

CHAPTER : V

RURAL FAMILY, LOVE AND MARRIAGE IN RENU'S NOVELS.

CHAPTER - V

MAJOR THEMES : RURAL FAMILY, LOVE AND MARRIAGE IN RENU'S NOVELS.

Maila Anchal by Phanishwarnath Renu has been both a popular and critical success. The setting of the novel is a remote village in North Eastern Bihar, in the district of Purnea, which borders Nepal on one side and Bangladesh on the other. The time of the setting of novel is the eve of the country's independence in 1947.

"Anchal" word is a Hindi translation of 'Region'. It was in England that first of all Thomas Hardy and Arnold Bennett used a particular region, Staffordshire, as the setting and focal point for their novels. They have depicted realistically the social structure, folkways and mores, language customs and superstition of that particular region. The characters were life like and displayed the same likes, and weaknesses which were found in the people of a particular region. Regionalism, thus, often becomes regional patriotism. The region is taken in its totality. Every aspect of that particular area or part of the country is taken, be it political, social psychological or economic. In fact 'Region' has become a character in Hardy's novels and its characterisation is so authentic that his novels are popular even to-day.

But it may here be noted that regionalism found in Hindi literature is not due to the influence of western literature. In Hindi literature the tendency has been a basic one and can be found before the advent of Munshi Premchand. The language used in Premchand's

'Godan' was not of a particular region but yet it gives authenticity and naturalness to the characters of the novel. It was Nagarjun, a contemporary of Renu, who used the related regional languages and symbols in his novel **Balchanma**. But it was in **Maila Anchal** that the regional trend got its real importance and acknowledgement.

Renu himself provided the label 'regional' for his first novel.

In the now famous introduction, he says, "This is Maila Anchal (i.e. soiled end of a sari or a dirty region or both) a regional novel, Ek Anchalik Upanyas. The setting is Purnea. Purnea is a district of Bihar State; to one side is Nepal to other Bangladesh and West Bengal. Its outline becomes complete when we draw the boundaries of Santhal Parganas to the South and Mithila to the West. I have made a single village of this area the field of action of the novel considering it a symbol of a backward village.¹

Maryganj is the fictional village which is characterised by backwardness, land problems, power struggles, religious and social perversity and corruption. As described in the novel this village is situated on the bank of Kamla. It is reached from the railway station of Rauthat, fourteen miles eastwards, after crossing the river Kosi. Maryganj actually is the new name given to the village by an English Indigo Planter, Mr. Martin, who named it after his wife who died there of malaria. Gradually people forgot the old name of the village.

1. Phanishwarnath Renu : **Maila Anchal** 6th. printing, 1969 Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, (English translation Indu Prakash Pandey in **Regionalism in Hindi Novels p.82**)

The time of setting the story is the pre and post independence period, when the first rays of change had touched the dark clouds of superstition, backwardness, illiteracy and casteism, in the form of a new hospital or malaria centre, and coming of a doctor. Against this backdrop the novel has discussed in detail the numerous aspect of human relationship which form the web of the village society.

Family, marriage, sex and love are, some of the major themes which form the integral part of not only Maila Anchal but his other novels also.

Family : Family is the basic and universal social structure of human society. Nuclear forms of family are associated with modernized industrial society, and extended or joint families are associated with relatively agrarian societies. Renu in his **Maila Anchal** has never specifically illustrated in any place that joint families prevailed in Maryganj village. But it can be assumed that since it is an agrarian type of society different castes like Kayastha, Rajputs, Yadavas and other backward classes must be having a joint type of family, though Vishwanath Prasad is a patriarch of a nuclear family, which consists of him, his wife and daughter Kamli.

Marriage & Sex : Renu has ripped off the veil of the face of the traditional Indian Society's puritanism. He exposes the dual nature of the Indian social life regarding its concept about marriage and sex, and has tried to raise the curtain on the myth behind religious practices, thus showing his preference and leaning towards socialistic ideals.

Renu has vividly brought out the contrast between theory and practice. He has shattered the myth of morality and purity in the Indian Society. Marriage is sacramental and sacred and has been considered indissoluble. And the concept of morality is related to sanctions regarding sex. Sex is permitted only within marriage and only with one's spouse. But Renu has thoroughly exposed the prevailing immorality and sexuality in rural India. He has dealt with premarital, marital and extra-marital relationships in his novel, thus exploding the myth of Indian sexual purity. He has shown the ugly face of the so called simple village community. Village has been shown, to be full of clandestine sexual activities.

It is for this reason that he has given great importance to Math, (monastery) where all the inmates (sadhus) are shown to be corrupt. They are shown as either having enjoyed sex with women or as craving for it. The whole village knows about the illegitimate relationship between Lakshmi Kotharin and the blind Mahant Sevadas. When Sevadas had brought Lakshmi Dasin (as she is popularly called) as a child to the Math, then she was totally ignorant and knew nothing about the "going ons". And as Kishnu of Yadav Toli reports, ".....on one side a child and on the other this fifty year old vulture: Lakshmi used to cry every night - such a cry would melt a stone. I could not sleep Equally wicked is this Ramdasua (his disciple) Once the mahant went away to Purnea for some days. I thought that Lakshmi could now sleep in peace for four nights. But my God ! she escaped from the mouth of the lion only to fall a prey to the cat. After that Lakshmi

fell seriously ill and barely escaped death. Their sins could not remain hidden. Ramdas started getting epileptic fits and sevadas became blind I do not accept them as saints.'¹

Many other sexual attempts on Lakshmi by the visiting saints are mentioned in the novel. After the death of Sevadas when Ramdas, the rightful heir becomes the mahant, after much rivalry and infighting from Sadhus of other maths, he tries to seduce Lakshmi. She resists and refuses him openly.

Ramdas, in reality was an 'illiterate', without any religious or spiritual consciousness. He had become the disciple of Sevadas because his ability to play the tombourine well, had pleased Sevadas. So when he finds that his 'inherent right' has been rejected, he selects Rampīayri of Tatma Toli and brings her to the math as his mistress, whom he later marries.

But being disgusted after some time, she leaves the math and builds a separate hutment for herself. In the meantime she has developed a deep love for Baldevji who is a strict disciple of Gandhiji, and a Congressman. He is also attracted to her and feels a particular type of 'fragrance emanating from Lakshmi's body ! There is intoxication in this fragrance which makes his mind pure and calm. As a result Baldev forgets everything and later marries Lakshmi.

1. **Opcit** p.87

Renu has succeeded in depicting the nature of backwardness and the harsh reality behind so called religion by dramatizing the perverted forms of popular religion.

Another sample of Love :

Dr. Prashant who has come as a messiah of change and wellbeing for every one, falls in love with Vishwanath Prasad's daughter Kamli who is a patient of psychosis. The doctor himself becomes a patient of love while treating her.

Kalicharan, a Socialist and a person of staunch principles, who always stayed away from the females, changes when he comes in contact with Mangaladevi a Hindu widow and congress worker. They are attracted towards each other. He desires her, when during her illness he changes her clothes and bedsheets.

Jotkhiji, the pompous astrologer of the village who preaches morality to others is himself involved with four women. Khalasiji an outsider lusts after Phulia of Tatma Toli and ultimately succeeds in marrying her but Phulia is in love with her childhood mate and secretly pines for Sahdev Misir. Poverty has made many families close their eyes towards 'goings bwtween their daughters and the Babus of the village. The relationship between Phulia and Sahdevmisir is a burning example of this. This Sahdev Misir is caught red handed with the married Phulia in her house by the youths of Tatma toli but Phulia's

father keeps quiet as he is indebted to Sahdev misir. In this way Renu has exposed the naked reality of the poor people and reveals, the contradiction in the Indian Social life. He shows that morality and poverty do not go hand in hand. He also shows that the rich equally indulge in moral violations.

Upendranath Ask in his criticism on **Maila Anchal** has pointed out that it is the lust and desire, which makes the Brahmins spend their nights with lower castes like the Chamarins and the Bhangans (Harijans). But during day time they do not allow them to drink water from the same well. Thus the traditional link between sex and morality has been completely exposed. In this matter there is complete dichotomy between theory and practice. Though the word sex is a taboo in Indian Society therefore all sexual exploits are shady and shrouded but Renu shines a clear torch of truth and exposes their blackness.

It is worth mentioning that in this novel Renu has introduced a revolutionary idea of unwed motherhood, thus evolving a new sex ethics. It seems that what Renu wants to say is that morality is simply a matter of values.

The relationship between Dr. Prashant and Kamli is visualized from this new perspective by the author. Their love is considered pure and lime and their intimate relationship gets legitimacy even when it is found that Kamli was pregnant. To get legitimacy, was indeed revolutionary considering the time period when the novel was written and specially in a rural setting. Even to-day in the age of modernization

when the old concepts regarding family marriage and sex are changing, children outside wedlock are not easily accepted. True, there have been a few cases, but mainly in the urban societies and big metropolitan cities where children of mothers not legally married have been accepted. In villages, it will still take some time to get recognition—that is this historical process. What Renu implies is that progress has already begun and Prashant's case is a model example.

Love : In the beginning of the novel itself, when Renu is describing his village he says "it has flowers as well as thorns".¹

He has symbolised the beauty and the fragrance of flower in Dr. Prashant's love for Kamli, a village Belle and the daughter of Vishwanath Prasad. He has also stressed upon the other aspect of human relationship where the love between a man and a woman need not have an overtone of sex, but is purely platonic love, found between two friends who completely understand each other. This kind of relationship is shared by Dr. prashant and Mamta. This idea of Renu sets him apart from the traditional thinkers who view the relationship between man and woman through a narrow glass only.

At the end of the novel we come to know that Dr. Prashant has married Kamli and elects to stay in the village and continue his profession. He no longer conceives this work purely in terms of scientific therapeutics or research but in the language of wider humanitarianism.

1. **Maila Anchal**, Preface.

We are made aware that Dr. Prashant falls in love not only with Kamla, but also with her village, gradually, and accepts the village in totality-together with its ugliness, though in the beginning he was termed a 'German spy' and later a communist, an agitator and an instigator in the conflict between the villagers and tribals mainly Santhals. For, he has seen that beauty is also born in a world full of poverty, dirt and ignorance.

When viewed superficially **Maila Anchal** and **Parti Parikatha** appear as two faces of the same coin but we can not call them as duplicates. Each has its own distinctive qualities. Both, **Maila Anchal** and **Parti Parikatha** are linked with each other in the sense that they both explore the changing human relationships in rural India as a result of interplay of technological political and cultural factors. In both the novels Renu has discussed the rural life of the post independence era which is gradually subjected to the forces of change and modernization. Thus the picture that emerges is that of a village in transition, the subsequent turmoil and instability in all aspects of human life.

In **Parti Parikatha** he has discussed a different dimension of marriage. He has highlighted the feudal system of maintaining mistresses which was socially accepted. Like for example, the relationship between Shivendra Mishra and the English lady who was a convert and had changed her name to Gita Mishra. Shivendra Mishra already had a wife but he purposely develops clandestine relationship with Gita Mishra so that he could confiscate her land which was next to his estate. Thus

he tries to point out that some relations were made intentionally to further one's interest. But some relationships were natural, and though they did not get legal sanctions they were socially accepted like the relationship between Jitendra Mishra, son of Shivendra Mishra, and Tajmani. Though the whole village knew about the relationship between them, nowhere in the novel, has Renu mentioned specifically and clearly that it had sexual overtones.

Through the character of Irawati Malhotra, he has acquainted us with the sexual exploitation and molestation of women during partition and after partition by the so called politicians.

The concept of homosexuality which is a taboo even today has been hinted at, by Renu, as far back as fifties. He has subtly hinted at it through the character of Kuber Singh, a Deputy Minister in the Congress Party. Renu has put forward a revolutionary idea showing marriage between a harijan girl Malari and Suvanshlal in **Parti Pari Katha**. In the novel, a Congress Minister announces that whoever will marry a harijan girl, that upper caste boy will get a scholarship for further studies. Renu has, in this way suggested means and ways to encourage .

Dirghatapa is a story of the elite class of the society. The corruption and a moralism found in the so called influential and rich class.

Bela Gupta is the central character in the novel. She is the daughter of a physical training instructor of Islampur and has inherited

the love for sports and martial arts from her father. She is not only good in sports but leaves far behind her male counterparts in the academic field also. Since childhood she has been regaled with the stories of bravery and chivalry of revolutionaries. And she has been dreaming of freeing her country from foreign rule. She dreamt of a sovereign India. In the meantime she comes in contact with a young revolutionary, Banke Bihari, who was once a favourite student of her father. Banke Bihari is healthy and handsome, and introduces himself to Bela as a member of a revolutionary group, he also tells her that he studies in Banaras. He tells Bela of many anecdotes of brave deeds by his revolutionary friends. Bela is very much impressed by these stories and decides to do something for her country. Banke makes her a member of his group by making her sign, with her own blood. And after sometime takes her along with him. Since Bela has promised and dedicated herself to revolution, She readily agrees and without informing anyone, she goes away from the house.

Bela has to go to Peshawar for some party work, with Banke-Bihari. He disguises himself as a fruit-merchant and Bela becomes the fruit-merchant's newly wedded wife. Throughout the way Banke Bihari discusses on various topics like virginity, virtue and sin and the slavery of the country. He said "what is virginity? Nothing. What is sin? What is virtue. The emancipation of the country from the foreign rule is the greatest virtue. Just as we feel hungry, similar is the carnal hunger."¹ That night, on the train while going to Peshawar Banke rapes

1. Renu, **Dirghatapa** p.44 (Translated in english by the researcher).

Bela, but she bears everything for the sake of her country. Bela feels that Banke has treated her like "the leather bag in his hand. When he feels like, he opens the zip and puts his hand inside.^{1,2} Bela is again raped by Sarfaraz Khan, who stays in Peshawar and sells arms and ammunition to Banke's party for the cause of the country. All her struggles against Sarfaraz prove in vain and ultimately she is subjugated by the carnal lust of Sarfaraj Khan. Throughout this sordid episode Banke Bihari is a silent and coward spectator. Bela has now become aware of the true colours of these so called 'revolutionaries'. She understands that in this whole wide world she is to struggle singlehanded. Meanwhile Bela's father commits suicide in the absence of his daughter and her mother also becomes mad.

Bela runs away from the clutches of Banke Bihari and his friends, and comes to Calcutta, then to Patna. Bela again falls in love with Ramakant who is a revolutionary in the real sense. One night he runs away from the hospital and is later killed in an encounter with the police while crossing the river Ganga. Before dying he takes the name of Bela, as a result Bela is thrown out of the nurse's quarter on the suspicion of her collaboration with the revolutionaries. The other four girls of her group also leave the hospital as a protest against this injustice. They all live in a rented house in the town. They are always questioned and harrassed by the police, in connection with the revolutionaries.

2. Ibid p.45 (translated into english by the researcher).

Later with the help of Mrs. Ramola Banerjee, a social worker and the directress of the Women's Welfare Board, Bela is made the incharge of the Working Women's Hostel which is an off shoot of Women's Welfare Board. After a few years of Bela's joining, Mrs. Ramola Banerjee dies. Meanwhile Bela has earned a good name for herself due to her a good conduct and work. She is looked upon with great respect not only at Women's Welfare Board but also in the whole town. Mrs. Jyotsna Anand succeeds Mrs. Ramola Banerjee as the Honorary Secretary of Women's Welfare Board. Mrs. Anand was previously Mrs. Jyotsana Mahanthi, she was the wife of a purchase officer in Eastern Timber company, Calcutta - a Mister Mahanthi. Those days the Rana Clan was in power in Nepal. General Narbahadur was in-charge of the timber business. Mr. Mahanthi went to Nepal on some business for his timber company. The general, wanted Mrs. mahanthi in lieu of the contract for the company. But Jyotsna formed a new company in partnership with general Narbahadur's agent, Anand. Now Mrs. Jyotsna Mahanthi became Mrs. Jyotsna Anand. Both of them came to Bankipur and settled down as respected citizens because no one knew their past history. Here their company profited lakhs of rupees.

When Mrs. Anand became the, Honorary Secretary of the Women's Welfare Board, she started the business of 'flesh' in a new way to please the high-ups of the local society. Two new girls Anju and Manju are given rooms in the Working Women's Hostel by Mrs. Anand without Bela Gupta's permission. These girls are often invited to parties at Mrs. Anand's house and are asked to sing and thus, are used by Mrs. Anand

to please high officials.

Once some guests from Delhi were invited to Mrs. Anand's party, she sends her driver with the car to bring Anju and Manju who have been invited to sing at the party. Since it was against the hostel's rule to let the girls stay out at night, Bela refuses, which leads into a confrontation between Mrs. Anand and Bela, as a result Bela is abused in the bargain. In the party Mrs. Anand meets Bage a young tribal who in reality was a tout and supplied young girls to the high society. She becomes intimate with him.

Though the nurses cause a lot of botheration, Bela is never worried and always tries to remember the words of Mrs. Ramola Banerjee that "the girls who are easily defeated should not take the VOW of serving the society. It is like fighting a war where they have to undergo a lot of hardships and pain and may even have to die"¹. Some are married and smoke biris other talk in vulgar language and some even drink. Because of these girls the environment of the hostel has become quite foul and impure. Girls like Kunti and Tarawati often complain against Bela to Mrs. Anand due to the former's strictness. Kunti and Tarawati are frequent visitors to Mrs. Anand house and are often seen there with their male friends.

Mrs. Anand and Bage plan to confiscate milk powder and

1. Dirghatapa p.7 (translated in english by the researcher).

medicine which is worth twentyfive thousand from godown and embezzle the fund. In / Bage ^{/the meantime} has developed intimate sexual relationships with Mrs. Anand. Some Mr. Das has heard of the trainee nurses from the village he agrees to take the goods worth twenty five thousand on the condition that these girls would be sent for his sexual gratification.

Bage and Mrs. Anand with the connivance of the Board clerk plan to hold a drama, in which all the girls from the hostel are invited. The 'play' starts late at night, as soon as it commences the main lights are switched off, and then all hell is let loose. Some of the girls, like Vibhawati and Gauri undergo traumatic and morally degrading experiences which shatters them. They are brought home broken and bruised at 3 0' clock in the morning by Mrs. Anand's driver.

The next day Bela is informed by Mrs. Anand that an American Officer from UNICEF is coming on a visit to the hostel. Bela is also told not show the accounts register to the visitors as the new entry of the stock has not been made due to the negligence of the clerk. Mrs. Anand then discloses that she would not be present at the time of the arrival of the new guests as she has already fixed her programme for Rajgir. Before leaving, she visits the nurse's hostel with Kunti. She informs Miss Bela Gupta about the injuries of the two girls and asks her to look after them.

Bela comes to know the truth about Vibhawati and Gauri after

Mrs. Anand's departure to Rajgir. She is furious and orders Ramrati, the maid of the hostel, to lock the main gate, but Kunti manages to escape. Meanwhile the American Officer and the deputy director of health services came to the hostel. They review the situation, and are annoyed to find that inspite of the knowledge of their arrival Mrs. Anand had left for Rajgir. Miss Bela is then asked to show the register, which she refuses. Thus the UNICEF officer is very much annoyed and after checking the stock, notes down the irregularities and his comments on the stock register. Mrs. Anand receives these news through the telephone and panics, but is calmed down by Bage who says that he can handle the situation.

Gauri due to insult and frustation burns herself to death, and Vibhawati is already hospitalized. All these incidents arouse the suspicion of the police. The police questions the maid of the hostel, who tell the real truth to them, but they choose to disbelieve her saying that since Bela was the hostel superintendent she is fully responsible for everything.

Bela is finally accused of embezzelment, though there are only fifteen rupees fifty paise in her pass book. The people of the town who know her reputation as a dedicated social worker are dumbfounded when they see that she refuses to defend herself.

There are many other female characters in the novel like Prof. Rama Nigam, the radio artist Reva Verma, the nurses and many other females or mothers who come to the milk centre.

Renu thus tries to show through different female characters, the urban-rural conflict and the resultant maladjustment of the cultures due to this. He also focuses on the pseudo culture of the elite class and the dual life and double standard they maintain in matters related to marriage, love and sex.

There is one group of females, like Mrs. Ramola Banerjee and Miss Bela Gupta who are dedicated social workers, they are educated modern and emancipated. In spite of surrounded by exploitation and corruption they are determined to carve a niche in the society with their burning desire to help and raise the helpless position of the weaker sex.

Then there is another group of females represented by Mrs. Anand. Prof. Nigam and Miss Reva Verma who are what Dr. Promilla Kapur describes as "She is educated, sophisticated and aristocratic type who dresses smartly, talks interestingly and mingles in society, lives in reasonably nice or even posh localities, charges comparatively high for her sexual favours, and above all, who trades in sex voluntarily. She looks like any other respectable girl Many of these girls may be working in Private or Public organisations and normally can not be suspected of their real status or real source of income They are dryly dubbed as "respectable", "refined", "elegant" or "aristocratic" prostitutes".¹ Mrs. Jyoti Anand married thrice and aiming for the fourth

1. Dr. Promilla Kapur, *The Indian Call Girls*, 1978, p.11.

is a highly ambitious lady, driven by her lust for sex and her craze for wealth to the very depths of degradation, she is a typical prototype of a section of the newly rich class.

Prof. Nigam and Miss Reva Verma belonging to the middle class are a victim of their own foolishness. In their pursuit for the elusive 'love' they have been deceived many times and have in the process been sexually exploited. In this way, Renu emphasizes that inspite of widespread education, equal opportunity in job and a number of laws passed in favour of the women, their position in the male dominated society remains shaky. And they are exploited both emotionally and physically.

Another group is represented by Kunti, Rukmini, Anju, Manju, Vibhawati, Gauri and Chandramohini. These girls coming from rural background are introduced into the urban culture. Some fall victim to the socio-economic circumstances; like Kunti, Anju and Manju who willingly offer themselves to morally degrading experiences and indulge in perverted sex, specially Kunti who is shown by Renu, to have lesbian tendencies. Whereas girls like Vibhawati, Chandramohini and Gauri try to resist and remain firm against the economic and psychological exploitation for which they have to pay a heavy price.

Another of Renu's novel which deals with the darker side or the dysfunctional aspect of the so called joint family is **Julus**. In **Julus** Pavitra is the central character, who is herself a victim of the

traumatic days of partitions. She with other men and women is rehabilitated on the Indian side of the border and the new colony of the refugee is known as Nabinagar. This colony is next to the Godiar village, which consists of people from different castes. The villagers themselves pose as very good people and look down upon the refugees as people with 'easy character'. But in reality we find that most of the families in the village are corrupt and one of them even has members who have incestual relationship among themselves. The most powerful and rich person of the village, Talewar Gordhi, who is looked upon as the most respected patriarch of that village is infact involved in many corrupt and clandestine practices.

Talevar Gordhi who is a Tantric also has sexually exploited many females in the guise of practicing his cult with the help of his henchman Jairam Singh. He has also heard about the beauty of Pavitra and has lustful aspirations towards her. He belongs to a backward caste but his and his family's life style is an example of Sanskritization.

In this novel Renu has also tried to bring into focus the clandestine sex practices of elderly people of the village, like Pahalwan Ranbir Singh, and his relations with his five daughters-in-law and his "special relationship" with his younger daughter in-law. The love affairs of Sarswati, a middle aged widow and her numerous paramours from Paras Prasad and Kare Mandal to Ramjai Singh are all characters who expose the other side of the so called 'pure' and 'simple' village life.