdiction of 100 miles. The Railway police as auxiliary police forces was organized for the prevention and detection of crimes and preservation of public peace and security of property within the railway limits.

### RAILWAY POLICE ARMED RESERVES

The former Presidency General Reserve and the two Special Emergency Forces stationed at Vizianagaram and St. Thomas Mount have been amalgamated and formed into two new formations. One formation was known as the Range Armed Reserves which are local strategic forces at the disposal of the concerned Deputy Inspector General of Police. The other formation was known as the Railway Police Armed Reserves intended for railway protection duty at the disposal of the concerned Superintendent of Railway Police. vii The Railway Police was part of the Bengal-Nagapur Railway line in the Orissa Province until the 1st April 1938. In 1939, there was reduction in the strength of the railway police due to the transfer of some of the police officers to the Orissa province of railway lines lying within the area of that province. viii The constables were recruited separately from district police accordingly to rules laid down in the police order. Temporary additional staff of two constables retention was sanctioned for the year 1939 in Vizianagaram railway police station. ix The proportion strength of the railway police officers till independence in 1947 was almost same.

## POWERS AND FUNCTIONS

The railway police had the same powers equivalent to those of ordinary police. They performed the same duties as general police and also liable to all duties, discipline and punishments.<sup>x</sup> They were organized to co-operate with the regular police and it was divided into two divisions. One was stationary platform staff to preserve order within the railway limits and maintained law and order at the railway stations and this force was armed and unarmed.<sup>xi</sup> The second division was for detective and protecting the traveling staff.<sup>xii</sup> The Railway police dealt different forms of thefts in running trains from passengers, mail and baggage vans, goods train, stationary wagons, goods shed, platforms, passenger sheds and railway material which frequently occurred in the Railway Police District.<sup>xiii</sup> The District Superintendent of Police regularly instructed their subordinates in the matter of preventing trespass on railway lines and circulars were issued to warn the people of the danger of using railway lines as footpath.<sup>xiv</sup> As there were frequent railway strikes both violent and non violent in nature, the British government made an important development during 1931 by introducing a new Railway Strike Schemes. In additions to these, detailed schemes for every district were prepared and approved. The Station House Officers were directed to create public awareness and to warn the villagers during their village visits on danger of walking on the railway tracks. The District Superintendent had issued instructions regarding safety measures to the village officers. The police travelled in the guards van and line patrols were instituted at particularly criminal parts of the line to prevent crime. Theft was mostly recorded from transshipment yards and goods shed. To prevent theft on goods train especially in the nights, constables travelled to watch loading and unloading at transshipment yards.<sup>xv</sup> One beat constable travelled by every passenger train day and night. The cases were usually reported to the Criminal Investigation Department, the railway police took action only when culprit was handed over.

## DISCIPLINE

Discipline was maintained in the department and these officers were also liable for punishments departmentally and judicially in their private and official capacities.<sup>xvi</sup> The members of the police were dismissed for corruption, drunkenness, disorderly behavior, and insubordination, suspicious conduct, for bringing false charges and also for persistence absence without leave. The police for the above offences were punished with deferred black marks, fines, suspensions, censures, de-promotion, removal and dismissals.<sup>xvii</sup> The punishments of the police force were by conviction before magistrates under the Police Act XXIV of 1859 and the Indian Penal Code or else by departmental notice. No police officer was convicted by a Criminal Court of any offence and sentenced to imprisonment was re-admitted to the service without the special order of the Inspector General of Police.<sup>xviii</sup> All the punishments of the policemen were entered in the defaulters-book.

## CRIMES AND OFFENCES

The offences related to the railways were thefts in running passenger trains, from the passengers, from mail and luggage vans, from platforms and passengers shed, thefts in running goods train, thefts from stationary wagons, good shed and yard and thefts of railway materials. Derail, Suicides, trespasses, accidents and throwing of objects and stones on running trains were general offences. The offences were committed due to

mischief, drunkenness and enmity among gangsters and such cases were registered under Section 126 of Railway Act.<sup>xix</sup> The general increase in the crime related to the railways in the Madras Presidency were unfavorable seasonal conditions, unemployment due to demobilization, sporadic communal tension, widespread labour and agrarian unrest, the abrogation of the Criminal Tribes Act, the general upward trend of prices of essential commodities and better reporting and registration of crime consequent of reallocation of areas in several districts of the Madras Presidency contributed to the increase in crime. There was a marked increase of crime in 1947 in the Railway Police Districts was to a great extent due to smuggling of food grains and to registration of shortages in sealed wagons as cases of theft.<sup>xx</sup>

## OFFENCES DURING FREEDOM STRUGGLE

Derailment, damaging wagons, obstruction to electric trains and burning of the railway stations were common offence committed during the freedom movement and the British had introduced a new scheme 'Villagers Railway Protection Scheme' to control such actions and it was strictly enforced. According to which the villagers had to patrol under the supervision of Revenue Inspectors.<sup>xxi</sup> The railway police outpost and railway police stations were well guarded during the freedom movement.<sup>xxii</sup> Train guards were furnished from amongst the reserve men on all passenger trains during strikes.<sup>xxiii</sup> As a part of agitation, the visit of Prince of Wales to Madras on 14th January 1922 was opposed by setting fire to the train and the offenders were arrested. The Vendra railway station incident is note worthy, this station was about 5 kilometres away from Bheemavaram and next to the railway track running between Nidadavolu and Bheemavaram. Under the leadership of Bhupathi raju, Subba Raju, with his followers attacked the railway station and set it on fire. The Railway Sub-Inspector of Police Bheemavaram, received the message and arranged guards at the railway junction. The case was referred to the Sessions Judge by I.V.Seshagiri Rao, the sub divisional Magistrate, Bheemavaram and the prosecution was conducted by R.V.Rama Rao, Public prosecutor. Later, the judgment was finally delivered in the year 1943 by Syed Kadir Muhammad, Session Judge of the West Godavari division at Eluru, and all the convicts were sentenced. Another case was recorded at Attili, a village in West Godavari district, a bunk near the Attili railway station was set on fire under the leadership of the Maganti Chakrapani and the followers attacked the railway stations and destroyed the records and other things during Quit India Movement of 1942. The culprits were soon arrested, convicted and sentenced to one year imprisonment by the Joint Magistrate of Narasapur. Large amount of railway property was destroyed which was estimated as Rs 2,735. Collective fine of Rs. 5,000 was imposed on the communities of Relangi, but Attili was exempted. Massive destruction was caused by the agitators during Freedom Movement, they interfered with railway lines, railway telegraph wires were cut near stations, fish plates and bolts were removed, engine and bogies were derailed and the police had imposed fines on the culprits.<sup>xxiv</sup> To suppress these anti British movements additional Reserve Police Forces was sanctioned and the British government resorted to severe policy of repression during the Non-cooperation Movement, Civil disobedience movement, Quit India Movement and till the Independence.

## COMMON OFFENCES

Stone throwing on the running trains was common offence by the young boys. Such offenders were convicted and their

parents were warned about the danger caused to the travelling public. In this regard the Village Vigilances Committees had played a great role in controlling such offences.xxv

Collision of trains occurred in the Madras Presidency and these issues were also dealt by the railway police, in 1933, two train collisions and five cases of derailments occurred in which 13 passengers lost their life. There was regrettable increase from 355 in 1933 to 383 in 1934 in the number of persons run over and killed by train.xxvi In 1938, three train collisions occurred, of which two were with carts owing to the negligence of level-crossing gate keepers and the third was between two trains. xxvii

Destruction of the rails and trains was common occurrence and a number of wreck trains were recorded. In the month of November 1939, a case of derailment between Nandyal and Gazulapalle in Madras railway police districts was recorded in which the engine and the five bogies of the train were derailed due to the removal of fish plates resulted in the several casualties. Many such cases were undetected in spite of vigorous efforts made by the railway police and Criminal Investigation Department.

Trespassing and suicide cases were frequently reported, in spite of continued efforts made for the prevention of trespassers on the railway lines by the officials. Under preventive measures the villagers were made to patrol the railway tracks under the supervision of Revenue officers. The special Majesty Courts were setup for speedy trial of persons travelling with tickets and trespassers continued to function well.

Some of the noteworthy cases were registered where the railway police were successful in punishing the culprits. An interesting case had occurred in 1928, two railway carriage Inspectors of good status in East Godavari district with some associates carried on currency note duplicating tricks. They selected rich men and convinced them that they were able by photography to duplicate hundred rupee currency notes and the process and the materials required would be represented to be very costly, and after the dupe had paid money process would fail. The case was successfully handled and the chief offenders were convicted.xxviii Another case of interest, Gugru Charan Singh opened an office at Lucknow styled as railways land acquiring office, Shimla dubbed himself as an inspector and issued bogus railway passes. This case was noticed and the culprits were arrested successfully. This was a case of swindle covering most of the railway systems in India it is a good example of credulity of human nature.xxix In 1935 at the Eluru railway police outpost, a constable was caught and sentenced to 2½ months rigorous imprisonment for stolen properly according to the police record. In 1938, a railway thief disguised himself as gosha woman and robbed women passengers on the platform of Mayavaram railway station she robbed jewel worth Rs. 420, she was arrested under section 406 of Indian penal code. In the same year heavy floods breached the line at Ayyalur and Shencottah, passenger train was derailed causing 33 deaths 93 injury cases.xxx Here is a case of interest during 1942, a young man of the Guntur district posed as a Lieutenant of the Royal Indian Naval Reserve was found traveling in a first class compartment from Madras and Waltair. He used railway warrants for his journeys and was arrested on suspicion by the railway police. Several forged documents were seized from him and he was sentenced to two years imprisonment. xxxi

The following table shows different types of cases recorded in the years 1937, 1938 and 1939.

| Type of cases                                      | 1937       | 1938       | 1939       |
|--|------------|------------|------------|
| Thefts in running passenger trains                 | 102        | 84         | 78         |
| a) from the passengers                             |            |            |            |
| b) from mail and luggage vans                      | 5          | 4          | 4          |
| Thefts from platforms and passengers shed          | 82         | 127        | 147        |
| Thefts in running goods train                      | 7          | 12         | 18         |
| Thefts from stationary wagons, good shed and yard. | 45         | 56         | 87         |
| Thefts of railway materials                        | 84         | 54         | 8w         |
| Other thefts                                       | 63         | 55         | 66         |
| <b>Total</b>                                       | <b>388</b> | <b>392</b> | <b>482</b> |

Source: Report on the administration of the Police of the Madras Province-1939.

The above table shows that there was marked increase in the thefts from platforms and passengers shed, thefts in running goods trains, theft from stationary wagons good shed and yards recorded in Trichnopoly railway police district and they were due partly to casuals taking to crime and partly to the activities of district and inter-provincial criminals, many of them were traced and booked.

## CONCLUSION

The introduction of the railways by the British brought remarkable changes to the indigenous Indian society and played an important role in national integration. In the Madras Presidency, the British government had organized Railway Police Force in 1893 for the security of the railway property and railway tracks from criminal gangs. As auxiliary police forces, coordinated and cooperated with village vigilances committees, Criminal Investigation Department, Revenue Department and with the regular police played a great role in controlling offences in the railway districts. The railway police performed their functions in the maintenance of law and order, prevention, registration, investigation and detection of crimes. A number of cases of theft were dealt successfully and those culprits who were responsible were punished. Especially during the freedom struggle huge destruction was caused to the railway property. To deal with these offences several railway police stations and outposts were established and Special police forces were organized for guarding and for protection other property such as telegraphic lines, bridges, roads and highways, etc. There was an increase in the crimes related to the railways in the Madras Presidency due to unfavorable seasonal conditions, unemployment, sporadic communal tension, widespread labour and agrarian unrest, the abrogation of the Criminal Tribes Act, the general upward trend of prices of essential commodities and the political struggle in the Madras Presidency. The railway police dealt with all these offences successfully. Crimes such as thefts in running trains from passengers, mail and baggage vans, goods train, stationary wagons, goods shed, platforms, passenger sheds and railway material were also handled by the railway police of the Madras Presidency. Railway Police Force was responsible for law enforcement on the Madras Presidency railways. They maintained discipline on platform and also inside the trains to keep passengers secure and railway accidents were also handled by them.

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