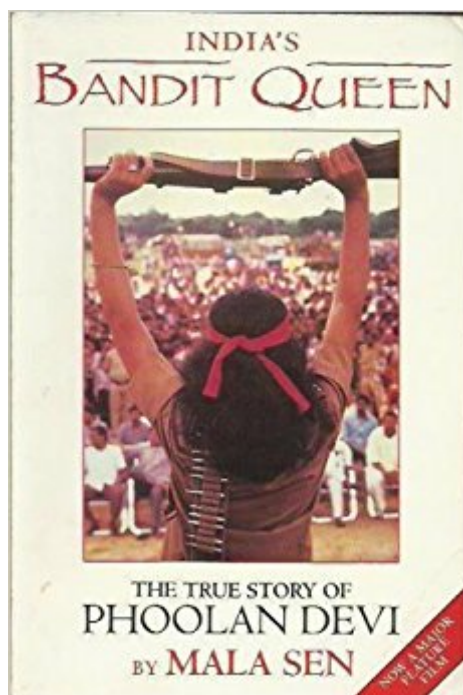


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India's Bandit Queen



Synopsis

Born into poverty in Northern India, Phoolan Devi has become one of the most famous bandits in India's history, a living legend revered by millions. In revenge for the murder of her lover - and her own rape - Phoolan is said to have been responsible for the murder of 22 highcaste Hindu men. Based on prison diaries, letters, family interviews, police records and eye witness accounts, this updated edition takes account of recent developments in Phoolan's story - as well as wider events in India's troubled democracy.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In 1983, 26-year-old Phoolan Devi made a conditional surrender in front of thousands of people to the government of India on charges of murdering 22 high-caste Hindu men. Labeled as India's "Bandit Queen," she had been an outlaw for almost two years; the murders were revenge for the life of her lover and for her own kidnap and rape. This is the story of a woman, born in poverty and the low ranks of a caste system, who fought back against a system of oppressors. She managed to keep her life and is serving a jail sentence. Much of this book is compiled from her prison letters. --
From The WomanSource Catalog & Review: Tools for Connecting the Community for Women

The gripping biography of Phoolan Devi--the remarkable woman who defied the conventions of her sex and caste in her transformation from an impoverished Indian villager to a notorious roaming bandit and national heroine.

PHOOLAN Devi in current media parlance would be classed as a yob or a hooligan. Mala Sen's beautifully crafted biography not only lights up the paths to crime but also picks out the stuff Indian nightmares are made of. In 1981, Phoolan Devi, 24 years old, was charged with 48 criminal offences including 22 counts of murder. She was said to have slaughtered 22 high-caste Hindu men at Behmai, Uttar Pradesh, in revenge for her being gang-raped and her lover being killed. It was an act of vengeance that led some to worship the Bandit Queen of India as a reincarnation of Kali, the goddess often represented as man-eater, quaffing men's blood as she protected the outlawed of society. Sen, who in her research befriended Devi herself, spoke to an officer policing the Chambal Valley, the area of Madhya Pradesh patrolled by Devi's gang. He quoted from *The Waste Land* when asked to describe it. You get the picture. She was brought up in a parched village, carrying the burdens of being low-caste, poor and a woman. A fairy-tale evil uncle conspired to steal her family's land and Devi was married off to a pervert for a cow and a goat. It's a tragically common story that has been repeated over the millennium and flogged to death by Bombay film producers. But Devi didn't get the fanfared white horse. Instead she decided to chart her own dharma, or fate, and vowed to kill as many men as possible from the landowning class and to take from the rich and give to the poor. Mala Sen, a bit of a bandit herself when fighting for workers in this country, has written up a great story that emphasises the cultural over the psychological. Where a Norman Mailer - or even a Ridley Scott - might have homed in on how gang-rape causes a woman to pick up a rifle, Sen takes it for granted and expands on the tradition of banditry since the Delhi Sultan and the Moghuls. The end of the book sees Phoolan Devi in prison hearing of how the terms of her surrender, in which she negotiated the protection of her family, are being broken against a chaotic backdrop of warring local and central government. Sen tells a ripping yarn that ought to be read by corrupt Indian politicians holidaying in Zurich as well as by the girls who watch drummer boys in our own little caste-war in Belfast.

"Bandit Queen" is a superb book. It is however not for the faint-hearted as it covers a multitude of horrors such as rape, mutilation, and murder. Phoolan Devi's story is not an uncommon one in India, but her reaction to her treatment by society and its Caste System is more extreme than most. She takes up arms, and becomes a bandit, representing her sex in a way never before acknowledged in India. This book does not try to justify what Phoolan Devi did during her time as an outlaw, rather it tells the story of young girl wronged. From a tender age this young girl and her family were abused, not only because of her Caste but also because of her sex. That a woman

would dare to fight back was unthinkable to many people but Phoolan Devi was a woman with nothing to lose and everything to gain. This book chronicles her life and times, never sentimental, sometimes vicious, but always inspiring, this book is a testament to the human spirit and all that it can endure for the sake of justice and truth. Phoolan Devi did things she shouldn't have, but in a world where livestock is often valued over human life, she had no choice. This is an amazing book, well worth reading, and certainly well worth reprinting.

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Since voicelessness (in all guises) is a huge part of what Phoolan Devi has spent her life resisting, it's important that we hear her story FROM HER. There's an autobiography called "I, Phoolan Devi" that's available in England (etc.?) (still haven't seen it anywhere in the States). It was told by Devi, transcribed to text, and o.k.'d by Devi page-by-page.

I thought this book was going to glorify violence. Boy, was I wrong. I couldn't put this book down because of the unbelievably harsh existence Phoolan Devi had to endure before she decided to fight back against her oppressors. Being from a lower caste, as well as being a woman put her at a disadvantage. She was tortured and debased. She could only get salvation through violence because the powers-that-be were the abusers who were in cahoots with the police. As a bandit, she gave to the poor, and protected the weak; especially girls/women who were molested by men. She tortured and castrated those who dared to rape and humiliate women. This book is a statement to

the enduring power of the spirit, and a testament to the dignity of the oppressed.

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