

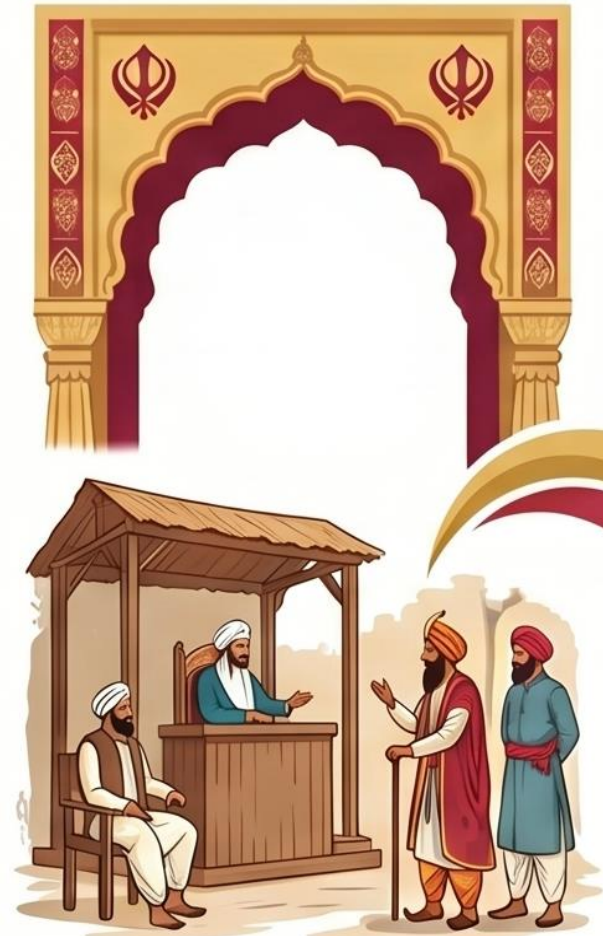
Forging the Punjab Police

The institutional evolution from arbitrary rule to the landmark Police Act of 1861.

**CRIMINOLOGICAL INSIGHTS
BY DR. MRIDUL SRIVASTAVA**

The Evolution of Law and Order: Policing the Punjab (1800–1861)

The Sikh Era and Early Annexation (1800–1849)



● "Rude and Simple" Governance

Under Ranjit Singh, there was no written law; justice often involved bribery or ordeals.

● **Annexation of Punjab (1849):**
Following years of characteristic strife after Singh's death, the British annexed the province.



● **The Village Watch**
The nucleus of the early police was the ancient, universal system of village watchmen.

The Path to Reform and the 1861 Act

● **The Dual Branch System:**
Early British policing split into Military Preventive Police and Civil Detective Police branches.



● **The Police Commission of 1860:**
Appointed to increase efficiency and reduce expenditure by merging separate police and quasi-police bodies.



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● **The Police Act V of 1861:**
Established a uniform, civil-led force under an Inspector-General, distinct from military or judicial authorities.

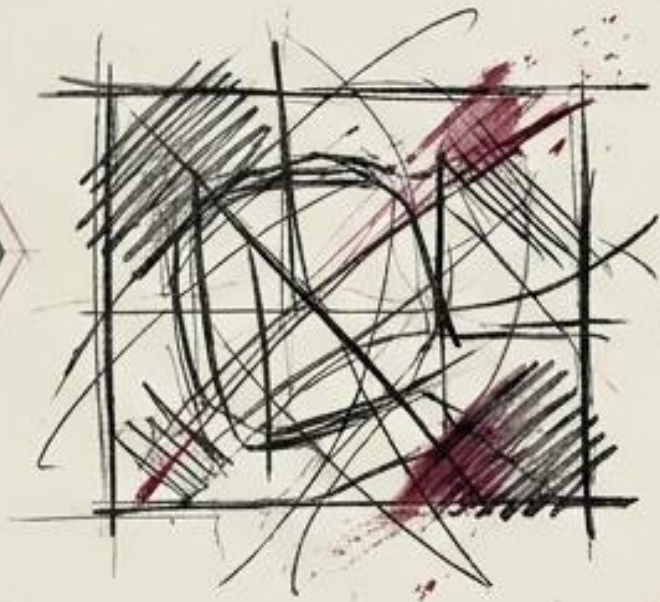


Feature Comparison: Pre-1861 vs. 1861 Act

 Pre-1861 System	 1861 Police Act System
Nature of Force: Mixed Military/Civil nature	Nature of Force: Entirely Civil and non-military
Control: Local and often unorganized	Control: Centralised under Civil Executive
Authority: Vested in Tehsildars/Magistrates	Authority: Supervised by an inspector-General

The 12-year architectural journey of a modern police force

The Chaos & Annexation (Pre-1849)



A volatile landscape of arbitrary justice, purchased immunity, and widespread plunder under the collapsing Sikh empire.

The Flawed Dual System (1849–1857)



The British experiment with a bifurcated force—a heavy Military Preventive branch and a subordinate Civil Detective branch—proving loyal but financially unsustainable.

The 1861 Reorganisation



The Calcutta Police Commission engineers a unified, executive-led constabulary, culminating in the Police Act V of 1861.

The collapse of order under the Sikh Empire

Regime Diagnostic Matrix

Constitution

No fixed form of government; no law written or oral. Administration functioned entirely around Ranjit Singh's immense personal energy.

Justice

Immunity purchased through wealth; private arbitration heavily relied upon. Only one formal court existed in the entire kingdom: the Sudar Adawlat at Lahore.

Punishment

Arbitrary and brutal. Trials by ordeal included immersion in boiling oil or carrying a heated ploughshare for fifty to a hundred yards.

“There was hardly any crime, from larceny to murder, for which immunity could not be purchased.”

Inheriting a volatile landscape of plunderers and disbanded armies

Military Residue

50,000 disbanded men of the former Sikh army mingling restlessly with the civilian populace.

Predatory Culture

A populace famously described as a mixture of ravening wolves, and of helpless sheep, where thievery was sometimes considered a hereditary profession.

Punjab Annexation (1849)

Communal Friction

Intense animosity. Mohammadans viewed Hindus as idolaters; Hindus viewed Mohammadans as defilers of their faith.

Sir **Henry** Lawrence faced a work of almost **insuperable difficulty** to introduce **inviolable law** to this multifarious society.

The First Blueprint: A fractured Dual System

Departing from the unified Sindh Police model, the British implemented a bifurcated system that separated prevention from detection.



Military Preventive Police

- **Command:** Supervised by four British Police Captains.
- **Nature:** 10 Battalions (Infantry & Cavalry) acting primarily as an Indian Army regiment.



Civil Detective Police

- **Command:** Ultimately under the Chief Commissioner and local Magistrates.
- **Nature:** An unorganised body of burkandazes (armed watchmen) handling detection and routine enforcement.

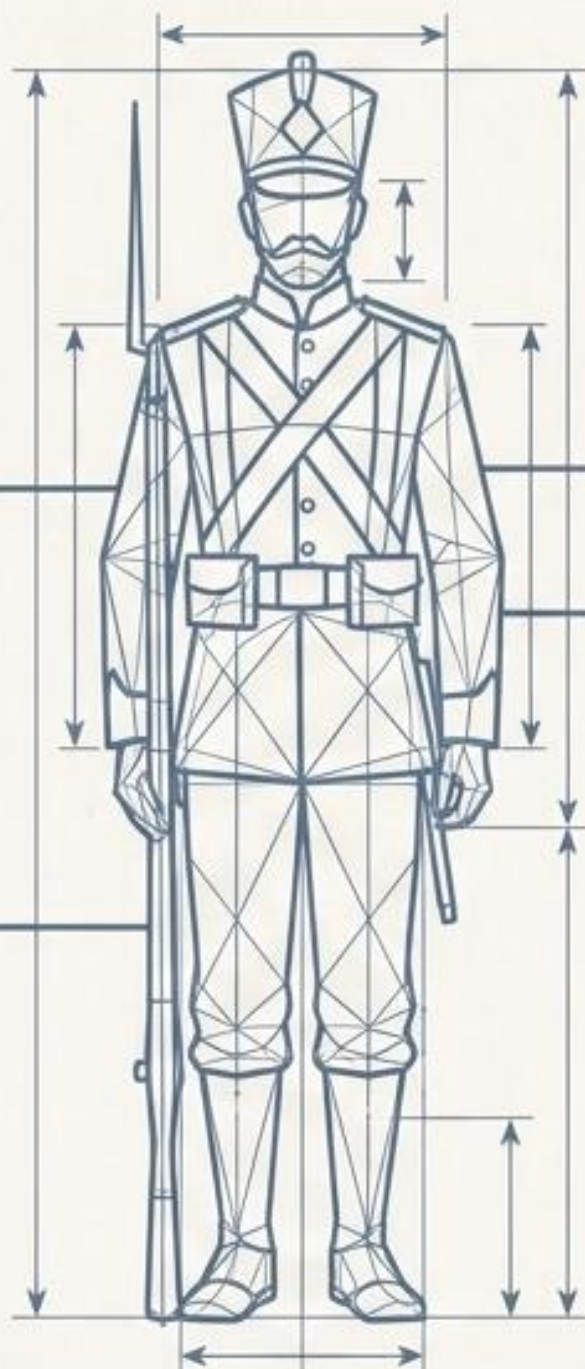
The muscle of the administration: The Military Preventive Force

Composition

Formed from disbanded old soldiers of the **Sikh Army** who remained faithful, alongside **Dogras** and youth from the **Manjah yeomen**.

Duties

Guarding jails and civil treasuries. Frontier garrison duty at volatile outposts like **Kohat, Bannu, and Hazara**.



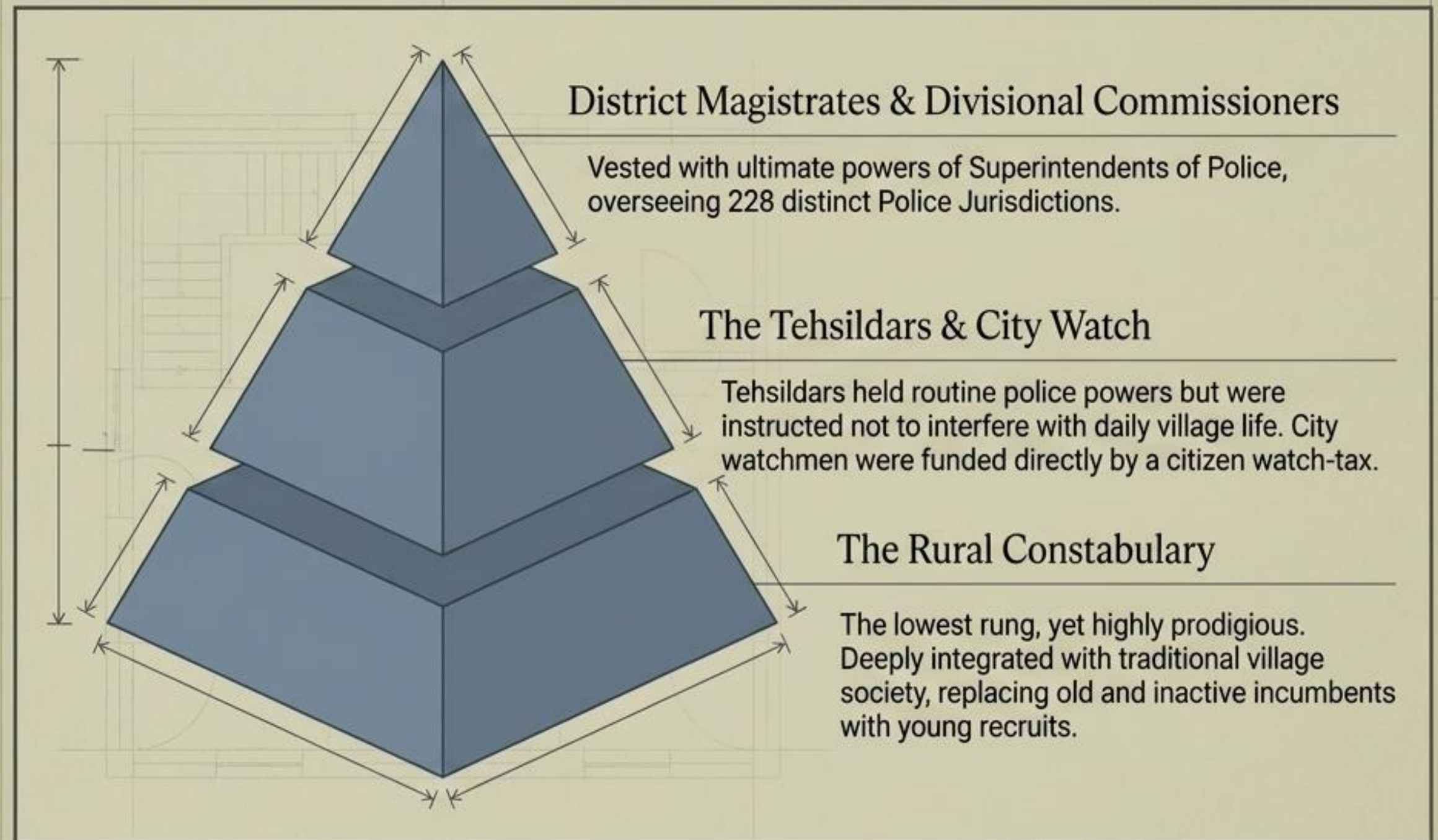
Scale

Grew to **10** total Battalions of foot and horse.

Reputation

Commended by **Sir John Lawrence** for a vigour that challenged any province in India. One battalion even volunteered for the **Crimean War**.

The local dragnet: Organising the Civil Detective Police



Co-opting indigenous intelligence



The Denizens of the Wild

The police heavily employed self-taught professional trackers. Drawn mostly from cowherds grazing cattle in jungles, their acute external senses and tracking aptitude were described as approaching almost to an instinct.



Eradicating Thuggee

Though a newer implant in the Punjab lacking the religious subtlety seen in Central India, **Thuggee** gangs were aggressively pursued. A separate establishment was formed, and by **1853**, the **Branch Thuggee Office** at Ludhiana was permanently abolished.

The Crucible of 1857: Loyalty amidst the Mutiny

ACTION

Civil Police detachments destroyed the disarmed 26th infantry on an island in the Ravi and dispersed mutineers of the 51st.

While rapine and crime ravaged eastern districts, the Punjab Police stood firm during the great crisis.

REWARD

Native Commandants of the first seven battalions were richly rewarded with extraordinary promotions and granted jagirs (land grants) for their conspicuous loyalty.

The Punjab Police was supposed to be a model Police Corps.

The Breaking Point: Why a loyal force had to be dismantled

Judicial Overlap

The conflicting dual functions of a Magistrate and a Superintendent of Police vested in single individuals demanded urgent separation.

Extreme Expenditure

Post-1857 financial stringency demanded immediate reductions; the massive military police levies had become an extraordinary extravagance.

The Dual System

Command Friction

Zero harmony in operations. The military and civil branches reported to entirely separate heads who were not members of the same department.

The 1860 Police Commission: Designing a unified force

Ascertain **exact numbers and cost of all quasi-police** currently paid by general revenues.

Relieve the Military entirely of their internal police duties.

The Calcutta Police Commission
(August 17, 1860).
Constituted of officers of ripe experience under Government of India resolution.

Drastically **reduce heavy administrative expenditure.**

Increase overall efficiency through systemic reform.

The Blueprint for Reform: Core structural propositions

The New Constabulary

Complete Separation

Absolute divorce of the military armed force from the **Civil Constabulary**.

Duties to be exclusively civil.

Executive Centralisation

All police placed firmly under the Civil Executive Government, led by a single **Inspector-General** for each province.

Judicial Severance

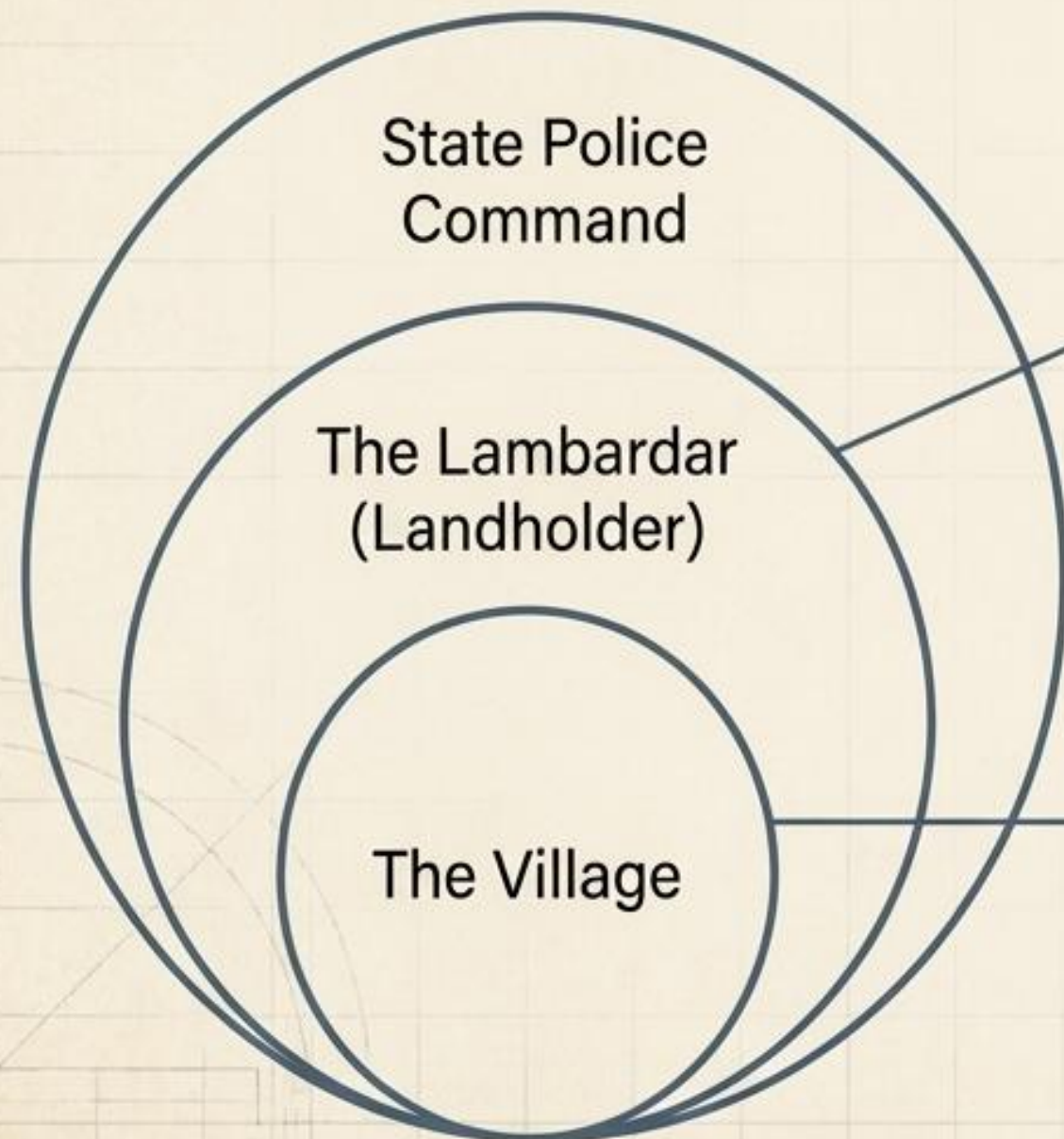
Complete separation of executive police from Judicial authorities—**no police officer** to have judicial functions, and vice versa.

Unified Command

Fusion of all separate quasi-police bodies into one **uniform force**, modelled on the **English and Irish Constabularies**.

Integrating the Village Watch

Rather than discarding traditional village police, the Commission formalised them as a legally recognised municipal institution.



The Landholder's Role

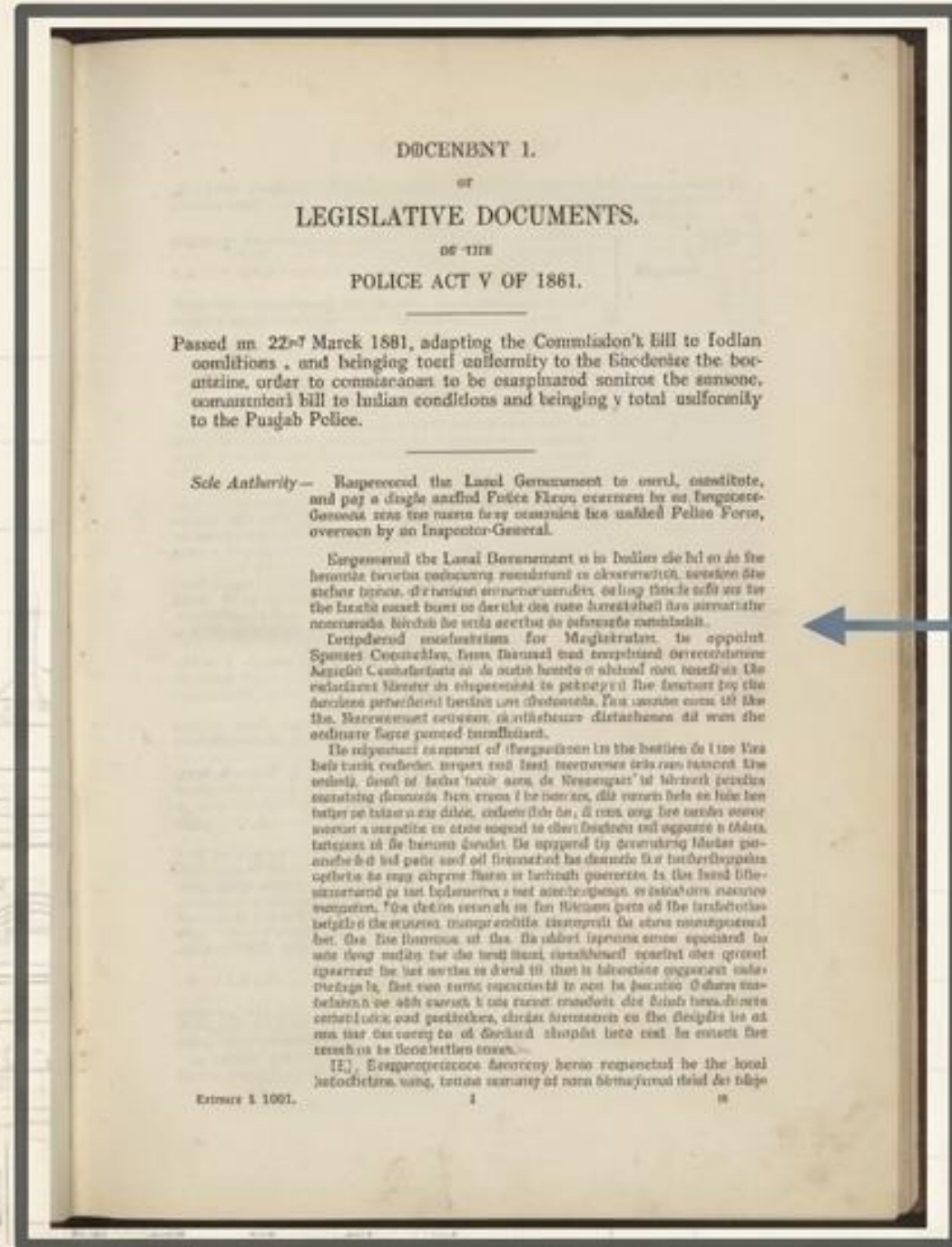
Landholders (Lambardars) were given the power to appoint village police, while the Police Officer retained veto and dismissal powers.

Modernising Compensation

Arbitrary grants of land or grain payments were systematically substituted with reliable, cash monthly payments wherever practicable.

The Milestone: Police Act V of 1861

Passed on **22nd March 1861**, adapting the Commission's bill to Indian conditions and bringing total uniformity to the Punjab Police.



Sole Authority

Empowered the Local Government to enrol, constitute, and pay a single unified Police Force, overseen by an Inspector-General.

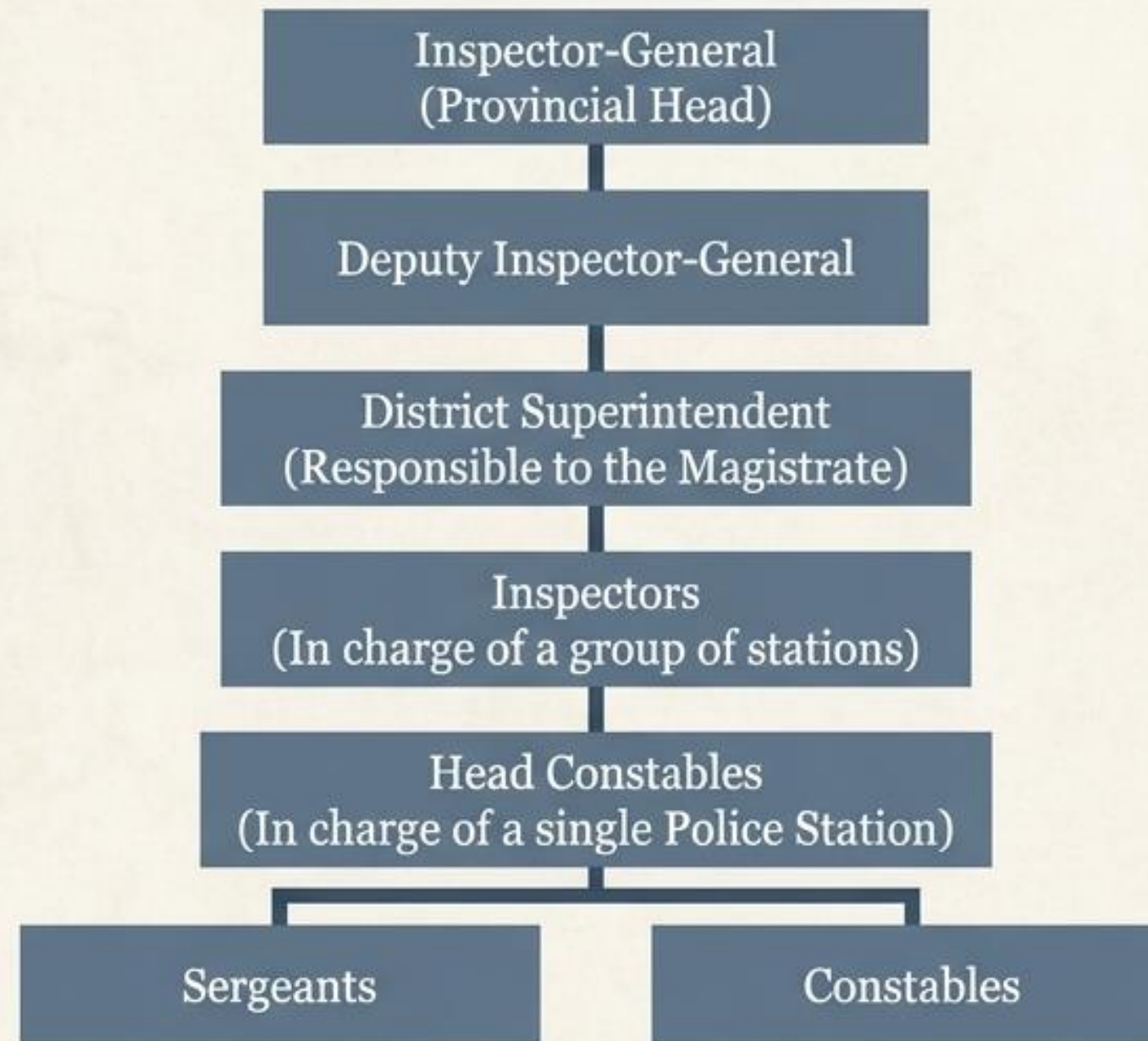
Special Constables

Introduced mechanisms for Magistrates to appoint **Special Constables** from the local populace during disturbances when the ordinary force proved insufficient.

Operational Control

District Superintendents responsible for local jurisdiction, while the IG retained power to frame rules for classification and distribution.

The New Architecture of Order



“Every Police Officer thus appointed receives on his appointment a Certificate under the seal of the Inspector-General.”