

Control and Conflict: a Grassroots Perspective on Adivasi Rights Over Natural Livelihood Resources

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Introduction

The context of this paper is the lived experience at the grassroots level. The following text is taken from 'Defeated Innocence':¹

Does 'To Know' mean standing up against the corrupt Forest Guards? The Baigas got cash once a year. In May-June, every year, they—men, women, and children—went deep inside the jungle to pluck the Tendu leaves-leaves from which bidis are made. Bidis—cylindrical smoking pipes stuffed with tobacco—sells cheaply in the countryside. Every morning, very early in the morning, in hordes, oblivious of slithering reptiles and howling brutes, the Baigas march on foot into the jungle to pluck and pick leaves. With tied up leaves on their heads, they return only in the afternoons. And then, while men and children sort the leaves, the women cook their first meal of the day. For fifteen to twenty days every year, the routine is repeated without fail. In these days, it is pluck and pick, it's packaging in neat bundles of thousand leaves that is primary. Around it, lore is woven, dreams are made, hopes are carried, and lives are lost. Life is leaves. Leaves are life.

But no longer the forest belongs to those who for centuries have lived and formed their lives around it. It belongs to a department manned by those whose lives never touched the forest. Far removed, in Bhopal or Delhi, they coin policy jargons. In the villages there are guards who protect the forest from humans of the Baiga variety. It is a mercy that the Baigas are allowed to pluck and pick. The law actually prohibits their entry into the forest. But Tendu season gets the government enormous revenue and so conditional entry is allowed. For the Baigas, however, the cash received forms the sole source of hard currency.

Law prohibits. But law is mostly confined in the books. The Baiga live in village, located on the fringe of the forests. They make houses and encircle their fields with wood from forest, just as their forefathers did. But Forest Guards have recently been more active than usual. After the pluck and pick got nationalised, meaning that it is now the government which alone shall buy the leaves from those who pluck and pick, it is Forest Guards who make cash payment to the Baigas in lieu of leaves packed in bundles of thousand each. This is in addition to their job to guard the forest. But the forest is fast vanishing and rarely have they caught the culprit. The man who came to hunt or mow trees was either influential or mafia before whom the guards had no power. As against the Baigas, they had *all* the power. "You are fined for you cut the tree in 1996"! Fine is slapped for a crime committed allegedly four years ago. The guard needs to protect himself. If he fines for the current felling, his alertness comes under scrutiny and his service record is sullied. He needs to show that his existence is guarantee to conservation. And once fine is imposed, money comes from dues on Tendu leaves-Baigas' only source of cash. He resists but in vain. The guard who is supposed to pay him for Tendu leaves is also a man who has imposed the

¹ Extract taken from 'Defeated Innocence: Adivasi Assertion, Land Rights and The Ekta Parishad Movement,' by Rahul Ramagundam, GrassrootsIndia Publishers, New Delhi, 2001.

fine. Meek and subservient, whatever he gets—most often half of his genuine pay—he takes. To know is to march ahead!

Partisan Assimilation and Technological Innocence

In the rhetoric of modernization the Adivasis represent a society that lacks the positive trait of modern society and thus constitutes a simple, illiterate and backward community in need of “upliftment”. The alienated middle classes and intellectuals have either romanticized or adulated the egalitarian, community-oriented, and nature-regenerating culture of Adivasis but at the same time have also been singularly responsible for the extermination of Adivasi identity. This double-edged approach is the cause of much discomfiture, as a self-respecting community has been silenced into being the passive recipient of development.

Development means material prosperity. Imbued in the material progress lies the concept of exploitation. Exploitation leads the way to progress. Technology is invented to facilitate the prospecting, exploration and exploitation of Nature for the intended progress of human civilization. The extent of technological innovation achieved to exploit the resources is the scale of human progress. In consequence, those societies and cultures in which there exist deficiencies in the transformatory technologies are placed at the bottom rungs of progress. In other words, those societies and cultures that have been reluctant to base their relationships with other societies and cultures, and with Nature on the bedrock of exploitation, and hence have limited the technological advancement for sufficient and sustainable living, have been relegated to the background. What is the fundamental aim that distinguishes “indigenous” technology from that of modern?

The use of technology to subdue Nature by those who treat Her as an object of exploitation rather than having a harmonious coexistence has created a chasm which throws the very question of development open to debate. These very people have attempted to manipulate other societies and cultures with the object of subjugating them and treating other cultures and societies as inferior and in need of “development”. In the process, the innocence of the subjugated cultures and societies, just as Nature’s, has been defeated.

Technological innocence does not by any extent of logic mean defeat of these cultures and societies. Defeat of innocence is accompanied by the violent integration of the vanquished into the mainstream on the conquerors’ terms of exploitation. Such integration is catastrophic for all concerned. While some bear the brunt immediately with their livelihood resources emaciated and their innocence annihilated, others degenerate in the course of historical time subsumed by material immorality. Societies and cultures therefore should be circumspect in the use of exploitation (of Nature as well as other societies and cultures) to foster economic prosperity, since innate in this exploitative paradigm is decline and degeneration. What are the ideological premises that inform the relationship between nature, innocence and the Adivasis?

Call them Adivasis or aboriginals or tribals – this group of people is facing tremendous pressure to *voluntarily* eject themselves to the realm of an anonymous nowhere. Besides, their history is in their resources hidden beneath their habitat. There are other distinguishing features that characterize the Adivasi identity. However, for the moment, we identify them with the marked trait of technological innocence. The use of technology for the surplus capital accumulation is the marked characteristic of capitalism. It is this innocence that has been responsible for their progressive marginalization and their dispossession from their sources of livelihood. It has also made them vulnerable to cultural shock and has led to the decimation of their collective identity. But this very threat to their identity and the livelihood has fed into their consciousness the awareness that identity assertion is an important tool of articulation for empowerment. What are the modes of resistance available to those whose innocence has been the cause of their exploitation?

It is thus amply clear that the control over natural livelihood resources forms an important part of the whole process of Adivasi empowerment. Land is the prime resource of economic empowerment. The debate on land reform has thus naturally resurfaced in an altered social atmosphere as initiated by the unfolding process of globalization, liberalization and privatization of the Indian economy. Popular discontent in different parts of India has sprang up as people's opinion with regard to the acquisition of land and their consequent displacement from their habitat is sought to be stifled. This process of displacement and discordance as a consequence of combination of Adivasis' disempowered existence (due to socio-economic-political marginalization), resource-richness of the terrain, and easy penetration for commercial profit, is concentrated in areas of dominant Adivasi population.

In the early days of imperialism—the days of physical colonization—appropriation of society was key to the conquest. It was the first step towards the building of hegemony and the conquering of the mind to complete the process of colonization, after which the colonized began to identify with the colonizer. Now, exclusion is central to the ideology of development. There are enough numbers to sustain the continuum of the market. Even the harbingers of the market mantra understand the limits of physical opulence. Those who are not even rudimentarily familiar with the world of written tradition have lost their rights to be part of the revolution in information technology. Gandhi warned of the danger of availability of the limited resources to those who had unlimited greed – the rest confined to their basic needs, scum of the society, the guinea pigs of development.

Development breaks the relative isolation of the Adivasi world. In India, in common with the world over, Adivasis have been the victims of the menacing march of development. Their habitat has been broken through. Their forest has been mowed down. They have been systematically deprived of their land. A study estimates that, in the recent past, the government has been acquiring land at an average of 170,000 acres annually under compulsory land acquisition schemes - more than it has been distributing. A large amount of this land comes from the small and marginal

landowners, particularly Adivasis. Various developmental projects since 1950, according to an estimate, have displaced 50 million persons of which 40 percent have been Adivasis. These projects include large irrigation dams, hydroelectricity projects, open cast and underground coalmines, thermal power and engineering plants, and mineral based industrial units. These industries are modern and based on incomprehensible technologies which lacked any remunerative avenues for the displaced inhabitants. Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policies, based as they are on academic concerns, lacked visible impact. Nehru's modern India with a burgeoning public sector was built on the forced sacrifices of the Adivasi population.

The government on the other hand also showed concern for the Adivasi land alienation. But, all legal and administrative measures to stop the land alienation were in vain as loss of Adivasi land to various interest groups went on unabated. The *Annual Report, 1994-95* of the Rural Development Ministry, which has tabulated the figures below received from only 7 out of 26 states, depicts a very gloomy picture. Figures presented here testify to the truth of the argument:

No. of Adivasi land alienation cases registered so far	4,73,165
Area alienated by the above no. of cases	2,72,508 ha
No. of classes in which order of restoration was issued	1,97,341
Area of alienated land covered under restoration orders	2,15,157 ha
Area of alienated land restored with physical possession	96,559 ha
% of physically restored area out of total alienated land	35.42
No. of persons/families benefited from restoration	71,438
% of benefited families out of total alienated families	15.09

Infirm Law

In Madhya Pradesh, a state with the largest Adivasi population in the country at 22.97 per cent of the total population, the continuing gravity of the problem can be assessed. As is evident from the Census figures on Madhya Pradesh, the percentage of Scheduled Tribes (ST) cultivators to total ST workers fell from 76.45 percent in 1961 to 68.09 percent in 1991. Correspondingly the percentage of ST agricultural labourers to total workers rose from 17.73 percent to 25.52 percent.

This happened, despite the introduction of many laws for the protection of Adivasi land beginning from Madhya Pradesh Land Revenue Code (MPLRC), which came into force from 1959. The MPLRC imposed a ban on transfers of agricultural land owned by Bhumiswamis (the land owners) belonging to a declared aboriginal tribe to a person not belonging to such a tribe without the prior written permission of the District Collector. In 1976, through an amendment the State Government notified some areas to be "predominantly inhabited by aboriginal Adivasis". For Adivasis residing in these areas, all transfer of agricultural land held by aboriginal Adivasis to non-Adivasis was completely debarred. The decision of the Collector with regard to the Adivasi agricultural land was made final. Subsequently, in order to prevent

attachment or sale of aboriginal land in favor of a decree or order, a constitutional amendment for blanket ban on such transactions was made.

But all the legislative activism could not stop the rampant alienation of Adivasi agricultural land, as various studies over the years have revealed. For instance, *Report of the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission (1961)* observed that “the lacunae in the laws, the ignorance of the Adivasi people, and the complicated legal procedures to be followed” are the main reasons for such a scenario. A study conducted by Bhopal based Tribal Research and Development Institute in 1973 concluded that more than fifty percent of cases that sought permission for the sale of Adivasi land were just for repayment of debts. Of these, fifty percent were for repayment of government loans alone. The Study Report states: “Indebtedness is the main cause of land alienation. Actually what happens in the area is that Adivasis mortgage their land to non-Adivasis and take loans. They would then take a loan from Government and use it for repayment of the private debts. Having failed to pay the loan due to Government, they apply for permission to sell land, which is granted. In fact the sale is to the mortgagee, while on paper it assumes the shape of an innocent transfer for repayment of Government loans.” Thus, the government alone is responsible in more than fifty percent of legally alienated cases of Adivasi land. The incidence of illegal transfers, though hard to detect, is very high. The alienation of Adivasi land has moved apace with the industrialisation of the region with not only government claiming land for the *national purpose* but also private persons showing interest in the land with increase in its value. Therefore, both legal and illegal Adivasi land alienation continues as a result of “chronic indebtedness, a fragile economic base and infirmities of the legal system”, as Harshmander, an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer noted in a recent study.

Sections 170(A) and 170(B), which were introduced in the MPLR Code by important amendments in 1976 and 1980 respectively, made an attempt to plug legal loopholes and to secure alienated land for the Adivasis. The amendment in 1980 made it compulsory for any person in possession of agricultural land which belonged to a member of an aboriginal tribe between 1959 and 1980 to submit “all the information as to how he has come in possession of such land” to the Sub-Divisional Officer within two years. The Officer was empowered to declare the transaction null and void if upon enquiry he finds deception in transfer.

But unfortunately, all legal and administrative measures have failed to fulfill the laudable intent. The following tabulation is drawn from the official figures available in Madhya Pradesh up to September 1997 to show the situation with regard to the implementation of section 170 (B).

Adivasi land alienation cases registered so far under section 170 (B) 9,710

Area alienated by the above no. of cases 45,729.792 ha

No. of cases in which ruling was ordered 34,489

Area of alienated land covered under ruling order	41,963.053 ha.
No of cases in which restoration of Adivasi land was ordered	14,395
% of cases decided in favour of Adivasi land owners	41.73
Area of alienated land ordered for restoration to Adivasi	16,149.97 ha.
% of alienated land ordered for restoration to Adivasi	38.48
Area of alienated land restored with physical possession	5787.557 ha.
% of physically restored area out of total land ordered to be restored	35.82
% of cases still pending after 17 years of the enactment of law	13.15

The situation is appalling when we note that only 12.65 per cent of the total alienated land in the registered cases could be restored to its Adivasi owners. But even this could be a false picture given the ground realities that exist in the Adivasi region. It is unlikely that Adivasi, even after receiving formal legal possession of their erstwhile lands, would have the local administrative and political clout to ensure that they would retain possession in all cases against their powerful non-Adivasi opponents.

Grabbing the Adivasi lands

Land grabbing from the poor is not uncommon in rural India. Though the methods and techniques vary, all methods are designed to entrap the poor into a dungeon existence. Field research across the Adivasi villages has revealed some means and ways practiced by the exploiters to grab land from Adivasis.

The government has proclaimed that the Adivasi/landless poor be given priority in allotment of the land in areas predominantly inhabited by them. Yet, it is the non-Adivasi who manages to be the leaseholder in these areas, making the Adivasi landless. The method is easy. The government makes an entry into its record that a public announcement was made in the village and as no Adivasi turned up for the meeting, the land was leased to a non-Adivasi. There are villages where the terror of a big landlord rules the roost. So frightened are the Adivasis of him and his goons, that many have left the village. He forces them to work on his fields and only when he grants permission does an Adivasi have the courage to till his own land. Consequently, many Adivasis rarely get the time to work on their own fields. Untilled, unsowed lands are someday entered in the records in the name of some bigwig. The *Patwari* (the land officer at the grassroots) rightfully gets his share. To give a veneer of legitimacy to this, the Adivasi owner is declared once again to be missing.

Since non-Adivasis are not allowed to buy lands in the Adivasi areas, the landlords use the name of a *Hadi* (bonded labourer for a year) or any other loyal Adivasi

servant to buy the land. According to the records land may appear to belong to the Adivasi but the actual owner is a non-Adivasi. The Adivasi, often being illiterate, is persuaded by the families where they work as *Hadis* to give away their lease documents. Result: the loyal Adivasi is deprived of his lease forever.

Harassment by the forest department is the commonest of all problems. The forest department has been known to eject the poor from their land in the name of social forestry. Land was promised in exchange but the promise remains unfulfilled. Those who tried to get back their lands were harassed and their ploughs and oxen taken into custody. Further, there has been the forestland made arable by the Adivasi. In many cases, they have tilled the land for more than 20 years. But their right to land is taken away by the stroke of a pen in a single day.

Sometimes an Adivasi mortgages his land when he faces a compelling situation. They earn their daily bread and are unable to pay back the required amount, which increases by the day with interest. Eventually the land is lost forever.

The poor have been enslaved through intoxication as well. Situations of distress have led to increased alcoholism. Taking advantage of this phenomenon the liquor contractors and the landlords keep their *Hadis* happy by providing free liquor. It is a well-laid conspiracy, transparent yet untouched and undisturbed by law or any other enforcement mechanism.

People having legal papers given by the government are unable to find their land. For years they keep running after the government officials with a request to demarcate their land, but their pleas go in vain. There is a clear strategy in not demarcating the land of the poor. In the absence of demarcation, often the poor Adivasi tills land, which previously was barren. He develops the land in the hope that one day he would get the possession of it. Being a landless person, the government offers him land entitlement. But to show him his land is the *Patwari's* job and he is most reluctant to do so. The ambiguity in land demarcation is source of his illegal earnings over and above his government remuneration. Once the land is developed and made cultivable by the Adivasi, the *Patwari* connives with the village rich to dispossess him of his holding. Demarcation in the land map is done in such a manner that the land belonging to the Adivasi is shown as lying somewhere else. The land hitherto being tilled and prepared after a long haul is shown as belonging to a village influential.

India has a fairly well laid-out revenue administration. At the bottom of the administrative hierarchy, in the village, is the *Kotwar* who, in simple terms, is the state informer. He keeps his superiors informed about happenings in the village on daily basis. There is a *Patwari* who is the keeper of records related to land in his circle which constitutes not more than five villages.

Rural governance centres around the *Patwari*, the most important person at the village because he is the keeper of records of the land related issues. Though

marginal in the power structure, he is prone to petty corruption and his whims affect the villagers most. It is he who teams up with the village rich to dispossess the poor of their land. It is he who tampers with the land records to harass the ignorant and small cultivators. It is he who is the ultimate villain in the eyes of those tillers who have occupied a piece of government land for livelihood.

The *Patwaris*, owing to their proximity to the actual happenings in the village have information regarding the land and the tillers. Once a landless person occupies a piece of land, belonging either to the Revenue or Forest Department, the *Patwari* waits for the opportune time to strike deals. At first he demands a bribe by threatening eviction, as the tiller has no legal entitlement to the land he is tilling. After the land becomes cultivable, the *Patwari* gives the legal entitlement of the occupied land to the richest bidder among the villagers. The *modus operandi* is simple. First, he registers the name of the rich bidder as an offender for the said land. Then he appeals to higher authorities to grant the legal entitlement on the pretext that the offender is landless.

It is not that the higher authorities in the revenue administration are ignorant of the wheeler and dealer *Patwari*. In fact the system demands that they be complicit in the dealings. Most of those who dispossess a landless person tilling government land and gain illegal entitlement are close relations of the local politicians. These politicians win by making voting arrangements with the village high caste and the rich.

Conflicts In Conservation: a Habitat for Forest, Wild-Life and Humans

A prominent Project Tiger official estimates in a recent publication that 'the number of tigers has now crashed to below 3000 and is falling rapidly'. His solution: 'Make 1% of the country's land mass completely inviolate and dedicate it to wildlife. A country which cannot meet its needs with 99% of land has no right to be governed by its existing system.' In his view, no one 'be it politician, bureaucrat, industrialist, human activist or villager' wants the tiger to survive. He wants 'thoughtless development activities' that overexploit natural resources to stop. But at the same time he wants to give 'share of development benefits to forest-fringe dwellers'. 'Give the people the right to choose and make their own decisions'. Strong rhetorical words for a high-ranking governmental official!²

If there are any 'development benefits' in the region surrounding the Park it is owing to the presence of the Forest Department. Besides running an elaborated hospitality industry with the rituals of ego massaging and favoritism that caters to local elite as well as visiting VIPs, the Forest Department also manages the wildlife to the aggressive exclusion of the 'forest-fringe dwellers'. There are number of Jungle Resorts owned by people not belonging to the category of 'forest-fringe dweller'. Numerous Maruti Jypsies ply tourists inside the core tiger country for a dekko at the tigers. In the evenings, in the tourist seasons, select bands of 'forest-fringe dwellers' entertain the guests to get a share of 'development benefits' at these resorts.

² P.K.Sen, Director, Project Tiger, in Valmik Thapar (ed) Saving Wild Tigers (1900-2000)

The attitude of the government of India, whether imperial or independent, towards forest dwelling Adivasis was double pronged and self-serving. Their low cost killings of carnivores were praised and encouraged by the British while simultaneously being accused of killing the game animals. Their intricate knowledge about the forest and behaviors and living of its denizens were used for the hunting expedition but at the same time their access to forest and its produce was monitored, controlled and gradually restrained. While their hunting practices were termed brutal, they were recruited to be the appendage to the hunting parties of the ruling elite. They were central to the imperial design of the elimination of carnivores and the increase of herbivores, both vital for the hunting sport.

Post-independence, as the numbers of wild animals declined rapidly and conservation came into vogue, the Adivasis were the first victims of the exclusivist policy towards preservation as villages were uprooted from their original forest sites. Commercialization of natural resources got another face, as sponsors of hunting Safaris became resort owners at the newly carved out zones of National Parks and Sanctuaries. For the Adivasis, it has been a gradual process of resource alienation through the modern form of governance that came to be established with the coming of the British but with no concomitant gain from their integration into the mainstream society. And, as India took to the road to development the Adivasis became the prime victim, as their displacement from their habitat was central to many of the industrial and infrastructure projects.³

The ethos that informed imperial policies towards conservation were rooted in the dismemberment of the symbiotic existence that defined the forest and its inhabitants in the Indian forest. A similar ethos underlines the idea that demands one percent of total landmass *exclusively* for the wildlife. Timber consumption and not wildlife conservation informed the imperial policy and continued to dictate post-independence policies too until the time came that the rarity of wild life demanded protection.

Commercial interests being central to conservation, there has emerged a caucus of conservationists whose own survival is linked to the survival of the wildlife. When hunting paid, it was in vogue among the rich and famous and also among the marketers. Now it is conservation that pays. It is therefore again the rich and famous and tour operators, resort owners and those owning the hospitality industry, who are its biggest propagandists. Conflict between the wildlife management and the Adivasis living in the vicinity of the jungle is not about the aim of conservation but about the adopted methods of the conservation.

Conservation has a negative connotation. It denotes an exclusive zone wherein nature's symbiosis is broken for the survival of select species. It is as modern a phenomenon as the extermination of natural fauna and flora at the behest of technocapitalism. The concept of the museum is epistemologically related with that of conservation. The museum houses the relics of past. Conservation attempts to arrest a process of extinction made possible by the combination of factors, natural and/or man-made.

Both the museum as well as conservation, springs forth from the guilt consciousness emerging out of the expanding bandwidth of human greed transformed into an inertia of commercial exigencies. Otherwise, why would the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), that epitome of the conservation, be headed and funded by the industrialists and

³ For the struggle around the dispossession of livelihood resources see *Defeated Innocence: Adivasi Assertion, Land Rights and the Ekta Parishad Movement* (Rahul Ramagundam, GrassrootsIndia, 2001)

princes whose very depredations of the natural wealth is its *raison d'être*. In the days of image-building spin doctors, it would seem anachronistic but remains a historical truth that it was the princes and the imperial policies that were responsible for the vanishing wildlife of India. The question: Who Killed the Wildlife? does not need a specialist to be answered.

Still, the survival of the subaltern continues to be stifled, more so in the subtle imperialism spawned by technology, information and capital. Adivasis, for centuries dependent for the livelihood on the natural resources, trigger an emotional backlash among the conservationists who see them as a 'pest' killing off the remnants of the wildlife. Measures of conservation therefore are formulated to counter and control the life patterns of those inhabiting the overlapping zone of conservation and communities. It is these measures that are rapidly becoming a space of struggle, as its enforcement would mean perpetual bondage for some and the direct/indirect benefit of a few. Witness the WWF tiger conservation advertisements relayed, in English, on Discovery Channel. It commodifies a life wherein some shall be allowed to exist to the obsoletion of the majority.

Modes of Protest

Implicit in the struggle presently being waged across the country is the question of control over natural livelihood resources and the mode of protest to be adopted by the marginalised people in the decision making process. Livelihood issues have somehow remained out of the political arena. It is only in the last few years that realization has dawned that these issues are important as people lacking their basic rights. They do not have basic resources. The issues of livelihood are not survival issues alone. They are synonymous with sustainability. There are two kinds of issues that attract people's attention: *survival* and *consumer* issues. For survival issues to bear fruit out of the struggle demands stamina. As their gestation period is long it depends on the conviction and stamina of the leadership to keep the issue alive.

The question of control over natural resources is important. It is on these things that life's survival depends for most Indians. Colonial India witnessed the enactment of laws restricting the rights of the people. After independence the restrictions increased. But the state of its natural resources, instead of improving has only deteriorated. The industrial economy has its own vested interest in keeping people out of natural resource management. Despite the spread of democracy at a grassroots level, the government remains prisoner to the dominant worldview. The interest group that decides the destiny retains the lion's share of national wealth for itself. The rise of environmental consciousness in the west as well as among the Indian middle class is mainly due to the concern that clean air is a great leveller. Rich can secede from the general society in all matters but clean air. It is the urban industrial political economy that is largely responsible for the degradation of the environment due to its culture of consumerism. To offset the urban pollution, the world needs to have a certain level of forest cover. While there is no intention of the rich to withdraw from the wasteful expenditures and reduce thereby their standard of consumption, there is every attempt to squeeze the dispossessed of their legitimate livelihood rights. But a degraded environment also affects the poor.

The dispossessed can only assert their rights by adopting a mode of protest, which can place them in an advantageous position. Neither the Marxist-inspired violent revolution nor the passive resistance that allows the dispossessed to have only every-day forms of resistance like stealing or procrastinating can come to their rescue. In the post independence India, Gandhi has been reduced to a caricature of his true self. Stripped of revolutionary content, Gandhi has been turned into a saint whom anybody unworthy of his salt could abuse, without fear or favor. The project of independent India, it seems, was to negate all that Gandhi stood for. Gandhi being an indigenous symbol of unparalleled mass appeal could have been an extremely potent force in a country, which has one of the greatest concentrations of dispossessed humanity. If the law-breaking trait of Gandhi's personality and action was not erased from the societal memory then there was every possibility for the dispossessed to take control over the state. So, Gandhi was turned into a meek saint who, in keeping with his *Ahimsa* would offer his second cheek to be slapped after you had done the same to the first. To traduce him as such would be a travesty of Gandhi but to let him remain as he was would be of greater danger for the status-quoists!

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