How does postcolonial governmentality construct women, and how do women resist such construction and form a sense of counter-governmentality? Studies in women’s presence, participation, and leadership in both colonial and postcolonial contexts are widely narrated, but studies in postcolonial governmentality are very few. In chapter 6, we narrated attempts at counter-governmentality or counter-Islamic governmentality. Counter-governmentality projects formulated by women are characterized by their objectives, goals, and strategies in realizing them. We then examined Taslima Nasrin’s attempt toward self-representation through what I identified a gendered subaltern narrative (Alam, 2002). In the current chapter, we will explore the relationship between women and governmentality—with specific emphasis on torture and pain as a repressive tool of governmentality. We will first genetically analyze the testimony of torture victim Illa Mitra, a Marxist political worker in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The second section will chronicle the 1995 rape and murder of a young woman named Yasmin Akhter, which triggered a revolt.

THE POLICE AND THE (POST)COLONIAL BIOPOLITICS

According to Foucault (1991), one important aspect of governmentality is that it adopts myriad mechanisms through which the government brings the “population” into its folds. In colonial India, of which Bengal was a part, creation of the colonial police was such an exercise in governmentality. Although few systematic studies on colonial police have been made, David Arnold’s (1986) examination of colonial police in Madras is noteworthy. In it, Arnold rejects two versions of explanation for the emergence of colonial police: (1) police were the essential tool in the establishment of “rule and law” and
(2) the police were created to catch “criminals and to protect the lives and property of Indian citizens” (3). We can add yet another hypothesis regarding the “origins” of the police in colonial India. Misra (1959) argues that the police force emerged out of wide-scale administrative reforms initiated by the colonial state. Its creation had been guided by administrative and political considerations (340). With these twin goals in mind, the colonial state introduced the horsa (the police chief) system to safeguard the newly installed landowning class. The zamindars (landowning class) were responsible for “law and order” situations in rural areas and for collecting taxes on behalf of the state (340; Rahman, 1987, 61).

To Arnold (1986, 2), the emergence of the colonial police should not be viewed in terms of what function they were supposed to play but rather as a “metaphor for the colonial regime as a whole.” He asserts that the police were so thoroughly institutionalized that it “passes largely unchanged into Indian hands and has remained of central importance to the political fortunes of Independent India” (2). The political basis on which the colonial police was created remains intact, as it did not vanish with the demise of the colonial state.

While Arnold’s work focuses on colonial Madras, Rahman (1987) and Kamal (2009) concentrate on colonial and postcolonial Bengal. Rahman (1987, 57–65) describes the establishment of the police daroga as “politicó-administrative penetration” in rural society. Kamal (2009), on the other hand, sees the police force as a continuous, repressive force both in colonial and postcolonial contexts. Kamal reproduces the earlier colonialist assertions that the police is the organ for maintaining “law and order” and in that capacity, it has been systematically used to suppress social agitation against the state.

We need a fresh approach to discuss the police in colonial and postcolonial situations. In Security, Territory, Population (2004), Foucault discusses the emergence of the police in Europe. He attempts to understand the police’s function historically. During the sixteenth century, the police were known as a “form of community or association governed by a public authority; a sort of human society when something like political power or public authority is exercised over it” (312). He continues:

Often you find a series of expressions or listings like the following: states, principalities, towns, police (les polices). Or again, you often find the two words, republics and police, associated. A family, or a convent won’t be said to be a police, precisely because they lack the characteristic exercise of a public authority over them. (312–313; italics original)