

Maila Anchal: Rejuvenating the Soul of Anchlik Upanyas by Phanishwar Nath

Renu

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Abstract:

Maila Anchal opens the door to a new literary approach that has been called Anchlik Upanyas in the history of both Hindi as well as English literary world. An encyclopedic narration of a particular region, place or geography in a specific historic time frame or a space comprising all the peculiar characteristics of an anchalik justifies its true nature and spirit in the setting years of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Renu himself called 'Maila Anchal' an 'Anchalik Upanyas', a regional novel with the plethora of a particular region called Marygunj village of a Purnia district of northern Bihar. The vicinity of the novel is set around the stated village that tells us about the lives of the villagers during the traumatic times between 1946-48 which saw the Indian independence, partition, social-political upheavals, assassination of Gandhi, the abolition of the land-tenure system and socio-economic transition of the society as well as polity. Unlike earlier writers of the time who narrated village as stereotypically rigid and unchanging, Renu radically depicts a more gentle, honest, realistic, sensitive and detailed representation of the Anchalik with rapid transformations of man women relationships and social-economic transformation towards a modern era. The soul and the spirit of the region are reflected holistically in its truest sense representing the throbbing nerve of the region and its culture and tradition.

Key Words: Anchalik Upanyas, Regionalism, Local language, tradition and culture

In this research paper, the definition and characteristics of Anchalik Upanyas are attempted and their efforts to cover the socio-economic culture of the region are emphasized. Until considering Sahitya Manthan, A Peer-Reviewed, Open Access e-journal, ISSN:2582 6867, Website:<http://www.sahityamanthan.in>, Year-1, Issue-4, Continuous Issue-4, November-December 2020

Renu's genius in the way of expressing his unique qualities, values and complexities in his literary craft, deliberate efforts to describe and validate regionalism motivate the reader. As specified by one standard: "In a regional novel the writer concentrates on a particular part of a country and depicts its life in such a way as to bring about a consciousness among the readers of its unique characteristics, distinguishing features and particular customs and patterns of life."¹

Phanishwar Nath Renu's magnum opus *Maila Anchal*, published in 1954, brought the author the President's Award for the best novel of the year in 1955. The vicinity of the novel is set around the village called Maryganj that tells us about the *Anchalik* lives of the villagers during the traumatic times between 1946-48 which saw the Indian independence, partition, social-political upheavals, assassination of Gandhi, the abolition of the land-tenure system and socioeconomic transition of a particular Anchali i.e. region or place in the context of time and space. Unlike earlier writers of the time who narrated village as stereotypically rigid and unchanging, Renu radically depicts a more gentle, honest, realistic, sensitive and detailed representation of the same with rapid changes towards a modern era.

He portrays the Anchalik life of Maryganj in all its aspects: religious, social, political, economical, racial and from a gender perspective as well. Renu's brilliant skill in depicting all the details of Anchalik village life makes the novel both a challenge to the casual reader and a rich source of information for one with a desire to know more about village life.

Maila Anchal opened the door to a new literary approach that has been called Anchalik Upnayas or regionalism. Renu himself called *Maila Anchal* an 'Anchalik Upnayas', a regional novel. Renu here effectively captured the complex collective life of an Indian village. Naturally, a major challenge in producing such literature would be the knowledge of that specific village/region, its culture, tradition and the local language of the folklore above all the essence and the spirit must be interwoven with the silken thread of sensitivity and compassion to deal with such a fragile matter of narration in literature. Renu, who has the first-hand experiences of all such influential factors exuberantly and excellently representing the various dialects and colloquial expressions of villagers more than any other regional writers.

It was not until the publication of his first and the most prominent literary contribution popularly known as *Maila Anchal* in early 1954 in the post-Premchand Munshi's era, at a time when young independent India was trying to redefine its identity as a Nation, Renu had earned any benchmark position in the field of literature. That great novel had rewarded him lifelong stature and fame as a

highly acclaimed writer and got enrolled in the list of prominent writers of Hindi literature for the time immemorial because of its unparalleled anchalik peculiarities. Besides Maila Anchali, he pioneered regional rural voices into mainstream Hindi literature with a tone of intimacy, honesty and sarcastic style, which was crafted by him by using the local flavour instead of Khari Boli. He has credit to award the literary world with numbers of novels, stories and poems etc. Truly they all essentially possess the worth of being sacrosanct to the sensible literary enthusiasts. Like his diversely rich works, Renu's literary style was full of adventure and challenge as he never intentionally followed the traditional route of his literary predecessors.

Maila Anchali, apart from its numerous merits in being descriptive and its range and depth of narrative, is a celebration of anchalik/regional Hindi language like the Khari Boli. It is none other than Renu who has brought this language to literary pages, the language as we hear and live it today. When he talks about social transformation, and issues closer at heart to socialists in undertones, he also springs at us a well-written marvel of the language, freely indulging, romancing as if, with local words and variations, and at times, openly mocking the literary rhetoric Hindi of classy figures of modern literature. Due to the colonial power of reign and undue importance is given to English as a language of knowledge and erudition, Hindi in literature and as a language has suffered enormously.

Kathryn Hansen, while introducing Renu says that

"A writer speaks first through his work and Renu is no exception Renu wrote of the village/region/anchalik, the locus of Indian culture and values through the ages, and this in itself set him apart from the majority of modern writers." 2

Unlike, his literary predecessors who presented the village as stereotypically inflexible and unaltered; Renu depicts village which is rapidly transitional under the influence of the advent of time and tide. Renu's views of the village are dynamic, and he focuses our attention on the tensions and conflicts caused by the natural complexities of rural life.

According to M. H. Abrams,

"The regional novel emphasizes the setting, speech and social structure and customs of a particular locality, not merely as local colour, but as important conditions affecting the temperament of the characters and their ways of thinking to feel and interacting". 3

His narrative art very aptly elucidates the contemporary realities of Indian village scene at the threshold of pre and post-independence era. Apparently, it is noted that except one or two short stories, he directly never contributed anything more in the literary collection of his mother tongue-Maithili. But it becomes seemingly clear that they inspired and originated from his Maithili speaking rural locale of Purnia district of the northern Bihar. Renu was a throbbing humane being like his literary productions exudes. Most of his creations are the rare piece of literature entrusted with superb delineation of rural wisdom. Probably very few works in modern time have been woven in such lucid intricacies of rural folklife or regional life and at best with the greater revelations of humanism over the blind materialism.

Although Renu is credited for introducing a new genre of *aanchlik upanyas* (regional novels) in Hindi fiction, the merit of his oeuvre lies in his being 'realistic'. His locale, characters, situations etc are not imaginary; his keen penetrating eye captured the human predicament in its true colours. The characters do not seem far removed from us and this quality of universalism in him is commendable; his 'humaneness' is the hallmark of his writing. Like Premchand, 'he too wrote of class, caste and gender prejudices in rural, often marginalised and suppressed societies'⁴ and because of this concern for the marginalized and dispossessed, he is able to reach across the national audience. In his literary output, his realism dominates. He does not romanticize rural India; instead is more focused on the 'devastating countryside that suffered from divisions of caste, ethnicity, and culture' (*Kalankmukti*, 4).

Renu's ruralities are full of their cultural specificities and the landscape of a backward region is densely imbued with particulars that cannot be translocated to any other setting. Renu's 'regional-rural' craftsmanship depended on three mutually connected factors. These include his innovative use of language forms distinguishing him from his predecessors; his utilization of an enormous amount of information or the cultural memory of the region; and third, his technique of narration. Together these three produce an essential raw material to reconstruct the region of a particular historical juncture in his literary masterpiece *Maila Anchal*.

Kathryn Hansen says "rather than trying to denude such a richly robed figure as Renu, cutting through the myths and mysteries to find the "real man". I thought to bring together here a collection of writings that would suggest the fullness of his contours as a writer and artist; as a personality as a literary phenomenon".⁵

A reader is struck by his remarkable care for details. Unlike writers of the *Nayi Kahani* movement, the detailing in Renu's works is not so much obsessively oriented towards the interior lives of characters. Rather, they reveal the richness of the social and cultural landscape of his characters. It has been an established proposition that the art of literature of any society is influenced by the political, economic and social environments of that particular *Anchal* or region. The same can be more aptly said about Renu's work. His novels reflect the changing patterns of the political and social atmosphere of the Indian regional society especially the rural society from 1920 onwards. Renu was a soul villager, and Indian farmer by heart and spirit and therefore his novels are mainly concerned with the life struggle and complexities of the regional village life.

Besides *Maila Anchal*, most of his literary works like *Parati Parikatha* are stories of the transformations taking place in villages, namely Marygunj Paranpur, Purnia district, regions of Koshi river. The former is depicted as a symbol of backwardness and the later is described as a large and developed. In both cases, the narrator juggles to describe the elements and processes of change not merely in the respective village but the entire region as well.

Renu attempted to portray the maladies of regional backwardness in the most authentic manner and thus participated in the life of the region to acquire the closest possible observation of his subjects and objects. Besides, one may also argue that his deployment of the past, of social and cultural nuances and his tedious labour of piecing together, was a synchronised effort directed towards the development of the village, the region and the nation. In Renu, the region is surely a resource but it is also endowed with a character and a history. Characters of his literary crafts are real-life people from the region. His landscapes are filled with historical references and anthropological details and the narratives enter into a dialogue with the historical time of 1950. The attachment with the land is not simply because it is an agricultural field of peasants. Rather than the words like *Jamin and Dharti* are used for the land to consider it as both mother as well as sterile in the entire rural region.

Hence it has been developed as an independent "genre" of the fiction by virtue of its regional content, establishing itself alongside genres such as the social novel, historical novel and psychological novel. The purposeful psychology of Renu's choices of language and form to give a

conscious vision and distinctive aspects of his fiction is well witnessed in his literary crafts. An author's relationship to the word and his chosen form, rather than his stated ideas or philosophy, most clearly reveals his moral philosophy behind any creation. It implies a system of values, an integrated vision of the world which ascribes relative worth to various kinds of experiences the writer undergoes. Renu's such value system, the use of language and form are the appropriate lenses for viewing the perspective of his chosen domains i.e. *Anchalik* or regionalism. Renu's value system can be identified as "regional"—but an understanding of Renu's regionalism can only be gained through analysis of the structure that his chosen language and form given to his texts.

The social and cultural status of Renu's villagers finds its linguistic correlative in the naive quality of village speech of Bihar. For him, a village is a place where oral communication has a deeper impact; transmit wisdom, where speech is myriad forms of art. The experience of reading Renu compels the reader in this world of oral art of rural background. Frequently, mispronunciation, misspelling and conversion of the spelling in the context of local communication may shock the readers, but sooner or later, the reader is drawn in, swiftly swam away in the soothing flow of Renu's river of narration to justify his prime motto of depicting regionalism by soul and psyche.

Renu's use of local Hindi again allows him to attain truth to the rural linguistic environment without the sacrifice of apprehensibility because he had used the style of a regional dialect. In its freehearted and simplicity, such language manages to be accepted by the little man of the rural village. It is a republican medium, which dominates differences of caste, class, education, and even region. Ignoring the rhetoric style of the literate readers, Renu, intentionally uses simplified Hindi for the penetrating rural communication. Colloquial Hindi dialect brings ample charm and nostalgia and traditional culture of the northern region of Bihar.

Through the proverb, the villager articulates the element of the universal in every personal event. Proverbs redefine situations from daily life in the light of the past experience of the community. It exemplifies the love of the village people for metaphoric expression. Hence, Renu is fond of proverbs, and his characters often cap their remarks with quotations of conventional wisdom. Renu's adoption of proverbs into his text brings much of the flavour of rural discourse to it.

In *Maila Anchal* the parts of Renu's language that are the newest, the most distinctively his own, are those that possess an archaic, provincial, or folk character. In these Renu reveals his regional sensibility most clearly. At the centre of Renu's vision lies a hope for the synthesis of the old and the new in rural culture. In Renu's view, traditional village-based society had much to offer a modern urban man. One of the things it could offer was the richness of the spoken word, the sensitivity to sound and resonance, which even the illiterate villager possessed. Language had to be revived and made real, and that could only occur if a more favourable balance were struck between its traditional and modern components.

In Renu's *Maila Anchal*, on the other hand, we find both a universal language of a struggle between nature and man, between powers and exploited men and women, honest and corrupt, and castes and creeds, creating a challenge for the outsider or the reader to translocate the scene anywhere other than the region of Marygunj of Purnia district. Along with the technique of storytelling, Renu carries out several experiments in *Maila Anchal* both at the level of language, content, style, characterizations, as well as natural setting making him a unique literary craftsman of Hindi literature. The essence of the region or *dharti* to which its characters and villagers belong with all its supernatural characteristics get the true colour and voice in the novels of Renu. Especially the barrenness of the landscape is in the core of Renu's writings and same is artistically expressed in the regional dialect. He begins *Parati Parikatha* by delineating the contours of this landscape:

Dhusar, viran, antheen prantar.

Patita bhumi, parti jamin, bandhya dharti...

*Dharti nahi, dharti ki laash, jispar kafan ki tarah phaili hui hai balucharon ki panktiyaan.*⁶

Thus, to sum up, considering all the stated aspects of regionality, *Maila Anchal* can truly be considered as the encyclopedia of anchalik human civilization of Renu's literary world. The above lines symbolize Renu's rural soul and psyche in narrating the geography of the human civilization in realistic and honest mode by using the local colour and spirit even in the language as well as in form. Unlike other traditional writers of the time, Renu's creation of literary genres is par excellence and incomparable as they very often juxtapose the mood of pessimism as narrated in the above dry lines of the preface of *Parati Parikatha* as well as optimism in the merriment and ecstasy of the villagers against all odds and challenges of rural life as depicted in *Maila Anchal*. Renu keenly

interweaves the deftness of joy and sorrow, birth and death imagery in Maila Anchal by depicting the existence of naked reality of life holistically and in the true spirit of the region.

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