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Editor-in-Chief

Bijender Singh

Email: editor@expressionjournal.com

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LOCATING 'REALISM' IN THE 'REGIONALISM' OF PHANISHWAR

NATH RENU'S MAILA AANCHAL

Dr. Neha Aroara

Assistant Professor

Central University of Rajasthan

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Abstract

It is believed that with the publication of Phanishwar Nath Renu's Maila Aanchalin 1954, the trend of Regional Novels began in Hindi. Much critical work is produced since then about 'regionalism' in Renu's oeuvre, focussing upon the language employed, the use of folk songs, the problems of translation etc. The present paper proposes to look at the realistic elements in Maila Aanchal as it unveils the real (read 'ugly') picture of the otherwise projected 'rosy' India, the India of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. The novel exposes the divided social set-up, hollow codes of religion and hypocrisies of political leaders. Published just after seven years of India's independence, Maila Aanchal creates a powerful picture of the village life in India and the impact of modernism on the serenity of rural India leading to the cracks in the social fabric. Renu deliberately juxtaposes the village and city life/ thoughts/ people to highlight the shift that had set in. The locale Maryganj, a model for all Indian villages, projects the abject poverty and the wretched conditions of the sons of the soil. The novel pulls down the masks of those in power and bares the exploitation of the 'downtrodden, disenfranchised and disempowered of India's rural poor', thus illustrating the aanchal of Mother India getting maila by her own sons.

Key-Words

Regional Novels, transition, realistic elements, hypocrisies.

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"*Bharat Mata ro rahi hai*" — the extract is used like a refrain by Renu in his maiden and most popular novel, *Maila Aanchal* (1954). Translated as *The Soiled Border* by Indira Junghare, the very title of the novel is captivating — whose *aanchal* is it anyways? Is it the *aanchal* of Kamla who becomes an unwed mother of Prashant's child? If yes, then why is the Mother India weeping? With such intriguing questions, the readers are taken into the deep marshes of hinterland of India, hitherto oblivious to them — 'a dark world of abject poverty, ignorance, helplessness, exploitation and superstition, but one that is also lit from within by translucent beams of life.' (*Panchlight and Other Stories*, 3) Phanishwar Nath Renu began writing in the transitional period, when the world's largest democracy had just taken birth; hence his main concern was to depict the realities of the post-Independence India, the crumbling social order and corrupt politics. Published just after seven years of India's independence, *Maila Aanchal* creates a powerful picture of the village life in India and also studies the impact of modernism on the serenity of rural India leading to the cracks in the social fabric. Almost all his works are set in Bihar and he successfully recreates the region (urban as well as rural), capturing the intricacies of the language, culture, lifestyle etc. of the people that lend authenticity to the narrative. However, besides being the precursor of Regional novels in Hindi, Renu's writings have another aspect too. He seems to be more concerned in depicting the transition of 'real' India, the crumbling social order and corrupt politics. The novels like *Parti Parikatha*, *Dirghatapa*, *Julus*, etc. and short stories such as 'Lal Paan Ki Begum', 'Panchlight' etc. present the grim situation of post-Independence India. But he does not come as a preacher to his audience, rather as a commentator who speaks in the natural local dialect and presents his society and his characters very realistically.

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 disenfranchised societies' (1) and because of this concern for the marginalized and dispossessed, he is able to reach across the national audience. Having read writers like Premchand and Yashpal, and *chhayavadi* (Romantic) poets such as Suryakant Tripathi 'Nirala' and Sumitranandan Pant, he imbibed from them 'a concern for the immediate social context and humanism' (Introduction to *Kalankmukti*, translated as *Freed From Disgrace*, 1).

Despite this, his affiliation with the contemporary writers is only as much as is necessary. He was not a romantic; the spirit of realism pervades all his novels. Whereas Premchand's village was stereotypically rigid and unchanging, Renu presents a village rapidly altering under the forces of modernity. His view of the village is dynamic and this attitude lends 'freshness and charm to his descriptions of rural India' (1). Being the writer of the masses and of the oppressed section of the Indian society, Renu, through his writings, gave them 'a distinct manner and voice' (1).

In the very Introduction of *Maila Aanchal*, Renu drops the hint on his project: '*isme phool bhi hain shool bhi, dhool bhi, gulal bhi, keechad bhi hai chandan bhi, sundarta bhi kuroopta bhi – main kisi se daaman bachakar nikal nahi paya*' ('there are flowers and thorns as well, dust and colour too, filth and sandalwood both, beauty and ugliness too – I am unable to skip any of these'). It is evident that he will be not just indulging in the glorification of India, rather as an objective viewer he does not shy away from the pitfalls that were tarnishing India's image. The title of the novel is taken from Sumitranandan Pant's poem 'Bharat Mata': "*kheton mein faila hain shyamal, dhool bhara sa maila aanchal*", hence Renu too enlarges the '*aanchal*' to represent the entire India, not just the region Maryganj. Continuing the same parallel, he also lights a ray of hope in the engulfing pessimism. On the downward journey of Independent India, a new faith takes birth in the form of Kumar Neelotpai, Prashant and Kamla's son. If Prashant is the new awakened Indian, his son is his strength and reward; Kumar is the fruit of Prashant's sincerity and devotion and Kamla's patience: "*nahi nahi! Ye andhera nahi rahega. Maanawta ki sammilit vani gunjti hai – pavitra vani...prem aur ahimsa ki saadhna safal ho chuki hai. Fir kaisa bhay! Vidhata ki srishti mein maanav hi sabse badhkar shaktishali hai. Usko parajit karna asambhav hai...*" (*Maila Aanchal*, from now on M.A 311)

Phanishwar Nath Renu belonged to the 'Mandal' community, an unprivileged social group of India and was genuinely concerned for the downtrodden people of the country. Almost all his literary output reflects his sympathetic attitude and also his zeal and necessity for reforming the society. Born on 4th March, 1921 in a small village Orahi Hingana near Simraha railway station in Bihar, Renu was nicknamed 'Rinua' (literally meaning 'dust' or 'pollen grain') by his grandmother. It was later changed to 'Renu' and it eventually became his pen-name. Ironically, the name given in childhood shaped his personality and he did live up to it. The name spells out Renu's nearer-to-soil heart, a heart that beats and feels for his people, very much manifested in his opus.

He entered the literary world in 1946 with his short story, "Batbaba". However, it was his first novel, *Maila Anchal* (1954) that announced his recognition as a major Hindi writer. Becoming one of the popular writers in the 'Nai Kahani' (the 'New Story') circle of Allahabad and Delhi, his best-known stories are "Rasapriya", "Lal Pan ki Begam", and "Teesri Kasam", all published in mid-fifties in *Nai Kahani*. His oeuvre comprises famous novels like *Maila Anchal* (1954), *Parti Parikatha* (1957), *Dirghatapa* (1963), *Julus* (1965), *Kitne Chaurahe* (1966) and *Paltu Babu Road* (published posthumously); short story collections, *Thumri* (1959), *Adim Ratri ki Mahak* (1967), and *Aginkhor* (1973). His non-fictional works include *Nepali Kranti Katha*, his memoirs of the Nepalese revolution, and *Rinjal Dhanjal*, an account of the drought in Bihar in 1966 and flood of 1975.

Renu received the prestigious President's Award for the 'best novel of the year' in 1955 for *Maila Anchal*, made into a film 'Dagdar Babu' in 1977 directed by Nobendu Ghosh. Renu's writings capture India from 1924-77 – years of colonization in the grips of British empire, struggle for independence, Partition, communal riots, assassination of Mahatma, etc form the main grounds of his novels. His literary personality was moulded by his real life. His active participation in the freedom struggle finds way into his works. As a member of the Socialist Party, he was involved in the programs of several peasant movements, land reform movements for *Sampurna Kranti* launched by Jaiprakash Narayan and also in the revolt against the Nepalese monarchy and in the Human Rights Movement of the early 1970s. He had close personal relations with Jaiprakash Narayan and because of his commitment to political ideals of the Socialist Party, he renounced the title 'Padmashri' and surrendered his government awards and stipend to protest against the unjust treatment of Jaiprakash during the Emergency.

In his literary output, his realism dominates (although critics generally classify him as a regional writer). He does not romanticize the rural India; instead is more focussed on the 'devastated countryside that suffered from divisions of caste, ethnicity, and culture' (*Kalankmukti*, 1). In his novels, 'the unsung faceless multitude of India's villages' (5) get the opportunity to raise the question of their identity and to project themselves before the rest of the world. Because of his strong affiliation with the Socialist Party, his works reveal the contemporary political scene of India and the effects of mismanaged democracy. *Maila Anchal* and *Parti Parikatha* are representatives of the grim situation of post-Independence rural India. The former talks about the 'important value of the National Movement – the need to be of service to the common masses...be one with them in their pains and miseries' (9), the latter engages with 'the framework of India's Five Year Plans started in 1952' (11).

Renu has selected Bihar as the setting of all his works and through the lens of Bihar, he made the readers see the fast-changing pan-India society. The 'Bihar' he projects is politically-charged, facing unending politicisation, petty power politics, rendering common man to a no-where man, compelled to gravitate towards one or the other political party but with no relief to his worries. Renu's wit and irony are appropriately used to ridicule the contemporary political scene in a satirical manner. Maryganj

(the locale of *Maila Aanchal*) is not the centre of active politics yet it does not remain untouched with it. Characters like Baldev, Kalicharan, Baawandas etc are representatives of some or the other political parties and help in understanding the then scenario of India when the selfish manipulative leaders took the newly born nation astray. The novel presents a realistic picture that now village life is also not aloof from the political upheavals, rather now, more than ever, the simple rustics fall easy prey to and are 'used' for personal benefits/ selfish advantage of the leaders. *Maila Aanchal* exposes the divided social set-up, hollow codes of religion and hypocrisies of political leaders. Renu deliberately juxtaposes the village and city life/ thoughts/ people to highlight the shift that had set in.

The locale Maryganj, a model for all Indian villages, projects the abject poverty and the wretched conditions of the sons of the soil. The novel pulls down the masks of those in power and bares the exploitation of the 'downtrodden, disenfranchised and disempowered of India's rural poor', thus illustrating the *aanchal* of Mother India getting *maila* by her own sons: "...vedanta...bhautikvad...saapekshwad...manavtavad!...hinsa se jarjar prakriti ro rahi hai. Vyadh ke teer se zakhmi hiran-shavak-si manavta ko panah kahan mile?" (MA, 311)

Unlike the other writers who turned away from the humdrum of urban life to the serenity and natural life of rural India, and presented the village life standing at the threshold and only through the lens of an outsider, Renu penetrates deep to capture, understand and transmit the soul of the villagers. As the true son, he owes this to his mother. Hence his world is not 'beautiful' India but 'real' India. *Maila Aanchal* talks about the continuous transition of not just Purnea but the entire North India, the village/villagers who are waking up from the long slumber – the pre and post-Independence, the contribution to and the consequences of freedom struggle. It removes the layers from the socio-economic-cultural-political scene of India and unabashedly presents the naked reality – unhesitant to take the 'look within' approach for their own lacunae. Renu perfectly blends the bitterness and music/melody, simplicity and crudity, individualism and socialism etc. The political background of the novel further aids in the dynamic and round portrayal of the characters, in fact the characters and the setting complement each other in bringing out the intricate nuances of each minutely. They both affect and get affected by each other and ultimately shape up the society likewise and also the life of the subalterns/ commoners. The novel also stresses the indispensable, intricately woven influence of politics in carving the shape of the modern Indian society, rural as well as urban, none remains untouched. The various forms of politics are discussed – at the national level leaders fighting for a great cause of independence, and also their corruption, at the village level were the *mahants* and *zamindars* with their selfish agendas – the rustics are always on the periphery, treated as 'others'.

The village of Maryganj is divided into several sections, depending upon the caste and political affiliations - Baldev represents the Congress leaders, even in their deterioration he resembles them, Baawandas is a replica of Gandhiji and symbolizes those Congress leaders who did not fall into the trap of temptations, the Socialist-Marxist Kalicharan and Vasudev are the voice of the awakening populace

of India, exploited/ harassed by police and Congress for no fault and finally we also have the RSS organization of the Rajput community. All these characters portray the social and political life (both are intertwined and determine each other) of the transitional phase of India, and also its hollowness and rottenness.

Socially, the village is divided into sections such as *malik tola*, *guar tola*, *Rajput toli*, *kayastha toli*, *tatma toli*, *yadav toli* etc, prominent among these are the Kayastha tola, the Rajput tola and the Yadav tola. Each *tol*a had a powerful leader and Renu has very dextrously brought out the nexus between these leaders and the nationalist political parties. It is an open secret that all the political parties in India are deeply rooted in caste politics.

People like Thakur Ramkirpal Singh (Rajput toli), tehsildar Vishwanath Prasad (Kayastha toli), Biranchidas (Tatma toli), Khelawan Yadav (Yadav toli) etc ruled their respective *tolas* and earned respect (mostly out of fear) from the natives and this micro-level segregation eventually developed into the macro-level disunity of the Indians. Also it led to the emergence of various political parties, each busy in achieving 'its own agenda', in the name of being 'for/ of the people'. Renu was himself much disturbed with the deterioration that had set in, so much so that he distanced himself from active politics. He was completely devoted to the cause of the Socialist Party but was devastated when post-independence he found the party (that had defeated the long-reign of Congress and was ruling the nation) moving astray from its agenda. This was the period when he focussed on his writings, realistically charged. However in 1972 he once more became active and contested elections but lost, realising the 'strategic moves' of the political parties. His loss in his own region clarified to him the level of corruption that had seeped into the Indian politics. The political leaders only took advantage of the ignorant people. Sharing his experiences, he said: "*nirvachan mein ballot paper to dekh nahi saka, lekin bullet ka anubhav zaroor kiya*" and this makes everything very explicit.

With Jaiprakash Narayan, Renu supported the movement against corruption, suppression and exploitation of the villagers particularly. He also went to jail, the same jail where he was imprisoned in 1942. Noteworthy are his words to depict the general condition of India post-independence: "*Ghulam Bharat ki jail aur swatantra Bharat ki jail mein kaafi antar hai. Sach much Purnea jail maujuda Bharat ka asli namuna hai jisme aadmi bhi jaanwar ban jaaye. Is hazaar ek sau baarah qaidiyon mein shayad ek bhi vyakti swasth nahi hai. Shayad nark aisa hi hoga. 1942 aur 1947 mein itna antar?*" (Sariska Renu Smriti No. 1-154, April 1979) And this is the central theme of his personal concern reflected in his works. Even in *Maila Aanchal* he portrays a similar dissatisfaction and helplessness of the poor peasants who could not expect any relief from the custodians of law because of their penury: "*...kholo paisa, dekho tamasha...paas mein nagadnarayan ho to nagdi karane aao...kanoon aur kachheri compound mein palnewale keet-patage bhi paisa maangte hain..*" (MA, 171) India was riding high on the corrupt practices. The Indian English writers such as Nayantara Sehgal (*Rich Like Us*) and Rohinton Mistry (*A Fine Balance*) too express alike concerns, how India was going 'off the balance' and in order

to 'become rich' the political leaders and high profile aristocrats were 'soiling the border' of the motherland. Is this the India of Gandhi and Nehru? Is this the dream for which martyrs laid down their lives? On 26 June 1975, when Emergency was declared in India, Renu went underground. Dejected with the contemporary political scenario, he left for Nepal but came back to his motherland soon after. Loksabha Elections were declared in 1977 and Renu was optimistic that now the bridle will be in the right hands. Despite his ill health, he actively participated in the workings of the Socialist Party. The results were declared on 20 March 1977 and the ruling Congress Party was defeated at the hands of Janata Party. Believing that now the nation is with the deserving people who would cleanse the '*mailaanchal*' of the motherland, Renu died a satisfied man on April 11, 1977.

The complexity of Indian society is very much obvious in *Maila Aanchal*. Issues such as political instability, alteration in social values, decline in moral principles, conflict in relationships etc eventually carve a distorted picture of the post-independence society. The illicit relationship of Phuliya with Sahdev Missar, despite her marriage with Khalasi and her 'indulgence' with other men foreground that the deterioration of the cities have seeped into the purity of the villages too. It also mocks at the meaning of 'modernity' as understood by simple rustics. At the religious level too we confront a similar deterioration. The blind Sevadas is the *mahant* of the *math*, and he dies leaving behind his disciple Ramdas and 'mistress' Lachhami. While alive, he 'used' Lachhmi *dasin* as his '*dasin*' and after his death, not just the property and the *math* passed down to Ramdas, he also 'acquired' ownership over Lachhmi *dasin*. Eventually he marries Rampiyaria, who is a whore and the entire *math* is littered with fish, *ganja* etc. The sanctity of a holy institution is juxtaposed with the filth that now replaced it. Lachhami, had been the *kotharin*, the sole in-charge of the *math* and had been living there since her childhood but had to eventually leave with Baldev to establish a separate set-up.

In Doctor Prashant we get a glimpse of Renu himself; he is idealistic and optimistic for the future. Whereas Kalicharan and Chalittar Karmakar represent the aggressive revolutionaries of the 'new' India, Prashant is calm, incessantly working for the well-being of the natives. His settling in the village leads to a conflict between tradition/ orthodoxy and modernity/ progressive. Jotkhi ji was still in the grips of superstition and the simple-minded villagers blindly followed his words; Prashant sacrificed his bright future abroad to work in the desolate village with the thoughts of bringing positive change. Indirectly Renu stresses upon the need of keeping pace with time but without compromising with what all good we have. Villages are the real India, hence any revolution should begin from the grassroots; they should not be overlooked. Prashant's decision conveys this very message. Although both Prashant and Kalicharan fail in some respect yet they succeed in creating ripples in the otherwise dormant society. They depict the desire for upward mobility, the dynamic, even aggressive people. Their uprising is time and again curbed by the traditional set up, yet they at least rebel, the goading factors being: independence, democratic rights, voting rights, equality, industrialization, progressive measures.

Renu's characters are not individuals but representing figures of different ideologies prevalent at that time: Tehsildar is opportunistic and manipulative, in Baldev's character Renu mocks at Gandhism and in Bawandas, he recreates Gandhiji's idealism and also his brute murder. The much-awaited Independence was achieved but in lieu of a heavy price – Partition: "*suraaj mil gaya...Hindu log Hindustan mein, Musalman log Pakistan mein chale jayenge*" (MA, 217) And almost sixty-seven years after independence, we are still groping in darkness, the majority still lurks in poverty. For Renu, this is actually regression, once again going back to the years of slavery. As the nation is heading towards its 'downfall', the progress (economic) made by it was under question. The nation that takes pride in reaching Mars, has actually failed to reach its own villages; the people are engaged in detecting whether life exists on Mars but ignore the dying humanity on earth!

The native dialect, the simple-minded people, their superstitions and beliefs, their slow and unsophisticated lifestyle make the narrative of *Maila Aanchal* all the more poignant. They are still caught in the vicious cycle of caste issues, illiteracy, economic backwardness, exploitation, sexual vagaries, carnal pleasures. As aforesaid, Renu generalises the happenings of Maryganj to foreground the entire nation. We do meet the blood sucking *zamindars* who do not change their ways even when the *zamindari* system was abolished. The peasants celebrated the abolishment of *zamindari* system and held the belief: "*zamindari pratha khatam ho gayi. Ab zamindar zameen se bedakhal nahi kar sakta. Humne unhe zameen se badakhal kar diya. Jo jotega, zameen uski hai. Jitna jot sako, jiski zameen mile joto, boao, kaato. Ab baantne ka jhanjhat nahi...*" (MA, 173). However they were ignorant of the reality. The poor peasants were unaware of falling prey to the capitalists. For their personal interests, even the hard-core enemies, Tehsildar and Hargaurisingh joined hands against the peasants. The Santhals were considered outsiders, hence could not be given the rights on the land. Their leader Birsa Maanjhi and others were killed when they rebelled against the powerful *zamindars*. Although Hargaurisingh is also murdered, the plight aggravates all the more as the rich *zamindars* managed to 'buy' law, as a result, the Santhals were sent into life imprisonment but the *zamindars* were untouched! The police also succumbed to money: "*Nau santhalon ke alawa jo log ghayal ho kar ispitil mein pade hain wo log be bhi giriff hain...gair-santhalo mein koi giriff nahi hua...lekin, ye mat samjho ki muft mein ye kaam hua hai...muft mein sabki garden anhi chhuti hai. Paanch hazaar!*" (MA, 197) A sheer display of mockery of law!!

It was only the exploiters who changed hands post-independence, the exploited remained the same. Prashant tries to explain to Kalicharan and Baldev the strategy used by the *zamindars*, first they used these two against the Santhals and now it is the turn of the farmers. With wealth and power, the underprivileged could easily be evacuated from his own land. Kalicharan reasons out to the farmers: "*garibon aur mazduron ki aankhen Kalicharan ne khol di hain. Saikdo beeghe zameenwale kisan ke paas paise hain, paise se gareebo ko khareedkar gareebo ke gale par gareebo ke zariye hi chhuri chelate hain...jaat kya hai! Jaat do hi hain, ek gareeb aur dusri ameer.*" (MA, 169). Not satisfied with this, the *zamindars* indulged in hoarding and black marketing. The naïve folk could not co-relate the hike in

demand and fall in supply, the prices rose but the logic behind it was beyond their cognisance: “*Anaaj ke unche dar se gaon ke teen hi vyaktiyon ne faayda uthaya hai – tehsildar sahib ne, singh ji ne aur khelawansingh yaddav ne. chhote chhote kisaano ki zameene kaudi ke mol bik rahi hain. Mazduron ko sawa rupye roz mazduri milti hai, lekin ek aadmi ka bhi pet nahi bharta. Paanch saal pehle sirf paanch aane roz mazduri milti thi aur usi mein ghar-bhar ke log khaate the. Tehsildar sahib ne dhaan taiyyar hote hi na jaane kahan hhipa diya hai...kapde ke bina saare gan ke log ardhnagn hain...*” (MA, 117)

Almost all works of Renu throw light on the directionless journey embarked by India. Although there were many parties in the foray (Congress Party, Socialist, Communist and next was the RSS), none paid any heed to the underdogs/unprivileged.

The changing times led to the birth of new parties but all were lost in the charm/ fantasy of the ‘chair’: “*naye zamane mein to roz nayi-nayi baat hogi...lekin kotharin ji ganhi maatma ka raasta hi sabse purana aur sahi hai. Nayi-nayi party khul rahi hai, magar kisi ka raasta thik nahi. Sab hinsabad k raaste par hain...udhar dusri partiwallo ko bhi mauka mil gaya hai...hamare Congress k member ko bhi socialist party ka member bana liya hai*” (MA, 116). The interpersonal rifts were taken advantage of by the rival parties and the members were lured by materialistic gifts. Very sarcastically Baawandas remarks: “*ab logon ko chahiye ki apni-apni topi par likhwa le – bhumihar, Rajput, kayastah, yadav, harijan!...kaun kaajkarta kis party ka hai, samajh mein nahi aata*” (MA, 171). Now it is not the fidelity to one’s party and devotion to its ideology, now the new parameters are the position and power in the party; not what is to be done for the public but rather how much can be done for personal needs. Instead of working in collaboration for the welfare of the masses, the political parties are engaged in finding faults in each other and befooling the people with false promises. The nation expected a different picture post-independence but the external colonizers were replaced by the internal ones. The reins of the newly emerged nation were gradually going in the hands of the greedy people. The rich industrialists were now, directly or indirectly, controlling/ ruling the country. Power corrupted the ideology and diluted the commitment of those in authority. The ‘golden bird’ was now caged in casteism and butchered with communal riots.

As a novel, in *Maila Aanchal* we cannot definitely pinpoint a particular story to be the main story – all (social segregation, economic misery, political exploitation, religious sham) have been dovetailed perfectly, with only the region, the period, the people emerging as the ‘protagonist’. The post-independence scenario was very grim – power politics, exploitation, corruption, wrong means to achieve power, etc spread like epidemic and these cankers started eating into the very roots of the society. *Maila Aanchal* captures the political upheavals from 1942-48, eventually affecting the society in general and individuals in particular. If Hargauri loses his life in the futile power struggle, Baawandas’s death evokes empathy and also provokes our think-tanks to question – is this what our freedom fighters wanted? Baldev first appears to be a perfect follower of Gandhi ji, always wearing *khadi* and a believer of *ahimsa*, however he could not stay aloof from corruption. Baawandas on the

other hand is the true believer of Gandhi's philosophy. Even his death is very symbolic of the contemporary tension between India and Pakistan. Maddened after Gandhiji's assassination, his trust was broken and he leaves the village for the Nagar River (that flows between India and Pakistan). Exposing the racketeers of black marketing and smugglers, he boldly faces them single-handedly. Eventually he was crushed to death under the ox-carts – his body remained unclaimed, first thrown into Pakistan by the Indians, and then into the river by the Pakistanis. It is the metaphorical description of Gandhi's ideology thrown to wind by the self-centred people on both the sides of the border. It is only those commoners who sided with the 'right' suffered, torn between the two worlds, no one to own them.

Renu closes the novel with implicit questions and leaves the readers pondering – with so much of filth around, how can the soiled border of the motherland be cleaned?

Renu's regionalism becomes national and eventually crosses the boundaries, exposing the reality and showing mirror to us from which we cannot escape. The line: "*Baawan ne do azaad desho ki, Hindustan aur Pakistan ki – imandari ko, insaniyat ko, bas do deg mein hi naap liya!*" (MA, 298) serves the climax of our moral degradation and answers the concern expressed in the beginning, "*Bharat Mata ro rahi hai*".

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