

Chapter 6 - New Temples for Old

The six-year-old girl sat on her father's shoulder eating a guava and enjoying her self. She was thrilled at the great activity going on around her. Normally she used to go to the weekly market at Dhamtari town in Raipur district of Chhattisgarh from their home in village Dargahan in this way. Her exclusive mode of transport ensured that she could drink in the sights, occasionally dip into the pocket of her frock to extract delectable titbits stored in it, talk to her father all the while and yet remain fresh to explore the fascinating enticements of the market on arriving there. This time, however, it was not they alone but the whole village that was on the move. Bullock carts laden with all their household goods were creaking out escorted by the villagers. A fleet of jeeps and trucks carrying officials and police had come a week back and an official had announced that the time had come for them to vacate their homes and fields as the gates of the newly built Gangrel dam on the Mahanadi river downstream were to be closed soon. The vehicles and the officials went back but the police stayed on in camps to ensure compliance.

The little girl Subhadra was the only one who was in the best of spirits as the adults and older children were all weighed down by the sadness of having to leave their hearths and homes under duress in exchange for a paltry monetary compensation. Subhadra's family was slightly lucky in that they had land in a nearby village to which they could go. Her father Devnath in fact had been working as a "hali" or bonded labourer in Dargahan. His own small plot of land was in Jepra village, which was outside the submergence area. They were Mahars, the same caste as Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar the great leader of the dalits. The British had brought their forefathers here from Maharashtra. As mentioned earlier the British consistently transported people into the central Indian jungles from the nearest plains areas to increase the land under settled agriculture and buttress their earnings from land revenue. Like in the case of the Bhils in Western India the Gond adivasis of these heavily forested areas of what is now Chhattisgarh state, were averse to settled cultivation and like them vehemently opposed this intrusion and there were many fierce battles leading to their massacre. The most ferocious and well-organised struggle was that of the Gonds of Bastar under the leadership of Gundadthur called the Bhoomkal rebellion of 1910 (Shukla, 1985). This was a systematically organised uprising in which much pre-planning was done to cut communications by wire and road and the British were surrounded and forced to the point of surrender. However, they survived by treachery on the part of some of the Gonds and later the rebellion was ruthlessly put down. The British had earlier instituted a land revenue system in which malguzars, the Chhattisgarhi equivalent of the zamindars, acted as agents who had to pay a fixed tax to the British with freedom to collect as much as they wished from the tenants under them (Grant, 1870). This system was gradually extended to the Bastar region also.

The burden of this tax had become so much that it had become impossible for Subhadra's grandfather to pay it only from the cultivation of his small piece of land and increasing debts had made him put his younger son Devnath to work as a bonded labourer with his brother-in law who was a malguzar. After his father died leaving him still very young he continued as a bonded labourer and had to leave his share of the farmland fallow. Subhadra once heard from him a very interesting story of how her father had to go on foot to the palace of the Raja of Dhamtari to deposit the tax collected by his uncle. In those days there were no currency notes and only silver coins called kaldars. Devnath would carry on his head a big cloth bundle in which the kaldars would be bound up and he would be accompanied by guards armed with canes and guns. There would be a Daroga at

the palace to check that the full amount of the tax was being paid. He would toss up each kaldar and then listen carefully while it fell on the stone floor. A genuine kaldar would have a sweet metallic ring while counterfeit ones would sound flat. The Daroga always rejected a few kaldars even though they were all good ones and so extra kaldars had to be taken along to compensate for this. Devnath would faithfully bring back the rejected kaldars and deposit them with his uncle.

The land tax and the malguzari system were abolished after independence but Devnath had to continue to work as a bonded labourer to repay the earlier debts incurred. On the side he would also weave cloth on a handloom for the merchants in Dhamtari to augment his meagre income. Even though Devnath was not literate he had the foresight to see that education was the lifeline for his children to escape from the morass of poverty in which they were stuck. He took advantage of the expanding state subsidised education system after independence to send his children to school. His eldest son, however, ran away from school at a young age to work as a labourer and on coming of age married and went off to pursue a living with his in-laws instead. But the next son did pursue his studies upto high school and had a government job as a forest guard at the time of the displacement from Dargahan in 1973. Devnath afraid of frittering away the compensation amount of Rupees Three thousand that he received for his house in Dargahan decided to use the money to marry off this son who he thought would then take care of the rest of the family. This investment decision bombed as the urban daughter-in-law he chose forced his son immediately after marriage to remain immersed in their own family preventing him from lending a helping hand to his father who was in such dire straits.

Devnath and his family had then to toil on the land in Jepra to make ends meet. He still had a son and two daughters who were going to school. So he and his wife began work on their farm, which had lain fallow for years together, to make it suitable for cultivation. The cultivation of rice, which is the main crop in Chhattisgarh, requires a large amount of water. To ensure ponding of water in the fields the plots have to be dug out and the earth heaped on the boundaries to form water-retaining enclosures. Long years of disuse had flattened all the plot boundaries on the Khaperde farm. This meant that immense labour would have to be put in to rebuild these boundaries. The Khaperdes did not have any money so no hired labour could be employed. Thus began a gruelling time when even the children had to go and work in the field after coming back from school. Subhadra soon forgot her happy sojourns to Dhamtari on market day as the real import of the march out of Dargahan became clear to her and she too began doing her mite in the field at that tender age.

This desolation was visible in the whole region as not only the Khaperdes but also most other oustee families were suddenly faced with livelihood crises that spelt the doom of the rural wonder that was Chhattisgarh. Traditionally this region, even more than the rest of India, used to thrive in its villages. Even today the first thing that is bound to strike the eye of an outside visitor to a village in Chhattisgarh is the large number of tanks that dot the landscape. Sometimes numbering upto as many as a hundred and forty-seven, as in the village of Bastar which was the seat of the principedom of the same name, these tanks used to form the lynchpin of a socio-economic system that was amazingly sustainable in both economical and ecological terms. These tanks fulfilled the varied needs for water of the village ranging from drinking and washing to irrigation. The main purpose of course was the protective irrigation of the staple paddy crop of which more than seventeen

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thousand varieties used to be grown resulting in Chhattisgarh being referred to as a "Dhan Ka Katora" or a bowl of rice (Verma, 2002).

These tanks and the agricultural system based on them were maintained through an elaborate communitarian culture. The celebration of the Agti festival in April every year used to mark the community expression of this sound ecological sense distilled from centuries of interaction with Mother Nature. With the start of the festival the whole village would turn out regularly every day till all the tanks were cleaned up and deepened. Yet another ritual of the festival was the exchange of seeds. All the farmers would pool their seeds in a common place. Then seeds of different varieties would be exchanged. Farmers from other villages too could come and exchange seeds. This exchange of seeds supplemented the continuous practice of selection and conservation carried out in the field. In this way a large genetic diversity was maintained and some part of the harvest would always survive come flood or drought. This community awareness and activity owed its existence to the unique medieval political history of Chhattisgarh.

Historically Chhattisgarh, "Chatar Raj" as it is popularly called, was the region of the upper Mahanadi river valley. It was ruled continuously for about eight centuries from roughly 1000 A.D. to 1757 A.D., when the Marathas overran it, by a single dynasty - the Haihays, ruling from Ratanpur. The Haihays organised their rule around thirty six garhs or forts and hence the name of the region as chhattis in Hindi means thirty six. Each garh was the centre of administration for a chourasi or unit of eighty-four villages. These chourasis in turn were made up of seven barwahs or units of twelve villages. Each village had as its head a gountiya who was responsible for revenue collection and general administration. The gountiya's powers, however, were not absolute being circumscribed by the decisions of the gram panchayat or village council (Shukla, 1988).

The Haihays were themselves not the conquering type of rulers and were not threatened by conquest by others and so military expenses were minimal. They were also not extravagant builders of palaces, monuments and temples like the Rajputs and Mughals. Consequently revenue extracted from farmers was comparatively low. Thus despite being the lowest rung of a feudal system the village panchayats had considerable autonomy and could even regulate the trade within their jurisdiction. This naturally gave the farmers a lot of incentives to develop a prosperous farming system. The long period of peaceful rule devoid of any wars led to the development of a fairly egalitarian system that was at the same time productive and ecologically sustainable. The demise of this system and the gradual eclipse of rural Chhattisgarh began with the downfall of the Haihays.

The Marathas sounded the first discordant note by substantially hiking the taxes. They ruled from Nagpur in the nearby Vidarbha region and so took away all the revenue without spending anything on the region apart from the bare minimum necessary for administration. The British colonialists conquered this region by defeating the Marathas in the first quarter of the nineteenth century and promptly began implementing their oppressive system of land revenue maximisation that has been described earlier. The Malguzari system of land revenue collection introduced by them effectively circumscribed the independence of the small farmer and also struck at the roots of the vibrant community partnership of the earlier era. Most of these Malguzars were non-cultivating upper castes brought in from north and central India who had no interest in the development of sustainable farming practices whatsoever. They were concerned only with the collection of revenue as also were their masters, the British. Moreover a new trade route was opened up to link the region with the imperial capital in Calcutta and so hasten the exploitation of the

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rich natural resources of the region. In the new dispensation traders and moneylenders prospered at the expense of farmers. So much so that the traders of Raipur the capital city financially supported the British in their fight to suppress the first war of Indian independence in 1857 while the malguzar class provided it with moral and logistical support (Ghosh, 1985).

Independence in 1947 only aggravated the condition of the poor farmers. The formal abolition of the malguzari system was not accompanied by any far-reaching land reforms on the ground. The former malguzars, the most prominent among these became the new rulers, used a variety of stratagems to retain control of most of the land. In the nineteen sixties the green revolution was set rolling with the introduction of high-yielding varieties of rice and heavily irrigated, chemical fertilizer and pesticide based farming. A number of large and medium sized dams were built to improve irrigation facilities to meet the higher demand for water. Within a few years a primarily self-sustaining agricultural system was changed into one producing for the national and international markets with external inputs. Traders and rice millers reaped the benefits. The most infamous being the Jain brothers who made their millions initially by exporting rice but who later diversified into smuggling of foreign exchange and laundering of black money. They were subsequently implicated in a criminal case for having laundered black money for most of the important leaders of the major political parties in the country in a big scandal that shook the political firmament in the nineteen nineties, which like most such cases eventually came to nought for lack of sufficient evidence (Mahalingam, 1998)

Similar to the situation in the rest of India and especially in the state of Punjab (Shiva, 1991), the green revolution in Chhattisgarh too has only served to impoverish the small farmer in the long run and today with decreasing yields, proneness to pest attacks and increasing costs of inputs like chemical fertilizers, electricity and pesticides, it has become an albatross around his neck leading to a virtual epidemic of suicides by farmers laden with debt. A maverick agricultural scientist Dr R.H.Riccharia referred to his own field research to point out that there were indigenous rice varieties in Chhattisgarh, which were far higher yielding and pest resistant than the foreign hybrids that were being introduced (Richharia & Govindaswamy, 1990). However, his voice was a lonely and poor one, which got easily drowned out in the cacophony and heavy international funding in support of the green revolution. The introduction of the profit motive among farmers and the monetisation of the rural economy has been a blow to the community spirit and the traditional consensus based gram panchayats have lost their cohesiveness. The practices of voluntary labour to maintain the village tanks and the exchange of indigenous seeds during the Agti festival have gradually withered away leading to a decay of the tanks and a serious erosion of genetic diversity.

Nothing is more symbolic of this all round decay than the neglected condition of the once thriving village tanks which used to be the mainstay of the rural economy in yesteryears. Many tanks have dried up. The few that remain have as a result been subjected to heavier pressure than is healthy for them. Often humans and animals bathe in the same tank. Pesticide and fertilizer residues as well as human and animal wastes make their way into the tanks. Most deplorable, however, is the decrease in the protective irrigation potential of the tanks, which has meant that in years of less than normal rainfall, crops fail and drought results. One elder told me with a twinkle in his eye that in their childhood and youth they would go in teams during the summer from one tank to another cleaning them of their silt while singing songs all the time. It used to be a festival

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atmosphere that they looked forward to. He lamented that these days the younger ones had become lazy and spent their time playing cricket in the dried up tanks instead - "aaj kal ke korhiya laika man sukkha tariya me kirket khelthe"!

Industrial development only added to the woes of the bucolic Chhattisgarhis. It all started with the setting up of the Bhilai Steel Plant by the government in the nineteen fifties (Srinivasan, 1984). This was soon followed by various other projects like aluminium extraction plants, thermal power stations, cement plants and the mining on a massive scale of iron ore, bauxite, coal and limestone to provide the raw materials. All this involved displacement of rural people without commensurate increase in employment for them. These industrial plants and mines required for their operation and management relatively high skilled people who had to be brought in from outside and the local Chhattisgarhis, especially the adivasis, mostly got low paid casual employment or were left out totally from this process. Apart from these basic industries there was little downstream industrialisation to utilise their products. Instead the steel, aluminium, coal, cement and power were exported to Bhopal, Indore, Kolkata and Mumbai for further processing. The iron-ore mined from Bailadila in south Bastar is not even made into steel but is shipped raw to Japan without processing. A stunted industrial growth took place without any significant forward and backward linkages within the region that could create employment opportunities for a large number of people.

Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was a great proponent of planned industrial development. While inaugurating the first chemical fertilizer plant of the country in 1954 in Sindri in Bihar he had hailed it as being a temple of modern India and had gone on to say that India needed many more such temples (Nehru, 1958). The first and most important such modern temple in Chhattisgarh was the Bhilai Steel Plant. To meet the huge water requirements of this plant and its colony, which after some time could not be met from local sources in Durg district anymore, another temple had to be built - the Gangrel dam on the river Mahanadi in Raipur district. India has a long history of religions competing with each other to build places of worship and often the rulers have taken part in this activity with gusto producing some of the most breathtaking architecture of the world with the surplus extracted from the toiling poor. There are many instances also of the kings of one religion destroying the existing places of worship of another religion and building their own temples, mosques or churches on them. The modern temple building of Nehru too has followed this timeworn retrograde tradition. Throughout India for a period of four decades after independence, till this iniquitous practice was challenged and brought into question in a substantive manner for the first time by the NBA, rural communities, their lands and their temples were laid waste at the altars of modern development with little or no compensation and no worthwhile planned rehabilitation and resettlement (Fernandes & Paranjpye, 1997).

It may be mentioned as a relevant aside here that Nehru is also responsible for condoning a different kind of religious monument bashing which too has had deleterious consequences on the Indian polity. He set in motion a process that eventually led to the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh by the Hindu fundamentalist organisations under the umbrella of the Sangh Parivar in 1992. When some Hindus installed a set of idols of Rama, Lakshman and Sita in the mosque on the night of December 22nd in 1949 despite the presence of a police picket there, the District Magistrate of Faizabad instead of removing these idols just sealed the doors of the mosque which till then had been under the control of the Muslims. The then Chief Minister of

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Uttar Pradesh Govind Ballabh Pant and Nehru blew hot over this outrage in public but did not take the necessary executive decision to remove the idols and restore the status quo. Thus a new turn was given to the legal dispute that had been going on between the Muslims and the Hindus since the late nineteenth century regarding the possession of the site with the Hindus alleging that the Mughal emperor Babur had destroyed an earlier temple situated there and built this mosque (Tripathi, 1990). The mosque remained sealed till in 1986 the then Prime Minister, Nehru's grandson, Rajeev Gandhi ordered the gates to be opened so that the Hindus could go and offer prayers to the idols. Later things came to a climax in 1992 when with the Sangh Parivar hordes on the verge of demolishing the mosque another Congress party Prime Minister Narsimha Rao looked the other way and it was razed to the ground. This last event and its consequences have over the past decade and a half or so rent the socio-political fabric of the nation asunder with repeated Hindu-Muslim riots of a virulent kind, the most gruesome being the Gujarat riots of 2002 (Communalism Combat, 2002). Thus, whether in building destructive modern temples with much fanfare or in surreptitiously providing a convenient symbolic peg in Ayodhya on which the baggage of Hindu fundamentalism could be hung, Nehru's legacy conceals a thorny stem below the rose bud that he used to stick in his coat buttonhole to enamour all and sundry.

The submergence zone of the Gangrel dam had been a highly productive and self-sustaining agricultural region centered round the weekly market village of Chavar. The people of the region got the fascinating and addictive taste of the modern market economy for the first time when the construction of the dam started. The people were initially very happy because they could sell their rice to the labourers and officers of the construction company at higher prices than obtainable in the local market at Chavar or even in Dhamtari. They could also buy the newer consumer products that became available on the demand of the urban officers and staff of the construction company. Thus money began to play a much more important role than before and people were very happy oblivious of the fact that one day they would lose all their land. When the end came most people were devastated as they spent the little monetary compensation they got in consumption of various things, primarily liquor and lost their sources of livelihood. There was a temple in Chavar to the local Goddess Angar Moti, which means literally the ember pearl. The Goddess was believed to be very powerful and able to fulfill the wishes of her devotees. People used to come from far and wide to worship her and ask her for boons. Nevertheless this rural Goddess lost out to the new God of modern development and her temple was sacrificed along with her devotees at the altar of this new God. Old Hindu superstition dictated that unless some human sacrifice was made to the God when a new temple was built it could not become functional. Nehru had no compunction in demanding and getting similar sacrifices from thousands of people for his own temple building spree.

The rural people in Chhattisgarh have found a way out of the havoc caused by lopsided and destructive development by either resorting to making bidis, which are handmade cigarettes, or migrating to other states in search of employment. So far and wide do they go in search of employment that some Chhattisgarhi labourers had the misfortune of being killed by armed separatists in the northern insurgency prone state of Kashmir in 1999. Bidis are made by rolling tobacco inside leaves of the tendu tree and tying them with string. This is a widespread cottage industry carried out through a system of putting out whereby makers, mostly women, are supplied with the tendu leaves, tobacco and string by contractors and get paid by piece rate for the bidis they make. The tendu

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leaves are also collected during the summer season by the rural poor on a piece rate basis. The bidi makers are totally at the mercy of the agents who act as middlemen on behalf of the bidi factory and supply the raw materials to them, collect the finished bidis and make the payment. Despite this the reality is that after all this exploitation the money earned from making bidis is much higher than the daily wages that can be earned as agricultural labourers (Rahul, 1999b).

Normally exchanging old things and getting new ones is a profitable exercise leading to greater productivity and happiness but such has not been so in the new temples for old deal brokered by Nehru in the case of poor rural Chhattisgarhis. The general run of Chhattisgarhis and especially the adivasis have suffered displacement and loss of livelihoods on a gargantuan scale. Naturally people have not readily swallowed Nehru's exhortation to "suffer in the interest of the country" (Nehru, op cit). There have been innumerable clashes between the people and the state over the ill effects of this perverse temple building, in which both the industrial workers and the peasant masses have been ruthlessly crushed. Bastar itself has witnessed a large number of such atrocities, the most gruesome being the murder of the king of Bastar, Pravir Chandra Bhanjdeo, and his adivasi supporters in his palace in Jagdalpur by the police in 1966 in one of the worst cases of callous extra-judicial mass killing of adivasis by the independent Indian state.

The adivasis of Bastar had been having a raw time ever since the suppression of the Bhoomkal rebellion earlier in 1910 and this increased with the vastly greater influx of non-adivasis into the region for various developmental activities. This influx took place mainly due to the resettlement of Bengali refugees from the erstwhile East Pakistan after independence and the initiation of the iron-ore mining project in Bailadila. The king of Bastar was an eccentric person who was opposed to the new order that came into force after independence in which the princes were deprived of their earlier powers and began exhorting the adivasis to disobey the new government. He would hold a daily durbar or audience in his palace and distribute currency notes of various denominations to the adivasis who gathered there. Apart from this he used his considerable influence as the head priest of the Danteshwari temple whose Goddess Kali had a big hold over the adivasi population to propitiate the Goddess in their favour in times of agricultural crises through "yagnas" or fire sacrifices. He became extremely popular as a result. Naturally this brought him into disfavour with the leaders of the new government and their colonial minded bureaucrats who wanted to establish their own legitimacy in the minds of the adivasis (Sundar, 1999).

The Madhya Pradesh Government deprived him of his estate in 1953 for his anti-government activities with the excuse that he would whittle it away through debauchery and charity. This prompted Bhanjdeo to increase his efforts at channelising the discontent of the adivasis against the state through the formation of a mass organisation in 1955 - Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor Sangh. Initially the Congress party made a compromise and decided to support him and his supporters for election as MLAs in 1957 and they won overwhelmingly. However, since even after this his estate was not restored to him he resigned and continued with his organisation of the adivasis against the state now under the name Adivasi Seva Dal. Disregarding warnings from the government he set up a parallel administration right down to the village level which campaigned against the economic and political power of the non-adivasi people who had come from outside and dominated the Congress party, the higher echelons of the bureaucracy and trade and commerce. The year 1960 saw an increase in activities of the Adivasi Seva Dal in the form

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of forcible take over of the land of non-advasis and also of government land. In a bid to strike some fear into the advasis the government brought in reinforcements of special armed police and threatened Bhanjdeo with de-recognition as ex-ruler and so also the loss of the Privy Purse that he was being given annually by the state for having acceded to the Indian Union at the time of independence. This only aggravated the situation and Bhanjdeo went to meet the Home Minister in Delhi and warn him that state violence against them and his de-recognition would leave the advasis of Bastar in turn with no alternative but to de-recognise the Madhya Pradesh Government.

The King was arrested on the way while returning to Bastar from this meeting in February 1961 under preventive detention provisions and sent to jail. Immediately the Advasi Seva Dal launched an agitation for his release and began chasing traders away from the weekly markets leading to confrontation with the police. On March 31st 1961 there was a major confrontation in the market village of Lohandiguda in which thirteen people were killed in unwarranted police firing and scores of others arrested and indicted for charges of armed rioting and attempt to murder. The Additional Sessions Judge of Jagdalpur later dismissed the case against those arrested concluding that there was no cause for the wanton firing resorted to by the police. Even though the state went on appealing perversely against it the High and Supreme Courts too upheld the lower court's decision thus putting their seal on the culpability of the administration. The Lohandiguda incident was to set the ball rolling for the final tragic act of rebellion of the advasis of Bastar in the nineteen sixties before they began to mobilise again two decades later under the leadership of the Naxalites.

Bhanjdeo was released from jail in April in 1961 and was given a rousing reception on his arrival in Jagdalpur. Thereafter he became even more strident in his demand for justice for the advasis, especially for action to be taken against the officials responsible for the Lohandiguda massacre. In the 1962 general elections six members of his organisation were elected as MLAs and one as the only MP from Bastar completely routing the Congress party. This was the time when the whole country was going through a food crisis due to successive failure of monsoons and in Bastar too the price of rice the staple had begun to increase. Thus the advasis led by Bhanjdeo began agitating for provision of rice at subsidised prices in sufficient quantity and this intensified as the situation deteriorated from year to year. The Central Government at that time had to import grains to tide over the crisis, which had assumed nationwide proportions. However, since the distribution of these food grains was a time consuming process and a backward and huge state like Madhya Pradesh faced severe logistical problems in early 1966 the state government imposed a levy of rice on the cultivators with the intention of trying to procure as much as possible at the local level within the districts and obviate the need for allotments from the Central Government, which were hard to come by.

This was rightly felt to be unjust by the advasis of Bastar who were anyway in a deficit situation. A massive movement started for the repeal of this levy and Bhanjdeo himself launched into a prolonged fast in February 1966. In the villages and markets people refused to give the levy and fought with the police to prevent this procurement. A remarkable fact about this struggle was the tremendous participation of women in the mass actions to prevent the procurement of the levy. There were innumerable rallies and demonstrations throughout the district against this unfair order. The government instead of bowing to the legitimate demands of the people brought in additional police forces with the intent of crushing the agitation and so set up the scene for the tragic end to a militant

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mass movement of the adivasis of Bastar. On March 25th 1966 a massive rally was planned in Jagdalpur and the people began collecting on the palace grounds armed with bows and arrows disregarding the prohibitory orders against public assembly that had been clamped by the administration. The inevitable skirmish, given the tinderbox situation, started between the adivasis and the police in the afternoon and as had happened before in the Lohandiguda incident it ended with the massacre of twelve people including the king in police firing.

The devastation of nature and the decimation of populations living in harmony with it has been a singular feature of modern industrial development and was kicked off after the Europeans began subordinating the peoples of the other four continents to facilitate their own industrial development through colonial plunder. This retrograde process of unsustainable exploitation of natural and human resources began with the setting foot of Christopher Columbus in the Bahamas in the West Indies in 1492 and so can be termed to have been set in motion with the "Columbian Encounter" (Turner & Butzer, 1992). Indeed this tradeoff between nature and the working masses on one side and industrial development on the other is so basic a feature of centralised modern industrial development that it takes place regardless of whether this is occurring in a capitalist economy or a socialist one. The horrifying Gulag Archipelago of labour concentration camps (Solzhenitsyn, 2002) and pollution of rivers and lakes in the Soviet Union was necessitated by the need for it to catch up in modern development with the Americans. The latter had themselves created a few lesser Gulags of their own at about the same time to turn their country into an industrial power as so poignantly portrayed by Steinbeck in his great novel "The Grapes of Wrath" (Steinbeck, 1969). The wholesale rape of Latin America, that still continues, of course provided the main resources for American industrial development (Castro, 1999). The British refined this process into an art in India and according to an estimate the contribution of the Indian tribute to the British gross domestic capital formation was between twenty-five to thirty-three percent in the crucial four decades from 1765 to 1804 when the industrial revolution was getting off the blocks in England (Patnaik, 1986). Nehru and his brigade of technologists and administrators carried on from where the British left off and kicked off a process of internal colonialism to finance lopsided modern development.

Nehru in his midnight speech on the occasion of independence had pompously announced - "Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny and the time now comes to redeem that pledge..... the task should not be considered to be finished till each and every Indian does not breathe the air of freedom, till his misery has not ended and all sufferings done away with" (Nehru, op cit). But like many other promises he failed to keep, this one too was trashed soon in the frenzy of his temple building, which required that the masses be pushed even deeper in poverty than they already were. So the many millions of people who have been displaced and continue to be booted out of their habitats without so much as a by your leave, were doomed from the start because that was their tryst with destiny as they were too illiterate to read even the large print not to talk of the devious fine print!

Devnath and his wife were hardworking and so were able to recover from the body blow of involuntary displacement by redeveloping their land and making it productive once again. This in spite of the fact that the increasing spread of mill made synthetic cloth had put paid to the supplementary source of livelihood that Devnath had from his weaving. Relief was momentary, however, as things were once again upset when Subhadra lost her

mother to a heart attack when she was thirteen years old. Her mother was a strict disciplinarian and was feared by all the children and even her husband. She used to run the household in an efficient manner and was the main reason behind its swift recovery from disaster. Her loss led to a new set of problems. Subhadra's eldest brother who had been living separately all these years because he did not want to be disciplined by his mother came back and demanded that he be given his share of the land and the house. He even beat up Devnath and forced him to accede having little regard for the fact that his father still had the responsibility of bringing up his youngest brother and sister and marrying them off.

Immediately the household responsibilities of her mother fell on Subhadra and she lost her girlhood to become an adult woman prematurely. She had to cook, wash utensils, wipe the mud floor regularly with cow dung and also help with the agricultural operations and all this had to be done on a smaller income than before. Even though her father helped with the housework this sudden increase in the load of work resulted in Subhadra being able to devote less time for her studies and failing in her class eight examinations that year. Devnath, however, insisted that she continue with her studies despite this setback because this was the only lifeline available in the circumstances out of the sea of troubles in which they were immersed. This was easier said than done as doing the entire house and fieldwork meant that she could not study much at home. The government school education system in India is such that it is possible to pass examinations just by doing some rudimentary learning by rote with a clandestine helping hand from the teachers during the answering of the question papers. So despite the entire extra house work Subhadra managed to scrape through her higher secondary board examinations in 1986 and join the increasing force of educated and unemployed young Chhattisgarhis.

Subhadra's elder brother had got a job immediately after passing out of school in the nineteen seventies because the still expanding state system and the provision for reservations in government jobs had created a need for educated dalit and adivasi people far exceeding the supply. However, by the time Subhadra entered the job market in the late nineteen eighties the structural adjustment policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were in place because the Indian Government had taken a loan to tide over a payments crisis. So the reverse process of withdrawal of the state from direct participation in the social and economic spheres, which used to be a mandatory condition imposed by the IMF for advancing loans to governments (Goldstein, 2000), had begun, limiting government job opportunities in the face of a rising number of applicants coming out of the school system. The future seemed bleak for her.

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