

15/4/72

Chambal cheers as dacoits surrender

Express News Service

JAURA (Gwalior),

April 14.

EIGHTY-FIVE dacoits of the Chambal Valley today surrendered here before Sarvodaya leader Jayaprakash Narayan.

The gang which surrendered at a quiet but impressive ceremony was headed by Mohar Singh, Sarup Singh, Makhan Singh, Deva Singh and Pan-cham Singh.

The dacoits who came in three buses from their camp at Gherora village, ten miles from here, offered prayer before laying down their arms.

When they reached the Gandhi Ashram they rent the air with slogans of "Jayaprakash Zindabad" and "Vinoba Bhave Zindabad."

Prayer

Shortly after the two-hour function they were driven to the Gwalior Central Jail by the Madhya Pradesh Police.

The first to surrender were Mohar Singh, the most dreaded of them all, and Sarup Singh, leaders of the two big gangs. Mohar Singh and Sarup Singh walked up the dais and laid their arms before a portrait of Gandhiji and Vinoba Bhave as 5000 people who had arrived here from near by villages witnessed the ceremony with tense expectancy.

They were repeatedly cheered by the crowd as they bowed and reverently touched the feet of the Sarvodaya leader.

Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan presented a copy of the Ramayana and the Geeta to both the dacoits and hugged them.

Mohar Singh and Sarup Singh later returned to the dais and talked to Chief Minister P. C. Sethi who had arrived in a helicopter from Gwalior to witness the cere-

mony. Mohar Singh also asked the Chief Minister to seize the arms of the enemies of the dacoits.

Mohar Singh and Sarup Singh have been operating in the valley since 1960. Between them they command nearly 80 persons.

Other dacoits and leaders of the smaller gangs surrendered their arms after Mohar Singh and Sarup Singh.

Madho Singh who initiated the peace talks and who carried an award of Rs. 1.50 lakhs on his head will surrender on Sunday along with other gangs.

The ceremony at Jaura began this afternoon with the favourite prayers of Gandhiji. Later Narain Prasad Pujari, a leading member of Mohar Singh's gang apologised on behalf of the dacoits for their crimes. He said the dacoits had taken a vow not to use arms again.

Jayaprakash Narayan assured the dacoits that the Government will abide by the terms of surrender and none of them will be sentenced to death.

In the morning 200 dacoits attended a prayer meeting at Pagara Bam near Gherora village. Women from the village turned up in large numbers to offer rakhs to the dacoits.

FTI reports: The Jaura function today marked the end of a decade that saw 38-year-old Mohar Singh, wanted for no fewer than 250 offences, including murder, kidnapping and dacoity, attain almost the same legendary proportions as Man Singh.

It was about 12 years ago that Acharya Vinoba Bhave had launched a similar "change of heart" mission in the Chambal ravines. He had succeeded in securing the surrender of 19 dacoits, mostly belonging to the gang of dacoit king Man Singh.

In a rare coincidence Man Singh's son, Tehalldar Singh, released from jail recently played an important role in bringing about the surrender today.