

With its focus on politicians and VIPs (at the cost of the ordinary people), the Sindh Police has steadily withdrawn and lost its credibility. The vacuum is partly filled by Rangers who are now planning to fight the street crime as well. The Sindh Police needs to reclaim its functionality, use many of its excellent professional officers, seek technological solutions and eliminate simple crimes like 'Mugging' that take place ceaselessly on the streets of Karachi.

'Thuggee' vs 'Muggee'

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The band of stranglers engaged in 'Thuggee' in the Central Indian states during the 18th and 19th century are estimated to have killed between 50,000 to 100,000 people. In a strikingly similar occupational pursuit, the band of assailants engaged in 'mugging' on the streets of Karachi appear to have done far better. Mr. Zubair Habib, the newly appointed Chief of the Citizens-Police Liaison Committee (CPLC), confirmed that in 2015 alone, 37390 incidents of mugging at gun point were reported in Karachi. What he did not reveal was the fact that only one out of five victims ever bothers to lodge an FIR.

The modern 'mugging' is a far more sophisticated and efficient version of its forerunner - 'Thuggee'. While the 'Thugs' looped a 'Rumal' or a handkerchief around the victim's neck, the 'muggers' use a 9 mm pistol. The pistol expedites the decision making process and the deal is clinched within a matter of seconds. The muggers, just like the 'Thugs', attack those on the move. The 'Thugs' looted the travellers when they encamped for a night break, while the muggers ambush their prey in broad day-light - when the vehicles stop at a traffic light. While the 'Thugs' took great pains to hide and bury their dead, the muggers are only interested in collecting their booty and revving away on their standby motorbikes.

The arrival of the British and their rigorous methods to fight crime meant that the 'Thugs' had met their match. A 'Thuggee and Dacoity' department was established in 1835 and William Henry Sleeman was appointed as its first Superintendent. Using simple techniques and plenty of common sense, Sleeman began to meticulously map each attack site and profile the 'Thuggee' gangs and their techniques. His specially trained police officers, disguised as merchants and travellers would infiltrate the gangs and take preemptive actions to capture the gangsters. The captured 'Thugs'

were given the incentive to save themselves if they informed on their accomplices. Special trial courts were set up and more than 3700 'thugs' were either hanged or 'transported for life'. In a short span of about 10 years, Sleeman succeeded in eradicating, what had plagued the sub-continent for over two hundred years.

The Sindh police, had only to follow the recipe of William Sleeman to eradicate the modern version of 'thuggee' in Karachi. The process could begin by identifying 10-20 most 'mugged' intersections. Installing cameras to cover these locations. Placing 3-4 armed policemen (in plain clothes) at each of these intersections in a manner that they have a full view of the location. Closely monitoring each intersection from a central control room. Informing the police on duty as soon as a mugging is observed (if the event has not already been detected). Using stun (or real) guns to disable and arrest the culprits. The camera evidence should be enough to prosecute the 'muggers'. The element of surprise is a key factor in combating this crime. Finally the cameras are discreetly relocated at different potential mugging sites so that the muggers are never sure of when and what location is being actively monitored.

It is most likely that the police will reject these simple methods and instead opt for more complex, cost intensive and externally funded options. Should we not question as to why the police has been hesitant to handle a localised version of the task that Sleeman could accomplish 200 years ago? Why has a dedicated 'Mugging and Dacoity' Department not been set up thus far? Why a major part of the Sindh Police is employed to protect some 1000 VIPs in the province, leaving the ordinary citizens at the mercy of 'muggers' and target killers?

Along with the specially designed 'mugger traps', a number of other steps ought to be taken in parallel. A nation-wide hot-line for reporting loss of cell phones be advertised and implemented. Cancellation of SIM and IMEI be made obligatory for Telecoms as well as Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) immediately on receiving information about a phone theft / snatching. Phones with missing or fudged IMEIs must not be allowed to operate and PTA must assume the overall responsibility to ensure compliance. A national database of cancelled IMEIs be maintained on the PTA's website. The sale and purchase of phones (new and second-hand) must be traceable to equipment IMEI and the CNIC of the customer. If in the 19th century, William Sleeman could single-handedly eliminate 'Thuggee' throughout India, how come a 21st century nuclear state cannot stop mugging in Karachi?

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