

Baghi And Bagan : Banditry and Peasantry in Medieval Deccan (1700-1750)



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Peasants are extremely over-burdened with the heavy taxation; the luxury and livelihood of the state and its officials is totally depended on these peasantry class. The state machinery use maximum nuzzle or suppression to get the revenue and the share of state; which was very high and was unbearable for peasants to pay. After facing of all these extremities, the common peasants arose and stand up rebellious and shows their opposition as well as dissent against the concealing nature of state. Banditry might be considered as a part of such protest which is against the state. Banditry can be defined as 'socially constructed category' and an instrument for 'social boundary formation' in which people from society came together as a last resort to support their subsistence¹. In the article 'The Ideology of Banditry' Carlo Giuseppe Rossetti highlighted about the origins of the 'ideology of banditry' in Sardinia, and cited that banditry came from the mechanism of negative reciprocity inbuilt in livestock-rustling. Slowly this group, called themselves as 'bandits' in the adjacent region of Sardinia and further, it also follows the suit of robbing the villages and trading routes in and around². The definition of bandits can also be taken from the archival documents which shows that bandit was all those who refused to abide by the law of the state, went around armed 'in bands' and might had 'the support of the local population' to make sound against state and poverty. In simpler terms, Banditry can be defined as an act of robbery, which especially held this task by a group or with the help of gang or marauding band. Bandits were mainly involved in damage to enclosed property and in rustling of livestock belonging to elite gentry class of the various villages or looting the trade routes.

The powerful rural gentry dominated in South India started capturing and controlling the countryside rural population during the absence of any powerful central authority in medieval Deccan as when Delhi was juggling in war of succession after the death of Aurangzeb. This was because of that reason that these local military mendidn't have secured employment opportunities and didn't get regular salary; which they earlier enjoyed of military serving to their parent ruler and finally turned themselves to bare minimum bandits. Moreover, other than facing serious unemployment situation, these rural gentry class had also going to face

¹ Thomas Moss defined banditry as 'socially constructed category' and an instrument of 'social boundary formation' to highlight the nuances that these social bandits are to be the part of the society and labelled themselves to this jobs due to the toughness of the scenario.

² Carlo Giuseppe Rossetti, *The Ideology of Banditry* pp-24-26

severe famine and droughts in upcoming time, which added more fuel to fire and supported their cause to choose Banditry as occupation.

The aim and objective of the paper is to search how the rural gentry class turned themselves to bandits and further what was the social stratification associated with it. Other than that, I also want to focus on the recruitment process, role of women, and role of common peasantry in terms with banditry. Trade routes, *Sarias*, and ports were the important junction of loots for of these bandits, so I intrigue more of their role and societal implications associated with this looter. In this paper, I also want to limelight the concept of 'social banditry, their role in society, societal support of bandits, robin hood image and their types. Lastly, I mainly tries to conclude with various issues and multiple dimensions of revolts and dissents from which the peasantry class, who tries to show through their protest and regular dissent by joining banditry as last resort. The source materials like *Ain-i-Akbari*, *Muntakhab-ul-Lubub*, folk lore's and narration, travellers accounts and Dutch letters during that time is used as primary source, other than that, this paper also uses a lot of secondary sources which was cited in the end in Bibliography. But during writing the seminar paper I personally fill the unavailability of primary sources and I have to totally rely on the oral narrative accounts, official letters and the imperial document to search in depth about the issue.

The Chapterisation of this seminar is done mainly done on concept as well as theme based, it is as follows:-

Chapter 1;- Social bandits; recruitment of bandits; role of peasantry in banditry; types of banditry etc

Chapter 2;- The themes based on two Bandits and their life; Papadu and Riza Khan

Chapter 3;- Folk narration and Oral history of Banditry in Golconda; Depiction of heroic as well as Cruelty figure. The check of historicity etc.

SOCIAL BANDITS

Social bandits are peasant, who outlaws themselves from the clutches of lords and the state, and regarded them as criminals³. Although, there is much difference between the bandits and the criminals, as criminal might be bandit but bandits might not be criminal. The bands of criminal robbers roaming the countryside which might not be visited by bandits, that's why bandits are differentiated from social bandits both by their composition and their mode of operation⁴. Other than that, these bandits live within the encircled life of peasant society and are considered by their peoples as heroes, as champion, avengers, fighter of justice and perhaps the leader in liberation⁵. The banditry is also integrated into peasant society but they may not be seen in the mainstream of that society and upkeep their hidden counter with unknown identity. Social bandits are not typically political actors of any proportion though they may be one element among others in a rural power-game⁶. Due to availability of resources, these bandits class turned themselves into a nucleus of effective political rebellious group.

The definition of banditry changes with the time and space as cited by Hobsbawn, 'a man may be a social bandit on his native mountains and might became a robber in the plains'. Social banditry is a universal

³E J Hobsbawn, *Bandits*, Pantheon Publications, New York, 1981 pp-14

⁴ Ibid pp-39

⁵ Ibid pp-14

⁶ Ibid pp-18

phenomenon, which embodies a rather primitive form of organized social protest of peasants against the oppressions. There are various types of banditry, like noble banditry (Robin-hood), avengers and the cruel one coming either from the top or the bottom of the society. Bandits are mainly those people who were shackled themselves by the double chains of lordship and labour⁷. Banditry and criminality associated to these people tended to increase at the time of pauperisation, disaster and economic crisis. For example, the *Aheriyatribe* of UP, a hunter tribe, did not take the highway robbery till the great famine in 1833. Youth of village with economic hardship, peasants, landless labourers and ex-military soldiers are the elements of the Pandora of banditry. If we talk about the recruitment we must have to focus on the caste, class and social stratification of the recruits in the profession of banditry, as in *Papadu* case the most of recruits came from lower caste and in *Riza Khan* case most of the recruits is from the unpaid Mughal military. More or less if we see the social stratification of bandits, they are mainly coming from the downtrodden society, especially from tribal background or the personal coming from lower-caste. One thing, is very interesting and peculiar about studying the bandits is that, they are mainly seen in drier atmosphere, where the availability of cropped food is less and the living condition is tough. The role of women seems very less in banditry, the anti-social bandits can supplement their sexual needs and desire by raping the women, they were used only for fulfilling their sexual zeal and not more than that⁸. The women living with bandits did not used to carry firearms or not used to take part in fighting and robbing. But some of the menial as well as entertainment work is allowed for them like cooking, singing and dancing. So, it can be concluded on gender perspective, that women provide all the essentialities to the robbers and marauding gangs but they didn't participate in direct confrontation. But in the cotemporary times, we had lot of examples, like women directly engage in confrontation against the oppression. PhoolanDevi was enduring from cruel poverty and degradation, survived the humiliation and horrifying gang rape to claim retribution for herself and all the low caste women of Indian plains. She was with different persona of robin hood type, she delivered justice to rape victims and was beacon of hope for poor and downtrodden and stand with stiffly against the oppressor⁹.

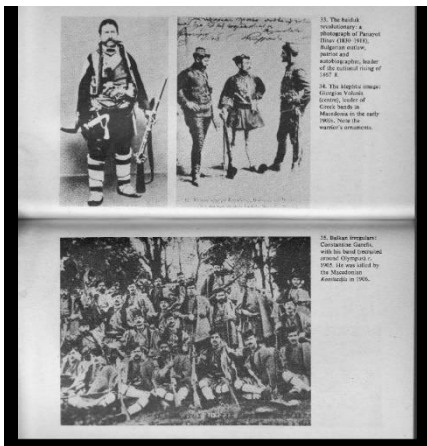
Aton Blok came with the firm criticism of Hobsbawn and countered with the argument that 'social bandits are reformers rather than revolutionaries' as they proved to be asset for those who wants to overthrow the established regime, and they are never acted like bare revolutionary who stood for their rights and demands. According to me, Aton was seeing this Banditry system with the specs of societal tussle between the elites and the commoners. Other than that, the firm criticism of Hobsbawn, in my point of reference is that, his book mainly focuses on the urban gentry bandits not enquired much about the rural and countryside one. Aton Blok argument that, 'Bandits have fulfilled pivotal roles in the demobilization of peasants and they were also the precursor or companion of major social movements¹⁰. Other than that, Aton also said that 'Social banditry cannot be useful sociological concept as the questions of bandits with reference to other groups, classes or network with which bandits form specific configuration of interdependent individuals are not in the same line.

⁷ Ibid pp-31

⁸E J Hobsbawn, *Bandits*, Pantheon Publications, New York, 1981 pp-151

⁹I, PhoolanDevi :*The Autobiography of India's Bandit Queen*

¹⁰Anton, Blok, '*The Peasant and The Brigand: Social Banditry Reconsidered*', Comparative studies in Society and History, vol xiv pp-496



The discussion on banditry may contribute to a more adequate understanding of peasant mobilization and peasant movements¹¹. If we agree on political mobilization as a process through which people seek to acquire more control over the social conditions that shape their lives, it may be argued that bandits do not seem the appropriate agents to transform any organizational capacity among peasants into a politically effective force. Rather than promoting the articulation of peasant interests within a national context, bandits tend to obstruct or to deviate concerted peasant action. Hobsbawm's comparative treatment of banditry over-emphasizes the element of social protest and obscures the significance of the links which bandits maintain with established power holders¹².

The essential element required to support the Banditry is the feudalistic society, as it was mainly seen in the pre-colonial and pre-industrial era. Another peculiar thing, seen in Indian secret network of bandits, as they bound together by shared religious beliefs and practices, and even a secret language. Hobsbawm also describes about the highly institutionalized brigandage in south and south-east Asia who performs magical and ritualistic charm¹³. It was to be done to please their associated local gods, but the real scientific essence behind these charms is the sole unification among the bandits. Wagner in 'Stranglers and bandits: a historical anthology of thuggee' also explained, about the nineteenth-century Indian Thuggee (Thugs), who specialized in ritually strangling and robbing travellers, lived as ordinary peasants in their native areas where they were protected by local rulers with whom they shared the booty¹⁴. Basically, the peasant robbers are not robbing in all seasons, they move with this profession in off-field seasons means other time, when they aren't engaged inpeasantry. On discussing all fronts, it might be concluded that social banditry had large ingredient of peasantry, and they act as real frontiers and Soundkeeper against the unmerciful acts of state.³



THEMES OF SOUTH INDIAN BANDITRY- RIZA KHAN AND PAPADU

Seeing the different types of banditry and their phases in the world, I want to jump myself to the region, where I am interestingly working on different sources. Describing about the Deccan region, it existed southward to the Vindhya range and it stretches up to the river belt of Krishna and Godavari. The feudalistic society and loose central Mughal control on this region, makes this region vulnerable and pioneered the rise of banditry. In my seminar paper I am going to deal about two bandits of Deccan region.

Pic- villagers and peasants as real bandit

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid pp-504

¹³ E J Hobsbawm, *Bandits*, Pantheon Publications, New York, pp-55

¹⁴ K A Wagner, *Stranglers and bandits : a historical anthology of thuggee* pp-04

The Muslim rulers for the sake of controlling the peasant and collection of revenue opened doors for the local countryside gentry class in the administrative machinery. But, due to rise in status, and with no checks and balances, these telgu warrior aristocracy was left armed, with retainers, kinsmen and troops under its local command. Moreover, they also have undistributed local social status, base of hereditary soldiers and local officers with the responsibility of collection of land tax, surplus agricultural produce of the area which supplemented these above factor to make resonance in surfing towards the path of rebellion and direct challenge to the Mughlai throne.¹⁵ The central Mughal kingdom holds remain sceptical in the region as the local commanders become strongest during the last days of Aurangzeb reign. As the power efficacy and credibility of empire declined in the region, on the spiral basis both the Muslim and telgu aristocrats faced an unpredictable future¹⁶. The governor of the region fell free-handed and started plundering their own people, they were mainly trying desperately to seize goods, foods and money in order to feed off the insistent demands of violently mutinous followers. The breakdown of the state power, public order and economic distress turned the normal occupants of peasantry or artisans into various forms of beggary, vagabondage and brigandage¹⁷. Another point for the recruitment was that the unpaid, disbanded soldiers also join their charge to these bandit's chiefs and further the drought and plague in the region also supported the cause for recruitment of peasant into banditry.

Riza Khan- ex Mughal military commander(faujdar) turned bandit leader was one among these cited bandit leaders. In 1700-01 Aurangzeb sent him to Deccan and given him the charge of Ramgir- a town in Deccan. Assembling a large irregular force, he began to seize the imperial revenues and started making their hold in the region by plundering the roadside caravans. There are many sources which have mentioned about the detailed description of Riza khan and his loots, like the traveller's accounts, Dutch accounts and trade records with Machilipatnam. The sphere of capturing and raiding increases with the time and finally, these bandits came up to the sketch of main Hyderabad town. All the trade routes associated with Hyderabad was locked off due to the fear and threat of Riza Khan¹⁸. The recruitments of the soldiers in Riza bands were done from the unpaid Mughal military, who wants to come out from the economic and social disorders¹⁹. The sources which were with concerned to Riza Khan simplified that he extracts money from districts in South and sent tributes to the Mughal king. The tension and popularity of bandits increased with the intensity in their raids. In 1706, Mughal deputy governor of Hyderabad *Rustam Dil Khan* came under the intense pressure from Mughal throne to arrest these bandits' gang. Finally, Mughal governor with a series of strike and tussle against the Riza khan surrendered itself and make softer relations and accepted their booty on seeing the verge of defeat on the hand of these bandit chief.

During the political turmoil in Deccan after the death of the Governor in 1711, the chief Mughal fiscal officer of Hyderabad was reported to be planning to send a punitive force of 2000 to 3000 cavalries against one of the

¹⁵Richards, J. F, and V. Narayana Rao, 'Banditry in Mughal India: Historical and Folk Perceptions' The Indian Economic and Social History Review, vol xvii Pp-492

¹⁶Ibid Pp-493

¹⁷ Ibid pp-504

¹⁸ J F Richards' The Imperial crisis in Deccan' The Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Feb., 1976), pp-241

¹⁹ Ibid pp- 496

leading rebels, with the help of Riza Khan the rover 'who had excoriated the coastal districts of Golconda'²⁰. But eventually, in 1712 the Mughal records confirmed that new governor of the region 'having skilfully called him (Riza khan) before him' seized the bandit leader, and killed him and most of his associates.

Other than that, one another bandit from lower caste²¹ background comes to scenario in the medieval Golconda region, he was primarily known with the name of Papra or Papadu. An analysis of his supporters and opponents reveals much about the alignments of caste, class, and religious community in this part of India around the turn of the eighteenth century²². Starting from a small bandit gang and capturing the wealth of his sister, Papadu started his profited journey of banditry. First of all, getting hold on his birthplace Kilpak, he started his expedition towards highway of Hyderabad. Afterward, Papadu was successful in gathering more adherents and acquired more arms and 'materials for exercising rebellion' but was challenged directly by the imperial officers and finally get umbrellaed under Venkat Rao- a zamindar of Kulas. The truth of robbing episodes with his close associate Chinahanu Vat did came into light and as a course of action, zamindar Venket Rao prisoned both of them with rigorous imprisonment. But here, the story of Papadu doesn't ended, further, he was released by the zamindar after sometime on a religious occasion and after getting out from there, he started making a ground in Bhongir district, for his future expedition.

Papadu and his banditry is known for his heinous act of robbery as he in the meanwhile started lifting the women of rich Muslim and elite Hindus as cited in different historical records of the region²³. Khafi Khan writes that a delegation of merchants and respectable people of all communities and castes went straight to the court of Bahadur shah to demand justice²⁴. The emperor order eradication from Hyderabad's Deputy Governor, who in turn dispatched the faujdar of Kulpak, a town about fifteen miles from Shahpur, to deal with Papadu (see map). But the faujdar, an Afghan named Qasim Khan, was shot and killed by one of Papadu's men in a skirmish near Kulpak²⁵. The fierce battle was on between the royal command and the Papadu, but ultimately Papadu manage his defeat and capture, but lost its fort. After sometime, along with his associates Papadu regain its position and became the sole command in the region. Again, Rustam Dil Khan seeing the atrocities in highway and trading routes marched towards Shahpur, but after having two- or three-month siege and no effect returned back by accepting a large sum of money from Papadu. Means that, Papadu have given always a tough tussle to the royal Mughal army. Although Khafi khan, does not state this in his account, about the political uncertainties surrounding the expected death of the emperor which must have contributed to the Mughal officer's lack of resolution. Thus, it is clear that, in the course of perhaps six to seven years, Papadu had built up the essentials for the survival, a fort, an army, a treasury, a reputation, and all acquired in a time of

²⁰Richards, J. F, and V. Narayana Rao, 'Banditry in Mughal India: Historical and Folk Perceptions' The Indian Economic and Social History Review, vol xvii Pp-498-99

²¹Kafi khan has given in his account about caste description, as he belongs to the caste of toddy seller.

²² R M Eaton, The new Cambridge History of India, 'A social History of Deccan' (1300-1761); *Eight Indian lives pp-156*

²³Richards, J. F, and V. Narayana Rao, 'Banditry in Mughal India: Historical and Folk Perceptions' The Indian Economic and Social History Review, vol xvii pp-506

²⁴Khafi Khan, Muntakhab-ul-Lubab, Bibliotheca Indica, Caclutta, 630-43

²⁵Khafi Khan, Muntakhab-ul-Lubab, Bibliotheca Indica, Caclutta, 630-43

political disorder, might well have ensured that he could have made the transition to a petty chief, who, with possibly a new, fictive genealogy might well have become a telgu zamindar or raja.²⁶



Map 6. Eastern Deccan in the time of Aurangzeb, 1636–1707.

Second episode of Papadu starts with the capturing of Warangal fort, as Warangal fort was a major commercial centre in inland Telengana, famous for its carpet manufacturers. The techniques used by bandits is that they first blocked the road and aftermath one segment of the bandit army carried out a salient escalade of the fort walls using the traditional Deccan technique of throwing, from their saddles, nooses over projections in the fortification to anchor the rope scaling ladders. And finally, they were successful in plundering two of the most sizeable towns of Hyderabad province, now Papadu began to extend his territorial base and acquire more and more elements of a royal style in his favour. Dutch letters sent from Negapatam to Batavia illustrates a report of from

Hyderabad city to the effect that the emperor Bahadur Shah had admitted to an imperial audience '*den rover serwapaper*' who had been marauding in the region for the years. The 'rover' who seems to have been Papra, offered the emperor as tribute one million four hundred thousand rupees, and large amount of other stuffs. In return the emperor presented a ceremonial 'robe of honour' to the bandit. The incident, as yet unconfirmed by other sources, took place in the course of Bahadur Shah's brief stay in Hyderabad after the defeat and killing of his brother Prince Muhammad Bakhsh. If the Dutch account is accurate and it was confirmed Papra, then we should be in better position to understand the indignation of the local Muslim notables, and the moral pressure which they were subsequently able to exert upon the Emperor²⁷. Papadu as like the practice for kings and generals in the Deccan, he summoned a band of itinerant grain merchants and bulk carriers who, driving herds of thousands of pack bullocks, supplied the armies and urban markets of the region with bulk food grains, salt, and raw cotton. But instead of paying their price, Papadu simply imprisoned the merchants and plundered the cash and foodstuffs carried by their bullocks. He put the 10,000 or more pack animals to work, ploughing in the area around his forts. Papadu was in search of lavish marriage ceremonies and if he found it, it resulted in the abduction of the bride by these bandit leaders.

Seeing this, and responding to the growing pressure, Bahadur Shah appointed the Mughal governor to the province named Yusuf Khan. The new governor ordered a force consisting of Afghan troops under the command of Dilawar Khan, and from here the setback story of Papadu started. On using conspiracy, the Mughal agent started capturing the main hold of these bandit town forts and stenting back to Papadu to its last

²⁶ Richards, J. F., and V. Narayana Rao, 'Banditry in Mughal India: Historical and Folk Perceptions' *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol xvii Pp-501

²⁷ KA 1670 (7.5.1709) fol. 41

hold. Finally, Papadu was captured and cut into pieces, the head was to be sent to Mughal emperor in Delhi, and the remainder of the corpse to be displayed on the walls of Hyderabad city. However, the Mughal news report of this event, not exploiting the dramatic ironies of Papadu's end, merely records says only the taking of Tarikonda fort, and said about the casualties occurred on both side as well as capture of the notorious brigand²⁸

FINDING HISTORY- FOLK NARRATION

The main primary source material for banditry seemsto be Folk narration and oral records. The story of Papadu was available in two versions- both oral and written versions of oral records. Other than that, the Boyle version of oral history states the heard story from person to person from Boya caste from Bellary district about Papadu. The text of the song given by Boyle, as indicated by the excerpts he quotes, considerably differs from the song as it is sung today. But the theme does not seem different. This is precisely the way oral traditions operates; with a fixed theme, a fixed metre, but not necessarily a fixed text.²⁹ According to one of the folk narrations, there was a story regarding Papadu that, when he was twelve, Papadu went to his mother dressed like a soldier, with sword and spear in his hand. He asked her to direct him to do things suitable to his ability. She replied that you are too young to achieve anything and asked him instead to take the cows out for grazing. He called his friend and his associates whose number is also twelve to this work. Another incident of the story tells that, the twelve hooded cobra and recognized his noble features, which indicated that he would become a king in near future. Furthermore, the cobra decided to provide shade for him against the sun for seven hours. If we talk about the narration of folk stories of Papadu the number 12 and 7 is most common and it further does not fit in the taste of historicity, because all his story rotates in and around the number 12, like 12-year-old age, 12000 forces and 7 hours etc. Further, the story of this bandit shows the number in association with royalty and destiny in some way³⁰. So, this fact has to be checked with the tools of research and methodology and have used with causation while interpreting in history.

Now, lastly the oral tradition was carved into making Papadu the heroic figure by the existing modern folk writer like Rajmannar³¹, and tries to depict the bandit figure of Papadu as an indigenous voice and the struggle of low-class people and commoners towards the state. Like one of the stories, of Papadu when meeting to Jidanna saw him too strong that he was poisoned but didn't get affected from it. He was depicted in the story as a man who commands and his commands was followed by everyone, people, animal, trees and god and someone who did not obey his command should be punished. In folk stories destiny plays the supreme role in development of hero. His birth, or the beginning of his heroic activities is related to the higher manifestation of his activities and in same way his death also becomes an act of destiny. So, finally a bandit through the legendry song depicted as ideal men, ideal husband, ideal friend and ideal hero³².

²⁸Richards, J. F, and V. Narayana Rao, 'Banditry in Mughal India: Historical and Folk Perceptions' The Indian Economic and Social History Review, vol xvii Pp-505

²⁹ J A Boyle, 'Telgu ballad poetry', Indian Antiquary, vol-III, 1874, pp-1-6

³⁰ John W S, 'The Number Twelve in Ancient India' Journal of Asian Studies, XXII-I, 1962,

³¹Richards, J. F, and V. Narayana Rao, 'Banditry in Mughal India: Historical and Folk Perceptions' The Indian Economic and Social History Review, vol xvii pp-517

³² Ibid pp-518

Other than that, the cruelty depiction of Papadu is also seen through the story as he asked mother for money and she denies, and then he became frustrated and angry. He ordered his friends to get some oil and boil it hot. He then poured this hot oil on her mother's body, unless and until she reveals all his secret places, where she had hidden money. In Alf Heiltebeitel, we also come through the different acts of Papadu against women like lifting them during the loot season³³. The folk legend sung in telgu verse seems in its mythical and fantastic episodes about Papadu. Papadu in the Persian text, is described as of 'base lineage, from caste (Quam) of toddy sellers; without respectability'. While, intelguBallard he is depicted and described as a member of *gavandla* caste of toddy sellers. Other travellers accounts like Taviernier, Bernier and Munday throws very little or minuscule information about theses specified bandits, but overall, they had mentioned about the region in greater detail and also confirmed the fact of presence of bandit and road-side looters in the Telengana region. The death story of Papadu was also get transformed into the legend, following the established pattern. He does not die at anyone's hand. No poison kills him. No warrior kills him. The incident caused by the 12-year-old son of JinkalaVenkanna, which was predicted by the brahmins, alone leads to his death. Even that mishap only serves as an indication that his preordained task in this world has come to an end. Papadu kills himself, dramatizing the fact that there is no one equal to him on this earth. In the book of textures of time; Writing South Indian History, also writer tries to depict through different *kathas* and stories about the acts and heroic depiction of Papadu. He was seen as a up healer of justice through the perspective of lower caste in the telgu ballad narration. And his death was also depicted in much royal senses in his different *kathas*.

In conclusion, to the banditry theme, I mainly focus on the cause of banditry, it might be agrarian distress, drought, flood, disasters, poverty and the unemployment of the peasantry class. The basic reason for joining the banditry or acts of robbery was that people didn't get the basic level required goods for subsistence from medieval to contemporary modern times. Banditry also acts a regular voice or dissent of people used against the state and society, if they are suffered and savaged by the government in power. I want to end this seminar by quoting reference of PhoolanDevi, who became bandit at the last resort, when she was entrenched by both the government and society in single go.

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³³Alf Hildebeitel, *The Cult of Draupadi Mythologies: From Gingee to Kuruksetra*, Motilal Banarasidas Publishers, Delhi pp-122-145

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