

## **Regional Sensibility in Fanishwarnath Renu's Novel *Maila Aanchal***

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This research paper is devoted to explore and identify the regional consciousness in Fanishwarnath Renu's *Maila Aanchal*, which is regarded "as the first novel to have set the tone of regional novel in Hindi literature".<sup>1</sup> Fanishwarnath Renu is an eminent literary luminary who is credited to have systematically introduced the corpus of regional novel in the domain of Hindi literary portal. Renu made a conscious effort to write a regional novel as he stated in the Preface to *Maila Aanchal*, "This is a Maila Aanchal –a regional novel."<sup>2</sup> Its publication in 1954, invited a great deal of critical attention, as it was trying to introduce a new thematic concern to the domain of novel in Hindi literature. Renu's articulation to write a regional novel generated much spurt among the scholars who instantly set to define the concept and identify other characters required to designate a regional novel. Renu's other novels and stories are also characterized by the elements of regionalism. In Hindi literature, Munshi Premchand and Vrindalal Verma had also presented beautiful pictures of village, customs, habits, poverty and some elements of regionalism in their novels. But they were not unanimously acknowledged as regional novelists as new trends of writing regional novel in Hindi literature started with the publication of *Maila Aanchal*.

The concept of regional writing is not a new phenomenon, as it was well practiced and popularized in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century English literature. Thomas Hardy has created an immortal region –Wessex for all his novels. His Wessex has become the most dominant character by itself. In Indian Writing in English, R.K.Narayan is regarded as a regional novelist. Like Hardy's Wessex, Malgudi is the chosen region which forms the background to the works of Narayan, whether novels or short stories. In Marathi literature also the regional elements can be fully relished in S.N.Pendse's Rathchakra, Vyankatesh Madgulkar's short stories Manadeshi Manase and in R.R.Borhade's novel Pachola. Kannada Literature is substantially rich in regional writings .Dr. K. Shivram Karath's Marali Mannige [Back to soil], Dr. Kuvempu's Malegalalli Madumgallu and Kannuru Heggadoti and Annaraya's Gramayana form a huge corpus of regional writing. Similarly, other Indian languages have a considerably rich fountain of regional literatures.

The emergence of the regional novel as a main literary form can be attributed to the changing political trends after independence. In free India, democratic form of government was constitutionally accepted viewing that this form would promote well-being and prosperity of the nation. India is mainly a country of villages. The role of villages is quite significant in the formation of democratic government. Therefore, the government was obliged to shift its focus from urban to rural areas. They were well aware that indifferent attitude towards villages might cause considerable damage to their reputation. Consequently, a number of new plans to develop the countryside and rural areas were implemented in due course of time. Besides, politicians, intellectuals and artists could not resist their temptation to represent villages which were deprived of all basic requirements, and forced to live the kind of life, not meant for ordinary human beings. These artists, thus, selected the regions of their choice, be it mountainous, hilly, plain, forest side etc. and depicted them realistically in their works. Thus after 1947, a number of

*Variorum Multi-Disciplinary e-Research Journal*  
*Vol.,-04, Issue-I, August 2013*

novels in Hindi literature saw the light of the day. For instance, Rahi Masum Raja's Aadha Gaon [1966], highlights various problems faced by the Muslim community in a village of Gajipur district of Uttar Pradesh. Shiv Prasad Singh's Alag Alag Vaitarani [1967], Ram Darash Mishra's **Jal Tootata Hua** [1969] and Shrilal Shukla's **Rag Darbari** present true pictures of the villages located in Banaras, Gorakhpur and Lucknow districts of Uttar Pradesh respectively.

In addition to Historical evolution of the regional novel, it is reasonable to dwell upon definitions theory of regionalism to advance proper discussion on the subject at hand. Region, according to the New Encyclopedia Britannica is "a cohesive area that is homogeneous in selected defining criteria and is distinguished from neighboring areas or regions by those criteria. It is an intellectual construct created by the selection of features relevant to a particular problem and the disregard of other features considered to be relevant. .... Regional boundaries are determined by the homogeneity and cohesiveness of the selection."<sup>3</sup> Further, Regionalism, defined by the New Encyclopedia Britannica, is a "literary movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that centered on the realistic depiction of Midwestern small towns and rural life and was an early stage in the development of American realistic writing. E. W. Howe's Story of a Country Town (1883), and Joseph Kirkland's *Zury* (1887) and *Macveys* (1888) foreshadowed the stories and novels of Hamlin Garland, the foremost representative of Midwestern regionalism. Influenced by the realistic theories of William Dean Howell, Garland wrote Main Travelled Roads (1891) and A Son of the Middle Border (1917), are examples of works that deal with poverty and hardships of Midwestern life and exploded the myth of the pioneer idyll"<sup>4</sup> The other definitions offered by the scholars are worth mentioning. 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 feeling and interacting."<sup>5</sup>

According to Nanda Dulare Vajpayee, "Regional novels are those which especially depict the undeveloped regions of the tribes".<sup>6</sup>

Devraj Upadhyay opines, " In regional novel, the novelist deals with the physical features people, customs and conventions, habits, beliefs, life style etc. of a particular locality".<sup>7</sup>

The meaning and the definitions tendered above by different scholars bring out the fact that a regional novel is one which reflects true picture of a village in all its facets. A part depiction of society does not constitute a regional novel. In regional novel society it plays the role of a hero, as entire narrative moves around it. The local language, customs and conventions, beliefs, style, dress of a locality are characterized as assets of regionalism.

It is now pertinent to examine Maila Aanchal as a regional novel in the light of above observations. Maryganj, an undeveloped village, in Purnia district of Bihar, forms the locale of the novel. It is not a story of an individual but of the entire social structure of Maryganj. In preface to Maila Aanchal, the novelist presents the entire and integrated picture of Maryganj as:

"It has flowers and thorns; it has dust also rose; it has mud, sandal wood; it has beauty and also ugliness—I could not escape myself from any of them."<sup>8</sup>

*Variorum Multi-Disciplinary e-Research Journal*  
*Vol.,-04, Issue-I, August 2013*

The village was renamed as Maryganj after Mary, wife of an English officer Mr. Martin, who passed away prematurely in a malarial attack due to non-availability of instant medical treatment. Mr. Martin as a glowing tribute to the dear departed, allotted land for malaria centre at Maryganj to avoid any such kinds of untoward happenings in future. Despite his best efforts, his proposed centre could not be materialized for many years. It was only after the independence that long cherished dream of opening of the centre could be fulfilled. Dr. Prashant, appointed as a doctor at the centre, smells the soil of Maryganj and identifies himself with it. After a brief association with the people, he gathers that they have got nothing to be called human beings. He becomes so much emotionally attached with people that he turns down the offer to go abroad for career advancement. It becomes intolerable for him to see people who are sinking in the deep mire of poverty and ignorance. He prefers to serve the people and make them human beings. Earlier as a student of medicine, his assessment of mankind was based on biological theory which would imply, "There is a thing like dil in human body, I do not know."<sup>9</sup> But after serving these people for a brief span, he does realize that there is a dil in every human being which transcends any scientific theory and cannot be even seen by dissecting the body. It is a thing to be realized only by our senses. However, initially people seem to have no faith in him and feel that he is causing the disease by putting medicine into the wells and also by injecting them. This tendency of people is but natural as the village has only ten to fifteen people to be called educated as they can sign and are eligible to become a Tahsildar. Dr. Prashant continues his scientific and spiritual researches to strengthen people physically and spiritually and to provide them with better life conditions. After completing his medical research successfully, he becomes very popular among people who treat him with great honor and respect as a unique malariologist of Maryganj. According to his scientific research, anopheles and sand fly are responsible for spreading malaria. But his spiritual research shows that the two more insects accountable for the traumatic situations in villages are poverty and barbarity. He proclaims that these insects are even more dangerous than anopheles and more poisonous than shadfly. It is possible to cure people from malaria, but a cure from poverty and barbarity is quite impossible, unless people try to liberate themselves from the shackles of their exploiters. Dr. Prashant tries to create awareness among people to put their feet down against the feudal lords to restore their rights, as the lands possessed by the landlords belong to them. Dr. Prashant's effort to create a new sensibility among the oppressed is definitely a strong step towards modernity.

Besides, Maryganj is divided into various groups such as, Brahmins, Rajputs, Kayasthas and Yadavas. These groups are further divided into many sub-groups namely, Tantima, Galhot, Dhanurdhari, Tatma, Kushwaha etc. There also exists one marginalized group called Santhal which is located at the outer skirt of the village, as they are treated outsiders by the prominent groups of the village. Further, as generally happens in a village, Maryganj is deeply concerned with the party politics. There are two parties- Congress and Socialist – which are functioning prominently to create better impression upon politically unseasoned innocent people. The activists of the parties tend to maximize the membership by enrolling new members on a nominal membership fee. However, Choudhary, Baldev, and Bawandas are honest and dedicated Congress supporters who really want to carry forward Gandhiji's messages in the larger interest of the people. As such, a centre for spinning wheel and handloom opens in the village and two masters and one mistress are appointed to train people for the job opportunities. Kalicharan, a wrestler of high repute and formerly a follower of Baldev, supports the socialist party, as he finds the policies of Congress ineffective and unpractical. He convinces people that the Socialist party

*Variorum Multi-Disciplinary e-Research Journal*  
*Vol.,-04, Issue-I, August 2013*

is the only party to safeguard the interest of the poor, the exploited and the oppressed and condemns the landlords and capitalists. “These capitalists and landlords suck our blood like bedbugs and mosquitoes.”<sup>10</sup> Another supporter called Sainik enthuses people with inspiring speeches as, “Wake! true sons of the soil! true master of the land !wake move forward with the torch of the revolution”.<sup>11</sup> These highly sentimental speeches accelerated a large membership from Santhal group, as they offer voluntary membership to the Socialist party to get rid of ignominious situations imposed on them by confronting groups. Of course, others also extend full co-operation and coordination and the Socialist party emerges as the biggest party.

**Maila Aanchal** also presents vivid description of how people from various groups sinking their internal differences, join to celebrate the happy moments of independence of India. While the sky is being echoed by the resounding slogans—‘Mahatma Gandhi ki jai, Jamahirlal ki jai’, a strange sound comes partly with the reacting slogan as : yeh aazadi jhoothi hai, desh ki janta bhukhi hai.<sup>12</sup> [This freedom is untrue, country people are still hungry.] This stranger is nobody else but perhaps the novelist himself who is not pleased with the tantalizing appearance of freedom where the poor are still oppressed and have no access to justice. He tends to say that the real happiness lies in liberation of those who are still entangled in the labyrinths of utter poverty and barbarism. The incident brings out the fact that people are now in a position to exercise their own conscience and cannot be misguided by the rosy picture shown to them by politicians. It is really a fruitful change in the perception of people towards life.

**Maila Aanchal** throws light on how utter economic handicaps force people to compromise unashamedly with the things which are socially not acceptable. Besides other kinds of exploitations, even economic poverty leads to sexual exploitations which are the most humiliating experience that a woman suffers in her life. For instance, Phulia is obliged to share bed with Sahdev Misir simply because of the fact that he is capable of assisting her family financially as he is a railway employee and earns money. Rampiyariya accepts to be *dasi* of Ramdas as she needs to quench her fire of hunger. Besides them, so many other sex relations have been depicted throughout the story of the novel.

There is also a *muth* in Maryganj which was earlier looked after by Mahanth Sevasdas but after his death it is taken care of by Ramdas. The *muth* is grappled with its own problems regarding the selection of *muthship*. Lakshmi who is a *dasi* in the *muth* takes part in political activities of Congress and supports Baldev financially. There is also a realistic picture of armed fight between the Santhal group and other integrated groups where a number of people from both the groups are seriously injured and similar number of people is killed. A police case is registered whereby Kalicharan, Dr. Prashant and many others from the confronting groups are arrested and put into judicial custody. This entire event is fed and fanned by Bishwanath Prasad in order to win the favor of integrated groups. He, therefore, sends his armed men against the Santhal group.

As a regional novel requires multiplicity of characters, **Maila Aanchal** figures approximately two hundred characters representing different strata, sections, groups and aspects of social structure. In *Maila Aanchal*, both male and female characters are beautifully blended in the texture of the narrative to expose the real status of Maryganj. Dr. Prashant, whose role is quite significant in the novel, is a stranger. His real mother, perhaps, threw him, perhaps being an illicit child, to the overflowing Kaushi River to avoid public disgrace. Luckily he was found by an Upadhyay family which was exiled by the king of Nepal. The family established an ashram

*Variorum Multi-Disciplinary e-Research Journal*  
*Vol.,-04, Issue-I, August 2013*

called Adarsh Ashram, which was shared by a poor lady Snehmaya. This kind lady took the responsibility of his upbringing as a mother. After matriculation, he comes to Varanasi along with his mother to complete his Inter Science. Unfortunately, one day Snehmaya disappears mysteriously from Varanasi forever. However, Prashant completes Inter Science from Banaras Hindu University and later on takes admission in Patna University to become a doctor. Thereafter he joins the malaria centre to serve the needy people in Maryganj. He also treats Kamali, daughter of Bishwanath Prasad, and cures her permanently of her hysterical attack. During the treatment Dr. Prashant and Kamali fall in love with each other. It results in the birth of their son Nilotpal after they were gracefully married. Despite his passionate love for Kamali, he never fails in carrying out his duty to people who are his prime concern. Dr. Prashant, in spite of being a good human being and a doctor, is also gifted with poetic sensibility. During Bidapat Dance, he is deeply touched by the melodious songs presented by people in Maryganj. He finds true melody in the spontaneous overflow of these exploited, poor and illiterate people. He instantly gets reminded of the great Hindi poet Vidyapati who once had said, "Chalo kavi, van phoolon ki ore".<sup>13</sup>[Poet, let's move towards forest full of flowers].

Baldev, a follower of Gandhi, is an active Congress worker. In true sense of the term, he is a committed worker and extends his full cooperation to Dr. Prashant in the management of the Malaria Centre. He supports Lakshmi who is supporter of Congress. But people do not accept this kind of association between them and comment on them quite intolerably. Therefore in order to legalise their relationship both of them decide to live together as husband and wife, a little away from the *muth*. Kalicharan, initially an associate of Baldev, joins the Socialist party as he finds it the only party respond to his inner calls. He is a champion wrestler. His guru advises him to keep himself away from woman to maintain his championship in wrestling. He supports Dr. Prashant whole-heartedly and once rounds up hundreds of people to give them injection to dislodge cholera. Bavandas and Chunni Gosai are Congress activists. Bavandas is acknowledged as a great leader who has made written communication with Gandhiji. He is very short and treated as god by Aabharani.

Bishwanath Prasad, head of the Kayastha group and Tahsildar possesses acres of land. He resigns as Tahsildar saying it is a sin which he can carry no more. Though an oppressor earlier, now he has better understanding and insight of what may be the likely position of the village in near future. Once he told Dr. Prashant light-heartedly: "The day people treat the rich, the landlords and businessmen as mad and leper, that day only true swaraj can be attained by the country."<sup>14</sup> On the birth day celebration of Kumar Nilotpal, he distributes hundred bigha lands among the poor and thus materializes what once he had said to Dr. Prashant. There is a change in perception of Bishwanath Prasad who is trying to keep pace with the changing scenario of Maryganj. On the other hand, Ram Kripal Singh possesses two hundred acres of land but is quite selfish and there is no change in his perception, despite phenomenal changes taking place in every walk of life in and around Maryganj. He shelters Baldev for his personal benefit but dismisses him instantly, as soon as he realizes that he is not favorable to his end. Hargauri Singh, a new Tahsildar belonging to the Rajput group, is killed by the Santhal group. Jotakhi, an old Brahmin, always instigates the Rajput group to lock horns against Yadav group. On his advice, Hiru kills Parvati's mother considering her to be a witch. Other characters are equally important. To mention a few, Sumritdas, Sahdev Misir, Ramdas, Larsingh Das, Chotan Babu, Shanichara, Sunderlal, Sukhilal, Soma Jat, Charittar, Rampal, Tilhara Chamar, Nakchhedha, Ramkishun etc.

*Variorum Multi-Disciplinary e-Research Journal*  
*Vol.,-04, Issue-I, August 2013*

Female characters, on the other hand, are much less in number as compared to the male characters. Kamali, the only daughter of Bishwanath Prasad, gets engaged thrice, but every time one or the other obstacles come in the way of her marriage. She suffers from hysteria which is cured by Dr. Prashant. Lakshmi is an orphan and stays in muth under the service of Mahanth Sevadas. He promises his advocate that he will treat her as his daughter, but as soon as he brings her to the *muth*, he forces her to become his *dasi*. Mamta, a doctor working once with him, truly acknowledges his sacrifices when she says, “O Prashant, how great you are, how great”.<sup>15</sup> Other characters are Phulia, Ram Piyaria, Aabharani, Mrs. Ganguli etc.

**Maila Aanchal** has some other specific ways to celebrate memorable moments of life. All happy and notable occasions are celebrated with the beats of certain kinds of musical instruments peculiar to that locality. Drum, *digga*, *mridunga*, *nagada* and *jhanjh* are the oft-used instruments. The novelist not only recognizes the sounds of these instruments but also understands their meaning. For example, in the wrestling ground the beats of drum create sound like, “*Chat dha gid dha, chat dha gid dha*”.<sup>16</sup> They mean in Hindi “*aa jaa, bhid jaa, bhid jaa, aa jaa, bhid jaa* [Come and wrestle, come to wrestle]. So many other sounds too are referred to in the novel. The village has two kinds of dances such as *nautanki* and *bidapat*. There are also varieties of songs as *jogira*[a song sung on the day of Holi] ,*barahmasa*[a song vividly describing all twelve months] , *chaita*[a song sung in the month of Chaitra only], *phagua*[a chorus sung in the month of Phalgun only] ,*sohar* [a chorus sung by women to celebrate the birth of a son at least for twelve days ] etc. As a matter of fact, these songs used to comment strongly on the existing social and political practices and norms perpetuated by people without proper understanding of their implications. For instance, *jogira* sung to celebrate the happy moments of Holi, sharply comments on the ‘dubious culture’ creeping in politics:

*Charakha kato khadi pahno, rahe hath mein jholi*

*Din dahade karo dakaity, bol suraji boli—*

*Jogi ji sa ra ra ra ra.*<sup>17</sup>

[In the name of Gandhi people use spinning wheel, wear khadi clothes, and have begging bowls in the hand, support swaraj, but commit day light robbery.]

Generally it has been a practice to write a novel in *Khadi Boli* in Hindi literature. *Khadi Boli* is the literary form of Hindi. But in order to give a feel of local colour and regional flavour, an artist selects certain words of that dialect which he wants to render through his work. In *Maila Aanchal*, approximately two hundred regional words have been meticulously used to give the feel of regionalism. To mention a few, *Kaniya*(bridegroom), *bhurukwa*(morning star), *purain*(lotus), *hoolmaal*(revolution), *kiriya*(oath), *chumauna*(engagement) etc are the words to give local colour to the novel. Even some of the characters try to speak commonly used English words with the impact of local tongue such as, *lalmunia* for aluminium, *resary* for reserve, *luchkar* for lecture, *pulogram* for programme, *rat* for right etc. However, an overdose of local words may endanger the communicability and comprehensibility of the language for those who are not culturally familiar with the background of that dialect. However, Renu has made a balanced use of local words to avoid miscommunication and gap of communication in the novel.

*Variorum Multi-Disciplinary e-Research Journal*  
*Vol.,-04, Issue-I, August 2013*

In **Maila Aanchal**, people generally speak a word with similar –sounding alliterative pre-fix such as, kar-kachahari, mar-mahajan, far-faujdar etc. The language varies from person to person depending on the status of the speakers. Manager Dough, an English man, tries to express himself in Hindi as, “Amara estate mein ek bhi badmas am nahin dekhane mangata”.<sup>18</sup>[I do not want to see any naughty fellow in my state] Aabharani, a Bengali speaking lady, treats Bavandas as a god and advises him when he is sick, “Bhagban, aaj theke tomay roj ek gilas yehi ras , aar ratre dudh khete habe.”<sup>19</sup>[Respected sir, I shall give you a glass of this juice in the day and milk in the night] A very young Ganesh lisps while speaking about Dr. Prashant as “Poolab chhe chhaheb aaya”<sup>20</sup>. [Sahib has come from the east] Some proverbs used in the novel give the flavour of regionality such as, nau do gyarah hona[to run away], mitti ka mahadev[to be an innocent], sab dhan bees paseri[to treat everyone equally] etc. Dialogues in local language deserve their mention. The maiden servant conveys the news of Kumar Nilotpal’s birth as naati bhayal ho [a grandson has born]. The bullock cart driver says at Kalimuddinpur that “Gaddi to na lauti” [cart will not go back]. Bavandas responds in the same dialect-“lauti na to thaadh rahee” [will stop, if not go back].<sup>21</sup>

To conclude, the above discussion shows clearly that **Maila Aanchal** fulfills all the requisites meant for a regional novel. It presents a vivid and lively picture of Maryganj, a selected locale, situated on the bank of Kaushi River. The entire story, compressed in one and half years, offers honestly the thumb nail description of the selected region. Besides, the novel tends to shape an ideal society which needs better life conditions to make forward movements in life. It is duty of an artist to sharpen the awareness of people to such an extent that they should be in a position to act conscientiously in the larger interest of mankind. In **Maila Aanchal**, Dr. Prashant, Baldev and Kalicharan are the major characters who have instilled a new kind of sensibility and realization in people who are now able to handle situation quite independently and wisely. For instance, people earlier having unflinching faith in the ideology of Congress now patly show their disagreement after hearing the high sounding phrases being used by the processionists in favour of Congress. They immediately realize that Congress is celebrating its victory of Independence, while common man is starving and getting entangled in the rigmarole of complex situations. The novel has also suggestions for the abolition of feudal system in India. Tahsildar Bishwanath Prasad once a strong pillar of feudal system changes his attitude towards the poor and returns them their lands which were unofficially acquired by him. These ideological and perceptual changes will definitely offer people healthy surroundings and better life conditions to perpetuate their intellectual pilgrimage in future. The novelist was familiar with the region closely, smelt the soil of Maryganj and created successfully a corpus of literary form with regional consciousness. Thus, Fanishwarnath Renu holds a unique place as a regional novelist in Hindi, and will enjoy unprecedented literary glory as the most representative literary artist to have introduced a new sensibility in the arena of novel form in Hindi literature. To quote Dr. Anjali Tiwari “It can be definitely said that **Maila Aanchal** is the first regional novel which has provided new concern and craft to novel form.”<sup>22</sup>

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*Variorum Multi-Disciplinary e-Research Journal*  
*Vol.,-04, Issue-I, August 2013*

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