

# Changing Nature of Crime in Urban Region: A Case Study on Haora City, West Bengal

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**Abstract:** Haora city (22°37'N and 88°20'E) is one of the oldest cities of West Bengal, India. The city has a commercial and administrative importance for a long time. Now it is the second most (after Kolkata) thickly populated city of West Bengal. The city is characterized by widespread human poverty despite increasing employment, child labour and wide socio-economic disparities, a large immigrant population. Due to a large migrant population, refugee and commuters the city has gone through an economic crisis; a crisis in housing, employment, transport, water etc. like any other city of Afro-Asia. Recently, a complex economic and social hierarchy is found which has changed the traditional nature of crime in the city. Now mobile phone snatching, ATM theft, kepmari, Eve teasing, credit card fraud, Nigeria fraud and human trafficking have got predominance than that of earlier crimes such as dacoity, pickpocket, theft etc. According to the report of Howrah City Police number of crime has been increased more than double in last five years. If we intend to find out the cause we have to face bitter experiences. Increasing flow of lower class people from the outer states and rural areas has created the situation more critical. So, the safety of the peace-loving permanent dwellers has become insecure. Mainly CBD, industrial belt and dock areas are the most crime-prone zone. For proper development as well as social stability, city crime must be controlled.

**Keywords:** crime, social hierarchy, human poverty

## 1. Introduction

Haora city (22°37'N and 88°20'E) is one of the oldest cities of West Bengal, India. The city has a commercial and administrative importance for a long time. The city is characterised by widespread human poverty despite increasing employment, child labour, wide socio-economic disparities and large immigrant population etc. Due to a large migrant population, refugee and commuters the city has gone through an economic crisis; a crisis in housing, employment, transport, water etc like any other city of Afro-Asia. Recently, a complex economic and social hierarchy is found which has changed the traditional nature of crime in the city. Now mobile phone snatching, ATM theft, kepmari, Eve teasing, credit card fraud, Nigeria fraud and human trafficking have got predominance than that of earlier crimes such as dacoity, pickpocket, theft etc.

## 2. Objectives

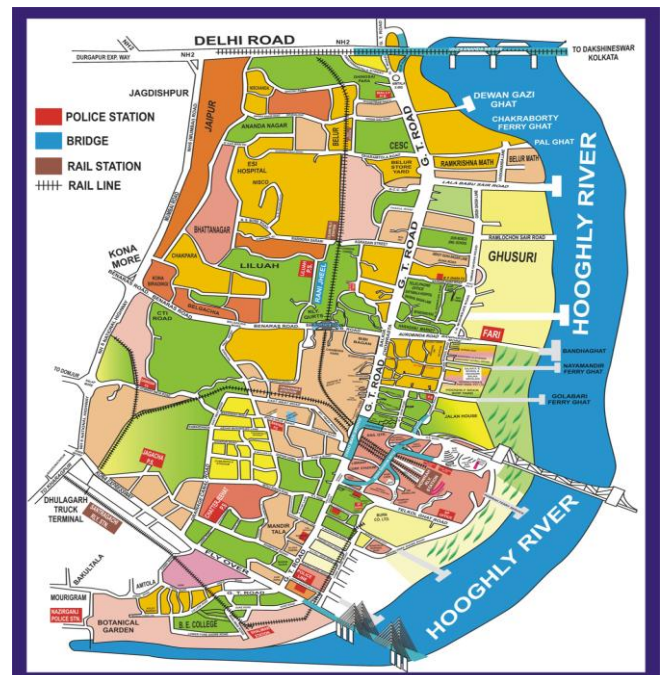
The study has been set before the following objectives:

1. To evaluate the recent socio-economic and political scenario of Haora city because these are essential to crime study
2. Categorizing crime and identifying the crime-prone areas of the city.
3. To study demographic, religious and linguistic structure of the criminals.
4. To indicate the nature and trend of recent crime.
5. To find out the causes of various crimes.
6. Finally, how to prevent crime in urban society.

## 3. The Study Area

In Haora city there are five assemblies and one Lok Sabha constituency. The assemblies are Bally assembly, Howrah Uttar assembly, Howrah Madhya assembly, Shibpur assembly, and Howrah Dakshin assembly; one Lok Sabha is

Howrah. Howrah Municipal Corporation (H.M.C) includes 50 wards which encompass 1,467 km<sup>2</sup> (566 sq mi) area. In the northern part of H.M.C there is Bally Municipality which has 35 wards. Very recently Bally Municipality has been merged with HMC and the total number of wards is 66.



## 4. Socio-economic and demographic characteristics of Haora City

- a) According to population (4,841,638) it is the second largest city of West Bengal. Population density is also very high (3,300 people/km<sup>2</sup>)
- b) Along the River Hugli the city has a traditional industrial belt.

- c) Among the fifty wards of H.M.C twenty seven are highly congested slum areas where almost 118286 people live.
- d) The city is characterised by widespread human poverty ever increasing employment, child labour and wide socio-economic disparity.
- e) A significant flow of immigrant population from outer states (e.g. Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa and UP) even from Bangladesh.

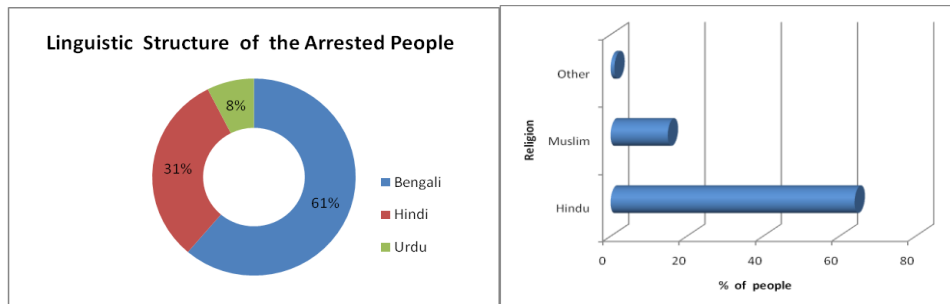
### 5. Crime records in Different Police Stations

Three years record (2009-2011) of arrest from ten police station of Haora City points to the fact that except for the Bantra Police Station, the number of arrest of the other P.S

is more than that of the previous years. Among them, the localities belonging to the P.S like Bally, Shibpur and Golabari have exceeded in respect of crime and arrest.

### 6. Religious and Linguistic Structure

Regarding this, 100 samples have been collected from various police stations. From this, it is obvious that 80% of the arrested ones are Hindus, 18.75% belongs to Muslim community and only 1.25% are from other communities. In connection with this,



**Figure 1:** Religion and linguistic structure of the arrested people  
 (source: Daily crime record of the Police Stations)

the linguistic structure of the criminals is noteworthy. 80% of the permanent citizen of Haora City are Bengali speaking and the rest 20% speaks in Hindi or in Urdu. Most of them settled here for job from other states. But of the criminals 61.5% is Bengali speaking and 38.5% is non-Bengali. Accordingly, in respect of population non-Bengali outsiders are mostly prone to crime.

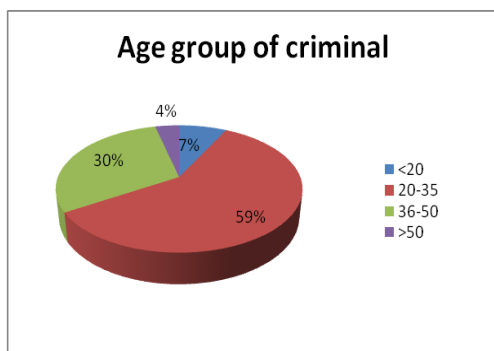
units, producing unattached men, vulnerable to the seduction of crime. The departure of the most stable members of the community deprives the community of leaders and positive role models.

### 7. Demography of the Criminals

Like other citizen most of the criminals are young (20-35 year) who comprise 59% of the criminals. On the other hand, the age of the 7.5% criminal is less than twenty years and 3.5% is aged people (more than fifty years).

### 8. Common Crimes and Recent Trends

Traditionally, Criminology has been dominated by the twin corner of locating the causes of crime in the individual and of attempting to improve the operational effectiveness of the criminal justice system. But some of the most recent and valuable studies of crime have sought to move considerably beyond these narrow concerns, and raises questions not only about crime and crime control but also about the social and historical structures within which they are located.



**Figure 2:** Age-group of the criminals  
 (source: Daily crime record of the Police Stations)

There is an alarming incidence of juvenile crime and correspondingly, offenders are increasingly younger. Major criminal organisations are making increasing use of young people to carry out certain functions associated with their activities. High level of youth poverty affect stables family

The common crimes in Haora city include specially dacoity, robbery, theft, murder and culpable homicide etc. From year-wise crime statement (2007-2011) of Howrah City Police it becomes clear that the number of crimes has fluctuated. On the other hand, the crimes like rape, crime against women are on the rise. Very recently, in comparison with common crimes, some new crimes like eve teasing, ATM theft, Nigeria fraud, mobile phone snatching and human trafficking are notable and increasing. Some examples can be cited in this regard.

#### a) ATM Theft

On January 23, 2012 Hindustan Times reported that the police on Saturday nabbed a couple of siblings, who had been targeting traders of Mangalohat for ATM theft. The arrested duo Raja Sau and Binod Sau, had been known to hack into the personal bank accounts of the traders in the ATM units through the last month, said officers of the Howrah police. "Over the last one month, they have nicked

out no less than Rs 1 lakh after hacking into the traders' accounts. They had some conduits, who are yet to be arrested," a senior officer of the Howrah city-police said.

**b) Credit Card Fraud**

The fraudulent use of a credit card account through the theft of the account holder's card number, card details and personal information, through a wide variety of methods in order to perform unauthorized transactions from the compromised account. Sometimes the bank employees are found involved in such crime.

**c) Eve teasing**

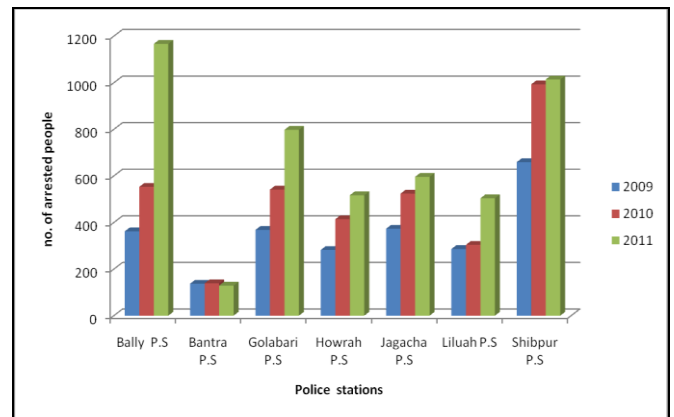
Priya Shaw and Puja Shaw were injured when they were recently attacked by a gang of eve teasers at night at Salkia area in Howrah. Later two were arrested. Eve teasers are mainly found in the outside of the schools, colleges, market and shopping mall complex of the city.

**d) Human Trafficking**

In what could be a case of human trafficking, Mohammad Zeman and Mohammad Irfan, both Class VI students of the Anjuman High School in Chowra Basti from the Tilkhana area under Golabari police station in Howrah have gone missing recently. A police officer said, "Both Zeman and Irfan belong to poor families." Considering their background, the police have ruled out that they were kidnapped for ransom. "We are investigating the kidnapping angle. But since they were poor boys, they could have been lured by child traffickers with the promise of comfort and money," sources said.

Police said nearly ten cases of missing children are pending with the Golabari PS. Sources said all cases are considered to be of kidnapping. "Locals have also staged protests over the missing children. But we have not been able to trace them," said a police officer.

smuggling, kidnapping, illegal export of iron scrap, forcefully collection of money from the businessman and threatening them by phone have become notable crime.



**Figure 4:** Police station wise crime statistics (source: Howrah City Police)

During last few decades the large factories like Gestkin William, Bern, Remington, many jute mills and cotton mills have been locked out. As a result many people from lower-middle have lost their job. This has incited the jobless people and their next generation to be involved in various illegal activities. Encroachment of the deserted land of the closed factories, brokery and the oppression of the various political labour organisation have stretched out the area of crime.

**10. City crime and women:**

The study of human relationship in the urban environment vis-à-vis the incidences of crimes against women over geographical space has been dealt with in this study through an understanding of two different world environments, that of the developing and the developed world. Crime against women is not only limited to being a social problem but more and more it is being taken into consideration by departments other than the law enforcement while formulating policies.

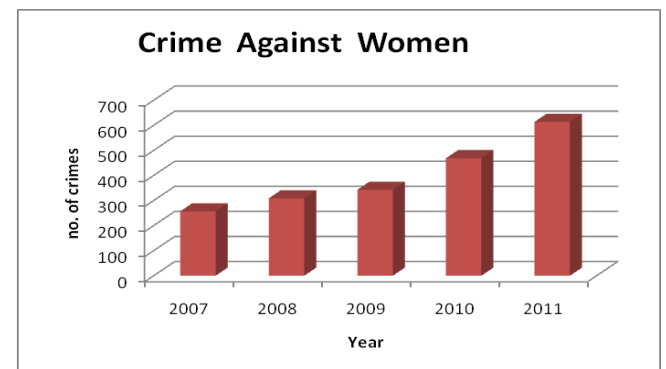
In Haora City the rate of crime against women is rapidly increasing. According to the report of Howrah City Police the number of crime against women was 257 in 2007 which is abruptly increased to 614 in 2011. Such crime includes eve teasing, harassment in working place, rape and suicide for dowry etc.



**Figure 3:** Recent trends of urban crime (source: Howrah City Police)

**9. Crime-Prone Areas**

The main crime-prone areas of Haora city comprise slum area, dock area and industrial belt. The areas of the first category are mainly under Haora, Shibpur, Bantra and Malipanchghara P.S and here the crimes like theft, robbery and eve teasing are dominant. In the dock and industrial areas (i.e. Shalimar, Golabari, Liluah, Ghusuri, Salkia etc)



**Figure 5:** Increasing crime against women (source: Howrah City Police)

## 11. Some initiatives to Protect Women from Harassment

With the rise in attacks on women, police are planning to give self-defence training to female students in more than 50 schools in Howrah. A senior police officer of the newly formed Howrah Police Commissionerate said police officers who are experts in judo and karate will train the girls in martial arts. Initially, girls studying in Classes VII to XII will be trained in batches. Each batch will undergo training for around 15 days.

Besides organising training programme for girls, officers from the women's police station in Howrah, and local police stations in plain clothes, have been posted outside schools that fall under the jurisdiction of the Howrah Commissionerate. They pick up youths found teasing or making lewd comments at girls.

## 12. Crime prevention in Urban Society

The idea of preventing crimes is far from new. Historically in Western societies the idea of preventing crime was closely linked to ideas of punishment and protection. Collective rather than individual interests determined what was crime and how violation should be punished. Gradually, the individual responsibility for crimes and the practice of punishing responsible persons replaced those of vengeance and collective responsibility. Personal responsibility, however, was closely linked to the idea that punishment of individuals also protected the collectivity. The belief arose that punishment of those held responsible for a crime deterred not only them from continuing to commit crimes but that their punishment deterred others from ever doing so under the threat of a similar punishment of major objective of punishment. Thus became prevention as well as vengeance or compensation for wrongs.

Those who focus on social, structural and situational determinates of crime by contrast, assumed that one can prevent crimes without any understanding of individual propensities. Underlying these models of invention and crime prevention is a simple model of human behaviour based on cognitive and perception psychology----- the model of relational choices about whether to commit crimes and that they will refrain from doing so whenever one calculates that the losses from behaving in a criminal way exceed the gains. Interventions accordingly must focus on altering opportunities so as to increase the losses from behaving in criminal ways.

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