

# **RAMBRIKSH BENIPURI: THE MAN AND HIS IDEAS**

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of  
**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**



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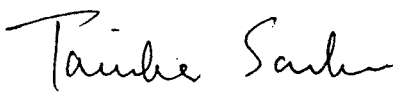


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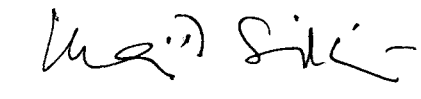
## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "RAMBRIKSH BENIPURI: THE MAN AND HIS IDEAS" submitted by PRABHAT KUMAR in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY is his original work and has not been submitted for the award of any other degree of this University or of any other university.

We, therefore recommend that the dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to take this opportunity to give my sincere thanks to my supervisors Prof. Tanika Sarkar and Dr. Indivar Kamtekar for their guidance and help. I am also deeply indebted to the faculty and staff of the Centre for Historical Studies.

My thanks are also due to Prof. Karmendu Shishir of Patna, Prof. K.K. Sharma of Bihar University and Prof. Prabhakar Singh of Hajipur College. And also to Avinash Kumar and Nandini Chandra.

I am also grateful to the Indian Council for Historical Research, for granting me with a contingency grant, without which it would have been impossible to complete this dissertation.

I would also like to acknowledge the help provided by the Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad Library, Patna, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies Library, the J.N.U. Central Library and the Bihar State Archives.

My thanks would hardly be suffice to express the debt I to the persons who have had the greatest influence on me. My Bhaiya, the tutor from my childhood i.e. Umeshwar Acharyaji, Ravi Sir and a friend who is now a SOAS scholar.

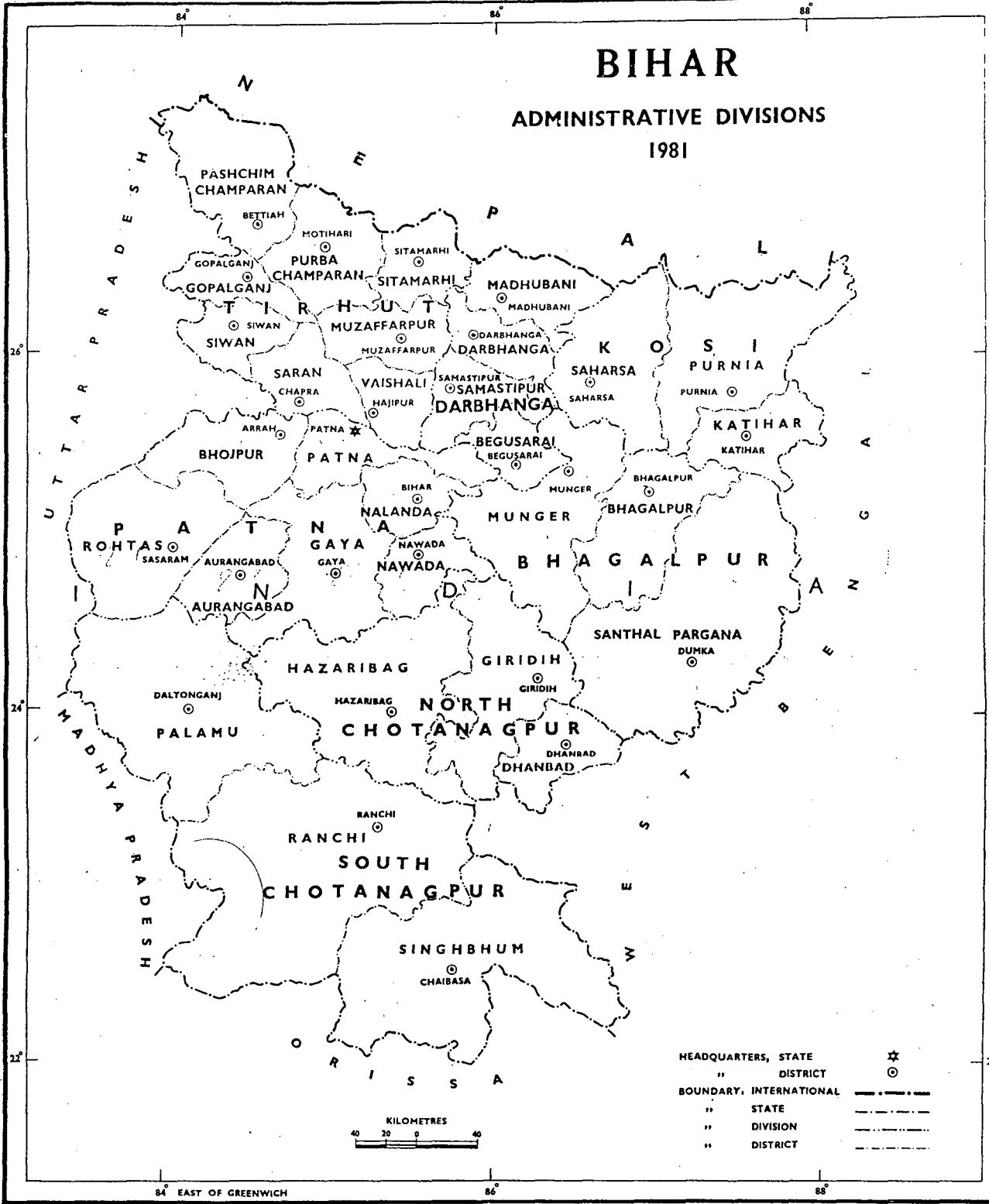
I cannot forget the immense help that I received in writing this dissertation from my friends first and foremost Projit, Saurabh, Niraj, Nitin and also Kalyan, Prasun and Monjita.

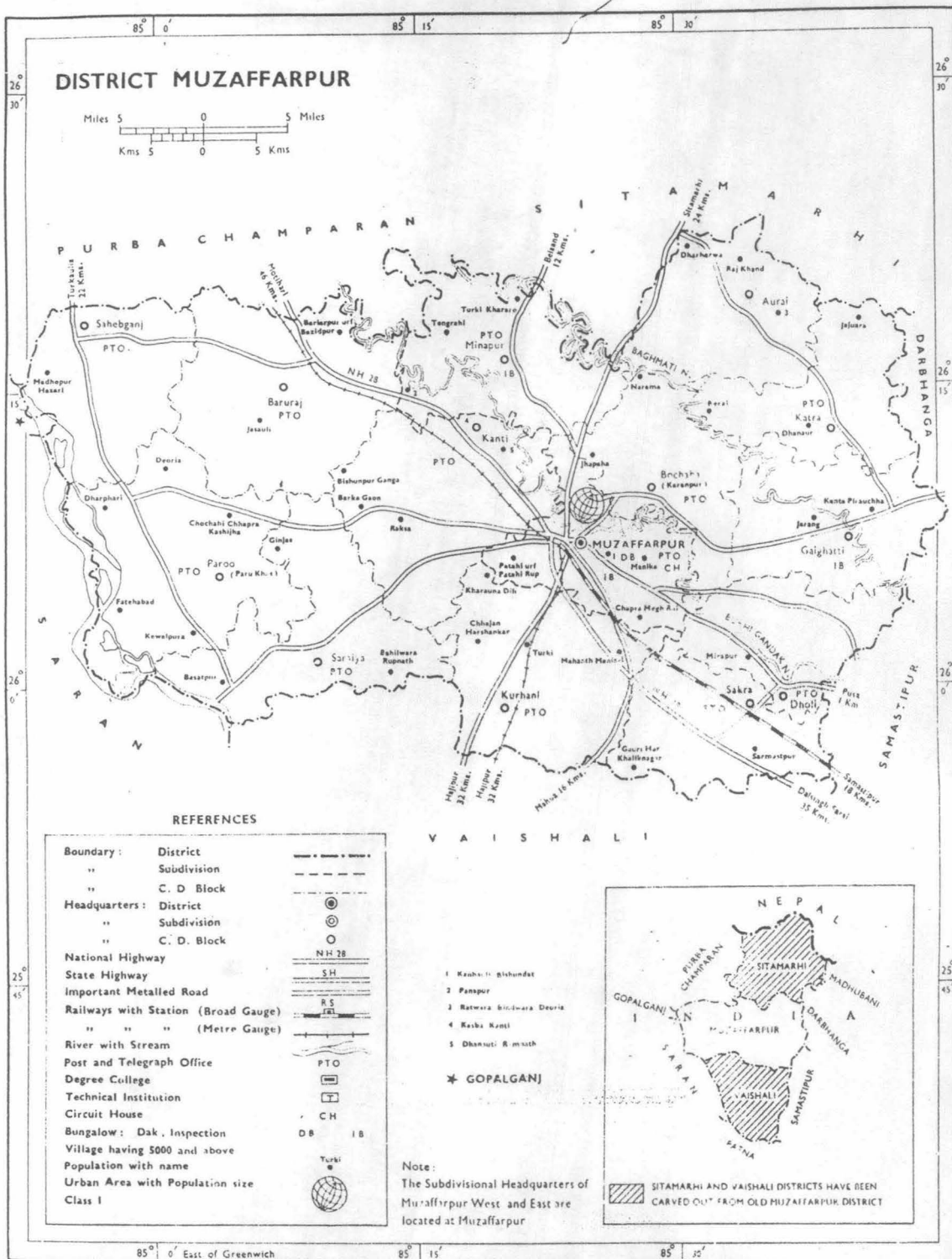
A special acknowledgement is in order for my ... circle, i.e. Projit, Saurabh, Samrat, Dharam, Arvind, Muro and Niraj--- the circle within whose precincts, I lost touch, at least momentarily, with the pangs of 'reality'... albeit to snatch me back into the lap of miserable reality there always waited the mighty Mr. Conscience (a.k.a. Vivek). And of course I ought not to forget Satto and Vaibhav, and the eminent luminaries Baba, and the ever-deserving Communist son of the barbaric Huns....

Despite the their utter lack of support in the completion of this dissertation, do I dare forget, across the seas of traffic at the Delhi University i.e. Naval I.A.S. (??????), Shailesh, Deepak, Sanjeev, Rahul, Devanand and Kanchan.

# BIHAR

## ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS 1981







## INTRODUCTION

My study is focussed on an organic intellectual of Bihar, Shri Rambriksh Benipuri (1899-1968). In his chequered public life/career of almost four decades between 1921 and 1959 he remained an important figure in the literary and political life of Bihar. Born in an upper caste Bhumihar family of middle peasants of a small village in Muzaffarpur district, Benipuri entered into the public domain during the heyday of the Indian National Movement in 1921, when he left his school in response to Gandhi's call. From 1921 to the end of his active life in 1959, when he fell prey to paralysis, his career shows the interface of a journalist, a politician and a litterateur. He edited or co-edited more than a dozen of Hindi political and literary journals. As a politician he was an active member and office-bearer of several organisations--- the Indian National Congress, the Congress Socialist party, the Kisan Sabha of Bihar, etc. His strong anti-imperialist political moorings had earned him more than seven years of prison life. Further, as a litterateur, he wrote in several genres---sketches, short stories, plays, novels, essays, biographies, translations etc., and was conferred the title of *Sahitya Vachaspati*, by the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Allahabad. Added to this he was very active in the Hindi literary institutions, especially at Bihar. For example, he had been the president and general secretary of Bihar Hindi Sahitya Sammelan and a member of the Council of Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad.

It is an irony that no serious study of such a dynamic personality has been done so far, even within the Hindi academia. The works on Benipuri are limited to a few commemorative and hagiographical writings in Hindi. For instance, *Smarika: Hindi Navjagaran aur Shri Rambriksh Benipuri* and the introduction to the selected works of Benipuri entitled *Swadhinta aur Samajwad* written by the noted Marxist Hindi literary critic, Dr. Rambilas Sharma belong to this category.<sup>1</sup> Both the works were written and published after the publication of the eight volumes of Benipuri's collected works, viz. the *Benipuri Granthavali*. They, the commemorative works merely, provide the glimpses of his writings by citing and quoting from Benipuri's collected works so as to make the

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<sup>1</sup> Ravi Bhusan and Prabhu Narayan Vidyarthi (ed.), *Smarika: Hindi Navjagaran aur Shri Rambriksh Benipuri, Rashtriya Sangoshthi*, 1-2 April 2000, Patna; Rambilas Sharma, *Swadhinta aur Samajwad*, Swaraj Prakashan, 2000, Delhi.



readers remember a forgotten writer. The picture that emerges from these works can be summed up as that of a writer/ intellectual, who had worked for the cause of India's independence and endeavoured towards the establishment of a socialist society. None of the works on Benipuri deal with Benipuri's views and ideas in the proper historical context and above all do not utter anything about the shifts and changes quite visibly reflected in his literary oeuvre over a period of time.

It is in this light that, I have attempted to locate Benipuri's life and activities within the contemporary historical milieu and to place his shifting views and ideas vis-à-vis the various contending discourses of the period as well as his own biographical trajectory. I begin this study of Benipuri's life and works by placing him in a social context, i.e., we look at him as a man-in-society, a man responding to the movement of social forces. This, however, does not imply that I deny the agency of an individual who acts instrumentally. Rather, I would look at a socially situated individual acting by negotiating the dynamics of the movement of social forces.

Hence, my first chapter, provides a biographical sketch of Rambriksh Benipuri's personal, political and intellectual life. It also looks into the issue of the various kinds of formative influences, institutional and family constraints and maps the shift and changes in his world-views. The picture of Benipuri that emerges is more or less that of a radical Hindi middle class intellectual of colonial India---- to use Francesca Orsini's phrase.<sup>2</sup> Although his writings reflect the concerns and anxieties of his class, the extended horizons of his concerns also fractures its boundaries, especially in the post-1930 period when Benipuri involves himself in the radical mass politics and ideologically comes closer to Marxian socialism. In the subsequent chapters I deal with various themes with which Benipuri involved himself under the overarching category of nationalism. The themes being pre-eminently those of Indian culture, language, literature and gender.

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<sup>2</sup> Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism*, OUP, Delhi, 2002, pp. 13-14.

Benipuri, in fact, was one of the second-generation Hindi intellectuals of colonial India, active in the period of mass movements after 1920. He had inherited the early nationalist legacy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and was a first generation participant in the nationalist political mass mobilisation. The historical presence of colonialism had already occasioned the emergence of nationalism in India. The process of imagining a national community was already in motion. The endless debate over what constituted the various aspects of Indian nation had started. It is in this context that Benipuri's initial intervention is sought to be understood. However, Benipuri's views and ideas underwent a radical transformation in the wake of his personal involvement in the growing leftist trend of national movement in the 1930s when he became a socialist politician.

Towards the later half of the nineteenth century economic criticism of British rule was accompanied with its social and cultural critique, in the Hindi region. This is best manifested and voiced by the 'father of modern Hindi', Bharatendu Harisachandra.<sup>3</sup> This is what Clifford Geertz calls the first formative stage of nationalism. He sees this phase as

confronting dense assemblage of cultural, social, local and linguistic categories of self-identification and social loyalty that centuries of uninstructed history had produced with a simple, abstract, deliberately constructed and almost painfully self-conscious concept of political ethnicity- a proper nationlaity in modern manner.<sup>4</sup>

It has been argued by a host of scholars, for example, Sudhir Chandra<sup>5</sup> among others that as a part of resistance to British colonialism by the early Indian intellectuals, the process of constructing an 'oppositional' identity vis-à-vis that generated by colonialism operated simultaneously at several levels of consciousness. Consequently, the criticism heaped upon the British rule for destruction of an Indian civilisation, also sought to represent national community. On the one hand, it served as a response to the

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<sup>3</sup> Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalisation of Hindu Tradition: Bharatendu Harisachandra and the Nineteenth Century Benaras*, OUP, Delhi, 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture*, New York, Basic Books, 1973, p. 239.

<sup>5</sup> Sudhir Chandra, *The Oppressive Present: Literature and Social Imagination in Colonial India*, OUP, Delhi, 1992.

British rejection of the notion India as a nation, while on the other, it congealed as a base on which the idea of a continuing everlasting Indian society could be founded. This base was made coherent by the construction of a glorious Sanskritised ancient past, on which a modern nation could proudly represent itself and thereby come to terms with the oppressive present and the political reality of subjection.

This nationalist project of establishing the Indian nation's civilisational and cultural superiority made the past or indeed history an important site of negotiating cultural ideals and the amelioration of the burden of present subjection. The present subjection was explained in terms of the available hegemonic colonial discourse of Indian history. The ancient golden Aryan cultural past of India was followed by the phase of decline during the Muslim rule and hence the further defeats and subjection at the hands of the British. This Hindu/ Aryan interpretation of Indian culture continued to be predominant in the twentieth century as well. Benipuri's views of India's cultural pasts, remains limited to this idea. However, this ideal Hindu view of the past also gets fractured with the growing attacks coming from the leftist intellectuals and women activists etc. But as has been shown by Orsini, the critical voices always remained at the margins. She further shows that even those who stood for radical socialist politics and advocated class struggle in the present context, could not free themselves from this idea of social harmony or the golden past. As a result, she shows that, there existed a hiatus between the views of the present and the past society. However, her study is limited to the period of 1940. I have further shown how, in the 1940s and 1950s, some changes affected the socialist circles which interpreted 'Indian culture' with a view to making of a new socialist society. Although the overall picture of Indian culture remains, for all practical purposes, that of a predominantly Hindu culture. Yet the class or caste oppressions of the ancient or Vedic age were attacked. Consequently, it was the post Vedic phase of the Indian past, that supplied most of the new ideals. At this stage, Benipuri's view of 'Indian Culture' more or less, remains similar to that of other socialists, except that he evaded the question of social relations in the context of the past.

Further, it has been argued by Dalmia and also by Orsini that, the Hindi intellectuals claimed to belong to and simultaneously aspired to create a larger community. For this they used two terms: *rashtra*, which stood for 'nation' in the political sense, and *jati*, which was used to indicate a common cultural identity. Nineteenth century Hindi writers, thus envisaged, the public as a cultural community whose contours and essential features had to be extricated from many layers of social realities, with its diverse cultural and religious traditions. In nationalist terms, language and literature were the means to define and communicate the agenda for progress, and were themselves metaphors for the *jati*/ nation: the strength of literature showed the strength of the nation; the life of language was the life of the nation. In the context of the Hindi/ Urdu and English divide, Hindi was singled out as the bearer of the Indian (Hindu) tradition and means to reach out to unite the whole Hindi (Hindu) population.

Vinay Dharwadkar<sup>6</sup>, has argued that the Orientalist working on India has consistently used all inclusive enlightenment conceptions of literature covering works in all branches of knowledge. At the same time, they operated with European concepts and developed tools of philology, which led them to concentrate upon Sanskrit and its early textual tradition. Moreover, Orientalists also used the Romantic notion of literature as the expression of 'national spirit' of a people. According to Francesca Orsini, echoes of all these Orientalist concepts were found in the debates over literature. She further points towards another novel deployment peculiar to the period. These were the dual perspectives of the *Lok Ruchi* (popular tastes) and *Lok Dharm* (popular duty). This raised two questions: how to interpret the literary tradition and what kind of literature was needed now.

While earlier, people like Bhartendu had been more eclectic and included a variety of literary traditions (except 'Urdu' or 'Islamic' traditions) in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the reformists like M. P. Dwivedi purged the entire *brajhasha* tradition especially devotional and erotic poetry. Benipuri, a product of the Dwivedi era of rationalist

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<sup>6</sup> Vinay Dharwadkar, 'Orientalism and The Study of Indian Literature' in C. A. Breckendridge and P. Van Der Veer eds. *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, Pennsylvania University Press, Philadelphia, 1993. pp. 158-185.

reformism (1900-1920), also held the same view about literature. However, his concerns and views widened with his association with the 'progressivist' leftist trend of Hindi literature in the 1930s. This is because the category of 'people' itself broadened. However, the moralist view was still strong. Even the indifference towards the 'Urdu' literary heritage persisted.

Interlinked with the question of literature but more pronounced, was the controversy over language. According to King<sup>7</sup>, Hindi, as the language of Hind, which was a common language written in both scripts Nagri and Persian was popularised as two distinct languages. One for Hindus and the other for Muslims by John Gilchrist and other Orientalists of the Fort William College. This Orientalist notion internalised by various (Hindu) votaries of Hindi helped to load this language with specific Hindu markers in the wake of the idea that the nation has one language. This idea, that the nation, with one language which belongs simultaneously to individuals and the communities and covers all the spoken and written practices and finally, the seal of recognition that it earns for by becoming the language of the state or nation, was itself new. This idea was ingrained in the European model of linguistic national entities.<sup>8</sup>

Although it was problematic when applied to the Hindi context yet, it had a powerful appeal for Indian reformers. To Alok Rai<sup>9</sup>, this idea was sought to be achieved through the standardisation of Hindi: *khariboli* Hindi, as the standard written and spoken form which was enriched by the borrowings from the high Sanskrit register and purging the rusticity i.e. common popular language or dialects and also Urdu works.

This language controversy became very pronounced and acquired a new status when the Indian National Congress and Gandhi tried to replace English with Hindi, conceiving its status as the language of the masses to be written in both scripts. It was opposed by the Hindi/ Hindu chauvinists. Benipuri's intervention comes in this regard.

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<sup>7</sup> Christopher King, *One Language Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in 19<sup>th</sup> Century North India*, OUP, Delhi, 1994.

<sup>8</sup> David Washbrook, 'To Each A Language of His Own: Language, Culture and Society in Colonial India' in P. J. Corfield edited *Language, History & Class*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1991.

<sup>9</sup> Alok Rai, *Hindi Nationalism*, Orient Longman, Delhi, 2001.

He stood for the popular Hindi as against the Sanskritised Hindi and even worked for Gandhiji's Hindustani Propaganda Organisation. However, despite his association with Gandhi's Hindustani Prachar Sabha, he did not fully conform with the language that the this organisation propagated and at best, remained merely a strong votary of popular Hindi and a bitter opponent of Sanskrit laden ones.

While the movement for building the Indian nation was spiraling into different directions, several constituents in this 'nation' were simultaneously negotiating their role within it. The 'women question', as it was called, then, was linked with this project of nationalism.

In fact, the question of 'reform' in the status of Indian women emerged simultaneously with the establishment of the colonial order. 'Once the fact of colonialism sank into the consciousness', Tanika Sarkar argues, 'almost the first thing that Indians started to discuss was not so much the legitimacy of foreign as the position of their women'.<sup>10</sup> The reason for this obsessive concern with age/ form of marriage, conditions of widows, *sati*, education, possibility of divorce, polygamy etc. were diverse. Amongst them were the desire to emulate the Victorian moral code and create new forms of domesticity and companionship, a heightened sensitivity to bondage, lack of other avenues of debate, use of new legal and educational arenas, etc. The language in which the concerns were expressed varied to include debates on community, tradition, nation and state. Used by the colonialist to buttress their assumption regarding the need to civilise India, the debate on status or reform of women took interesting routes where 'oppression' was located not in specific socio-economic conditions but in religious tradition of the Hindu (India) when Indians chose to contest British characterisation of 'barbaric' India, they too did so on grounds of tradition with the result that the debate on women according to Lata Mani became the ground for the contest over what constitutes authentic Indian (Hindu) traditions. The coupling of 'tradition' and reform with respect to women thus provided an early form to the question of gender relations in India.

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<sup>10</sup> Tanika Sarkar, 'The Feminine Discourse. A Candid Look At The Past And The Present' in Rukmini Sekhar edited *Making A Difference*, Spic Macay, New Delhi, 1998. pp. 26-41.

Further, according to Radha Kumar<sup>11</sup>, reformers who since the nineteenth century had advocated some kind of improvement in the status of women envisaged it as a closely monitored process and with the object of making them better wives and mothers. According to Chatterjee<sup>12</sup>, debates on the 'women's question' were profoundly affected by the symbolic identification of womanhood with 'Indianness' i.e. with India's peculiar spiritual essence, that which made it superior to and essentially different from the West.

As Orsini<sup>13</sup> has shown, the Hindi speaking area had remained largely unaffected by the nineteenth century debates and initiatives for women's education in British India. It was only in the 1920s that women's voices began to appear in the Hindi press and literature. This was undoubtedly a part of the general expansion of Hindi literacy, education and print; and more widespread participation of the people in the national movement after the First World War and the Non Co-operation Movement. Yet even in the post 1920s period, she argues, the values of 'Indian Womanhood' remained primarily modesty, sexual chastity, moral purity, steadfast self-sacrifice and nurturing. This was conspicuously present irrespective of whether it was created by male or female writers. The convention was so strong that, typically, if any of these attributes were missing in a woman protagonist, the reader could immediately be sure that either she was not a good woman after all or something awful happened had to her.

It is in this context that Benipuri's views on gender issues has been viewed. While his early writings of the 1920s conforms to this dominant trend. His works of the 1940s and 1950s shows the questioning of all patriarchic forms and also the advocacy of an economic and political solution to the issue of gender inequality. However, his radicalism is also shown to be receding back to the dominant middle-class attitude towards women in some instances, these moments of lapse, as it were, are conspicuous especially in his private diaries other unpublished works.

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<sup>11</sup> Radha Kumar, *The History Of Doing: An Illustrated Account Of Women's Rights and Feminism in India 1800-1900*, London, Verso, 1993.

<sup>12</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation And Its Fragments*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993.

<sup>13</sup> Orsini, op. cit. pp. 244-307.

The dissertation thus, traces the evolution of Benipuri's intellectual, political and personal life in the first chapter. His views on the cultural pasts of India, are analysed in the second chapter. In the third his idea of language and literature has been discussed. In the fourth chapter, Benipuri's exposition on the gender issue has been studied.

#### **A NOTE ON THE SOURCES**

The 8 volumes of the Collected Works of Rambriksh Benipuri, have been consulted extensively in this work. They contain the various literary, political and journalistic writings of Benipuri written in the period after 1930.

For the pre 1930 period, I have relied, apart from his autobiographical writings, extensively on the journals he edited in the period between 1921 and 1930. They help better understand the general context in which he was writing and also provide a fair idea of his different views.

His private papers available in Nehru Memorial Museum and Library crucial insights into the 'mind' of Benipuri that helps us better situate his other writings placed in the 'public' domain, revealing the inconsistencies and ambivalences of the man.

I have also consulted the Home Department, Political Branch files pertaining to the cases in which Benipuri or the journal, which he edited, was involved, available at Bihar State Archives, Patna. These files throws light on the 'activist' Benipuri involved in various political movements.

Further I have also consulted the works of the contemporaries of Benipuri like Acharya Narendra Dev, Jayprakash Narayan etc. Their works along with the other journals with which Benipuri was associated, situates his political and literary predilections of the post 1930 period.

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## CHAPTER I

### RAMBRIKSH BENIPURI: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

In this chapter I deal with the personal, political and intellectual trajectory of Rambriksh Benipuri's life and works. While constructing the biographical details various kinds of cognitive influences, institutional constraints and family compulsions, especially those leading to the shifts in his world views will be considered.

#### I

About 18kms out of Muzaffarpur on the road to Runnisaipur in Bihar, there is a small village called Benipur. According to the district gazetteer of Muzaffarpur (1907)<sup>1</sup>, it came under Katra police circle in Muzaffarpur sub-division and district. It was a low-lying marshy land subjected to frequent inundation by the river Baghmata. It had a population of about six hundred, and was inhabited mainly by Bhumihar Brahmins<sup>2</sup>, some Yadavs or Goalas and Dusadh castes in the first year of the twentieth century. Rambriksh Benipuri was born in an upper caste Bhumihar family of the middle peasantry in Benipur that on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December 1899.<sup>3</sup> He was the only child of his parents born after they had been married for twelve years. The excessive affection that his parents showered on him made him a naughty child. His mother died when he was four years old; five years afterwards his father died of jaundice. The orphan was sent on 1909 to maternal uncle's home in Banshipachra, a small village in the same district. His maternal uncle and aunt had no son of their own, and hence once again he received excessive love

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<sup>1</sup> L.S.S. O' Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer, Muzaffarpur*, 1907. p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> The Bhumihar Brahmins held high social positions. They were popularly called 'Babhans', it is said, they were originally Brahmins who became Buddhists and their status degraded with the downfall of Buddhism, when they took to agriculture, by seizing the land attached to old Buddhist monasteries. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup> There was an uncertainty regarding the actual date of birth of Benipuri. In the *Benipuri Granthavali* Part I (May, 1954) published by Benipuri himself from his own publishing house i.e. Benipuri Prakashan Patna, his year of birth is 1902. But in his diary dated 14<sup>th</sup> October 1954, he mentions that, according to his family priest's account, which he had recently discovered, he knew his actual date of birth to be 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1899. Suresh Sharma (ed.), *Benipuri Granthavali* (Hereafter BG) Vol. 8, Radhakrishna Prakashan, Delhi, p. 230. Unless stated all the information are based on Benipuri's autobiographical memoirs, *Mujhe Yaad Hai* (1953), *Janjeeren Aur Deewaren* (1957) and *Kuch Main Kuch Ve* (Unpublished) in BG, Vol.4. pp. 13-286.

and affection from them. In comparison to Benipuri's father, his maternal uncle was quite well-off and could be called a rich peasant.<sup>4</sup>

Though he started going to the village *tol* earlier, in Benipur, his systematic education started at Banshipanchara. He was schooled at the lower primary school, and learnt Urdu and Persian separately from a Kayasth tutor. It is during these years that he was first attracted to the *Ramcharitmanas* of Tulsidas. He read all the available treatises on the Ramayana and several other medieval Bhakti texts such as *Sursagar* and *Premasagar*. But it was Tulsidas' *Ramcharitmanas* that aroused literary interest in him. He became a devout believer.

A major turn in his life came around 1914 when he was sent to his maternal cousin sister's home in Sursand. There he was admitted in middle school, learnt English, and came across the world of modern Hindi journals and literature. After the untimely death of his brother-in-law in 1915, he left Sursand and studied for five months at the Shivhar Middle School in the Sitamarhi sub-division. Finally he came to Muzaffarpur where he was enrolled in the Bhumihar Brahmin Collegiate School (later known as the Langat Singh College). There he studied till the Non-co-operation agitation in 1921, when he voluntarily quit school.

The years between 1914 and 1920 occupy an important place in terms of formative influence, both political and literary, on Benipuri. It is during his school days that he came into contact with the larger literary and political happenings of the times. Benipuri hailed from a village where *Khariboli*<sup>5</sup> Hindi was still considered to be alien and

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<sup>4</sup> Benipuri was born in a joint family consisting of his grandfather, parents, uncle and aunt and their children. Benipuri's family tree is given in the Appendix 1. His father was its most capable and only earning member. Their main source of income was agriculture. With the death of Benipuri's father the economic situation of the family weakened. Yet it was sufficient to maintain the minimum requirements. On the other hand, Benipuri's maternal uncle was quite affluent. For the latter's maternal uncle was the zamindar of Banshipachara. Benipuri's maternal uncle was the caretaker of the zamindari. As a result of which he acquired a very high social status in the village and his 'durbar' witnessed regular social and religious gatherings. The recitation of the Ramayana and other holy scriptures was another regular feature of his 'durbar'.

<sup>5</sup> *Khariboli* Hindi is the standardised form of modern Hindi developed in the course of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This style was created to be used in proper discourse and public interaction.

Western Maithili<sup>6</sup> was the common language of the people. Literary texts were also far from *Khariboli* Hindi. It was only in Sursand and later Muzaffarpur that he came across modern Hindi journals and periodicals.

Journals like *Pratap* of Kanpur, *Abhyuday* of Allahabad etc. among other political weeklies had commenced and flourished during the World War I. They carried both national and international political news. They had expanded the horizons of political journalism in Hindi, by publishing articles on European countries fighting for the cause of their national independence. Further, the ideas of patriotism and nationalism and India's subjection by a foreign power were energetically propagated by these journals in areas far beyond the cities of their publication.<sup>7</sup>

Benipuri writes in his memoir that he devoted much time to these periodicals and weeklies. From them, for the first time he became aware of the political condition of his country and his nationalist consciousness was formed. He specifically mentions the immense popularity of *Pratap* and the poems of Maithili Sharan Gupta, especially *Bharat Bharati*<sup>8</sup> which was the bible of young nationalist students. Besides these journals, the Hindi text books in schools also imparted a (Hindu) nationalist consciousness to the students. Krishna Kumar has shown how Hindi education was a "secret door through which cultural nationalism could enter the colonial education system and impose rigid linguistic, and cultural ideals. It was far too subtle a means of spreading religious and cultural consciousness to be acknowledged by the bureaucracy of the education

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<sup>6</sup> Western Maithili is a dialect of Hindi and is the predominant spoken language of Muzaffarpur and its adjoining areas. It was called 'western' by Grierson, since it was different from the mainstream Maithili because of its Bhojpuri influence. L. S. S. O'Malley. op. cit. p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> As Veer Bharat Talwar has shown, the circulation of *Pratap* was more in small *quasbas* and towns than in the city of Kanpur, from where it was published. *Pratap* was a weekly at the time of its inception in 1913, but became a daily during the World War and continued likewise afterwards as well. It devoted itself to the propagation of secular nationalism and had no place for religious and sectarian issues. It was the first political weekly to raise the Champaran issue before Gandhi's arrival on the scene. It also one of the earliest and proponents of news from Russia and pertaining to the Russian Revolution. Veer Bharat Talwar, 'Samajwadi Chetna Ka Prasar Communist Party Se Pehle', in *Rashtriya Navjagran Aur Hindi Sahitya: Kuch Prasang Kuch Pravrittiyan*, Himachal Pustak Bhandar, Delhi, 1993.

<sup>8</sup> *Bharat Bharati* was written in 1913 and in the Hindi speaking areas it came to acquire a canonical status and was instrumental in the formation of a historical consciousness among the youth. The poem was a narrative of the rise and fall of Indian (Hindu) jati. See Prurshottam Agarawal, 'Rashtra Kavi Ki Rashtra Chetna,' Oct - Dec., 1986, *Alochana*. pp. 27-36.

department as a contradiction in its secular policy".<sup>9</sup> Benipuri must have been influenced by this curriculum.

Further, cultural organisations of students, like the *Bihari Chhatra Sammelan* and the *Seva Samiti*, that taught social activism in different ways, also influenced Benipuri. While the former organised talks and seminars, essay writing competitions and debates on socio-political issues like illiteracy, social and religious superstitions, issues of democracy and liberty, the latter worked as volunteers in the secular and religious fairs and gatherings. The *Bihari Chhatra Sammelan's* annual convention was attended by several nationalist leaders and intellectuals such as Mahatma Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu, Annie Beasant, Prafulla Chandra Roy etc. Benipuri always remained at the forefront of these activities and was famous among his classmates for being an intelligent and politically conscious student. Benipuri was greatly influenced by Gandhi's arrival on the political scene, specifically after the Champaran Satyagrah. He read a small biography of Gandhi and his prison diaries about the experiences in South Africa. Apart from Gandhi, he was much influenced by Swami Satyadev's speech in Muzaffarpur: Satyadev had just returned from America and preached the virtues of freedom and democracy.

Benipuri also came to know about the revolutionary terrorists who were then popularly known as the 'anarchists'. He used to listen to the stories of Khudiram Bose from a sepoy in his hostel who apparently had been in the same jail where Khudiram Bose was kept in Muzaffarpur.

However, his nationalist feelings remained limited to attending meetings and lectures and listening to the stories and the ideology of revolutionaries, the curiosity to see national leaders etc. He was more involved in the political than in literary world. In 1916, he passed the 'prathama' examination of *Hindi Sahitya Sammelan*<sup>10</sup> that won him

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<sup>9</sup> Krishna Kumar, *The Political Agenda of Education*, Sage, Delhi, 1991, p.162

<sup>10</sup> Sahitya Sammelan examination was an interesting educational experiment set up in 1915 that offered a cheap alternative to university degrees in Hindi at a time when Hindi teachers were in great demand, after the primary and secondary schools had been converted to the vernacular, but trained teachers were rare. Candidates for this examination could prepare cheaply at home even while working and could sit for the examination at different local centres. The 'prathama' examination was made equivalent to the High School

the award of 'Sahitya Visharad'. He started composing nationalist poems and his first literary venture, a poem, was published in the *Pratap*. He regularly attended the *Kavi Sammelans*<sup>11</sup> where he recited nationalist poems.

It is during these years that he learnt Bengali and read Bengali periodicals and literature. He had already learnt Urdu in his village and hence was a keen reader of the Urdu literary journals like *Zamana*.<sup>12</sup> Apart from that he was a regular reader of the 'Modern Review'<sup>13</sup> and any available English books that he could comprehend with his limited knowledge of English.

In his school days Benipuri consciously led an austere life devoid of fashion and extravagance. He was helped in this by his obsessive religiosity and strong patriotic sentiments. He greatly despised boys who lived lavishly. He always stood first in class and was proud of it because, to him, it was one of the benefits of his austere lifestyle. While he was still in school he was married to fourteen year old Uma Rani, daughter of Mahadev Sharan Singh, a rich peasant of Mushahari village. But the financial condition of his family was getting worse and he had to sell off some of his ancestral land to continue his studies and maintain his family. However he was considered to be the potential 'bread-winner' and up lifter of his family, for it was certain to his family members that Benipuri would certainly get a government job. But in the nationalist wave of the Non-Co-operation movement, after initial vacillation due to the problems back home, he left his school as a part of the boycott called by Gandhi in 1921. His leaving of

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or Matriculation examination in 1940. This examination tested language proficiency and general knowledge of rhetoric and of literary selection. No creative or intellectual effort was required or invited. Literary proficiency meant knowing meters and rhetorical figures, and possessing stock (bhandar) of literary passages mostly from Bhakti poetry- which excluded 'shringar' (erotic) poems- conveniently packed and explained in the anthologies and the editions with commentaries brought out by the Sammelan(s). To know Hindi meant being able to use a high Sanskritised register, in addition to the one for daily use, and to accept the cultural presumptions and social relations of Brahmanic Hindu-Hindi culture. See Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere, 1920-40*, OUP, Delhi, 2002. pp. 116-20.

<sup>11</sup> Orsini provides a fair idea about how the Kavi Sammelan or the poetry meetings acquired a new nationalist theme and attracted a wider group of public students, political activists and the general public from the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ibid., pp80-89.

<sup>12</sup> *Zamana* (1904) was published from Kanpur by Munshi Dayaram Nigam. It was famous for its literary quality. People like Premchand were among its regular and prolific contributors. See Amrit Rai, *Premchand: A Life*, PPH, Delhi, 1982. p. 44.

<sup>13</sup> An English monthly published by Ramanand Chatterjee from the famous Indian Press, Allahabad of Chintamani Ghosh. Orsini, op.cit. p. 58.

school was deplored by his wife and aunt but the male guardians didn't say anything because they were also in some way or the other were influenced by the Gandhian movement. His maternal uncle had given up tobacco and *bhang*, while his father-in law had been arrested for *satyagraha* against the indigo planters of Belsand in Sitamarhi subdivision. Benipuri writes that his father-in-law was the first political prisoner from Bihar and the case of his arrest was covered by the prestigious newspaper *Independent* of the Nehrus.

For a while Benipuri worked as a Congress volunteer but soon, in 1921 itself, joined *Tarun Bharat*, a monthly published from Patna under the editorship of the famous litterateur Mathura Prasad Dikshit, also his teacher at his Muzzafarpur school. Benipuri worked as its co-editor for almost six months. *Tarun Bharat* basically published articles and reports of Gandhi's journal *Young India* and *Navjivan* in Hindi.<sup>14</sup>

After the withdrawal of the Non- Co-operation Movement, he did not rejoin school, but remained in the world of journalism. Benipuri's recourse to journalism was the result of a number of factors. His family's financial condition was not good specially, after the death of his grandfather in 1920. Rejoining the school would have meant increased expenses. Also the possibility of getting an exemption from fees or getting a scholarship was quite bleak on account of his association with the Non-Co-operation Movement. Hence he looked for a job that could bear the expenses of his family and also give him a platform to express his nationalist inclinations. Journalism seemed to be the best alternative. During the Non-Co-operation and its aftermath, Hindi newspapers and periodicals greatly increased their circulation.<sup>15</sup> The profession of a journalist / writer was increasingly viewed as a way to serve the nation, and writing itself had become a political act in the Hindi public sphere.<sup>16</sup>

Benipuri left *Tarun Bharat* because of some pending legal cases of property dispute in his village, but he rejoined it soon. However due to the anti-Congress attitude

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<sup>14</sup> See Ved Pratap Vaidik edited *Hindi Patrakarita: Vividh Ayam*, National Publishing House, Delhi, 1976.

<sup>15</sup> In 1922 there was almost a threefold increase in the circulation of the journals from what it was in 1918. See Annual Report on the Newspapers and Periodicals published from Bihar and Orissa for the years 1918-1922. 211/1919, 104/1920, 15/1923. Home Department (Political), BSA.

<sup>16</sup> Orsini, op.cit. p. 79.

of the new editor, Benipuri again left it in 1922. In the next month he joined the *Kisan Mitra* which was started by the Zamindars of North Bihar as a medium for the counter-propaganda against the peasant movement led by Swami Vidyanand in Darbhanga. Benipuri later claimed that he was ignorant of the zamindari involvement in the journal. He fell ill and left the *Kisan Mitra* in the same year. He wrote that his illness was the punishment for the sin that he had committed by joining it.

Benipuri was not yet an established figure in the world of Hindi journalism, and faced difficulties in finding a job. With the end of the Non-Co-operation Movement, the sharp growth in the newspapers and periodicals had ceased and journalists were no longer in as great demand. He was helped by the famous litterateur Acharya Shivpoojan Sahay in getting the co-editorship of the Hindi monthly *Gol Mal*<sup>17</sup> in 1924. The monthly stopped publication in 1925 due to financial difficulties and losses. However it was during this time, working for a year as a journalist in Patna, that he acquired a reputation as an editor. So when he left *Gol Mal* he got job offers from several publishers and finally joined the biggest publishing house of Bihar, *Pustak Bhandar*, in Lahariyasarai, (Darbhanga) of Acharya Ram Lochan Sharan in 1925.

## II

Benipuri got the job of writing text books of Hindi for which, the *Pustak Bhandar* had got the contract from the District Board<sup>18</sup>. Between 1925 and 1928 he wrote the children's story books *Bagula Bhagat* (1925), *Siyar Pande* (1925) etc., edited a book of poems entitled *Kavita Kusum* (1925), translated Ashwini Kumar Dutt's *Prem* (1925) and wrote a treatise on the medieval Bhakti poet Bihari's selected poems (1925). He also wrote the biographies of Shivaji (1925), Vidyapati (1925), Guru Govind Singh (1926) and story book *Bilai Mausai* (1927-28) and edited another story book *Heeraman Tota* (1927-28). He further wrote a book on scientific inventions--- *Avishkar aur Avishkarak*

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<sup>17</sup> We do not know much about this monthly other than Benipuri's own description of it as a satirical monthly.

<sup>18</sup> According to Orsini the private publishers used to get the contract for preparing school text books for the regular curriculum as per the law of the times. For details see Orsini, op.cit. pp. 92-93.



(1927-28) and also one on world famous wrestlers *Samsar ke Pehlwan* (1927). All these works were for adolescents.<sup>19</sup>

The biographies were written as the character sketches of great Indian heroes who were depicted as being honest and truthful believers in God ever since childhood. They were also said to be intelligent, selfless, kind-hearted and willing to sacrifice themselves for the good of their religion and country. Thus they emerge as legendary figures by virtue of their service to their respective religions or nations. The moral or didactic message was an important feature of these character sketches. However, in the fables on animals, though the didactic content was ever present, along with it there was also space for pranks and mischief. For instance the protagonist of *Siyar Pande* is a shrewd, clever and alert jackal, who fools the others and his adventures are always successful, just as the cat of *Bilai Mausi* always succeeds in keeping her patron happy by fair or foul means. In the books on scientific inventions too, we find Benipuri providing a brief character sketch of the scientist along with the invention concerned. Similarly the books on different wrestlers provided a short character sketch and sought to inspire the young readers to be physically strong.<sup>20</sup> While we do not know much about the anthologies of poems edited by Benipuri, we have some information about the translation of Ashwini Kumar Dutt's *Prem*. The advertisement in *Balak*, said that this book establishes 'what is true love'.

What is love? Today what we see in schools and colleges, in towns and markets, is that love? No. Never, that is not love. That is just lust. Lowly desires and passions. If you want to know what true love is and its true interpretations, then read this novel.<sup>21</sup>

Besides these, the treatises of Benipuri on the medieval Hindi poets Bihari and Vidyapati, basically transcreated them by rendering them in contemporary Hindi. What is noticeable is that this was Benipuri's first and last engagement with medieval poetry or

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<sup>19</sup> All the literary pieces referred too here are reproduced in the BG Vol. VII.

<sup>20</sup> As the text is not available, the information given here is drawn from an advertisement published in the July 1926 issue of the *Balak*. Page number not mentioned. [The pages carrying advertisements were not numbered in this journal.]. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from Hindi sources are translated by me.

<sup>21</sup> *Balak*, July 1926. Page number not mentioned.

for that matter *sringar* (erotic) literature. Later much in tune with the dominant nationalist view of Indian literary heritage, these mediaval poets and their poems were looked down upon as self-indulgent, decadent and a far cry from 'good literature' that could impart a political and social consciousness. Further they were thought to be too 'effeminate' for a society that required a strong national awakening.<sup>22</sup>

However apart from the works on Vidyapati and Bihari, Benipuri was completely engaged in the realm of children's literature and arguably the best output of his endeavours came in January 1926 in the form of the children's monthly i.e. *Balak*. Published from the same *Pustak Bhandar*, it established him in the world of Hindi literature and earned him both money and prestige.

The title of this monthly itself suggested that it addressed a male child. The cover of this magazine had a photograph of a smiling boy with books and yet armed with a sword, bows and arrows etc. and surrounded by tigers.<sup>23</sup> The second picture always carried the pictures of gods and goddesses from the Hindu pantheon, ranging from Saraswati and Durga to Shiva and Vishnu. The content of this magazine broadly included a prayer and stories with practical and moral teachings; adventurous stories of hunting, mountaineering etc.; columns on healthy sports, body building and physical culture movements such as Boy Scouts, patriotic poems, columns on general knowledge, geography, science, history, didactic quotations from great persons such as Vivekananda and Gandhi, puzzles and questions asked by the editor and their answers by the readers, character sketches of great men of India and the world, abridged translations of stories written by foreign writers, a column on the strange and funny news from around the world, and editorials with diverse information from the world of science, politics and literature. Besides these, advertisements of other children's literature were regular features of this journal.

Once again this suggests that Benipuri's attempt was to provide a normative, didactic, moralistic, puritanical education which would create an intellectually and

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<sup>22</sup> See for instance his article, *Sahitya aur Yug-dharm*, discussed in greater length in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>23</sup> See, Appendix 2

physically strong child, and consequently an 'ideal' adult citizen to create a strong (Hindu) 'nation'. I would like to underline the 'Hindu' element in this construction not only because Benipuri drew his icons mostly from the Hindu mythography, but also because the values espoused were often consolidated vis-a-vis a Muslim "other". More importantly his larger socio-cultural vision, at this stage, was also that of a typical North Indian upper caste Hindu-Hindi intellectual.<sup>24</sup> Hence, for example, his icon of Shivaji is the defender of the cows and Brahmins. Even the most intelligent animal protagonist is *Siyar Pande*, the patronymic title being that of a Brahmin, who is at one time even heard saying that, "I could never have eaten at the house of an *ahir* (i.e. low-caste milkman)."<sup>25</sup> Additionally in his personal life, Benipuri wore the sacred thread, kept the sacred lock of hair (i.e. *shikhar*), and wrote his name as 'Pandit Rambriksh Sharma Benipuri', i.e. he abided by all the caste rules followed by the Brahmins.<sup>26</sup>

The editorship of *Balak*<sup>27</sup> in particular and his work at the *Pushtak Bhandar*, earned him proximity to the Hindi literary circle<sup>28</sup> as well as recognition in the Hindi literary world. The reviews of *Balak*, show both the popularity of the journal and its editor<sup>29</sup>. For Prem Chand,

*Balak's* publication is quite timely and deserves appreciation. All the materials required for children are available in this monthly. *Balak* is the best among the contemporary Hindi children's journals. From the point of view of its content.

The journal *Tarun Rajasthan* of Ajmer, wrote on the 18<sup>th</sup> of February 1926,

<sup>24</sup> I use the word 'typical' here, since the tropes being deployed by Benipuri were common to a host of other literary figures of the times who shared his class/ caste/ regional/ linguistic etc. affiliation, such as Maithili Sharan Gupta (see Purushottam Agrawal op. cit.). For a fuller discussion on the topic see F. Orsini's Chapter on the Uses of History, op. cit.

<sup>25</sup> *Siyar Pande*, BG Vol. VII. p. 46.

<sup>26</sup> See the author's name in the books written by him the period between 1925-1928.

<sup>27</sup> Before *Balak* there was no children's journal published from Bihar. Only one standard children's monthly was *Balsakha*, published from Indian Press, Allahabad. Dr. Surendra Vikram, *Hindi Bal Patrakarita: Udbhav aur Vikas*, Sahityavani, Allahabad, 1992.

<sup>28</sup> During 1925-28, Benipuri came into contact with Hindi litterateurs, working in Benares, Calcutta, Allahabad etc. While earlier his contacts had been limited to Bihar.

<sup>29</sup> All the following quotations of the reviews are taken from the summary of reviews published in *Balak* July, 1926.

In *Balak* history, biography, science, scouting, wonders of the world etc. are written in simple and beautiful language. The stories are refreshing and educative (*shikshaprad*). We appeal to the people to get it for their children.

The Amrita Bazar Patrika of Calcutta, wrote on the 20<sup>th</sup> June 1926,

Hindi literature was so long without a children's magazine. The *Balak* might be called a Hindi *Sandesh* (the best Bengali magazine for boys). The editor has spared no pains to make this little periodical attractive and interesting to the young boys. Edifying biographies of men of mark, tales of chivalry, interesting notes on scientific discovery and physical exercise and beautiful stories of adventure are the principal features of the magazine. Hindustani boys will find it very useful and we would advise their parents to recommend it to their children.<sup>30</sup>

However, in 1928 Benipuri suddenly left *Balak* and the *Pushtak Bhandar* due to his differences with the publisher.<sup>31</sup> From this time onwards begins Benipuri's involvement in active politics. His political life started with his activities in the youth movement. It is quite well known that there was an up-swing in the activities of the student's in the aftermath of the non-co-operation movement. Bihar also witnessed the organisations of youths and students coming to the fore in its town centres in 1928.

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III



According to the reports of the Deputy Inspector General, Criminal Investigation Department, Patna 1931,

By August 1928 there were *Yuvak Sangha* (Youth League) in ten districts ... A Special Branch Report in November 28, reported that the Bihari youths were betraying keenness and were seeking membership in some numbers ....In the *Bihari Chatra Sammelan*, held in Motihari, the *Bihar Yuvak Sangh* was established and Professor Gyan Saha (later imprisoned for his revolutionary activities) was elected an indefatigable secretary in August 1928

<sup>30</sup> The review by the Amrita Bazar Patrika was reproduced as it was in the *Balak*, July, 1926.

<sup>31</sup> The reasons for the differences are not known, except for what Benipuri himself writes about it. According to him the publisher was deluded by certain vested interests.

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... [However] this was merged with the *Yuvak Sangh* of Patna at a secret meeting called at the Sadakat Ashram on February 1929. This *Patna Yuvak Sangh* was quite active in supplying volunteers during the Civil Disobedience Movement. Among the active members and supporters are Professor Saha, Manindra Nath Ray, Prajapati Mishra, Amritakant Singh (Manager of the Searchlight Press), Jaychandra Vidyalkar of the Bihar Vidyapeeth and Rambriksh Benipuri.<sup>32</sup>

Benipuri joined the *Yuvak Sangh* of Patna in 1929, when it was merged with the *Bihar Yuvak Sangh*. The *Yuvak Sangh* of Patna had its office i.e. *Yuvak Ashram* in front of the Patna College. This Ashram became the centre for the political activity of the youth and students in the city. Many young political activists who later turned out to be revolutionary terrorists, for example Yogendra Shukla; or Congress Socialists such as Ambikakant Singh and Gangasharan Singh, Benipuri himself and even the Communists like Rahul Sankritayan and Kishori Prasanna Singh; or even people who remained active Congressmen like Krishna Ballabh Sahay were connected with this organisation. However Benipuri was personally closer to Ambikant Singh and Gangasharan Singh. It is this trio that collected the money to publish the monthly journal *Yuvak*, which was published from the Yuvak Ashram as an organ of the Sangh. Benipuri was its editor, publisher and legal proprietor<sup>33</sup>. The journal was an attempt towards independent journalism and Benipuri and his friends sought to manage it from the financial contributions from the readers alone. Hence they tried to publish the first issue during the Congress session at Calcutta in 1928, but due to the insufficiency of funds their plan could not materialise. It was only in January 1929 that its first issue could come out. Although its circulation was better than any monthly published from Bihar at that time<sup>34</sup>, *Yuvak* ran at a loss, especially because of the hostile attitude of the government<sup>35</sup>, which demanded a heavy security deposit because of its anti-government content.

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<sup>32</sup> See File No. 90 of 1931, Home (Political) Department, BSA, Patna. When Benipuri was arrested in 1931, the same report also said that, "he was the most active, energetic and pushing member of the society and his conviction is keenly felt by the Sangh."

<sup>33</sup> Annual Report, Newspapers and Periodicals published from Bihar and Orissa for the year 1931. File no. 1/ 1932 Home (Political) Department, BSA.

<sup>34</sup> No other Hindi monthly had a larger circulation than *Yuvak*(1500). Only the weeklies *Searchlight* (English,4000), *Mahabir*(1500), *Light Of the East* (English monthly of the Catholic Press,4000) had a higher circulation than *Yuvak*. Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> See File No. 272/ 1931 Home (Political) Department, BSA.

Generally the agenda of the *Yuvak Sangh* and for that matter Benipuri was to awaken and sensitise the youth towards the national movement led by the Congress. Simultaneously there was a strong sympathy towards the young leaders and revolutionaries of all hues, besides the strong influence of young Congress leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Bose, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay et al., who used to occasionally attend the meetings of the *Yuvak Sangh*. The magazine published their views and articles and strategically covered the conspiracy cases of Meerut, Lahore and Kakori etc. I used the phrase “strategically covered”, because in order to avoid the government’s wrath the tone of the coverage was one of dry reportage. But once one analyses the placement of the reports vis-à-vis other pieces glorifying patriotic and nationalist movements the reports acquire a new meaning. Even though most of these pieces were not overtly anti-government and only spoke of the rising tide of youth awareness; yet when one suddenly confronts the reports on the conspiracy cases as well as the photographs of the protagonists tucked right in the middle of them, the reports are invested with a clear revolutionary potential.

In spite of the deep sympathy with the revolutionaries and his association with people like Yogendra Shukla, Benipuri remained a Congressman. He mentions an interesting incident in his memoir. One day when he was sleeping at his friend’s house, he was woken up by a man holding a pistol, who asked him to join his revolutionary organisation. Soon he felt that it was none other than Yogendra Shukla. Benipuri merely replied that his weak hands could only hold a pen not a pistol. At this the intruder asked him to put his pen to use for the revolutionary cause, but Benipuri once again replied that he had not the strong heart required to walk this difficult path, and he could only work within his limits. At this the revolutionary left.<sup>36</sup> Benipuri’s strong sympathy towards the revolutionaries led him to write a seditious article, which ultimately earned him one and a half years imprisonment in 1931, eulogising Bhagat Singh and his friends on their execution.

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<sup>36</sup> *Mujhe Yaad Hai*, BG Vol. IV, p. 60.

Between 1929 and 1933, Benipuri and his friends were active in the Patna Town Congress Committee, and always at loggerheads with the older crop of conservative leaders like Babu Braj Kishore Prasad, whether on the question of the protest march on the occasion of the martyrdom of Jatin Das or the proposal of *Purna Swaraj* at the Bihar political conference in Munghyr in 1929. Yet his commitment to the Congress remained strong and he was at best a radical Congressman. In the meeting of peasants at the Sonepur Mela in 1929, where the Kisan Sabha was formed, Benipuri opposed its formation as a separate organisation outside the Congress. He evades this incident in his memoir, writing that “at that time all this seemed an like an illusion”<sup>37</sup>. Swami Sahajanand has however described in his autobiography<sup>38</sup> how Benipuri most vociferously opposed the formation of the Kisan Sabha, because he felt that a separate Kisan organisation would weaken the Congress, and the Congress was the only organisation that represented the interests of all sections of Indian society<sup>39</sup>.

In March 1930 when India witnessed large-scale popular mobilisation as a result of the beginning of the Civil Disobedience Movement, Patna city was still silent. When the Patna District Congress Committee meeting was convened in April 1930, the senior Congressmen, especially the advocates, were initially hesitant about the *satyagraha*, but the young Congressmen and the President of the Town Congress Committee, Ambikakant Singh, Benipuri and his friends obtained the permission for *satyagraha* from Rajendra Prasad who had come to Muzaffarpur. The *satyagraha* started in front of the Patna College, and was led by Ambikakant Singh. Benipuri was not among the *satyagrahis* because he had been asked to manage the journal *Yuvak*. But the immediate situation<sup>40</sup> during the *satyagraha* caused Benipuri to lead a group of *satyagrahis*, for

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>38</sup> *Mera Jeevan Sangharash*, People's Publishing House, Delhi, 1985, pp. 180-90

<sup>39</sup> According to Arvind N. Das, there were three camps at this meeting. One that was in favour of the formation of the Kisan Sabha, with Sahajanand as its leader; a second group represented the conservative Congress opinion who also happened to be zamindars like Babu Braj Kishore Prasad who felt that its formation was a dangerous move and the third was a group who though broadly sympathetic to the peasant cause thought that a separate peasant organisation outside the Congress was not a good idea. It was this group that was led by Benipuri. A. N. Das, *Agrarian Unrest and Socio-Economic Change in Bihar 1900-1980*, Manohar, 1983, pp. 90-94.

<sup>40</sup> About the incident Benipuri writes, that he was merely a silent spectator but the volatile situation in the wake of Ambikakant's arrest and the subsequent *lathi* charge instigated the crowd towards violence. As a

which he was arrested and imprisoned for six months. Benipuri was initially kept in the Patna Camp Jail and later transferred to the Hazaribagh Jail, where he remained for the next six months. While in jail he brought out a hand-written journal titled *Qaidee* (1930) which, he himself edited. Among the contributors to it were his fellow jail mates such as Rajendra Prasad<sup>41</sup>, Sahajanand and others. In jail he also started organising Hindi classes for the political prisoners from Orissa and Bengal as a part of the 'nationalist duty', which had been bequeathed to him upon his election as the 'propaganda minister' of the *Hindi Sahitya Sammelan* in October 1929.

After coming out of jail Benipuri established a Congress office at the Baghmati Ashram in November 1930 near his village Benipur and collected funds for the Congress. Besides that he resumed the publication of *Yuvak*, in which, he was financially helped by Ramanand Mishra (a socialist leader of Bihar). When he left the Baghmati Ashram after the Gandhi-Irwin pact in March 1931, he took up the publication of *Yuvak* seriously. By this time Bhagat Singh along with his friends had been executed. Benipuri had already published a special issue *Viplav Ankh*, in March 1930, which was proscribed under the Press Act of 1931, but no action was taken against him as he was anyway imprisoned soon after due to his involvement in the Civil Disobedience Movement.

Once again according to the government reports two articles, one titled *Inquilaab Zindabaad* written by Benipuri under the pseudonym Sri Ajatshatru, and another titled *Hind Naujawanon Se* by Anand Mohan Sahay from Japan, and the picture of the executed martyrs Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru captioned "*Azaadi ke Diwaane*" appeared in May 1931 issue of *Yuvak*. This invited the wrath of the government on Benipuri. Under the charges of sedition 124(a) of the Indian Penal Code the issue was proscribed, his arrest warrant was issued and a case Benipuri vs. the King Emperor was lodged.<sup>42</sup> While the case was under trial at the lower court in Patna, he was given bail against a deposit of Rs. 5000/- as security, which had to be paid by selling his wife's

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result he had to come forward to pacify the crowd, which he succeeded in doing only by offering to lead a section of the crowd in peaceful *satyagraha*. *Mujhe Yaad Hai*, op. cit., p. 87.

<sup>41</sup> Rajendra Prasad, *Autobiography*, National Book Trust, Delhi, 1957.,p. 324.

<sup>42</sup> File No. 272 of 1931, Home (Political) Department, BSA.



ornaments. The decision of the lower court dated 8<sup>th</sup> September 1931, sentenced him to one year imprisonment and Rs. 250/- indemnity or an additional six months imprisonment. When this was challenged in the high court on the 30<sup>th</sup> November 1931, his appeal was turned down by an order dated the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 1931. Finally he surrendered before the court on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 1932. He was convicted to one and a half years in prison.<sup>43</sup>

On the one side while the case against Benipuri was going on, the leaders of the *Yuvak Sangh* circle at Patna were busy in forming the Bihar Socialist Party. It was formed at a meeting held at the Yuvak Ashram where it decided to organise peasants and labour and to work with the Congress while recognising the limitation of the latter. The leaders obtained the blessings of Jawaharlal Nehru on the condition that they would not run counter to the Congress. This meeting had been attended by people who were later to become active in the Kisan Sabha movement and in the Congress Socialist Party. Of course Benipuri was one of its founder members and was planning, with his friends Ambikakant Singh and Jagdeesh Narayan, to start a socialist newspaper<sup>44</sup>.

The Bihar Socialist Party was formed in 1931 and its manifesto was largely in line with the programme of the later Congress Socialist Party; i.e. working within the Congress and simultaneously radicalising its agenda by taking the initiative to bring peasants and workers into its fold with a vision of a class-less society. It was an organisation of left-leaning leaders of the Bihar Congress Party with little intervention at the mass level uptill 1934, when it was merged with the Congress Socialist Party.<sup>45</sup>

Although Benipuri says in his memoir that he became an ardent socialist during the *Yuvak Sangh* days, we find little evidence of this avowed socialism in his writings. There are certain signs of a shift from his earlier views and visions, away from the earlier Brahmanical Hindu nationalist tone of his pre-1929 days. We find his journal propagating

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<sup>43</sup> See the copies of the judgements of the lower court and the High Court. Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> All the information is drawn from the CID Report on the Bihar Socialist Party. File No. 266 of 1931. Home (Political). Department, BSA.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

the message against the varna system and in favour of communal harmony; his larger cultural vision, especially of an Indian past, shows a hiatus between the image of the past and the that of the present. His ideal past largely remains a Hindu past. On the whole his journal aimed at imparting a strong puritanical and nationalist consciousness to his readers, who could break the chains of old and tottering beliefs and practices and question the status quo of society and lead their country to its liberation. The cover of his journals shows a well built muscular serious-faced youth with a naked sword in his hand standing beside a jumping horse upon a rocky terrain with a large halo in the background. The caption beneath reads “*Shakti, Sahas aur Sadhna ka Masik*” (i.e. A journal for Strength, Courage and Devotion)<sup>46</sup>. Its regular features were the articles on hunting, physical exercises and health care, sexual abstinence and celibacy, character sketches and the political ideas of nationalist leaders like Nehru, Kamaladevi and other nationalists of Europe ranging from Voltaire to Mussolini, news reports of Indian revolutionaries and their trials, essays and poems exhorting the youth to question traditional norms, articles celebrating the Indian Cultural heritage, informative articles on socialism such as “*What is Socialism?*”; political news confined to the activity of the youth reporting the meetings of the *Yuvak Sangh* or reporting the achievements of any young man in any field.

In his personal life Benipuri stopped using the surname ‘Sharma’ and the title of ‘Pandit’ in his name, he also stopped wearing the sacred thread and cut-off his sacred locks and started eating non-vegetarian food.

#### IV

It is in Benipuri’s writings of the period after 1930, that one finds the influence of socialist ideas. When Benipuri was in jail during February 1932 and March 1933, he read the government reports on the zamindari system; he also met the peasant *satyagrahis* coming from different districts, from whom he got first hand details of zamindari oppression. After coming out of jail he wrote several articles in *Vishal Bharat* and *Pratap* with titles such as *Bihar ke Kisan* and *Zamindaripratha Kyun Utha Di Jaye* respectively.

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<sup>46</sup> See, Appendix 3

Both advocated the abolition of the Zamindari system. In 1933 at a district *Kisan Sammelan* in Muzaffarpur he proposed the abolition; the proposal was passed after some initial hesitation and Swami Sahajanand Saraswati's abstention. In fact after coming out of jail, Benipuri and the other socialists in Bihar re-activated the Bihar Socialist Party. Benipuri along with others such as Abdul Bari, Jayprakash Narayan, Phulan Prasad Verma, Bisheshwar Prasad Sinha, Gangasharan Singh, Ambikakant Singh and Kishori Prasanna Singh were made the members of the B. S. P's Council of Action. As a part of the party's programme, they actively participated in Kisan Sabha meetings and at their instance the zamindari abolition was passed at Hajipur, Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha Conference in 1934, despite some initial hesitation of Shahajanand. Meanwhile Benipuri and his socialist friends were also involved in disseminating the idea of the evolution of socialism through their speeches and writings<sup>47</sup>.

Besides working with socialists in the Kisan Sabha, Benipuri was also editing *Lok Sangraha*<sup>48</sup> a monthly published from Muzaffarpur. He remained with the publication from the last quarter of 1933 to the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 1934, when in a catastrophic earthquake, the office of the publication collapsed. The *Lok Sangraha* was owned by Swami Shahajanand and its caretaker was his lieutenant Yamuna Karji, with whom Benipuri worked for three months. After the earthquake Benipuri was engaged in the relief work. Later on he was part of the Congress relief efforts as well. It was at this time that Gandhi visited his native village of Benipur. In the aftermath of the earthquake, the situation of the peasantry in North Bihar had become worse because of little production and the demands of zamindars, who had refused to remit the revenues<sup>49</sup>. In the wake of growing zamindari oppression, Benipuri and Awdheshwar Prasad Singh were made the members of an enquiry committee to look into this matter by the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha.

The socialist leaders of the Bihar Socialist Party, who were released from jail at this time, planned a meeting of the All India Congress Socialist Conference in May 1934,

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<sup>47</sup> A.N. Das, op. cit. p. 140.

<sup>48</sup> File No. 16/ 1934 Home (Political) Department, BSA.

<sup>49</sup>, A.N. Das .op. cit. Chapter 4.

at Patna. This finally came into being with its constitution, programme and resolution at the Bombay Conference in October of the same year. At Bombay Benipuri, was elected a substitute member of the All India Congress Socialist Party<sup>50</sup>. The agenda of the Congress Socialist Party was to move the Congress Party towards adopting the leftist agenda, that is to adopt the policies and programmes for agrarian reforms. Also at this time the socialist leaders had established a Socialist Research Institute at Patna in January 1934. Its aim was to educate the youths in Marxism and to publish the books and pamphlets of the Socialist party. On its board there were five members: Jayprakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Dev, B.P. Sinha, Sri Prakash and Benipuri. According to the foreword of the socialist syllabus, prepared by this board:

as far as the understanding of Marxism is concerned, the best rule is to go to Marx , Engels and Lenin and to follow closely the Russian experiment, which by the way seems to have grown definitely out of the experimental stage... marx and Engels were the founders of scientific socialism and Lenin its most successful proponent and Russia is the only country in the world today, where a serious attempt is being made to build a socialist society. Therefore, for one wishing to understand socialism, it is just as important to know what is being done in Russia as to read these great teachers of socialism.<sup>51</sup>

Around this time, however, Benipuri had to leave Bihar and went to work at Makhan Lal Chaturvedi's *Karmveer* at Khandwa in Central Province (in the last quarter of 1934). Due to his long imprisonment between 1930 and 1933, and also because of the flood in 1932 and 1933 and finally the earthquake in 1934, he could not get enough produce from his agricultural holdings for him to be able to have stayed back at home. But he stayed for only six months at Khandwa and came back in 1935 and joined *Yogi*, a political weekly published from Patna. According to the government reports, *Yogi*, ever since its inception had had an objectionable career. But after Benipuri took over its editorship, it became positively 'dangerous'. Although no action was taken against the paper, a close vigil was maintained on it. For instance Benipuri was warned of pictures of the execution of nationalists with the caption '*Azaadi ki Kimat*' (i.e. the Price of Liberty).

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<sup>50</sup> Bimal Prasad (ed), *Selected Works of Jayprakash Narayan*, , Vol. I, Manohar, Delhi, 2000., p. 267.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid p. 249.

Objectionable poems and articles were carried in its issues regularly. For example, according to the government, three 'objectionable' pieces, in the *Yogi* were 1) The poem by Sriyut Ayodhya Prasad Shandilya--- *Present of Dagger*, that attacked the zamindar and capitalists and mourned the slavery of toiling masses in the issue of the 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 1935. 2) Article by Benipuri ---- *What do the Kisans of Bihar Want?* , that once again spoke against the zamindari oppression and quipped upon the government's attitude towards the Kisan Sabha as a 'Communist Conspiracy'. This was carried in the 5<sup>th</sup> September 1935 issue. 3) Editorial by Benipuri ---- *Don't Forget the Martyrs—At the Feet of the Congress President* in the issue of the 18<sup>th</sup> of October 1935. It mourned the neglect of martyrs, especially the revolutionaries and urged the Congress president to enthusiastically commemorate the martyrs of the Indian National Movement<sup>52</sup>. However in general *Yogi* was a political weekly that covered the international and the national news items ranging from the activities of the Congress, the Kisan Sabha and the peasant mobilisation in rural Bihar to international political developments such as the rise of Hitler and Fascism, and the rivalry for establishing the empire among the European nations.

In 1936, Benipuri left the *Yogi*, due to the growing pressure of his political engagements. He had been elected the president of the Town Congress Committee, Patna in 1936-37. In the 1937 provincial legislative elections, Benipuri's work as the TCC President was instrumental in the winning of the Congressmen in Patna Town and adjoining areas. He proved to be a brilliant public orator and a crowd puller<sup>53</sup>. After the elections he participated in the Congress National Convention in March 1937 at Delhi which was convened to discuss the issue of ministry formation. He took to the C. S. P. line, arguing against the acceptance of office: a proposal was finally passed to the effect that the Congress would enter the ministry only if the Governor undertook not to intervene in its functioning. The government did not accept the Congress proposal.

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<sup>52</sup> These facts are drawn from the CID Report on the *Yogi*. The titles and the contents of the pieces are taken from the English translation from the File No. 152/1935 Home (Political) Department. BSA.

<sup>53</sup> The reports of CID on the objectionable speeches made by Benipuri at Pupri, Aurangabad, Hajipur and other places. File No. 73 & 182/ 1937 Home (Political) Department. BSA. See also the reminiscences of Dr. Chandrasekhar Karn, in *Smarika—Rambriksh Benipuri Aur Hindi Navjagran*, edited by Ravi Bhushan and Prabhu Narayan Vidyarthi, April 2000, Rashtriya Sangoshti, Patna.

Further since the new constitution was 'imposed' on India it was decided to organise a nation-wide strike on the day of its implementation. In Bihar as per the party line, the Congress did not accept office and an Interim Ministry under Mr. Younis, was formed. On 1<sup>st</sup> April 1937, this new constitution was to be implemented, for which the Congressmen at Patna, and especially the Congress Socialists prepared for a strike. Benipuri as the TCC President, organised this strike and a protest demonstration in the evening on that day, in which, he along with Jayprakash Narayan and Basawan Singh were arrested and imprisoned for three months. Afterwards he was sent to the Hazaribagh Jail.

In these three months in jail Benipuri came, personally, closer to Jayprakash Narayan. This sojourn in the Hazaribagh jail was personally very tragic for both Benipuri and Jayprakash. Benipuri lost his most loved son and Jayprakash his father. When he came to know about his son's death, Benipuri broke down. He wrote a *smriti chitra* (memory sketch) --- *Gandhinama* on his son, whom he called Gandhi.

After coming out of jail in July 1937, Benipuri along with other socialist leaders began working for the publication of a socialist newspaper and press for political work. The plan for the *Jan Sahitya* press and the weekly *Janta*, had been chalked out earlier in 1936, but the weekly could start only by October 1937.<sup>54</sup> The *Janta* (weekly), under the editorship of Benipuri soon became very popular with its circulation rising to seven to eight thousand, which was quite high compared to the other contemporary Hindi weeklies.<sup>55</sup> However its financial condition was quite fragile due to its anti-propertied class attitude and sometimes overtly anti-government tone, because of which it could not get enough advertisements. Its financial position depended mostly upon donations by individuals and the donation campaign organised by Jayprakash Narayan, Acharya Narendra Dev and other notable personalities of the Congress Socialist Party. Benipuri

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<sup>54</sup> Application for the proposal to start *Janta* was submitted to the Government in 1936, See file no. 118/1937, Home (Political) Department, BSA.

<sup>55</sup> See Annual Report on Newspaper and Periodicals published from Bihar. File no. 1/1938, Home (Political) Department, BSA. The circulation of *Janta* was even the more than the famous weekly *Abhyuday* of Krishna Kant Malaviya. The latter had the circulation of 6000 in 1937. See the table of Important Periodicals published from the United Provinces in Orsini, op.cit. p.64.

was the chief editor of the *Janta* and he was assisted in his work at the *Janta* office (also the office of the Congress Socialist Party) by comrades like Awadheshwar Prasad Singh, who had been the president of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha. The *Janta* became the mouth-piece of the Bihar Socialist Party and the Kisan Sabha. It also provided coverage to the smaller peasant mobilisations in rural Bihar and it captured the imagination of the rural population to such an extent that one can find mention of this newspaper in the novel of Nagarjun, *Ratinath ki Chachi*,<sup>56</sup> which is set in the rural Bihar of the period. Subhas Bose appreciated Benipuri for his brilliant editorship of *Janta*, which was disseminating progressive ideas and voicing the grievances of the oppressed Indian populace.<sup>57</sup> An overview of the content of *Janta* will provide a fair idea of its coverage.

The covers of *Janta* contained the picture of handcuffed peasants and, sickle and hammer wielding workers in a procession and the name of the editor, Rambriksh Benipuri. The news mainly pertained to the World War or strikes by the peasants and workers and sometimes about the Indian National Movement too. Its pages were divided into different columns. The column *Hansiya Aur Hathaura* contained the news of the Bihari peasants and workers struggle, *Duniya Ke Parde Mein* provided the analysis of international political happenings, *Majdooron Ki Samasya* described the activities of different mill workers, *Janta Ki Panchayat* covered the grievances and complains of common people, *Rajdhani Aur Prant* provided the news of Patna and other parts of Bihar, *Annadata Ki Angraiyan* covered the activities of cultivators and peasant mobilisation, *Tarunai Ka Takaza* was for youth and students activities, *Julm Ka Chirag Aur Mahanti Ka Narkkund* exposed the oppressive activities of Zamindars and Mahants, and lastly, *Sampadakya* provided editorial comments on the most prominent political incident of the week.

Besides the editorship of *Janta*, Benipuri was involved in the Kisan Sabha and was hated within the right wing circle of the State Congress. In the organisational

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<sup>56</sup> The novel was written and published in 1948. The information, however is based on its third edition published from Kitab Mahal, Allahabad, 1967.

<sup>57</sup> See letter from Subhas Bose to Benipuri dated , 23<sup>rd</sup> Oct. 1937. Rambriksh Benipuri Private Papers, NMML.

election of the Congress for the coming Haripura session, he was defeated by active anti-campaigning and bogus voting instigated at the instance of the Congress right. A poor old man, who was going to vote for him was brutally assaulted.<sup>58</sup>

In 1939 Benipuri was elected the president of Patna labour union. Along with Yogendra Sukla, he organised a strike in Bihariji Mill in Patna against the oppressive mill owners. In this connection he was arrested under the 107 of IPC popularly known as 'Gunda Act'. However, he was released after the heavy pressure from the socialists Jayaprakash, Awadheshwar Singh etc. He was brought to the residence of the labour minister Anugrah Narayan Singh, where a settlement was reached between the workers and the mill owners.<sup>59</sup> However this was his only involvement in the workers' movement. Benipuri's political activities went on simultaneously with his firebrand journalism in the *Janta*, that took up several controversial issues, thereby attracting the close vigilance of the colonial government. The special branch file on the *Janta*, shows that the publication of anti-War news and articles on Nepal,<sup>60</sup> that enthusiastically covered the perpetration of oppression of the people by the Ranas, were the main causes behind the demand of security of Rs. 5000 and his arrest warrant in April 1940.<sup>61</sup> Subsequently, the *Janta* stopped publication due to governmental pressure and Benipuri himself was arrested after the Ramgarh session of the Congress on May 4, 1940. He was imprisoned for a year and was kept in the Hazaribagh Jail along with Jayaprakash, Swami Sahjanand and others. He writes in his memoir that the political factionalism of the Ramgarh session stayed alive even in jail. The three groups, i.e. the Socialists, the Forward Bloc and the Communists were all present, and they kept their factional affiliations alive even in prison. During his days at the Hazaribagh Jail he received a legal notice of the defamation suit. This was the result of Benipuri's coverage of the *Bakast* Movement led by Rahul Sankrityayan in Saran against the local zamindar in 1939. It was this zamindar, who had lodged the case

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<sup>3</sup> See the article of Jayaprakash Narayan which was published in *Searchlight*, Selected Works of Jayaprakash Narayan, vol.2, Edited by Bimal Prasad, Manohar, Delhi, 2001, pp. 184-186.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.256-9.

<sup>60</sup> Benipuri's service to the cause of Nepali people earned him respect and veneration amongst the democratic political parties and leaders of Nepal. In the 1950s he had been called by Bisheshwar Prasad Koirala for the negotiation among the different feuding political parties, when the tussle between the monarch and the democratic forces were going on. See his Diary, dated 14<sup>th</sup> August 1955. BG, Vol. 8, p.495.

<sup>61</sup> File No.114/ 1940, Home (Political) Department, BSA.



against him. For this case he was shifted to Siwan jail for a few months; subsequently he was brought back to Hazaribagh.

As soon as he came out of Hazaribagh Jail, he was made the President of Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha of the Congress Socialist faction, which had split from Sahjanand's in March 1941, when the latter was also in jail. It is probably after this time that his attitude towards Sahjanand became critical.

Benipuri remained with the Socialist Party from its very inception. From the Bihar Socialist party, and Congress Socialist Party to the Praja Socialist Party, which was formed after the Socialist split from Congress in 1949. When the Congress Socialists withdrew their support to Subhash Bose at Calcutta in 1939, Benipuri was critical of the socialist leaders. The differences with Jayaprakash also cropped up, but these were soon resolved. His attitude towards his political circle was quite orthodox in the sense that he was not comfortable with the leaders of the other political parties. Phanishwar Nath Renu in his memoir<sup>62</sup> writes how Benipuri had cautioned him not to get too close to the Communists. His attitude towards Sahjanand also changed because of political reasons, once he dissociated himself from the Congress Socialist Party and came closer to the Communists.

Benipuri as a Congress Socialist did not like the functioning of Kisan Sabha outside the Congress' influence. But Sahjanand was constantly opposed and harassed by the Congress right wing. Even the Congress Socialists, and for that matter Benipuri admitted to the pro-zamindar attitude of the Congress ministry in Bihar. When Sahjanand intensified the peasant agitation, especially during the Bakasht Movement<sup>63</sup> and opposed the secret understanding reached between the zamindars and the Congress ministry in Bihar that watered down the Tenancy Bill, his public meetings were banned by the district committees of Munghyr and Saran at the endorsement of Rajendra Prasad and the

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<sup>62</sup> Phanishwar Nath Renu, *Atmaparichaya*, Edited by Bharat Yayawar, Rajkamal, 1980, p.117.

<sup>63</sup> The Bakasht Movement was against the Zamindars move of evicting the ryots from their traditional agricultural holdings. See Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885-1947*, Macmillan India Limited, Delhi, 1983, p. 362.

secretary of Mahatma Gandhi, Mahadev Desai.<sup>64</sup> Finally, Sahjanand had to leave the Bihar Pradesh Congress Committee in 1938. This offensive of the Congress right wing, had been opposed by Jayaprakash and the other Socialists as well. They saw it as a part of a nation wide onslaught by the Congress right wing, on the pro-peasant movement. This disenchantment of the Sahjanand with the Congress led to his shift towards Forward Blocists and then to the Communists. Meanwhile the days of United Front politics of the left were over, with the Communist Party of India supporting the British led Allied Forces in the Second World War as the 'People's War'. Although Sahjanand did not oppose the Quit India Movement of 1942, the C. P. I. did. However, Sahjanand's disassociation with the Congress and his closeness to the C. P. I. provided enough reason to the Congress Socialists to oppose him. The tension between Sahjanand and the Socialists came to the fore in the Ramgarh session of the Congress in 1940, when the Congress Socialists came closer to the official Congress position and, for all practical purposes, the Sabha split. The split was finally formalised in the Dumraon session of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha in March 1941, at which the Congress Socialist Party described Sahjanand as a faction leader. At this time Sahjanand was in jail for his anti-imperialist speeches. Without waiting for him, the Socialists formed a rival Kisan Sabha.<sup>65</sup>; Benipuri was elected the President of this rival faction of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha.

However, once he became the President of the Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha in June 1941, he started campaigning in peasants' meetings throughout Bihar. He was arrested for giving an objectionable speech at Hajipur, and though he was released on bail after only a few hours, the case dragged on for a long time. At the All India Kisan Sabha Conference of the Socialist faction in Lucknow in 1941, Acharya Narendra Dev was elected the President and Benipuri the Vice President. There, it was decided to organise the Annual Conference of the new All India Kisan Sabha in Bihar. The place of the Conference was to be Bedaul, near Benipuri's village. However, Benipuri was arrested in Sitamarhi where he had gone for some work pertaining to the Conference. The

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<sup>64</sup> See Chapter Seven of A.N. Das, op.cit, pp. 143-83.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

Conference took place in his absence; it was presided over by Yusuf Meherali and inaugurated by Sri Krishna Sinha, the Chief Minister in the 1937 Bihar Provincial Ministry.

After the arrest of Benipuri in 1942 at Sitamarhi he was not released till 1945. From Sitamarhi he was transferred to the Madhubani Jail, from where he was shifted to Hazaribagh in August 1942. When Jayprakash Narayan, Yogendra Shukla and his other jail mates escaped from the Hazaribagh Jail, he was transferred to the jail in Gaya, but was soon shifted back to Hazaribagh. In 1944, when his eldest son was married, he submitted an application, requesting his release on parole. But the application was turned down. The next year, in July 1945, he again applied for conditional release because his wife was seriously ill. This time he was released on parole.

## V

After his release Benipuri moved somewhat away from active politics and his literary activities took centrestage. However, he never divorced himself from politics completely. In 1952 and 1957 at the time of General Elections for the Bihar Legislative Assembly he came into the fray, but won only in the latter election, of course as a Praja Socialist Party candidate<sup>66</sup>. His involvement in the organisational politics of his party at this time was minimal. The reasons for this were twofold: first, the financial condition of his growing family had been steadily deteriorating and second, he was quite disappointed with the factionalism, especially after Jayprakash Narayan's virtual renunciation of politics after 1952<sup>67</sup>.

After winning the election of 1957, Benipuri tried his level best for the welfare of his Assembly constituency. Even his private letters show this concern. In a letter to his son Jitendra Benipuri, he writes:

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<sup>66</sup> The Congress Socialists broke up from the Congress in 1949 and the All India Socialist Party was formed. Again after the debacle of the Socialists in 1952 elections, they merged with the Krishak Praja Party of Acharya Kripalani and the new party was named Praja Socialist Party.

<sup>67</sup> For example see Benipuri's Diary dated 9<sup>th</sup> May 1950, 25<sup>th</sup> April 1952, 7<sup>th</sup> October, 1956; 9<sup>th</sup> January, 1957 in BG Vol.8, pp.18, 93, 336, 345.

...I often wonder how I would be able to meet the expectations of all the people who were behind my victory. I have decided that whatever salary I would get (from the Government as an MLA), it would be invested in the development of my constituency. If I can be instrumental in establishing 50 to 60 pumping sets and wells it would be a memorable achievement...<sup>68</sup>

In another letter he writes:

Yesterday I could manage to get five tube wells for my constituency and they were sent to three villages. People were rejoicing on this achievement.<sup>69</sup>

In the last years of his active life, he remained busy and restless for the establishment of a college (Bagmati College) at Janadh, near his village, in his own constituency in 1959.

In December of that very year, his hectic activism took its toll upon his health, he was paralysed and with it virtually ended his political and literary life.<sup>70</sup>

What is interesting and remarkable in Benipuri is that even after his disenchantment from the political situation as well as the organisation of the Socialist Party, he was deeply concerned about it. For example, despite his great admiration and respect for Jayprakash Narayan he criticised the latter's renunciation of active politics and his decision to join the Bhoodan or Sarvodaya movement of Vinoba Bhave. His criticism was in the wake of the degeneration of Socialist Party and the general chaotic political situation of the country which, according to him, needed leaders of calibre and vision. In his letter to Jayprakash Narayan he blamed him for the confusion that beset the party and goaded him to come out of his self-imposed hibernation to lead the way:

...[Although] I have also side-tracked myself from politics and am pessimistic towards it after the murder of Mahavir [a workers'

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<sup>68</sup> Letters to J.K. Benipuri dated 21<sup>st</sup> March, 1957, Rambriksh Benipuri Private Papers, NMML.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. dated 30<sup>th</sup> March, 1957.

<sup>70</sup> See the Diary dated March to December 1959. op.cit. pp.424-469.

leader] in Japla, I am writing this letter to you...I am disgusted at the pathetic situation of the Praja Socialist Party. I had once told you that not only Lohia but you are also responsible for this. Though responsibility also to an extent lies with us but do our faults matter anyway! Your contribution in making the party was great and so is your hand in its decline.... You have once told me that the next battle would be between autocracy and democracy. Autocratic forces are rising day by day. Why don't you make an endeavour to unite the democratic forces? This is the cry of our nation. If PSP becomes the pioneer in this holy act, history will never forget your contribution---you will be immortalised as the prophet of democracy. You can very well ask why don't I make this suggestion to the party. The answer to this is that I don't enjoy this stature that you have...Lastly, you know in my personal behaviour I am a believer in 'Sati-Dharma', once I am tied to something I stand by that forever. I was among the earliest few and will remain the last one in the party.<sup>71</sup>

Despite this attachment to the Socialist Party Benipuri remained primarily a publicist and litterateur, and enjoyed considerable reputation in the Hindi literary sphere in general and in the Hindi literary institutions of Bihar in particular. In 1946, Benipuri started *Himalay*-a high quality literary monthly.<sup>72</sup> He and Acharya Shivpoojan Sahay were the joint editors. However the journal became defunct within a year. Between 1946 and 1950 Benipuri was the general secretary of the *Bihar Hindi Sahitya Sammelan*. In January 1951, he was made its President.<sup>73</sup> Between January 1948 and June 1949 he was the co-editor of *Janvani*, published from Benaras, which had been started Acharya Narendra Dev in 1946.<sup>74</sup> It was basically a Socialist Party journal, which also published articles on Indian history, philosophy, art, literature, politics and the Socialist Party's activities. In April 1950, Benipuri became the editor of *Nai Dhara* – a quality literary monthly and *Chunnu Munnu* – a children's monthly both published from Patna. While he left the latter after a year, he remained in the former till 1959. *Nai Dhara* was owned by a litterateur and a noted zamindar of Suryapura estate, Raja Radhika Raman Prasad Singh, and managed by his son, Uday Raj Singh. The inauguration ceremony of *Nai Dhara* was quite conspicuous as it was attended by the Chief Minister and other politicians of Bihar

<sup>71</sup> Letter to Jayprakash Narayan dated 29<sup>th</sup> October 1959. op.cit.

<sup>72</sup> The issues of *Himalay* are not available but its editorials written by Benipuri are available in BG Vol 3.

<sup>73</sup> See *Bihar ki Sahityik Pragati, Hindi Sahitya Sammelan*, Patna, 1956, p.241.

<sup>74</sup> Issues of *Janvani* are available in Bihar Rastra Bhasha Parishad Library, Patna.

attended it.<sup>75</sup> Powerful financial backing was the main reason for its long survival, even after 1959.

In 1949 when Benipuri was in *Janvani*, he endeavoured to organise a cultural literary forum on the line of the Progressive Writer's Association—an organisation of left leaning writers which was said to have been captured by the Communists. The new organisation was named the *Nav Sanskriti Sangh* and had the support of the Socialists. But its agenda was little different from the P.W.A. Benipuri was its convenor and its inaugural conference, presided over by Acharya Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, was held in Benaras. However this organisation existed more or less on paper only.<sup>76</sup> Apart from this Benipuri was nominated as the member of the council of *Bihar Rastriya Bhasha Parishad*, in 1950.<sup>77</sup>

He travelled to Europe twice, first in 1951 and again in 1952. During his first visit, he was among the six Indian journalists invited by the British information services for two and half months between April and June 1951. On his second tour, he was one of the five Indian representatives to Cultural Freedom Congress held in Paris.

Throughout his chequered lifespan Benipuri wrote extensively and enthusiastically on a variety of issues and in different genres, especially after 1930. Although in the fourth decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he could not write much due to his tumultuous political life, this was compensated for in the next two decades.

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<sup>75</sup> See the paper cuttings of different newspapers reporting the inauguration ceremony of *Nai Dhara* in 'Rambriksh Benipuri private papers' at NMML. The editorial written by Benipuri are available in BG, Vol 3.

<sup>76</sup> This would be discussed in the third chapter.

<sup>77</sup> The Parishad was established in 1947 by a resolution of the Bihar Legislative Assembly. Its stated aim was to publish books on arts, science and literature in Hindi and other languages. It started functioning in 1950. The Parishad had two bodies, the Council and the Board of Control. The latter exercised the general power of administration and management, the former determined, subjected to the approval of government all general policies and programme of the Parishad. See the constitution of Bihar Rastra Bhasha Parishad issued by the office of Director General Public Information, Patna dated 7<sup>th</sup> October 1950 (available in Rambriksh benipuri private papers. NMML).

He wrote extensively for children.<sup>78</sup> Between 1935-36, he wrote *Sahas ke Putle*, *Jhopdi se Mahal* (not available), *Rang-Birang* (republished in 1948-50 under the new title *Anokha Sansar*). Between 1937 and 39, *Jaan Hatheli Pe*, *Phoolon ka Guchha*, *Padchinha* was written and published. Between 1948 and 1950, *Bete ho to Aise*, *Betiyan ho to Aisi*, *Humare Purkhen-Hamare Padosi* (this was later published under the new title *Amar Kathayen*), *Prithvi par Vijay*, *Prakriti par Vijay* (New edition of the previous book *Avishkar aur Avishkarak*), *Sansar ki Manoram Kahaniyan*, *Hum Inki Santan Hain* and *Apna Desh* were published. In 1952, *Amrit ki Varsha* and *Jeev-Jantu* were published. His oeuvres are comprised of character-sketches of intelligent, hard-working, adventurous children, or the inspiring stories of the childhood of various great men and women from history, drawn from India or the world, or are simply the life-stories of great men and women from different fields like politics, science and literature. The agenda behind these writings is made clear in the preface of *Sahas ke Putle*:

In these stories we have little boys, small girls, young men and also our old seers. They hail from different backgrounds from the huts to the palace. Bravery is not conditioned by the factors of age, class or gender. *In the present situation our lovely motherland needs these kinds of sons and daughters.*<sup>79</sup>

However besides the character-sketches, some are informative books on sports, music, the education system and new technological and scientific discoveries. There is a significant shift in his children's literature in the post 1930 period. Although the character-sketch is dominant as in the previous works, we find the absence of caste and other primordial prejudices and its disavowal in the sense that there are now characters from 'low' status groups as well.<sup>80</sup> But the central focus on the moralist, didactic and educative content of these works is accompanied by the absence of fables containing pranks and mischief which is a significant change from the earlier works discussed above. The echoes of this feature can be heard in Benipuri's letters to his sons advising them to be organised and disciplined in their life, to follow the path of men of value. For

<sup>78</sup> All the following literature is available in BG Vol 7.

<sup>79</sup> Emphasis mine.

<sup>80</sup> See for example *Chamar Ka Beta*, *Bachche Ka Matri-Prem* and other stories in *Bete Hon To Aise*, BG Vol 7 pp299-303. This book was awarded Rs.500 by the Indian government. See, *Bihar Ki Sahityik Pragati*. op.cit. p.240

instance, in his letter to his second son Jitendra, he suggested that he should read the inspiring biographies and learn from them

...There is a proverb in Sanskrit, 'a lion need not be crowned'. Power follows the man of value. Look at the biographies of the great rulers, merchants, soldiers, artists, etc. Their ability, courage, efficiency and intelligence raised them to the highest pedestal. Nobody bestowed the power on them, they achieved it<sup>81</sup>...

Benipuri wrote as many as six historical plays: *Ambapali*(1940-45)<sup>82</sup>, *Tathagat* (1947), *Sanghamitra* (1948-50), *Netradan* (1948-50)<sup>83</sup>, *Singhal Vijay* (1948-50), *Vijeta* (1943-55). All of them were centered on the historical personas of the post-Vedic and Mauryan period and were represented as national heroes. Benipuri sought to reinterpret the Ancient past by using modern ideals.<sup>84</sup>

Besides these plays Benipuri wrote several radio plays or what he called 'radio-features'<sup>85</sup>. He wrote two mythological radio features, *Sita ki Ma* (1948) and *Shakuntala* (undated). *Sita ki Ma* is a solo radio feature narrated by the protagonist herself. The play narrates the pain and anger of a woman oppressed by the patriarchal society.<sup>86</sup> *Shakuntala* is adapted from Kalidasa's *Abigyan Shakuntalam* that focuses on the liberal attitude of the society in accepting Shakuntala, who was an unwed mother. *Amar Jyoti* (1951), another radio feature, focuses on Gandhi the leader of the toiling masses leading his country to the path of freedom. *Gaon ka Devta* (1948) is based on two characters of a village who had died for the cause of their fellow villagers and became legends in the popular memory. He wrote *Pataliputra*, which narrated the story of the city from ancient times to the modern period till 1947. *Ramrajya* (1951) is a flight of imagination into the India of 2051 where there is no oppression or discrimination and which will provide a model for the development to the world. Benipuri perhaps wrote some more radio-

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<sup>81</sup> letter to his son Jitendra Benipuri, dated 25<sup>th</sup> August 1954, Private Papers, op.cit

<sup>82</sup> *Ambapali* was selected for the performance at National drama festival in Delhi organised by Sangeet Natak Akademi in 1954. See diary 10<sup>th</sup> November 1954, op.cit.p.233

<sup>83</sup> *Netradan* was included in the Hindi literature syllabus of matriculation in Bihar.

<sup>84</sup> This is discussed at length in the second chapter.

<sup>85</sup> No significant secondary work is available on radio features.

<sup>86</sup> *Sita ki Ma* was selected for the course of MA (Hindi) in Nagpur University. See Benipuri's Diary dated 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1953. BG Vol 8, p.130



features like *Ispati-Puri* on Tata Steel Industry which are not available, and was planning to write another on the bridge over the Ganges.<sup>87</sup>

Benipuri also wrote only one social play *Naya Samaj* (1951) that depicted the class oppression and the protest led by an educated youth of the village who is murdered by the local zamindar.<sup>88</sup>

Apart from plays Benipuri wrote two novels as well. The first draft of *Patiton ke Desh Mein* was written in 1930 in jail after listening to the story of a prisoner who allegedly had raped his own beloved. The girl's family members falsely implicated him in the case because of his lower caste origins. The novel harshly criticises class and gender injustice and questions the existing social norms as being constructed by the dominant class for its own interest. This is the first writing of Benipuri in which the socialist categories and perspectives were used. The novel ends with the hope that with the establishment of socialist society all forms of discrimination will come to an end and there will be no place for the perpetrators of the oppression. The second novel *Qaidi ki Patni* was written in 1940 and published in 1951. This was written in Saran jail when Benipuri's wife was not allowed to meet him by the jail authorities. This is a tragic tale of his own wife, and for that matter the wives of political prisoners, who had to silently suffer because of their husband's involvement in the national movement and above all it underlines the fact that their pain and sacrifice went unacknowledged.

Benipuri wrote a collection of short-stories *Chita ke Phool* in 1930-32 which was published in 1948 and also edited another collection *Jhopdi ka Rudan* in 1934. In the latter one of his own short stories i.e. *Kahin Dhoop Kahin Chaya* was also included

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<sup>87</sup> See letter to his son Jitendra Benipuri, dated 11<sup>th</sup> February 1958 where he mentions that this feature is to be broadcasted from AIR. Rambriksh Benipuri Private Papers, NMML. In his diary dated 30<sup>th</sup> March 1953, he mentions that he has written many radio features but unfortunately neither the text is available nor he mentions the themes he has written on.

<sup>88</sup> It is significant to note why Benipuri did not involve himself in writing more social plays because this piece has been much appreciated in socialist circles. See letter from Yusuf Meherali dated 21<sup>st</sup> January 1950. Meherali complains about not receiving a copy of *Naya Samaj* because 'a good amateur group was asking me for it'. Private Papers, op. cit.

alongwith the pieces written by other noted Hindi writers like Premchand. These stories were also centred on the themes of class and gender oppression in the rural society. In the preface of *Chita ke Phool* he writes,

I have tried to artistically represent the horror of death and destruction caused by the class-differences in our society. The attempt is not to cover, but rather to expose them. Let us see the oppression and look into the roots of the matter to provide a new shape to our society.<sup>89</sup>

Benipuri gradually left the conventional genre of short stories and took to a different one called *Shabda-Chitra* or sketches. Benipuri in his first collection of sketches *Lal Tara* (1938-39) wrote,

These are not stories but small biographies, (sketches) of living people.<sup>90</sup>

Benipuri's characters in the sketches generally were real human beings. For instance one of his most famous sketches in *Mati ki Mooratein* there is a sketch entitled *Mangar*. Mangar was his own ploughman.

Benipuri wrote three collections of sketches *Lal Tara* written in 1938-39 and published in 1943, *Mati ki Mooratein* written in 1940-41 and published in 1946 and *Gehoon aur Gulab* written in 1948-50 and published in 1954. Benipuri was awarded Rs. 2000 for *Mati ki Mooratein* by the Education Ministry of India.<sup>91</sup> It earned rave reviews from the litterateurs and the intellectuals.<sup>92</sup> The Sahitya Akademi, Delhi commissioned its translation into twelve Indian languages.<sup>93</sup> He got 5,000 rupees from Raj Kapoor who had planned to make a film on *Mati ki Mooratein*.<sup>94</sup> All the characters of this collection

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<sup>89</sup> BG, Vol. 1, p. 362.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>91</sup> See letter from Humayun Kabir, Secretary to the Education Minister, Government of India, dated 25<sup>th</sup> September, 1954. Private Papers, op.cit.

<sup>92</sup> See the paper cuttings of the reviews by Maithili Sharan Gupt, Rahul Sankrityayan, Banarasidas Chaturdevi in *Speeches and Writings* by Benipuri, Serial No. 15, Private Papers, op cit.

<sup>93</sup> See Diary dated 11<sup>th</sup> March, 1955. BG Vol 8, p.245.

<sup>94</sup> Diary dated 9<sup>th</sup> June, 1955. BG Vol 8, p.265.

are from rural settings and of lower-class backgrounds.<sup>95</sup> Benipuri also wrote *Satrang* *Indradhanush* (1937-39)--a collection of sketches on various aspects of rural life and culture. For instance in the sketch *Ropani*, he tries to capture the festive mood in the countryside during the sowing season. The joy and the spirit of anticipation that such an occasion provides is most beautifully captured and described in this piece. An interesting unpublished piece of writing is on an issue that he seldom wrote. This article is entitled *Gaon ki Seva*<sup>96</sup> begins with a young educated man who comes back to his village and realises how limited bookish knowledge is. Practical exigencies of day-to-day life, like sanitation and hygiene, is a problem that has hardly crossed his mind. He now takes the initiative of educating the people about the values of sanitation, and organises the local youths for a sanitation drive. The essay ends with the note,

...That if a new India is to be built, one has to start from its villages. Rome was not built in a day. Rejuvenation of the village will also take some time...

Benipuri had started his literary career by writing biographies and continued to do so till the very end. He wrote the political biographies of Jayprakash Narayan (1947), Rosa Luxemburg (1943), Karl Marx (1951) and a short unpublished sketch on Chiang-Kai-Shek. Besides that he was planning to write the biographies of Premchand, Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi etc. He wrote a rough draft of the biography of Bhartendu, which he couldn't complete.<sup>97</sup> Further he also translated Victor Surge's *From Lenin to Stalin* in Hazaribagh Jail.<sup>98</sup>

*Rosa Luxemburg* was adopted from Paul Fraulik (sic) and was published in 1946. Benipuri wrote it at the instance of Jayprakash and dedicated it to Satyawati Devi of Delhi, a heroine of the 1942 movement. Its foreword was written by Jayprakash, which throws light on the agenda of writing this book:

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<sup>95</sup> Benipuri doesn't mention the caste of his characters. For instance, Mangar of *Mangar* was his own ploughman and was a lower caste Dusadh. I got this 'personal' information from a resident of Banshipachra, Munna Singh.

<sup>96</sup> *Speeches and writings of Benipuri* in Private Papers, op.cit.

<sup>97</sup> See *Miscellaneous Writings* in Private Papers, op.cit.

<sup>98</sup> Available in *Speeches and Writings*. Serial No.11, Private Papers, op.cit. The manuscript is in a tattered condition. The cover shows the stamp of Hazaribagh Jail and the date of writing is not legible.

Rosa Luxemburg was amongst the top five teachers of Marxism and socialist revolutionaries...Luxemburg had differences over several questions with Lenin but both worked together with due respect to each other. After Lenin's death when his Russian followers gave a narrow interpretation to Leninism Rosa's respect from the communist circles vanished...*Today when socialism is trying to establish itself in its true form and struggling to save itself from the puppets of Stalinism, the dissemination of Rosa's ideas is indispensable.*<sup>99</sup>

All the biographies show the protagonists struggling against heavy odds fighting political and social injustice and their endeavours to lead the people towards the path of emancipation, even if this entailed jeopardising their own lives. These images have a striking resemblance to his own 'self', as projected in his autobiography, which will be mentioned later. It is interesting that he wrote the biography of much maligned Chiang-Kai-Shek, alongwith those of other Marxists. Chiang-Kai-Shek is portrayed as a staunch nationalist who despite his ideological-political differences with the Communists, fought against the common enemy along with the Communists at the time of national crisis i.e. the Japanese aggression on China, despite his anti-Communist stance.

Besides these biographies, he wrote *Meel ke Patthar* that provides a short character-sketch of Gandhi, Premchand, Bernard Shaw, Rajendra Prasad, Acharya Narendra Dev, Shivpoojan Sahay, Makhan Lal Chaturvedi and Vinoba Bhave and of European artists Leonardo-da-Vinci, Michel Angelo and Van Gogh.

Benipuri wrote three political books *Lal Cheen*, *Lal Roos* and *Roosi Kranti*. *Lal Cheen* is said to be adapted from Edgar Snow's *Red Star over China* and portrays the contemporary ongoing revolutionary struggle under Mao and predicts the success of the Maoist revolution in China. It focuses on how Mao and his comrades in the party were leading their struggle and describes the features of the soviets and the general policy and programmes of the party. *Lal Roos* was written in 1940 and published in 1942. It was

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<sup>99</sup> BG, Vol. 5, p.133. Emphasis mine. This is in direct reference to the Communists of India whose policies were guided by the Comintern controlled by Stalin and their negligence of the harsh political reality of the Indian situation.

said to be based on the *Socialist Sixth of the World* and *Soviet Communism*. It describes the experiments, achievements and policies of USSR as a model to be emulated. *Roosi Kranti* was written in 1944 and was unpublished.<sup>100</sup> He also edited the articles and speeches of Jayaprakash Narayan on the socialist movement in India of the period between 1936-45, entitled *Jayaprakash ki Vichardhara* published in 1947.

What is noticeable and needs to be mentioned is that his political writings, including biographies discussed above, emphasise and eulogise the role of leaders, who are portrayed as infusing consciousness amongst the 'dormant masses' and redeeming them from their toiling situations. This middle class, patronising attitude, is crudely manifested in a passage of his Diary where he wrote in a reflective moment on the 17<sup>th</sup> May, 1950:

*'Some Guiding Principles of my life':*

*It is imperative for an effective leadership to stand above the masses.*

*Interpretation:* Leadership does not merely demand a loving attitude but a deep sense of dedication and devotion. The devotion is impossible until and unless the devotee acknowledges the lordship of the lord. Dedication does not require the feeling of equality but of supremacy. The lord is above one and all, and this is the essence of supremacy. The leader therefore is the one who is perceived as someone greater and farther from the masses. The podium is constructed at a higher plane so that when the leader stands upon it, the people are dwarfed by his presence. This is not merely an organisational necessity but signals towards a psychological truth.<sup>101</sup>

Benipuri had written a piece of an essay, probably written after the first general elections of independent India, which is unpublished but available in his private papers. This essay, entitled *Jantantra ka Khoklapan*, discusses at length that democracy in its true form cannot be established until and unless economic inequalities are removed. He underlines the 'class-nature' of the state apparatus (the bourgeois democracy), which perpetuates the hegemony of the propertied class and restricts opportunities and avenues for the general mass of population. This he illustrates by using examples from the so-

<sup>100</sup> Its manuscript is incomplete and the available pages provide the description of revolutionary party/leaders the masses against the aristocracy. *Speeches and writings of Benipuri*. Private papers op.cit.

<sup>101</sup> See his Diary, op.cit., p. 24. Emphasis mine.

called developed and democratic states like the UK and the USA to India. Benipuri concludes the essay with an interesting mathematical representation of his argument:

*Democracy – Economic inequality = The best ideal*

*Democracy x Economic inequality = Poisonous hypocrisy*

He wrote several collections of essays on various themes and issues. In *Nai Nari* (1949), there are essays on the gender issue that not only questions the prevailing gender injustice but also uncovers the constructions and impositions of patriarchal norms and institutions as a mechanism to control and subjugate the women. It also underlines the male anxiety for controlling female sexuality as a part of maintaining the patriarchal hegemony in society.<sup>102</sup>

In the three collections of essays-*Hawa Par* (1949), *Mashaal* (1949) and *Vande Vani Vinayakau* (1947), Benipuri propounds his views on literature. These essays together with his speeches and articles in the literary journals *Himalay* and *Nai Dhara* throw light on his position on various issues and questions current in the Hindi literary circles. For instance, the question of national language i.e. popular Hindi versus Hindustani and Sanskritised Hindi, and also Hindi versus the other regional languages and dialects. The nature and purpose of art, i.e. art for art's sake versus art with a social purpose, the role of literature or for that matter of litterateur as a torch-bearer of society. The relation of literature and literary institutions with politics and political institutions or the question of freedom and autonomy of literature and literary institutions.

In brief, Benipuri stood for 'popular' Hindi as the national language and fought against both-the 'manufactured' Hindustani and sanskrtised Hindi. To him Hindi was to be developed as a *lingua franca* of the country while allowing other Indian languages to flourish simultaneously. He advocated art for a social purpose and stood for progressivism in literature, which would be a vanguard in 'cleansing the dirt and filth of society'. For Benipuri an artist could not avoid politics because it was inextricably

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<sup>102</sup> A detailed discussion of this issue will be undertaken in Chapter 4.

linked with the people's life but at the same time he must also remain free from narrow party politics and political control.<sup>103</sup>

Benipuri also translated several works of English, Bengali and Urdu poets. He selected and translated the poems of English romantic poets Keats, Shelley, Byron and Wordsworth entitled *Tulips* (unpublished) in 1945 at the Hazaribagh Jail. He translated Rabindranath Tagore's thirty poems from different collections titled *Rabindra Bharati* (unpublished) in 1942 at the same jail. He also rendered into Hindi the Urdu poems of Iqbal and Josh Malihabadi, between 1940 and 1945, which are not available. He also prepared an Urdu-Hindi dictionary consisting of Urdu words of popular usage entitled *Hindustani Dehat Mein*.<sup>104</sup>

Benipuri started writing his diary from 1950 at the inspiration from James Iggets, 'A Shorter Ego', which was gifted to him by Yusuf Meherali in 1947. He had planned to publish his diaries but in his lifetime this did not happen.

His two travelogues- *Pairon Mein Pankh Bandh Kar* and *Udte Chalo Udte Chalo* which were a part of his diary, written during his trips to Europe, were published in 1952 and 1954. They contain the description of nature, culture, politics and above all the economic situation of the European countries. In his travelogue he seems to be especially impressed by the prosperous countryside, industrial development and the welfarist labour-regime of Britain. This is continually accompanied by lamentation over the poor socio-economic condition of India. This lament touches upon the entire differential body-politic as well. Benipuri often lamented the poor physique of the Indians compared to the Europeans.

Benipuri wrote three autobiographical memoirs in 1953- *Mujhe Yaad Hai* which narrates the story of his life from his childhood to 1950. *Janjeeren Aur Deewaren* which tells the tale of his long prison-life (1932-45), and *Kuch Main Kuch Ve* is divided into

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<sup>103</sup> To be discussed at length in Chapter 3.

<sup>104</sup> *Tulips* and *Rabindra Bharati* are available in BG, Vol. 7. Manuscript of the dictionary is available in his private papers. op cit.

two parts. The first part *Rajniti Ke Toofan* describes his political activities between 1920 and 1940, the second part *Patrakar Jeevan Ke 35 Varsh* is about his journalistic experiences.<sup>105</sup> These autobiographical writings of Benipuri represent those aspects of his past, which seemed to be relevant for his contemporary status and action. In these works his political self dominates i.e. the image of a person who has struggled for his country and his people throughout his life by jeopardising and sacrificing his personal interests, raising him to a high moral position. This image must have provided him the source of 'authority' in the public realm in general and the Hindi literary sphere in particular. In the Hindi public sphere the question of 'authority' was a contentious issue, linked with the legitimacy to speak on behalf of 'people' or for that matter the 'nation'. Francesca Orsini has shown that the meetings of Hindi literary institutions were dominated by the nationalist politicians, who spoke authoritatively on the question of literature and how their claims were contested by the litterateurs, who claimed that they had better understanding of the social reality and were closer to the people than the politicians. Hence, the litterateurs claimed that they did not require the direction of the politicians.<sup>106</sup> Benipuri by virtue of being a politician as well as a litterateur, must have enjoyed a privileged position and authority in this kind of situation.

## VI

Benipuri's public life was chequered; his personal life shows the picture of a struggling family man. He was constantly under financial strain. His agricultural holdings could only maintain the minimum requirements of the family. There was continuous pressure on him to earn. As I showed earlier, the crop failure in the beginning of third decade of the twentieth century compelled him to go to the Central Provinces to earn. This pressure to earn increased on him in the 1950s when his family expanded.<sup>107</sup> His eldest son, with a wife and six children was unemployed. His second

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<sup>105</sup> *Mujhe Yaad Hai* was serialised in *Nai Dhara* in the 1950s. *Janjeeren aur Deewaren* was published as a book in 1957. The first part of *Kuch Main Kuch Ve* was unpublished and second part was serialised in *Nai Dhara* between 1956-59.

<sup>106</sup> Orsini, op.cit, Pp. 365- 75.

<sup>107</sup> See his diary written between 1950-59 in BG Vol.8. Even in his letters to his son Jitendra between 1954 and 1959, the problems of financial difficulties keeps recurring. Private Papers, op. cit.



son was selected for the Indian Military Academy in 1948, but was commissioned only in 1956. His daughter Prabha was studying at Vincent College, Benaras. Benipuri seemed to be in greater financial difficulties because of his daughter's marriage and his dream of making a double storied house at his native place. He had fixed his daughters' marriage with Shayam Shunder Das, the son of the Mahant of Shitalpur, with the help of Jayaprakash Narayan. The groom's father was unwilling to marry off his son because he wanted a dowry. The date was fixed for his daughter's marriage and Benipuri had made all the preparations, but at the last moment the marriage was postponed due to the dilly-dallying of the groom's father.<sup>108</sup> However Benipuri, it seems, successfully managed everything. He had started his own publishing house, *Benipuri Prakashan* in Patna and later shifted it to Muzaffarpur<sup>109</sup>, from which he published his own Granthawali or Collected Works in two volumes (although he had planned ten volumes) and managed its marketing through his institutional and political connections.<sup>110</sup> He also tried to work in Bombay film industry. Once he wrote to Prithviraj Kapoor (his friend) to look for some job of script writing for him. He was given rupees 5000 as advance from Raj Kapoor, who was planning to make a film on his *Mati Ki Mooratein*.<sup>111</sup> With his hectic work schedule and rigour Benipuri managed to overcome the difficulties but always lamented that he couldn't fulfil his writing potential due to his busy life.

He always had a deep attachment to his family and his native village. He had a long drawn plan of making a big house which could become his memorial as well. He wrote that whenever he was fed up with his hectic schedule and the travails of his family, a visit to his village home always brought him great solace. Benipuri realised his dream of a big house<sup>112</sup> after taking a loan and shifting his business of publication to

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<sup>108</sup> See Diary dated 16<sup>th</sup> June, 1955 and 10<sup>th</sup> July, 1955 in BG, Vol. 8, Pp, 267-75.

<sup>109</sup> See Diary dated 29<sup>th</sup> January, 1956, op.cit, p. 308.

<sup>110</sup> See Diary dated 11<sup>th</sup> September 1955, op.cit, p.274 and letter to Jitendra Benipuri dated 17<sup>th</sup> September 1955, Private Papers, op.cit. Whenever he would attend a Literary Conference or Seminar, he would try to utilise the occasion to popularise his publication house by boosting the sales of his Collected Works, by unofficially speaking to those gathered.

<sup>111</sup> See Diary dated 29<sup>th</sup> May to 19<sup>th</sup> June, 1955, op.cit, pp. 254-65.

<sup>112</sup> Ramdhari Singh Dinkar in his Diary dated 7 September 1968 wrote after getting the news of Benipuri's death that he was a great revolutionary in his ideas, a great man of mark in literature and politics. But simultaneously he mentions an interesting incident, "When the construction of his (Benipuri's) house was going on, the truck carrying cement for the construction work drowned in the Gandak River. Cement was being sent stealthily and the truck was also of the district board. This accident might have disclosed this

Muzaffarpur with a view to remain closer to his village.<sup>113</sup> Benipuri's deep affection for his village of for that matter rural society is clearly evident from his writings, to cite some of them- *Sataranga Indradhanush*, *Mati Ki Mooratein* (discussed above) etc.

On the whole Benipuri had a active and struggling life—private as well as political—till the very end when he fell prey to paralysis in 1959 while he was busy with the establishment of the college near his village. After that his active life ended. His contribution to the Hindi literary world was acknowledged by the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Allahabad by conferring the title of *Sahitya Vachaspati* on 20<sup>th</sup> January 1967, almost one and a half years before his death on 7<sup>th</sup> September 1968.

## VII

Francesca Orsini, has pointed out the specificities that marked off the Hindi literati/ intellectuals from the neighbouring Bengali *bhadralok* who to some extent had formed the middle class intellectual role models for them. The degree of 'cultural bilingualism', the relatively poor class backgrounds and a greater connection to land, were merely some of the features that shaped the specific milieu of the Hindi intellectual. Their strained financial positions often made them gravitate towards nationalist and often times peripatetic occupations as writers and journalists.<sup>114</sup> While many, if not most of these contours are visible in the biographical trajectory of Rambriksh Benipuri, his relatively high reputation as a politician and his socialist leanings provide further deflections within this broad typology.

The study probably, more than anything else highlights the fact that, broad typologies, never completely exhaust the subject matter of an intellectual's biography, and hence the specificities of his particular context and always marks his works in certain ways. While the views and formulations of Benipuri do largely mirror the anxieties and concerns of a middle-class nationalist author/ journalist, his evolution of

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secret. Frightened of this possibility Benipuri fled to Patna at my [i.e. Dinkar's] place and did not come out of my residence for a day." Ramdhari Singh Dinkar, *Dinkar Ki Diary*, National Publishing House, New Delhi, 1973, pp. 123-4.

<sup>113</sup> See Diary dated 12<sup>th</sup> November, 1953. op cit. p.178.

<sup>114</sup> Orsini op. cit., pp. 13-14.

his personal and political life often precipitates shifts that cannot be wholly predicted with reference to merely his class affiliations or milieu alone. It is these shifts and slippages that allow us to use the life of a sensitive author/politician to glimpse the shifting mentalities of an historical epoch as well as the individuality of his works.

In the course of the subsequent chapters it is these shifts, concerns and anxieties that we shall attempt to unpack.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE PASTS OF BENIPURI

Rambriksh Benipuri wrote extensively on the question of the Indian past and culture, and most of the writing revolves around the themes of history. Many scholars have stated that culture was the realm where the earliest forms of resistance to imperialism by the colonial intellectuals occurred in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> This was also true for 20<sup>th</sup> century colonial India, when this cultural resistance was accompanied by political resistance. Benipuri's engagement with the culture was also a part of this larger project of nationalism which sought to infuse a new vigour into a subjected 'nation' and for this the site, was the many pasts of India. This obsession with the past does not stop with the end of colonial rule. Since the last years of the colonial rule in India a new urgency comes to the fore in Indian nationalist circles, especially in the socialist circles which tried to reinterpret the pasts or traditions on a new ideological light to rebuild a new Indian nation. As stated earlier, Benipuri's views and ideas were subjected to change in accordance with his political praxis (see the first chapter). However, I would situate his views vis-a-vis the larger literary/political discourses of that time, this would provide a better understanding of the shifts and contradictions in his views over a period of time.

Benipuri's earlier writings on the Indian past were written mostly in the forms of biographies or so to speak as the stories of the bravado and valour of (Hindu) national heroes. They were written either for his children's periodical *Balak* or for the series of books titled as *charucharitmala*.<sup>2</sup> Benipuri wrote four out of six books in this series. They were on Shivaji, Vidyapati (the Maithili poet), Guru Gobind Singh and Babu Langat Singh (a benevolent millionaire of Muzaffarpur in Bihar, who had established institutions of higher education).

These writings of Benipuri are in tandem with the dominant discourses of this time that selectively interpreted the Indian past/ culture as essentially

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<sup>1</sup> See K.N. Panikkar, 'The Intellectual History of Colonial India: Some Historiographical and Conceptual Questions', in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Romila Thapar ed. *Situating Indian History*, OUP, Delhi, 1986. pp. 403-433.

<sup>2</sup> Both were published by the famous publishing house of North Bihar, Pustak Bhandar, Lahariyasarai, owned by Pandit Ram Lochan Sharan Bihari.

homogenous and glorious Aryan/ Hindu past /culture 'which had fallen from the pinnacle of its glory during the tyrannical Muslim rule leading to the present state of subjection and cultural decline'. But the victory of the Muslims was never, it is said, complete and was powerfully resisted and challenged by the Hindu heroes – Marathas Rajputs, Sikhs etc. Though the Indian civilization was under alien political rule, its civilization and culture had been great throughout the period of its history.

The issue and the context of this Hindu nationalist view of the Indian past has been variously well argued and analysed by a host of scholars<sup>3</sup>. However I would make a few points, especially from these works. For politically/culturally vanquished subjects, any past - real or unreal, was better than the "oppressive present". The past not only provided them the space to seek solace and create (national) heroes/heroines, but also the site to reveal and resolve the present contradictions and oppressions. In this project, Indian writers/intellectuals were helped by the Orientalist scholarship. Even though they had internalised the latter's hegemonic discourse on Indian past/culture; by its selective appropriation – of both their research finding and methodology – they sought to write the history their nation by themselves which had hitherto been the captive of the British. Yet again, this agenda of retrieving the history of the nation and restoring it to the original glorious place was becoming increasingly difficult due to the challenges coming from serious historical scholarship. This problem was resolved either through the selective and critical reading of sources and thereby producing a fusion of myth, fiction and history, or by moving on to romantic and stylistically appealing varieties of history with an emphasis on literary and dramatic qualities within the more creative form of fiction which could also have the potential of engaging relatively large audiences.

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<sup>3</sup> Ranajit Guha, *An Indian Historiography of India: A Nineteenth Century Agenda and Its Implications*, K.P. Bagchi Publication, Calcutta, 1988. Partha Chatterjee, *Nation and Its Fragments*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1993. Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya and Formation of the Nationalist Consciousness in India*, OUP, Delhi, 1994, in the context of Bengali and by Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalisation of Hindu Tradition*, OUP, Delhi, 1997. Sudhir Chandra, *The Oppressive Present: Literature and Social Imagination* OUP 1992, and by Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920 - 1940*, OUP, Delhi, 2002 in the case of Hindi.

## I

It is within this milieu that Benipuri's early writings are to be situated. He wrote mostly on medieval hindu heroes and their exploits, as a part of *Charitalekhan*, which meant to project the ideals to be emulated. I would like to elaborate some points after Francesca Orsini. While the Ancient Indian reading provided an ideal of excellence, Medieval History compelled the writers/historians to grapple with a more painful and problematic past: a past that was, according to their narrative full of decadence, decay and subjection. But how could one find pride in defeat? And how could one learn from it? Here the fictional narratives rather than scholarly history offer imaginative ways to answer these questions. They could 'utter what history could not spell' and could 'work through certain knots' and still offer positive self-identifications by qualifying defeats, imagining resistance, investing defeated heroes with a nationalist halo etc.<sup>4</sup> This is exactly what Benipuri's writings reflect in their narratives of heroism on Shivaji, Guru Govind Singh among others.

Also, preponderance of imagination had something to do with the fact that they were geared to impressionable juvenile audiences. A quote from the review by Premchand of a historical novel would be appropriate and prove my point:

Our literary taste changes together with our age. Historical novels are a favourite in adolescence when our imagination soars to the skies and common mundane things appear dull, lifeless and devoid of wonder. We hope our youth will read with pleasure this tale of heroism (*vir ras ki katha*) and dream to become another Madhav (Hero of this novel).<sup>5</sup>

Another important point that could explain the selection of this narrative of heroism or *Vir Ras* among others has been made by Kathryn Hansen. She has argued that narratives of male and female heroisms in this period stood at the crossroads of several genres and concerns. *Vir Ras* literature was considered in the reformist view as one of the necessary features of our national literature. The narratives of heroes and heroines were seen as the most appropriate means of carrying the message of valour, virility and strength that Hindi literature even in

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<sup>4</sup> Francesca Orsini, op.cit.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted from Gopal Rai's *Hindi Upanyas Kosh*, Volume 2, in Ibid. p.208

the centuries of Muslim rule had been a literature largely of *Shringar Ras* (erotic poetry) was taken as both a cause and consequence of political subjection: too effeminate to think of war rulers had turned to worldly and decadent pleasures.<sup>6</sup>

If we take a holistic view of Benipuri's work during this time, we can easily make out that these writings were a part and parcel of the larger project of 'nation building' through preparing and shaping an ideal childhood and thus supplying the ideal citizens of a future Indian nation with role models. By providing juvenile readers the national icons through these *Jeevanis* or biographies, he not only sought to create a sense of pride for a nation's past but also a sense of duty towards the present. The points that I made here will be proved in the following pages.

For Benipuri, this 'Indian Culture' (read Aryan/Vedic/Hindu/Brahmanical culture) was essentially great which although fell from its pristine glory during the rule of the 'foreigners' or the Muslims; yet the nationalist heroes like Shivaji, Maharana Pratap or Guru Gobind Singh not only challenged the alien rulers and their cultures but sought to reestablish the original cultural order to revive the nation. For instance, while Shivaji, a descendant of Sishodya Rajput is titled as the 'Maharashtra Kesri, Hindu Rajya Sansthapak (Founder of Hindu Kingdom), the wrecker of the Mughal empire'<sup>7</sup>. Guru Gobind Singh, is viewed as the leader of Hindu militia who sought to revive Hinduism in accordance with the teachings of Nanak-'the founder of *Khalsa Panth* a religious sect that basically aimed at enlightening the Aryans sinking into the darkness of ignorance, by disseminating pure Vedic religious ideals'<sup>8</sup>. Even the poet Vidyapati is shown as the great Hindu nationalist poet who was not only a great artist *per se* but also through his poetic genius he is portrayed as the rescuer of his patron king from the shackles of Muslim Sultan of Delhi. The story goes like this:

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<sup>6</sup> Kathryn Hansen, 'The Veeranganas in North Indian History: The Myth and Popular Culture,' *EPW*, XXIII, 18, 30 April 1998. pp. 25-33.

<sup>7</sup> Rambriksh Benipuri, *Shivaji*, 1925, BG 5, p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Rambriksh Benipuri, *Guru Govind Singh*, 1925, BG 5, p. 95. Though there are any number of factually incorrect information like Nanak founding the *Khalsa Panth*, we will see it as a deliberate attempt to fulfil his project.

... Shiva Singh, the patron of Vidyapati, was not just an art connoisseur but also a great warrior. He was troubled by the fact that he was subservient to the Yavanas or the Muslims. When his father was still the king, he had stopped paying taxes to the Delhi Sultan. As a result Muslim forces invaded Mithila. Misfortune befell him and he was captured and brought to Delhi. Dev Singh, his father, accepted his suzerainty but kept pining for his son. On the other hand Vidyapati was also restless and aggrieved. Vidyapati put his life in jeopardy to bail him out of trouble.<sup>9</sup>

(This story has a striking resemblance to the story of *Prithviraj Raso* in which the poet Chand Bardai helps his patron king Prithvi Raj).

These 'national heroes' are always portrayed as staunch and devout Hindus. Shivaji is shown as the upholder of *dharma* in the empire of the *yavanas* and hence he is portrayed as a hater of the Muslims. Benipuri writes that:

right from the childhood Shivaji was revulsed by the religious fanaticism and cruelty of the Muslims. When he was asked to meet the Sultan of Bijapur by his father he replied- the sultan is infidel! I am the servant of Brahmins and cattle while he is an enemy. Witnessing cow slaughter on the way sets my blood boiling. Instead of bowing before him I feel like decapitating the sultan...when requested by his parents he went to the court but did not bow before the sultan. However he was excused because of his childish behaviour and sultan rewarded him with jewellery. But as soon as he came back he threw it away and purified himself by bathing and worshipping. This great Hindu hero found cow slaughter unbearable and one day when he was wandering with his friends Shivaji killed a Muslim who was selling beef.

Benipuri hails this act of Shivaji in these terms: "The reader can imagine the courage required to behead a Muslim in a Muslim dominated area ruled by the Muslim Sultan."<sup>10</sup> Shivaji is shown as a devout believer and religious to the core:

Shivaji did not take any action without the action of *Bhavani*. He used to reach a state of trance while meditating upon Her. In that state every word that came out of his mouth was for him the order of the goddess. This order was irrevocable or *Brahmvakya* for him.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Rambriksh Benipuri, *Vidyapati*, 1925, BG 5, p. 60.

<sup>10</sup> *Shivaji*, op.cit., p. 20.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p.47.



His commitment to the Hindu/Brahmanical ideals was so great that “even when attacked by a Brahman in war, during the war against Afzal Khan, he did not retaliate and let him go because he could not kill a Brahman.”<sup>12</sup> Even the narration of Shivaji’s coronation ceremony gives a fair idea about how Brahmanical supremacy and order is hailed by Benipuri:

Although Shivaji hailed from the famous lineage of Suryavanshi Sishodiya Kshatriya, the Kshatriya sanskaras of his ancestors had been lost. He had not yet undergone the investiture rituals. According to the famous Vedic scholar from Kashi the sacred thread ceremony was conducted along with the coronation itself due to the special circumstances. On that day one lakh Brahmans were fed and for four months the capital Raigarh echoed with the sounds of *mantras* being chanted by fifty thousand Brahmans.<sup>13</sup>

Benipuri’s national heroes are ideals in all walks of life. They are obedient sons and students. Hence Shivaji could go out to attack and successfully capture a fort when his mother desired so. He could even milk a tigress when asked by his teacher, Guru Ramdas. These heroes of Benipuri are physically strong and capable of killing and defeating their enemies not only in direct encounters but are also great military strategists<sup>14</sup>. They are simultaneously the owners of a strong abstinent and pure character with full control over their desires. They are kings in their own right and do not oppress the enemies in a cold-blooded manner. Even the women and children of enemies are revered as their mothers and children. These are the qualities that are essentially Indian and Hindu and this made them great<sup>15</sup>. The narratives of heroism not only portray the smaller achievements as great but change their meaning too, providing ‘rational’ explanations for the retreats of the heroes, who are depicted, as all time greats. Even when these heroes are defeated it is because of traitors. Benipuri writes:

The loss of independence of any race or *Jati* is caused in a large measure by its own members. Unfortunately this is more than true in the case of Hindus. By inviting Muhammad Ghori, Jaychand destroyed Hindu empire along with Prithvi Raj. Jaipur (Amber) is especially (in)famous for this. The king of the same Jaipur Mansingh made the brave Maharana Pratap ascetic of the jungle.

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 27.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p. 44.

<sup>14</sup> *Raj kaj mein phase rahne par bhi Shivaji nitya roop se pranayam karte the* ( Even though he was caught up in the affairs of the state Shivaji never forgot to do the Pranayam). *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Today the same Jaipur king Mansingh is set to destroy Hindu empire of great Shivaji. Alas this doomed Hindu race!<sup>16</sup>

Shivaji's retreat and his seeking of compromise when attacked by the Mughal emperor's commander Jaisingh is explained as follows:

...the historians have treated Shivaji as a feeble monarch because he accepted the proposal of compromise without his complete defeat. But this is unwarranted. Firstly, Jaisingh was a Hindu and there were a large number of Hindus in his army. Shivaji did not like the infighting of the Hindus, which could only help the infidels. Secondly at that time the Bijapur ruler had broken the treaty of alliance with him and started the battle. Shivaji feared the unity of two Muslim powers and finally he used to meditate upon *Bhavani* in difficult times. He did so at this juncture also. The goddess ordered him to compromise with Jaisingh-this was irrevocable.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly ample space has been provided to the 'miraculous escape' of Shivaji from the custody of Aurangzeb. While it is shown that he was captured in the court as a consequence of a momentary angry outburst. Not only was the outburst brought out by the betrayal of a promise by the Mughal emperor, but at the moment of his arrest, he started shouting like a tiger thus frightening everybody but he fainted suddenly, and was hence captured<sup>18</sup>.

Thus these narratives of heroism easily 'win over' the vexed question of historical analysis of a more complex truth. The heroes, even in their defeat, remain great military strategists and diplomats. Hence half of the biographies of Shivaji and Guru Govind Singh are replete with accounts of their expeditions and physical prowess. Similarly most of these stories in *Balak* are about the military activities and gem-hunting expeditions of these heroes.

Benipuri's quest for national heroes led him to invest Shivaji as a great patron of Hindi literature because Bhusan, the poet of *Vir Rasa*, was in his court. Shivaji is also venerated because he started *Shuddhi* – a ritual that purified the Muslims and brought them within the fold of Hinduism thereby doing a great service to the Hindu nation.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 34.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 32.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. pp. 36-38.

So far we have seen Benipuri's attempt to define the Indian past as essentially Vedic/Brahmanic/Aryan past. Its identity was constructed vis-à-vis the 'Muslim Other'. Through the narratives of heroism he tried to alleviate the pain of the 'oppressive present' caused by colonial subordination and sought to infuse Brahmanical, Hindu nationalist vigour amongst the readers. As a result the picture that emerges out of this discourse of an ideal society or social organisation is nothing but of a Hindu society stratified on the basis of a four fold varna system. Hence the present state of society is explained as a corruption from this original and pure model. Ironically it evaded the problems of ritual practices and actual oppression and held Brahminhood and Kshatriyahood as 'Gunas' or qualities. Although these 'Gunas' are disembodied ones, yet it is shown in essentialist terms.<sup>19</sup> A great hero like Shivaji too could be nothing but a kshatriya of high lineage.<sup>20</sup> In the contemporary society though untouchability was accepted as a problem, caste as an institution and even caste associations were accepted as a positive focus of social activism, provided they accepted the overall unifying discourse of the one 'national *Jati*'. Hence in his biography of Langat Singh it is said by Benipuri,

Even patriots are hardly awake to the cause of Caste Association and *pari passu* I too accept that the cause of caste should never be privileged to the National cause, yet in my humble opinion if caste associations are founded with a purely national consciousness then the larger cause of national uplift would be greatly furthered. The coming together of diverse peoples (i.e. castes) gives birth to the nation. Therefore the aspiration to consolidate the different peoples will necessarily advance the cause of nation building, and not hamper or inhibit it. Yes I agree that in this age of nationalism, when caste associations are used to throttle any disorganised, illiterate and/or minority community it is most definitely reprehensible and fit to be denounced.<sup>21</sup>

## II

Benipuri's uncritical engagement with the Indian/Hindu past/ Culture shows little sign of change with his involvement in the youth league's i.e. *Yuvak*

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<sup>19</sup> See the essence of the passage I of. op. cit. p. 44. Also this is amply manifested in his biography of Langat Singh where he describes at length the essential characteristics of Bhumihar Brahmins. p. 74.

<sup>20</sup> *Shivaji* op. cit p. 44

<sup>21</sup> *Langat Singh* op. cit p. 83-84.

*Sangh* activities at Patna in the period between 1929 to 1931.<sup>22</sup> This is reflected in the journal *Yuvak* edited, printed and published by him. At least till 1930 *Yuvak* propagated an (Hindu) masculinist, nationalist and anti-imperialist ideology.<sup>23</sup> Although the overt anti-Muslim and Brahmanical tones disappeared and the journal spoke against communalism and casteism vociferously while referring to contemporary events the opinion about the past hardly changed. That the Vedic /Aryan/ Ancient past was still considered a golden epoch, is clearly evinced by even a cursory a look at Benipuri's article in the June issue of *Yuvak* in 1929. Further, when this is contrasted with the gloom of the Medieval/ Islamic era, the issue is clearly thrown into sharp relief. In the article *Sahitya Aur Yug-dharm*, he describes the rise and fall of 'Indian Culture', through literature —“ the best medium reflecting the health of the Nation.” While to him Vedic, Upanishadas, Smritis and Puranas are the testimonies of a glorious Indian past, the crescendo of Indian civilization and culture is said to be reflected, in the works of Kalidas. The Gupta Age is viewed as the zenith of Indian civilisation because it provided a politico-cultural unity to the sub-continent. He writes:

The problem that even the great might of the Bow-wielding Lord Ram and the Chakra-wielding realpolitik of Lord Krishna could not resolve, was finally resolved by the mighty braves of the Gupta clan. The whole sub-continent was united under the shadow of the mighty Garuda banner; and it was then that the sparkle of true and pure literature flowed unabated. The songs of Kalidas' prime continue till this day to humble the entire universe and make us bow our heads in reverence.<sup>24</sup>

'Empire' thus emerges as the ideal model for the nation. Once again in this perhaps one can read the dual impulse that marks the consciousness of the colonial intellectuals, at the same time wanting to both subvert the imperial authority as well as to replace it.

According to him a period of cultural decadence is reflected in Hindi literature, since its inception (i.e. in the Medieval Age). He cites the preponderance of erotic literature as its testimony.

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<sup>22</sup> See File No. 90 of 1931 Home Department (Poll.), BSA. And the First chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>23</sup> This would be discussed in greater detail in the subsequent chapter.

<sup>24</sup> Rambriksh Benipuri, *Sahitya Aur Yug-dharm*, *Yuvak*, June 1929 p. 295.

Even in the *Veer Ras* genre of poetry the mighty and brave Hindu lord, Prithviraj, even whilst confronted by the *Yavan* (i.e. Islamic) armies, is yet found dallying with the petty seductions of women. Even such great warriors as Alha and Udal died squabbling over women. So much so that even Vidyapati is to be found swimming in the mire of eroticism. It is during this time that our lovely land came under Muslim subjection and not a single brave hero could emerge to check this alien attack. This sort of poetry could have produced nothing but the weakly and the cowardly. We needed the poetry that could fill us with the energy and the motivation for self-sacrifice at the altar of freedom. Even today our culture is being destroyed while we are busy romancing with the 'nayikas'.<sup>25</sup>

So while the Indian past/ culture is still interpreted as essentially Hindu and the Muslim culture was either disparaged as 'corrupting' or simply glossed over, the present political reality was sought to be tackled differently i.e. instead of anti- Muslim rhetoric we find articles appealing strongly for communal harmony and for the removal of untouchability etc. in this journal. In fact it was a precondition for being a member of the Youth League that the person should not be a member of any communal or caste organisation. For example, in an article by Benipuri, *Kumar Ganganand Singh Aur Unka Srinagar*, it is said that the Kumar could not be the member of the Yuvak Sangh because he refused to quit the Hindu Mahasabha. At the same time, what is noticeable in this article is its tone. The article tends to speak that Kumar's ineligibility was a great loss to the organisation.<sup>26</sup> In other words there is a hiatus between the vision of the past and the opinion about the present and consequently the tension between ideological compunctions and practice.

### III

In the decade between 1930 and 1940, we do not find Benipuri engaging with this theme any longer. This also, probably not coincidentally, is the period when he was active in the Kisan Sabha movement and the Congress Socialist politics of Bihar. His writings in this period mostly concern contemporary socio-political themes. Between 1940 and 1945, he was in prison most of the times, due

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* p. 296

<sup>26</sup> The article lauds the contributions of the Kumar through out for his social activism and his love for Hindi literature. It ends with a wish that such a prince should be born in every princely state. *Yuvak*, May, 1929 p. 257-60.

to his enthusiastic involvement in the socialist movement and the government's deep suspicion of it.<sup>27</sup> It was during this period, and even afterwards, that Benipuri resumed his pre-occupation with the past and attempted to re-interpret bygone tradition within a definite politico-ideological matrix. In other words, the socialist Benipuri endeavoured to re-define the cultural contours of the nation to provide a new vision and thereby to re-build it. This engagement was in tandem with the larger socialist project of providing a framework to re-make and re-constitute the Indian nation. Though the evaluation of the Indian past along socialist lines had started much earlier in the Hindi public sphere.<sup>28</sup> In the forties and fifties it acquired a new sense of urgency, especially in the leftist circles, which is also manifested in the emergence of various left wing cultural organisations throughout the country.<sup>29</sup> This urgency was both caused and effected by the intense popular movement and mobilisation of the 1940s. This, along with, the general mood of apocalypse that prevailed in the wake of the World War, had enabled the intellectuals/ politicians to imagine that the days of the Raj were over and freedom was a matter of time. However, most of the left cultural organisations were dominated by Communists at this time.<sup>30</sup> This was probably the reason that a new organisation *Nava Sanskriti Sangh* was formed in 1949, which was backed by the Socialist Party. But this organisation is to be seen only as a small part of the larger project of the engagement of socialist intellectuals with Indian culture, which was discussed and debated in the journal

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<sup>27</sup> This aspect has already been discussed in the first chapter.

<sup>28</sup> Veer Bharat Talwar in his article 'Samajwadi Chetna ka Prasar, Communist Party se Pahle', has shown that the critical evaluation of Indian society on socialist lines, started in the journals *Maryada*, *Abhyuday Pratap* etc. in the aftermath of the Russian revolution. op. cit. Francesca Orsini has also shown this in her book, op. cit. But intensive and more organised efforts started in the 1930s with the peasant and socialist leaders and the founding of the Progressive Writer's Association. In this regard see Shivadan Singh Chauhan, 'Impact of Socialist Ideology on Hindi Literature 1919- 39', in B R Nanda edited *Socialism in India*, 1976, NMML, Mimeograph. See Sudhi Pradhan *Marxist Cultural Movement in India: Chronicles and Documents 1936-1947*, National Book Agency, Calcutta, 1970.

<sup>30</sup> For instance the Progressive Writers' Association, which was started at the initiative and the very enthusiastic support of the communist intellectuals/ politicians, in the early years it had the support of non-communist circles also. This was partly because its birth coincided with the period of the United Front politics of the Communists, but since the 1940s it came to be dominated by the Communist party alone and hence despised by others, specially those writer/ intellectuals who were either socialists or non-leftists. One of the major reasons behind this anti-communist feeling was that the communists were viewed as anti-national due to their politics during the 1942 movement. Another cause was the narrow attitude of the Communist intellectuals towards the question of what constitutes 'progressive art' by the communist intellectuals, see Ralph Russel, 'Leadership in All India Progressive Writer's Movement' in B N Pandey edited *Leadership in South Asia*, New Delhi, 1977. Shivadan Singh Chauhan, *Paripreksh ko Sahi Karte Hue*, Swaraj Prakashan, Delhi, 1999.

*Janvani*, 1946, published under the aegis of Acharya Narendra Dev from Benares. For our purposes, this journal becomes more important since Benipuri was on the editorial team for a full one and a half years.

In *Janvani*, articles on national and international politics, history, culture, philosophy, literature, socialism and socialist movements were published. Issues of this journal can provide a fair idea of the contemporary socialist view of Indian culture. All the articles were written by scholars of repute and were either based on a selective reading of prior research on the topic, or indeed more often were products of original research. In the latter case, Marxist tools and the conception of historical materialism, were used. However, in general, unlike objective history, which avoids passing judgement on events past, they were strongly opinionated. They used and interpreted the past to understand the present problems. The articles often began with the ancient period and ended with contemporary concerns and sometimes with suggestions for the future well being of Indian society and culture.

There were several essays that touched upon different but inter-related issues. One such trope being that of a “composite Indian culture”. In these articles, while the geographical existence of the Indian nation is unquestioned it is tautologically accepted that the Indian nation seems to have existed since antiquity. Indian culture is projected as being the conglomeration of the various cultural groups coming to India over a period of time. Among any number of such articles, we can take the example of a few.<sup>31</sup>For instance Bhagwat Sharan Upadhyay begins his article as follows

Today’s Indian culture is the legacy of several diverse *Jatis* and Ages in tandem. What we today call “Indian Culture”, in reality its provenance and evolution is in the inter-mixture of several different and diverse *Jatis*. The India of today is a museum of several different customs characteristic of their diverse origins. All mutually opposed tendencies are resolved and enrich each other once introduced into the great melting pot of ‘Indian culture’.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Bhagwat Sharan Upadhyay, *Bharatiya Sanskriti ke Nirman me Vividh Jation ka Yog*, *Janvani*, September, 1947. By the same author, *Humble*, October 1937. Dr. Bhupendranath Dutta, *Bharatiya Kala Aur Sanskriti*, February 1947.

<sup>32</sup> Bhagwat Sharan Upadhyay, op. cit.

The theme of diversity is invoked, but is then quickly dissolved into and cancelled out by the unity that the 'melting pot' model of composite culture suggests. If the past origin is heterogeneous, the present is homogenised. This idea of a composite culture of India, however, turns out to be predominantly an Aryan/ Hindu culture. The process of the formation of the Hindu Culture itself is said to have started with the encounter of Indus Valley People and the Hindu- Aryans--- a part of the larger Hindu-European *Jati* (used here in the sense of a cultural group). This encounter resulted in the destruction of the former and the triumph of the latter. The culture of the victorious *Jati* assimilated and incorporated the culture of the vanquished. This Hindu-Aryan culture was subjected to the influence of various other cultural groups such as the Persians, Greeks, Kushanas, Huns etc. and lost into the larger whole of 'Indian Culture'. However there is a certain semantic fluidity in the narrative of Indian culture. The term Hindu-Aryan, is used in the sense of Indo-Aryan in the context of the first cultural encounter with the Indus people. But when it is discussed in relation to other cultural groups in later periods, this term Hindu-Aryan as simply 'the' Hindu culture; and it is this Hindu culture which forms the core of *bharatiyata* or 'Indian-ness', which was consolidated during the Gupta period. It is this Hindu (Indian) culture, which came into contact with 'different cultural groups coming under the banner of Islam'. But unlike other encounters, the interaction between the two groups (i.e. Hindus and Muslims) remained superficial and limited to the elites. The intermingling between the two cultures could not succeed because of popular opposition. A typical example of this is as follows

Their [i.e. the Muslim's] economic, political and religious well being were always antagonistic to those of the Hindus. The victors did not establish any contact with the Hindus, for any such contact to be established it was a condition precedent that the Hindus converted to Islam... already Indian society had lost much of its power of absorption, even prior to their arrival and become inward-looking consequently the Hindus could not trust the Muslims either. Further being in a minority in a land of foes, the survival of the Muslims was premised upon fear and power alone, hence they too made little effort of attracting the Hindus apart from trying to convert them. Yet along with Islam had also come Sufism, and under its influence the likes of Kabir, Nanak, Akbar tried to foster some degree of inter-communal cordiality. A new culture, although quintessentially Islamic in flavour was born in the process. Not only did it spread across India but a section of the people adopted it too. A new dress code, a new language --- Urdu and a new social



etiquette was glimpsed in Delhi, Agra, Jaunpur, Lucknow, Hyderabad, Deccan. The predecessors of today's liberal politicians, such as the likes of Man Singh, Birbal, Todar Mull etc. also tried to consolidate inter-communal ties. But in general such moves failed to make much head-way due to the over-arching opposition of the people at large.<sup>33</sup>

Thus Islamic culture though a small part of the constitution of 'Indian Culture' could not be at its core. More noteworthy perhaps is the easy fluidity with which the socialist 'populism' is transformed is used as a metaphor for communal otherisation. It is this brand of (Hindu) Indian culture, which was said to have been, later enriched, with its contact with the West under the leadership of the British, which led to the emergence of a Nationalist consciousness and democratic institutions, thereby facilitating the dissolution of the Hindu Varna system. It is further said that the cracks and fissures that had emerged in the Varna or caste system were a signal of its imminent dissolution, which would be realised under a socialist sun. It must be conceded that their arguments in this regard were grounded on their readings of the actual struggles that were current at the time.

At the base of this conception of Indian Culture, which is great per se, lies the fact that it is intrinsically a Hindu Culture. Thus Hinduism becomes a metaphor for the Indian way of life whereas Islam and others are reduced to being mere religions. Simultaneously it follows that the greatness of Indian Culture, which assimilates all others, is in reality the greatness of Hindu Culture. It is this very conception of Indian Culture that allows Acharya Narendra Dev to say that,

...it was the catholic spirit of Hinduism that makes this miracle possible. Hinduism is not a cradle religion it does not forcibly impose its way of life on others. It does not believe that the only true way of life is one, which is professed by it. [Therefore] people from different cultures and races [who] migrated to India from time immemorial... were absorbed in the Indian community and the religion of the land [i.e. Hinduism] assimilated their custom and ideas.<sup>34</sup>

However, this kind of Hindu-centred secular discourse about the compositeness of Indian Culture is fraught with tension vis-à-vis Islamic or

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<sup>33</sup> Bhagwat Sharan Upadhyay op. cit.

<sup>34</sup> Broadcast from Lucknow by Acharya Narendra Dev on the 30<sup>th</sup> of November, 1950. Selected Works of Acharya Narendra Dev, Vol.3, p. 286-287, NMML 1997.

Muslim Culture—a Culture coming from outside and unassimilated. While Upadhyay resolves this tension by merely positing Islam as being antithetical to the Hindu way of life and hence having limited influence amongst the Indian people, for Narendra Dev it is the amazing power of the catholic spirit of Hindu Culture that reformed even the illiberal spirit of Islam. Narendra Dev says,

...even monolithic sects of India have been tamed by the spirit of Hinduism. Hindu Culture powerfully influenced Islam in India, whatever the Muslim divines, the theologians may believe and preach, the Muslim masses hold the belief that every one should follow his own ancestral faith. They have not the real zeal of a religious fanatic. This is partly due to the fact that a very large number of them became converts to Islam because of the oppressive caste system ...and not because of their passionate devotion to the tenets of Islam.<sup>35</sup>

Another set of articles is concerned with the enquiries into the causes of invasions of India that had led to its subjection at different times and the resistance to it. In the context of immediate political reality, i.e. colonial subjection, the historical roots of the nation's weakness were traced along with the indigenous resistance. Articles like *Humble* (Invasions)<sup>36</sup> to a great extent objectively traced the history of invasions on India since the beginning of Indian Civilisation—from Aryan, Persian, Greek, Kushana, Shaka to the Muslim and British invasion. Interestingly the first invasion i.e. the Aryan invasion is shown as an attack on the "Indus Valley Civilisation" but all later attacks are always depicted as being against the "Indian Civilisation". Predictably all the invaders before Muslims, one after another was made a part of Indian Culture. Unlike them, Muslims do remain a source of tension and stood in the line of the Europeans and the British as complete outsiders. In the last part of the article, Muslims and the British are shown as outsiders almost on the same footing and during the search for the causes of the defeat all examples are taken from the medieval or Muslim period of history. The reason for the defeat of Indian Culture is said to be the absence of nationalism or the lack of nationalist feeling caused by the caste or Varna system. Because of the caste system, even heroic resistances, were bound to fail in the long run.

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* p.286

<sup>36</sup> Bhagvat Sharan Upadhyay, *Humble, Jarvani*, October 1947.

The criticism of caste comes as a part of the nationalist endeavours at internal social criticism. It was ultimately aimed at nation building. In article after article,<sup>37</sup> caste was criticised as a mechanism for appropriating the surplus of the productive classes and providing a religious sanction and moral philosophy to legitimise and perpetuate, this exploitation within the Hindu society. In some articles, avowed criticism of the Brahmanical social order was accompanied by special editorial comments. For instance the essay titled, *Brahman Samrajya*, which documented the history of Brahman kingdoms ranging from the Sunga, Kanva, Satvahanas to the Sena kingdom carried special editorial comments in the preface.

It is almost commonsensical in our country that the Brahmins have always been engaged merely in prayers and scholastic pursuits and that they have always been far removed from the domains of politics or self-aggrandisement. But this is wrong. They have founded as many as nine kingdoms and it is under these kingdoms that the forces of regressive orthodoxy reached their highest fulfilment. In the absence of thoroughgoing revolution, Indian society is yet plagued by these social evils.<sup>38</sup>

However, with these criticisms also went the search for the icons, periods and the kingdoms of the past, which could balance the damage done by these criticisms to the great Indian culture. To balance this, for instance, the tradition of Vikramaditya was invoked. In *Vikramaditya Ki Parampara* Bhagvat Sharan Upadhyay says:

... there has been a long line of *Vikramadityas* (in India). In India, there is a long tradition of leaders like such who tried to free India from the yoke of foreign subjugation. It is a proven fact in the history of India that whichever monarch assumed the title of *Vikramaditya* was always involved in a struggle against foreign powers.<sup>39</sup>

Relying on the researches of indologists like K.P Jaiswal, Alexander Cunningham, etc., it is said that there are five *Vikramadityas*- 1. Vikramaditya *Adi* (ie, original) 57 B.C., 2. Chandragupta Vikramaditya 375-414 A.D, 3. Skandagupta Vikramaditya 455- 467, 4. Yashovarman of Malwa 532- 533 A.D.,

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<sup>37</sup>Bhagvat Sharan Upadhyay, *Bhartiya Varna- Vyavastha Athva Abhishap*, *Janvani*, January 1948, Professor Rajaram Shastri, *Varna Vyavastha Ka Uday*, *Janvani*, March 1949 and November 1949, Bhadant Shanti Bhikshu, *Naitika Aur Manusmriti*, *Janvani*, July 1948.

<sup>38</sup>Bhagvat Sharan Upadhyay, *Brahman Samrajya*, *Janvani* April, 1948.

<sup>39</sup>*Janvani*, November 1947.

5. Hemchandra Vikramaditya of Rewari 1556 A.D- who as true *jananayakas* resisted the foreign invaders. It is said :

...although efforts of Hemchandra Vikramaditya who dreamt of re-establishing Hindu empire and fought vigorously against Akbar was last in the line of endeavours of this tradition. Attempts in this tradition of *Vikramadityas* were made by the Marathas, it was made in 1857 and since 1885, Indian national congress had been doing the same. The vows of *Vikramadityas* have recently been completed when the English left India.<sup>40</sup>

This tradition of *Vikramaditya* was stretched into the present and above all to the future is stated in an editorial comment at the end of the essay which lamented the partition caused by the vested interests of propertied class and the consequent revolt by feudal rulers of Indian states. It is said:

...we need not worry our potential to action is already awakened. We have incessantly fought the British and we are destined to drown their legacy [mainly Pakistan and the reactionary forces of the landed elites, who were behind the partition and the secession of the Indian state]. We will surely redeem our Taxila [metaphor for Pakistan]. I assure you we shall do this and it is from amongst us that the socialist Vikramaditya will be born. The tradition of Vikramaditya has not been lost to us- it lives still.<sup>41</sup>

Besides this search of a glorious Indian [Hindu] tradition against the foreign invaders that threatened the nation, we find the efforts to resurrect those traditions or icons of reform which attacked the very roots of the evils of the varna system and tried to promote *bharatiyata* or Indian-ness as the unifying metaphor for the entire country. The essays on Chandragupta and Chanakya by Bhagwat Sharan Upadhyay in the July, 1947 issue of the *Janvani* shows how a common man like Chandragupta with the help of Chanakya established the glorious Mauryan empire and brought unity to the sub-continent by dissolving the internal oppressive and reactionary regime of the Nandas--- hated by the people--- and successfully defeated the external foes threatening the nation and established the natural frontiers of India in the politically volatile North-West.

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid

<sup>41</sup>Ibid

Similarly Buddhism and the Buddhist philosophy was held in high esteem because it attacked the roots of Brahmanical social hierarchy and its social ethos. The attraction of Buddhism in Indian intellectual circles was not purely as a metaphor of negation of Brahmanical Hinduism. As Eleanor Zelliott has shown, the image of Buddhism as a rational, ethical, creative and egalitarian religion full of compassion for mankind had been spread through India by the scholars, popular writers and participants alike since the mid-nineteenth century. It is this image, current at this time, that provided the socialists with an extant idiom within the corpus of Indian tradition which could be reclaimed and refashioned in keeping with the agendas of their project.<sup>42</sup> While one Dr. Jagdish Chandra Jain<sup>43</sup> showed that the emergence of Buddhism and Jainism as the product of the general social milieu required opposition to the Brahmanical social order hindering the progress of society, Suman Vatsayan<sup>44</sup> threw light on the Buddhist philosophy of the middle path meandering between the oppressive austerity of the Jains and the debauched lifestyle of the Brahmins and hence helped the common folks in the pursuit of right belief. In another article by the scholar/monk Bhadant Shanti Bhikshu,<sup>45</sup> says that all religions except Buddhism, be it Islam, Christianity or Manu's dharma, are narrow in their attitude. What is interesting here is that he made a distinction between Hinduism, the original or *Pauranic* and the Hinduism of Manu. And it is argued that Islam and Christianity are more violent in imposing their way of life than even Manu's Hinduism. Hence, Hinduism is more tolerant than any of these. It is said

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<sup>42</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century India, like Europe, discovered Buddhism afresh. In history, archaeology, in texts and its living presence. The European scholarly interest in Buddhism was supplemented by an astonishing number of Europeans who became Buddhists and even Bhikkus. It was also accompanied by popular writing, the most influential of which was by Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia*, a poem on Buddha's life (1879). See Philip C. Almond, *The Buddhist Discovery of Buddhism*, CUP, Cambridge, 1987. These three strands i.e. scholarship, active participation in Buddhism and popular writing, according to Zelliott, also marked the Indian revival of Buddhism that started in 1856 and continued till in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Especially in the intellectual and social activism of four scholar activists--- Dharmanand Kosambi, Rahul Sankritayayan, Jagdish Kashyap and Bhadant Anand Kaushalyan. Besides there were remnants of Buddhist communities surviving in the original homeland of Buddhism right into the modern age. Through the efforts of those scholars and the Buddhist nations bordering India, the idea of Buddhism as a living force was added to the increasing consciousness of the glorious Buddhist past. Thus as a result of this actual/intellectual rediscovery of Buddhism, the very symbol of the new India, i.e. the Asokan Pillars and the Wheel of Law, spoke of the reclaimed glory of the age of Buddhism. Eleanor Zelliott, 'The Indian Rediscovery of Buddhism: 1855-1956', in A K Narayan (eds) *Studies in Buddhism and Pali Literature*, Delhi, 1978.

<sup>43</sup> *Buddh Aur Jain Kaleen Varna Vyavastha*, *Janvani*, Feb., 1948.

<sup>44</sup> *Budh Dharm Mein Tapas Jeevan*, *Janvani*, Oct., 1949.

<sup>45</sup> *Naitikta Aur Manusmriti*, *Janvani*, July 1948.

Manu's religion is narrow, so are Islam and Christianity, but the former is not as violent as the latter. Manu's religion socially excommunicates the non-believers but does not destroy them... whereas Christianity and Islam destroy the local culture of wherever they go. In relation to these religions India's Hindu (*Pauranic*) religion is very liberal. It contains all the qualities required for a liberal religion except the caste system. But, Buddhism is more liberal and progressive than all of them.<sup>46</sup>

The author argues that Buddhism is tolerant of dissenting views because in this religion one does not have to be the follower of a particular prophet or a holy book not even of the Buddha; rather a Buddhist can claim to raise himself to the position of Buddha. In fact there is a different standard of morality which is guided by pragmatism and action. It accepts that a phenomenon can be interpreted in various ways for the well being of the majority or for the narrow ends, but it favors the former. Further, a Buddhist happens to be positively critical of popular traditions. It is said:

A Buddhist has a special approach to the tradition. He does not destroy the beliefs and traditions of the people rather it critically interprets them and makes them eligible so that society could move on the path of progress.<sup>47</sup>

Thus what we see that the icon and traditions of reforms that were selected all came from Hindu traditions. Not only Buddhism but even medieval Bhakti saints' efforts to bring social equality were seen to be rooted within the Upanishadic philosophy by the people like Narendra Dev (as I have shown above). The opinion of people like Ramdhari Singh Dinkar, who was known as 'Rashtrakavi' Dinkar wrote a famous book, "*Sanskriti ke Chaar Adhyay*" in 1954. Its preface was written by Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru. His conception of Indian culture was similar to that of Upadhyay's notion of composite (Hindu/Indian) culture. What is different in Dinkar's proposition is that since the beginning, Indian (read Hindu) culture has two strands-orthodox and liberal. It is within this liberal tradition that came the Upanishadic philosophy out of which Buddhism and even medieval Bhakti saints were encapsulated. It is this vibrant tradition that kept alive the Indian culture. Hence, there resulted a change in the location of golden age- from the Vedic age to the post-Vedic. The denial of Islamic legacies is not

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

surprising because of the Hindu view of this Indian culture. However there could be an additional reason of the socialist aversion to the medieval past. For in a typical Marxist view the medieval age was viewed looked down on as a feudal age. This is also reflected in the policy statement of the Socialist Party written by Acharya Narendra Dev in 1948.<sup>48</sup> In fact the British contribution to the Indian culture becomes more important vis-à-vis the silence on the Islamic culture. It is the result of modern idea and the institutions like, democracy and nationalism, which came along with the British and spread modernity in India and enabled the unification of country by undermining the primordial beliefs and practices.

This engagement with the India's past/culture not only underlines the problems but also looks for their solution to create a new 'culture' for the making of India. It is said that despite the numerous efforts by great men from Buddha to Kabir and others, the problems of social inequality persisted. To Dr. Jain

Buddhism could only help in alleviating the rigidity of the caste system. Although they opened their religion to everyone, they could not provide a new social and economic order. For instance even Buddha kept the number of varnas as four only. The abolition of poverty and slavery was not the part of Buddha's agenda.<sup>49</sup>

Acharya Hazari Prasad Dwivedi was more lucid on this issue. According to him

Indian history is testimonial to the fact that the religious and spiritual endeavors to abolish the social discrimination and inequality (of caste) have never been successful and it is only a few amongst us who can reach the spiritual and philosophical heights. Most of the people remain involved in the mundane world...as a matter of fact, the increase in the self-respect of socially oppressed castes is more due to political and economic causes rather than the religious one. It is only when the political and economic freedom is disseminated among the socially oppressed masses of India that they will be liberated in actuality. Those who think that religious movements or the temple entry movement can do away with this evil system have learnt little from history.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>File No. 67 , Socialist Party Papers, P.C Joshi Archive, J. N.U.

<sup>49</sup>Jagdish Chander Jain, *Buddha Aur Jain Kalin Varna Vyavastha*, *Janvani*, February 1949.

<sup>50</sup>Acharya Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, *Bharatiye Sanskriti ke Tatwa*, *Janvani*, February 1949 and Bharatvarsh Ki Sanskritik Samasya, *Janvani* ; December 1946.

The advocacy of social and economic empowerment rather than abstract religious effort to abolish the social inequality of caste system is more explicit and pronounced in the editorial comment enclosed with the article *Bhartiya Varna-Vyavastha Ya Abhishap*. It sees a conspiracy of the Hindu right in the Temple Entry movement, and deflection of the Shudras from real economic and social empowerment. Simultaneously it says that the establishment of the socialist society in India can be anticipated from the ongoing peasant and labour movements. Only they can provide the solution to this problem. According to the extract:

Today the old varna system is trying to protect itself by inventing new tactics. These strategies are: the activities of Hindu Mahasabha, Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh and Sanskritised Hindi movement in the name of protecting the Hindu culture. One faction of these organizations is trying to deflect the Shudras by encouraging the Harijan movement or the Temple Entry Movement by a tacit compromise with the Congress right. The Shudras are made the object of pity, but the economic and social character of these movements is status-quoist. For we socialist this is not a reason to worry. The roots of socialism have become deeper in our country. Labour movement has strengthened itself, peasant movement has broken the backbone of zamindari system, but we should always keep in mind that Brahmanism will not disappear as long as there is private ownership of land and industry. Therefore, the only solution to India's problem is socialism.<sup>51</sup>

At the time of these writings, the foreign yoke was either still present or was a fresh memory. The socialists moreover were grappling with the problems of socio-economic equality manifested in the caste and peasant/popular movements and the crisis of communalism. The attempts to define Indian culture for the remaking of a 'new' India could never have overlooked this political reality. Then it was imperative to look into the deeper and internal causes of the loss of the political freedom to the foreign power. The causes were seen as the internal division of the Indian society on caste/community lines. In other words the project of defining the cultural contours of the Indian nation vis-à-vis the alien British power was to work at two interrelated levels: establishing the greatness of a harmonious indigenous cultural past as against the foreign, and simultaneously looking into the causes which led to subjection by foreign power. This would help

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<sup>51</sup> *Bharatiya Varna—Vyavastha Ya Abhshaap, Janvani, January, 1948.*



in the making of a strong Indian nation. For idea of India as a geographical and cultural unit existed since the Vedic times or even before that, so the historical enquiry began from that period of Indian history. An attempt of internal criticism viewed the varna system or the Brahmanical social order as exploitative and a painful blot on the great Hindu Indian culture. But this tension was relieved by the proposition that there have always existed two strands in Hinduism- the orthodox and the liberal. It is this strand of liberal tradition in Hindu culture that has its root in Upanishadic philosophy that has time and again tried to do away with the prevalent social evils. However, the question of caste was seriously taken up and the causes of its persistence despite the effort to eliminate it were examined. Consequently, it was linked up with the present way of handling the issue of caste and a socialist solution was sought to be provided.

Side by side with this internal criticism of Indian culture went its glorification, which has assimilated itself into various cultural groups coming from 'outside'. In this discourse while the non-Muslim cultural groups could easily be incorporated, the Muslims and the Islamic culture remained the subject of tension because of its explicit contemporary identity as non-Hindus. Since this discourse was the product of a context in which the self of indigenous national culture was defined against the outsiders- the British- any other cultural group that has not been fully absorbed into it was bound to remain either at best on the fringe at normal times or to be excluded at the time of crisis.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, in the socialist circles due to this construction of Indian culture as essentially a Hindu culture, we find a fault line on the question of communalism despite their sincere denunciation of communal riots and especially the Hindu communal fascist organisations like Hindu Mahasabaha and the R.S.S. Probably this could explain, to a lesser extent, the later socialists' closeness to Hindu fundamentalist organizations like Jana Sangh and Bhartiya Janta Party.

#### IV

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<sup>52</sup> See how Rammanohar Lohia asks the muslims to be loyal to india not Pakistan during communal rights in the aftermath of partition, See, Gyan pandey, 'Can a Muslim be an Indian', Comparative Studies in Society and History Vol. 41, No.4, October 1999, pp.608-619.

So far I have discussed the nature and causes of the socialist engagement with the Indian past. Benipuri's engagement with the past was driven by the same impulse to redefine the cultural contours of the Indian nation. His writings on this theme pertain to the period between 1940 and 1965. They are primarily in the form of historical plays. Apart from the plays there are some essays also. He wrote six historical plays: *Ambapali*, *Vijeyta*, *Tathagat*, *Netra-dan*, *Sanghmitra* and *Singhal-Vijay*. These writings show Benipuri's interpretation of Indian past in the light of his contemporary political praxis-the influence of his socialist ideological moorings. Benipuri selects a particular historical epoch to reinvent the ideas, icons and symbols. Like other socialists, whom we have discussed, he selects the ancient Indian past of the post-Vedic period. The plots of his plays revolve around the Buddhist and the Mauryan period.

Before moving further we require to clarify some points. Firstly, Benipuri was consciously reinterpreting the past with his own ideological political designs and readily accepted it. Hence, he was conscious in taking recourse to fictional narratives, which provided him liberty to interpret history imaginatively. To him, historical veracity was not a prime concern works and 'an artists history was bound to be different from an academic history and, in fact, it remained his or her own creation.'<sup>53</sup> He further clarifies:

History merely chronicles the events of the past but a litterateur goes into the heart of those events and seeks its essence in its various nuances, dresses them up and presents them before the ordinary folks. In his hands those dry and blank events and characters acquire new vigour and come to life ....I accept that there should be a limit to this [imagination], because there is limit to everything. A litterateur knows his limitations but he also knows the extent of freedom he has within that limit.<sup>54</sup>

Benipuri does not stop here he privileges the artists construction of past over that of an archeologists' and historians.<sup>55</sup>

As Sudipta Kaviraj has opined in the context of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, those narratives were a 'continuation of history, uttering what

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<sup>53</sup> Rambriksha Benipuri, *Purani Kathayen Naye Roop*, B.G, Vol. 3.,p.112.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, P.112.

<sup>55</sup> See introduction of the play *Ambapali*, BG, Vol.2, p.20.

history could not spell.... They had a deep internal relation to history works. For they helped to spell the same idea only in different manner and style'.<sup>56</sup> Secondly, the selection of the post-vedic past of ancient India also requires some comments. Like other socialist intellectuals, as I showed earlier, who stood for socio-economic equality in their contemporary political praxis during the Indian National Movement, Benipuri found himself more comfortable with this particular period of Indian history, which was marked by the rise of heterodox sects like Buddhism and Jainism. Further, this period also the rise of ancient republics, territorial states and, above all, the vast empire of the Mauryas that said to have provided cultural and geographical unity to the Indian subcontinent and spread the message of peace and tranquility to the lands far away. However, Benipuri's interpretation is not always quite similar to that of general socialist interpretations.

Benipuri's historical plays are focussed on great personas of Indian history: Chandragupta Maurya, the sons and the daughters of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka- Kunal, Mahendra and Sanghmitra, Buddha and Ambapali- the royal dancer of the ancient republic of Vaisali. All of them, especially the Mauryas are interpreted in new light.

In the introduction of the play *Vijeta*, Benipuri proposes his agenda:

Hitherto all the plays on Chandragupta Maurya basically revolve around Chanakya and Chandragupta remains his puppet. Which kind of puppet? Attempts have been to denigrate this *Chakravatin* crown by calling him Shudra. Hence, this great man must be rescued from the ditch of degeneration.<sup>57</sup>

The plot of the play goes like this. A poor Brahmin, dreaming passionately of redeeming his country from the enemies within and without, was looking for a *loknyak* or leader of the people to realize his dream. He finds an intelligent young boy named Chandragupta and trains him in all fields of knowledge. This Chandragupta, after his training rescues firstly, his country/motherland from the internal enemy/oppressor, the Nandas at Chanakyas' instance. For "as long as enemies were within the country the external enemies or the foreigners could not

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<sup>56</sup> Sudipta Kaviraj, op.cit., p.111.

<sup>57</sup> *Vijeta*, BG, Vol.2, p.102.

be defeated.”<sup>58</sup> The destruction of the Nandas is followed by the establishment of a new kingdom and the restoration of law and order. After this Chandragupta is asked to lay the foundation of an empire. For “destruction must be followed by creation and reconstruction. If this is not done, then destruction becomes more destructive.”<sup>59</sup> Consequently, Chandragupta establishes a vast empire by driving out the external enemies and the Chakravartin crown wins ‘natural frontiers’ for this country *Bharatvarsha*. The play ends with the scene of Chandragupta’s self-immolation as per the Jain sacred law. He immolates himself because he claims the moral responsibility for the great famine, which has occurred in his empire causing the death of millions.

Although this image of Chandragupta Maurya as the Emperor of India is quite common, there is a striking uniqueness in Benipuri’s portrayal of Chandragupta’s character. Despite all the achievements of Chandragupta that made him a ‘national hero’, there is ambivalence in Benipuri’s Chandragupta regarding the violence embedded in the making of the Empire. It is said that the making of an Empire is necessary for the unity of the Indian nation and it raised the glory of India. This was a necessity of the times and there is an obvious sense of pride in that. Chandragupta, who pioneered in establishing the first Empire in India, did this as a part of his duty to the Motherland. Simultaneously, however, the Self of Chandragupta is shown as torn by moral dilemmas, and he is shown as restless and thinking over the violence of war and victory<sup>60</sup>. He neither rejoices in nor despises his achievements. This ambivalence is well portrayed. The moral dilemma is said to be the product of ‘delicate and soft emotions’. And ‘this cannot go along with the great aims and ambitions’- nationalism<sup>61</sup>. Thus it is suggested that to realise the larger and nobler causes of ‘nationalism’ (*rashtriya*) some unscrupulous measures are bound to be taken .

In the last part of the play, Benipuri’s Chandragupta turns out to be quite a distinct ideal. The last part begins with the Chakravarti crown fed up with the violence of the war taking recourse to Jainism. It is shown that a great famine has

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* p.105.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* p.108.

<sup>60</sup> *Vijeta*, BG, Vol. 2, p.121

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* p123

occurred in his Empire and he owns the moral responsibility for it, because to him it was a part of the failure of his Empire based on violence. Then he prepares for self-immolation as a penance for his sins. When Chanakya asks Chandragupta that as per his duty he freed his Motherland, established peace in his Empire. Even after that if a famine has occurred it is not his responsibility. At this Chandragupta replies:

On the basis of our scriptures and the might of our arms we founded a Sovereign Empire that could not save its citizenry from the pangs of hunger . If only we had heard the sermons of Bhagavan Mahavira of Vaishali and the Lord *Tathagata* of Kapilavastu the world may have been quite different. But we did not pay heed to their message of non-violence and the result (famine) stares us in the face today. What a divine irony has been wrought upon your credulity. ... At the very moment the Monarch assumes the sceptre does the responsibility of the nation's well being devolve upon Him. For whatever reason, be it material or popular or supernatural, if he fails this sacred duty he fails in the trust imposed upon him. And the just recompense for this failure can be nothing short of the King's execution.<sup>62</sup>

What is said here is that the failure of the Mauryan Empire was due to its being based on violence not on the ethics of peace and non-violence; hence the natural calamity as a result of which the people had to suffer. The true Chakravartitva, that is, an ethically and morally just Empire must be based on the ideology of peace and non-violence. Once this is realised by Chandragupta by claiming the moral responsibility of the natural disaster and consequently self-punishment, he becomes the real or true conqueror.

However, in the end we have Chandragupta's adamant decision of self-immolation with the decision of his son's succession on the throne of Empire. The flaws of the Empire are realised, but simultaneously *Rajadharma*, duty of governance, is shown to be a must.

Thus the Empire, albeit based on violence, is shown as necessary and its criticism remains limited to the personal and moral domain. For *bhavana* or emotions are one thing and *Rajadharma*, is another. The emotional and moral

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p132

criticism seems to be all right but it is not pragmatic and rational. Hence the Empire must prevail.

Thus Chandragupta is a national hero who freed India from external and internal foes and established a glorious Empire, the frontiers of which extended up to the natural boundaries of India. This task of bringing cultural-political unity to India, which was a necessary and commendable achievement *per se* was, however, achieved through violence. Although this was in a way inevitable and there was no pragmatic and rational alternative available, the violence embedded in the making of this Empire was not justified morally. Hence, there was ambivalence in Chandragupta, which was resolved at personal level. In fact, this ambivalence of Chandragupta is the ambivalence of Benipuri. His Gandhian / Socialist moorings make him decry the violence of imperialism but his nationalist longings cannot deny this legacy. In other plays on Asoka's sons and daughters – *Netradan* on Kunal, *Singhal Vijaya* on Mahendra, and *Sanghamitra* this ambivalence is to be found. But it gets resolved in these plays when the military conquest is replaced by the conquest through the ideology of peace and non-violence, i.e. *dhammavijay*.

There is a thematic unity in these three plays. The Mauryan Emperor Ashoka although known for his policy of '*dhammaghosh*' instead of '*bherighosh*', i.e. the policy of winning hearts and minds through the ideology of peace and non-violence rather than of military conquest, had a violent and bloody past. He was involved in much bloodshed in his expedition to Kalinga.<sup>63</sup> While the author decries the violence done by Ashoka and at his instance by his son Mahendra, it is argued that this military expedition is shown to be a sham on humanity.<sup>64</sup> According to the author, the horror of genocide during the war on Kalinga made the Emperor, his son Mahendra and his daughter Sanghamitra jittery, causing loss of peace of mind. He got solace by embracing the rising waves of Buddhism, current in the country that spread the message of non-violence and the love for humanity. As a result of its influence that the Mauryan emperor got a new mantra of winning the people and the country through the ideology of *Dhamma* i.e.

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<sup>63</sup> See Preface to *Netradan*, BG, Vol 2, p.189

<sup>64</sup> See for instance *Singhal Vijay* BG, Vol 2, p.240.

through spreading the ideas of peace, tranquility and non-violence. Sanghamitra and Mahendra were portrayed as the real conquerors that owned Singhal (Ceylon), through this new ideology.

Benipuri speaks through the conversation of Sanghamitra and Mahendra staying in Singhal:

Mahendra: O Mitre! We have been here for five years. And how Singhal has witnessed a radical transformation. Sanghamitre, this is the real victory. A victory which has not seen a drop of blood, where the distinction between the loser and the victor collapses. What a stark difference, the victory over Kalinga and this victory over Singhal.

Sanghamitra: In Kalinga we were not victorious but we were defeated. O Bhaiya! Singhal is the place where we really triumphed. A victory in which the victorious likes to serve the vanquished and the defeated places the triumphant in the throne of his heart. This is the real victory.<sup>65</sup>

However despite this recourse to this ideology of peace and non-violence, it is shown by the author that one has to pay the price of one's past mistakes. This is the theme of the play *Netradan*. In the introduction of the play, Benipuri comments:

...War has been a bane on humanity. It was a curse in the past, it is still a curse in the present and it will remain so for the humanity. Whoever provokes the war or indulges in it has to repent.<sup>66</sup>

The story of *Netradan* goes like this. The younger son of Ashoka, Kunal was the most loved, delicate and gentle member of the Maurya royal family. He was the most innocent, kind-hearted and a connoisseur of heart. Kunal gets closer to the youngest queen of Ashoka, Tishyarakshita-the daughter of Ceylon king-because of her deep love in art and music. Kanchanmala, the wife of Kunal worries about this relationship. Coincidentally, at that time Kunal is sent outside the capital for some administrative work, but this is taken as otherwise by the young queen. After that she intrigues to take revenge as a result of which Kunal has to sacrifice his famed beautiful eyes. This is interpreted as the price paid by

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<sup>65</sup> *Netradan*, BG, Vol 2, p. 190.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.191.

the Mauryan family for the outrage at Kalinga. Mahendra is shown to be speaking in this vein:

Kalinga is not a place; it is a symbol-a symbol of war, murder and slaughter of humanity. The repentance for Kalinga is now complete. We have compensated the reckless carnage of Kalinga with the blood of the eyes- the most beautiful eyes. This is the biggest lesson of history.<sup>67</sup>

The play ends with the message:

We have to create a new world so that Kalinga is not repeated. Let us make a new society where there will be no place for Kalinga, for war, for bloodbath.<sup>68</sup>

Despite the avowed criticism of violence perpetrated by the empires and the emperors, there remains a nostalgia for it. That is a nostalgia for an empire of a different kind, where the ruler is benevolent, peace-loving and a humanist who conquers the world not through military might but by the ideology of peace and non-violence thereby raising India to the position of real '*Vishwavijeta*'.

The idea of peace and the dislike for war acquires a prominent place in the play *Ambapali*.<sup>69</sup> Besides this ideal there is also an attempt to idealise democracy and the republican form of government which existed in Ancient India-the republic of the Vajjis. In *Ambapali* much has been written in praise of the republican political structures which was based on the principles of equality and fraternity. Whenever occasional comparison is made between the republic and the monarchy, Benipuri's obvious tilt is towards the former. For instance, in *Vijeta*, the Mauryan emperor is shown as speaking:

The land (Vaishali-the capital of Vajjis), is great where there is no discrimination between the king and the subjects, where every citizen thinks of himself as the king and every child as the prince. Where the royal power looks for eligibility rather than draws legitimacy from the origins of the dynasty.<sup>70</sup>

Besides that Vaishali is shown to be the ideal nation/state which followed the seven laws-the characteristic feature of any prosperous nation. As long as the Vajjis followed these, they were invincible. These laws were : 1. regular and

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid. p.216.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. p.216.

<sup>69</sup> For instance see Buddha's statement on true victory. In *Ambapali* BG, Vol 2, p. 50.

<sup>70</sup> *Vijeta*, BG, Vol 2, p. 132.



healthy functioning of the council and devotion to its governance; 2. Awareness of the rights and duties bestowed by the republic on to the citizens; 3. Respect towards the constitution; 4. Respect for the elders; 5. Compassion for the fair sex; 6. Protection of cultural heritage; 7. Receptive to the knowledge of the scholars of other countries.<sup>71</sup>

Vaishali is said to have the ideal political system because of its accountable and responsible citizens who submitted themselves and their individuality to the Vajji Sangha or the union of Vajji republic. It is said:

Our republic (Vaishali) is famous in the subcontinent because its citizens submit their individuality to it. Whatever responsibility the republic delegates to a citizen, he faithfully follows it. The republic of Vajji ensures our liberty and we in turn religiously perform our duties.<sup>72</sup>

However Benipuri with praise for this political system of the Vajjis also tries to provide a picture of its darker side i.e. the uncritical surrender of one's individuality. Therefore his protagonist Ambapali, although she is great and an ideal because of her responsibility and sincerity towards her duty as a citizen, has a painful private life. The plot of the play is as follows.

Ambapali, a girl of humble origins from the countryside is, selected by the republic as the royal dancer. She completely devotes herself to her new duty and relinquishes her previous relations and life. In the time of 'national' crisis i.e. when her country's freedom is threatened, she jumps into the battle as a warrior and motivates fellow citizens to do so too. Even when her country is defeated by the Magadh emperor Ajatshatru due to the disunity among the people fomented by the shrewd Prime-Minister of Magadh, Ambapali triumphs over Ajatshatru in her palace where the latter had come to win her over and to take her along with him to his kingdom. But the private life of this heroine of Benipuri is shown as tormented because before she became a royal dancer she was in love with a young boy of her village. The lovers got separated due to her selection as the royal dancer. The separation was very traumatic for the boy and his life was utterly ruined. This haunted Ambapali throughout her life. But she never publicly

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<sup>71</sup>*Ambapali*, BG, Vol 2, p. 62.

<sup>72</sup>*Ambapali*, BG, Vol 2, p. 38-39.

expressed her pain, because it may have interfered with the deliverance of her duties. Finally Ambapali accepts Buddhism and becomes the first women Bhikkhu. This provides her peace and tranquility.

In his historical plays Benipuri is juggling with the themes of peace, non-violence, democracy, nationalism etc. In this he seems to be heavily influenced by Mahatma Gandhi. The overarching influence of Gandhi is also manifested in his play on Buddha-*Tathagat*. He acknowledges in the preface of this play:

When I was writing *Tathagat*, it seemed, I was virtually under the radiance of Mahatma's ethereal presence.<sup>73</sup>

The play- *Tathagat* is a hagiography of Buddha who renounced his family and kingdom to serve humanity. The enlightened Buddha is portrayed as a divine being. He preaches truth, non-violence, and this-worldly approach to life and subscribes the middle path instead of going to the extremes. In fact, Buddha is shown to have postulated all the moral and ethical virtues. However what is striking is that unlike the socialist interpretation of Buddha and Buddhism, as I have shown in the previous section, and contrary to the general and powerful trend in Hindi literature about Buddha or Buddhist society,<sup>74</sup> there is no mention of Buddha as the reformer/philosopher against Brahmanical oppression of the *Varna vyavastha*. Benipuri's Buddha remains disturbingly silent on the issue of varna/caste. In his silence on caste, when juxtaposed with his anxiety on the question of the lower caste origins of his great hero of ancient India- Chandragupta,<sup>75</sup> one can sense a lurking Brahmanical residue. Unlike his early writings, which I have discussed above, there is no overt inclination towards Brahmanism in his later writings (post-1930). His later writings-- his novels, sketches, and political essays stood firmly and ruthlessly against any form of

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<sup>73</sup> *Tathagat*, BG, Vol 4, p.198

<sup>74</sup> There was a powerful trend in Hindi literature on historical themes written by left leaning writers. The Buddhist past was selected in these writings to critique the Brahmanical social order. For instance, see the historical novels of Rahul Sankrityayan, Rangeya Raghav, Yashpal, Acharya Hazari Prasad Dviwedi etc. Acharya Hazari Prasad Dviwedi, *Vanbhatt ki Atmakatha*, Rajkamal, Delhi, 1973. Rahul Sankrityayan, *Volga Se Ganga*, Kitab Mahal, Allahabad, 1946. Yashpal, *Divya*, Lokbharti Prakashan, Allahabad, 1945. For an overview of the portrayal of Buddha and Buddhism in Hindi literature, see Rajesh Sharma, *Hindi Sahitya aur Bauddha. Dharma*. Swaraj Prakashan, Delhi, 1997

<sup>75</sup> Benipuri in the introduction of the play *Vijeta* decries the literary tradition of debunking Chandragupta as a *Shudra*.

social oppression and inequality.<sup>76</sup> However, there was no mention of caste as such and all criticisms were in class terms. This was the general trend amongst most of the socialists that I have discussed.<sup>77</sup> But there is a difference too. The socialist evaded caste only in the context of the present society but criticised it in the context of the past. More importantly, in his private life Benipuri seemed to be genuinely against the caste system. In one of his letters to his son, Jitendra Benipuri he told his son to marry preferably a girl from non-Bhumihar-Brahmin caste.<sup>78</sup>

Like on the question of caste, Benipuri prefers to be silent on the question of medieval/Muslim past. None of his historical writings are from this period. But again in the present context his writing showed that he stood for communal harmony and criticised religious fundamentalism.<sup>79</sup> Besides that he had a great liking for Iqbal's poetry, which he often quoted in his personal diaries. But by and large his overall view of Indian past fell within the framework of the composite Indian culture. This is well testified to by his review of Ramdhari Singh Dinakar's book *Sanskriti ke Char Adhyay*.<sup>80</sup> He seems to have developed a special liking for this book that was written from the same perspective : Indian culture being Hindu culture in its essence.<sup>81</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have tried to unpack some of the symmetries as well as the disjunctions between Benipuri and his fellow socialist intellectuals in their attempt to recuperate a particular vision of 'the Indian past'. The politics of such a re-invention provides important clues to understand not only the socialist politics of

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<sup>76</sup>For instance see his novel *Patiton ke Desh Mein* and his sketches and short stories.eg. *Jhopadi ka Roodan*, *Mangar* etc in which the protagonists are from lower castes. BG, Vol 1. See also his essay *Varga Viheen-Jati Viheen* in *Mashal*, (1949). BG, Vol 3, p. 45-48

Though it must be pointed out that the views of R.M. Lohia, one of the major socialist leaders of the day, held quite different views on the issue of caste. In fact among the socialists then there were two distinct streams of thought. One adhering to Lohia, and eponymously called the Lohiaites whilst the other chose to follow J. P. Narayan and were called the JPites. Benipuri was of the latter creed, and thence his views are different from the Lohiaites.

<sup>78</sup>See letter to J.K. Benipuri, 30 th April, 1957. Private Papers, op.cit.

<sup>79</sup>See his sketch *Subhan Khan*, BG, Vol 1.

<sup>80</sup>See *Nai Dhara*, April, 1956, BG, Vol 1, pp238-241

<sup>81</sup>See 'Sanskriti ke Char Adhyay' by Ramdhari Singh Dinakar, Rajpal and Sons, Delhi, 1946

the period, but also the social milieu from within which these intellectuals were drawn. Benipuri, in this regard, forms an especially revealing example by virtue of his long drawn transition into socialism.

While in his earlier works there is an attempt to relocate present day conflicts in a bygone era, in his later and progressively more avowedly socialist phase a deathly silence greets us on such contentious and uncomfortable issues as caste and sectarian strife. In his latest works, which coincides with the political independence of the country, one finds him grappling with the various contradictions that lie at the heart of the modern state such as the role of violence and its use to the nation, the question of social inequities etc. His attempts to resolve these dilemmas within the over-arching reality of both his situation as well as his ideological commitments, not to mention his beliefs about the literature and the role of the litterateur, lead him to advance some imaginative solutions to these anxieties.

His relocation of these tensions within the personal domain, though symptomatic of several twentieth century intellectuals, is unique in its efforts to establish a moral economy that now had no longer to contend merely with the task of political activism but also had to grapple with the issue of administering a nascent nation and providing ideal citizens for that nation. The extent to which he succeeds in this project, is a matter of judgement, yet his attempts remain crucial to the understanding of the suspicions that confronted both the socialist politics in particular, and perhaps the middle classes in general at the moment of the nation's political independence.

## CHAPTER 3

### BENIPURI'S VIEWS ON LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

In this chapter I discuss the views of Rambriksh Benipuri on various issues involving Hindi language and literature. As an influential figure in the Hindi literary realm of his time Benipuri has written extensively on this issue especially in late 1940's and 1950's when the issue of language and literature was hotly debated and contested. I would situate his views amidst the various contending currents of his times, while underlining the literary *sanskara* of Benipuri himself.

The word *sanskara* carries several layers of meaning. It means primarily: a) to polish, refine; b) refinement of mind and behaviour, hence the making of the culture; c) rite of passage; d) the effect of previous action on mind and behaviour e) influence; f) idea. Generally, *Sanskara* thus indicates an active change or an aspect of a layered mind. The expression literary *sanskar*', current in Hindi suggests a taste, an inclination and its source, i. e. whether it is inherited from one's family, local traditions or tastes, or it is acquired through education, contact with the outer world and with literary trends. It suggests a taste, which settles upon other tastes according to one's individual experiences of life. The notion of *sanskara* then emphasises the creative process of acquiring and combining tastes simultaneously also highlighting the medium of transmission . This also helps to avoid misleading simplification such as 'traditional' and 'modern': not all that was acquired was modern, not all that was inherited was traditional<sup>1</sup>.

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As I have earlier shown, Benipuri's literary *sanskara* was multilayered. His family *sanskara*, inherited at his maternal uncle's place, included Brajbhasa poetry

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<sup>1</sup> Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940*, OUP, Delhi, 2002. pp. 43-44

whether devotional or courtly erotic, that he acquired through reading the texts, listening to oral recitations, *bhajans* and expositions etc.

He acquired *Khariboli sanskara* and the influential models of English, Bengali and Urdu through modern journals and books and translations in his school days.

The influence of reformist or moralist literature was very strong amongst the young students during the *Dwivedi Yug*. The era is named after Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi (1900-1920), the nationalist/ moralist editor of the quality literary journal *Saraswati*. It was in this period that Hindi literature was 'purified' of various literary traditions like 'Urdu' and medieval *Sringar* (erotic) poetry.<sup>2</sup> Benipuri was not an exception to this. However, he was also close to and influenced by the towering litterateur of Bihar, Jagannath Prasad Chaturvedi, who was a great *Brajbhasa* poet and the first president of the Bihar Hindi Sahitya Sammelan (1916).<sup>3</sup> This multi-layered literary *sanskara* of Benipuri, is clearly manifested in his early oeuvre during the Pustak Bhandar days. His children's literature showed the simultaneous existence of pedagogical stories and popular fables enframed within a playful mood. Above all, his other literary pieces included the treatises on Vidyapati and Bihari (i.e. the medieval erotic poets).<sup>4</sup>

The literary *sanskara* and the inherited tastes of Benipuri when confronted with the new ethos of nationalist canons of literature are seen to concretise in a different contour, in his days of ardent nationalism in the Yuvak Sangha. A major shift took place in his views on literature, which also had strong symmetries in his contemporary multi-layered Hindi literary sphere.

Since the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, debates on the meaning and utility of literature had begun to animate the Hindi literary sphere. Hindi journals began to both expressly internalise Orientalist stereotypes as well as imbue literature with a 'national spirit'.<sup>5</sup> This debate continued and became more intense in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There was a

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<sup>2</sup> For a fuller discussion on M.P. Dwivedi, see Orsini, op. cit., Chapter 2, p. 125-74.

<sup>3</sup> See *Bihar ki Sahityik Pragati*, Bihar Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Patna, 1956, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

<sup>5</sup> See Vasudha. Dalmia, *The Nationalisation of Hindu Tradition*, OUP, 1997, Chapter V, pp. 222 to 237 and Vinay Dharwadker, 'Orientalism and the Study of Indian Literature', in C. A. Breckendridge and Peter Van

general consensus that the nation required a new kind of literature. The *bhandar* (treasure) of Hindi literature was assessed and selected with this new urgency. While in the 19<sup>th</sup> century this process of selection had been started it was more eclectic and included the *brajhasa* poetry while excluding its 'Urdu' or Islamic heritage<sup>6</sup>. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century even the *Brajhasa* poetry, especially the erotic *sringar* poetry was under attack, albeit not uncontested<sup>7</sup>. It was argued that in the age of nationalism and for that matter under the then political reality of colonialism, the nation needed a new kind of literature to reawaken the people. Hence what followed was the rejection of those traditions of literature (such as *Brajhasa* poetry) which were thought to be immoral and effeminate and hence not fit enough to infuse people with masculine vigour. This was sought to be achieved by establishing the basic canon that literature should be socially relevant. Literature had a commitment, it was argued, to change and improve the tastes of the people. Further, every epoch was said to have a *Yug Dharma* i.e. 'the ideal distillation of the tastes of the people' which both society and literature had to comprehend. It was also said that literature was a mirror, through which society perceived its true self. Hence the litterateur was the vanguard and the moral leader of society.<sup>8</sup>

During his Yuvak Sangh days, Benipuri wrote, an article entitled '*Sahitya aur Yug Dharma*'<sup>9</sup> which reflects his ideal of a masculinist Hindu nationalist. It begins with the proposition that literature is an expression of 'national spirit',

What indeed is literature---but a reflection of a community's heart (*Jatiya Hriday*). So if you want to hear the beating of a national heart (*Rashtriya hriday ki dhadkan*); if you must know if it is still strong or weak and emaciated; if you must know if it is still healthy or diseased; if you must know if it is courageous and brave or cowardly and unmanly (*kapurush*), you must turn to listen to its literature.<sup>10</sup>

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der Veer, eds., *Orientalism and the Post-Colonial Predicament*, Pennsylvania University Press, Philadelphia, 1993, pp. 158-85.

<sup>6</sup> Vasudha Dalmia, op.cit, Chapter 3, *Hindi as the National Language of the Hindus*, pp. 146-221.

<sup>7</sup> See Orsini, op.cit, Chapter 2. She discusses how the moralist puritanical attack on Brajhasa poetry was defended by the people like Padma Singh Sharma, pp.125-74.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pp. 125-74.

<sup>9</sup> *Yuvak*, June 1929, pp. 294-296

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p.294.

From here it proceeds to cite examples from the canons of the Vedic era or from the days of the Imperial Guptas to situate an age of cultural decline in the medieval times, when the Indians (read Hindus) were defeated by the invading Muslims. He criticises the erotic court poets of the medieval era drawing the people into the ocean of immorality and vulgarity instead of infusing them with vigour and valour. Even Vidyapati and Surdas are found to be hindering the progress of the nation. He is uncomfortable even of the image of Krishna as a philanderer and blames Surdas for not projecting the alternative image of the Chakra-wielding Krishna. Finally, he comes to the contemporary political situation and decries the fact that even at this critical juncture, this sort of immoral poetry continues to be composed. In an era 'when our nation and culture are being destroyed' he advocates a 'heroic literature'.

At this stage Benipuri's idea of literature is in tandem with the political and cultural ideals, it selectively privileges aspects of the ancient literary heritage of the Sanskrit literature while the whole corpus of devotional and courtly poems were discarded except that of Tulsidas' (moralist) *Bhakti* literature. Even Kabir's oeuvre could not find its place in this project. Although the relevance of literature to society and for that matter 'nation' or 'people' was accepted, the category of 'people' remained vague and amorphous. That is if we look into the matter of 'what constitutes the nation' for Benipuri, we find that it could only include the upper caste/ class/ Hindu/ male.<sup>11</sup>

It is after 1930 that Benipuri's conception of literature shows a sign of shift towards socialist ideas. Consequently, the conception of 'what constitute the nation' also broadened. His novels and short stories had the peasants and the labourers as protagonists from the 1930s onwards, and, we find the use of socialist images for instance, viewing social injustice in class terms. It has been argued that 'peasant as subject' emerged in the Hindi literary sphere in the 1910s when poetry started being written on the plight of the impoverished rural society and consequently the peasantry.<sup>12</sup> But the heart-rending depiction implied the notion that the pitiful sight of the peasant's plight would be enough

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<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed analysis of his social and political views, see Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

<sup>12</sup> Veer Bharat Talwar, op. cit. and Francesca Orsini, op. cit. pp. 322-40.



to shake the affluent town-dwellers out of their stupor and effect a change. Further, with this sort of depiction went the championing of the simple life of the peasantry in contrast to the wasteful town-life, thereby making them the truest representatives of India. This again hid the hardship of the life of the peasant in a moral guise. However, the articles and essays made the peasants economic and political subjects in their own right after 1917 (i.e. the Russian Revolution). A greater awareness is shown in the 1920s during the Gandhian emphasis on mass movements. But it is in the 1930s that the arguments and vocabulary of the peasant issues is seen to become markedly socialist. Unlike the earlier epoch, the new socialist realism, attempted to make a vocabulary and idiom available to literature within which the subaltern could emerge as a protagonist or actor rather than as a theme.<sup>13</sup>

Thus Benipuri was one of the earliest Hindi writers after Premchand who deployed socialist themes and idioms to represent the miseries and the oppression of the peasantry, from early 1930s. Even before the formal organisation of the All India Progressive Writers' Association (hereafter AIPWA) in Lucknow, Benipuri's novels and collection of short stories written between 1930 and 1932 depicted zamindari oppression and ruthlessly attacked it. For instance, the story *Kahin Dhoop, Kahin Chhaya* depicted the striking contrast between the palace of the zamindar pompously celebrating his daughter's marriage and the house of an impoverished old woman whose son had been brutally assaulted by the zamindar and his men for not doing *begar* (forced labour).

It was six years later that the AIPWA was born and it consolidated this trend. This new trend or movement in literature, which was influenced by socialist ideas, was named *Pragativad* or progressivism in literature. Benipuri was amongst the ardent supporters of this literary project. Although there were already several trends present in the Hindi literature especially of the 1930s, the platform for this movement was prepared by some young Indian Marxist students in London as part of the worldwide movement of the

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<sup>13</sup> Orsini, Ibid.

writers/ artists against fascism and imperialism held in Paris in 1934, namely, the International Congress of Writers.<sup>14</sup>

When its first conference was held in Lucknow it was supported by the left leaning politicians like Jawaharlal Nehru and Narendra Dev, and Premchand presided over the session. However this was initially supported by only the younger crop of writers, among whom Benipuri was a prominent one. The agenda of the AIPWA had a great impact on his views as well. Benipuri's article written in 1939 entitled '*Nai Disha*' closely follows the agenda of the AIPWA.

While accepting the earlier relations between the literature and society that I have outlined above, the new vision also sought to alter conceptions of literature in the light of the current political developments. In doing so, it made use of Marxist categories of analysis. This shift whereby older literary canons are subverted to a Marxist reading of socio-political realities is what maps out the difference between the new and the earlier vision of literature subscribed to by Benipuri.

Assessing the literary heritage, it was argued that Indian literature after the destruction of the ancient civilisation (as if everything was alright with the ancient culture) especially in the last 200 years had taken refuge to mysticism and destruction and become devoid of reason. This was ascribed to its association with and the control of worth by the conservative ruling elites. Further, it was argued that the decline was still underway. It was said that even with due respect to the best traditions of India the decadent aspects should be ruthlessly criticised. That is, history or the past was to be an eye-opener so that a new forward-looking society was to be built. The respect to tradition and past should never become an excuse for preserving retrogressive tendencies. It was proposed that the new literature must focus on the basic realities of life, economic and political inequality and represent the grievances and struggles of the common people by infusing a 'revolutionary spirit' in the wake of the changes that indicated the coming of a

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<sup>14</sup> For early years of AIPWA, see Carlo Cipola , '*The AIPWA: The Early Phases*', in his edited book *Marxist influences on South Asian Literature*, Chankya publication, Delhi, 1988. pp 1-41.

new era (socialist society). It was this kind of literature; it is said, representing one and all that would be the best and the most beautiful one.<sup>15</sup>

So a picture of pain and exploitation must be followed by a picture of self-assertion by the subalterns. Benipuri worked with this formula, for instance, the protagonist of his title sketch *Lal Tara* depicts not only the impoverishment and plight of the small cultivator but also underlines his anger and class-consciousness. Benipuri's Mangar in *Mati Ki Moortein* is an agricultural labourer. He is shown as a self-respecting, honest and hard working rural labourer, whose situation becomes pitiable when he becomes old and unable to work in the field. Yet he never begs for charity. His sketch *Charwaha* is a sensitive and hard-hitting portrayal of the economic inequality of rural society showing the plight of the disorganised labourer- the cattle herder who had to survive on the meat of the dead animals.<sup>16</sup>

However, the radicalism about the present gets tempered whilst dealing with societies of antiquity. Benipuri seemed to be uncomfortable with the class analysis of ancient society and evades the social issues therein.<sup>17</sup> In fact, this is in a way related to the premise of 'the' ancient Indian culture and literature as great and golden with the medieval age being a stark contrast. This view of culture and literature led to the discarding of the medieval literary tradition as decadent. Embedded in this, was the masculine and puritanical view of culture and literature that despised the medieval devotional literature, especially the *sringar* or erotic poetry.

This disrespect towards medieval literature may not necessarily be linked with, or the result of, the dislike towards Islamic culture. For even people like Sajjad Zaheer and Premchand shared the same feelings. For instance, Raghupat Sahay Firaq Gorakhpuri had friendly arguments with Premchand because the latter did not like the love poetry in

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<sup>15</sup> See the agenda of the AIPWA published in the *Hans*, (1936) Appendix I *Pragativad aur Samanantar Sahitya*, Swaraj Prakashan, Delhi, 1979. Rambriksh Benipuri, *Nai Disha*, (1939) in Rambriksh Benipuri Private Papers. NMML.

<sup>16</sup> All his oeuvre cited above is collected in BG, Vol I. *Mati Ki Moortein* and *Charwaha* were written between 1940-50. the former being written in 1940-41, while the latter was written between 1948-50.

<sup>17</sup> This is discussed in 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter in detail.

Urdu. Premchand wrote in a letter to a well-known Urdu writer and his friend, Imtiaz Ali Taz,

I wish to see literature masculine, for I do not care for femininity in any of its manifestations. That is why I do not like the songs of Tagore. This must be some congenial fault, about which I can do little...<sup>18</sup>

The critique of the medieval literary canon and its feudal social moorings, therefore cut across the religious affiliations of the writers. Benipuri's core idea on the nature and purpose of literature remained the same. But organisationally he was no longer with the '*Pragativadi Andolan*' or the 'progressivist' movement of the All India Progressive Writers Association. Rather, he became a bitter critic of it after the Quit India Movement of 1942. The AIPWA, since its very inception, had been led and dominated by the Communist intellectuals like Sajjad Zaheer, Mulk Raj Anand, Shivdan Singh Chauhan etc. At one point it had got the support of writers of all hues who sympathised with its progressive agenda. Its left-leaning agenda was quite subtle in the sense that it followed the agenda more or less of the united front politics of the left—supporting the national movement led by the Congress while simultaneously seeking and working for the incorporation of the leftist agenda. But this situation changed after 1941 when the USSR was attacked by Hitler. Subsequently the Communist Party of India (hereafter CPI) opposed the Quit India movement and supported the British according to the 'People's War' line. Despite some differences among the AIPWA members, the official stand of the organisation followed the line of the CPI. This led to a major dissatisfaction among many, especially Congress Socialists like Benipuri who viewed this move as a 'national betrayal'.<sup>19</sup> It is because of this reason that Benipuri became a critic of *Pragativad*, which according to him was becoming the private preserve of the Communists.

Benipuri articulated his grievances against this particular brand of progressivism which was dominating the AIPWA, in terms of the upper class attitude and alien nature of the whole leadership. Rekha Awasthi, in her book *Pragativad Aur Samanantar Sahitya*

<sup>18</sup> See Amrit Ray 'Premchand: A Life, PPH, 1982, p.46.

<sup>19</sup> For a largely objective assessment of the progressive movement in Hindi literature see K. S. Chauhan, *Pragativadi Andolan ka Itihas* Neha Prakashan, Delhi, 1985.

rather superficially reads Benipuri's criticism of *Pragativad* and brands it simply as the 'malice of a socialist towards a communist'<sup>20</sup>. She does not go into the roots of his criticism, which was not against the progressive literary trends or movements as such, but was directed towards a particular brand led by the Communists. Benipuri himself used the term *Pragativad* for the Communist led literary movement, but she reads it as being against the whole literary project.

Benipuri in his article *Pragativad Aur Samajvad* clearly articulates his views against this particular brand of progressive writers and their writings, which planned and organised the AIPWA as part of the world-wide movement against Fascism. He writes that it got the support of the writers like Premchand who were already writing for the cause of the common people and had a grip on the pulse of the Indian masses. Yet soon this progressive trend in literature became the fashion, and amongst the ranks of these authors were many, who were hypocritical about their avowed beliefs. That is, even whilst their personal lives were full of leisure and pleasure, they talked about the poverty of the toiling masses, in the name of Marxism. This pseudo-progressivism, according to him, did much harm to literature. In the meantime the Communist leaders of the AIPWA, who were the puppets of Stalin, worked against the interest of the country and ridiculed the progressivism in literature by firstly debunking the World War led by the British as an 'Imperialist War', just because Britain and Russia were not on the same side as yet. Subsequently, they reversed upon their position, once Hitler attacked Russia in 1941, to call it a 'People's war'. To Benipuri progressivism died in the month of August 1942 when the leaders of the AIPWA supported the British and opposed the Quit India Movement.<sup>21</sup>

So what is decried is not the alien provenance of ideas that guided the progressive movement; but the alien attitude of the Communist intellectuals who overlooked the Indian reality and followed the Russian dictates. For unlike Premchand (who had already died in October 1936, i.e. two months after the organisation of the AIPWA) among

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<sup>20</sup> Rekha Awasthi, op. cit., pp. 18-19.

<sup>21</sup> Available in Rambriksh Benipuri Private Papers, NMML.

others, most of them were upper class intellectuals. This upper class and aristocratic social origin was a matter of fact<sup>22</sup> that had been noticed by even the doyen of Hindi poetry, Suryakant Tripathi 'Nirala', who was a non-political litterateur. Pointing out this fact is not to doubt the sincerity of the people like Sajjad Zaheer and Mulk Raj Anand, but to highlight the general perception of a host of authors. This criticism gained currency within the left leaning circle of intellectuals. For instance, in the article *Sahityakar Ki Samasyayen* by Sitaram Jaiswal, it had been written, after emphasising the virtues and necessities of progressive literature, that,

Some progressive writers write whilst sitting on couches of velvet, and with expensive pens. Those progressive writers who meet the first rays of the new sun at ten in the morning, shall they talk of a Red Dawn and a Golden Beginning? It is because of them that the honest amongst us remains trapped in the web of poverty and fails to reach the vantage point from whence he can speak his mind.<sup>23</sup>

Thus Benipuri's attack on *pragativad* or progressivism was about the growing narrowness of this literary project, which was to him the result of both excessive influence of the immature and dependent vision of the communist intellectuals and the hypocrisy on the part of urban middle class writers. The progressive credentials of Benipuri cannot be doubted because outside the realm of this polemics that addressed the AIPWA, his views remained in favour of progressive literature throughout the 1940s and 1950s.

Arguing against the proposition of art for art's sake, Benipuri writes that 'this slogan had already died in Europe' and if the

'litterateurs are arguing for it today it is because they have no clear direction ... this is an infantile mentality. Literature is the product of society ... we litterateurs have not come from heaven – we are not a special species. Like simple ironsmiths and goldsmiths we are the craftsmen of this society and our creation is for this society... our country is standing at the threshold of a new era. This era will be great so

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<sup>22</sup> See Hafeez Malik, 'The Marxist Literary Movement in India and Pakistan' in *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXVI: No. 4, August 1967

<sup>23</sup> See *Janvani*, April 1948.

should be its literature. And we writers have to adapt ourselves to create that great literature by borrowing from the western counter-parts.’ Arguing strongly in favour of art or literature with a social purpose, he says that

the literary production of a literature is not merely writing, but it also acts as a spade, a knife and a broomstick. The job of a litterateur is to clean filth, to plough the barren land and dissect the festered wound (of society). It is then that the creation of a healthy society would be possible and this will be followed by the construction of an aesthetically pleasing literature.<sup>24</sup>

Further, in an article *Naya Desh: Naya Samaj : Naya Sahitya* Benipuri visualises the remaking of a new Indian nation along socialist lines. Though one is at once forced to see that this vision of his largely utopian, and hence the place and role that he assigns to literature in this vision of his, is also somewhat utopian. He speaks, eloquently of a literature for the people and produced directly by the people themselves, thereby putting an end to the vanguard role played by the middle class literati. He writes:

Hark! That old country that we had died on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August 1947. On its ashes is being established a new nation. That old nation that was tottering, haggard and senile, after years of bondage and slavery, today has been laid to rest forever. Because in this new epoch, we need a new nation. A new nation, that is youthful, energetic and full of life... A new nation, that will have the ability, the courage, the discrimination and the potential to establish a new social order...It cannot be that nation gains independence, but society labours in bondage. The nation lost its independence because the old society was also in chains....The old society must be exiled to those worlds where there persists the difference between man and man, in terms of race (*varna*, may also mean caste), economy, shelter and development...And we shall build here a new society. A society in which humanity is free and happy. The new society today is searching for dreams to implant its foundation upon, and who shall supply these dreams ...? The new literature, that shall belong to all and sundry and not to a particular caste, class or individual. This new literature shall be eternal and beyond the ravages of time. Today you are proud of a single Kalidas, a single Tulsidas or a single Rabindranath---this new literature shall present you with a million such in every village and in every street. Confronted by their talent the talents of these litterateurs shall be a mere pale shadow, a ruse. By saying this, I do not wish to insult these great men. They shall form the foundation upon

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<sup>24</sup> See *Sahitya ki Upeksha*, BG, Vol. 3, pp. 108-9. Originally written in *Nai Dhara*, September 1954.

which shall stand. Can glory of the mansion ever detract from the glory of the foundation?<sup>25</sup>

Thus Benipuri's support for the progressive art influenced by the socialist ideas but he seemed to be totally against the direct political intervention in literature. He accepted that literature cannot be apolitical but because politics is an integral part of life. In one of his essays entitled *Sahitya Aur Rajniti*, he writes,

Is it enough to merely clamour that politics is evil? Today's political institutions affect our entire life. Neither is this the old world, nor is the politics that about which it was once said that 'whoever may be the king, it does not concern us'. The world has changed, and the litterateur will have to keep pace. His creations today must have the greater common good at heart, how then can he stay away from the predicament of the people. If he does not do this, then it shall point towards his cowardice and not his creativity...It is a sheer misconception that politics is an impediment to good literature. Good literature can only be born when the writer is incessantly inspired by the tumults of his heart. This obviously can only be fired either by love or the social struggles for which the best forum is politics. Further this is sheer misconception that politics hinders literature. A good literature can be produced only when the writer keeps on getting inspiration from tumult within his heart and this can be achieved either in love or in social struggle for which the best forum is politics.<sup>26</sup>

While Benipuri remained committed to the progressive current of literature and his views remained that of a socialist, his disassociation with the AIPWA was basically due to its control by the CPI, which he opposed due to the reasons mentioned above. In February 1947, Benipuri and his socialist friends of *Janvani* group prepared a plan to organise New Culture Society or *Nav Sanskriti Sangh*. Its rough plan and agenda were published in the socialist Journal *Janvani* that stated:

Till now our work had been more or less confined to politics. Rhetorically, towards cultural reformation, we have done precious little. *In the field of literature there is a Progressive Writers Association but it has tied itself to a particular political party.* The reason for this probably lies in the fact that its progressive principles instead of being based on the real social economic circumstances, are confined to merely the fulfilment

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<sup>25</sup> BG, Vol 3, pp. 103-106.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. pp. 315-316.



of the political aims of a particular party. Our comrades are working desperately in different regions such as Maharashtra. But it is necessary to act in concert. Towards this, Benipuri and we have chalked out a plan of organising New Culture Society or in Hindi *Nav Sanskriti Sangh*, of which Benipuri will be the convenor. Briefly its aim will be: to develop our culture or different aspects of culture in a new direction so that our social life would be reorganised on the basis of liberty equality and humanity and could be aesthetically beautiful and pleasing.... It is necessary to make it clear that this cultural organisation is not linked to any political party. At least, it will not be *controlled* by any political organisation.<sup>27</sup>

The first conference of this New Culture Society or *Nav Sanskriti Sangh* was held in Banaras in February 1949 and it was presided over by Acharya Hazari Prasad Dwivedi who prepared its manifesto which was little different from that of the AIPWA's agenda. It interpreted the Indian society and culture in socialist terms and advocated the establishment of a new society for its realisation invoked the need of a new literature.<sup>28</sup> Benipuri was made the president of the New Culture Society of Patna in 1949.<sup>29</sup>

The endeavours to establish another cultural forum after disassociating with and criticising the AIPWA, had its roots in the strong aversion of the Indian Socialist against the Indian Communists. As a participant in the Cultural Freedom Conference in Paris, in 1952, Benipuri, writes in his diary (later published as *Udte Chalo, Udte Chalo*),

At the Conference I got an opportunity to speak to a few of the other representatives as well... most of them seemed mortally scared of the deadly demon they call either Communism or Russia. The urge to redress and avenge the brutal oppression that the Russian autocracy has inflicted upon the community of artists in the countries beyond the Iron Curtain, is amply visible amongst most of them. This is a laudable impulse. Yet before going any further, we must wait and see why did such a situation come, to pass and what indeed is the right path out of this. It would be a blunder to resist the established autocracy with a new autocracy. The only true path is the one of Democratic Socialism, the future welfare of the world as a whole lies in the realisation of what we in India have understood and propagated as the vision of Democratic Socialism.... Unfortunately in India today democracy is understood

<sup>27</sup> See editorial of *Janvani*, February 1947. Emphasis mine.

<sup>28</sup> For the agenda of the New Culture Society see Acharya Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, *Nav Sanskriti Sangh ka Prastavit Ghoshna Patra, Janvani*, March 1949.

<sup>29</sup> See Letter from the Ministry of Information, Prague, Czechoslovakia in Private Papers, op. cit.

merely as the blind support of Capitalism. Therefore whenever we speak of the need to protect 'democracy' it is confused as the support of Capitalism. Further, since in Europe Capitalism is in its death throes, capitalism is popularly seen as being synonymous to American Capitalism, and our efforts are seen as being an expression of support for American Capitalism. The Communists further help perpetuate this confusion. Therefore at the Conference, I suggested that a few of the European promoters of this movement come to India and directly acquaint the people with the literature they have been producing within this new and democratic vision. I also took the opportunity to acquaint them in turn to the malafide confusion that the Communists are spreading amongst the educated sections in India.<sup>30</sup>

However for all his progressive views about literature, Benipuri stood for a strong moralist version of it. This is not only because of his view on *sringar ras* as essentially corrupting but also because he was bitterly critical of a strand of the progressive realism, which nakedly portrayed sex or sexual desire without the guise of morality. In his criticism Benipuri said:

Slowly but surely this [progressive realism] is moving towards vulgarity. In the name of peasants and workers, their women folk are being portrayed nakedly. In name of the progressivism the dastardly libido of the lower middle class is being covered by the canopy of art. Even whilst Marx himself, would have trembled to see the vulgar discussion even in the presence of children. His descendents, believe that it is their duty to transgress the boundary of vulgarity in front of their fathers too... nay, in socialism the place of literature is a pious and exalted one.<sup>31</sup>

It was not as if his morality inhabited the realm of artistic creations alone, but indeed it touched upon the very life of the artist. Benipuri had no patience for the 'debauched' artist. For him an artist ought to be as unimpeachable in his art as in his life. Writing on the occasion of the heinous murder of Devdutt, a young artist slain for his illicit love affair, Benipuri writes:

This commerce betwixt the artist and love has been a long standing one. Artists are essentially sensitive souls, and this sensitivity is slippery in the extreme. An artist's feet, has often been known to slip on the treacherous and slippery terrain of beauty. It is thus, that he falls headlong into the

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<sup>30</sup> BG, Vol. 4, pp.

<sup>31</sup> See miscellaneous writings of Benipuri private papers op.cit.

abyss. Yet, is it justified for an artist to knowingly fall into this dark abyss?...People tend to look upon the artist as being made of wax. One who would melt at the slightest warmth. This is the greatest shame and scandal of an artists life. Why should all sensitivity be inscribed in weakness and not be found in strength? Especially where at stake is the very issue of being or non-being? I recall an incident from my own life. Just once, and that too, for only a few days had I been smitten by love. But that was it. From that day I awoke, and from then onwards I have assiduously avoided the company of women. Wherever I glimpsed the seductions to slip from my path, I avoided it.<sup>32</sup>

Benipuri thus clearly holds that the writer ought to be a restrained and selfless individual. It is from this selfless restraint that the writer derives his right to morally lead society.

Further Benipuri's treatment of literary heritage or culture remained largely of a Hindu- Hindi kind. This is argued here not because of his views on literature that remained unchanged, but more so because even when he talked about the modern Indian litterateurs or iconicised them he could invoke the example of Rabindra Nath Tagore of Bengali but did not talk about Urdu literature in his public stand especially when addressing the Hindi literary circle. So he accepted a split between Hindi and Urdu literary spheres that the conservative Hindi votaries advocated. This stands in contrast to the fact that he personally admired the poetry of Iqbal and Josh Malihabadi and had translated their works during his long stay in prison in the first half of the 1940s. This kind of vacillation, as we shall see, seems to be visible on the question of language in the 1940s and 50s when the debate over Hindi-Hindustani controversy became more pronounced.<sup>33</sup>

## II

It is a well argued fact that Hindi language and literature had been at the centre of intense arguments and discussion about the progress and reform of the country since the nineteenth century: 'the progress of one's own language is the root of all progress',

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<sup>32</sup> See his Diary dated 19<sup>th</sup> June 1950. BG, Vol. 8, p.19

<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately we do not know Benipuri's views on language in the period before 1940, so we will discuss on the basis of his views in the 1940s and 50s.

Bhartendu Harishchandra had said. It has been argued by several scholars how such arguments were instrumental in creating a cultural identification with the language over a wide geopolitical area in opposition to English and Urdu and the multiple linguistic *sanskara* like *Brajbhasha* and others.<sup>34</sup> According to Orsini, the growing support for Hindi and its politicisation in the 1920s on the eve of Gandhi's nationalism changed the context of the language issue quite dramatically.<sup>35</sup> Suddenly the question of language (*rashtrabhasha*) appeared plausible and even urgent with the support of Gandhi and the Congress as *rashtrbhasha*. What had been so far a provincial contest between Hindi and Urdu now became a matter of national politics.

That is to say that with the active support of Gandhi and the Congress, Hindi's claim to be the national language became quite powerful, but it also posed some intractable problems. The cultural baggage of Hindi as the language of the Hindus and its opposition to Urdu or the Muslims became quite prominent. Although Urdu was far behind Hindi in the race between the two for acquiring status of national language (*rashtrabhasaha*), the language controversy acquired a new form of Hindi versus Hindustani—Hindustani being a sort of compromise formula which enabled the shared legacy of the Indo-Muslim culture and based on the notion that there is no difference between Hindi and Urdu and so it should be called Hindustani and could be written in any of the script—Devanagri and Persian.

Although the language controversy had quite old roots in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, since when Hindi developed as the language of the Hindus, it was accepted by Gandhi as *rashtrabhasha* as against English in 1918, when he was made the President of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan. For Gandhi, Hindi was the language of village India that cut across the divide of literature and scripts, and he called it Hindi-Hindustani or simply Hindustani

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<sup>34</sup> Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalisation of Hindu Tradition*, OUP, 1987; Christopher King, *One Language, Two Scripts*, OUP, 1994.; Francesca Orsini, op. cit. , Christopher King, 'Forging A New Linguistic Identity' in S. Freitag edited *Culture and Power in Benaras*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1989. pp. 179-202.

<sup>35</sup> Orsini, op.cit, p.125.

whenever he felt that the point about script needed to be made clearly, particularly in the increasingly communalised 1930s.<sup>36</sup>

Despite the fact that Gandhi's view differed substantially from the Sammelan, initially the Sammelan quite happily accepted Gandhi's definition. Probably it was only too happy to find such an influential and popular patron. Indeed, it put Hindi more urgently on the Congress agenda. Yet Gandhi's view of Hindi-Hindustani went completely against the fifty years of effort of Hindi press and literary associations. Gandhi was again invited to preside over the Sammelan meeting in 1935 to repeat the success of 1918 and to enhance Hindi's claim within the Congress. Gandhi instead made the Sammelan accept formally his Hindi- Hindustani definition. This sparked off a great controversy and the Hindi world was divided into two camps. Ultimately, the conservative Hindi faction was triumphant. But for our purpose what is important is to look into this divided camp and to locate Benipuri in this controversy.<sup>37</sup>

In the divided camp of Hindi, most of the National Congress leaders like Nehru, Rajendra Prasad and Narendra Dev favoured Hindustani in order not to alienate the Muslims, while the regional politicians and Hindi activists like Purusottamdas Tandon and Sampurnanda favoured the Hindi camp and hence opposed Gandhi's stand. In this kind of situation Benipuri's attitude towards this issue was quite interesting and full of ambivalence. He neither came out openly against the supporters of Hindi nor firmly stood for Hindustani. By and large, his views on this issue remained that Hindi had the strength to be open and accommodating.

Benipuri's own literary and cultural *sanskara* made him partial towards Hindi. As I have pointed out earlier, Benipuri's views of Indian culture was largely a Hindu culture. A product of the Dwivedi era (1900-20) his own literary *sanskara* was also of largely Khariboli Hindi. But simultaneously he could not keep up with the orthodox Hindi people who favoured completely sanskritized Hindi.

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<sup>36</sup> David Lelyveld, 'The fate of Hindustani: Colonial Knowledge and the Project of a National Language' in Breckenridge and Van de Veer eds op. cit.

<sup>37</sup> I have heavily relied on Orsini op.cit.

When the debate over Hindi-Hindustani controversy was going on and Hindi's supporters were openly criticizing Gandhi's role and opinion, Benipuri came up in defence of Gandhi. Lamenting Gandhi's indifference towards the Sammelan he defended him on the ground that it is due to him that Hindi acquired national prominence vis-a-vis English and was made acceptable in non-Hindi speaking areas through the organization that he established, the Rashtrabhasha Prachar Sabha, Wardha and the Hindustani Prachar Sabha for the propagation of Hindi in Central Province and the South respectively.

In *Janvani* Benipuri wrote:

These days Hindi wallahs have made too much criticism of Gandhiji regarding the Hindi-Hindustani controversy. But we often forget that without Gandhiji there was little possibility of making Hindi acceptable as the Rashtrabhasha ...when English was dominating our public life, it was Gandhiji who secured the prestigious place for Hindi in our public life... but when Hindi came into its full bloom in public life the Hindi-Hindustani controversy cropped up. In this controversy the forces opposing Gandhiji were representing the voice of the reactionaries. Even the people like honourable Tandonji were in this gang.....they harassed Gandhiji but his love for Hindi did not vanish from his heart... it is the influence of the great personality of Gandhiji that other linguistic regions (Bengal and Maharashtra) accepted Hindi as the Rashtrabhasha... but what about those who always thought against the interests of Hindi. If we don't understand their intrigues then it is the height of foolishness.<sup>38</sup>

However, his defence of Gandhi on the question of Hindustani did not mean that he was strictly in favour of Hindustani. Despite being the member of Gandhi's Hindi organization,<sup>39</sup> he selectively conformed with Gandhi's view of language. Gandhi favoured the language of rural India written in both scripts, Nagari and Persian. But Benipuri, like his other socialist comrades, favoured Devnagari script but advocated the language of popular usage. For instance Acharya Narendra Dev in an interview to the press on 18<sup>th</sup> August, 1948 strongly argued:

I am for Hindustani written in the Nagari script. As a matter of fact I stand for the abolition of all the provincial scripts... to promote interprovinciality

<sup>38</sup> See R. Benipuri, *Gandhiji Aur Hindi, Janvani*, March 1948.

<sup>39</sup> See the letter to Benipuri from the convenor of the Hindustani Prachar Sabha dated 24/03/51 urging him to arrange and organize the tour, lecture and meeting of a senior Hindi activist of the South with the northern counterparts. Also letter from the office of the *Rashtrabhasha Prachar Samiti*, Wardha dated 27/08/51 to Benipuri requesting him to reach Wardha urgently. See private papers, op .cit.

and to know each others' literature... We shall have to revise some of our old notions and have to give up the contempt for the language of the masses... As modern Hindi has a tendency to become laden with Sanskrit words, it is all the more necessary for Hindi writers of note to develop a new style of writing which is as close to the people as possible. Only such a style could claim to be natural and will start a new trend in our national literature... I purposely call this language Hindustani because present day Hindi and Urdu suffer from artificiality and are the products of middle class culture.<sup>40</sup>

Much in tune with Narendra Dev, Benipuri also stood for Devnagari script and Hindi consisting of popular vocabulary as against both Sanskrit laden Hindi as well as what he calls as manufactured Hindustani. Presiding over the 22<sup>nd</sup> conference of Bihar Hindi Sahitya Sammelan at Arrah on 21 January 1951 Benipuri spoke for the Hindi language to be constructed on the basis of people's vocabulary. He said:

Language and literature cannot be made in the Secretariat. It is made on the tongue of the people. Yes, on the thick rough surface of people's tongue. Barring some scientific terms, the millions of words are scattered in the countryside. Our peasants, carpenters weavers ironsmith, fishermen have the treasure of technical words. By borrowing and utilising them we can enrich our language. But, instead of paying attention towards them, we are trapped in the yoke of Sanskrit and English. Why does this happen? This is quite clear that it is the people who bring revolution but those who rule do not come from amongst the people rather they are only their representatives. With the gaining of power their aristocratic pride comes to the surface and starts imposing their life style and their language upon them. Why should they bother to follow the rustic fellows?<sup>41</sup>

Arguing against the Sanskrit laden Hindi Benipuri wrote:

Hindi is the language of the common people and those who are divorcing it from its popular base and making it a language of the gods (i. e. sanskritic) ... they should remember that this king of Hindi will meet the same fate as that of *Devavani* (i.e. sanskritic) which had to confine itself in the sky or in the senile scriptures.<sup>42</sup>

Thus Benipuri opposed the sanskritised Hindi and advocated for the language which is closer to the masses and above all this is amply manifested from his own writings also. His literature seldom shows the usage of *Tatsam* or the Hindi words with

<sup>40</sup> See *Selected Works of Acharya Narendra Dev*, Vol. 3 NMML p. 46.

<sup>41</sup> See *Bihar ki Sahityik Pragati*, Bihar Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Patna, 1956. pp. 245-6.

<sup>42</sup> See editorial entitled *Mahapurushon ki Jayantiyan* reproduced in BG, Vol. 3, p. 290.

its pure Sanskrit roots. Even the literature with historical plots reflects little use of sanskritised vocabulary. This is however in sharp contrast to the famous historical works by the Hindi writers like Hazari Prasad Dwivedi and even Yashpal (one of the leading figures of progressivist literary movement). For instance, in their writings, respectively *Vanbhatt Ki Atmkatha* and *Divya*, one can find strong echoes of Sanskrit laden Hindi vocabulary.

However, for all his sincerity to popular Hindi and his association with his attitude towards Hindustani is quite perplexing, especially after 1950 when Hindi triumphed in the constituent assembly. Despite his association with the organization of Hindustani, he blamed that Hindustani being propagated by Dr. Tarachand and Pt. Sundarlal among others (all were lieutenants of Gandhi's Hindustani team) is manufactured language.<sup>43</sup> Whether it was manufactured or not is important, but Benipuri's attitude towards it was quite dubious in general.

In his editorial of *Himalay* in 1946 written on the opinion of Kaka Kalelkar—a strong proponent of Hindustani and close aid of Gandhi—his position seems to be vacillating. Article suggests that Benipuri agrees with the opinion of Kalelkar on the question that Sanskrit had been the language of elites while Prakrit was that of the masses in ancient times and that the growing sanskritization of Hindi is condemnable, but he prefers to avoid the claims of Kalelkar that “Hindustani represents the voice of protest against the move making Hindi laden with Sanskrit by the scholars”.<sup>44</sup>

After 1950, Benipuri's attitude towards Hindustani seems to have changed. In the March- April issue of *Nai Dhara* he attacks Dr. Tarachand, one of the strong supporters of Hindustani – for wrongly and jealously interpreting the history of evolution of Hindi in his book without slightly maintaining any thing substantial about the book, *Urdu Sahitya ka Itihas*.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> See editorial of *Himalay* in BG, Vol. 3 p.253

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>45</sup> See BG. Vol. 3, p.281



In the June 1954 issue of *Nai Dhara* he attacked Pandit Sunderlal – a famous activist of Hindustani and close aid of Gandhi in his language movement – as the enemy of Hindi. He wrote

...Pandit Sunderlalji is playing the role of an enemy of Hindi by digging the grave of Hindustani. After the acceptance of Hindi as *rashtrabhasa* in the Constitution, Hindustani had died its natural death. But, there are people like Sunderlalji who enjoy digging up the graves. Why should not it be, if the grave provides a treasure? He is wresting lakhs of rupees from the government and using it for organising assemblies for peace and committing the crime of calling our nation inferior in front of other countries...<sup>46</sup>

However, about the same Pt. Sunderlal Benipuri had written in his diary dated 18<sup>th</sup> April 1950:

Whenever I see Sunderlalji, I feel some sort of attraction towards him. To remain firm on one's ideas even after losing everything, is nothing but a matter of pride... He makes us remember the sages of olden times.<sup>47</sup>

Thus what we see, is that Benipuri remained a supporter of Hindi, at best of its popular variant as against both the 'Sanskritised' and the 'Urduised' (Hindustani). Hindustani, to him was acceptable, till it played the role of a facilitator in making Hindi acceptable outside North India i.e. in raising and facilitating Hindi's acquiring the status of *Rashtrabhasha*. For Benipuri Hindi was to be raised to the level of *lingua franca* of India, which could bring about the cultural uniformity/unity of the country, thereby enabling the making of a strong nation. This concern was not only reflected in his advocacy of a strong initiative geared towards spreading and teaching of Hindi in South India, but also in his attitude towards the dialects of Hindi, albeit in different terms.

After a decade of India's freedom in 1957-58 he wrote obsessively on the question of Hindi's dissemination in the southern states. In a series of articles *Naya Setu Bandh Banayen* or 'Let Us Make New Bridges'—bridge being a metaphor of connection between the North and the South—he wrote that Hindi must be propagated in the South

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<sup>46</sup> See BG Vol. 3, p. 356

<sup>47</sup> See BG Vol. 8, p. 14

and be learnt by the people. According to him, the Southern people were really interested in learning Hindi but this feeling had been marred by some discontentment with Hindi. This was, to him, a result of a one way process. The Southern people were learning the language of the North, without this being adequately reciprocated. He appealed to the Hindi public to learn any one South-Indian language. He even lamented upon the fact that 'Hindi intellectuals were self-indulgent and there is not a single authentic book on the history and culture of South India in Hindi nor do the Hindi writers attempt to write on it.'<sup>48</sup>

In fact, Benipuri himself was planning to write a monumental book on the History and Culture of India which was to focus on each and every region. In letters to his son, Jitendra Benipuri, dated 30/05/57 and 15/04/57, Benipuri suggests him to learn any one South Indian language, as the latter was staying in Coimbatore. He further wrote that he would write a travelogue on the South after a tour of that region<sup>49</sup>. In his diary he discusses about writing a multi-volume book on Indian History and Culture.<sup>50</sup>

However, the urge towards bringing cultural uniformity and creating a new strong nation was articulated in dialogic terms in the context of regional languages. His views towards the dialects of Hindi were quite different. When the issue of providing education in Hindi region, in the *Janpadiya Bhasa* or dialects like Maithali, Bhojpuri etc, was raised,<sup>51</sup> he viewed it as measure of debilitating the position of Hindi. He was fearful that this would make 'small linguistic pockets and weaken the nation. He opposed this as containing the potential leading towards creation of 'multiple Pakistans.'

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<sup>48</sup> See June, July and August 1958 editorial of '*Nai Dhara*' in BG, Vol. 3, p. 451 to 458. Conspicuous by its absence though are any comments on the other non-Hindi, non- South Indian languages. Benipuri never speaks upon such languages such as Assamese, Bengali, Oriya etc. which while being distinct from Hindi were not South Indian languages.

<sup>49</sup> Private papers op. cit

<sup>50</sup> See his diary dated 8<sup>th</sup> February 1959, BG, Vol. 8, p.423

<sup>51</sup> For the discussion of making the vernaculars the medium of instruction in schools in the Hindi intellectual circles, which was occasioned with Rahul Sankrityayan's article on the same issue written in January 1944 in *Vishal Bharat*. See Shivdan Singh Chauhan, 'Mahapandit Rahul Sankrityayan Aur Janpadiya Bhashaon ka Prashn' in his book *Paripekshya Ko Sahi Karte Hue*, Swaraj Prakashan, Delhi, 1999.

There are two tendencies visible in India today. One towards maintaining the integrity and another of divisiveness. The political implications of these tendencies are taken into account, but its impact on other areas is hardly noticed. The irony of the matter is that people favouring unity in the political sphere simultaneously take the opposite positions in the other spheres. Those who are ardent supporters of the political integrity of the Indian nation and who virulently oppose Pakistan, those very people on the question of language show a very *Pakistani mentality* i.e. in the matters of language they are party to the idea of disintegration. We 'Hindi-wallahs' were quite proud that our language had its sway from Kathmandu to Indore and Rajmahal to Panipat. Some amongst us were optimistic that this Hindi speaking region will be unified in to a composite whole. On the virtue of being the largest and centrally situated region, it will lead the other regions in each and every field as it has done in the past. Of late there has been an unnecessary clamour for the *Janpadiya Bhashas* or the dialects, which is essentially a manifestation of the *Pakistani outlook*. If the different vernaculars of Hindi are considered as its legacy, this is understandable. But, the attempts of dividing the regions on the basis of these different vernaculars, by giving them the status of proper languages and making them the medium of instruction in schools and universities is nothing but a *Pakistani attitude*.<sup>52</sup>

On the question of language, by and large, Benipuri's predicament was that of a Hindi nationalist, who sought to bring about linguistic and cultural homogeneity under the dominant cultural ethos of the North Indian Hindu/Hindi middle class. This explains his concerns and anxieties, and serves to explain his differential attitude of patronising the Southern languages while suppressing the dialects of Hindi. The latter of course fractured the very idea of Hindi as the lingua franca of the new nation and hence was an anathema to Benipuri. On the other hand, the Southern languages were viewed as being essentially different from Hindi, and hence Benipuri was willing to concede to them a statesman like patronage that, while asserting the superiority of Hindi, was yet inclusive in its cultural vision.

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<sup>52</sup> See his editorial in *Himalay 1946 Bhasha Main Pakistan*, in BG, Vol. 3 p. 249

## CHAPTER 4

### BENIPURI'S SEARCH FOR A RADICAL SOLUTION TO GENDER INEQUALITY

In this chapter I deal with Benipuri's views on the women's question which dominated his literary oeuvre in the post 1930 period. Although he had started his literary venture in 1926, the woman's 'issue' is virtually absent from the writings pertaining to the period between 1926 and 1929. However, his views in this period can be anticipated on the basis of the gender stereotypes that his journals *Balak* and *Yuvak* propagated, especially the latter.

#### I

I have already outlined the content of *Balak*. The magazine is quite gendered in nature. This is reflected not only from its title (*Balak* i.e. male child) and its cover picture of it (that of a smiling male child armed and yet carrying books in his hands), but also in its content, which chose to focus upon sports like hunting<sup>1</sup> and body-building exercises<sup>2</sup>, stories of valour and adventure,<sup>3</sup> propagating masculinist virtues. The female child neither gets space of any kind nor is she the targeted reader.<sup>4</sup>

*Yuvak*, being the journal of the Yuvak Sangh, propagated avowedly masculinist ideas. Apart from the political news, it also carried articles on physical culture and exercises<sup>5</sup>, *shikar* stories<sup>6</sup>, and the virtues of *brahmacharya* (celibacy)<sup>7</sup>. The women's

<sup>1</sup> See Sriram Sharma, *Bagh*, February 1927; Sriram Sharma, *Gorilla*, January 1927.

<sup>2</sup> See Acharya Shivpoojan Sahay, *Dand-baithak*, June 1926. *Kaliyugi Bheem Ramamurthi*, Author not mentioned, March 1926 *Digvijayi Pahlwan Hecken Smith*, Author not mentioned, July, 1926

<sup>3</sup> See Rambriksh Benipuri, *Rana Jung Bahadur ki Bahaduri*, June 1926; Rambriksh Benipuri, *Shakti Singh ki Aloukik Shakti*, April, 1926; *Balcharon ( Boy-Scouts) ka Khel*, Jatadhar Sharma Misra (Scout Master), July 1926.

<sup>4</sup> The target readership may be inferred from the mode of address deployed in the editorials, it is always "HeyBalak..." (Dear Boys...), quite obviously, the editor was not attempting to reach out to the Girls or *Balikas*.

<sup>5</sup> Sadhu Vaswani, *Pahalwan Bano*, January 1929. Jagdish Narayan, *Tahalna Achchha Vyayam Hai*, January, 1929; Jagdish Narayan, *Tairakon ki Duniya*, August 1929; Prof. Manik Rao, *Sharirik Shikshan*,

issue remains limited to calls for the abolition of the *pardah* system<sup>8</sup>, so that they could step out into the public domain for the cause of national uplift. Most of the contributors to the journal in fact were members of the Yuvak Sangh and later day socialists. Among them were Jagdish Narayan, Kishoriprasanna Singh, Phooldev Sahay Verma and, of course, Benipuri himself.

One may wonder as to how far the views espoused in these articles are expressive of the editor's i.e. Benipuri's own vision. Benipuri's own assertions in this regard leave little in doubt. Benipuri writes:

Some may wonder why the issues of the *Yuvak* are devoid of an editorial column. Well, it is because, the editor of *Yuvak* finds himself in each and every page of the journal. He exhausts himself in every single paragraph. It is not his wish to be an exile amidst the delights of this heavenly garden.<sup>9</sup>

Clearly then, we can take the views and anxieties expressed in the pages of *Yuvak* to be largely representative of Benipuri's own views.

The articles on physical culture are deployed to construct a 'national body politic' in which the physical strength of the individual, is seen to be directly related to the cause of national uplift. Consider for example the following extract from the May 1929 issue of *Yuvak*:

In the struggle for existence it is essential that all aspects of our being receive equal attention. Therefore, along with the intellectual development of the individual, we must also be mindful of our body and diet...the main cause for the subjugation and degeneracy of this country

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December, 1929; Sri Vyayam Premi, *Sattar Varsh Ka Kaiser Jawan Kyun Hai*, February 1929. Sri Vyayam Premi, *Saath Saal Ka Henry Ford Jawan Kyun Hai*, January 1929; Kishori Prasanna Singh, *Daud: Lambi Aur Chhoti*, October, 1929.

<sup>6</sup> Sri Ram Sharma, *Veerpur ka Adamkhor*, December 1929; Sri Ram Sharma, *Bagh Se Bhiranth*, January 1929

<sup>7</sup> Sri Jagdish Narayan, *Vivaha Karna Paap Hai*, May 1929; Sri Srinath Singh, *Vivaha Jeevan Ki Sabse Badi Bhoor*, July 1929; Sri Ashwini Kumar, *Swapnadosh Kaise Door Ho Sakta Hai*, March 1929.

<sup>8</sup> Sri Dev Raj Upadhyay, *Bihar Se Purde Ki Vidai*, January 1929 and Sri Kumari Vidyavat, *Purde Ki Samasya*, October 1929.

<sup>9</sup> See the first page of *Yuvak* issue of February 1929. This claim of Benipuri is absent in the case of *Balak*, therefore we would not discuss it as the representative of his views.

lies in the decline of physical prowess amongst its citizens. This decline, moreover affects the educated classes more than all else, amongst them again it is the youth who are most conspicuously in the grip of this malaise. Those very youth upon whom rest the hopes and dreams for the future of this country...<sup>10</sup>

This project of constructing a national body politic that emphasises the necessity of physical prowess in the construction of nationhood, is further strengthened by repeatedly linking it to a host of dietary regimes. Several articles appear in the *Yuvak* that attempt to foster a whole regime of what to eat and what not to eat. An interesting example of this pertains to the injunctions against tea. In the July 1929 issue it is iterated that:

These days several thousands of rupees are being spent on herbal products such as tea and coffee....Whenever I see the youth of my country caught in the grip of tea-addiction I'm greatly pained....Among the harmful effects of tea are the following: it affects the brain, it removes the natural efficiency of the body only to replace it with a certain artificiality, it kills the appetite, ..., it leads to nocturnal emissions and exalts the libido, by inflaming the sexual passions it robs one of the peace of mind, it causes gastric problems, it deprives one of his eye-sight and above all the country's wealth lands up in the pockets of foreigners....there is not a single chemical element in tea which is indispensable to the normal functions of the body.<sup>11</sup>

The article ends with an appeal to the youth of this country that they save themselves as well as their motherland from this grievous and destructive affliction. Interestingly one of the major problems with the addiction seems to be the stimulation of sexual desires. If need be they are exhorted to drink tea made from *tulsi* (mint) leaves. In exemplary fashion, the author also informs us that he himself, has never drunk tea.

Articles like this one use a mix of scientific terminology, didactic moralising and populist nationalism to put forth a strict dietary economy that attempts to visualise the national-body as an extended version of the individual body.

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<sup>10</sup> Prof. Phooldev Sahay Verma, *Khadya Padarthon Mein Rasayan*, May 1929.

<sup>11</sup>, Ganesh Indra Dutt Sharma Gaud, *Chai ka Pyala*, July, 1929.

Another such article is *Khadya Padartho Mein Rasayan* (May, 1929).<sup>12</sup> It discusses the chemical actions of various edibles and hence attempts to give us an entire dietary regimen. Noteworthy in this article is the fact that oily foods and non-vegetarian foods are less preferable. Yet another example of how a Brahmanic, Hindu identity is infused into the nationalist project, is thus to be glimpsed here.

The 'vital force' that is sought to be augmented by the dietary regimes is then sought to be preserved by the strict regime of celibacy. A number of articles advocate celibacy for the youth, while some of the more militant versions of this, even urge a celibate life within marriage, or indeed go to the extent of denouncing marriage itself.

The following extracts will perhaps exemplify the point further:

Even the gods do not show pity to the weak. I ask you therefore, to build a new and strong India. Hence, O the youth of our country, indulge in sports, exercise regularly and remain celibate. Child marriage, is an unforgivable sin committed against the nation. To be delicate (*komalta*) is a crime. Be strong, be masculine.<sup>13</sup>

Ironically the strictures against child marriage do not relate to the problems of the child wife, but rather as the weakening of male self-discipline and hence loss of power, in a sense. While Vaswani rests content by preaching abstinence to the youth alone, and advocates late marriage, Jagdish Narayan and Srinath Singh, take the more militant path and denounce marriage itself. For instance Narayan writes:

Marriage is always accompanied by lust. In lust lies weakness. Weakness is a sin. Therefore, to marry is to commit a sin!<sup>14</sup>

Relating celibacy to national liberation, Narayan goes on to write:

As long as we keep shifting our responsibility on to others India will never be independent. Today you people are nothing more than a bunch of thirty two crore slaves. If you marry you add to those numbers of slaves.... There is only one way out of these dangerous temptations [i.e. marriage], never forget your aim in life. Move your innate propensities away from lust and deploy it towards the realisation of your aims. It is only then that you shall achieve immunity from all mental or physical harm. Today the motherland is crying aloud with the pain of slavery. What more beautiful aim can we have but the liberation of our

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<sup>12</sup> op. cit.

<sup>13</sup> Sadhu Vaswani, op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> Jagdish Narayan, *Vivaha Karna Paap Hai*, op. cit.

traumatised country.... Look ahead brother, there waits the deadly demon called marriage. Slay him first. Today whoever stands in the way of the realisation our dreams, they must be slain.<sup>15</sup>

Hence, we see that the cause of celibacy too, feeds into the larger project of national liberation. The body politic that is constructed, is clearly an andro-centric imagination: an imagination that holds the male body as the microcosmic source of all power and seeks to address the political subjugation of the country by harnessing the power inherent in that body. This bio-moral construction of national identity treats the male thus as not only a source of national liberation but also a metaphor for national strength/ re-awakening etc.

This male imagination though is always fraught with a tension. The tension that is embodied in the female. Its anxieties with regards to the female identity within the project of nationalism leads to a complex interplay between the dual motifs of a strong and asexualised 'mother' identity and the seductive and sexualised identity of the temptress.

The latter trope is seen in the following extracts,

The seductions of Gold and the temptress (*Kamini*) are extremely strong. It makes the man worthless for life. Without these he feels his life is pointless. Even a momentary separation makes him restless. It makes him afraid of death. For he keeps worrying, 'when will she come', 'where will she live', 'where will I be' etc.<sup>16</sup>

A visual image of the same trope is available to us in the October 1929 issue of the *Yuvak*, where a painting representing a kingly figure is seen to be surrounded by a bevy of pretty women. The picture is captioned *Pralobhan* [temptation].<sup>17</sup>

The deployment of this trope is also conspicuous in its use of women as a source of weakness/ pollution etc. In a way this is the very counter-point of the male who is the source of virtue/ power etc. Yet more importantly it shows the inability of the male-

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> See, Appendix 4.



centric national imagination to accommodate the identity of the female citizen within its folds.<sup>18</sup>

The former trope i.e. that which attempts to see woman as power/ *shakti*, is brought out in the following piece

I have full faith in women. But only till such time as they do not become the victims of men's lust. Weakness is a sin, for both men and women. Women are repositories of strength, yet they become helpless weaklings (*abala*) the moment they come into contact with the lust of men.

Another assertion seeks to make a difference between 'woman' and 'womanhood'. Benipuri himself, in an article entitled *Laksh Bhed*, writes that

We embrace women but not their womanhood. Not that quintessence within her that bestows her with immense strength. Women are the models of strength. Yet why do we become worthless addicts once we are faced with this source of strength? For once again, I say, we embrace women, but not womanhood. We worship her flesh and her voluptuousness alone. Men are the victims of lust, and tries to shift the blame of his own weakness on women. What irony that the twin sister of strength (*shakti ki sagi bahen*) is considered the minefield of weakness. Oh what anguish! If only men had the good sense to put women to proper use (*upyog*).<sup>19</sup>

Another visual image of this trope can also be culled from the pages of the February 1929 issue of the *Yuvak*. The reproduction of a painting shows a man and a woman sitting in a field. The man is seen to be fitting an arrow to his bow, which handed to him by the woman.<sup>20</sup>

Apart from the ambiguity that marks these two visions, i.e. one trying to see the woman as the pollutant/ source of all evil etc. and the other that obversely sees the man as the polluter of women's strength etc., there are deeper politics to be glimpsed in these depictions. The woman, be she a pillar of strength or a cancerous contagion, is always viewed from the point of view of her utility to the man. It is her *upyog* (utility) to the man

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Rambriksh Benipuri, *Lakshya Bhed*, February 1929.

<sup>20</sup> See, Appendix 5.

that marks both her strength as well as her weakness. In short, her identity remains premised upon her utility for the man.

This attitude is manifested even whilst tackling the women's issue per se. Not only does the focus of these articles remain confined to the urgent need to abolish the *purdah* system, but indeed, the urgency itself remains premised on the need for women in the National Movement. Francesca Orsini writes<sup>21</sup> in this regard, that the role of women within the National Movement (i.e. *desh seva*), was sought to be conceptualised as an extension of their roles as dutiful wives (i.e. *pativrata dharma*). Thus never was the centrality of this *pativrata dharma* challenged, and neither was the role of women considered from their own position. Instead, it is merely re-configured within a new matrix of instrumentalism. It is in this light that we may consider the comments of Dev Raj Upadhyay. Upadhyay writes in an article entitled *Bihar Se Purde Ki Vidai*:

The call for the abolition of *purdah* is important from a national point of view. As long as we, either seduced by our narrow self-interests or by our ignorance, carry on condemning one of the two wheels of the 'national vehicle', to weakness and futility, it shall be impossible for India to achieve complete freedom.<sup>22</sup>

It is interesting to note how the issue is tackled by a woman writing on the issue in the pages of the *Yuvak*. Sri Kumari Vidyavat writes:

People today feel that the lifting of the *purdah* will lead women to immoral indulgences. But this argument is fallacious. The women of Gujarat and Maharashtra do not observe the *purdah*. Gandhji's mother never even heard of the *purdah*. Did that make her an immoral woman? To lift the *purdah*, would merely mean that our women do not remain prisoners, do not become a mere bundle of clothes, do not become blind even whilst possessing perfect eye-sight....We should aspire to make society pure, the family happy and human existence holy. We should attempt to extradite the scandal of injustice from our midst. We should aspire for a society where the men shall be like Ram and the women like Sita. I plead especially to the men of Bihar, that they give this issue a sympathetic consideration. I hope that our brothers shall pay heed to the plea of their humble sister.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Francesca Orsini, op. cit., p 265.

<sup>22</sup> Dev Raj Upadhyay, op. cit.

<sup>23</sup> Sri Kumari Vidyavat, op. cit.

Not only does the tone lack the self-confidence of the male authors, and remains couched in a plea, but indeed we see Sri Kumari too like her male counterparts, subscribing to the vision of an instrumental role for women, in a world that remains male-centric. Further the patriarchal structures of morality, are also seen to be deployed. Thus bearing out the earlier contention that the National Movement was imagined as merely being an extension of the older role played by women.

## II

It is in the post-1930s period that there comes a radical transformation in Benipuri's views on the women's issue. The reasons for this shift may be traced back to his growing affections for the socialist project at this period and his involvement with socialist politics as such.<sup>24</sup> His writings in this period can be seen to be questioning the construction of patriarchal norms in all forms. Be it the anxiety to control the expressions of female sexuality or the idealisation of a particular brand of traditional womanhood. Be it the invention of codes of conduct or the symbols/ metaphors of ideal womanhood. All come under suspicion at this time. What is startling for a writer of his times, is that Benipuri's vision, however progressive, does not remain confined to the domain of middle-class womanhood alone, as indeed do several of his compatriots. Instead he is seen to be attentive to the relatively 'liberated' status enjoyed by women of 'lower' social groups as well.

As with the concerns regarding the peasantry, so too with the assertions of female sexuality, the assertion had started quite some time back within the Hindi public sphere. Nonetheless, it was at this time that the issue acquires a radicalism and militancy that is completely new. According to Orsini, the articulations of female sexuality within the Hindi public domain were available between the 1920s and the 1940s too, but at that time it remained largely confined to a moralistic tenor.<sup>25</sup> It was only in the 1940s and after that female sexuality was allowed an autonomous voice.

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<sup>24</sup> For a fuller discussion on the issue please see the first chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>25</sup> Francesca Orsini, *op. cit.*, Chapter IV, pp. 243-308.

What makes Benipuri's challenge even more interesting and creatively fertile, is the ploy he uses in his essays on the theme. Instead of directly debunking the traditional tropes, he attempts to re-interpret the tradition on its own term by reading against the dominant vision of tradition while yet using traditional icons and motifs. In a clear appraisal of his 'method', Benipuri writes, while responding to some of his critics, who had urged that his views on women were counter to the Indian ethos:

Even if this has been the case [i.e. that his constructions of femininity run counter to the Indian ethos] I would have never hesitated, because there are some things that are quite novel and were beyond the imagination of our ancestors, yet, today we discuss them and try to follow them. But I feel, that I need not go so far. For I have enough evidence to prove the criticisms of my esteemed friend misplaced. Their problem is that, they take the inanimate and static state that befalls our society today as being the 'true' and only form of Indian Culture, and beyond that all else is false, unholy, hellish and disgusting.<sup>26</sup>

In seeking to re-invent the Indian Culture, Benipuri thus sought to challenge those very motifs that was seen as being the hallmark of the Hindu/ Indian ethos of femininity. For instance he attacked the Sita icon, and championed the polyandrous Draupadi in the following terms:

The two most popular historical scriptures, that you [i.e. the self-appointed keepers of the tradition] have, are the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. These two project two distinct female ideals. Our enthusiastic sisters who today are eagerly looking forward, when they are compelled by you to look backwards, it is natural for them to look to these two ideals for inspiration.

Now let us look at these two ideals....On the one hand is the monogamous Sita, who had forever lived her life in the name of one man. Who never so much as uttered a word of complain and kept drinking here tears. While on the other hand you have Draupadi. Draupadi, who was over-bearing and truant ever since her childhood. Where Sita had devoted herself entirely to Ram well before he actually broke the *Dhanush* and won her hand, there Draupadi, like a true pragmatist (*Duniyadaran*) waited for all her suitor to prove themselves, before giving herself away to the triumphant Arjun.

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<sup>26</sup> Rambriksh Benipuri, *Nai Nari*, BG, Vol.3, p. 89.

Even after she was forced to marry the five Pandav brothers, she did not lose her pluck. She challenged fate and said—‘you have toyed with me, now let me show you what I can’. For her whole life she made all the Pandavas dance to her tune. Draupadi, throughout her life raised a storm, and amidst that storm she lived her life to the hilt...Hence Sita and Draupadi are both the daughters of the same civilisation, yet they are so different. It might well be, that when our new women look backwards, they can choose either one, and you cannot blame them for choosing the one over the other. If, by looking backwards, you want to mean that they look at Sita alone, then why don’t you just tell them that ‘hey women, we want to keep you in perpetual bondage’?<sup>27</sup>

The extent of Benipuri’s militancy in this regard is perhaps best understood in the light of his views on female sexual assertions. In the essay entitled *Panchkanya*, Benipuri begins by remembering a Sanskrit verse, which was taught to him by his village Punditji. It had been chanted by millions of Hindus, and recalled the story of the five most virtuous female icons from the Hindu mythography. It was said that the five icons were so virtuous, that the mere chanting of the verse expiated all sins. Benipuri then proceeds to show how the very same mythography also gives us details about the various extra-marital or pre-marital liasons that these women had. Thence he wonders:

On looking closely at the five women mentioned in the verse, one is forced to wonder as to why the sages of yore chose these women, whose character, when looked at with modern eyes is indelibly marked by scandal? Why did they not choose other women, of impeccable virtue, many of whom were indubitably to be found amongst the millions of women who have lived in our country? Could it be that *Satitwa* (virtue) had a different meaning then? Could it be that the question asked then was not ‘what have you done and with whom’ but rather ‘what are you and what have you done for the sake of humanity’? ...Our sages were perhaps, more broad-minded, far-sighted and discriminating. They were not concerned with triviality, they were men of high standing and had an equally high vision. Today we have fallen, and that is why we can only think in terms of lowly inconsequentialities.<sup>28</sup>

He goes on to further unravel the not only the constructions of *Satitwa* but indeed also tries to explain why and when it was done. Quoting from the *Adi Parva* of the

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<sup>27</sup> Rambriksh Benipuri, *Sita aur Draupadi* in *Nai Nari*, BG, Vol. 3, pp. 66-70.

<sup>28</sup> Rambriksh Benipuri, *Panchkanya*, *Ibid.*, pp. 70-74.

*Mahabharata*, Chapter 122 (sic), in the essay entitled *Satitwa ka Bharatiya Adarsh*, he wrote:

Once upon a time there was a sage named Uddalak. One day when sitting with his wife and son Swetketu in his hermitage. Suddenly a Brahmin came, and holding Swetketu's mother's hand asked her to accompany him. This enraged Swetketu. Seeing Swetketu's rage, his father told him--'Son, do not be enraged. This custom has been in vogue since great antiquity. All human beings treat the women of their caste like cattle in sexual matters. The women of all castes are independent in this regard. Yet Swetketu was not to be pacified, and he founded a moral regimen that one woman could only have sexual relations with a single man.<sup>29</sup>

Benipuri further writes that the unquestionability of *Satitwa* has a very ridiculous story at its root. Apparently, there was a sage Kathatiya and his wife was called Mamta. Her brother-in-law cohabited with her during pregnancy, despite her verbal protestations. Consequently the child born was blind. This blind Dirghtama [Literally = Immense Darkness] was extremely libidinous and cohabited with his wife Pradweshi in broad daylight and amidst a crowd of people. They begot many children, but he never bothered to work. The annoyed wife threatened to leave him, if he did not start earning. At this he made a norm that a woman was to remain with a single man until death. If she left her husband, she would be considered adulterous and fallen. Having narrated this tale, Benipuri writes:

The norm of *Satitwa* was imposed on women by men and the nature of the man-woman relationship has been changing, consequently the notion of *Satitwa* was also subject to change. This proves that in the future too these norms shall further change.<sup>30</sup>

Thus not only are the ethico-moral regimes of control over female sexuality shown to be constructed, but further still they were shown to have their origins in the whims and caprice of men desirous of keeping women subjugated. Going on to explain the origins of this domination in 'scientific' terms, Benipuri writes,

At the dawn of creation none of the animals were distinguished into male and female. With time though, there evolved the distinction of male and female. These distinctions had emerged well before man came on the

<sup>29</sup> Rambriksh Benipuri, *Satitwa Ka Bharatiya Adarsh* in *Nai Nari*, op. cit., pp. 91-92.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91

scene. Since the female was principally responsible for child-bearing, consequently the frequent pregnancies robbed her of her physical strength. Among the mammals this process of weakening of the female reached its apogee. Due to the responsibilities of nurture, the female also developed a tender disposition. As a consequence even the physical structure of the female was greatly altered...In the case of humans, not only did there arise differences in physical structure, but also in physical strength. On the one hand was the man, with well-sculpted biceps and strong arms, who was brave and revelled in his masculinity. On the other hand was the woman. Her bones were tender, her physique delicate and her heart was full of compassion. Thus their mutual interaction eventually came to be marked by this difference. The women had to bow before the greater physical prowess of the men. In marriage relations too, men came to have the upper hand.<sup>31</sup>

While looking at the issue of gender inequality in the days of yore hence, we find Benipuri laying greater emphasis upon the lack of physical strength in the women and consequently their subjugation by the men who are stronger. This is quite in contrast to his exegesis of the issue in the present context. Moving away from an analysis based on power and an analytic strategy that is closer to Social Darwinism, we find him now taking recourse to a sort of socialist class-analysis. The difference is amply brought out in his writings on the issue of prostitution. Regarding the origins of prostitution, Benipuri writes:

There are two principal schools of thought [regarding the origins of prostitution]. The first says, among the women who possessed unparalleled beauty; that they should be in the thralldom of any single man was thought to be against both the principles of justice as well as social well-being. It was possible that if they had remained with any one man, this would have led to great strife and violence in the society at large. Hence whilst all the slaves were distributed amongst the powerful in society, some were left for communal consumption. Since they belonged to everybody, they were given a modicum of social prestige. Because of their unsurpassed beauty, one and all sought to cohabit with them. So much so, that people even sought their cohabitation in the other world...The other version is somewhat revolutionary. According to this view, prostitutes are those revolutionary women who have wiped the stigma of male-domination clean off their foreheads and thus achieved complete sovereignty. Since they rebelled against the men, the men in turn attempted to debunk them as the lowest of the low. Those who

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<sup>31</sup> Rambriksh Benipuri, *Nari Jagran Aur Vivaha Bandhan*, in *Nai Nari*, op. cit., p. 85.

accepted the slavery of men were addressed as 'virtuous', 'holy' etc. Poverty too is a reason for the existence of prostitutes.

I personally know of two women who have turned to prostitution. The first was from a high caste family and she was married off to a man who was a marijuana-addict (*ganjeri*). When she fled her husband's house and returned home, she received no support. Thus to support herself she turned to prostitution. The second was an extremely beautiful girl from a poor low caste family. She was married off to an extremely ugly man. Quite naturally, she too ran away. Once again since the only recourse left to her to realise the dreams that were natural for a young girl, was prostitution, she too became one.<sup>32</sup>

Thus we see that though poverty is mentioned as being one of the causes that leads to prostitution, it is only touched upon and, that too, in the present context, while the prostitutes of antiquity are shown as either social rebels or the victims of the lust of powerful men. The non-attribution of economic causes to the past, even while discussing the same institution, is in fact, quite interesting. Spelling out this difference even more clearly, we find Benipuri arguing about the redundancy of gender discrimination in the future, writing that,

The young men and women who can today work in different fields and can earn from different sources [since science has rendered physical disparity to be of little import], shall in the future be completely economically self-reliant and hence shall come together by virtue of mutual friendship and produce children. They shall be able to dissolve their union by mutual consent too. For this they would neither have to approach the courts of law nor the heads of any religious order. Society too shall not condemn such practices. Yes, in such a society the question 'whose son are you', shall also acquire an interesting answer. In such a society women shall be the prime agents in child-birth. There might be a situation, where the three children of a woman are the result of her cohabitation with three different male friends. Hence in reply to the question 'whose son are you', they shall only have their mother's name to offer.<sup>33</sup>

Whatever the reasons he ascribes, Benipuri is, at this stage of this intellectual and political development, clearly and acutely aware of the fact of gender domination. He pleads for the incorporation of women into the public sphere and seeks acknowledgement for their contributions that are largely ignored by the male dominated social set-up.

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<sup>32</sup> Rambriksh Benipuri, *Vaishya Banam Sati*, in *Nai Nari*, op. cit., pp. 80-83.

<sup>33</sup> Rambriksh Benipuri, *Nari Jagran Aur Vivaha Bandhan*, in *Nai Nari*, op. cit., p. 88.



In a piece entitled *Mira Nachi Re*<sup>34</sup>, Benipuri uses the story of the medieval bhakti saint Mira as an allegory. He describes her as a rebel who challenged the norms of patriarchy, thus making her a metaphor of the awakened modern woman and celebrates their arrival in the public spaces. He simultaneously also criticises the conservatives and the hypocrites, who while paying lip service to the need for women to come out of their closets, do not allow the women of their own households from taking part in public performances. He ends the piece with the invocation that if a new society is to be established the participation of women in it, as equals, is indispensable.

Drawing upon the plight of his own wife while he was in jail because of his political activities, Benipuri wrote the novel *Qaidi Ki Patni*.<sup>35</sup> In it he narrates the story of Rani, who is born in a middle peasant family. After an extremely sensitive depiction of how she is burdened with restriction after restriction as she grows up, he speaks of her marriage to a man she has never even seen. Yet Rani is shown to immerse herself in her duty as a housewife. Benipuri raises the question of who was to acknowledge the role of these silent and dutiful housewives behind the leaders and workers of the National Movement, without whom these men would never have been able to indulge in their politics without bothering about their household cares. Benipuri's sensitivity lies in the fact that even while recognising that most of these women had little or no role to play in their having become housewives in the first place, he yet pleads for the recognition of their contribution to the National Cause.

Even in terms of his depiction of the heroines of history we witness this mode of representation. His 'historical' women are powerful and play an active part in the public life of the day. The protagonist of the play *Ambapali*, or Chandra the heroine of the play *Vijeta*, all testify to this trope of strong and active women who are important actors in the drama of history and not mere side-show freaks.

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<sup>34</sup> Rambriksh Benipuri, *Mira Nachi Re*, BG, Vol. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Rambriksh Benipuri, *Qaidi ki Patni*, BG, Vol. 1.

The foregoing discussion should not lull us into the belief that Benipuri's concerns remained confined to the world of middle-class women. He is also expressive in what he chooses to depict as the relatively freer world of the poorer women. Two of his sketches i.e. *Domkhana*<sup>36</sup> and *Ghaswali*<sup>37</sup> have lower class women as their principal protagonists. In the former, he narrates the tale of a forthright lower class woman, the wife of a Dom (a member of the lowly scavenging caste) beating up her worthless, alcoholic husband and the sheer disbelief that it spawns in the eyes of the onlookers at the sight of this incident. He speaks of a zealous young man, who in his public spiritedness had offered to help take the Dom to the hospital and threatened to lodge a case against the sweepers who he thought were behind the attack. His disbelief at the revelation of the identity of the true assailant and the wife's willingness to unabashedly threaten the husband with further beatings if he did not mend his ways, are contrasted to bring out the patriarchic moorings of the middle class educated ethos. In the latter sketch, Benipuri goes further and attempts to depict the sexual freedom enjoyed by women of the poorer classes. His tale is that of a poor grass vendor, who falls in love with an *ekkawala*. They establish sexual relations and subsequently the girl is married to someone else. Yet on a chance meeting ten years later, they fondly reminisce about their escapade, without any remorse or regret. Benipuri also uses the story to bring out the hollowness of the middle class anxieties over sexual promiscuity in general and female sexual fidelity in particular. He writes:

The love of the poor is such--- a stone dropped into a stagnant pond raises only a few ripples---and then all falls quiet once again. Tides and tempests are to be found in palaces.<sup>38</sup>

### III

The comparisons that Benipuri drew were not merely vertical but horizontal too. In one of his travelogues i.e. *Pairon Mein Pankh Bandh Kar*, he notes with obvious appreciation the equality and sexual liberty enjoyed in the west. He writes,

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<sup>36</sup> Rambriksh. Benipuri, *Mati Ki Moortein*, BG, Vol. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

There are a great many misconceptions back home about the women of the west. People feel that Englishwomen are undisciplined, corrupt and self-indulgent. But having seen them here, one is forced to feel a deep respect for them. The description of women as equal partners (*ardhangini*) that our sages bequeathed us, is here, truly realised. They share half the burden of domesticity in all spheres of life. Their ability to work is surprising. On the roads you will see women urgently hurrying about. Amongst them are girls, ladies and old women---all. They work in the offices as clerks and typists, you find them as saleswoman and you find them driving cars as well...Even in the mansions one does not meet with servants. The women do the work themselves. Yes, it is also true that men too share the domestic chores. People had said that one should offer the seats to women whenever they are around, but the modern women here take this as an insult. Do not show them any pity, their legs are strong enough.<sup>39</sup>

Commenting on the issue of sexual freedom in the west, Benipuri writes,

Just as in the days of antiquity none of our *yajnas* were considered complete without women, similarly here no walk is complete without a woman. Boats are flying like the breeze, smiles are being tossed around, even kisses and embraces are not hard to find here. Yet just how far this liberty went, I realised on the way back. It was dusk, and the sun's rays appeared more as a diaphanous blanket that does not hide beauty within it but rather adds to its glory. Young men and women lay sprawled hither thither. Lo behold! ---What is this? Look at the way that young girl has lost herself in the arms of that young man! And look at the way he showers kisses on her lips....None of this is considered vulgar here. The limits of vulgarity have greatly shrunk here...<sup>40</sup>

The acuity of Benipuri's vision is manifested in the ways in which he perceived bondage. Not only did he focus upon the overt forms of domination and inequality but also the symbolic forms that domination often took. In his piece entitled *Zanjeeren Aur Deewaren*, he writes,

The jails or prisons have been destroyed a number of times, history bears witness to as much. The prisoners of one time, have become the sovereigns of another. The colonial prisons were the destiny for a period, for some, yet even they after a time re-gained their liberty. But what about those prisons, within whose walls are locked millions of Indian women? True the walls in the latter case are neither made of iron, nor are there any visible guards at its gates. Yet, the prisoners dare not step out

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<sup>39</sup>Rambriksh Benipuri. *Pairon Mein Pankh Bandh Ke*, in BG, Vol. 4., pp. 345-346.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., pp. 311-312.

of them... What are these bangles, O sisters? Have you ever thought if there is any difference at all between these bangles and the handcuffs that prisoners wear? Be they bangles or handcuffs both are the messengers of domination. One of man over man, and the other of man over woman. Those who buy animals, often put a rope around the animals neck, so that he may recognise it. Since you are somebody's wife, or are going to become one, so put on your bangles. Beautiful, are they? Well, domination achieves its highest success the day the slaves take the symbols of their bondage to be their ornaments!<sup>41</sup>

Yet, for all his progressive ideas, his sojourns abroad also startlingly reveal his own victimhood within the colonised categories of perceiving the feminine. His contrasting depictions of white and black women bring this out with disturbing clarity. Deploying the colonial economies of race and gender, we find Benipuri's eroticism being a highly racialised one. Writing of an incident when he had to wait a long time in the midst of a crowd of people to catch a glimpse of the royal entourage, he says,

The crowd has grown so large that we can't even leave this place. As time passes, the crowd seems to grow. By now it was difficult to make out the individuals, men and men seemed to have merged together. Look at my predicament. Ahead of me is a young girl, with blonde hair and a sharp nose. From time to time our heads bump against each other. Behind me is a beauty in the spring of her youth. Whenever a wave passes through the crowd I feel a strange shiver of excitement run down my spine, and my heart skips a beat. On the right is a negro lady. Whenever the crowd throws her into my arms, she bursts out in a smile, and I recall the smile of the demon *Shurpanakha* as she must have smiled when her eyes first met with Lakshman's!<sup>42</sup>

Despite all his avowed progressivism and political radicalism, thus we find Benipuri, at times betraying flashes of his earlier views. This is not just limited to his iteration on the west either, in India too, a close study of his unpublished writings, such as the entries in his personal diary betray this lapse. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 1953, for example we find an entry in his diary about his perceptions of the Samstipur railway station. He writes about a young girl,

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<sup>41</sup> Rambriksh Benipuri, *Zanjeeren Aur Deewaren*, in *Nai Nari*, op. cit., pp. 75-77.

<sup>42</sup> Rambriksh Benipuri, *Pairon Mein Pankh Bandh Ke*, op. cit., p. 330.

Look at this girl. How shameless! Talks to all and sundry with a smile on her face. Just now I saw her put her hands forcibly into that *bidiwala's* bundle and pull out a *bidi*. The young *bidiwala* was left smiling. And now she is scolding that old man, for spitting all over the place. I overhear a letch [*rasik*] saying---' poor thing, the gates of the old man's mouth are already broken!' Now the girl is talking to the letch, with the same wanton shamelessness...<sup>43</sup>

The views of Benipuri on the gender issue hence are seen to undergo a progressive radicalisation since his early days. After the 1930 especially it is largely inspired by his socialist politics. We also see how, his journeys abroad help to clarify his conceptions in this regard. Yet never in his life was he wholly free of his own middle-class moorings. Even as late as the 1950s, when we find his radicalism to have assumed a concrete shape and form, he betrays a tragic residual imprisonment to the middle-class mindset of his times.

On the whole, while definitely realising the limits of any gesture that seeks to radically challenge the societal organisation of the day, we must not fail to appreciate the aspiration that fired the imagination of such intellectuals of the early twentieth century Bihar, such as Benipuri.

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<sup>43</sup> Rambriksh Benipuri, BG, Vol. 8, p. 148. In this regard also see Footnote 29 in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there remain a few points that are worth re-iteration. Since the basic aspiration of this dissertation is to try and situate the oeuvre of Rambriksh Sharma Benipuri within the context of his times and his own biographical moorings, it is worthwhile to remind ourselves that Rambriksh Sharma was born in 1899 in a middle ranking Bhumihar Brahmin family in the village of Benipur, in Northern Bihar. After loosing both his parents at an early age though he moved to the nearby village of Banshipnachra and was brought up by his maternal uncle, who being without a son of his own, raised him virtually as his own.

After an initial stint at the village *tol*, Rambriksh, received formal education at several different schools. This exposed him to a wide range of intellectual influences. From the initial investment in the traditional corpus of the upper caste Hindu predilections, to his later implication within the translated world of modern thought. Finally in 1920, responding to Gandhi's call for boycott, the young patriot in Rambriksh decided to quit school. Though the agitation fizzled out, as we all know, Rambriksh, like several other young men of his generation did not find the opportunity to return to school. Thus despite being a good student, the exigencies of the political situation prevailing at the time, halted his educational career well before its acme. Yet again like most educated middle class youth, of his times, he turned to journalism to support the dwindling income of his family. Till now, the story of Rambriksh, is little more than the story of several hundreds of nameless youth of his generation.

After the usual struggles to land a job in the journalism, Rambriksh finally earns himself a job as the editor of the children's magazine *Balak*. At this time too, there is little that holds him apart from the general nameless masses. By the end of the 1920s though, Rambriksh starts moving towards the socialist politics of the Yuvak Sangh. Along with this comes the change in occupation. Taking charge of the mouth-piece of the Sangh i.e. *Yuvak*, and having been sent to jail for his participation in the Civil

Disobedience movement, the year 1930 is a watershed in the life of Rambriksh. It is at this time that he clearly can be seen to be moving away from typical prejudices of the upper caste, middle class male (Hindu) nationalism of the times. Fired perhaps both by socialist thought as by the sympathies generated in this sensitive youth by the contact with people from diverse background whom he had to rub shoulders with in jail, Benipuri is seen grappling with the grossly inegalitarian and oppressive social relations that pertained in the society of his times. Though he never really divorces himself from the nationalist project yet, his uncriticality about the project is slowly lost and he develops into a sort of an unhappy consciousness of the nationalist project itself in the region. By such time we can also see his slow rise to intellectual eminence within the world of the Hindi literati. This too is marked by a break. The earlier phase when he was largely influenced by the canons established by Hindi (Hindu) reformist stalwarts such as Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi, we find him now moving towards the left leaning trends which are finally institutionalised in the form of the All India Progressive Writer's Association. Yet, just as in his political proclivities, so too in his writings, the break is not a complete one. While moving away from the earlier parochialism, which allowed him access to only a small segment of the puritanical ancient Sanskrit tradition, and embracing more inclusive traditions, yet his distance from the Urdu traditions (which of course were assiduously segregated through out the nineteenth century) remains.

Not only the colonial predicament, but perhaps the anxieties of these incomplete breaks in Benipuri's imaginaire, may have been one of the reasons that forced Benipuri to write so profusely about contexts that were temporally distant. He deals in his writings both with the past as well as with the possible futures of his country. At times it seems as though he was merely seeking a place of solace away from the splits and ambiguities of the present context of multiple subjections. In the 'past' or indeed the 'future' too his creative genius had a freer license than could be afforded by the yokes of the 'present'. His initial investment in the 'past' was essentially a Hindu/ Aryan past epitomised by the imperial reign of the Guptas. Here Muslims were looked upon as outsiders, marauders and debauchees. The internal contradictions of the Hindu society are conspicuously absent and the imperium is held up as the model of nationhood. In his later depictions

though there appears a significant shift. The imperial model still hold good, perhaps under the lasting influences of the nationalist consciousness, but the Gupta Empire is replaced by the Mauryan Empire. The shift in symbolic representation, is more than merely a gesture. The act of this shift allows Benipuri to give full vent to the contrapuntal pulls of a socialist nationalist. The acute awareness of the wrongs and inequities of the native society coupled yet with a dream to throw off the foreign yoke. He moves now to what may well be called the 'melting pot' model of national culture, the diverse and different pasts of the nation are not seen as being conflictual but rather as the source of a rich and common present. One glaring area of difference though is that, Benipuri unlike his fellow socialist writers never gives utterance to the oppressive nature of caste society in the past. Though openly against caste in the present context, he remains silent on the issue in his writings on the past. Even in the present context caste is often reduced to and conflated with class as a category of analysis.

In terms of the past we see that despite the shifts and changes, Benipuri remains implicated within a repertoire of symbols and images drawn from a Hindu past, albeit in his later phase as a unifying metaphor than as a disjunction. In the realm of language too, we find him leaning towards such a position. Even though becomes quite an ardent opponent of the attempt by Hindu chauvinists to load Hindi with a vocabulary increasingly drawn from a chaste Sanskrit register, yet he remains distant from the Urdu heritage of Hindi. He urges his compatriots to use their skills and talents to attempt to integrate the south Indian linguistic zones as well. His work in the Hindustani Prachar Sabha is also similarly fraught. His position on the various dialects of Hindi are probably most putative evidence of this anxiety, though supportive of popular linguistic idioms, Benipuri was forced to oppose the assertion of dialects in the form of the medium of education owing to the fears of balkanisation of the nation.

The deployments of temporally distanced contexts received another novel object in terms of Benipuri's views on the gender issue. Moving away from his earlier position on women, when he unquestioningly believed in an absolute sexual dimorphism, we see him later in life prophesying a future India where men and women shall be equals. The



terms of this equality are poignantly radical, in so much as it goes as far as to even renounce the very need for marriage itself. From a position where women were only looked upon in instrumental terms from the point of view either the breach of male discipline or as the source of male inspiration. The complex economies of national body politics shifted over time, and in the later Benipuri we find a greater willingness to afford female agency and indeed feminine sexual desire. Albeit this remains a highly racialised eroticism i.e. black women are looked upon as demoniac rather than as erotic. Further while looking at the roots of gender inequality, Benipuri once again introduces a disjunction between the past and the present. Whilst in the present as well as in the imagined future, economic empowerment are seen to lie at the heart of gender relations thus making them analogous to class relations, in contexts of the past they are seen largely as having arisen out of a sort of a Social Darwinism, wherein the lack of physical strength on the part of the women are seen to be the main cause of their subjugation. Finally we must also concede that in Benipuri's private diaries as well as in his unpublished works we do, at times, see him lapsing back into the prejudices symptomatic of the middle class patriarchic value systems.

On the whole then we see in Benipuri both the biography of an average man caught in perhaps one of the most eventful chapters in the history of the sub-continent as well as the story of creative talent trying to grapple with the ambiguities and anxieties precipitated by the clash of his intellectual leaning and his more sub-liminal prejudices. It is at the same time of a man being caught in the inextricable bind of society as well as a man trying to rise above that society and give it a new direction. Not only in his actions and projects but also in the idioms he chooses to deploy in his writings wherein he continually attempts to re-configure the meanings of traditional symbols and icons is expressive of this anxious moment in history, that was Rambriksh Benipuri.

## BENIPURI: A PROFILE

**Date of birth:** 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1899

**Place of Birth:** Benipur, District Muzaffarpur, Bihar.

**Family:** Father- Sri Phulwant Singh, Grandfather- Sri Yadunandan Singh,

**Education:** Primary education- Bansipachra, Secondary Education- in Sursand and Muzaffarpur, left his studies in 1921, during Non cooperation Movement.

### **Journalism:**

1921- *Tarun Bharat* (weekly).

1922- *Kisan Mitra* (weekly).

1924- *Golmal* (weekly).

1926- *Balak* (monthly).

1929- *Yuvak* (monthly).

1930- *Quaidi* (handwritten) in Hazaribagh jail.

1934- *Lok Sanghrah* (monthly) and *Karmveer* (monthly).

1935- *Yogi* (weekly).

1937- *Janta* (weekly).

1940- *Toofan* (handwritten) in Hazaribagh jail.

1946- *Himalay* (monthly).

1946- *Janta* (weekly).

1948- *Janvani* (monthly).

1950- *Nai Dhara* (monthly) and *Chunnu Munnu* (monthly).

1951- *Janta* (Daily).

## Literature:

Short story- *Chita Ke Phool* and other stories (1930-32).

Novel- *Patiton Ke Desh Mein* (1930-32) and *Quaidi Ki Patni* (1940).

Sketch- *Lal Tara* (1937-39), *Mati Ki Mooratein* (1940-41) and *Genhu Aur Gulab* (1948-50)

Play- *Ambapali* (1940-45), *Vijeta* (1943-45), *Netradan* (1948-50), *Sanghmitra* (1948-50), *Singhal Vijay* (1948-50) and *Tathagat* (1947)

Radio Play- *Shakuntala* (1949), *Amarjyoti* (1951), *Gaon Ke Devta* (not dated), *Ram Rajya* (1951) and *Sita Ki Maa* (1948-50)

Essay (Literary and Political) – *Hava Par* (1949), *Mashal* (1949), *Nai Nari* (1949), *Vande Vani Vinayakau* (1949) and *Satrange Indradhanush* (1939)

Children's Literature- *Bagula Bhagat* (1925), *Siyar Pande* (1935), *Bilai Mausai* (1927-28), *Phoolon ka Guchchha* (1938), *Snsar ki Manoram Kahaniyan* (1948-50), *Amrit ki Varsha* (1952), *Hamare Purkhe Hamare Padosi* (1948-50), *Sahas ke Putle* (1935-36), *Padchinh* (1938), *Bete ho to Aise* (1948-50), *Betian ho to Aisi* (1948-50), *Inke Charan Chinho Par* (1948-50), *Prithvi par Vijay* (1948-50), *Prakriti par Vijay* (1948-50) and *Rang Birange* (1942)

Biography- *Shivaji* (1925), *Guru Govind Singh* (1925), *Babu Langat Singh* (1926), *Vidyapati* (1926), *Rosa Luxemburg* (1946), *Jayprakash* (1947) and *Karl Marx* (1951).

Auto biographical Memoirs- *Mujhe Yad Hai* (1953), *Janjeeren Aur Deewaren* (1957) and *Kuch Main Kuch Ve* (1953).

Travelogues- *Pairon Mein Pankh Bandh Kar* (1952) and *Udte Chalo Udte Chalo* (1954)

Political Writings- *Lal Cheen* (1939), *Lal Roos* (1941) and *Jayprakash ki Vichardhara* (Undated).

Translation- *Ravindra Bharti* (1945) and *Tulips* (1945).

Treatise- *Bihari Satsai* (1925).

Commentary- *Vidyapati ki Padavali* (1925).

### **Literary institutions:**

1929- Propaganda Minister, Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Allahabad.

1946 to 50- Joint Secretary and General Secretary of Bihar Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Patna.

1951- President of Bihar Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Patna.

### **Politics**

1929- Member and Organiser of Yuvak Sangh, Patna.

1931- Founder Member of Bihar Socialist Party.

1934- Member of Socialist Research Institute, Patna.

----- Substitute Member of Executive Committee of the Congress Socialist Party.

1937- President of Town Congress Committee, Patna.

1939- President of Patna Labour Union.

1941 (March) - President of Bihar Provincial Kisan Sabha.

----- (June) -Vice President of All India Kisan Sabha.

### **Imprisonment**

1930- Six months in Hazaribagh Jail.

1932- One and a half years in Hazaribagh and Patna Camp Jail.

1937- Three Months in Hazaribagh Jail.

1938- Two days in City Jail Patna.

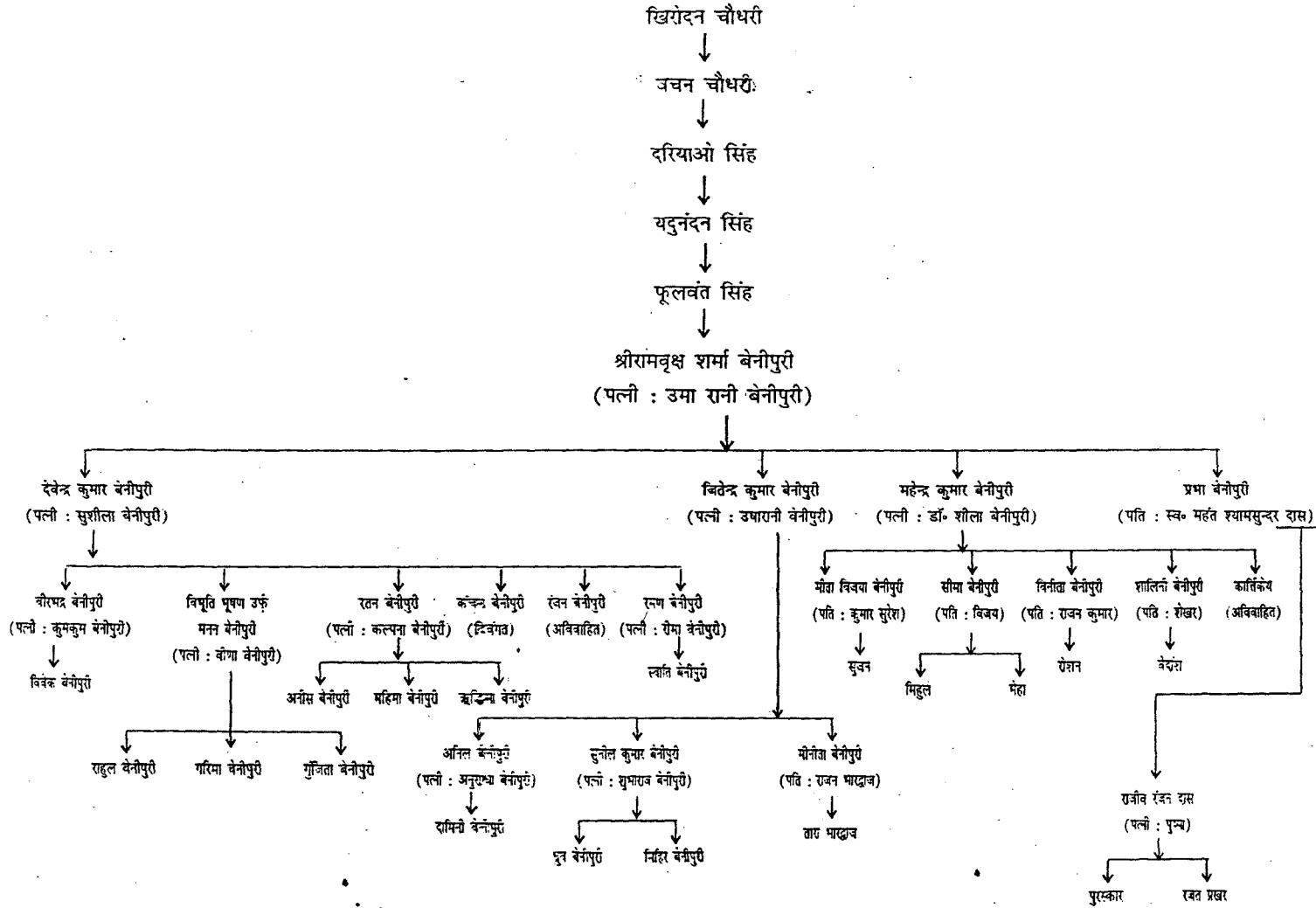
1939- Two weeks in Patna Jail.

1940- One Year in Hazaribagh Jail.

1941- Six months in Hazipur and Muzaffapur Jails.

1942 to 45- Three Years in Sitamarhi, Madhubani , Darbangha, Hazaribagh and Gaya Jails.

## श्रीरामवृक्ष बेनीपुरी का वंश वृक्ष



१ वर्ष

सावन, १९८३

अंक ११

# बालक



सम्पादक  
श्री राम वृक्ष रमा  
बेनीपुरी

एक अंक

हिंदी-पुस्तक-भंडार, लहेरियासराय से प्रकाशित

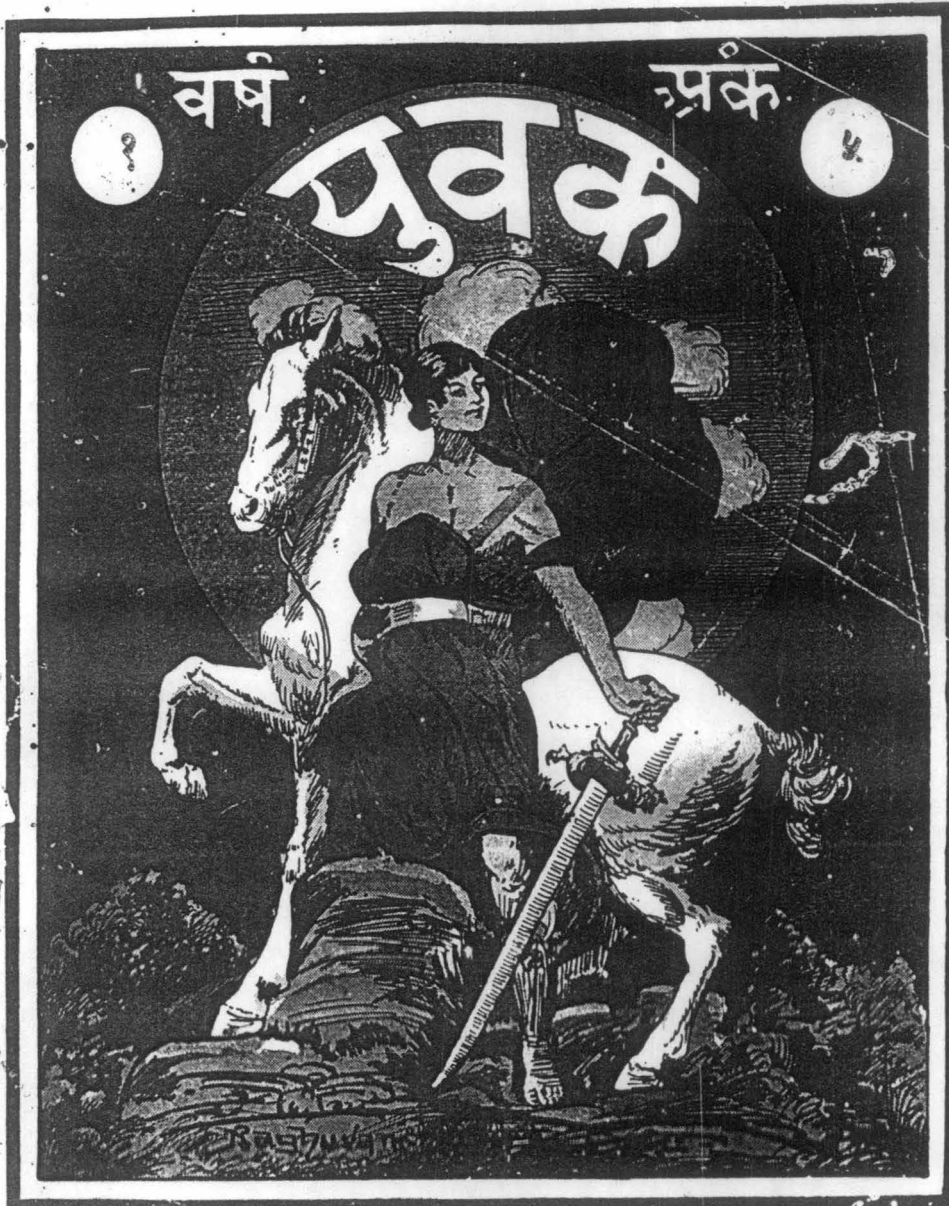
वर्ष २

# बालक



सम्पादक  
श्री  
राम वृक्ष रमा  
बेनीपुरी

शक्ति, साहस और साधना का मासिक



सालाना

४)

सम्पादक---

श्रीरामवृक्ष शर्मा बनारसपुरी

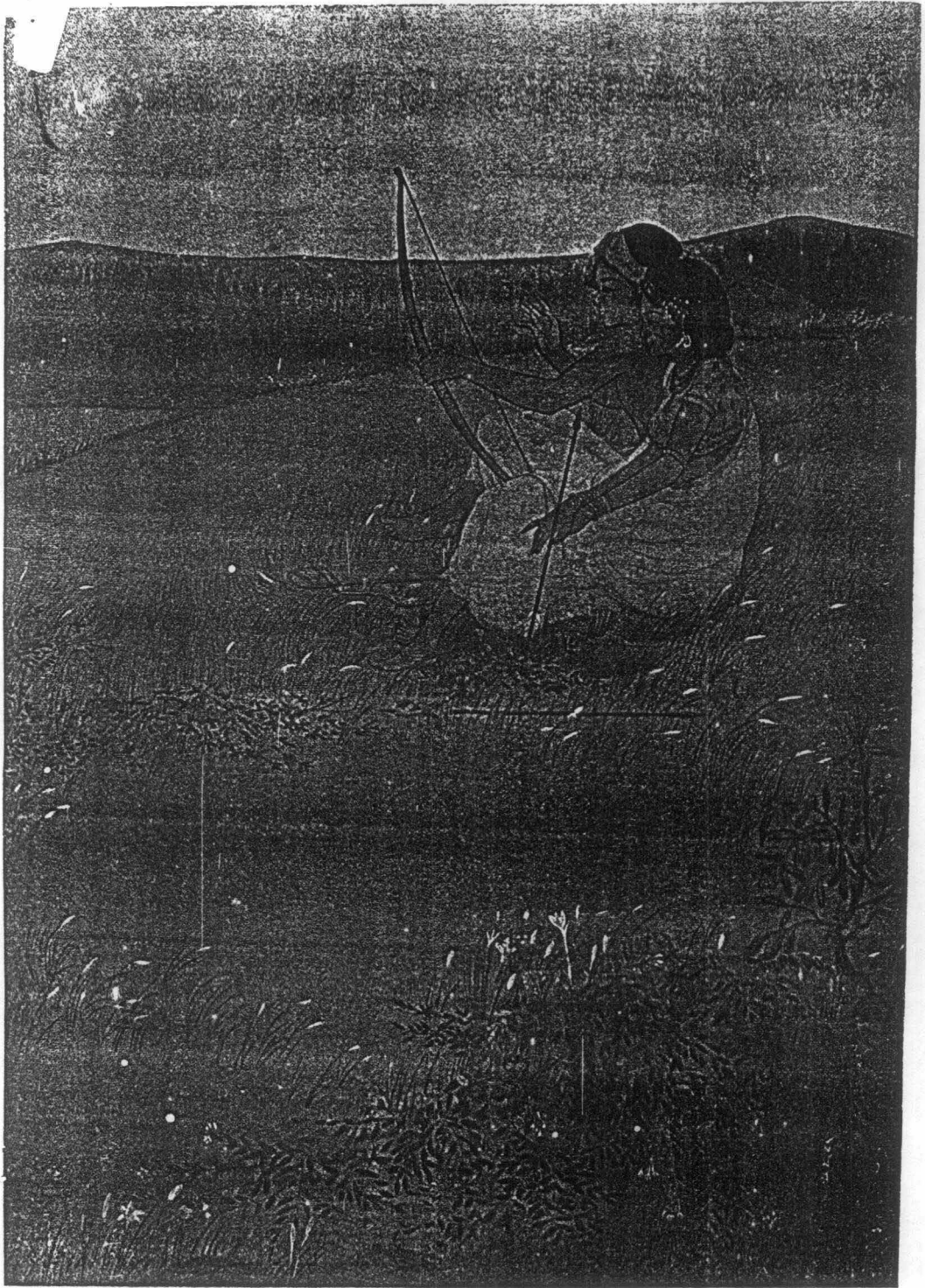
युवक आश्रम, फटना

नमूना



प्रलोभन





लक्ष्म-भेद

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*Balak*, monthly (1926-1928)

*Yuvak*, monthly (1929-1930)

*Yogi*, weekly (1935)

*Janta*, weekly (1937-1939)

*Janvani*, monthly (1946-1950)

*Nai Dhara*, monthly (1950- 1957)

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