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# Rethinking Caste and Resistance in India



Edited by  
Murzban Jal

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## CHAPTER 5

# Triveni Sangh in Literature and the Literature of Triveni Sangh

*Pramod Ranjan*

“The war that had ended in the 1930s will have to be resumed.” This resolve is reiterated time and again by the residents of Bihari Tola in Madhukar Singh’s novel *Katha Kaho Kunti Mai* published in 2002. The novel is centred on the Naxalite movement in Bhojpur (Bihar) in the 1968-74 period. But the heroine and other characters of the novel repeatedly recall the “war” of the 1930s, which, unfortunately, ended before it could reach its logical conclusion. In the novel, the 1930s is a sort of fantasy with which the unfulfilled desires of the characters are associated.

### Triveni Sangh in Literature

What is this war of the 1930s that the Dalit, agricultural and artisan castes want to resume? The Indian history that we study does not refer to any “war” or movement in the 1930s—one that could be a source of inspiration for lower-caste peasants and labourers. And that too for characters who are proponents of an extremist pro-change ideology like Naxalism.

Witness the allusions to this “war”, which is missing from the history books, in *Katha Kaho Kunti Mai*:

Despite his martyrdom, Massaheb [Naxal leader Jagdish Prasad Mahto, who is also the protagonist of famous Bengali writer

Mahasweta Devi's novel *Master Saheb* is still alive in the villages of Bhojpur. Almost everyone can be heard saying that Massaheb had stayed for the night at my place and was saying, 'Our battle is a long one'. People also reiterate his resolve: The war that had ended in the 1930s would have to be resumed. An armed struggle led by peasants—as was fought in the Naxalbari village of north Bengal—would have to be launched. The time for the second war has come; but this time, not under the leadership of any Triveni Sangh but under the banner of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist).<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, this war is the war of the Triveni Sangh, the bugle for which was sounded by the backward castes of Bihar before Independence. The characters of the novel are fighting that unfinished war through the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) in the 1970s.

In their research paper *Bahee Dhar Triveni Ki* (Loktantra Prakashan, Patna) published in 1998, Prassana Kumar Chaudhary and Shrikant, for the first time, conclusively proved that Triveni Sangh was founded on May 30, 1933. Its first meeting was held at Karghar in Shahabad district of Bihar. Chaudhary J.N.P. Mehta, Sardar Jagdev Singh Yadav, Shivpujan Singh and others were its founders. In 1935, the Triveni Sangh assumed its presence at the state level and Dasu Singh became its first president. For a long time, it was wrongly believed that Triveni Sangh had come into existence before the 1930s. Well-known Bihar politician Anugrah Narayan Singh says in his reminiscences that Triveni Sangh was formed "before 1930".<sup>2</sup>

With minor changes, the above-mentioned painstaking, authoritative and visionary study of Prassana Kumar Chaudhary and Shrikant finds mention in their two other books, *Bihar Mein Samajik Parivartan Ke Kuch Aayam* (Some Dimensions of Social Change in Bihar), Vani Prakashan, 2001 and *Bihar Mein Samajik Parivartan* (Social Change in Bihar), Vidya Vihar, 2010. Besides, this movement is referred to in K.K. Verma's *Changing Role of Caste Association*, and Kalyan Mukherjee and Rajendra Singh Yadav's *Bhojpur Bihar mein Naxalvadi Andolan* (Naxalite Movement in Bhojpur, Bihar).

After all, what was this Triveni Sangh? Just see what the characters of *Dhodhayacharit Manas*, the much-acclaimed novel of Satinath

Bhaduri, famous Bengali writer and the literary mentor of Phaniswarnath Renu say:

Kurmi Kshatri, Kushwaha Kshatri and Yaduvanshi Kshatri—these three castes will jointly stand up to the Rajputs and the Bhumihars. These three castes together constitute the Triveni Sangh.

What a beautiful name—Triveni Sangh! After telling this to Patnidaar, the old man Garbhu asks Bilita, ‘Have you ever heard such wise things in your life?’ Geedhad has not spoken till then. When everyone got up to leave, he only says this: A caste which is in slumber is not a living caste.<sup>3</sup>

It might be recalled here that some people had charged Renu with having plagiarized *Dhodhayacharit Manas* in his famous novel *Maila Aanchal*. Subsequently, Satinath Bhaduri rose to his disciple’s defence and dismissed all these allegations as baseless.

Be that as it may, “Bhaduri’s great novel *Dhodhacharit Manas* is based on the Indian Independence movement. A work that chronicles the struggle of the starving, unlettered, half-clad masses for independence in such a touching manner is rare. He has also depicted the duplicity of the avaricious landlords, selfish traders and opportunistic intellectuals at the time when independence was at hand ... that is why, this novel is described as the epic of the newly emerged India.”<sup>4</sup> The sound of “Triveni Sangh’s bugle” is clearly audible in this great epic of the newly emerged independent India.

Besides *Katha Kaho Kunti Mai* and *Dhadacharit Manas*, there are many other novels, stories and poems on which the influence of the Triveni Sangh’s movement is clearly visible. There are allusions to the movement in Renu’s novels and stories, too. Premkumar Mani has written a story titled *Uska Vote (Khoj Thatha Anya Kahaniyan*, Aadhar Prakashan, 1999), which offers a portrait of the Sangh’s first President Dasu Singh. Also, there is a longish reference to Triveni Sangh in his well-known novel *Dhalaan* (Vani Prakashan). Another writer from Bihar, C.D. Singh has written a novel *Triveni*, which was published in 2004 by Triveni Prakashan, Dehri-on-Son, Bihar. The writer of the novel was probably its publisher, too. There might be other similar works. This movement deeply influenced the ideology of many Hindi writers of the post-Independence era.

## A Bahujan Perspective Needed

Triveni Sangh is missing from Hindi criticism. Despite its deep impact on literature, the Triveni Sangh does not find even a cursory mention. What must be the reason behind the so-called “Marxist, progressive and pro-people” critics ignoring the influence of the Sangh on literature? Was Triveni Sangh’s ideology capitalist, retrograde or anti-people? Was it promoting aesthetic, existential-individualistic, or communal thoughts? Definitely not. It had openly declared:

Triveni Sangh is the stream of the tears of the exploited, the repressed, the ruled, and Dalits, peasants, labourers and businessmen, and the bugle of the sigh of those whose religious, social and political rights have been trampled upon by a minority that is making merry, not only in India but in the entire world. And they are girding their loins to battle for their rights while wishing for world peace.<sup>5</sup> (*Triveni Sangh Ka Bigul*, 1940)

The reason the movement of Triveni Sangh and other similar movements, philosophies and thoughts are ignored by Hindi criticism is the lack of a “Bahujan perspective”. The “elite perspective”, of course, is always trying to consign such thoughts to the dustbin of history by either maintaining a silence on them or by making baseless allegations against them. On the other hand, owing to its ingrained values, the section of the Indian elite that claims to believe in the so-called “Marxist, progressive and pro-people” approach to criticism has yet to imbibe the essentials of these philosophies. Even if its concerns went beyond the clichéd terms, they stopped at the expression of sympathy for the untouchables. Since even this sympathy was transplanted, they needed more and more nauseating, tragic and grief-producing depictions to arouse their sensitivities. The literature of the untouchables, detailing their miseries, fulfils this need of theirs just as Sharatchandra’s *Devdas* and Dharmaveer Bharati’s *Gunahon Ka Devta* serve to meet the emotional needs of an adolescent immersed in platonic love.

Again, to fulfil their need, Dwiij-Marxist critics aided in every possible way the narrowing down of the wider meaning of the word “Dalit”. In society and literature the word “Dalit” originally referred to the entire non-Dwiij social community, including Scheduled Castes, OBCs, lower Vaishyas and women. They narrowed it down to mean only

the SCs. Some SC intellectuals committed the grave error of believing that the Dwij Marxists were their well-wishers and concluded that this would serve at least their short-term interests. Due to these reasons, the study and analysis of the movements, philosophies and thoughts which were shared by the entire non-Dwij, Bahujan people or which were more popular among the OBCs than among the SCs, became less frequent and ultimately came to a virtual stop.

The example of Triveni Sangh would suffice to understand the fallout of this development. Attempts were made to consign to the dustbin of history—a wide social movement with a strong philosophical foundation and one which was “a union of peasants, labourers and businessmen against landlords, big businessmen, capitalists and highly paid government officers”<sup>6</sup>—by branding it as a body of casteists and traitors. But the so-called “Marxist, progressive and pro-people” intellectualism never rose to its defence. This, when the movement was based on the vision of “Bahujan Hitay, Bahujan Sukhay” and the philosophy and thinking behind which could have become a beacon not only for politics today but also for literary ideology.

Due to these reasons, it has become imperative to develop a Bahujan criticism methodology to examine and understand literature—a methodology which neither neglects caste-based discourse, like Marxism does, nor is one-sided like Dalit criticism. The pro-people ideologies of Marx, Ambedkar, Phule, Periyar, Narayan Guru, Triveni Sangh, Arjak Sangh, etc. should be the guiding lights of this methodology of criticism.

### **History of Triveni Sangh**

Triveni Sangh was active from 1933 to 1942. That was the time when “leaving its adolescence behind, the twentieth century moved towards youth. Its bugle sounded all over the world. All races, religions, countries and societies tried to get their act together. Everyone attempted to progress and grow. But at the same time, the exploiters and the rulers were also not sitting idle. They began increasing the scale and intensity of their exploitation. The communities that tried to rise were suppressed. The sacred threads of some were broken; the inter-marriages with others were stopped. Some were sued for recovery of land revenue; the fields of others were auctioned off. Some were denied access to wells; the roads of others were blocked. In short, the oppressors began their dirty game.”<sup>7</sup>

Amid the awakening of the Backward-Dalit communities and the all-out efforts to suppress and exploit them, was born the Triveni Sangh, the “objective and programme of which was the progress of the exploited, the ruled and the Dalits, i.e. the entire undeveloped society”.<sup>8</sup> It declared, “Who owns the land? The one who tills it.”<sup>9</sup> The Sangh launched a movement in all the three fields—religious, social and political—for the progress of the backward communities. “The Sangh’s organization was a big success and all backward communities joined it. As a result, many of those who were arrogant had to bite the dust.”<sup>10</sup>

The Sangh showcased its numerical strength by fielding candidates in the Bihar assembly polls of 1937 and in the district board elections that followed in 1939. Though all its candidates lost in the 1937 polls it succeeded in proving that a political battle can be fought by bringing about social awareness among Dalits and Backwards. In the district board elections in 1939, five of its 21 candidates emerged victorious and others garnered sizeable chunks of the votes. Besides Yadavs, Koeris, Kurmis and other backward-Dalit castes, “Dusadhs were also with the Triveni Sangh in these elections. Among the chowkidars [village watchmen], a sizeable number were Dusadhs. Thus, the Sangh got its agent and propagandist in every village. At polling booths, the chowkidars used to identify the voters—and the Dusadh chowkidars did their duty well. They refused to identify many veiled upper-caste women.”<sup>11</sup> The active participation of the Dalits-Backwards in these elections under the banner of the Sangh had a wide impact and the Congress was forced to change its upper-caste-dominated organizational set-up in Bihar.

The chief theoretician of the Triveni Sangh was Yadunandan Prasad Mehta (J.N.P. Mehta), alias Swami Sahastranan Saraswati (February 18, 1911—January 3, 1986). Mehta was born in Lakhantola of the village Jitaura in Shahabad district. “In 1940, he wrote a book titled *Triveni Sangh Ka Bigul* under the pen name of Triveni Bandhu Chaudhary J.N.P. Mehta. The publisher’s name was given as ‘Triveni Shakti Karyalay, Jitaura, Shahabad’. This was perhaps the first attempt to craft a distinct ideological-political philosophy of the Backwards.”<sup>12</sup>

Mehta had also established a printing press at Jagdishpur in Bihar. He wrote many other books including *Aage Badne Ke Rahein*, *Gaon Ka Sona* and *Aage Badho*. In 1948, he edited a magazine called *Shoshit Pukar*. Some of his colleagues in Triveni Sangh were also creative

writers. It is said that the constitution of the Sangh was also drawn up. However, for want of adequate research, most of the literature of the Sangh is unavailable to date. The Sangh was active from 1933 to 1942. "By 1945, the Sangh was almost dead."<sup>13</sup>

### **Triveni Sangh's Book**

*Triveni Sangh Ka Bigul* is the only available book of the Sangh that elaborates its worldview, ideology and action plan. The book's writer Chaudhary J.N.P. Mehta has described it as "Triveni Sangh's book". Though the book is a movement's manifesto, it is not a dry or sermonizing treatise. It is more like a literary work in which idioms and proverbs have been liberally used. It uses imagery, metaphors and parables to drive home its message. Whenever Mehta describes an incident, it is as if it is happening before our own eyes. The imagery gives the reader the wider background, too. Some parts of the book are so touching and reveal deep, distilled truth in such a manner that while going through them, one feels as if a valley immersed in darkness has been suddenly illuminated by a very bright source of light, exposing both its beauty as well as its horrors.

As for the sophistication of language, the Hindi of *Triveni Ka Bigul* is on a par with, if not better than, the Hindi that was used in the literary field in 1930-40. The thought-provoking contents and the flow of language can be the envy of any accomplished writer. J.N.P. Mehta's expertise in the art of writing appears to be even more surprising when he says, "Friends, I could not make this book as complete and comprehensive as it should have been because I am not a scholar—I am an ordinary educated person. Moreover, this is my first attempt at writing and I wrote the book in the press even as it was being printed."<sup>14</sup> In this article, we will discuss in brief the thoughts of the Sangh on different issues on the basis of this book.

### **Voice of Farmers, Workers and Small Businessmen**

One can get an idea of the Triveni Sangh's ideology merely by reading the *Samaritan* (Dedication) page of *Triveni Sangh Ka Bigul*. The writer says, "To those who have boundless respect in their hearts for the country and for the exploited, the ruled and Dalits—those whose hearts are raring to end injustices, atrocities and victimization; those in whose hearts, the

elixir of life is raining for farmers, workers and businessmen—at the feet of such people, this book is dedicated.”<sup>15</sup>

It is another matter that in north Bihar, at the rural level, Naxalites drew inspiration from the Triveni Sangh. But the policy of Triveni Sangh was not of extremism or of boycott of the state but of securing concessions from government, private and all other sources of power for the deprived sections through democratic means. The Sangh believed, “Ninety per cent of the people of this country are backward ... Triveni Sangh wants concessions for this backward community in both public and government spheres, so that they can grow.”<sup>16</sup> To get this concession, it called for using the power of the ballot: “We should ensure that in all elections, we field our able and honest candidates and all our votes go to them.”<sup>17</sup>

The Sangh said, “We consider farmers, workers and businessmen as the Triveni of the country, without whom no nation can be built. Farmers produce commodities, labourers give it a shape that makes them tradable and the businessmen take it from one place to another—this is the business of the world. Because there is a natural relationship between the three—which is called Triveni Sangh or Triveni Sangham.”<sup>18</sup> In the Sangh’s eyes, the farmers were today’s OBCs, labourers were socially excluded Achhoots while the businessmen were lower Vaishyas who ran small businesses.

Just see the description of this Triveni society in the words of the *Bigul*: “The condition of the farmers, workers and businessmen is very pitiable—old men and women, young men and women, children, all work day and night. In the afternoon, when the sun is raining fire, the farmers, drenched in sweat, are toiling in their fields, when all the others are snoring in their homes. In the months of Sawan and Bhadon, when it is pouring from the skies, the sun is not seen for weeks, it is raining incessantly, the farmer is transplanting paddy with his family, shivering with cold and the entire world is sitting at the jharokhas [windows] singing kajri [semi-classical songs typically sung in the rainy season]. It is the month of Poos or Maagh: Heaps of paddy are lying in the barn. The farmer has nothing to cover himself with except straw in the biting cold. A small child is asking his father to buy him a sweet costing one paisa. The father is looking towards the ground. Tears are streaming down his cheeks. It seems he is saying—Oh Mother Earth,

I tortured you to produce paddy but I cannot sell even one paisa worth of it because it is guarded by the landlord. Oh mother, take me in and provide asylum to this unfortunate farmer. The condition of the labourers is no less pitiable. They are made to work like animals for the whole day. And in return, they are given only three *ser* [a measure of weight approximately equal to 800 grams] paddy, which is not even half of what is needed to fill the bellies of his family members. Landlords and capitalists are great tormentors. Landlords are such tyrants that they do not even pay the wages to the labourers and even if they do, the wages are meagre. Moreover, the labourers get kicks, punches and abuses in bonus. The capitalists are also close cousins of the landlords. They make the labourers toil like animals and their profit is twenty times more than the wages they pay the labourers ... The fate of our small businessmen is similar. They are exploited by big businessmen, and the government's income tax department does not let them live in peace. Though they are not liable to pay tax, they are burdened with taxes due to the evil eye of the officers."<sup>19</sup>

Triveni Sangh was "an advocate of spreading 'surajya', happiness, equality (social, political and economic), peace, and love, not only in India but in the entire world."<sup>20</sup> And its advocacy was not merely verbal or outwardly. It laid stress on the unity of all exploited classes, literacy, women's education, health, nutritious diet and a well-run family life. It focused on things that were of long-term importance. The Sangh said, "Get immersed in love because love is the essence of life. One who does not have love in his heart is merely a heap of bones covered with flesh."<sup>21</sup>

### **Poetic Expressions of Triveni Sangh**

Besides presenting a fictionalized account of the social, political and economic ideology of the Sangh, *Triveni Sangh Ka Bigul* also includes 11 poems. Yadunandan Mehta was a well-rounded poet and he may have also used pen names such as Indra and Madhav. The book begins with *Ish Prarthna* (Ode to God) but this is not a run-of-the-mill prayer. It calls for a love that is all-pervading. Just look at some of the lines:

Oh God, let our life be for the world; Let our life be for the good of others.

Our nature should be so good that it should enchant even our enemies. The moment they see you, they should say that you are meant to be loved.<sup>22</sup>

In fact, “love” permeates the entire thinking of Triveni Sangh. It believes that “Only love can bring about the rule of peace and happiness in the world”.<sup>23</sup> But the Sangh does not hesitate to present itself as an extremely powerful organization—of men of indomitable courage—when it happens to face oppressors. One of the poems in the book is titled “Triveni Sangh Ka Bigul”. It may have been published on the back cover of the original book. Some of its lines are worth quoting:

It destroys the sins of the sinners, it is like death’s messenger for them,.....It is an annihilator of arrogance and pride, it exposes the intrigues of the vile oppressors. It helps the exploited of all classes by all possible means.”<sup>24</sup>

The poems compiled in the book deserve a critical reading and understanding but for the present, we should not deviate in that direction. We would prefer to understand the key thoughts of the Sangh. According to Triveni Sangh, “There are many kinds of sins in this world but there is no greater sin than tolerating injustice and atrocities and not resisting them ... If someone powerful is tormenting the weak and the helpless, it is one’s bounden duty to resist him. Even if this involves some violence, it is acceptable and correct.”<sup>25</sup> The message of not hesitating from indulging in violence, if it becomes necessary for the “defence of the poor and the weak”, was meant for the rural squads of the communities which had been shattered by centuries of atrocities and injustice and for which society had nothing to offer. This was a call for communities that were shackled by “social, economic and political imperialism” for centuries. Their own Hindu-Sanatan religion was also not with them. Their religion was held captive by their religious brethren of higher varnas.

### **A Glance at the Sangh Vocabulary**

The communities that were called “Achhoot” once, then Harijan, are now known as Dalits. And most of the castes labelled Shudras in Hindu scriptures are now called OBCs or backward castes. These words have become part of the vocabulary of literary and sociological discourses and of political discussions, and are universally accepted. But that was not

so till many years after Independence. In the *Triveni Sangh Ka Bigul*, the term "Annunat Samaj" (undeveloped society), with "backward" in Roman script within brackets, is used for today's OBCs. At some places "people who are backward" and "Dalit" have also been used. At most of the places, the same terms "undeveloped communities" and "backward" are used for today's Scheduled Castes. That means "backward", and "Dalit" have been used interchangeably for OBCs and SCs. But at many places, the word "Achhoot" has been used for the SCs of today. At some places, "Shudra" has been put within brackets after the word "Achhoot". The words "kisan" (farmer) and "mazdoor" (labourer) have also been used for these two communities respectively. The Savarna/Dwij castes have been generally addressed as exploiters, oppressors, etc. At one place they have been called "uech jati" (high castes), with the words "high class" in Roman script within brackets. At another place, it has been demanded that the undeveloped castes be made "forward" by giving them special concessions in appointments to government and public posts. Here the word "forward" is not used for Dwij/Savarna castes. There is need for a historical and sociological analysis of the vocabulary used in *Triveni Sangh Ka Bigul* to denote Dalit, OBC and Savarna communities.

### **Call for Unity of Deprived Communities**

Triveni Sangh stood for a rocklike unity of "undeveloped" and "Achhoot communities". According to the Sangh, "Just as the lust of the rich gave birth to the capitalist, similarly the word 'Achhoot' [Shudra] has been created to enslave people by the religious bigots and the blood-thirsty ... Triveni Sangh ... wants to banish the word 'Achhoot' from this world."<sup>26</sup>

At the time when the Sangh was active, Congress and its Dwij-Gandhism was the dominant force in Bihar as in most parts of the country. In Bihar, Swami Sahjanand and his Kisan Sabha actively represented the Bhumihars and Brahmans. Triveni Sangh admitted that Mahatma Gandhi was a hypnotic and an almost magical personality and drew inspiration from many of his thoughts. But it questioned the motives and ideology of the Kisan Sabha of Swami Sahjanand, the Congress and its Dwij-Gandhism.

At that time, the fast unto death undertaken by Gandhiji for the emancipation of the Dalits had drawn the community towards the

Congress in a big way. Triveni Sangh tried to convey the reality of the Gandhians to its constituency—"When Mahatma Gandhi announced that he was going on a fast unto death for the emancipation of the untouchables what happened? At some places, public meetings of Achhoots were organized and longish speeches were made. At other places, they were invited to fill water from wells. And Mahatma ji started receiving letters and telegrams from all corners of the country that 'we have adopted and accepted the Achhoots, that we no longer hate them'. Similarly, the Achhoots wrote to him, 'Now, we are facing no problems. We enjoy the same rights as Savarna Hindus' ... But what happened? Were you emancipated? The same tone, the same behaviour, the same tambourine, the same beat were back."<sup>27</sup> Cautioning the Achhoots against this kind of Gandhism, the Sangh told them, "Brother, the rich are helped by the rich and the poor by the poor. And so, all of you should come under the banner of Triveni Sangh because Triveni Sangh is an organization of only the poor."<sup>28</sup>

### **Anti-Brahmanism and Secularism**

Triveni Sangh was a bitter critic of Brahmanism and Dwijvaad. It was equally unsparing in its criticism of the rituals and hypocrisy of the Sanatan Dharma but it believed that the "foundations of the Sanatan Dharma are so strong that it cannot be destroyed even in 'kaaltray' [the three times, i.e. the past, the present and the future]"<sup>29</sup>. Going through *Triveni Sangh Ka Bigul*, it seems that the Sangh was not even remotely aware of Ambedkar's movements.

But their concept of secularism was very clear. They believed that whatever their religion, the poor shared a common misery and that "Ram and Rahim are one and the same. Hindus worship addressing him as Ram-Krishna, Muslims as Allah and Christians as God. But the Almighty of all is the same ... but due to misunderstanding, there is tension and blood is spilt by organizing riots ... Mostly Pandits and Maulvis engineer these riots ... those who make them fight, clap and achieve their ends but it is you, poor brothers, who are beheaded."<sup>30</sup>

### **True Patriotic Sons**

Triveni Sangh enthusiastically joined the freedom movement and openly opposed the landlords. "Its leaders and workers actively participated in

the Quit India Movement ... They went underground and were jailed.”<sup>31</sup> But despite that, they were charged with being hand in glove with the British and the landlords.

At that time, “All the top leaders of Bihar—Dr. Sachiddanand Sinha, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Swami Sahjanand, Anugraha Narayan Singh, etc—associated themselves with organizations of their castes.”<sup>32</sup> No one questioned the association of these upper-caste leaders with organizations of their castes but Triveni Sangh, which had moved from caste towards community, was branded as “casteist” and even “traitor” and was accused of dividing the society. Besides pro-Congress newspapers of Bihar, even Jawaharlal Nehru and Swami Sahjanand, the leader of the Kisan Sabha, described the Sangh as casteist. Even more surprising was the caste bias of two well-known Hindi writers Rahul Sankratayan and Ramvriksha Benipuri—both belonging to the caste of Swami Sahjanand. Benipuri was directly associated with the Kisan Sabha, which was an opponent of the Sangh. Rahul Sankratayan also accused the Sangh of being a stooge of the landlords. In his book *Dimagi Gulami* (Mental Slavery), he writes, “Ever since the movement of the peasants has gained momentum, the landlords have been forced to take steps to weaken the peasants ... that is why, they back the movement of the agricultural labourers, just as in the last elections they had provided counsel to the Triveni Sangh and even more so, had helped it monetarily.”<sup>33</sup> Clearly, Sankratayan’s allegation was absolutely baseless and flew in the face of the facts. The Triveni Sangh was created to oppose landlords and feudals; and had to face violent reprisals of the landlords.

The following lines give an idea of what patriotism meant for the Sangh. These lines are from the poem *Juloos Gaan* (Procession Song) that appears in *Triveni Sangh Ka Bigul*:

We are the soldiers of Triveni Sangh, we will go to the battlefield.

We are boiling from within, we will do something great.

...

We will console mother, We will serve the nation.

The fortunes of the miserable will change, We will be called true sons of the nation.<sup>34</sup>

## Village, Education and Family

The Sangh believed that the key to the rise of the oppressed is political empowerment, and the more influential a community is in the ruling establishment, the higher it will rise. "Nothing can be done without organizing. Therefore, we should shun mutual rivalries and unite."<sup>35</sup> For achieving this objective, its motto was "Sanghe Shakti Kaliyuge"<sup>36</sup> (in Kaliyug, strength lies in organizing). But gaining political power was not its only or ultimate objective.

The Triveni Sangh, despite its small size, had created a stir in the politics of Bihar and had forced the powerful political groupings of Bhumihar-Rajputs and Kayasthas in the Congress and the Kisan Sabha to sit up and take notice and had even managed to humble them in a sense. But that did not make the Triveni Sangh happy or satisfied.

That is why, it is important to explore what it mainly intended to achieve through the strength of its organization. For this, we will have to refer to the chapter titled "Hamara Programme" (Our Programme) in *Triveni Sangh Ka Bigul*. In the chapter, the writer says, "Friends, you have brought the Triveni Sangh into existence for the rise of the exploited and the oppressed and Dalits; for ending injustice and atrocities; for showing how to behave like humans with one another; for sounding the bugle of freedom in the shackled hearts and minds; for asserting the rights of the human society; for improving the economic condition of the farmers, businessmen and labourers; and for the progress of agriculture, crafts and other professions and businesses. But till now, you have not been able to do anything concrete to achieve your objectives."<sup>37</sup>

Which of the "concrete objectives" had not been attained and had left the Sangh worried? The Sangh's primary objective was "physical, mental and spiritual" advancement of the Dalit and undeveloped communities. For the fulfilment of this objective, "Many things need to be done. But let us begin with moving towards the villages, where 90 per cent of the people of the country are doing physical penance, not only for the country but for the human society; in biting cold, braving scorching rays of the sun and amid pouring rain and thundering clouds. So come, let us go and serve them because they are the gods of the country."<sup>38</sup>

Triveni Sangh was committed to the transformation of the villages and for that it wanted to build a team of volunteers, to be called

Triveni Seva Dal, in every village. The team was to have the following responsibilities: eradication of illiteracy, establishing a library in every village, launching sanitation campaigns and managing akhadas (gymnasium/a place to exercise). About exercise, this is what the Sangh had to say: "Don't ask what benefits will accrue from exercising. Just imagine how the way of an elephant gets cleared ... Young men, consider exercise as necessary for the body as eating and defecating."<sup>39</sup> The Sangh's agenda of a healthy mind and healthy body demonstrates its far-sightedness. Its ideology did not attach significance only to immediate results—to short-term victories and defeats. Its aim was a comprehensive development of the coming generations.

The Sangh struggled at the grassroots level and its work-plan was very practical. It did not allow its ideology to get caught in the web of wordplay or highbrow philosophy. Its concept of an ideal society included people full of *joie de vivre* and happy families: "Can even paradise attract a person who has lived—even if just for a few days—in a well-run and well-maintained family?"<sup>40</sup> But it was acutely aware that without economic independence, it would be meaningless to dream of a "well-run and well-maintained family" and that the grinding poverty of the Backward-Dalit families was the first and the biggest stumbling block in their "physical, mental and spiritual" progress. That is why, in its *Bigul*, it quoted Mahatma Thiruvalluvar: "Mercifulness, which is born out of love, can be brought up only by the mother of money ... earn money because no other material is as capable of turning an unknown and insignificant person into an honourable man as money is."<sup>41</sup>

### **Inter-Caste Marriages and Women**

The Triveni Sangh stood for inter-caste love marriages, equal rights to women and widow remarriage. Although the literature of Triveni Sangh refers to women mainly in their role as "wife" "daughter-in-law" and "mother-in-law" and says, "One who does not have strength is bound to lose his money and wife to others"<sup>42</sup>, it would be unfair to conclude that the Sangh's thinking about women was retrograde. As the writer has pointed out in the preface, "I wrote the book in the press even as it was being printed". Hence, it can be assumed that the Sangh's thoughts may not have been comprehensively delineated in the book. On compiling what has been written at different places in the book about women, the

disparateness of thoughts becomes apparent. It says, "Those who keep on lying at the feet of their wives can never attain anything. Those who wish to achieve something great should not fall into the trap of this useless love." But at another place, the writer says, "People have thrust religion even into the realm of marriage. If a man of one caste marries a woman of another caste, it is said that he has lost his religion ... Isn't this sad for the country and society? Is religion really coming in the way? No, not at all. Religion says that women are one caste and men are another. If such [inter-caste] marriages become common, it will not be long before this country sees brighter days."<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, at one place the writer advises the daughter-in-law: "If your mother-in-law abuses you, just plug your ears with your fingers. That is what girls of decent families are supposed to do." On the other hand, it tells mothers-in-law, "You harass your daughters-in-law a lot. I admit that they are a bit hurried and hasty; but that is natural ... See, when your daughter-in-law is pregnant, don't torment her even by mistake. Don't hurt her ... instead, free her from worries and always keep her happy."<sup>44</sup> This sermonizing to mothers and daughters-in-law, some may feel, is unwarranted but looking at it from a wider perspective, one would realize that they have a long-term validity and are necessary, given the condition of backward and Dalit families. The Sangh's belief in equality of men and women becomes clearer when the writer asks religious leaders, "Didn't you feel ashamed while decreeing that women should be killed when they commit a mistake but men should be patted on their backs? Have you seen the reddened eyes of widows, which have swollen due to crying?" The Sangh exhorts its people, "The illiteracy among women is taking the country and society downhill because society's progress depends more on women ... Educated young men should take a vow that from today onwards they will let their wives get an education."<sup>45</sup>

### **Carrying Forward Triveni Sangh's Inspirations, Ideas and Sentiments**

"Though Triveni Sangh's activities were primarily confined to Bihar, parts of eastern Uttar Pradesh, adjoining Bihar, were also influenced by it."<sup>46</sup> At the political level, the Triveni Sangh's mission was carried forward by the Shoshit Dal, founded by Jagdev Prasad in 1967 in Bihar.

The Dal formed its government in the state in 1968 with B.P. Mandal as the chief minister—the same B.P. Mandal who was to later become the chairman of the famous “Mandal Commission”.

Similarly, in the field of social movements, Triveni Sangh’s successor was Arjak Sangh, founded by Ramswaroop Verma in Uttar Pradesh in the same year (1968). Again, in 1968, Jagdev Prasad began publishing his weekly *Shoshit* on the lines of J.N.P. Mehta’s magazine *Shoshit Pukar*. Arjak Sangh propounded the theory of the “unquestionable superiority of physical labour” and tried to apply it to religion, art, literature and all other facets of life.<sup>47</sup> On the lines of Triveni Sangh, *Shoshit Dal* asserted that that the “battle between the 10 per cent exploiters and the 90 per cent exploited was the real battle of socialism or communalism in Hindustan. The castes known as Harijan, Adivasi and Musalman are exploited.”<sup>48</sup> It also had the slogans, ‘*Das Ka Shashan Naabhe Par, Nahi Chalega, Nahi Chalega* (Ten cannot rule over ninety) and “*Jo Zameen Boye, Wahee Zameen Ka Malik Howe*”<sup>49</sup> (The tiller is the owner of the land).

Ramswaroop Verma, the founder of Arjak Sangh, had also established a political organization called Apna Dal in Uttar Pradesh. In 1972, the *Shoshit Samaj Dal* was formed by the merger of Apna Dal and *Shoshit Dal*.

If we want to look for the remnants of the Triveni Sangh’s movement, we should focus on the works of Ramswaroop Verma, Jagdev Prasad and Lalai Singh Yadav. The three of them expanded and developed the inspirations, qualities and thoughts of Triveni Sangh in their true sense. This stream is still alive in different forms in north India. This is a related but a different story.

Some people mistakenly believe that the “Picchda Pawe Sau Mein Saath” (Backwards should get sixty from the hundred) movement, launched many years after Independence by Dr Ram Manohar Lohia, was a revival of the movement of Triveni Sangh. In their study of the Triveni Sangh, Prassana Kumar Chaudhary and Shrikant have described Lohia as the person “who developed a more mature ideological and political philosophy of social revolution of the Backwards.”<sup>50</sup>

Though Lohia was influenced by Triveni Sangh, his thoughts, in fact, came in the way of the flourishing of the basic spirit of Triveni Sangh. “Dr. Lohia’s personality was so full of contradictions that even

today it is difficult to guess what he exactly wanted. To strengthen his politics, he raised the slogan of 'Picchda Pawe Sau Mein Sath' and did manage to garner support for his party but he did not launch a systematic attack on Brahmanical thinking. What Lohia propounded and propagated could help form a government but it could not build a movement."<sup>51</sup> That is why Ramswaroop Verma and Jagdev Prasad had to part ways with Dr. Lohia and create their distinct base.

### **In the End, Swarajya Versus Surajaya and a Warning**

The rather outdated concepts, which were at odds with modern science, propounded by Mahatma Gandhi in his *Hind Swaraj*, published in 1909, were very popular and enjoyed wide acceptability during the period when the Sangh was active. But the Sangh rejected them and described them as concepts that would lead to the rule of the "rich and the tyrants". Just see what *Triveni Sangh Ka Bigul* has to say about them:

No, No. Not swarajya but surajya. Triveni Sangh wants surajya. Swarajya means self-rule—hence, Swarajya in India would mean the Indian state. If someone believes that only swarajya would make the people of this country happy and prosperous, he is living in a fool's paradise. India is being ruled by foreigners for the last 150 years only. Before that, India was being ruled by Indians. I want to ask, did happiness and peace reign here then? Did everyone enjoy equal religious, social and political rights? If not, then of what use is this swarajya? It will be the rule of the rich and the tyrants. What will we, the poor and the weak, get? Their slavery?<sup>52</sup>

Therefore, Sangh not only wanted freedom from the British but an end to "religious, social, political and economic imperialism and its replacement by religious, social, political and economic equity. It wants industrial revolution so that everyone can flourish and there can be a surajya of happiness and peace."<sup>53</sup>

Almost a century after Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*, in 2010-11, a Gandhian called Anna Hazare launched a movement based on the concept of the so-called swaraj. At the time of the writing of this essay, his disciple and a very well-known face of Indian politics is the chief minister of the Delhi state. He wrote a book titled *Swaraj*<sup>54</sup> in 2012 and in some respects, he has presented this concept much more clumsily

than Gandhi. He wants to implement this concept in today's India. Needless to say, ideologies like that of Triveni Sangh and the political unity of Backwards, Dalits and Tribals can give a befitting reply to such retrograde thinking and politics.

In the end, I would like to remind the Bahujans of the dangers of the falling-apart of the unity of "Triveni Bandhuon" (Triveni brothers), as pointed out in the book. "Be cautious. Even if you slightly digress from your path, you will be gobbled up like grains."<sup>55</sup>

### Notes

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4. Devkant Barua, Preface to Hindi translation of *Dhodaya Charitmanas*, in *Ibid*.
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11. Prassana Kumar Chaudhary and Shrikant, *Bihar mein Samajik Parivartan* (New Delhi: Vidhya Vihar, 2010):
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