An Earthquake

The Bastar Rebellion

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The sahibs

"A small-sized postage stamp would be a little more effective substitute for clothing of many of these weird people/" snapped Tom Boggs, staring at the three tribal youths. The latter lounged against the saja tree and watched with much interest the two white men clean their guns.

"True," said Colonel Asquith, carefully cleaning the barrel of his gun with a long stick around which had been wrapped a rag soaked in oil. "But," he pointed at the youths to emphasize his view, "rings and beads they must have. Look at him, for God's sake! Look at the perfect bushel of brass rings the fellow has in his ears! Fascinating!"

Of the three tribals, two squatted on the dust and stared at the Englishmen with deep interest. Even
from far, the broad-cheeked, thick-lipped, triangular faces looked amazing. The two were dark bronze in colour, thin but raw-boned; their chests and limbs were bare of hair. The third, who was standing and chewing on a blade of grass, was taller, and slimmer. He was practically nude with a tiny strip of cloth strung to cover that had the habit of swaying sideways when he moved. The youth was supremely unconcerned.

"Look at them! Savages!" grunted Boggs.

"They are not too bad, Boggs," murmured Asquith. "And look at the fellow standing. Look at his eyes. Handsome fellow."

"Handsome? Him?"

"Look at the jungle, Tom," said Asquith. "Have you ever seen such a forest? It is superb."

"What I do not like about this jungle is the lack of game," Boggs continued to complain. "I came all the way from England to shoot tigers in India, and here I am in the middle of nowhere, chasing buffaloes! It is a woman’s sport," he snorted.

Asquith sighed. Tom Boggs was his brother-in-law, the only one and a great favourite of his wife, Penny. There was no choice but to tolerate his boorish ways. "I suppose buffaloes and tigers are not in the same category Tracking a buffalo is not an easy job and it requires a great deal of finesse."

Boggs snorted hard through his nostrils, an act that brought the tribal youths three steps closer. The white man was most peculiar, they thought, watching the
swollen face of the feringhee that was tomato-red in colour. And why was he trying to spit through his nose? Sukma, a tribal belonging to the bison-horn Maria tribe, spat efficiently in the dust and then looked at Boggs as if to tell him that is how he could do it.

"Savages!" yelled Boggs, springing from his chair and seizing his gun which lay on the table. He galloped to Sukma who was sitting in the dust. He pointed his gun in the centre of the youth's chest and shouted, "You apologize for your manners!"

Seconds ticked by as the white man's bloodshot eyes poured venom on Sukma who stood deathly still, frozen almost in an attitude of fatalistic acceptance. He was going to die, thought Sukma, before he was even married. He let his head hang between his knees and his fingers traced patterns in the dust. His heart was hammering in his chest. He did not want to die.

"It is no use, Tom," said Asquith wearily. "The gun is empty. Besides, they spit all the time. It is not bad manners for them."

Boggs threw down the gun in disgust. He rubbed his eyes and said, "Okay, Asquith, let us go and chase the buffaloes. I am tired of eating chicken and pork. I could do with some beef."

"Sukma," Asquith called the Maria who was his personal boy and for whom the colonel had much affection, "go with the scouts and look for the herds again."

It was hot and dry, so dry that even in the thick jungles of Bastar the ground beneath the huge teak
and saja trees was drying. For the Englishmen, it was the best time to be in the jungle in spite of the heat. For, the mosquitoes had died, the rivers were passable and water holes were dry which meant that the animals were forced to move out of the protection of the forest. Still here in Bastar (now in Chhatisgarh) the grass was high and a small panther could inch along, stomach to the ground, totally invisible to the human eye. It was the panther you needed to keep a watch for here, and not tigers.

"Big buffalo herd, sir!" Sukma came running into the camp.

"Where?"

"At the bend of the river! They are wallowing in the mud."

The Englishmen jumped up and raced after Sukma and came upon the most extraordinary sight of fifty or more big, black buffaloes, their huge, wallowing bodies squelching luxuriously in the liquid mud, on the banks of the Indravati river. Their ritual bathing was accompanied by profound blowing and puffing that informed everyone for at least two miles around in their proximity.

"Which one, Asquith?" asked Boggs, gun to the shoulder with the deadly barrels aimed at the centre of the herd. "By God, that one is a beauty," he pointed at the tremendous length of the horns of a great bull in the centre. "I can have those horns up on the wall of my Hartfordshire home to be the centre of every envious eye in the town."
"No! Leave them alone," said Asquith, slapping the gun down. "There is no fun in shooting sitting ducks."

Unhappy, but obedient for once, Boggs gave up the idea of so easily acquiring his first pair of bison horns and the two set off once again looking for more challenging game. They were on the edge of the Abujhmar country, the most primitive and isolated of the tribal areas of the Central Provinces. Very few Englishmen had penetrated into the jungles; as for the Indians, that is, the non-tribal Indians, they knew even less about the tribals of Bastar, leave alone those of the Abujhmar mountains. They did not want to know about the tribals and continued to look upon them as savages, skilled in herbs, seeking human victims to sacrifice to their gods and potent practitioners of magic and witchcraft.

The Indravati river began in Orissa and flowed across the centre of Bastar. Its waters were swelled by the two rivers, the Gudra and the Nei Bheret that drained the tangle of wild mountains and jungles of Abujhmar. It was a beautiful and mighty river, less revered than the Ganga of the North maybe, but more majestic in some ways specially where it fell in many falls over cliffs and mountains. The Englishmen followed the river upstream keeping a sharp lookout for buffaloes. It was a hot, arduous march, penetrating the thick jungle, struggling through a country devoid of any but the wildest of tracks, where often even the way had to be cleared through the thick, green undergrowth. Scores of coolies carried the camp kit
uncomplainingly and every night they set up camp for the Englishmen—raising the tents, setting up the chairs and the cots and heating water for their toilet.

Sukma took care of everything for Asquith including his shaving and ironing of clothes. One thing that Sukma refused to do was change the style of his own clothing. He wore only a loin cloth most of the time. At times he would wear a dirty turban on his head and strut around like a peacock. However, the turban did not last too long on his head—he could not bear the weight of it.

The hunt

On the eighth day, amidst shoulder-high green grass when Boggs was thrashing around, all hot and irritable, up sprang a fine bull bison right in front of him. Squealing up in excitement and fear, he managed to lift his gun and fire. The bull moaned, threw up its head and ran off at a tangent. The wounded, frightened animal ran for at least four hours till they finally found him fallen but alive. It took a shot from Asquith’s big, single barrel to finish him.

"Cut off the horns and tail," Asquith ordered the tribals, "and give it to Boggs sahib."

In the next ten days they got two cows, two deer and three more bull buffaloes. The mutilated corpses littered the jungle, being watched by the hill Maria tribals who badly needed the food but were scared of
the feringhees. They would wait for the Englishmen to leave the jungle to go for the flesh.

"It is so peaceful here," grunted Boggs, as he accepted the plate of food from the cook. "I only wish you would train your fellows to cook. What is this red stuff?"

"It is Mughlai. Like a steak but better."

"But why is it red? And so overdone?"

"Eat Tom," said Asquith a little wearily. "You are not in Hartfordshire, you know."

"I know that well." He eyed the chapattis with distaste. "I could do with some bread."

Asquith ate steadily and with enjoyment. His cook, Abdul, came from Lucknow, and that is why they were eating Mughlai food in the middle of nowhere. He appreciated that fact even if Tom did not. And Abdul made the best coffee. Coffee with a dash of brandy, the blazing stars overhead and the brooding, dark, almost menacing jungle around him—Asquith asked for nothing more. The forest echoed the deep hoot of the owl. Three occasional rustlings in the under-growth could be heard. Was it a panther? A python? Here was peace of a kind he had never felt before.

"You know, Tom," said Asquith. "the shikar (hunting) of buffaloes is not that easy a sport. Let me tell you a story about an old Indian named Jenkins..."

"Jenkins had gone out one morning on the tracks of a big bull which he had hit the previous evening. Armed with a heavy black powder rifle, probably an
eight-bore, he came upon the bull lying down in an open glade. He approached perilously close to finish it off, and was charged! The bull was said to have chased him to a tree, around which the unfortunate man dodged and, on every side of it, attempted to seize his pursuer’s spreading horns. In such an unequal strife the two opponents did not struggle long. The sportsman was easily tossed aside and then gored. When the bull finally left, the poor man and his retainers rushed to his rescue, and their master was beyond aid. He ejaculated one word, 'water' and was dead before their eyes."

"I bet you made that up to scare me," said Tom Boggs.

"No, I did not. Ask Sukma," Asquith indicated the youth, who sat beside the dying embers of the fire chewing a thick wad of tobacco. "The story is true. Of course, such stories shock even the keen shikari (hunter), and a narrow escape might teach him greater caution, but these rarely deter him from embarking on a shikar."

"What about you?" asked Boggs curiously. "Have you had a personal, narrow escape?"

"Yes."

"Tell me."

"I got maul ed by a tiger so badly that I got scared off the jungle itself." Leaning forward, Asquith stirred the fire. Apart from some red-orange flying embers the fire remained dead. "Sukma, go, get some wood for the fire. Can you not see the fire is dead?" Asquith
helped Sukma to arrange the logs of firewood before he spoke again.

Boggs, who had forgotten his question, was startled back from sleep. Asquith said, "The jungle exercises a compelling fascination for me, and I am in love with my rifle. I live for the smell of gun oil and so, as time healed the scars both mental and physical, I was once again drawn to the solitude of the Bastar jungle. You know, Tom, when I went into the jungle for the first time after recovering from the attack, I was afraid of every rustle in the bushes. I would start sweating at the harsh sounds of the wild beasts. I loved it at the same time and soon the incident became jungle lore."

"But what happened?"

"I will tell you some day," said Asquith, rubbing his left shoulder. "Not today. I am not in a mood."

"Come on," said Boggs, "I want to know and I am not ready to sleep yet. It is lovely outside." Tom jiggled Asquith's arm in impatience.

"Okay, it was not Abujhmar," Asquith indicated the jungle around him. "It was a still, thick jungle and tribal country up north. More, the tendu patta (leaf of the ebony tree) area, you know." Asquith looked at Boggs. "You do know tendu patta, do you not? The leaf that is used to roll the tobacco and make bidis, the Indian cigarettes. Well, I was there in the jungle and we had set up a camp and were relaxing. Suddenly, out of the blue, there was the most deafening and frightening roar, and a tiger, that had slinked silently upon us, leaped onto my back. Both
its front paws with the huge curving nails dug into my left shoulder. The shock, the pain and the smell of that animal is something that I will never forget. It is the stuff of my nightmares.” Asquith stopped and involuntarily looked over his shoulders in fear.

"What happened," squeaked Tom Boggs.

"We managed to kill it, but not before it killed one man, apart from mauling me. It was a sick, old maneater. It had been hounded out of villages and forests because it was picking up stray animals and children herding cattle." Asquith shook his head and smiled wryly, "It was a mean devil, and how it stank! We tried to skin it, but gave up for the stink."

Boggs leaned forward and touched Asquith's shoulder. "Is the wound still painful?" Asquith shrugged off Tom's hand.

"Do you not want to go back to England?" asked Boggs with persistence. Though insensitive and quite self-centred, Boggs had begun to realize that the love, which his brother-in-law had for the jungle and the tribals, went much beyond the call of duty.

"To tell you the truth, wet, cold England holds no attraction for me. I want to be buried here, in Bastar."

Asquith lay back and locked his hands behind his head and smiled dreamily up at the dark night sky. How could he explain to a boor-like Boggs that he was in love, in love with a country and its people? Even Penny did not understand it. Poor Penny, so pale, so colourless and so English!

How did it happen that the English bred people
compelled almost by a missionary zeal to improve the world, yet were so insular in their thinking that they accepted nothing of the country they had adopted, not the language, not the food, not the clothing, not even the beauties of the country. They just kept harping on a dream back home that existed only in their imagination.

East versus West

After a whole month in the jungle, the Englishmen reached Jagdalpur, headquarters of Bastar. There, in the Circuit House, they spread with pride all their prizes which now included the skin of a small, jet-black panther, the most dangerous animal in the jungle. It was Asquith who had actually bagged the animal but he let his brother-in-law take credit for it. Boggs could not stop bragging about his catch. They sat over drinks with their trophies spread on the table in front of them. The panther had been slinking along in the undergrowth, belly to the ground and eyes fixed on Daisy, Asquith’s yellow bitch, when Tom saw it. He could not shoot it. It was Asquith’s bullet that hit the animal beneath the left ear and killed it. Boggs kept poking at the panther’s skin with Asquith’s baton. He could not wait to mount the skin.

"Boy, I am glad to have some ice in my drink," said Asquith, shaking his glass close to his ear and smiling as the ice clinked musically.
"A relief from the incessant chatter of the monkeys and the cry of the peacock," Boggs poked one thick finger at the bison horns. His florid face was red with the skin peeling in places. Unlike his almost ascetic looking brother-in-law, Tom Boggs was grossly overweight with a huge belly hanging over his belt and powerful thick arms. Where the skin was exposed it was flaming red in colour and wherever covered it was a pasty, dirty white in colour. His head was bald and the skin behind his head fell in four folds before extending over his back. His body was supported on the slenderest legs that you saw on anyone.

"I am going to keep the panther in the hallway," said Boggs, putting a finger inside the grotesquely open mouth of the animal and feeling its teeth.

"It would not show against the panelled backdrop so well," said Asquith. "Best you put it in the bedroom, tail up and face down."

"The missus will get nightmares with the creature staring at her all night," laughed Tom. He could not wait to see his wife's reaction to the ferocious looking animal. What a story it would make. His great grandchildren would be relating it too!

"Sahib!" A bearer came in silently and stood with eyes fixed to the ground. "Sahib, Panda Baijnath sahib has come."

"Monkeys," said Boggs, jumping at the sound of the bearer’s voice. He had not heard him come in. "Why do they not cough or do something?"
"Go, send him in," cried Asquith. "And tell Abdul, Panda sahib will be here for dinner."

"A native! For dinner! You must be joking," said Boggs.

"Actually I am not," said Asquith, again wincing at Boggs' form of address. "He is the Diwan (prime minister) of Bastar, you know."

"Still, a native," Tom sputtered, unable to believe what he was hearing. "And you the king's representative."

"Shh, he is here. Do come in, Panda sahib. How do you do? Will you have a drink?"

"Oh, no. I am a Hindu."

"So you are. What about a glass of nimbu pani (lime juice)? Abdul makes the most fascinating nimbu pani."

"Thank you." Panda Baijnath nodded courteously and folded his hands in greeting Boggs.

"My brother-in-law," said Asquith, waving at Boggs.

"You do not drink, eh?" Boggs offered by way of a reply to Panda sahib’s greeting. "But your entire Bastar population drink beer and toddy, and what have you?"

Panda Baijnath placed his knees together like a prudish woman and pursed his lips before speaking, "They are not Hindus." Panda Baijnath was a thin, short man with compelling eyes. He habitually dressed in a dhoti and kurta of Kosa silk. His skin was copper-coloured, his face clean-shaven and his forehead high. Panda Baijnath was a scholar and a
thinker and, as Diwan, his entire energies were directed towards schemes of tribal welfare.

"Did you have a good shikar? Ah, I see you did." He indicated the trophies with his cane.

"Yes," said Asquith.

"No," said Boggs.

"Why is that, sir?" Panda addressed his question to Boggs.

"No tigers."

"No tigers?"

"No tigers. Only buffaloes. It is the most boring jungle that I have ever seen."

"If you shoot all the tigers, the jungle is bound to become boring," cautioned Panda Baijnath.

Boggs stared at the old man. "But if you do not shoot animals, what do you do with them?" He glanced at Asquith as if to ask him whether this Indian was crazy.

Panda Baijnath sighed and shook his head. His orange-coloured turban was too big and heavy and he was dying to scratch his scalp. It was not as though he did not believe that the British were doing a good job in India, but the tribals were different and they had to be treated differently. While the rest of the country was getting educated and railway lines were being laid everywhere, the tribals of Bastar were frightened of horses! They thought the horse was a mythical creature capable of flying, sprouting wings and flying. It was essential that both the British and the non-tribal Indian should be made to understand
that the tribal world, its social norms, its laws, its goals and way of life were all different.

"Here is your nimbu pani, Pandaji," said Asquith.

Resentment

Asquith, thin, tall, reminded Panda Baijnath of a cadaver with his sunken cheeks and hollows at the temples. His hands were so thin that you could see the blue veins and almost count all bones and joints. On his part Asquith liked and admired Panda Baijnath very much. He wanted to be friends with him, and in a certain way they were friends. Panda Baijnath was so disapproving of the British though in a very guarded way that Asquith was often irritated with him. Asquith desperately wanted Panda Baijnath’s approval. But the high-caste, twice born Panda almost seemed to hold his breath when any Englishman was around. Even the bodies of flesh-eaters stank of decay!

"How is the road coming along?" Asquith asked, leaning close to Panda Baijnath. Instinctively Baijnath moved back.

"The one from Narainpur to Paralkote is complete, but I want to build a road into Abujhmar."

"Abujhmar?" Asquith looked surprised. Even in tribal areas, Abujhmar was the most remote, backward and inaccessible.

"Why?" asked Boggs in a drunken slur.

Panda Baijnath gave him a pained look and then
turned towards Asquith. When he spoke, he had dropped the subject of roads. "The problem seems to be the opposition to the schools. I am not able to convince the tribal people to send their boys and girls to school."

"I know, I was in Dimrapal village and the village medicine man, what do they call him?"

"The *kasyeq gaitu.*"

"Whatever. This medicine man thought that education was the devil's work."

"That is the problem." Panda Baijnath slapped his knees with his hands and, getting up, began pacing the length of the living room. "They object to every new measure! They are unhappy over the reservation of the forest too. How can I explain to them that their shifting cultivation is ruining the forest. At the rate at which they are cutting the forest, it will be destroyed in ten years. And then what will we do?"

"What do you mean?" asked Boggs.

"He means the railways," explained Asquith, "British railways need timber."

"If the British railways need timber, let the forest be destroyed." Tom Boggs' voice slurred over.

"What will the British railways do for timber once the forests are destroyed?" asked Panda Baijnath.

"Never mind," Asquith waved at his brother-in-law, "you must try the *seekh kebabs*, Tom. I have not tasted better even in Lucknow."

"I think you understand very well what I mean, Colonel sahib," said Panda Baijnath, watching the
ease with which Tom Boggs’ attention had been diverted towards food. "I have to serve the imperial interest of the British as well as that of the Raja of Bastar. What about the interests of the people? What about the interests of the poor tribals whom nobody understands?"

"Panda sahib, I understand your worry very well. Do you not think you are going too fast? I mean the entire tribal area of the Central Provinces, including Bastar and the Abujhmar mountains, has been so isolated for years, ages in fact. The people of this area are at least a hundred years behind the rest of the country. They do not understand the value of what you are trying to do. For them it is only an intrusion, a totally uncalled for intrusion."

"Maybe. But are we to leave them exactly where they are? A hundred years behind the rest of the country which itself is a hundred years behind England?" Panda sahib was sitting up straight, and two spots of colour were on his pale cheeks.

"You cannot compare the tribals with Englishmen," came Boggs' drunken voice from the depths of the chair.

"No, no, he does not mean that," said Asquith, giving his brother-in-law a murderous look. "I am afraid that if we meddle too much with the tribal way of life, there might be trouble. On the other hand, we do need the timber and the iron ore." Asquith used his skeletal fingers to comb his hair. "You know what I really feel, Pandaji?"
"What?"

"I feel that the Indians, whether the tribal or the non-tribal, are more ready to accept the Englishman as the harbinger of change than an Indian in that role. They feel that the English are fair and dependable."

"Do they now?" Panda Baijnath's piercing eyes bored into Asquith's. "Wonder what makes you say that?"

"Sometimes I feel the tribals are not as stupid as they appear. I feel a restlessness, an anger almost..." He stopped speaking and shrugged his shoulders.

"What makes you say that, Asquith sahib?" asked Panda Baijnath. Asquith flung up his hands but refused to say anything more. Panda Baijnath watched him for a while and then spoke, "You know, Asquith sahib, my family has worked for the Rajas of Bastar for generations and we know the tribals even better than they know themselves. They are the quietest, mildest people that you would ever know."

"There is a resentment," Asquith spoke almost to himself.

"The tribal does not understand what it means. He is like a cow that has to be led!"

"I do hope that you are right, Pandaji. I am afraid. No one can live forever with the feeling of ill-treatment. Sooner or later the resentment is bound to come out." He shook his head, looking worried. He spoke again, almost as though he was speaking to himself, "There is a resentment and I am afraid."
"Colonel sahib..." began Panda Baijnath.
"Let us not be so morbid. Let us have some dinner."

The Circuit House dining hall was splendidly furnished with carpets, snowy white napery and gleaming cutlery. There were mountains of food on the table. Panda Baijnath stared with fastidious distaste at the chicken, meat and beef dishes. He did not even want to sit at the table leave alone eat at it.

"Panda sahib." A smiling bearer stood behind him.
"I am Pandit Hari Prasad. Abdul asked me to bring your food." He placed before Panda Baijnath a silver thali (plate on which food is served) containing a katori (small metal bowl) of curd, dal, fried lady fingers and chapattis. "Your honour will forgive the simple fare but there was no time to prepare a more elaborate meal."

Panda Baijnath sat down and while the Englishmen began eating, he prayed to the goddess thanking her for the food.

Asquith was a sparse eater. He ate slowly and seemed to spend a long time chewing his food.

"Pandaji, have you heard of Gunda Dhur?" asked the colonel suddenly.
"Gunda Dhur? The rebel? Bagi?"
"Yes,"
"Is he a real man? I mean, is not Gunda Dhur a story? The tribals make folklore around anything, even a make-believe incident."
"So you think Gunda Dhur is not real?" Asquith’s pale grey, almost transparent eyes, stared at Panda sahib.
"Do you think he is real?"
"Yes."
"Why?"
"I have seen him and heard him speak. He speaks about tribal awakening and self-rule. A remarkably learned man. I do not mean formal learning."

"Colonel sahib, you must be mistaken," Pandaji spoke patronizingly. "For years there have been songs about Gunda Dhur. Like Lingo Pen, the other tribal hero, Gunda Dhur performs impossible feats. It would not be long before they deify him. You must not take Gunda Dhur seriously."

"I hope you are right," Asquith repeated. "Why do you not try some of the rice pudding that Abdul makes? It is delicious."

"I do not eat sweets," said Pandaji. "I really should be going now. Thanks for your hospitality."

Panda Baijnath bowed once again at his plate of food thanking the goddess for letting him eat and walked out of the Circuit House accompanied by the colonel. In the porch, with one foot on the step of the buggy, he turned back and spoke quietly, "Colonel sahib, I get the feeling that you are worried. For your sake I will make enquiries. If there is any trouble afoot, I will know."

"Thank you. And you will tell me if you hear anything?"

"No doubt.
"Namaskar."

23
Of culture

Kalandiya strode back to the village, his lean and hard brown limbs moving with fluid grace. It was the day of the new-eating festival and he had to have his hair cut today. He found Domru, where the boys always sat, to get their coiffures done.

The first-eating festival was an important agrarian festival for the hill Marias. Among the hill Marias shifting cultivation was the only form of agriculture that they knew. The Bhum or the Earth is god and no land is privately owned. The crops grow because of the combined labours of the entire village. If one person suffers, the entire village suffers. The hill Maria practises penda or hill slope cultivation. For this he fells and burns the forest growth on the steep hill sides. After everything is burned and the fire has cooled, the unburnt material and the ash is spread as evenly as possible over the hill sides, the seeds are broadcast in the ashes after the rains break. Once the difficult task of firing and sowing is over, new houses have to be built on the slopes and the entire village shifts to the new site.

Quickly Kalandiya squatted in front of Domru with his head between his knees while Domru caught the long locks on top of Kalandiya’s head with his left hand and with the other he began to swiftly shave the rest of Kalandiya’s head.

After he was done, Kalandiya’s head resembled in appearance a hill-crest with a clearing all around for
*penda* cultivation and a grove of trees left standing on the summit. Kalandiya touched the round patch of hair on the crown that had been drawn back into a top-knot and the rest shaved off by Domru. He wished he had a mirror to study his looks. Most of the other young men shaved their heads once a year but Kalandiya was vain and, besides, it was the day of the new-eating festival and all the girls would come to dance in it.

Kalandiya’s heart beat fast as he thought about Jugho. She was old enough for the *ghotul* now and would be seeking a *ghotul* husband very soon.

The *ghotul* is the village dormitory. It is an institution that traces its origin back to Lingo Pen, the fabled cult hero of the tribals, and all unmarried boys and girls must be its members. All the boys and girls are given different social duties in the *ghotul* and they are taught all the things that will be useful for them as responsible members of the tribe. The *ghotul* touches every facet of the tribal’s life. The boys are taught all the aspects of cultivation; how to fire the woods and spread the ash after the earlier ploughed fields become fallow, they are taught hunting, fishing, gathering honey, making liquor and so on. The girls learn their duties. Both boys and girls are taught the religious rites and their considerable mythology which is all verbal. Every tribal boy and girl is passionate about the *ghotul* and life inside it. Lingo’s most cherished memories are of life inside it and he regrets forever having to leave the *ghotul*. 
Lingo Pen, the legendary hero of the Gond tribals, gave the tribals all the things they love, including dance, music, and liquor. It was Lingo who gave the girls the sweet voices, and made their songs strong and true. It is Lingo who gives the feet of the boys and girls, the special strength and grace to make them dance tirelessly the whole night long.

It is Lingo who built the ghotul and laid down the rules of discipline to be followed in the ghotul. The first ghotul, where Lingo lived, was beautiful as the horns of the bison, beautiful as a horse's throat. Its central pillar was a python, the poles of the roof were snakes and the cross poles were cobras. The bamboo framework of the roof was covered with the peacock feathers. The walls were cod-fish bones, the door was made of crimson flowers and the floor was plastered with the flour of urad pulse. And so for Lingo Pen himself, his turban was like the white flower of the gourd, his shirt shone in the sun, his clogs were made of sandalwood and his belt was a snake. As he walked he sparkled. Many legends and poems talk of Lingo Pen and his relation with the ghotul.

Kalandiya's mouth went dry as he pictured Jugho in his mind's eye. She was beautiful! Her skin was the colour of wheat which he had seen in the bazaars of Jagdalpur. She was always smiling and had the longest, curliest hair in the village. Jugho was strong with the strength of the oxen that the bison-horn Marias used. Kalandiya had seen her walk to the bazaar once, a distance of forty miles and she had
arrived at the bazaar looking as fresh and pretty as a mahua flower with not a hair disturbed and not a dew drop of sweat on her body. The cord which she wore around her hips had at least fifty brass rings, many more than what most girls wore.

Jugho was not just any girl. She was special and Kalandiya was fond of her. He had learned some of the ways of the town people and he vowed to himself that he would get Jugho rings or silver, even gold, if only she agreed to be his ghotul wife.

"Oh, Kalandiya! You baboon’s tail! Why are you all shaved and dolled up? Is it your wedding day?" queried the boys of the village.

Kalandiya ignored them and hurried home.

"Come and eat some pej (porridge)," said Kalandiya’s mother, Mago.

She sat on her haunches before the tattooist submitting to his painful ministrations as he tattooed an intricate pattern of dots on her shoulder. She was a fine woman, copper-coloured with a skin that shone like butter. She wore ten strings of large, white uneven beads around her neck and two long strings ending in brass pellet bells hung at the level of her navel. She wore large iron neck hoops that gave her neck an elongated appearance. A number of loose bracelets of aluminium and brass on her wrists and dancing anklets on her feet completed her dress. She was the best looking and the richest woman in the village. Her carved and ornamental combs at the side of her head added to her finery.
She was unfortunately very vile-tempered, and was possessive of Kalandiya.

"Kalandiya!" It was Samru.

"What is it?" Kalandiya hissed back, finger to his lips, but still his mother heard.

"Kalandiya, do not talk to Samru! He lies to me. Wait till I get him."

"Oh, Ma back off. He only wants to dance with you."

"Dance with me, will he?" Ma jerked upright and the tattooing needle pierced her shoulder, that made her shriek in pain.

"Lie still, Mago," said the tattooist and boxed Ma’s shoulder making her shriek again.

"Eat your pej, Kalandiya," Mago repeated.

"Eat your pej!" Kalandiya muttered to himself. He did not want to eat pej. Why was there no meat today. Not even a teeny-weeny mouse, no pea fowl, nor snipe. Never mind, he consoled himself, there was bound to be rabbit at the first-eating festival today, maybe even deer, if he was lucky. Pork was, of course, bound to be there. Like all his tribesman he loved pork fat when it was hot and bubbling. He always slept long and hard after he ate pork. He was hungry and there were no other choices, he would have to eat the pej.

"Eat your pej," Kalandiya muttered again, as he slapped the sticky glue on to a plate of woven saja leaves and ate it quickly with his fingers.

What nobody knew, not even his friends, nor his mother, nor even the other ghotul boys and girls was
that he had been invited last night by Arki Boiyya for communion with the clan god.

Arki Boiyya was the clan priest, which meant he was the priest of not only their village but of ten or twelve villages around all of which had the same clan god, the vulture. Growing old, Arki Boiyya had begun to worry about a successor. Among the hill Marias, succession to the clan priest was not a matter of primogeniture. Arki Boiyya was honour-bound to choose the most suitable of the boys as his successor. Kalandiya had offered himself for the job. The reason he did so was the omen.

The clan priest

Kalandiya already had the birthmark of the clan priest on his body—a big spread of red stain right at the navel. The red stain, like an uneven flower, had existed right from birth. His mother, convinced that Kalandiya was a born witch doctor, took him to the meeting of the witch doctors and offered the boy to them for training. The witch doctors, secure in their position of authority, had said that it was not enough to have the mark. He also had to have the powers.

Mago was furious with the witch doctors for daring to refuse her son and she had vowed that she would never send Kalandiya to be trained as a clan priest even if all the witch doctors got together and begged her on bended knees. Kalandiya had been told this
story many times by his mother and yet he yearned to be the clan priest and, if possible, the high priest. For this he had to have some sign of the powers.

The high priest was the head of all the village priests and all the clan priests too. No one knew who the high priest was. It was one of the best kept secrets. Kalandiya was sure that as he had the omen he was sure to get the powers too and would soon be inducted into priesthood. Then he would get to meet the high priest.

The omen had come in a dream at first. Kalandiya was asleep in his house. In his dream he saw himself lying on the ground beneath the sacred amaltas (Indian laburnum) tree, and while he lay there he saw a straight slim arrow rise from his navel and shoot straight into the tree and strike the breast of a red rooster that was sitting on the branch of the tree. The arrow pierced the breast of the rooster and the dark red pulsating blood flowed down straight onto Kalandiya's navel. The rooster did not squawk or cry, it just bowed its head in obeisance.

It was then that Kalandiya went to Arki Boiyya, the clan priest, who asked him to come along for the worship of the clan god before the new-eating festival. That was going to be Kalandiya's test. Kalandiya was very excited at being invited by Arki Boiyya. He desperately wanted to be the clan priest, the most powerful man in the village.

The previous night the village had prepared fish for both the clan priest and the village priest. That
was the custom and it was an indication that the village wanted the first-eating festival to be held the next day. If the clan priest accepted the village's offering, the village felt gratified and they waited anxiously for the results of the communion with the clan god.

Arki Boiyya was more than just a clan priest; he was a medium through whom the clan god spoke to the village. He was thus one of the most feared persons in the village.

Arki Boiyya eyed the fish with distaste. "I have to fast and remain on a liquid diet."

"Then I too will fast," said Kalandiya.

"We will ask that fool Dolna to eat," said Arki Boiyya, meaning the village priest, and Kalandiya was shocked to hear how irreverently he spoke about the village priest.

"Dolna does not have the vision," said Arki Boiyya. "It does not matter whether he eats or does not."

"Do you think I have the vision?" Kalandiya sounded fearful.

"That is what we have to see."

"Will Dolna also come alone to worship the clan god?" asked Kalandiya.

"No." Arki Boiyya's voice was contemptuous and Kalandiya felt his heart swell with both fear and elation. It was an important day in his life. First there was this communion with the clan god, then the first-eating festival and, if he was lucky, a meeting with Jugho.
Kalandiya’s village had only recently shifted and it was no wonder that the village still had a new look about it. It was also the first new-eating festival being held in the new site and therefore the significance of the festival was double.

It was after midnight when Arki Boiyya and Kalandiya set off for the shrine of the clan god. Worshipping the clan god was serious business and had to be done in secrecy, with none around to witness it. The shrine was a permanent hut temple on top of the hill, in the centre of the clearing between the saja trees. The clan god for Kalandiya’s village, Chelru, was the spirit of the vulture, the most wicked and ferocious of birds as well as the wisest. It was a king among birds and could see everything from its flight high up in the sky. The vulture never eats the living, Arki Boiyya explained to Kalandiya as they climbed steadily up the steep hill feeling their way in the pitch dark night.

As Kalandiya followed the clan priest and absorbed everything that he said, he kept praying to the spirit of the trees, the spirit of the pile of boulders, the spirit of the mountain. All the spirits and the gods needed propitiation so that they permitted the humans to pass. Arki Boiyya advised Kalandiya that if he plucked the fruit of the trees he must seek the permission of the trees and thank them.

It was taboo to eat any of the new crops until the clan god gave them permission to do so. This was the new-eating festival of not only pulses and beans,
but of *kutki*, one of the main foods eaten by the hill Marias. They were going to seek the clan god’s blessings.

The shrine of the clan god on top of the hill was a framework of logs criss-crossed with bamboos. It was bedecked with peacock feathers, spirals of quills, brass bells and other finery. The next day, Arki Boiyya and Kalandiya would take the god to the traditional place of sacrifice beneath the sacred *saja* tree. Following the sacrifice would come the feasting and all the good food that the village could afford. Finally there was the dancing and drumming. Before all this, the clan priest needed to commune with the clan god.

Half-way up the hill, Arki Boiyya stopped and turned to Kalandiya, "Remove all your clothes. Now we smear ash all over our bodies and wear the vulture feathers in our hair. Like this." Arki Boiyya helped Kalandiya to fix the feathers in his top knot. With the rest of his head shaved, that was all he had for fixing decorations in his hair. "Only leave your sacred red mark uncovered. See, like I have done it. Now," Arki Boiyya faced the top of the hill exactly where the shrine was and said, "from here on we move in silence. We do not look down and we do not look at the sky. We look at the path or we look at the shrine."

"What happens up there?"

"There I am going to pray and dance like I have been taught. I will wait for the vision to come to me."

There was silence. When Kalandiya spoke again,
his voice was hushed with fear and excitement, 
"Do you always get a vision? I mean does the god speak to you?"
"Yes."
"What should I do?"
"You sit and pray and wait. The vision might come to you too."

Arki Boiyya spoke with eyes to the ground. His voice had a different timbre—remote and sonorous. Kalandiya got the feeling that Arki Boiyya was in a different world and he was seeing things that he himself was not seeing.

"Will there be demons? I thought..." Kalandiya's voice was fearful.

"Where there are gods, there will be demons."

Arki Boiyya refused to say more, even as Kalandiya was bubbling with questions. He stood before the god, knees bent and hands joined in obeisance above his head. His ash-smeared body began swaying rhythmically to some music that only he could hear. The dance began very slowly and then, picking up speed, his feet settled into monotonous steps that kept repeating themselves.

Kalandiya watched for a while. Soon the endless repetition made him dizzy and he closed his eyes. Immediately it seemed as though someone had placed immensely heavy weights on his eyes and he was unable to keep them open. Soon he felt his body becoming heavy and he did not have the strength to resist the stupor that was stealing over him. He had
no control either over his body or his mind. The present receded and he was free.

Kalandiya was the vulture. He was the huge grey bird with the heavy jowls and the razor-sharp curved yellow beak. His yellow-rimmed eyes had a fantastic vision. He could see everything. What was that in the valley below? Kalandiya felt himself being lifted by his powerful wings and suddenly he was aloft, gliding effortlessly over trees and villages. He was soaring. Way below him Kalandiya saw a strange sight.

He saw hundreds of big, black ants running hither and thither. Almost crazy with fear, they ran in all directions blundering and scrambling. Big snakes with long forked tongues surrounded them. The snakes did nothing. They sat there with raised hoods and darting tongues. The foolish ants themselves fell into the snakes’ mouths. Sometimes the ants tried to fight but their pitiful attempts got them nowhere. Kalandiya flew back to his mountain pursued by the cries of people dead and dying. He saw terrible sights everywhere—children struggling in rivers of blood, headless bodies hanging upside down and much more.

When Kalandiya woke up, he was lying face down in the dirt far from the shrine. The first light of the day had begun to reveal the world. There was no sign of Arki Boiyya. Kalandiya lay for a very long time waiting for his strength to return so that he could go back to the village. After a while he heard the sound of singing and rejoicing as the entire village along
with Arki Boiyya carried the clan god down the hill to the sacrificial place. The clan god would first be taken to the shrine of the village Mother. The clan priest would place a grain or two of the new crop on the table stone or cleft stick representing her. He would sprinkle the blood of a small chicken on the Mother and the clan god and throw the still live chicken on the ground. If after a convulsive leap or two the chicken fell on its back with its claws in the air, it was an excellent omen! The sacrifices to the clan god then began in earnest. With every sacrifice blood was sprinkled on the clan god till the god itself dripped blood upon the ground below. The sacrifices were essential. The clan god was not easy to please.

At night the dancing began. The flesh of the sacrificed animals was cooked together in immense pots, in which the new grain was added. The boys and girls of adjoining villages also came to participate in the rejoicing. As the fragrance of the food rose, the drums began beating. Soon the sweet young voices of the Maria boys and girls mingled in song. The male singers asked questions, and the female singers replied in a full-throated chorus. The hills and forests resounded with the sound of the drums, the singing and the pounding feet.

Kalandiya did not participate in the dancing or the feasting. Frightened by what he had seen, he wanted time to reflect. What did it mean? Kalandiya was exhausted with want of sleep, fear and the thinking he had done. He did not discuss what he had seen
even with Arki Boiyya. He had to find the meaning of the omen himself, if he intended becoming the next clan priest. Right now he was just a very frightened and tired boy.

'Bhumkal'

One evening the village kaseq gaita and the elders of the village met over an unexpected treat of mahua wine, and decided to start building the ghotul dormitory in the new village.
"For long we have been without the ghotul."
"We need to send the boys and girls to help start building the ghotul."
"Yes, do that. The dormitory must come up first."
"For the boys and girls."
"Go, call Kalandiya."

In no time Kalandiya came before the council, panting and puffing, his matted locks awry. He flopped down in the dust and looked expectantly at Dolna, the village priest. He was dying to know why the elders had called him.
"Kalandiya, as the head boy of the ghotul, it is your duty to gather the boys and start building the dormitory."
"For too long have the boys and girls gone without instruction."
"It is the right time," said Dolna, the village priest, nodding his head wisely.
Kalandiya gritted his teeth.
"You have to build the ghotul. Get the boys."
"I will, sir, today. But am I to take only the boys?"
Kalandiya's dark eyes darted from face to face with desperate urgency.
The faces of all the elders were impassive. Flat expressionless faces stared at Kalandiya. Almost simultaneously, the elders burst into laughter. They threw back their heads and shrieked. They pointed knobby fingers at Kalandiya's bewildered face and went on laughing.
"Look at his face."
"He is smitten!"
"He wants a ghotul wife."
"He wants Joghu!"
Angry at being laughed at, Kalandiya got up in a huff, and stalked off. He strode beneath the teak trees hitting out at the branches in anger till his temper cooled.
Kalandiya slowed down, and chewed at the stem of a bamboo shoot while his mind darted to the image of Jugho massaging his arms and legs. He would go to the village of the Murias, Pooliya, that was situated in the plains just at the point where the hills finished to get the special lemon grass oil that they distilled. It had a beautiful pungent smell and, when rubbed on the body it left a tingling sensation all over. The thought of Jugho massaging his back with the oil was exciting.
Kalandiya jogged back to the village. He knew the exact spot to build the ghotul. It was in the forest,
a twenty-minute walk away from the village. It was the perfect spot for the dormitory. There, in the middle of the forest was a clearing almost round in shape and surrounded by the drooping branches of the graceful laburnam trees. He would build there.

Suddenly the lemon grass oil became very important. "I will go to the Muria village right now and secure the oil. Then I can ask Jugho to be my ghotul wife."

An excitable kind, Kalandiya forgot that he was to send the ghotul boys to start work. Instead he ran to the laburnam tree behind his house and began digging at the mud plaster he had used to seal the hole in the trunk of the tree. That hole was his special hiding place, where he kept all his treasured possessions. His most precious treasure was a hoard of five blue beads. They were beautiful. Oval in shape with a hole through them for stringing, the beads were a bright shade of blue, a colour that Kalandiya had not seen on anything else. He held the warm beads in the hollow of his hands and gloated over them. They were not his. Someone had offered them at the shrine of the village Mother goddess. Kalandiya made them his own.

As Kalandiya again looked at this bright blue colour of the beads and his heart contracted with pain at the thought of losing them. Yet he hardened his heart. He would use them to buy the oil. Kalandiya tucked the beads into a fold in his loin cloth and looked at the sun. He was sure he could go to Pooliya, and come back by nightfall.
However, Kalandiya had misjudged the distance. When the plains were finally in sight, Kalandiya stopped to rest beside the Indravati river for a drink of water and nibble at some edible roots. The sun was on its way down. Should he turn back? For one heavenly moment he smelled the strong lemon-like smell of the oil. It was fabulous. Where the lemon grass was distilled for the oil, the entire village was fragrant. He would go on to Pooliya he decided.

Strangely the village seemed deserted. It was dark. No women pounded the pestle, no children played. There was a death-like stillness all around. He remembered suddenly the time when there was a famine in Bastar. Half their village had been wiped out. He had heard stories of the piles of dead and dying and what his mother, Mago, described as the 'great silence'. Hark, someone was coming. It was a woman with two or three children in tow.

"Excuse me," began Kalandiya.

"Feringhee," shouted the woman and turned to flee.

"No, no, I am a tribal like you," said Kalandiya. "Wait. Where is everyone?"

The woman refused to answer and ran inside a house dragging her children behind her. Strange, thought Kalandiya, and decided to go in the direction from which she had come. As soon as he crossed the village, Kalandiya found the jungle again.

Ahead of him lay a well-beaten path and Kalandiya set off down the path at a brisk pace. He had hardly
travelled fifteen minutes before his ears were hit by
the sound of many voices. Some light filtered through
the thick jungle and instinctively Kalandiya stepped
off the track and the cover of the jungle. It was not
the most intelligent thing to do, for every hill Maria
knew the plains were filled with snakes. He said
a quick mental prayer to Danteshwari Ma, the
supreme goddess and with his hands stretched out
before him he began feeling his way towards
the clearing.

Something seemed to be going on in the clearing.
He could now make out that a large number of people
had gathered there. Light came from six or seven
kerosene lamps. He crept closer, and unobtrusively
became part of the outer circle of men and women.
They stood close, tightly packed together and listened
to one man who stood in the centre of the circle and
addressed them. The man was giving some kind of
speech. Kalandiya's curiosity was aroused.

"The feringhees are dacoits, looters! They have
taken from us the jungle and the earth, which is our
mother. Now they want the forests. They want our
forests, our timber, and what will they give us in
return?"

"Hunger!"

"Begar (forced labour)!"

"Yes! Hunger and begar! The forests are reserved
they say. What does it mean? It means that we cannot
cut the wood but they can loot the jungle as much as
they like. All that we get is a pittance for a wage. Our
homes are gone and our means of livelihood are gone. What do we get in return?"
"Hunger!"
"Begar!"
"Yes, my brothers, yes. And as if that were not enough, what does the feringhee do now? He gives our villages on lease to thekedars (contractors) and tells the thekedars to collect taxes. So the thekedar gets all the money and the land and the poor tribal is looted in his own home. He does not even have the money to pay his taxes. So what does he get?"
"Hunger!"
"Begar!"
"Friends, the insult is meted out to us, to our gods. We have lived in the forest and have lived off the forest for generations. From the forest we get our liquor which is the offering to our gods, the ancestral way to worship. And the Englishmen have taken even that away from us. They say that the tribal cannot brew his own liquor any more!"

A legendary hero

The speaker's voice was thunderous. For the next few minutes he ranted on, repeating himself while Kalandiya tried to digest what he had heard. The gorə-loɣ (British) had decided the tribal was not to brew liquor? Kalandiya almost laughed aloud at that. How could that happen? Every tribal collected the
mahua flowers and brewed his own liquor. The first drops he gave to Mother Earth, then to Danteshwari Ma, the clan god, the village Mother, the ancestors and then he drank the first draft deeply and in one gulp. The last swallow he spat out for the demons and the monsters so that they would not have cause to complain and would not sour the brew. No Englishman or thekedar or anyone could stop that. It was like saying they should not eat or sing or dance. It was laughable.

As the speaker had finished his speech, another man got up to speak. A hush descended on the assembly. Women quietened babies and men moved closer, anxious not to lose even the tiniest whisper. The man stood silent for a moment or two and Kalandiya studied him curiously. He was not a hill Maria obviously. His skin was lighter-coloured, his build slight, almost boyish. Certainly the narrow shoulders and pale, thin face was most unimpressive. He began speaking.

He spoke in a soft voice which, to start with, was almost inaudible but slowly gathered in strength. "Friends," he said, "we have been humiliated. I sometimes look around me and wonder what we have done to deserve this. We tribals do not bother anybody. We live quietly in our homes and worship our gods. We do not even go into their area. Why then do they grab our land and our forests? All we want is to be left alone—let the Raja leave us alone, let his Diwan leave us alone, let the feringhee leave us alone.
They will not. They take everything away from us and ask us to pay taxes. From where can we pay taxes when we cannot sell forest produce and cannot brew our own liquor? This cannot go on any longer.

"My brothers, we have to fight for our rights. At this very moment you have to decide whether you are with me or you are not with me. Let the man who does not want to fight, leave this assembly at this moment. I will have no quarrel with him."

A long, tense moment passed by as the man with the intense coal-black eyes stood rock-still and stared into the crowd. The crowd consisted of members of various tribes. There they sat on the dusty, leaf-covered ground staring open-mouthed at the speaker.

There were the Koyas of South Bastar, bison-horn Marias, Telugu tribals with dark faces, the Halbas, the Murias and, of course, the hill Maria tribals too. No one spoke a word or moved a muscle. Whites of eyes flashing in the dark night, with matted locks and minimum clothing the tribals of Bastar sat frozen, spellbound by the oratory.

Kalandiya's attention was riveted on the speaker and he was surprised to note how ordinary the man was! He was a slight, thin man, bronze in colour with a head of thick, black hair that seemed to see the ministrations of regular combing. He was dressed like a money-lender though in a rather dirty white kurta-pyjama. Unlike the first speaker, he did not raise his voice or try to impress anyone. He stood most naturally, spoke in a normal voice and yet he had
everyone's attention. They seemed to hang on every word of his. Who was he that he got so much devotion without seeming to ask for it?

Kalandiya stared hard at the man and suddenly, as though he seemed to realize that he was being stared at, the man lifted his head and looked straight at Kalandiya. Like a rabbit frozen by the stare of a snake, Kalandiya stared back at the man. Slowly the man lifted a hand and beckoned Kalandiya. Kalandiya felt himself immediately responding to the gesture almost as if his brain had nothing to do with the decision.

"Where have you come from and what are you doing here?" the man asked.
"I...I," Kalandiya floundered.
"Who is he?"
"An outsider!"
"An outsider. Kill him!" shouted someone from the crowd.

"Kill!" screamed the crowd that was so placid a second ago.

The man raised a hand to silence them. "That is the problem with us. We do not use our heads. Does he look like a spy? He is a poor hill Maria like many of you. Tell me, boy, why are you here?"

"I..." Kalandiya looked at the man and at the crowd that was staring at him and then again at the man. "Who are you?" he blurted out.

"I am Gunda Dhur."

Gunda Dhur!

Gunda Dhur was a rebel who had promised to free
Bastar from the yoke of the feringhees. He was the most important legendary figure after Lingo Pen.

"My brother from the hills of Abujhmar," said Gunda Dhur, smiling slightly at a dazed Kalandiya. "You are now part of our plan. Are you ready to fight the feringhees?"

Dumbly Kalandiya found himself nodding.

"Good. Sit beside me." Gunda Dhur gently pushed Kalandiya till he found himself seated almost at the feet of the rebel leader craning his neck to look into his face.

"Now that we have all decided to free ourselves from foreign yoke, here is what you have to do." Gunda Dhur raised his left hand and began to count on the fingers with his right hand. "First, make bows and arrows. Make as many as you can. Work night and day at the task. Second, grind poison for the arrows. Never forget that feringhees are the enemy. They do not deserve your sympathy. Next, sharpen the axes. We are going to fight everyone of them. We would throw them out of Bastar. But our preparations are going to be very stealthy and quiet. Nobody must know about the preparations and certainly no one who is not a tribal. Those of you who work with the feringhees and the Diwan and those of you, burdened by the loans of the money-lenders are going to make the preparations while behaving very normal. No one must know what we are planning. I cannot emphasize enough how important secrecy is. Your life and the lives of everyone here are dependent on that.
"Now," Gunda Dhur's face relaxed a little, "how are we going to communicate? We will circulate messages through red chillies hidden in clumps of earth. In every village when the chillies arrive, the headman must make five more clumps with red chillies inside and pass them on to the next five villages. Every such message will tell you that preparations are going on all over Bastar and that you must continue with your preparations too. Grind those arrow heads and axes. Train every ghotul member. Hold meetings. Spread the word. We prepare for the day, then strike when, with a single attack we will fell the feringhees and the Raja of Bastar. No man will be our master. We will bow only to the gods and Danteshwari Ma, who has blessed our rebellion. The day we are ready to strike will be the day of the great earthquake—the BHUMKAL."

"BHUMKAL!"

"Utmost secrecy will be our weapon and our centres for preparation will be ghotuls, our army will consist of young boys and girls. Choose one leader among three or four villages and start the work. Wait for my signal—red chillies hidden inside chapattis. Note the difference. The normal signal will be chillies inside lumps of earth, and my signal will come by way of chillies inside chapattis. When you get my signal, you will strike, not a day before that. And what will you strike? You will strike post offices, telephone lines, schools, vehicles, everything that belongs to the feringhees including the feringhee himself. That is
why we need the poison-tipped arrows. For the Bhumkal!"

"Bhumkal!"

"The earthquake!"

"Bhumkal!

Kalandiya did not remember how he stumbled back to his village from Pooliya. All the way he thought about Gunda Dhur. The man was extraordinary. His very presence was overpowering yet he looked so insignificant. It was his eyes! They had a magnetic quality that was almost hypnotic. If only he could work for Gunda Dhur, he would be like a slave for him.

'I will not let him down,' resolved Kalandiya. 'I will train all the ghotul members, both boys and girls,' he thought, 'and make the Bhumkal a success. As soon as he reached the village he would call all the ghotul boys and girls for a secret meeting. The old ghotul would do for this.

'The elders would have to be told that there was more important work to be done than building a new ghotul.'

Ghotul

On a dark night two days after the historic gathering, Kalandiya called a meeting of the young boys and girls of the village. The meeting in Pooliya with the seemingly innocuous and unassuming leader had influenced him a great deal. He had totally
forgotten about the lemon grass oil which he had gone to get. Suddenly he saw for himself a far greater role in the liberation struggle than he had ever dreamed of. Had not Gunda Dhur told him that he needed young and dedicated people like him? When Kalandiya had told him that he was likely to be the next clan priest, Gunda Dhur had sounded even more pleased. Who could influence the people better than the clan priest himself?

Walking to the ghotul through the dark, still night, Kalandiya called upon the trees and boulders on the way to give him their blessings. Once he stood before the god of the amaltas tree and prayed that he be allowed to pass in peace and that god grant him a silver tongue like Gunda Dhur’s. Ever since he had gone up the hill to pray to the clan god, his stature had gone up in the eyes of the villages around the area. Even the elders first looked away in respect when they met him or spoke to him.

The old ghotul’s main dormitory, a long hall, mostly bare except for some bins in which wheat was stored, was dimly lit by three oil lamps that stood in the tiny alcoves built into the walls. The ghotul boys and girls squatted on the floor and looked expectantly at Kalandiya who knelt at the head of the room. The flickering light of the lamp made everyone’s shadow larger than life. Kalandiya was short and stocky and he had the typical features of the hill Maria. His high cheek bones cast shadows that gave his face a hollow, hungry cadaverous look which, strangely enough,
made him look very powerful. Kalandiya had very strong magic and everyone in the room knew that. Kalandiya had chosen to smear his body with ash. His face, arms, torso and legs, all shone pale white-grey in the gloom and brought beads of perspiration on the brows of the listeners. Nobody dared to look away. It was well known that those who spoke to the spirits could suck out the jiva (tongue) of a person and make him an idiot who did not even remember his own name.

Kalandiya gripped his knees with both hands and stared right into the 'souls' of the boys and girls in the room. The room was deathly silent. Every eye was on Kalandiya. No one shifted or scratched or did anything, "I have spoken to the spirits," Kalandiya’s voice was low and hoarse. Some of the boys who were sitting at the end of the hall leaned forward so that they did not miss a word. At the mention of spirits there was a collective sigh from everyone.

There was not a doubt in anyone's mind that there were spirits in the room. Some saw monstrous shapes in the shadows. The room was oppressively hot. All the doors had been closed for the sake of secrecy. There was fear in every heart, fear of the feringhee and fear of Kalandiya too. It was as though Kalandiya was not the boy of their childhood but a full-fledged witch doctor with extraordinary magical powers.

"I have spoken to the spirits," repeated Kalandiya.

"It is true," said Arki Boiyya, the clan priest. "The clan god spoke and said that Kalandiya was a fitting
successor to me. You have to respect Kalandiya the way you respect me."

"Clan priest! Kaseq gaita!"

The boys and girls drew back in real fear. A kaseq gaita as young as Kalandiya would have to be very powerful to be chosen as successor. They avoided each other's eyes.

"Kalandiya's magic is strong," said Arki Boiyya. "Pola of the neighbouring village had been suffering from a lingering sickness for the last five weeks. Only Kalandiya could break the spell of the curse on him."

Everyone knew that serious sickness was caused by witchcraft and only a very good clan priest could perform enough magic to drive away another's magic. A man, who knew bad magic, could make a man fall ill, could make animals sick mysteriously and die, make a standing crop turn yellow overnight and whither away and could kill a man! And the fact that Kalandiya had performed the magic made everyone regard him with new overawed eyes.

"That is another matter," said Kalandiya, dismissing Arki Boiyya's praise with a wave of his hand. "We have gathered today for another very important matter. Chillies are being circulated by Gunda Dhur for a rebellion against the feringhees and the government officials who take money from us. Every man and woman gathered here tonight knows that both the feringhees and the Raja look down upon us and our way of life. They think their religion is superior and, thinking us stupid, they come to steal
from us. They take away our homes and our forests, destroy our gods and send money-lenders and *talukadars* (large land-owners) to extract money from us. Where do we have money? Now they say we cannot make liquor. Can you believe that? No *l Anda* no *mahua* beer, no nothing."

There was a sudden loud and angry babble of voices as the assembly tried to comprehend the meaning of what had just been said. Surely there was a mistake somewhere? "Silence! Yes, what I have said is true. It is no story. We have to fight for our rights and we have a saviour in Bastar, a man who is willing to fight for us. And this leader is—Gunda Dhur!"

Another loud babble of excited and nervous voices threatened to bring the roof down. Again Kalandiya pleaded for silence. He knew he had given the folks of his village more shocks than they had bargained for but it had to be done. It was no use adopting an ostrich-like mentality and burying heads in the sand in the hope that the danger will pass. "Yes, Gunda Dhur is our saviour and he cannot fight any battle alone. He needs our help. On behalf of all of you I have committed our friendship and help. Does everyone agree to help?" There was no answer, just a collective intake of breath. Gunda Dhur! Everyone was too dazed by the shocks thrown at them by Kalandiya to reply, and he rightly assumed that the answer was in the affirmative.

"Good. Then that at least is settled. From tomorrow a special camp is being organized. I want the girls to
make arrows and grind the poison. The boys will practise target shooting and make the bows. We have to be ready."

"Ready for what?" asked one boy, fearfully.

"Ready for the signal that will say that the time for the Bhumkal has come. Then we will fight." Kalandiya said this softly, staring into the shadows as though he was seeing something that no one else was seeing. "Yes, we will fight for our rights." As he spoke, his face hardened and his eyes narrowed till he looked not of this world. The boys and girls shrank back in fear.

"Bhumkal! Earthquake!"

An earthquake that would shake the foundations of the feringhee rule in Bastar. They would see the might of the tribesman and would quake in fear.

"Kalandiya?" whispered Jugho. The pupils of her eyes were like pin-points of black swimming in the milky whites. She too was afraid of the new Kalandiya. He did not look human.

The dance

Kalandiya barely glanced up and, for a long moment he continued to stare at the demons which only he seemed to see. They seemed to show him images which he did not like as his face grew grimmer. Then he looked up and found that everyone was staring at him. Suddenly he smiled and everyone
heaved a sigh of relief. He looked like the old Kalandiya who liked to laugh and dance and play practical jokes.

"Tonight we will dance," he said. "Tonight we will dance like we have never danced before and we will take a vow that after tonight we will dance again only when the forest will truly belong to us, hill Marias.

"Come on," he shook the shoulders of the boys in front of him. "Go, call the drummers. And get the bells, will you? We are all going to dance. Let us go. Out of here! Come on."

He stretched his arms and got up. Then he stepped out followed by the longing gaze of Jugho. Everyone knew that Kalandiya liked Jugho but only Jugho knew how much she cared for Kalandiya. Even now, when he scared her with his strange powers, she was unbearably attracted to him and wanted more than anything else to wipe the look of worry from his face. But Kalandiya was gone.

Outside the stars shone with a sharp white brilliance that was almost ferocious. The night was still young and there was no moon. In the clearing in the forest between the ghotul and the village, torches had been lit. As Kalandiya stepped into the clearing, it was as though he stepped into another world. It was as though the stars faded and the jungle retreated. Quickly Kalandiya scoured his body with water so that the ash flowed away. Wet and glistening from head to toe, Kalandiya stepped into the clearing again just as the drummers began their first tentative beats.
The drummers were beginning to warm up the drums and their hands. Still the fingers moved slowly, almost delicately. The boys and girls too seemed languorous, as though they were waiting for something to happen.

Jugho stood beneath the trees and watched them line up for the dance. The girls slipped their left hands around the waist of the person on their left and put their right hands on the right shoulder of the girl on their right. Like this they began a slow stamping dance, first bending low at the waist and then moving up again, all in perfect synchronization. The rhythm was still slow and the stamping raised little dust.

Jugho shivered a little in the cold night air. The chill that she felt was more than the chill of approaching winter, it was the chill of fear. It was true, as Kalandiya said, that the thekedar bought timber cheap from the tribals and sold it dear, but at least he gave them money when they wanted it. It was also true that the forest really belonged to the tribals and the school was the homes of witchcraft, but who could kill all the feringhees and throw out all the government officers? She tried to imagine life without the thekedar who gave them food on credit and the money-lender who gave them money and the forest officials who collected the land revenue. She was afraid. What if everyone left? Would not they also die in that situation?

"Jugho?"

Jugho was so lost in her thought that she did not hear anyone approach. She turned with a gasp of fear. "Huh!"
"It is me, Kalandiya."
"Yes?" said Jugho. She instinctively moved away from him.
"Are you afraid of me, Jugho?"
"You know magic."
"So I do."
"And you want the Bhumkal."
"I do. I want the earthquake."
There was silence.
"Do not be afraid of me, Jugho," said Kalandiya.
"I...I want to dance," she whispered and hurried to the clearing in front of the ghotul leaving Kalandiya staring after her.

The drummers were picking up the rhythm now and so were the dancers. Jugho quickly slipped into the snaking line of the women dancers and joined in the high-pitched singing too. The boys snaked in a separate line in front of the girls. Every time the boys raised their heels they moved their waists so as to make the bunches of bells that hung at the waists clash. The dancing scene was lit up by blazing torches and log fires.

Suddenly Kalandiya leaped in the middle of the circle of dancers, his face covered by a tiger mask. From his shoulders hung a cloak of tiger skin. The mindless monotony of the dancers steps was broken by the sudden interest generated by Kalandiya and they launched into a strange and aggressive dance. This time the tiger man was not playing games. He had found his ghotul wife.
The next day dawned grey and chilly. Unable to sleep, Jugho slipped out and picked her way to the Indravati river. She was disturbed by the *ghotul* meeting of the night.

The feringhees were very powerful. They had vehicles and guns. What did they, the poor hill folk, have? Bare hands and some magic? True, tribal magic was very strong. It was known that clan priests could actually kill a man without touching him. If that was possible, why not use that method to kill all the feringhee and the money-lenders? Was bloodshed the only way? Jugho entered the cold, fast-flowing waters of the river shivering a little as she splashed water on her shoulders.

Kalandiya stood on the bank. How long had he stood there watching her? Jugho glanced at him a little shyly, a little fearfully. She loved him with all her heart and soul. She wanted him to leave her alone so that she could sort out her feelings. Her thoughts and actions pulling her in opposite directions, Jugho inadvertently moved further away from the bank than she intended. Suddenly her legs shot off from beneath her and in a split second her entire body was caught up in a vortex of the fast flowing river and she was in the middle of the mainstream.

"Kalandiya!" Jugho shouted in despair, giving him a last glimpse of a white face and frightened staring eyes before she was swirled away by the dark waters of the Indravati river. The Falls were just ahead!

Petrified, Kalandiya stood rock-still for a few
moments. Then, with a sudden cry of anguish Kalandiya leaped into the river and felt himself swept along by the current. Arms failing and with a stomach full of water, he fought to keep his head above the water. Around him the cold, dark river thrashed and swirled in rage. Nothing could stand in the way of its might. The river was flowing downhill and there was absolutely nothing to hold on to. There was not even time to think, leave alone look for Jugho or try to save her. It was enough work to keep his own head above water. Kalandiya felt himself being swiftly borne downstream. Then, without any warning, he felt himself being dragged underneath. Though the top of the river was ferocious, the undercurrents were treacherous. Kalandiya fought with all his might to stay afloat, but it was no use.

Then he was over the fall!

Kalandiya's last conscious thought was about Jugho. Where was Jugho? Dear God, were they both going to die?

Kalandiya woke with huge spasms of cough. He was lying on his back and the blazing sun was in his eyes. It seemed to him that the entire universe was swinging around crazily. He coughed and vomited and fought for breath. The retching was so severe that his lungs felt as though they would burst and his throat was dry and on fire. Tears welled up in his eyes and as he sobbed, his breathing became even more difficult. He was going to die. He could not breathe, he could not see. His entire body was one huge mass
of hurts and grazes that burned raw. His back was on fire.

Even in agony, all Kalandiya could think of was Jugho and all he wanted to do was to die. Someone tipped him over on his stomach and pushed hard against his back forcing his lungs to deflate and then gasp in air greedily. The pain in his back was intense but at least he breathed.

"Jugho," gasped Kalandiya faintly, tears pouring down his eyes. "Jugho." He knew that she was dead. No girl could survive that fall. "Jugho."

There was sudden commotion around and a babel of voices. People realized that he was going to live. Someone made him sit up and offered him a drink of water. Kalandiya shook his head in despair. He did not want anything. He asked them if they had also rescued a girl, a girl as beautiful as a mahua flower. No, they replied, they did not. Then a strangely harsh voice said something in a language which he did not understand and Kalandiya squinted up at the speaker. What he saw was a golden giant with a covered upper body and bare legs.

The enemy

Kalandiya cowered in fear, unable to draw his eyes from the pale, sneering face and the gun held loosely in one hand. Where had the feringhee come from? Kalandiya looked around him with wild, frightened
eyes. He was surrounded. There were men all around him and they were staring at him and then at the feringhee. The feringhee was saying something in a strange tongue. He spoke through clenched teeth and appeared to be chewing a twig. The tribals stared at him in deference and kept nodding their heads in agreement.

"Yes, sarkar."
"Yes, sahib."
"Yes, your honour."

The men who had rescued him bowed to the feringhee, apparently understanding all that he was saying.

"No, he will not run away."
"Yes, sarkar. We will put him to work on the mines."
"Breaking stones."
"Digging ore."

Breaking stones! Digging ore! Where on earth was he? He was in a feringhee camp of forced labour! He was a slave, kidnapped so that they could extract forced labour from him. This was what Gunda Dhur had spoken about. He was a slave of the feringhee! He would never see his old village or home again. Kalandiya began wailing deep grief and despair. The feringhee snorted in disgust but the tribals watched him in sympathy. They knew the pain of being in forced labour camp.

One month of back-breaking work in the mines had numbed Kalandiya’s senses. He hardly knew when the day began and when the day ended. It seemed to
him as though he never got a chance to rest and he
never got enough food. They were all hauled out of
bed at five-thirty in the morning, given a thin gruel
and a drink of mahna wine called landa and put to
work. At regular intervals after that, all that they got
was more landa and no solid food till the evening. By
that time the men were all so exhausted that they
would be swaying on their feet. To sleep they had
prickly mattresses of dried leaves and thatch that left
a criss-cross pattern on his back and many insect bites.
Kalandiya was always groggy from the landa, bone
weary from the labour. Sometimes he dreamt of Jugho
and wept like a baby. How long was it since he met
Gunda Dhur and decided to organize the ghotul
boys and girls? What had happened to the Bhumkal?
The feringhees were so powerful that there was little
hope against their guns and education and golden
strength.

Ah, Jugho! In his mind’s eye Kalandiya saw Jugho’s
tender eyes suddenly fill with fear as the treacherous
river pulled her away from him. Kalandiya wept
anew. His guilt was that he was alive whereas she
was dead. And what a life for him! A proud, fearless
hill Maria, he slaved in the sun for a handful of food.
Why were the gods so cruel to him?

Kalandiya feared the feringhee with a fear that was
primeval, like ancient man’s fear of lightning. He
drove them with whips so that they worked fast and
constantly. The mines bled red ore and so did the
hands and the hearts of the slaves. Even as they slaved
under the sun, the feringhee could be seen striding up and down, slapping a cane against his thigh, his eyes darting constantly. He was looking for the shirkers or even the slow ones who then would be at the receiving end of his wrath. Kalandiya too had felt the pain and indignation of the cane on his naked back. Oh, the humiliation of it! Worse than the feringhee were the servants that he employed. Those corrupt petty officials, who implemented the Englishman's policies, exploited the tribals with a vengeance that made Kalandiya wonder why the Bhumkal targeted the feringhee only. Except for the colour of their skins there was little difference in the behaviour of the feringhee and their servants. If anything, the servants seem to take greater sadistic delight in exploiting their own countrymen.

James sahib was a particularly slothful example of an Englishman who in England would not have risen above a shop assistant or bus conductor or maybe a minor clerk in some obscure office. In India he was the Burra sahib (head man), the white man who willingly shouldered the burden of the naked savage. So what if the Burra sahib was a drunken slouch who had a cruel, vicious streak and an inordinate love for money. James sahib's terror was absolute and he did not hesitate to use either the whip or his fists.

"Administrator sahib is coming today." The slave camp was abuzz with news.

"He is the biggest feringhee of them all,"

"Even bigger than James sahib?"
"James sahib is a small fry in front of Asquith sahib."

"What is an administrator?"

"That I do not know. Today rice and lentils are being served so that we do not look too starved tomorrow and we do not complain against James sahib."

Kalandiya, who was eating the rice with the speed of the starved, wondered if anyone would dare to speak against James sahib and even if someone did, it would be of any use. The tribal labourers spoke no English and the Englishman spoke no *Halbi* or any of the other dialects spoken in the area. So how was anyone going to complain? Still, in spite of the hopelessness in his heart, Kalandiya slept well that night. Whether it was the knowledge that James sahib could not terrorize him as long as the Administrator sahib was there, or whether it was the unaccustomed rice and lentils, Kalandiya could not tell.

Strangely enough no one came to wake them up at the usual time either. When Kalandiya finally opened his eyes, his heart leaped into his throat with fear. The sun was already above the trees. Quickly he ran outside only to find everyone loitering around a man who was actually giving everyone a cup of tea and, wonder of wonders, dry chapattis!

They did go to work in the mines that day but there was an air of expectancy among the labourers, though for the life of him Kalandiya did not understand what there was to expect. He found himself stopping work again and again to look up at the ledge where James
sahib usually stood. The ledge was empty. Neither James sahib nor Asquith sahib put in an appearance the whole day. Even the servants were nowhere. For the first time the labourers were let off early.

Kalandiya sat alone, away from the gossiping crowds. He wanted to see the new sahib. The new sahib had the power to keep James sahib away from the mines and that was reason enough to want to see him. And a good sahib was such a contradiction in terms that Kalandiya just had to get up and go. He made his way through the thick undergrowth to the feringhee’s house to see for himself what was happening. Unfortunately the area around the house was too well tended to offer any place to hide. For a while he hung among the trees getting brief, tantalizing glimpses of a golden head. Then, unable to restrain himself further, Kalandiya loped silently across the lawn and crouched beneath the open window. Strange sounds and smells wafted out and he was sorely tempted to look inside. Slowly he poked his head over the sill all the time expecting a gun to blow away his brains. He stared transfixed at the scene in front of him.

The room looked like nothing that he had seen in his life. It had panelled walls of polished wood and at least a hundred lamps. The room was so brightly lit that it resembled a temple. Light shone off every surface. James stood behind a chair, his very stance revealing his discomfiture as he shifted nervously from one foot to another, waving his white
hands in the air as he struggled to answer Asquith.

Asquith sat on an easy chair with his head resting against the cane back of the chair. Both his legs with calf length leather boots were crossed on a red velvet foot cushion. His left hand twirled his moustache and in his right hand he held a cigar that smouldered slowly. He had blind eyes, or so they seemed to Kalandiya because they were the colour of playing marbles. Asquith smiled very unpleasantly at James and said something in a lazy voice. He did not raise his voice a single octave but the effect which his words had on James was electric. James literally hopped on his toes and a string of incomprehensible words poured out of his throat. The more he struggled, the more Asquith smiled.

Suddenly, a hand was clamped on Kalandiya’s mouth and he found himself being half-lifted half-dragged into the surrounding jungle. Kalandiya screamed silently in his throat.

"I am going to remove my hand from your mouth. Do not shout. Do you understand?" Kalandiya nodded, whites of his eyes rolling. "If you shout, you will bring the sahibs upon us and even Mahadev cannot save you." Kalandiya nodded mutely and the hand was removed from his mouth and he got a first clear sight of his kidnapper. "Do you not have any sense?" said the kidnapper. "Peeping like this inside the sahib’s room? What if they had seen you? They would have killed you and thrown you to the dogs!"
"Who are you?"

"My name is Sukma and I work for Asquith sahib. Do not be afraid," he added, seeing the look of fear returning in Kalandiya’s eyes. "I am first a bison-horn Maria and then a servant of the feringhees."

"Feringhee? You work for him?" Kalandiya choked over the word.

"Yes," said Sukma impatiently. "And he is a good sahib."

Kalandiya shook his head. No white man could be good. "Why do you work for him?"

Sukma patted his stomach. "For this. And also so that I can give you information about them. I work for Gunda Dhur too. Do you know him?"

"Yes!" Kalandiya’s eyes lit up. "I was working towards the Bhumkal. Then they kidnapped me. Now I will not know when the signal comes." His voice was full of anguish and despair.

Sukma held Kalandiya’s arm and led him to a large flat stone and pressed him to sit down. They shared a wad of tobacco. The evening light had totally faded and they could hear the parrots and the baboons noisily quarrelling for place in the branches. Kalandiya’s eyes were filled with tears. What would he not give for a bowl of his mother’s pej. Had Mago presumed that he was dead? He wondered for the millionth time whether the ghotul boys and girls were continuing with the Bhumkal effort or they had given up.

"Where is your village and what were you doing?" asked Sukma.
"I am a hill Maria and my village is close to the Indravati river. It is called Chelru."
"How long have you been here?"
"I do not know. More than four-moons at least."
"Hmm."
"Brother Sukma, you work for the feringhee. Can you help me to escape?"
"That is easier said than done, my friend."
"Please Sukma, help me to escape." Kalandiya fell at Sukma's feet. "Their people are everywhere. Unless you help me, they will kidnap me again in no time and then they will kill me! I have seen them do that once with another guy who had tried to escape. They cut his throat and hung him on a pole in the mines for days so that all of us could see. They neither buried him nor burnt him and eventually the hyenas and the vultures stripped his bones clean." Kalandiya shuddered in fear as he spoke and his eyes were filled with tears.

"Let me think. I have only two to three days because Asquith sahib is not likely to stay for more than that."
"Help me, please," pleaded Kalandiya.
"I will do my best. But you must not go near the sahib's house again. Understand?"
"Yes."
"Now, go. I have to think."
Kalandiya hung his head and walked back to the encampment with a heavy heart. He did not believe that a tribal who worked for the feringhee would help him. What if he betrayed him to Asquith sahib?
In spite of what Sukma said, Kalandiya did not believe there were any good sahibs. Kalandiya prayed to the clan gods that Sukma would be inspired to help him. There was no way he could escape alone. So he really had no choice but to believe Sukma. He had better sleep that night than he had ever since he had been taken prisoner and during half the time he dreamt about what he would do to make up the lost time once he was back in Chelru, his village.

Anger

Next morning Asquith, Tom Boggs and James stood on the cliff at the top of the open mines and watched the tribals work in the sweltering sun. Even though winter was almost upon them, the sun was still too hot to be out in the open without head gear.

The tribal men slaved with their heads bent. Half their perspiration was due to the heat and half due to fear. They had been warned that if their hands faltered for even a moment the sahibs were likely to shoot them as they stood.

As he worked under the gaze of the watching Englishmen, Kalandiya felt fear drain out of him and anger began to run through his veins. Was he to be treated like an animal then, stared at and beaten and hounded till he was left with no self-respect? Was the tribal not a human being? Why should he put up with such treatment?
Slowly, even as he worked, Kalandiya began to work up a slow anger. His muscles bulged and his blood boiled with rage. His pickaxe hammered into the stone wall like the piston of a machine. Kalandiya felt his forearms swell with extraordinary strength and he smashed the axe with such force that he drew the attention of the feringhee.

"Hey, you!" called one of the tribal guards, who treated the workers with much cruelty.

Kalandiya brought the axe down once more with such force that the head flew off and hit the wall of the cliff. "Who, me?"

"Yes, you. Go to the sahibs. They want to speak to you."

This is my chance, thought Kalandiya. He had the blessings of the clan god and he had the vision. He, the apprentice kaseq gaita, the clan priest, could kill anyone. He had the magic and he had the guts. All he had to do was to try to take some item of their clothing or hair or spit—anything so that he could work his magic and kill them from afar as he knew the head priest could do. He would use all the magic at his command, even die in the effort but kill them he would. As the ideas and thoughts went through his brain, Kalandiya leaped upwards to the Englishmen. There was the lightness and agility of a deer in his legs and the strength of a lion, in his muscles. In his left hand Kalandiya continued to hold the axe deprived though it was of the head. He was invincible.
"Kalandiya, wait." It was Sukma. He called out urgently and in a low voice, so that the others could not hear. "Make no mistakes. Drop the stick. They will kill you and all the workers now. Think, Kalandiya, and drop the axe. If you go up with that in your hand, they would not even let you reach them. They will shoot you."

Kalandiya turned blood-red eyes upon Sukma. For a second it seemed as though he was going to bring the stick down upon Sukma's head. There was murder in his eyes but somehow the pleading face of Sukma registered in his head and he understood what Sukma was trying to say. Naturally he could not fight guns and pistols, Sukma was right. With a jerk of frustration he lowered his arm and dropped the stick. With the gesture the strength too seemed to run out of his body; despair filled his heart. He was a fool for thinking that he could win against the white man. All the strength of his body ebbed and he climbed upwards now like an old man.

"What is your name and from which village are you?" asked Asquith through an interpreter.

"My name is Kalandiya, and I am a hill Maria from Chelru," he said, staring into the colourless eyes of Asquith. There was a knot of sick, cold fear in the pit of his stomach.

"What were you going to do with the stick? Kill the sahibs?"

"No."

"Have you been circulating chillies?"
"I have been breaking stones in the mine, as you very well know."

"Do not be impertinent," warned the translator. "The sahib is a mine of consideration if you deserve it."

"Ask him if he knows that chillies are being circulated," said Asquith.

"He says 'no', sahib."

"Ask him if he understands that it is the Englishmen who brought prosperity to the country?"

"He says that he does."

"Ask him if he realizes that, if it were not for the English, they would have no schools, no roads or railways. They would also not have enough to eat."

"He says he does," replied the interpreter.

"Hmmm." Asquith’s eyes bored into Kalandiya’s face. "This one spells trouble. Keep an eye upon him, James."

"Yes, sir."

"You may go."

As Kalandiya turned to go, Tom Boggs shot out his cane and tripped Kalandiya into the dust. Kalandiya went sprawling and, as he fell, the loud mocking laughter of the sahibs rang obscenely in his ears. The dust from the mines covered his body and went into his eyes and ears. He looked like a sadhu with ash-smudged face and body.

"If you show any reaction, Kalandiya, they will kill you. This is what they want." Sukma squatted on the ground in front of him. His eyes were filled with pity.

"You are coward." Kalandiya spat blood into
the ground but he controlled his anger and gathered
his torn dignity around him and limped off. Before
he did so, he gave Boggs such a look of smouldering
hatred that Boggs was driven back a step by the
searing blaze and for once forgot to curse the savages.

Two extremes

After chastising James about the way he was
treating his tribals, Asquith went back to Jagdalpur
and looked for Panda Baijnath. The latter was not back
from his tour and Asquith had to wait for him for a
few days, a fact which he did not like very much. But
then those two men could not really like one another.
Both were highly educated, austere men, but they
belonged to two ends of the world and to a generation
that could not readily mix the racial colours. But at
least they respected each other.

"You know I have a strong feeling that the tribals
are up to something which they are not letting out.
They do not like the steps that we have taken, the
schools, the forest and the liquor laws. And yet on the
surface, they seem to be bearing up with everything."

"What is wrong with that?" demanded Tom Boggs.

"It is unnatural. Some kind of protest, some noise
should have been made. It would be a—a natural
reaction. Nobody accepts defeat so easily."

"Ah! But you forget," said Tom Boggs. "They are
not humans. They are savages. More than savages,
they are animals. They do not have feelings."

"Even animals have feelings Boggs sahib/" Panda Baijnath's voice was dry. He had made a steeple of his fingers and was watching Tom Boggs over the tips of his fingers with an expression that said he did not expect a cockney from London to understand a civilization as old as India.

"Savages!" said Boggs. "Have you ever noticed that the colour of their blood is different? I have seen it. It is not scarlet like ours, it is darker. Even its consistency is different. I think you can see Darwin's theory of evolution here—they are the intermediate stage between the white man and the ape."

"Tom!" Asquith's voice was shocked. "You forget the presence of Baijnath sahib."

"Oh, he is white in education and temperament at least." Tom dismissed Pandaji with a wave of his pudgy hand.

"Forgive him," murmured Asquith, in an aside to Panda Baijnath. Then turning to Boggs, "I do think you need to supervise the roasting of the wild boar, Tom. And do see if there is any red wine. Baijnath sahib and I need to talk shop."

"But I do not understand any spices except salt and pepper," protested Tom Boggs.

"Then learn, Tom."

Tom Boggs tried to hitch his trousers up, an impossible task considering the huge over-hanging stomach which he had; scowled till his eyebrows met, and stomped out of the room most unwillingly. There
was silence after his departure. Colonel was a little embarrassed at Boggs' boorishness in front of a man like Panda Baijnath and the latter was embarrassed for the colonel. Personally Pandaji did not feel insulted by Boggs' words. He only felt nauseated, as though he had seen a cockroach cross the room just as he had sat down for a meal. Tom Boggs was just that—an unbearable nuisance who could not be ignored. The Raj did spawn very specific types among the British and Panda Baijnath did not know which was the worse, the sympathetic pro-Indian who actually felt that the native was inferior but courageously carried upon his shoulders the burden of improving the lesser races through friendship and understanding, or the uneducated, contemptuous boors who did not conceal their prejudices.

Panda Baijnath cleared his throat and smiled at the colonel, "You know we have a saying in India that you can fight with the whole world but not with your wife's brother because she would not let you live if you do that."

Asquith smiled back in relief and dismissed the thought of his brother-in-law. He inhaled deeply of his pipe and spoke about what was troubling him. "You know Pandaji, I do not believe in my heart of hearts that nothing is happening."

"You mean?"

"I am one hundred per cent sure that chillies are being circulated."

"Oh, no." Panda Baijnath was shocked. "I think you
are mistaken. The tribals will never work against the British rule."

"But there are rumours. Undercurrents. I can almost feel the tension."

"Where? Where is the tension? I meet the people every day. There is not even a whiff of opposition."

"That is what they said at the time of the Great Mutiny of 1857," said Asquith. "Everyone was convinced that nothing was brewing. They thought the sepoys were steeped in loyalty."

"That was different. The tribals are loyal."

"Do you not think that point of view is a little naive when everywhere in India an opposition to the Raj has begun."

"Sir, I am convinced that is a temporary thing and it will die a natural death."

"What about that fellow, Gandhi?"

"What about him?"

"I am told that he has a tremendous following already and the people revere him like a god."

"In a country, where people worship trees and snakes, it is not difficult to gain their devotion."

"Hmm. Still Pandaji, I would rest happier if you could find out some more about this chillies business."

"You spoke about unrest to me last time too and I have been doing some research. I have really not found anything to worry about."

"Have you inquired about the chillies?"

"Chillies? What chillies?"
"Red chillies in chapattis. That is how messages are being circulated from village to village."

"Like 1857. Wonder who told the tribals about that."

"That means that chillies are being circulated?" asked the colonel.

"I have not heard anything about it."

"You could find out, could you not?"

"Certainly." Pandaji smiled as a person trying to soothe a child throwing tantrums would. "I will ask again if you like."

"Thank you, I would like that."

Though he promised Asquith that he would make inquiries, Panda Baijnath did not really bother to make too many enquiries. In a few days he reported that people appeared contented and happy and the Marias and the Murias continued to dance and sing at their celebrations. To his occasional pointed query about the forest land too he got no representation from the tribals. It was no wonder that Panda Baijnath had nothing to report to the colonel.

Preparations

In the Chelru ghotul the head girl stood facing the boys and girls. In the centre of the room were laid out fifty bows, some three hundred arrows and a deep bowl of dark green paste that was the deadliest poison which the tribals knew how to make. There were also
about fifteen swords, a little crudely made but with
the edges sharpened to perfection. To most of the
ghotul boys and girls the display was impressive, yet
the head girl was not satisfied. A stick in one hand,
she disdainfully poked the pile of arrows while the
ghotul boys and girls shifted nervously. She was
difficult to please.

"No dance, no music, no lessons, till we make more
weapons," she announced, flinging her hands up and
stepping into the circle of light. "Do you remember
Kalandiya's vow? No dance till the hills of Abujhmar
are finally free of the foreign yoke." It was Jugho.

Jugho had survived the fall, though physically she
fared much worse than Kalandiya. No one who knew
the earlier Jugho, whom Kalandiya had compared to
a mahua flower, would recognize her now. She looked
different. One side of her face was a mass of a million
tiny, tiny lacerations. The skin was corrugated with
lines and ridges and puckered all over. And that
was not all. The eye remained horribly open all the
time and staring. At night she covered it with a piece
of cloth so that she could stop seeing for a while and
rest the aching nerves of her left eye. In the daylight
she suffered from too much light and there was nothing
she could do about it. Jugho looked horrific and felt
horrible too. The only saving grace was that she did
not lose her sight and could see as well as earlier.

The incident changed Jugho—physically and
mentally. In fact, her entire nature changed. Gone was
the soft, fresh girl with rosy dreams and fear of
shadows and monsters in the dark. Since the day she recovered, Jugho became a monster of hard work and vengeance. She hated everything and everyone particularly everything and everyone that was not tribal.

Chillies were being circulated daily now and everytime the messenger came, Jugho would run out and seize the chillies. It was only the sign for preparedness not the sign to begin. She was desperate to begin the Bhumkal and had made careful plans about what she was going to strike and where. Her hard work and her vision had made her a natural leader and she had replaced Kalandiya as the head of the ghotul.

"Get on with the work then," she said to the boys and girls and walked out of the ghotul into the cold, dark night.

More than two months had passed since the fateful day when both Jugho and Kalandiya had been swept down the river. Jugho leaned her burning brow against the cool bark of the amaltas and let the fat, yellow blossoms fall on her head. In the darkness she touched the left side of her face with her finger tips. No one had asked her to be a ghotul wife. No one. Once she had put combs in her hair and tried to get Domru, who had been Kalandiya’s greatest friend, interested in her, but he had run out on her in horror and she did not see nor hear of him for one whole week. When he did return, he avoided looking at her and went around with a girl who did not have half of
Jugho’s beauty, at least not half of what she did have earlier, and she certainly did not compare with her in brains. It was the hard fact of life that everyone of the boys wanted a good-looking girl to go around with. She was learning to live with that also.

"Jugho?"
"Yes?" She liked the dark now, it hid her hideous looks.
"It is me, Arki Boiyya."
"Yes, clan priest."
"Today I am going to sacrifice to the clan god. I am looking for a sign, for an omen."
"For what?"
"For success of the Bhumkal. There is fear and uncertainty among the people. I need a sign that will reassure them."
"You are right. It is too tense around here."
"Want to come with me? To the clan god’s shrine?"
"Yes. Me? Why?"
"Because you are brave and you are the leader now."
"Okay."
"Come then."
"Do I not need to make any preparations?"
"At the shrine. Come on."

They walked through the dark night side by side, Jugho’s wide open left eye gleaming eerily in the dark. They climbed the hill in almost complete silence. No one knows what Arki Boiyya was thinking about but there was turmoil in Jugho’s breast. After that fateful
day when the river Indravati had swept her away, Jugho had never wept. She had been angry but she had not wept or beaten her breast. Now she needed to ask the clan god what sin she had committed to get such a terrible punishment. It could also be the effect of the white man’s magic. Perhaps Arki Boiyya’s magic could do away with the spell. And of course there was need to pray for the success of the Bhumkal.

They spent the night in propitiating the god and sacrificing to him. Jugho was not clan priest material and she saw no visions. The gods did not speak to her. They had spoken to Arki Boiyya and the sacrifices had been good. When they climbed down the hill again, it was dawn. It was a particularly fiery and beautiful morning with the clouds in the east turning red.

'Another good omen,' thought Jugho. She was exhausted but elated. There were dark circles under her eyes but the eyes themselves gleamed in triumph. The gods had okayed their efforts, they had told them to fight the white man. They would win, they had to win.

Jugho was ahead, walking very fast and so she was the one that the messengers met.

"Jugho bail" they asked, staring unashamedly at the evil eye.

"Yes."

"It is time for the Bhumkal," said one of the messengers, a dark Telugu tribal as he offered her a lump of solid earth with both hands, almost like an
offering. Beneath the lump of earth were five golden-brown chapattis. "Take the chapattis," he said softly as Jugho stood still staring at the lump of earth that was the size and shape of a ripe pomegranate. At last! If only Kalandiya had been there, together they would have achieved so much. She kept the lump of earth aside and broke the chapattis in half. Red chilli powder spilled to the ground. Jugho's heart leaped in exultation. That was how the feringhee blood was going to spill! That was how she was going to spill it.

"Yesterday the post office at Karli got burnt," said the other messenger. The two squatted underneath a saja tree with Jugho and Arki Boiyya.

News had spread all over the hills and now had reached the plains too that a hill Maria girl called Jugho was braver than the boys and she had achieved wonders in organizing the boys and girls of five villages around Chelru. People knew of her disfigurement as well as of her level of motivation. She was totally committed to the tribal cause. The two messengers also knew about Jugho and they held her in high respect. She was the only girl who was taking such an active part in the Bhumkal. As they talked, leaf bowls of pej arrived along with an earthenware pot of landa. The travellers were hungry and thirsty and so were Jugho and Arki Boiyya.

"Day before yesterday, Gunda Dhur held a meeting in Karli and he told everyone to be ready for the Bhumkal. Gunda Dhur himself set fire to the post-
office in Karli. He went at dusk with a group of people, shot the postmaster and burnt down the building and all the letters and everything was destroyed."

"It has come, Jugho," Arki Boiyya's face was creased with smiles. He was excited as though it was he who was going to lead the Bhumkal to success. "It has begun! The post-office yesterday, the Collectorate tomorrow, and in a few days the British will be out of this country. The country and the government, both will be ours. Ours!"

Jugho felt like getting up and dancing with joy, so inspired did she feel. It had really begun. The Bhumkal had begun. All four of them were in a state of intense excitement.

The earthquake had come!

"What are you going to do?" asked one of the messengers.

"Huh?"

"For the Bhumkal, What have you planned?"

"You will see."

"We all know that you are going to do wonders. Everyone is talking about you."

"Yes, yes," said Jugho, suddenly impatient. She wanted the messengers to go so that she could get along with her work. What were they waiting for? Ah, yes, the chapattis! Quickly she got them organized and retreated to the ghotul. She had got it planned out and as soon as the messengers moved to the next village she got her commandos ready.
The target

For days Jugho had planned and plotted. The success of the operation depended on the success of the first hit that she made. Post-office, telegraph office, dak bungalows, office of the forest ranger, she had considered them all. It had to be something more important, something that affected all these offices and more. And that one thing was the means of communication. So she had chosen a road. It was a pucca road, the only road which connected Jagdalpur with the interior of the Bastar region. Everything that came into Bastar—rice, petrol, sugar, cloth, pots and pans—all had to be brought along that one road. From Jagdalpur the road wound its way like a long convoluted serpent touching a number of important villages and disappearing finally in the foothills of Abujhmar. No road went into Abujhmar.

Jugho targeted this road, the main lifeline of Bastar, specially the stretch that connected Raipur with Jagdalpur. It was the main highway, the only supply line for the British. She had a plan ready. She wanted not only to blow up the road but also take a few feringhees with it, if possible. Near Borla, twenty-eight kilometres before Jagdalpur there was a stretch of particularly dense jungle on both sides of the road. The undergrowth was very thick there and the spreading branches of the trees so intermingled that it was difficult to know which branch belonged to which tree. During innumerable visits Jugho had
marked that stretch and noted how, on the one hand, it was easy to hide an entire battalion on both sides of the road and, on the other, there was a clear line of vision, at least a mile down the road on both sides. Anything or anyone approaching was visible well in advance. Once she got the signal that the Bhumkal was on, Jugho lost no time. She got together her trusted band of followers whom she had been training in target hitting and building up of stamina, and set off for Borla.

It was afternoon. After the messengers, Jugho and her faithful interpret group marched. They carried with them strong twine, swords, bows and arrows and the gourd filled with poison. Jugho also carried, unknown to others, a string of crackers which she had stolen from the Jagdalpur bazaar at the time of the Dussehra festival. All the stuff was strapped securely on their backs and, led by Jugho, they moved at a steady trot, their bare feet raising a tiny storm of white dust around the feet. The distance which they had to cover was more than sixty kilometres; Jugho hoped they would be able to cover half the way on a bus or a truck.

They reached Borla after ten hours of walking and riding on a truck and, when the truck driver stopped to allow them to disembark, it was late afternoon. There was no choice but to hide in the jungle and await nightfall. All during the ride on the truck, Jugho had sat with her face covered by a dirty piece of cloth. She did not want anyone to recognize her staring eye.
In the jungle Jugho sat a little apart from the others eating her pej in huge, hungry gulps. In the situation, they could not afford better food. Thank God for the landa, the mahua beer. The people of the hill loved to eat the mahua flowers cooked like a vegetable, but the Abujhmar hills did not have enough mahua trees for both cooking and brewing, so the flowers were mostly used for brewing.

The commandos watched Jugho sitting apart, her back resting against a tree and her fingers busy sharpening the edge of a knife. They knew better than to ask her to join them. The snake sitting inside Jugho’s heart would not let her rest or be normal. Jugho sharpened the knife as though it were required to peel the heart of the enemy, inch by inch. Her concentration was almost grotesque. When there was nothing further to be done with the knife, Jugho picked up the bow and arrow and practised target shooting till her eye ached and her heart burned with a slow steady poison. Her damaged eye ached all the time. She could not blink and she could not close the eye. It was horribly exposed to light and dust and insects. Sometimes she wanted to gouge out her eye. At least the pain would be final! Then she would sleep in blessed darkness. Yet she was a coward. Jugho berated herself endlessly and needlessly. She plucked and re-plucked at the wound in her heart keeping it fresh and bleeding all the time.

As soon as it was dusk, Jugho and her companions quickly pulled the thick steel wire two or three times
across the road and fixed it about a foot above the ground on both sides. The information system developed by Jugho had already told her that there was a convoy of four trucks coming from Raipur. What unbelievable luck! Traffic being light on the road she had thought there might be endless hours of waiting time and one bus or a truck may be the prize. Four trucks was wonderful news! They hoped to stop them and kill all the people aboard. Quickly the boys climbed up the trees on both sides of the road with their bows and arrows and pulled back the strings of their bows. They were in a position of readiness. Those who had the rough swords hid in the undergrowth with the leaves parted enough to give them a view of the road.

Jugho stood closest to the road, a sword in her left hand and crackers in her right hand. Hearts were pounding and senses were alert. Jugho's hands trembled. What if they failed? The feringhee had guns. They could cut them down in seconds. What if the wire was unable to stop them? And what if the crackers were damp and did not light? Jugho's heart was in her throat. She could not fail now. She would lose face forever. This was her only chance to become the chief of the village. That was what she wanted. It was obvious no one was going to marry her, so how was she going to pass the rest of her life? If she could become the chief, she would change the face of Chelru. Jugho wove her dreams and waited patiently. Time crept by. The night darkened. It grew cold.
Jugho remembered the one trip she had taken to Jagdalpur *haat* (market) and seen in a daze the fabulous array of goods that cluttered the market. She could not believe that there were so many goods, and in such a variety, in the world. What haunted her for a long time was the food. There was food everywhere and the sight and the smell of food was amazing. She did not recognize eighty per cent of what she saw but she longed to taste it. A fellow from the village advised her to eat a samosa and drink a glass of tea. He vowed that she would never forget the taste of the food. And he was right. She loved both the tea and the samosa. Jugho felt her mouth fill with saliva as she recalled the taste. Perhaps, one day, she would visit Jagdalpur again and taste more varieties of food, but right now it was a question of survival. Unless they did something to prevent it, the money-lenders, the *thekedars*, and the feringhees, would swallow them up alive.

**Uprising afloat**

Just before dawn Jugho saw lights in the distance. At last! "Hey!" she called softly to the others many of whom were dozing. "The trucks are coming. Quietly now."

Silently bows were lifted and strings pulled back in readiness. The hunter in the tribals woke up. It was killing time.
The trucks drew closer. Now the drone of the engines could be heard. The headlights cut a bright path in the middle of the road. Jugho panicked. What if they could see the wires and stop in time? Or even turn back? She need not have feared that. For, what she had not anticipated happened. The trucks cut through the wire like hot knife through butter. Jugho stared open-mouthed in dismay as the first truck kept moving on at the same speed. The wires had not even caused a hiccough and the trucks were going to get away unless she quickly took some remedial action. Quickly she dropped the sword and fumbled with the matches. She had to stop them. It was the chance of a lifetime. She fumbled at the matches with fingers that refused to respond to her command. The damp matches would not light and the trucks were getting away! Finally one lit up. She quickly applied it to the crackers and one cracker burst. The rest just died away.

It was enough.

The second truck driver braked sharply, thinking it was a tyre burst. And because he braked without warning on an apparently empty road, the third truck banged into it and the fourth banged into the third. The whole accident happened with lightening speed and with a tremendous explosion of bangs and thugs, splintering of headlights and tail-lights and the sound of metal grating against metal and the shouts of men in shock and pain. There was instant pandemonium and chaos. The convoy had not a clue to what had
happened and there was a great deal of shouting and
cursing as they tried to find out what had happened.

"Why did you do that?"
"Someone is shooting!"
"Who?"
"The headlights are gone."
"Stop Jackson sahib. He is in the first truck."
"Hey!"
"Wait!"
"Who is shooting?"
"Shooting?"

"Someone is shooting!" The cry was taken up by
the others.

As the drivers and the cleaners and others climbed
out of the trucks to inspect the damage and stop the
first truck, they were met with a barrage of poison-
tipped arrows. There were screams of pain and horror.
They could see nothing and they were caught totally
unawares. The first truck started to reverse and there
was sound of gun fire from it. The truck braked
sharply and a feringhee jumped down. He reacted
remarkably fast to the incident for he had drawn guns
in both hands and was firing into the undergrowth
and the trees. He seemed to know how the tribals hid
in the jungle. There were screams from the
jungle now as bullets found targets. But there was
one feringhee with two guns and many tribals.
Besides, the feringhee was visible against the lights
of the trucks whereas the tribals were invisible in
the jungle.
Suddenly an arrow, true and straight, its iron tip smeared with greenish paste hissed through the air and buried itself in Jackson’s throat, right in the soft hollow at the base. With a cry of horror, Jackson pulled at the arrow. All that he managed to dislodge was the shaft, the head remained buried. As Jackson gargled in blood, the most horrific sight filled his eyes. It was that of a woman, mad and hysterical with a sword in one hand and a horribly, staring eye with a madly rotating pupil. It was difficult to say what killed Jackson—the poison, blood loss or fear. He was convinced that the figure was not that of a woman, but of a churail, the female demon that was feared more than monsters and ghosts.

The tribals killed everyone and set the trucks on fire. They watched the trucks explode one after the other and, when the atmosphere turned black and foul with smoke, they escaped silently into the night leaving their dead to the wild animals. No one knew who the assailants were. No one survived to tell the tale or take a guess.

Even as Jugho and her chosen band of commandos burnt four trucks and killed eleven men including one feringhee, the cry for liberty was taken up all over Bastar. Ghotul boys and girls, inspired by Gunda Dhur’s clarion call, rebelled and destroyed government property, attacked the wealthy and the powerful, looted bazaars and generally went on a rampage. All signs of foreign rule, be it Indian or English, was attacked in one all-out courageous
attempt to overthrow the foreigners. For the tribal, even a non-tribal Indian was enemy. The outburst was tremendous and it was accompanied by murder, looting and general savagery. It was a regular revolt against civilization, against schools, against forest conservancy, against the opening of the country to the Hindu settlers. It was a movement of Bastar state for Bastar forest dwellers.

Not waiting to see if anyone had seen or heard the explosions, the Chelru boys ran from the site of carnage. All day the commandos led by Jugho tramped and when nightfall came they stopped at a village to eat and rest. Although the whole of the state was in sympathy with the rebels, Jugho did not know it and she also did not want to take any risks of informers telling on them and so she ordered that all weapons should be hidden in a safe place before they entered the village. The fear was that if they hid the weapons in too safe a place they may not be able to find them later on. Quickly she hurried back in the direction of the village and found that the others had selected a thick bush and hidden the weapons deep inside it. She gave her approval and they proceeded towards the village.

A bold plan

That night Jugho slept in the ghotul of the village along with the others, the frightful and heroic stories
told by the villagers ringing in her ears. They heard
of traders and money-lenders who had been stripped,
beaten and thrown out of homes. They learnt of a
police chozuki that had been burnt and the officials
beaten up. The stories were pouring in from every
side. The rebels had indeed started the war against
the British. The news was exhilarating.

"Jugho? Jugho?" Someone was violently shaking
her by the shoulder.

"What?"

"Listen Jugho. Gunda Dhur has come to our village.
He needs help for an important encounter. It is against
the feringhees. Come."

Alert in seconds, Jugho ran outside. It was still night
and the thick jungle was eerily dark. But it was a
wonderful jungle too, for it hid both man and beast
in its dark bosom. Five men sat around a low
smouldering fire, their faces a canvas of black and
orange-red design. They were all smoking bidis and
drinking landa. They made room for Jugho in front of
the fire and offered her some landa. She accepted and
drank deeply. The men stared fearfully at her left eye
which was red-rimmed either from fatigue or the
glow of the fire. Poor girl, they thought. She really
had the most eerie looks with the frightful eye, the
scarred face and the unsmiling mouth. Jugho tried
not to show her pain. She would never really get used
to being stared at with fear and pity. She was a
monster and she knew it. Jugho's heart filled with
immense pain. She had lost everything. Her
courageous stand in the rebellion was almost like a death wish. She wanted to perform a heroic deed and die.

"I am happy to learn about your success, Jugho," said a thin, non-descript man.

"My success?" Jugho was suspicious. "Who was this man to talk of her success? What success?"

"The trucks."

Jugho turned the horrible side of her face with the hideous, staring eye towards the speaker and almost impaled him with its staring, non-blinking power. However, the man who had circles beneath his eyes and whose bones carried hardly any flesh on them, merely smiled at her serenely and nodded.

"You are brave and strong. I have plans for you."

"You have plans for me? I am not wasting my sleep for some romantic stories." Jugho got up, but the man caught her arm and urged her to sit down.

"That is Gunda Dhur," someone whispered in Jugho’s ear and she once again stared hard at the smiling man. He wore a dirty kurta-pyjama and drank lunda in deep thirsty gulps.

Gunda Dhur! The brain behind the rebellion? But wait, he was talking about a new plan. It was already time to forget about the success with the trucks. The Bhumkal had to keep going, tremor upon tremor.

"This is the plan." Gunda Dhur stubbed out his bidi in the earth and extended his hands towards the fire for warmth. "There is a limestone mine nearby where our brothers are used as slaves night and day to dig
out the limestone. They get no wages, only some pitiable food twice a day in lieu of money. There are guards that watch them night and day and beat them like animals if they so much as relieve themselves without permission."

"I have seen that camp. Even animals have better lives. At least they have freedom." The man who spoke was old. Lines of bitterness criss-crossed his entire face. His rheumy eyes had a permanently tearful look.

"Never mind, grandfather..." said Gunda Dhur.

"What do you mean 'never mind'? My two sons died in those mines. They were killed. Like dogs."

"We know. And that is why we are taking you. So that you can lead us to the spot without detection," said Gunda Dhur.

"I tried to get the younger one out. I got him as far as the barracks of the sahibs. But the guards, the tribal guards betrayed us."

"I know, grandfather. These petty officials, these stooges, they are worse than the feringhee. We will get them too. Do not worry."

"Kill them. Kill them all."

"We will."

Gunda Dhur turned to Jugho. "We want you to come with us on this mission. We have to free our brothers and kill the slave drivers. A woman can be of help," he said.

"This woman?" She turned her scarred face and horrible eye towards him.

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"We know you to be a brave and true Abujhmaria. We need people like you," said Gunda Dhur, looking straight at her and avoiding all comment about her looks.

"For what?" Jugho turned her face away to hide the sudden rush of tears.

"To lead and to inspire."

Jugho surreptitiously wiped away the tears and choked back a sigh. "I will come, but not because of what you say but because I have to free Bastar from the English."

"Good," Gunda Dhur ignored the softly spoken words and getting up suddenly rubbed his hands. "We do not have time to waste now. We have to start immediately. Come on, old grandfather."

"It is at least one day's runaway," grumbled the old man. "And these legs are old and weak."

"Remember your sons' grandfather." Gunda Dhur opened the knots on a bundle and handed around dry chapattis to everyone. "Eat these and let us start."

Bemused by the sudden turn of events, Jugho accepted the dry chapattis and chewed them thoughtfully. So this was the man, the mastermind behind the Bhumkal. She stared at him carefully, noting the way his thick hair sprang from his forehead, his thin dark figure and his non-tribal looks. Kalandiya had talked about the man as though he were a god! What was there in the man that was so attractive? To Kalandiya and to a lot of other tribals, as Jugho was fast learning, Gunda Dhur personified
Bastar’s urge for freedom. The tribals worshipped this commoner without any formal education. Already there were songs about him, about his bravery and his courage. He was not frightened of guns and motor cars and cannons and he was capable of standing alone and facing an entire army of Englishmen. Kalandiya had hero-worshipped Gunda Dhur and he had wanted to be with him when he fought the English. Where was Kalandiya now?

"Hurry up, Jugho," someone jogged her arm. "This is not the time to dream."

Jugho tossed the rest of the landa down her throat and stood up. She had to forget Kalandiya. She had to forget all emotions, all sentiments, all hopes for a family and children. Jugho guessed that the time was around one or two in the morning when they finally set off. It was a cold dark night and they trotted at a steady pace behind the old grandfather who, despite his grumbling, had very fast legs and set a brisk pace. He also had the eyes of a cat and skilfully avoided rocks and protruding roots and rocks whereas the others had a hard time preventing themselves from tripping over. They ran on the tribal half-walk half-jog which they could keep up for hours.

**Surprise attack**

They stopped to rest at dawn and ate more chapattis and drink landa. The jungle was behind them now and
the land offered little cover apart from occasional clumps of trees and lantana bushes. They had to be more careful now in case someone noticed that six of them were moving together, in a single file.

"It is not far now," said the old grandfather, pointing to the blue-grey hills in the distance. "Those are the mines and there, where the jungle begins again to the right, is the camp site. That is where they sleep."

"Hmm." Gunda Dhur sank down in the cool grass beneath a spreading neem tree and stared at the mines. The hills were still too far away for them to see anyone but they had to decide the strategy before they went any further. The main question was, what were they going to do after they reached the mine.

"What shall we do there?" said one man, hand to his chest as though trying to still his racing heart.

"Attack the mines."

"Hide behind the trees and rocks and shoot all feringhees."

"Not only feringhees, also tribals who have joined the feringhees and traders. We will kill them all."

"Yes. But they have guns."

"If only we had some sorcerers with us."

"It is a good idea. But even if you did have the sorcerers, killing through sorcery takes time. You need nails, hair, somethings."

"So what do we do?"

"We do not have guns and we do not have sorcerers, but we do have some trickery," said Gunda Dhur, speaking finally in his soft, commanding voice.
"Meaning?"
"We make a surprise attack. At dinner time when they have all drunk well and eaten well and are unprepared."
"How many persons are there, grandfather?"
"Hundred slaves and around twenty slave drivers."
"And feringhees?"
"One, I think."
"That is not much."
"True, but they have guns."
"Yes."
"How many guns, grandfather?"
"Many. Twenty. Maybe more."
"Where are they kept?"
"Everything is in the feringhee's house."
"Are you sure?"
"Do the guards not go around with guns on shoulders?"
"They do."
"Then?"
"I think this is what we should do," said Gunda Dhur. "We will quietly go as near to the camp as possible. None must see us, so we must close in at night. When the guards are having dinner, Jugho must go up to them and weep and cry that she needs to see her husband. Jugho, you must create a scene, a big scene. Scream. Cry. Beat your chest. Pull your hair. Berate the guards."
"Her husband? Where is her husband?"
"There is no husband, you fool. She will only create a scene to divert attention."
"They will come out to see what is happening."
"Exactly."
"Jugho, you must scream." Everyone was getting into the mood of the affair.
"Crack your finger joints."
"Eat dirt."
"Cry."
"In short," said Jugho, "become an object of ridicule."
"Yes."
"And while I create the diversion, you will free the others."
"Exactly! As soon as we have every one of the slaves freed and moving off into the jungle, we will come and kill the guards with poisoned arrows and rescue you."
"And if the timing does not coincide?"
"Meaning?"
"Suppose they do not listen to me. Suppose they shoot me the moment they see me."
"That can happen."
"True. They may not listen to a woman."
"They will listen to you if you can convince them that you are a churail."
"My face will do that for me."
"True, and you can use some peacock feathers too. Sign of a witch doctor."
"Your acting abilities will have to come to the front," Gunda Dhur smiled.
"It will be dangerous," said the old grandfather.
"Are you scared?" whispered Gunda Dhur as the others kept up the discussion.

"No. But I do not want to fail you/' replied Jugho.

"You will not." He stood up and dusted his back.

"Let us go now. Remember they must not see us. So we must move in the shadows of trees and rocks. Come now."

The revolution

The rebels, led by the wiry old man, managed to reach the immediate vicinity of the camp without being seen. They crept up to the edge of the jungle and surveyed the scene. In front of them was the wooden, sprawling bungalow of James and behind them was the camp. James's bungalow was a typical Englishman's bungalow with green shutters and a deep verandah all around. There were hordes of servants to look after the bungalow and one man was employed to keep the monkeys off the roof.

"There, behind the bungalow is the outhouse where the guards sleep. That is where you go and make a diversion, Jugho. While you are at it, we will round up the workers and get them out of here. We should not take long. Do not fear anything. We will join you very soon. Try and keep them diverted as long as you can. Go now."

Jugho took a deep breath, and saying a quick prayer to the clan god, quickly moved from darkness and
shelter to light and danger. There was no time now for questions or doubts. It was action time. As soon as she reached within hearing distance of the outhouse, Jugho began wailing and shouting.

"Arre, where is everybody? Danteshwari Ma! Will no one help a young girl alone in this world?" She began beating her chest and tearing her hair. "Oh, my misfortune that I shall die an unwanted widow! Who is to look after my child?"

"Who is it?"

"Who is outside?"

"Only some crazy girl. Hey girl, get out of here!"

The door opened and yellow light fell upon the porch where Jugho sat weeping and throwing her arms and legs about.

"What is the matter, girl?"

"Matter? You take my husband and ask what is the matter! What is to become of me and my child? May the leeches suck your blood. May you shrivel and die. What are you but a lot of impotent men!" She began pulling her hair.

"Oh, look, a freak! Hey guys, come and have a look."

"Look at the face!"

"A witch!"

"That eye. Why it is an ugly one, I say."

"Yeah, a young witch."

One by one the men came out to stare at the screaming girl with the ugly face. Before she realized it, Jugho was surrounded by half a dozen loutish men
all grinning wickedly at her and smelling of something stronger than landa. She continued to scream at them. Then one of the men who carried a gun with a sharp, pointed bayonet suddenly pressed the point of the blade about half an inch into Jugho’s thigh. Jugho, who had been looking the other way, swirled around screaming in pain and watched in horror the thick scarlet blood drip off her thigh into the wooden boards. She jumped up and danced around, shouting and berating them some more.

"Do you not have mothers and daughters that you shame a poor girl like me! Okay, here. Take my blood if that is what you want. But give my ghotul husband back."

"Is it a husband that you want?"

"Here, take this," another man drove the point of his bayonet into her stomach, not enough to seriously hurt her but enough to make her shout and scream in agony. Now the blood dripped from two places and Jugho was truly screaming in agony now. She had forgotten the play-acting. There was real fear and pain in her voice now.

The noise began to draw more people. Soon there was a crowd of men milling and pushing around. They were laughing and cracking jokes. Here was a woman who was making a spectacle of herself so naturally the cooks and guards and coolies were delighted. They were all hugely entertained by the sight of the young woman who screamed and cried and bled like a stuck pig. They taunted her, teased
her and hurt her. Some kicked her and some groped at her to feel the young flesh. Jugho whirled around in desperation trying to escape her tormenters but getting no respite.

Where was Gunda Dhur?

**Rescued**

Gunda Dhur and the others had silently crept through the jungle to the tumbledown shacks where the labourers slept. The shacks were dirty, smelly, with next to nil facilities. As they watched from the corner of the trees, four of the guards left to investigate the sounds of intermingled cries and laughter that could be heard in the still night. Jugho was doing her job well. There were only three guards left now around the shacks and over a hundred labourers most of whom were asleep. Those three were also more interested in the noise coming from the outhouse. They were curious and angry at being left out of the scene of the activity. They stood with their backs to the shacks and discussed what could possibly be happening.

The rescue party’s task was easy. At a signal from Gunda Dhur, each of the three guards was felled by an arrow straight in the heart. Gunda Dhur and his men quickly rushed into the shacks and began waking the men. Most of the men thought that it was waking up time and they automatically started moving
towards the water troughs to wash up. It took a while to get the men organized and rounded up. They did not believe Gunda Dhur when he told them he had come to rescue them from a life of enforced slavery. They distrusted everyone. They milled around in fear, backing away from the armed men. Like sheep they felt there was safety in numbers. Who would want to rescue them? And why? They did not like the look of the bows and arrows. Some of them were already babbling in fear. They were sure that this was a prelude to something worse. Just then Kalandiya gave a shout.

"It is Gunda Dhur!"
"Who?"
"What!"
"Why?"
"Listen, please listen. It is Gunda Dhur, the leader of the Bhumkal. It is a rescue. Hurray!"

"Gunda Dhur." It was Kalandiya. He was shaking Gunda Dhur. "I will organize this mob. Just tell me what to do, where to take them."

"Kalandiya, thank you, you are here. I have to take care of the guards. Just take this bunch into the jungle and towards Kalri. Doma and the old grandfather will guide you. Wait for us at the spot where we stopped yesterday to make the plan, Doma. Go now and get this crowd organized."

"Okay."
"Quickly now. If even one guard escapes, he will shoot and kill all of you."
"Okay."

Gunda Dhur turned and ran out calling to his team to follow him. Kalandiya climbed a broken table and shouted for silence.

"Listen friends, this is not the time to squabble or argue. Gunda Dhur and the others have come to rescue us..."

"Yes, but what if it is a trick?"

"They may have come to rescue us but the guards are many."

"They will shoot us."

"Like dogs."

"Listen, Gunda Dhur is a friend. He is the leader of the rebels. We have to believe him." Kalandiya felt desperate.

"Why should we?"

"Has he felt the whip upon his shoulders?"

"Has he broken stones for eighteen hours a day?"

"I am not going."

"Nor I."

"Not even me. James sahib will kill all of us."

"He will set fire to our villages."

There was sheer unbridled panic all around. Kalandiya was in despair. He shouted again, "Listen, please. All this noise will alert the guards and James sahib. Then we will definitely die. Quiet, please and listen to me. I trust and believe Gunda Dhur. Do you trust and believe me?"

"Yes."

"Then follow me, I know Gunda Dhur. Believe me
when I say that there is no one like him for the tribals of Bastar. He has come to rescue us and I am going with him. It is far more dangerous to stay here and become the target of the occasional guard who might escape the rebels' arrows. Kalandiya looked at the dark, frightened faces of the men. "I repeat...I am going. Those who wish to come with me should come now, and I mean NOW!"

"Okay."

"Is everybody coming with me?"

"Do not trust him," shouted a voice from the crowd. "He knows Asquith sahib's personal servant. Anyone who lives with the feringhee is unreliable."

"There is really no time now to argue with you," said Kalandiya a little sadly. "I for one do not wish to be killed. I have to get married and to father children. I am going. Come with me, those who wish to do so. The rest can stay and do what they like. Quietly now, if you can."

**Climax**

Kalandiya and the slaves as well as their rescuers reached the spot where Gunda Dhur had asked them to wait. Panting and exhausted, they all sprawled here and there and waited for their breathing to normalize. But the combined tension of fear and exultation would not let them relax. The babble of voices raised in questions and alarm was constant.
"Let us not stop," said one in fear. "They will catch us."

"No, please, I cannot go any further."

"But the feringhees?"

"And their paid dogs."

"They will kill us!"

"And shoot us."

"Where is Gunda Dhur?"

"Kalandiya, you said the great rebel leader is with us. Where is he now?"

"Oh, yes, where is Gunda Dhur?"

"I am hungry."

"I am thirsty."

"I am tired."

"I want to go home!"

Kalandiya feared that he had a rebellion in his own ranks now. The former slaves were like a flock of sheep, rudderless and confused. The primary emotion was still fear and the primary desire was to reach home. What should he do? Should he let them loose and leave them to find their own way home? He turned to the three rescuers who had accompanied them and found that they were incapable of taking decisions. They only wanted to be led. Kalandiya was at the end of his tether and wondering what to do next when there was a long shout from behind him.

"Kalandiya! Help!"

Kalandiya ran to Gunda Dhur and the others who were half carrying, half dragging a severely injured girl between them. She was unconscious. At the
arrival of this group the chaos became worse. The girl was laid down on the earth and immediately surrounded by a hundred men. There were so many questions, exclamations, cries and lamentations that it was impossible to be heard.

"Quiet! Quiet everyone, please." Gunda Dhur had climbed a rock so that he could be both seen and heard. "My friends, the feringhee is dead! The man who ran the slave camp and all his notorious servants are dead! You are free. Go home. Find your own way home. No one will follow you. We have a mission to fulfil which we will. Go home and may you be happy."

"And leave the girl alone, please. She is sick and hurt. The servants of the feringhee have injured her. Give her some air and space, please."

"For God’s sake, go!" shouted Kalandiya. This statement, screamed out, brought an immediate hush upon the assembly and the men fell silent.

Kalandiya sat in the dust with the head of the unconscious Jugho in his lap. The horrible side of the face was visible to all. Even though she was unconscious, the wild eye was still opening and darting aimlessly to the right and the left like a goldfish in the pond. It looked so grotesque and alive that the men feared her for a churail.

"Churail!"
"Eater of children!"
"Get away! Get away."

Slowly the crowd began to back away and the
atmosphere was filled with a sudden high-pitched keening of intense grief. Holding Jugho’s head between his hands, Kalandiya swayed back and forth and cried and screamed to relieve the pain in his chest and heart. This was worse than the worse nightmare that he had ever seen. A Jugho alive was what he had prayed for. But a Jugho who looked like this? How she must have suffered! She was covered with blood and had at least four big wounds that were bleeding and a number of lacerations and scratches. And the agonized face and eye! Nothing that he had ever suffered was equal to her suffering and disfigurement. This was the girl he loved and wanted to marry. Why had life treated them so brutally?

"Kalandiya, let the medicine man clean Jugho’s wounds and apply medicine."

"No, no. Leave her alone. You used her! You used my Jugho to free the slaves. You thought she is only a woman and what use is a woman’s life. You forgot that she was my ghotul wife." Kalandiya wept but allowed Gunda Dhur to carry Jugho close to the banks of the stream to wash and dress her wounds with medicinal leaves and herbal pastes. They fed her something and soon she was sleeping comfortably.

"How could you use Jugho like this?" Kalandiya repeated his question the moment Gunda Dhur came and sat down beside him.

"Only one hour of darkness is left," said Gunda Dhur in reply. "And more than seventy per cent of the slaves have left for their homes."
"A...a young delicate girl like Jugho."
"The others will leave as soon as it is dawn. We must not underestimate the feringhee."
"The best dancer in Chelru and the most beautiful girl in the whole of Abujhmar was my Jugho. And you almost got her killed!"
"We have to move on too. It is dangerous to stay in one place."
"Tell me why? Why is Jugho in this state?"
"Kalandiya," said Gunda Dhur severely, "let your grief die away. We are in the middle of a war. Jugho is the bravest soldier whom I have got. It was her choice to fight and this is her second successful campaign. Now I have work to do and I must be gone."
"What about me?"
"You are part of the Bhumkal. Do what you think is necessary for the freedom of Bastar." Gunda Dhur searched in the pocket of his kurta and brought out a bidi packet and offered it to Kalandiya. "For you and Jugho."

He walked a couple of steps, stopped and turned around, "Nothing will happen to her. All her wounds are superficial except the one in the stomach. She should be all right."

And Gunda Dhur went away. Gunda Dhur, the rebel, the *bagi*, the undeclared leader of thousands of men went where he was needed. He was the general whose plan was succeeding and now he had to handle other fronts. Gunda Dhur was the most important
hero in the whole of Bastar. Till today songs are sung about his heroic exploits.

The crocodiles!

Kalandiya and Jugho never went back to Chelru. They were told that there were two Englishmen in the crocodile swamp. The two young hill Marias discussed the matter one night about ten days after the rescue of the slaves. Kalandiya had made a rough wooden platform, about four feet by four feet and fixed it high on a huge, old teak tree. The tribals of Bastar had risen in one big effort and struck all over the state. Everything made by the foreigners or symbolizing foreign rule was attacked. The British presence as far as the troops went was next to nothing in Bastar. No one ever dreamt that the peaceful tribals were capable of such violence. Thus the retaliation did not get activated for a while.

Though they hid in the tree, no one was seriously pursuing Kalandiya and Jugho. The British did not begin to organize the counter-offensive until almost a month had lapsed. So it was not surprising that in the middle of the rebellion, Jugho and Kalandiya got the news of two Englishmen shooting crocodiles in the middle of the swamp. The news was startling to the tribals because crocodile meat was not eaten and they could think of no other reason to kill these huge, ugly animals.
"Asquith sahib and Tom sahib, are in a camp close to the crocodile swamp," said Sukma.

Jugho half-lay, half-sat on the platform high up on the tree and listened to Sukma without comment. Kalandiya and three other youths from Chelru sat around the platform on various bends of the tree's branches. This was the combat team, and Sukma, the betrayer, was bringing them news.

"Tom Boggs is a horrible, cruel man, just like James sahib and deserves to be killed," said Sukma.

"And what about Asquith sahib?" asked Jugho.

"Asquith sahib has been good to me," said Sukma. However, he is a feringhee and in Bastar there is no place for the feringhees."

"Are you sure you would not betray us to Asquith sahib when you realize he is in danger?" Jugho's voice was curt and mocking, and her eye gleamed red in the night. Sukma could not suppress a shudder and thought again that this woman was certainly inauspicious. If only she did not have Kalandiya's protection, the tribals would kill her in a flash.

"I do not have to explain myself to a woman," said Sukma in anger. "You either have faith in me or you do not."

"Of course, we have faith in you, Sukma," Kalandiya's soft heart was immediately won over. "We would never have got out of the slave camp but for you."

"So what have you decided?" Sukma's voice was still hostile.
"We leave for the camp."
"And?"
"And we kill the feringhee! Bastar for the tribals! Victory to the Bhumkal!"
"Victory to the Bhumkal!" shouted the others.

The crocodile swamp was huge, sluggish and dangerous. It was much larger than it looked and the edges were particularly hazardous. An unknowing person could never realize where the swamp really began. One unwary step and you were inside the swamp. If the lantana did not pull you down and drown you, the crocodiles were sure to get you. The crocodiles of the swamp were huge and dangerous. Their powerful jaws were at least two feet long with gleaming, yellow-white teeth. The black beady eyes were mean-looking and cunningly hooded so that you could totally mistake the crocodile for a log of wood. The swamp had hundreds of them—vile, monstrous creatures but strangely attractive. At least Asquith found them attractive.

"I have a love-hate relationship with these crocodiles," said Asquith. He lay on his hammock beneath the banyan tree, several feet away from the swamp and surveyed the vast area through binoculars. "They know me and I know them. Still they manage to hide from me."

Tom Boggs shuddered in distaste. Despite contrary advice, he wore shorts that ended at least four inches above his knee and thus exposed his fat, hairy flesh to attack by the mosquitoes and other parasites. It
was mid-afternoon and he was drinking steadily. His fat face was already tomato-red in colour. He was drinking because he was unhappy. He did not like the swamp and he hated the crocodiles.

"Ugly monsters! Their skin is yuck!" he shuddered.

"Come on, Tom, where is the good old sporting spirit?" Asquith had the gun to his shoulder. "Tell me how many you want and which one you want?"

"I do not."

"Quick." On his command the tribals had thrown huge chunks of tiger meat into the water and the repulsive creatures were suddenly all along the edge with wide open mouths chomping down on the disgusting meat. The sound made by the jaws and teeth was scary. Boggs was overcome by a strange feeling that had disgust, hatred and fascination in it. He watched a huge, ugly creature open its jaws and chomp down hard for the meat. It missed the meat but got the snout of another crocodile. The hurt crocodile flashed its huge tail in a massive attack and for a while all was chaos.

"Oh, my God," whispered Tom, watching the ensuing fight. He wanted to vomit but he could not look away.

"Come on, Tom," said Asquith, impatiently. "Remember, you wanted adventure?"

"Shoot anyone you like," Tom spoke thickly.

There were three quick shots one after the other and Tom watched the water of the swamp redden with the blood of the shot crocodiles. The hurt and
bloody animals thrashed around in pain, the big tails and snouts frothing the water and making the dirty, green water carry a pink frosting on top. It was a horrific scene and one which the tribals watched with sad eyes, unable to understand the working of the feringhee mind. Sukma, who stood half-sheltered behind the leaves of the teak tree, watched with grim anger. The time had come for him to show his talents. He had already decided which side he was and it was time to come out in the open. For some reason he also felt that he had to let Jugho know that he was true to the tribal cause. Though why he needed to do that, he did not understand. That horrible girl worried him. She had got under his skin and was now irritating him.

One crocodile suddenly gave up the ghost and flipped over on his back giving the world a view of his pasty, dirty, yellow-white belly. It was disgusting.

"How many shoes and bags do you think this monster will make?" asked Tom, forgetting that he was disgusted with the monsters.

"More than either of our wives can use in their lifetime," answered Asquith.

"Yeah." Tom Boggs suddenly lost interest in the crocodiles. "I am tired," he said, wiping the sweat off his face. "My body is hot, but my forehead is clammy."

"That is malaria, my boy. Swamp fever. Told you to dress in trousers and full sleeves." Asquith indicated his own decently covered arms and legs.

He turned towards the swamp, "Okay, lads, get on with the task," he indicated to the crocodiles and
strode into his tent for a wash and change before the evening.

Sukma rattled around in a temper. His anger and resentment was reaching boiling point. He was tired of the Englishman’s mindless sport, the senseless killing and the total lack of knowledge about why the tribal had risen in revolt all over Bastar. The Burra sahib did not even know that a rebellion was going on.

Tom wandered to the edge of the swamp and watched the tribal boys dragging out the corpses of the crocodiles. You had to be careful. The alive and hungry crocodiles were already snapping their jaws. They did not want to eat their own dead brethren but they watched with starved eyes the two-legged humans who were so tasty. One false move by them and the crocodile took an arm or a leg off.

"Sir, drink," Sukma forced himself to be respectful. How could the white man drink in the midst of the offal and the filth?

"Measure the length of that intestine," shouted Tom, his beady eyes watching the boys begin to skin the monsters.

A tragic end

The crocodiles were swarming along the edges and Tom Boggs’ eyes were on the bloody insides of the crocodiles. The tribals were all busy, some in skinning, others in dragging the animals and still others in
shooing the alive, snapping crocodiles. Sukma stood
behind Tom, tray in hand and the glimmering of an
idea came into his head, blossomed, in milliseconds
and before he fully realized what he was going to do,
Sukma flung away the tray and pushed Tom Boggs
with all his might!

Tom Boggs fell at least four feet inside the swamp
with a huge splash. Everyone watched in horror. Tom
Boggs let out a half-strangled scream that was cut off
the moment the thrashing, hungry crocodiles turned
upon him. The terrible scene was played out in
complete silence as the waters of the swamp were
once again churned and tinged with the red blood of
the white man. Nobody dared to scream or say a
word. They were frozen by the horror of the scene.
The crocodiles fought for the morsels of flesh and
ultimately it was the unnatural silence of the humans
and the sound of the thrashing waters that brought
Asquith on the scene. He had washed and was
buckling the belt of his trousers as he walked out of
the tent.

"What is the matter? Where is Tom sahib?"

Nobody dared to answer. Nobody looked in the
direction of Sukma who stood as though turned into
a statue. Everyone stood absolutely frozen.

"Sukma, where is Tom sahib?" And when there was
no reply, Asquith spoke sharply, "Sukma, have you
gone deaf? Why do not you reply? Hey, what is the
matter with the crocodiles. He stared sharply into the
swamp and then shouted, "Where is Tom sahib?"
"In...in...in the swamp," stuttered Sukma and finally he let out a scream, "They have eaten Tom sahib!"

"What? Oh, my God, do something!"

There was nothing to do. Tom was dead. And by now it was obvious that Asquith was not going to get enough of Tom Boggs to perform a decent funeral either. The colonel was in a state of shock. He immediately got a fire started to scare away the crocodiles and managed somehow to retrieve some bloody clothes and parts of the left side of the body. He decided to bury the remains in an unknown and unmourned grave close to the obnoxious swamp in the early hours of the morning. No one could tell him how the accident happened. No one apparently saw anything.

Shocked and dazed, Asquith sat around for half the night, trying to come to terms with what had happened. This was India. Nobody kept dead bodies more than a few hours. And who was going to mourn Tom? His family was far away in England and the nearest Englishman would be in Bastar. Which reminded Asquith of his wife. How was she going to take the news? In the early hours of the morning, as the mortal remains of Tom Boggs were lowered into a grave far away from his beloved England, Asquith stood by the grave recalling Tom Boggs’ wife, Penny’s face. She would be grief-stricken but she would also blame him for taking Tom into the dangerous jungle and exposing him to the heat and humidity, the stinging insects and snakes, the wild animals and the fevers.
Thinking about Tom, Asquith was suddenly flooded with the feeling that something was wrong. The tribals were too silent, too orderly, too restrained. That was strange. There was none of the outstanding grief with which the tribals received the news of death. And where was Sukma?

"Sukma?" Asquith turned around to look for him. "Yes, sahib." It was another tribal boy, but it was not Sukma.

"Where is Sukma?"

"Sukma!"

"Go, call him," commanded Asquith and turned back to the business of the funeral. On such occasions he had to play the role of the 'chaplain' too. He continued to read the funeral service. After a while he turned back again.

"Where is Sukma?"

"He...he is not...there," stammered the tribal boy, eyes rolling in fear.

"But where has he gone?"

There was no reply. Either nobody knew or nobody wanted to say anything. All the camp wallahs, barring the colonel, were tribal. He was the only Englishman. But he had been the only Englishman in huge districts and he had never felt insecure or afraid. For the first time Asquith felt the cold fingers of fear clutch his heart. Something was seriously wrong. He skipped the last two pages and said a hurried "Amen" and crossed his heart.

"I am going to look for Sukma," he said, turning
around and going towards his tent. "I just need to collect my gun."

"Sarkar? It will soon be dark, sarkar."

"I know. That is worrying me. I cannot leave him unprotected in the jungle."

"He is a hill Maria. He can take care of himself, sahib. The jungle is not safe at night, sahib."

"Nonsense."

Asquith strode into the tent and seized his gun. He was going to get to the bottom of the mystery. He loaded his gun and slipped a few extra bullets in his pocket. Then he strode out.

"I will be back. I am not too hungry. Just a soup will do. In the morning we go back to Jagdalpur."

"Yes, Sarkar."

"Oh, and those crocodiles," he looked with distaste at the corpses littering the water front. "I suppose we can cure the skins and send them to England along with the other trophies."

Asquith walked into the dark jungle alone. He was a courageous man. What was worrying him was that Sukma might be somehow connected with Tom’s death and he wanted to get to the bottom of that. Also an unexplained guilt and sadness was in his heart. He had grown somewhat fond of his boorish brother-in-law and somewhere in the back of his mind had lurked a feeling that Tom Boggs might not go back to England and that the two of them would set up home in some beautiful corner of India. And now unexpectedly, shockingly Tom was gone.
Asquith found himself alone in the jungle after having furiously walked for twenty minutes in trying to work out his anger and frustration. Had Sukma pushed Tom into the swamp and then run away? He knew very well that, if Sukma did not want to be caught, he could be a few feet away and Asquith would not be able to catch him.

"Who is there?" called the colonel.

There was no reply. All was still and normal. Was the jungle murmuring more than normal? Probably not. Then was he, the man of steel, a victim of nerves? And what had he to be nervous about? India was his country and he loved it just as the people of India loved him.

A dry twig cracked somewhere and again Asquith felt his heartbeat lurch in fear. But this time it was a couple of his bearers, who had belatedly chased after him hauling guns. Rightfully they begged him to return to the camp.

Asquith lay down in the camp-cot fully clothed and closed his eyes. He needed time to come to terms with the fact of Tom’s death. It was too sudden and unreal. How were people back home going to react to the news that Tom Boggs got eaten by a crocodile. It was unbelievable. The images of the gruesome remains of the body would not go away so easily, and Asquith found it difficult to sleep.

So it happened that when Kalandiya and Jugho, led by Sukma, entered his tent Asquith was half-awake.
Kalandiya used the broad, curved knife with the narrow tip for his attack. He raised his right hand above his head and struck the middle of Asquith’s chest with all his might, burying the knife deep.

"Sukma, you!" screamed Asquith in a mixture of pain, shock and surprise. He tried to rise but fell on the floor.

"Sukma, help," he gurgled.

Jugho, who had her hands raised for a second attack, brought them down with tremendous force upon Asquith’s head. She carried a big, sharply pointed stone and it would have ended the life in a flash, except for the fact that Sukma caught Jugho’s hands and screamed, "You ugly witch! Do not touch him!"

Shocked, Jugho dropped the stone and stumbled back. In Sukma’s mind contrary emotions seethed. He was happy to see the life drain out of Asquith, yet he genuinely mourned him. But for Jugho he had nothing but fear and hatred. She was a churail. An ugly, barren woman with magical powers had no right to live. She was a witch and the tribals hated witches. Sukma picked up the fallen stone and brought it down on Jugho’s head with great force, closing forever the horrible, staring eye.

Sukma turned to run so that he could join Kalandiya and carry on the Bhumkal. Sukma and Kalandiya escaped the camp and rejoined Gunda Dhur’s company of Dhurwas and Marias which became a great people’s force. But they died in Ulnar
at the disaster where Gunda Dhur also died, betrayed by one of his own men, Sonu Majhi.
That is another story.

Aftermath

Gunda Dhur, the tragic, legendary leader of the tribals, the man of superior gifts, refused to submit to the British and died fighting the British without food and water for three days.

The uprising of 1910, the Bhumkal, was suppressed by de Brett through a series of terrorist policies. He arrested Lai Kalindra Singh, the Raja’s uncle and fifteen others near Jagdalpur. Some were killed and others sent out of Bastar. He allowed the Chennai (Madras) police to loot the Dorlas and the houses of leading Hindu residents in Jagdalpur were searched. Four major military expeditions were sent in all tribal areas for the destruction of aboriginal rebels. Hundreds of tribals were arrested, charged with treason and hanged.

A brutal round of repression against the revolutionaries was started. Where no charges were made out, de Brett ordered his troops to wet the sticks and whip the tribals senseless. Hundreds more died. There was a huge hue and cry against the whipping and Standen, the then Chief Commissioner, Central Provinces, actually justified the whipping in a letter to the Secretary, Foreign Department, Government of India.
As if all this was not enough, fines were levied on villages that participated in the rebellion. Eight hundred and thirty-eight were identified and one lakh of rupees were collected from them by way of fine. There was a great disarmament movement and traditional swords and bows and arrows disappeared. Stringent methods were introduced in the Raipur jail to deal with the rebels.

After the 1910, the policy was 'to leave the tribals alone, to interfere in his affairs the least and to let sleeping dogs lie'. Abujhmar was declared out of bounds for the police and the Police Station at Kutul, in the heart of Abujhmar, was shifted.

Panda Baijnath continued as Diwan of Bastar for a decade after the rebellion and did the first intensive survey of the area with Rai Bahadur Hira Lai. Later, he also became the Prime Minister of Bastar state.
Hill Marias, bison-horn Marias, as other tribals of Bastar, loved their land fiercely. So did they love their freedom from slavery to the British (feringhees). Their deep resentment caused many uprisings. A major one, the 'Bhumkal' (lit. earthquake) of 1910 was inspired by a legendary hero, Gunda Dhur, who was a historical character. Kalandiya prepares to be the clan priest and leader of 'ghotul', where boys and girls receive training. Jugho soft and fresh like a mahua flower transforms herself into a determined rebel. The revolt engulfs the entire Bastar. Its central event came with the killing of the chief feringhee and, close on its heels, the tragedy of Jugho! The 'Bhumkal' was supressed.