



*IIMC CASE RESEARCH CENTER (IIMCCRC)*

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## THE BANDIT QUEEN'S TRYST: LOOTING DIGITAL RICHES

### PART I

#### INTRODUCTION

It was early in the spring, following the year of her anointment as Bandit Queen by media, Phoolan Devi sitting by the river that flowed through the deep ravines of Chambal was thinking about the future of her gang.

#### EMERGENCE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE GANG

Her gang had developed as the outcome of the massacre of 22 thakurs at Behmai. The massacre although a personal vendetta for her gang rape was not accomplished alone; even though her late lover Vikram Mallah had trained her in gunfight, and she had participated in campaigns with him. The raid on Behmai and the massacre had been accomplished with fellow dacoits Baba Mustakim, Man Singh, Balwan, Baladin, and others who felt similarly humiliated and aggrieved. Looting Behmai after the massacre and distributing the loot among the poor and untouchables of the region, Phoolan Devi with her red bandana had achieved the status of Goddess Durga in the eyes of the downtrodden. She had become emblematic of looting the rich and powerful, punishing them for their crimes, and a savior of downtrodden.

In leading the gang, Phoolan Devi had to break stereotypes against female participation in dacoity. The massacre at Behmai had served as her rite of passage. In the early period, her efforts were consumed by two goals. First was tracking down Shri Ram. Shri Ram was Mallah's killer, and the man who led her gang-rape. Second was developing a de facto code of banditry, such as not violating women and children, avenging injustice, and distributing loot. Her gang that comprised of fellow

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*Nimruji Jammulamadaka of the Indian Institute of Management Calcutta, developed this case study as the basis for class discussion and academic purposes as a fictionalized account based on publicly available material on Phoolan Devi.*

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outlaws belonging to other oppressed castes was simply organized. She led the attack. Baba Mustakim strategized the raids. Man Singh oversaw a network of informers and managed the intelligence system for the gang. The informers brought in vital information about injustices, police search parties, police informants, movement of the wealthy, and material for loot. Baba Mustakim, Man Singh, and Phoolan Devi worked very closely in finally planning and executing the raid. Balwan took care of equipment, readiness for raids, and oversaw the actual looting. Finally Ram Avatar took charge of distributing the loot amongst villagers and bringing in supplies for the gang. Refer **Exhibit 1** for more details.

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