THE SOILED BORDER

(*Maila Anchal*)

by

PHANISHWAR NATH RENU

Translated with an Introduction

by

INDIRA JUNGHARE

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Preface

It was 1972 when I wrote to Phanishwar Nath Renu, the author of the novel, asking for his permission to translate the novel. Not only did he offer his encouragement, but he also offered to assist me with any problems I might have in understanding his work. Although I never met him in person, it was clear from his letter that he was a warm, kind, and principled man. With the assistance of Rachel Birtha Eitches, who was then a Ph.D. student at the University of Minnesota, I completed the first draft of the translation in 1974. In December of 1974, I took the manuscript to India to show it to Renu. Unfortunately, at that time, on the eve of the Emergency, Renu was very much involved in political activities and therefore was unable to read my translation.

In the Summer of 1977, I took a second draft of the translation to India, only to learn that Renu had passed away in April of that year. I undertook the third and final version with the assistance of Jack Zylla, former Ph.D. student of Hindi literature. It was Jack's enthusiasm for the project and his interest in learning more about village India that encouraged me to redo the entire translation. The new translation was completed in 1985, but due to personal problems during the last five years, I had to postpone its publication.

I am aware of the complex nature of the work and my own limitations as a translator. The novel abounds in local and regional dialectal forms, which is one of its major charms. Following the view of Mulk Raj Anand, I have translated the novel as literally as possible. In order to maintain readability I have had to use the neutral mode at times, sacrificing some of the spicy taste of Renu's idiom and style.

Maila Anchal is a tale of the village of Maryganj of Purnea district in Bihar. Since I, too, was born and brought up in a village—Neri, a Vaidarbhian village of Nagpur district—and was married to a man of the village Anchal of Akola district, both in Maharashtra, working on this novel took me back on many nostlgic trips to my rural homeland and its people.

In addition to Rachel Birtha Eitches and Jack Zylla, I am indebted to many other individuals. I owe a great deal to my former colleague, Professor Ram Dayal Munda, a native of Bihar with knowledge of a number of languages of that region—Hindi, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Magahi, Bengali and Santhali—who often helped me with translation problems. I would like to thank Paul Staneslow for comments. I would also like to thank my former students Judy Frater, Abdul Hai, Apurva Uniyal, and Charles Pain for helping me in various ways.

I am indebted to Professor A.C. Naim of the University of Chicago for reading the first twenty-five chapters of the first draft and providing me with his valuable comments, Professor Frances Prichett of Columbia University for reading the second version, and Carlo Coppola, editor of the *Journal of South Asian Literature*, for his continued encouragement and scholarly support.

I would like also to thank Rajkamal Prakashan for giving me permission to publish translation of Renu's *Maila Anchal*. Thanks are also due to the Graduate School of the University of Minnesota for providing me with a grant-in-aid for the translation project.

I wish to thank my children, Samidha and Milind, for their support and love. I dedicate this book to their father, my late husband Dr. Yashwant N. Junghare, who encouraged and supported me in every way.

Minneapolis
October 1990

Indira Junghare

Introduction

Phanishwar Nath Renu's *Maila Anchal* was first published in 1954 by Samata Prakashan in Patna and was reissued in 1957 by Rajkamal Prakashan in Delhi. It has since gone through several editions.[1] *Maila Anchal* brought the author the President's Award for best novel of the year in 1955. In 1977, the novel was made into the film *Dagdar Babu* under the direction of Nobendu Ghosh. Known as the first "regional" novel in India, it is the story of the village Maryganj of Purnea district in Bihar during the two momentous years, 1946-48, which saw the coming of Indian Independence, partition, the assassination of Gandhi, and the removal of the oppressive land-tenure system. Through the story Renu effectively captures the complex collective life of an Indian village. He portrays the life of Maryganj in all its aspects: religious, social, political, economic. Renu's brilliant skill in depicting all the details of village life make 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.

Until the 1950's Hindi literature had been dominated by the growing concerns and views of the urban middle classes. For the first time since Premchand, Renu looked to the village for inspiration. Renu did not write about the village because it was novel or quaint, but because he understood the village, being himself from rural Bihar. With the exception of *Godan*, no other Hindi novel has presented such a gentle, sensitive, and detailed picture of an Indian village. Unlike Premchand, however, who presented the village as stereotypically rigid and unchanging, Renu presents a village which is rapidly changing under the forces of the modern age. Renu's view of the village is dynamic, and he focuses our atten-

tion on the tensions and conflicts caused by the structures within. *Maila Anchal* opened the door to a new literary approach that has been called regionalism. Renu himself called *Maila Anchal* an *anchalik upanyas*, a regional novel. "Regionalism" represents a movement away from a romantic utopian image of the village and toward a more particularized portrait often featuring tribal and other underprivileged classes. Naturally a major difficulty in producing such a literature would be the knowledge of village speech. Renu, more than the other regional writers, excells in representing the various dialects and colloquial expressions of villagers.

Scholars of Indian literature in India have recognized the importance of Phanishwar Nath Renu and his novel *Maila Anchal*. Critical works on Renu and his fiction include Kusum Sophat's *Phanishwar Nath Renu ki Upanyas Kala* (1968), Pramila Gupta's M.A. thesis, *Renu ke Upanyas* (1969), Purnadeva's *Renu ka Anchalik Katha Sahitya* (1973), Raj Raina's *Kahanikar Phanishwar Nath Renu* (1978), Ram Bujhavan Singh and Ramvachan Ray, eds. *Renu: Sansmaran aur Shraddhanjali*, (1978), Chandrabhanu Sitaram Sonavane's *Kathakar Phanishwar Nath Renu* (1979), Satyanarayan Upadhyaya's *Anchalik Upanyas and Renu* (1980), and Robin Shaw Pushpa's *Sone ki Kalamwala Hiraman* (1981).

In the 70's and 80's Renu attracted the attention of a number of Western scholars, most notably Kathryn Hansen, who wrote a Ph.D. thesis entitled: *Phanishwar Nath Renu: The Integration of Urban and Rural Consciousness in the Modern Hindi Novel (1978, University of California, Berkeley)*, and who has edited a special issue of the *Journal of South Asian Literature* (Volume XVII, No. 2 1982) devoted to Renu. This issue includes translation samples from Renu's main works, an autobiographical essay and interview with Renu, several critical articles, and a bibliography. Kathryn Hansen has also translated several of Renu's short stories in her book *The Third Vow and Other Stories*.

Although Renu's short stories have been translated into English by Hansen and others, his novels have not appeared in English translation. In general, many important works of Indian fiction are not available in English translation. It is my wish to help fill this gap. I hope this translation will be of use not only to students of literature but to all those interested in learning more about village life and culture.

Phanishwar Nath Renu

Phanishwar Nath Renu was born Phanishwar Nath Mandal on March 4, 1921 in the village of Aurahi Hingana in Purnea district of Bihar. His family were landowners belonging to the Kurmi caste. He was nicknamed "Rinua" by his grandmother. The name was later changed to Renu "dust", which also become his pen-name. Renu received his early education in Arariya, Forbesganj, and Viratnagar (Nepal). He then attended Banaras Hindu University but ended his studies and returned to Bihar to participate in the 1942 Quit India campaign. Converted to socialism while in jail, Renu embarked on a political odyssey which lasted the rest of his life.

As a member of the Socialist Party, he supervised the propaganda programs of several peasant movements and played an active role in the revolt against the Nepalese monarchy and in the Human Rights Movement of the early 1970's. He had close personal ties with Jaiprakash Narayan with whom he spent his final years in political activities. In 1975 Renu's opposition to government abuses under Indira Gandhi led to his arrest. In prison his health failed, and this led to his tragic death in March 1977.

Although Renu reveals in his writings the contemporary political life of India and the effects of mismanaged democracy, politics and literature were for him, nevertheless, separate spheres. Renu rarely, if ever, overtly advocated a particular political position in his fiction. He saw direct political involvement rather than literature as the best vehicle for change. His commitment to political ideals was shown when he renounced the title Padmashri, the highest honor bestowed by the Government of India, and surrendered his government awards and stipend to protest the unjust treatment of his political mentor Jaiprakash Narayan during the Emergency.

Renu entered the literary world in 1946 with the publication of a short story, "Batbaba". Yet it was not until the publication of his first and most famous novel, *Maila Anchal*, in 1954 that he was recognized as a major Hindi writer. Soon he became popular in the "Nai Kahani," the "New Story" circle of writers of Allahabad and Delhi. Some of his best-known short stories, "Rasapriya, "Lal Pan ki Begam," and "Tisri Kasam," were published in the

mid-fifties in the Hindi magazine *Nai Kahani*. Unlike the other writers of the *Nai Kahani*, such as Mohan Rakesh, Rajendra Yadav, and Nirmal Verma, who generally addressed urban themes and were most at home in an urban, Westernized environment, Renu's main concern always remained the village and his homeland Northern Bihar.

Besides *Maila Anchal*, Renu's literary contributions include the novels: *Parti Parikatha* (1957), *Dirghtapa* (1963), *Julus* (1965), *Kitne Chaurahe* (1966), and short story collections: *Thumri* (1959), *Adim Ratri Ki Mahak* (1967), and *Aginkhor* (1973). Renu's 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. His short story "Tisri Kasam" was made into a Hindi film in 1966, for the filmscript of which Renu received awards. Renu's posthumously published literature includes his novel, *Paltu Babu Road*, several short stories in the April 1979 issue of the Hindi fiction magazine *Sarika*, and *Vana-Tulsi ki Ganah* (1984), his reminiscences about his contemporary Indian writers.

Maila Anchal: Plot

Maila Anchal is not the story of one person or family, but rather the story of a village and all its residents. Therefore, there is no single sustaining plot to the novel but instead a series of sub-plots. Besides, the major love interest between Dr. Prashant and Kamla, there are the romantic relationships between Baldev and Kotharin Lachmi, Kalicharan and Mangala Devi, and Khalasi and Phuliya. The action takes place on many levels romantic, political, religious, social.

In 1946 a malaria treatment center is opened in the village. Dr. Prashant Kumar, a successful and idealistic young doctor from Patna, begins treating malaria and *kala ajar* (black fever) patients and conducting research on these diseases. He treats Kamli, the daughter or Tahsildar (revenue officer) Vishwanath Prasad, who suffers from fainting spells. Dr. Prashant develops affection for the village and its people. He saves the neighboring villages from the threat of a cholera epidemic. Having gained the respect of the villagers, he moves freely in the village with Kamli. Soon he and Kamli fall in love. Kamli becomes pregnant. Prashant is arrested

on charges of inciting the Santhals to riot and being a Communist. Kamli gives birth to a son, and Prashant, released from prison, arrives in the village just in time to participate in the child's sixth day rite. Finally, the doctor decides to give up his scientific career, settle in the village, and serve the people.

Baldev, a cowherd by caste and a member of the Congress Party, becomes influential and attracts villagers to the party. He leads a procession of village supporters to a Congress rally in the town of Purnea. He falls in love with Lachmi, Mahant Sevadas' former mistress and treasurer of the *Kabir math*. When Lachmi is finally forced to leave the *math* by the new Mahant, she goes to live with Baldev, who has resigned his post and been initiated into the *panth*.

Kalicharan, a young cowhered and leader of the village wrestling ring, defects to the Socialist Party and attempts to build up a faction of socialist followers from the laboring classes and Santhals. He falls in love with Mangala Devi, the teacher from the *Charkha* (spinning wheel) Center, which has been opened by Congress leaders to promote home spinning. Several socialists are arrested for their activities and Kalicharan becomes a fugitive.

Khalasi, an *ojha*, practioner of black magic, and also an expert singer of the ballad *Suranga-sadabrij*, loves Phuliya, a young girl from the Tatma quarter, and succeeds in marrying her after a very long pursuit.

Mahant Sevadas, the chief priest of the monastery, dies and a controversy arises over the appointment of the new Mahant. A disciple of the *acharya* at the main monastery in Kashi tries to oust Ramdas, the disciple of Sevadas. Kalicharan intervenes and Ramdas is anointed as the new Mahant. Rampiyari becomes his mistress and starts living at the monastery with her children and mother.

Tahasildar Vishwanath Prasad, after he loses some of his former influence, resigns as Tahsildar and becomes a Congress member. Ramkirpal Singh and other Rajputs support a Hindu rightist group known as the "black caps." The Socialist party, ridden with corruption, gathers its strength from the Santhals and low caste laborers. Bavandas, a regional Congress leader who is a close associate of Gandhi, comes to Maryganj to work. The coming of

Independence is celebrated with a big procession, songs, and a feast.

Gandhi ji dies and is mourned by the villagers. Bavandas, dismayed by the corruption and casteism within the party, loses faith in national progress. In an attempt to stop Congress smugglers from crossing the border, Bavandas allows himself to be run over by a bullock-cart. His body is thrown into the river that divides India and Pakistan.

A land reform bill is enacted in the Bihar legislature giving tenants the right to acquire share-cropped lands. Santhals and numerous villagers file petitions with the Purnea court to win their land, but their claims are rejected. However, Congress declares the abolition of *zamindari* system. The village land is auctioned. The rich peasants begin buying the lands of the poorer peasants. Confusion, competition, and chaos build up. Vishwanath Prasad urges the villagers to return to the old land tenure system and holds a *panchayat* meeting to restore unity and peace. Violence breaks out. Many Santhals are killed and the remaining ones are imprisoned.

Jyotkhi, the Brahmin astrologer and healer, does not believe in modern medicine. He thinks that doctors are the ones who spread diseases by giving poisonous injections and putting medicine in the wells. With the doctor gone from the village he instructs a villager to murder Parvati's mother, a widow suspected of witchcraft because of the death of her male relatives.

Matla Anchal ends on a positive note. Vishwanath Prasad and Prashant are reconciled. In a gesture of good will towards the villagers, Vishwanath Prasad returns five *bighas* of land to each household.

Maryganj: Backround

The village of Maryganj is named after an English woman Mary, the bride of the indigo-planter Martin who had lived there thirty-five years previous. The village is located in Purnea District in the northeastern corner of Bihar, bordering on West Bengal and Bangladesh on the east and Nepal on the north. Situated on the east bank of Koshi River, the district suffers from the revages of floods and from malaria and other diseases. The Kamala river, a

tributary of the Koshi, flows on the east side of Maryganj. To the south the Koshi meets the Ganges to form the southern boundary of the district. The name Purnea (Puraniya) means "land of lotuses"; the region is alluvial and known for its pink and red lilies. The major crops are paddy, jute, and bamboo.

Maryganj is sometimes referred to as a village of Mithila. Mithila is a large, heavily populated area, comprising most of Northern Bihar, north of the Ganges. Historically and under present-day usage, it includes Purnea District. Under British rule its name was 'Tirhut' and it designated only the land west of the Koshi. In the earliest period of history it was called 'Videha,' the area of the kingdom of Raja Janaka in the *Ramayana*. This area roughly marks the linguistic boundaries of Maithili speaking region. Maithili is the only language of Bihar with a written literary history (which includes the poet Vidyapati). In the novel, most of the songs and the speech of some of the characters is in Maithili.

During British rule, the village Maryganj belonged to the princely state of Parbanga. Another princely state referred to in the novel is the State of Rani Champavati. The rivalry over land between the Tahasildar and Ramkirpal Singh goes back to the conflict between Maharani Champavati and the Raja of Parbanga, whom their ancestors had served.

The village had also known the Indigo-Sahebs, such as Martin and their tyrannical treatment of the natives. Historically, various European settlers had come to the region for the cultivation of indigo. These indigo-planters flourished and were suddenly ruined by the invention of a chemical blue dye in Germany.

In 1911, a Province of Bihar and Orissa was created, separate from the Bengal Presidency, with Patna as its capital. In 1936, Bihar was made a separate State.

Social Organization of the Village: Caste

The caste system operates forcefully in Maryganj and surrounding villages. Not only do people live in separate quarters of the village according to caste and occupation, but they follow the usual caste restrictions governing marriage and co-dining. The relative position of the different castes in the caste hierarchy can

be determined mainly on the grounds of acceptance or non-acceptance of food and water from other castes.

Traditionally, Rajputs are higher in the caste hierarchy than the Kayasthas. However, in Maryganj, the family of the Kayastha Tahsildar has gained higher social status due to educational advancement. Economically, both castes are large land owners so there has been rivalry between them for social dominance. The Yadavas are a low caste but recently have started wearing the sacred thread, symbolic of the "twice born" caste, in order to claim higher social status. This is a result of their giving up their traditional occupation of cowherding, taking up farming and raising their economical status. Numerically, Brahmins are the smallest group, with the highest ritual status but low economic status. The tribal Santhals are a large group but stand at the bottom of the social hierarchy, with no educational, economic, or ritual status.

Interactions between these caste groups are guided by their position in the caste hierarchy, as well as their socio-economic status, which is not necessarily commensurate with their ritual status. For example, Biranchi had to perform a penance imposed by his caste group when they thought he had eaten food left over from the Tahsildar's meal. The implication is that Biranchi belongs to a caste higher than that of the Tahsildar. Only after performing penance could his caste members eat or drink or share a pipe with him. The Brahmins and Rajputs refuse to sit with others at the feast given in the *math*,

The various castes each live in their own separate quarter or section of the village called *tola* or *toli*. The high castes, the Brahmins, Kayasthas, Rajputs, Yadavs, and Bhumihars, reside in the center of the village, while the Untouchables and low castes, such as the Dusadhs, Musahars, and Raidas, live on the outskirts of the village, even beyond the low caste groups. In between there are castes who occupy a middle status, such as the various sub-castes of Chatris, the Dhanukdharis, and Paswans,

The Zamindari System and the Class Struggle

The village Maryganj like other villages of Bihar in 1947 was under the grip of the traditional *zamindari* system of land tenure. According to this system, the *zamindar* (landlord) collects the rents

from the *raiyats*, his tenants, and pays the land-revenue due from him to the government. The system of *raiyatwari*, in which the *raiyat* (tenant) pays rent directly to the government, prevailed in other parts of the country, such as in Bombay and Madras.[2] In the *zamindari* system, there are usually one or more intermediary tenure-holders between the landlord and the peasants, who have rent collecting powers and some rights to keep land. At the base of the system are the peasants with limited rights to the land and wage laborers with no rights to the land.[3] The land records are kept by the *patwari* and criminal records by the *kotwal*. The revenue officer, the *tahsildar*, is responsible for the collection of rent from the villagers for the *zamindar*.

The village Maryganj has inherited the same system with slight variation. The Tahsildar, Vishwanath Prasad, is himself a large landlord, owning nearly one thousand *bighas* of land. There are also other *zamindars* in the village among the Rajputs, such as Ramkirpal Singh, who owns three hundred *bighas* of land. The second category, intermediate tenure-holders, is represented by the Bhumihars and Yadavas. Peasants with limited rights to the land are represented by middle caste groups, and landless laborers by the low castes and Santhals. The Chatris, who are of middle caste status, appear to belong to the last two groups.

The class struggle that results from this tenure system seems to boil down to two main classes: (1) landholders, and (2) landless. As the *zamindars* are generally of high caste and the landless laborers from the lowest castes, this class conflict tends to be expressed as a caste conflict.

In the 1930's the oppression and exploitation of the peasantry let loose under the *zamindari* system drew the attention of the socialists, who campaigned actively in Bihar and elsewhere for the abolition of this system. It was felt that the poverty, unemployment, and other related problems of the village community were all due to this repressive land tenure and revenue system. Some of the villagers of Maryganj are shown to be actively involved in this movement.

The era of land reform in Bihar began with dawn of independence. Bihar was the first state to abolish the *zamindari* system by passing the Bihar Abolition of Zamindari Act in 1948. To some

villagers land reform meant giving land to the peasant after he had tilled it for a certain period of time, to others it meant the breaking up and redistribution of the land; whereas to some it meant changes in the existing tenure system.[4] This explains the confusion that occurs in Maryganj after news of land-reform reaches the village. Amidst the confusion, the landlords try to grab more land from the poor Santhals.

Political Organization

Basically the village has three political factions: the Congress Party, represented by Baldev, Bavandas, and later by the Tahasildar, the Socialist-Marxist Party of Kalicharan and his friend Vasudev, and the RSS organization, with which the Rajputs are affiliated. In order to understand the political interests and alliances of the villagers, it is necessary to give some background on these groups.

The Congress Party grew out of the nationalist movement which preceded the coming of independence in 1947. The Indian National Congress, which was to become the main platform for nationalist ideas, was established in 1885. Shortly after World War I Congress came under the domination of Mahatma Gandhi, who remained the most powerful voice in Congress until the achievement of Indian Independence. Under Gandhi, Congress, which had been largely a movement of intellectuals, became a genuine mass movement. It embraced more radical elements and included in its ranks socialists of all types, peasants' and workers' organizations, the Radical Humanists, and even Communists.[5] The goal of the Congress Party and its leader Mahatma Gandhi was *swaraj* (freedom) and the technique, *satyagraha*—nonviolent noncooperation—, a technique which he had used on various campaigns such as the Champaran *Satyagraha* of 1917, a protest against the poor conditions of workers on the indigo plantations of Bihar. The *Swadeshi* movement started by Gandhi advocated the use of home-spun cotton, or *khadi*, over foreign cloth. Following this movement members of Congress started wearing *khadi* and Gandhian caps, which are worn by the character Baldev. The opening of the *Charkha* (Spinning Wheel) center in Maryganj shows the influence of the *Swadeshi* movement on the rural areas.

During the period of the nationalist campaigns, the State of

Bihar was suffering from the oppressive *zamindari* system, which Gandhi defended with his conception of 'trusteeship'. Hence disillusioned Congressmen of socialist leaning, many of whom were from Bihar, being dissatisfied with the lack of progressive and radical leadership, took steps in organizing socialist groups in Bihar (1931) and later in other parts of the country. These socialist groups were strongly influenced by Marxist ideology but fell short of actually calling themselves Marxist. The main leader of this socialist faction within Congress was the Bihari Jaiprakash Narayan.[6] Under the influence of Jaiprakash and the socialists, the Congress Party officially became the Congress-Socialist Party in 1934 and held its first all-India conference at Patna, Bihar.

Ideologically, the Congress Socialist Party reflected three overlapping tendencies---Marxist socialism, social democracy of the British Labour Party type, and a democratic socialism tempered by Gandhian concepts of decentralization and the use of non-violent civil disobedience techniques for nationalist and class struggle. The outstanding exponents of the first persuasion were Jaiprakash Narayan and Acharya Narendra Deva, of the second persuasion M.R. Masani and Ashok Mehta, and of the third Achyut Patwardhan and Ram Manohar Lohia. Although a majority of Congress Socialist leaders were non-Marxists, the most influential were the Marxists whose views were tolerated by a majority of leaders and party members. As a matter of compromise the Party's programs and resolutions were allowed to reflect Marxian terminology, and Marxists from other radical parties were admitted as members on a restricted basis. But it did not allow itself to be called a Marxist-Leninist Party.[7]

In 1947, before leaving India, the British handed over control of the government to the leaders of Congress. Later that year at the Kanpur Session of Congress, the Socialist-Marxist wing of the party broke off to form an independent Socialist Party. To Jaiprakash Narayan and other leaders of the Socialist-Marxist movement, the real meaning of *swaraj* or freedom had always been not simply the ending of colonial rule but the emancipation of the masses from exploitation and injustice. The initial performance of the Congress Government offered little hope of a radical social and economic program; its policies were clearly intended to serve the interests of the Indian capitalists and landlords.[8] Renu, who was

a dedicated follower of Jaiprakash Narayan, was strongly influenced by Socialist-Marxist philosophy. The influence of Marxism on the Socialists is seen in the use of Marxist-type slogans and phrases like: "he who sows will harvest" and "Revolutionary Dialectic Materialism" by Kalicharan and Vasudev.

The Communist Party is briefly mentioned in connection with the arrest of Dr. Prashant, who is suspected of being a Communist and inciting the Santhals to revolt against the landlords. As mentioned above, Communists had previously been allowed to join the Congress Party on a limited basis, but in December 1945 all Communists were expelled from the party and were barred from holding any office in the Congress administration. On March 26, 1948, the East Bengal government declared the Communist Party of India to be unlawful, raided Communist offices in Calcutta, and made a number of arrests.[9] Similar searches were made in other regions, including Bihar.

Another political group in Maryganj is the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), to which the Rajputs belong. The RSS was founded as para military organization in 1925 by Dr. Keshav Hedgewar and grew rapidly under the leadership of M.S. Golwalkar. The avowed goal of the RSS was to protect the Hindu race, religion, and culture, and regenerate the ancient Hindu nation. Branches of the RSS were set up all over the country, promoting the cult of Hindu nationalism among the masses. After the assessination of Mahatma Gandhi on January 30, 1948, and the widespread allegation that the RSS was responsible for the crime, the RSS revised its constitution on Sept. 5, 1949, proclaiming itself to be a purely cultural body with no political role.[10]

Membership in the RSS was open to all male Hindus of ten years or older. RSS volunteers, uniformed in brown shirts, engaged in an intensive program of ideological, physical, and military training. In Maryganj, the RSS training is given by the Sanyokji to the children of the village, specifically the young Rajputs. The Rajput *zamindars* seek association with the RSS and oppose any change in the traditional system governing relations between landlords and peasants. This accounts for the revolt by the Santhals against the Singhs and the consequent death of Tahsildar Hargauri.

Religion

Various layers of Hinduism are represented in Maryganj. The Hinduism of Tahsildar Vishwanath, Kamli, the Rajputs, and other high caste people is that of the Epics and Puranas. The low-caste sorceror Khalasi performs certain shamanistic practices, such as possession, and black magic, which generally are not practiced by the higher castes. Local figures assume deification, like the political activist Bavandas, who after his death becomes the object of worship. Renu most skillfully represents all the details of the religious life of the village: the life rituals, supersitions, festivals, local legends.[11]

The chief religious institution in the village is the *Kabir math.* Much dialogue and action in the novel revolves around the *math.* The Kabir Panth ("Path or Kabir") is a sect based on the teachings of the 15th century mystic Kabir. Kabir, a Muslim weaver living in Banaras, opposed the dogmatism and empty ritualism of both orthodox Hinduism and Islam. Being of low caste, he never had access to Sanskrit literature. His *banis* 'sayings', so popular among the masses, are expressed in the vernacular. The earliest manuscript collection of Kabir's poems, the *Bijak*, serves as the scripture of the sect.

His sayings are in the form of *sakhis* (literally 'witness', rhyming couplets commonly called *dohas*), *sabdas* (songs composed in *pada* form), and *ramainis* (doctorinal poems consisting of an indefinite number of four-line verses).[12] In addition to the *Bijak*, two other recensions of Kabir's verses exist, one forming part of the Sikh scripture *Adi Granth* (1606) and another belonging to the *Dadupanth.* The language of Kabir's sayings has been described as a mixed Western dialect of Old Hindi, or old Khari Boli, with some admixture of Avadhi (particularly in the Bijak) and Rajasthani elements.[13] Several *ramainis*, *sakhis*, and *sabdas* are on occasion sung or recited at the *math*, which are attributed to the Bijak or sometimes the 'Guru Granth'. One song occurring in chapter twenty-two is what is termed an *ulatbamsi*, an 'upside-down utterance', meant to covey the paradoxical nature of Kabir's mystical experience:[14]

'Oh, good men, a strange thing has happened
A son gave birth to his mother'

Although Kabir was officially of the Muslim Julaha caste, he shows only limited knowledge of Islam.[15] The predominant influences on his teaching appear to be Advaita Vedanta, Vaishnava devotionalism, and Tantric Yoga, particularly that of the Gorakhnath school. The Gorakhnath or Nath Panth was founded by Gorakhnath, who probably lived in the 13th century or earlier. The Nath yogis practice a form of tantric yoga, called Hatha or Kundalini Yoga, whose goal is the attainment of the mysterious 'state' called *Sahaj*, identified with the Absolute Reality.[16] References to the *cakras*, mystical centers in the body, and the technique of Kundalini yoga occur in the fourth chapter of the novel.

Kabir's God is both personal and impersonal. As he rejects all forms and attributes of God, the only comprehensible aspect is his name, which represents his presence. Thus, in the Kabir Panth repetition of God's name (*nam sumiran*) is regarded as the most important means of attaining union with God. *Nam sumiran* is practiced at the *math* in the following forms: reading the *Bijak* several times a day, singing of the morning and the evening hymns, *japa* 'the muttering of God's name' as Ram, Hari, or *Sat-Guru* with the aid of a rosary, and *sat-sang*, listening to the religious discourse by the Mahant and the singing of Kabir's songs in the assembly.

Renu depicts not only the positive side of life at the *math*, the *satsangs* and feasts open to all the villagers, but also its negative side. The Mahants of Maryganj are shown to have deviated from the path of Kabir. They smoke *ganja* and keep women as *dasis* such as Lachmi and Rampiyari.

There are two main branches of the *panth*: the Surat Gopal branch having its center in Benares with a sub-branch at Maghar in Gorakhpur District, where Kabir died, and the Dharamdas branch in Chattisgarh (Madhya Pradesh) with its center at Damakhera. Another branch of the Kabir panth, which claims descent from Bhagodas, the compiler of the *Bijak*, is established at Dhanauti in the Saran District of Bihar.[17]

The *panth* consists of both householder and ascetic sections. The householders live at home while the ascetics, called *bairagis*, attach themselves permanently to one of the monasteries, or *maths*, belonging to the order. Women may become *bairagis* after a probationary period of two years.[18] The *panth* draws its members mainly from the lower castes.[19]

Principal officers at the *math* are the Mahant, who oversees its general operation and is the only one qualified to initiate new members, the *Diwan*, business accountant, and *Bhandari*, cook. The Mahant of the *math* receives authority to teach and initiate new members from the Head Mahant of the section to which the *math* belongs. The rite of initiation into the Mahantship varies.[20] In the case of Maryganj *math*, the Mahant receives a robe as part of his initiation. During the initiation of new members, the Mahant whispers a *mantra* into the ear of the initiate. The member is expected to wear a rosary of wooden beads and a *tila*, sectarian mark on his forehead, and to participate in the *satsang*.[21]

Literary Form

As noted earlier, there is no sustained single plot to the novel, no definite beginning or end in terms of events or action. The novel is like a motion picture: various scenes and characters flash before our eyes and disappear. Transitions are often abrupt. Often the narrative will move back and forth between dialogue and the omniscient narrator without the reader knowing who is speaking.

Just as there is no single, sustained plot, there is no single, well-defined protagonist. The characters in general lack depth and are predictable. This lack of depth is partly compensated by the variety of characters in the novel and Renu's skillful depiction of them. Renu has assembled in this novel a wide array of characters representing every walk of life. His portrayal of them is both balanced and sensitive. He does not let the audience know who he sympathizes with. Although it is no secret where Renu's political and social sympathies lay, he never used his novels to promote any of his causes. Renu is more concerned with people and their feelings---the things in life that make them human. In his writings there is no idealization or denunciation of any character. Their weaknesses and foibles may be exposed, as in the case of she malicious gossip Jyotkhiji, but their positive characteristics are also made known and they are treated with empathy and tenderness; when Jyotkiji's wife dies he is sympathetically shown to be a broken man, heartbroken and confused.

Another aspect of Renu's characters is that they are humorous The humor is conveyed through their manners of speech. their perceptions of the world, and relationships with others. This humor not only makes for more enjoyable reading but serves to create empathy for the character. Renu's humor is not a vindictive one and does not seek to 'put down' a particular person or group.

Unlike other writers, Renu does not describe his characters. They reveal themselves through their actions and conversations with one another to a great extent. Because the plot is not a linear one, a character's actions and thoughts may be suddenly dropped to be picked up again many pages later. The reader knows it is that same character by his or her actions or idiosyncratic speech. As Renu's practice is to describe his characters' thoughts in conversational mode, the reader often does not know if the character is thinking or speaking.

Another literary device of Renu is his blending of folksongs and sayings into the narrative. The songs, of which there are about twenty, include religious and ritual songs, patriotic songs and eulogies, film songs, women's worksongs, and traditional ballads such as that of *Suranga-Sadabrij*. Also used are the *Vidyapati* and *Jat-Jattin* dance dramas and the *nautanki* folk-drama about the famous revolutionary hero Bhagat Singh. On one level these songs and sayings draw the reader into the world of the village and bring it to life. On another level they serve as important structural elements of the novel. As Kathryn Hansen points out, a song may be used to create an atmosphere and form the backround to the main action. Very often a song being sung by a character will parallel the action that is taking place or that the singer wishes were taking place. For example, in chapter 11 when Khalasi sings the ballad of the lovers Suranga and Sadabrij, he is imagining his own love affair with Phuliya.[22] The songs and sayings also serve as transitions between scenes and chapters. The song in effect transports the reader to another plane, and when the song is over he finds that the scene too has changed. In addition to using the text of the folksong or folkdrama, Renu also provides its musical accompaniment, representing the sounds of the various instruments e.g. the tamborine: "*runa jhunuka jhunuka*" and the nagara drum: "*gud-gudaam*". This brings rhythm to the text and transforms the novel itself into a musical drama.

Linguistic Features

Maila Anchal is difficult to understand even for native speakers of Hindi because of its linguistic complexity. The languages used in the novel range from standard and colloquial Hindi to regional dialects such as Maithili, Bhojpuri, Magahi, Nepali, and Bengali and the tribal language Santhali. This complexity in part reflects the complexity of the linguistic area of Northeastern Bihar and Purnea District. According to Grierson, the language of Bihar, termed as Bihari, contains three major dialects: Maithili in the North, Bhojpuri in the West and Magahi in the center.[23] To the south and east lie the tribal languages Santhali and Mundari. In Purnea, which lies in the northeastern corner of Bihar, the major language is Maithili. Towards the east, the language becomes more and more influenced by Bengali. The Maithili spoken in Purnea may be called Eastern Maithili.

Renu, himself a native of rural Northern Bihar, is particularly skilled in portraying the linguistic diversity of this region and the patterns of village speech. He is also very much aware of the sociolinguistic levels and usages of speech within the village. The language of a character will often reflect their caste, class, and educational backround, and will be adjusted to fit a particular social context. For example, educated characters such as Doctor Prashant and the Tahsildar speak standard Hindi in certain contexts. Uneducated villagers tend to distort English words, for example *markin* ("American") and *kiliyar* ("clear"). Caste attitudes are reflected in the linguistic usages of the various caste groups. For example, the Kayastha *toli* is referred to as the Malik *tola* "masters' quarter" by the laborers of the Tahsildar. Since the word *toli* is diminutive, they use *tola* to indicate the "bigness" of their masters. Kayasthas are derogatorily referred to as Kaiths by the Rajputs; the Rajputs are called Sepoys by the Kayasthas; the Yadavas are called Guars "cowherds" by both the Rajputs and Kayasthas.

In his desire to present all the minute details of the villagers' speech, Renu shows also the idiosyncratic speech patterns, or ideolects, of the individual characters, e.g. the stutter of the toothless Mahant: "Lach-ch-mi." He even likes to give the sounds of animal the dog—"Auooo! Auooo! and the frog---"zzz. . .rrbt". Many words for foods, drinks, musical instruments, clothing, jewelry, trees, and plants are given which are unknown to most Hindi

readers and which can only be known by one familiar with the region.

The linguistic complexity of the novel is compounded by the use of folk genres: proverbs, and folksongs, which are mostly in Bhojpuri and Maithili, often with many archaic forms, religious songs, and the songs of Kabir in Old Hindi, which often present problems of understanding.

The Soiled Border

The word "border" is used in the novel to convey many meanings on various levels simultaneously. It refers not only to the border of the sari, but to geographical and spatial boundaries: the border between India and Nepal, or India and Pakistan, the border between city and village, and temporal boundaries: the border between British rule and independence, between tradition and modernity. All these borders are fraught with danger. The novel takes place between 1946 and 1948 at a great juncture in India's history, at a time of great disruption and change. The disintegration of traditional social structures and creation of literacy, modern medicine, and scientific advances create both hope and uncertainty for the villagers. This time of change involves much suffering and pain; in effect the border is soiled. Even after the departure of the British there is still much oppression and backwardness; for the villagers things have not really changed or they have changed for the worse. There is much greed and corruption in the Congress and Socialist parties. The region of Purnea which constitutes a border between Nepal and India is soiled by drug trafficking. The soiled border will be very difficult if not impossible to clean as tradition fights against change.

Often connected with the image of the soiled border of a sari is the image of a woman weeping. When Kamli learns she is pregnant, she cries, saying her sari is stained, meaning "her family name is ruined". "Mother India", who dwells in the villages, is crying because her sari border is soiled. In his description of the suffering of his female characters Renu often uses the expression "Mother India is weeping", thereby identifying them with Mother India.

Dr. Prashant, who has been a major, positive force for change in the village, at one point in the novel (Chapter 27) stands

overlooking the fields, finding a new appreciation for the past and with it new hope for the future.

". . .Ma! Motherhood. Mother Earth. A mother couldn't bear to kill her own son. Yet her offspring may strangle her to death. Bountiful Crops. . ."

Mother India dwells in the villages,
In verdant fields, with bountiful crops.
The border of her sari is soiled with dust.

"The soiled border! But now, in *this* season, her sari-border was golden."

A NOTE ON TRANSLATION

The very features that make this novel unique cause problems of translation. The linguistic complexity of the novel---the representation of regional dialects, idiolects, colloquialisms, patterns of speech related to social and religious contexts---as well as Renu's own peculiar literary style make the task of translating formidible. In a separate article, I have discussed the problems of translating *Maila Anchal*.[24] I have tried to convey the colloquial expressions as much as possible, but I am fully aware of the problems involved and my own limitations.

The novel is full of words and terms which will be unknown to many Hindi readers as well as words which are difficult to translate due to their complex social-cultural connotations. I have thought it best to retain many of these words in their original form while providing a glossary. Most of these words need not be looked up but can be easily understood from their context.

It is my sincere hope that this translation of *Maila Anchal* will bring a deeper understanding and greater appreciation of the people, culture, and literary tradition it represents.

NOTES

1. For the translation of the novel I have used: Phanishwar Nath Renu, *Maila Anchal* (Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, Seventh Printing, 1973).
2. John Houlton, *Bihar: The Heart of India* (Calcutta: Orient Longmans, (1949), p. 200.
3. F. Tomasson Jannuzi, *Agrarian Crisis in India* (Austin: University of Texas, 1974), pp. 10-11.
4. Jagannath Mishra, *Land Reforms in Bihar* (Patna: Bihar Institute of Economic Development, 1974), pp. 5-8.
5. Norman D. Palmer, *The Indian Political System* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), p. 73.
6. Ram Chandra Gupta, "The Changing Phases of the Socialist Party of India---A Critique," in Subhash C. Kashyap, ed. *Indian Political Parties* (Delhi: The Institute of Constitutional and Parliamentary Studies, 1971), p. 256.
7. *Ibid*, p. 257. Also, cf. Madhu Limaye, *Evolution of Socialist Policy* (Hyderabad: Chetana Prakashan, 1952), p. 1.
8. Ram Chandra Gupta, p. 260.
9. D. C. Gupta, *Indian Government and Politics* (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1972), pp. 316-17.
10. Norman D. Palmer, pp. 225-27.
11. For a description of folk-religious beliefs and practices in *Maila Anchal*, see Indu Prakash Pandey, "Folk Elements in *Maila Anchal*", *JSAL*, Vol. XVII, No. 2 (1982), pp. 137-140.
12. Charlotte Vaudeville *Kabir*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 49-55.
13. On the language of Kabir, see Vaudeville, pp. 63-69.
14. On the *ulatbamsi*, see *Ibid*, pp. 143-44.
15. *Ibid*, p. 89
16. *Ibid*, p. 125.
17. G. H. Westcott, *Kabir and the Kabir Panth* (Varanasi, 1974), pp. 98-99; cf. also Vaudeville, pp. 4-5, Fn. 3.
18. Westcott, p. 117.
19. *Ibid*, p. 107.

20. *Ibid*, pp. 118-20. See also Jodh Singh, *Kabir* (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1971), p. 31.
21. Westcott, pp. 121-25.
22. Kathryn Hansen, "Song and Structure in Renu's Fiction," in *JSAL*, Vol. XVII, No. 2 (1982), p. 157.
23. George Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India* Vol. 1, Part I, p. 120.
24. Indira Y. Junghare, "Problems of Translation", *JSAL*, (Vol. XVII, No. 2, 1981), pp. 121-130.