

6030
Times of India. 6/4/72

A TIMES OF INDIA NOTEBOOK

THE men who have held large areas in Madhya Pradesh in the grip of terror for long years are no ordinary criminals. Each of them is part dacoit, part Robin Hood and each looks upon himself as a *baghi*, a rebel against society. What has made some of them contrive and think of giving up their lawless ways makes a fascinating story.

Madho Singh, who carries a price of Rs. 1-12 lakhs on his head, went all the way to Patna last autumn to meet Vinoba Bhave and surrender to him. The Baba, the name by which his followers call the great Sarvodaya leader, in turn sent him to Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan. J. P. was no stranger to Madho Singh who once looked upon him as a mentor. For, as a young man he had been a member of the Socialist party for a while.

Madho Singh took the train to Delhi and went straight to the Gandhi Peace Foundation office there. He did not give up on learning that J. P. was in Patna. Ironically, during his journey to Patna this man whose name strikes terror in hundreds of Madhya Pradesh villages was himself robbed of all the money—about Rs. 5,000 in cash—he was carrying.

To start with, Madho Singh was a bit cagey and did not reveal his identity to J. P. But it did not take long for the Sarvodaya leader to win his confidence.

Madho Singh does not seek complete freedom for himself or his colleagues who agree to surrender. All he wants is that they should not be sentenced to death, that their trial should not drag on for too long, that their families should not be harassed in any way and that when they have completed their term in prison they should be helped to settle down to a peaceful way of life.

That such men can return to peaceful ways has been proved by the experience of the once notorious Lukka who suffered a change of heart when he heard a sadhu in the Chambal ravines recite a couplet of Tulsidas and surrendered to Vinoba with eleven of his fellow dacoits 12 years ago. Each of these men was given 20 acres of *bhoodan* land on his release. Lukka himself is now running a successful farm at Sheopor Kalam in Bihar.