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Renu’s Regionalism: Language and Form

KATHRYN HANSEN

This essay examines the relationship between language, culture, and fictional form in the writing of Phanishwarnath Renu (1921–1977), widely heralded as the creator of the regional novel in Hindi. His innovations in the language of prose fiction and the novel form have been the subjects of much debate among Hindi critics.1 Moreover, Renu’s fascinating experiments with language and the originality of his use of oral genres within the modern novel are apparent even to a Hindi reader unfamiliar with literary criticism. The Hindi critics for their part evidence little analytical skill in their discussions of Renu’s regionalism. They attempt to define regionalism before considering the form of Renu’s works, and thus consistently overrate the importance of content. According to one standard definition:

In a regional novel the writer concentrates on a particular part of a country and depicts its life in such a way as to bring about a consciousness among the readers of its unique characteristics, distinguishing features and particular customs and patterns of life.2

The regional novel is thus established as another “genre” of fiction by virtue of its regional content, taking its place alongside genres such as the historical novel, social novel, and psychological novel.3 The anomalies of Renu’s language and form are subsumed under this genre without further consideration of their nature or function.

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3“Regional” novels are compared to and contrasted with sāmājik (social), manovaijānī (psychologi-
The task that demands attention is that of finding the meaning of Renu’s choices of language and form. Is there a unified vision or consciousness behind these distinctive aspects of his fiction? According to Nirmal Verma, a Hindi author contemporary to Renu, an author’s relationship to the word and to his chosen form, rather than his stated ideas or philosophy, most clearly reveals his “morality.”4 By morality, Verma implies a system of values, an integrated vision of the world, which ascribes relative worth to various kinds of experience. My hypothesis is that Renu indeed has such a value system, and that his language and form are the appropriate lenses for viewing it. Renu’s value system can be identified as “regional”—but an understanding of Renu’s regionalism can only be gained through analysis of the structure that his chosen language and form give to his texts. I will therefore consider examples from Renu’s novels and short stories, drawing from them the significant patterns of language and form in his prose style. After this I will attempt to define what regionalism is for Renu and what this new writer’s morality does in a work of modern Hindi fiction.

Although Renu called himself a regional writer,5 he did not use a regional language for his prose. The dominant local language of Purnea District, the region in northeastern Bihar of which Renu wrote, is Maithili, but Renu did not write in Maithili, nor do his characters speak in Maithili except on rare occasions. A distinction must be made between the regional literatures written in the various vernaculars that have gained prominence in recent years and so-called regional writing in Hindi and other national languages. The regional language Maithili, for example, was recognized as an independent literary language of India by the national Sahitya Akademi in 1965 and thus officially acquired separate linguistic and literary status.6 Another Hindi regionalist, Nagarjun, writes both regional literature in Hindi (such as his novels Bābā Baterāṅnāh, Bālchannā, and Dukhmochan), and also novels in Maithili (such as Pārō) under the pseudonym Yatri.

Renu’s works, on the other hand, are in Hindi. Renu shows supreme control over the polished, Sanskritized literary style of Khari Boli, which had evolved during the first sixty to seventy years of modern Hindi literature. In the opening paragraphs of his second novel, Partī Parikathā (Legend of the Fallow Land), Renu describes the

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4Nirmal Varma, “Samajik, Samay aur Bhartiya Upanyās,” Purāntāk V (Jan. 1975): 6–11. The relevant passages are: “A writer’s morality [natītikā] is not inherent in his ideas or in the various styles of their expression, his morality is inherent in his attitude to his own genre and language” (p. 6). “This choice of the word is not whimsical, mysterious, or supernatural. The writer’s whole moral struggle is hidden behind this choice. Rather one should say that if there is any such thing as the writer’s commitment, it can only be echoed in the relationship between the writer and the word” (pp. 6–7).

5Renu himself provided the label “regional” for his first novel in the now famous introduction: “This is Mailā Āṇchal, a regional novel [ek ānhalik upanyās].” The setting is Purnea. Purnea is a district of Bihar state; to one side is Nepal, to the other Pakistan 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 the backward village.” Phāṅgīshvarnāth Rēṇṇa, Mailā Āṇchal, 7th printing (Delhi: Rājkamal Prakāśan, 1973), p. 5.

fallow land devastated by the Kosi River floods. Urdu words are not avoided, but the
diction is dominated by Sanskrit words. Such a prose style had become the norm for
most Hindi writers of the fifties. The vocabulary was elevated several steps above
ordinary conversation, giving eloquence to the tone, and providing a sense of
proportion and propriety. One can imagine these lines appearing in one of the
“better” Hindi weekly magazines, such as Dharmyug or Dinmān.

But unlike most Hindi writers, who adopted this style regardless of context,
Renu in this instance chose the Sanskritized medium as one from a number of options
available to him. In the opening lines, three key phrases stand out, each of which
consists of an adjective-noun sequence: antahīn prāntar (boundless tract), pattiā
bhūmi (fallen land), and vandhyā dharti (barren earth). In two of these Sanskritic
phrases, consonant repetitions occur, and each phrase involves a play on meaning.
The root of both antahīn and prāntar is ant (end), and the phrase thus contains a
paradox: a “tract” (prānt or prāntar), which is by definition bounded and has an
end, is described as “boundless.” Next, bhūmi (earth, land), which comes from the
Sanskrit root bhū, “to be, to exist,” and is associated as early as the Atharva Veda
with the word mātr, “mother,” is described as “fallen.” Similarly, the earth,
dhartī, from Sanskrit dhṛ, “to support, to bear,” is described as “barren.”

The two words for earth, bhūmi and dharti, unlike the Urdu equivalent, zamīn,
carry overtones of fertility, maternity, and sacredness, and provoke mixed feelings in
the reader when coupled with the words meaning “fallen” and “barren.” The shock
value is reinforced in the next line with the phrase dharti kī lāsh, “corpse of
the earth,” and the reference to kafan, “shroud.” The use of Sanskritized vocabulary
brings religious and mythological associations into Renu’s text here, so that the tract
of fallow land is perceived as the personified earth mother who has become defiled by
wrongdoing and perhaps cursed with infertility. The lofty tone of the passage, which
derives from the Sanskritic phrasing, is intentional in keeping with both the vast size
of the geographic entity being described and the attitude of reverence for the land
that the author is trying to convey.

Reverence and distance, however, are postures that Renu does not adopt for long.
He uses Sanskritic diction self-consciously, aware of its power, but also recognizing
its limitations. Thus one paragraph beyond the passage quoted above, he reaches the
boundary of communicability and begins to translate himself. With the phrase
kaccchāpatrīṣṭhasadṛsh bhūmi, he demonstrates the capability of Sanskrit to form
polysyllabic compounds possessing alliterative and rhythmical qualities; but he also
strains the reader’s comprehension and therefore immediately switches to the equiva-
 lent Hindi phrase, kachhū-pīṭhā zamīn. Suddenly we know that Renu is referring
to “land like the back of a tortoise,” and the image is vivid. The Hindi phrase has
an almost palpable solidity to it, as it should, unlike the rarefied prettiness of the
Sanskrit expression. The reader has been brought down to earth.

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9Phañśvamīnāth Reṇu, Parti Parikathā, 3rd
9. See Appendix A.1 for the original Hindi passage
with an English translation.
8Urdu words in the passage include vīrīn
(deserted), zamīn (land), lāsh (corpse), kafan (shroud),
and nakhā (map). Sanskrit words mentioned are
dharti (earth), pankti (row), daśkhiṇ (south), asam
(unequal), bhāg (part), vihhakt (divided), vihāl
(vast), bhūbhāg (territory), kishāṭik (momentary)
and dīhā (hope).

9I wish to thank Professor Ashok Aklujkar for
confirmation of the Sanskrit derivations and refer-
ence to the Atharva Veda, 12:1, bhūmē mātarnı
dēbī mā bhaḍraś śuprātiśtiṣṭam.
10The metaphor appears in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa,
6:3, in a passage describing the earth burned by the
fires of dissolution at the end of a cosmic cycle. See
Cornelia Dimmitt and J. A. B. van Buitenen, eds.
and trans., Classical Hindu Mythology: A Reader in
the Sanskrit Puranās (Philadelphia: Temple University
Sanskritized Hindi is one of the styles in Renu’s repertoire, then, and in general it is employed where solemnity is appropriate. Renu makes particularly effective use of it for descriptions of nature or for narration relating to one of his educated protagonists, such as Dr. Prashānt in his first novel, Mailā Ānchal (The Dusty Border), or Jitan in Partī Parikathā.¹¹ For most of the village characters in Renu’s fiction, however, Sanskritized Hindi is a foreign language. In the early pages of Mailā Ānchal, a Congress party member from the Yadav caste in the village, who is trying to establish his political credentials, asks one of the youths studying in high school to read a letter to him from a party secretary before an assembly of villagers. The letter, written in the high Hindi of offici aldom, is meaningless to the villagers, and they insist that the boy explain its sense.¹² To Renu’s villager, the world of Sanskritized Hindi is a world outside, a world which must be translated to be understood. And it is also a world to be feared because of its strange rules and mysterious sources of authority.

To remove this sense of being outside, to take the reader inside the village, Renu has developed a style of Hindi based on rural speech. This language, as mentioned previously, is not a local dialect—which would be unintelligible to the urban reader and would reduce Renu’s audience to fellow Purne residents. It differs primarily from standard literary language in the degree to which it brings the linguistic patterns of uneducated speakers of Hindi onto the written page. One example is an address delivered by the simple herdsman Bāldev before a gathering of his fellow villagers in Mailā Ānchal.¹³ When this passage is compared with the one from Partī Parikathā above, particularly after an oral reading, the absence of sophisticated Sanskritic phrasing is apparent. More specifically, short words predominate, the longest word here being of three syllables, and conjunct consonants and characteristic Sanskrit letters such as “ṣ” and “ṇ” are lacking.

In fact a number of Sanskrit loanwords are present in a modified form. Words borrowed intact from Sanskrit (known as tātsam words) have been altered phonetically so that they are only partial or ardabh (half) tātsams. For example, the word which appears here as sāstar comes from the Sanskrit shāstra. The “sh” has been changed to “ṣ” and the conjunct consonant “str” has been broken up by the insertion of a short “a” vowel so that the final syllable becomes a more easily pronounced “star.” To a Hindi speaker, the resulting word is still quite recognizable as a variant of the original shāstra.¹⁴ Other examples of ardabh tātsams in this passage are listed below.¹⁵

The use of such modified borrowings is common in Renu’s fiction. After cataloguing examples, I have found these words to exhibit the following characteristics:

1. swaraḥbakti: separation of conjunct consonants by interpolation of the short vowels /ʌ/, /i/, /u/, or /e/ in the case of /y/, e.g., pyāre for pyāre, isīrī for strī.

¹²Reņu, Mailā Ānchal, p. 33.
¹³Reņu, Mailā Ānchal, p. 31. See Appendix A.2 for the original Hindi passage and an English translation.
¹⁴Ardabh tātsam words are not to be confused with tadhav words, which are “all corrupted Sanskrit words, which, by the addition, loss, or change of certain letters, have come to appear in Hindi in a form more or less modified, and often greatly disguised.” S. H. Kellogg, A Grammar of the Hindi Language, 3rd ed. (first Indian ed.) (Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1972), p. 42. Examples of common Hindi tadhav words are kāth (Skt. katha), bhav (Skt. bhav), ṣyā (Skt. pīpāṭa). According to S. K. Chatterji, ardabh tātsams differ from tadhav in the feature of swaraḥbakti or anaptyxis rather than assimilation. Suniti Kumar Chatterji, Indo-Aryan and Hindi, 2nd ed. (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1969), p. 97.
¹⁵We find bidamān for vidvān (scholar), purān (Purana), mahatmā for mahaṁā (great soul, i.e., Mahatma Gandhi), partāp for pratāp (glory).
2. substitution of /l/ for /shl/, e.g., sāstar for shāstra, sarādh for shrāddh.
3. substitution of /kh/ for /s/, e.g., dokhi for dōti, bhākhan for bāsaun.
4. substitution of /j/ for /y/, e.g., kāraj for kārya, jatan for yatna.
5. /s/ for /l/, e.g., bidamān for vidvān, bistūs for visbūs.
6. /cch/ for /shch/ or /ksh/, e.g., lačchmit for lakshmit, prācchbit for prāyashcbhit.
7. /n/ for /l/, e.g., kāran for kāraṇ, pānām for prānām.
8. /r/ for /l/, e.g., bidamān for vidvān, bhagmān for bhagvān.
9. /l/ for /n/, e.g., lārā for narā, halumān for hanumān.
10. vowel shortening, e.g., ramāin for rāmāyaṇ, mahatamā for mahāmā.

When more than one operation is applied to a word, the results are often bizarre and initially unrecognizable, as in words such as bidamān (from vidvān, scholar), sarhan (from shravan, listening), or istirī (from strī, woman). Similar rules operate on Urdu words, and English words appear in Renu’s text in curious disguises. Some examples from Maila Ānchal:16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Devanagari</th>
<th>Romanization</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>द्वितिहृद</td>
<td>district board</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>मोमैन</td>
<td>movement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>लालमूत्या</td>
<td>aluminum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>रेडि</td>
<td>radio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>बैकोत</td>
<td>high court</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>जक्स्बैन</td>
<td>injection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>मितिन</td>
<td>meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>रिचराब</td>
<td>reserve</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>तरेनी</td>
<td>training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>अजक्सू</td>
<td>executive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>इसमीत</td>
<td>estimate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>पुलोवराम</td>
<td>program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The humor of these “misspellings” is obvious, but what are its sources? Renu is playing with the reader’s perceptions of language, pointing a finger at the gap between what the ear hears and the eye sees. Renu is writing these words in a form that matches their pronunciation in the eastern Hindi region and yet that looks corrupt and unacceptable by the standards of literate Hindi speakers. In spelling words as they sound, Renu breaks one of the rules of modern Hindi prose style, namely, that arddh tattams are to be replaced wherever possible by pure Sanskrit tattams. This practice contrasts with usage in the medieval Hindi dialects, such as Braj and Avadhī, in which arddh tattams similar to Renu’s are found in written texts in abundance.17 These older oral variants are still commonly understood and are heard daily in the marketplace, but for the most part they have been excluded from modern standard Hindi.

In reclaiming these forms, Renu jars the educated reader’s sense of linguistic propriety. He has been accused of distorting the Hindi language beyond the bounds of artisan license.18 Renu’s critics, however, rarely examine the artistic purposes served by his language. If the above position on arddh tattams as the spoken forms of words in an earlier period is correct, then it would follow that their usage brings an antiquated appearance and tone to Renu’s text. The educated reader, encountering these written forms now considered archaic, may recall the former contexts of such...

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16 The words are listed in their original forms in the Devanagari script in Appendix A.3.
17 Indeed the spoken forms of many words in the dialects of Middle and New Indo-Aryan are such arddh tattams, as S. K. Chatterji has shown in Indo-Aryan and Hindi, p. 97.
18 "Renu has not been successful at maintaining a balance. Going beyond artistic necessity, he has reached the level of sheer display. He breaks down words in imitation of the local speech which he could have saved without any artistic loss." R. Mishra, Hindi Štānāyās, p. 203.
words and be reminded, in a general way, of medieval texts such as Tulsidas' Rámcharitmánaś, Kabir's poetry, or lyrics in Braj Bhasha. Visual perception of older spellings may take the reader back in time to what nostalgically seems a simpler period, purer in spirit (at least in the imagination) than the present age. These associations would reinforce the atmosphere of the past and the mood feeling of the traditional world inherent in the author's representation of village society.

At the same time, the perceived disparity between the villager's speech habits as conveyed by such words and the model of standard "high" Hindi in the reader’s mind constantly reminds the reader of the villager’s lack of education and sophistication. The more the illiterate villager hankers after sophistication, attempting to imitate difficult Sanskrit words, the further he strays from the mark and the greater the disparity and humor produced. Bāldev's use of the word bidamān clearly proves his point, when he says ham koī bidamān nabā hai (I am no scholar), intending to impress his audience with his rich vocabulary. By accurately transcribing these pronunciations, Renu has reproduced the naive quality of village speech in Bihar, without resorting to the actual use of a regional language or dialect. The social and cultural status of Renu's villagers finds its linguistic correlate in this aspect of Renu's language.

Spelling according to sound forces the reader to mouth the words. Once spoken aloud, most of Renu’s constructions become recognizable. Renu makes the reader leave the security of the printed page and enter an oral universe. For him, the village is a place where sound is supreme, where wisdom is transmitted through oral traditions, where speech in its myriad forms is an art. The experience of reading Renu necessitates participation in this world of spoken sound—participation is demanded by the very shape of the words upon the page. Unconventional spelling may shock the reader at first, but sooner or later, unless he is a stubborn purist, the reader is drawn in, becoming another player in Renu’s language game.

Another aspect of Renu’s language apparent in Bāldev’s speech above is the inclusion of nonstandard grammatical constructions. Notice in the passage the omission of the passive ne construction with object agreement, used in the perfective tenses of transitive verbs.19 Adjective-noun agreement is also eliminated, the adjective declension being reduced to a neutral, masculine singular form.20 One might argue that these grammatical features reflect Bengali influence, particularly as the Bengali linguistic area intersects Purnea District. In Bengali, gender and number agreement between nouns, adjectives, and verbs and the use of the ne construction are absent. A more appropriate view, however, would be to consider this language the simplified or “Bazar Hindustani” described by S. K. Chatterji as “the veritable Basic Hindi created by the unschooled masses of North India.”21 The main grammatical features that undergo simplification in this variety of Hindi, according to Chatterji,

19The text reads kothārin sāheb bāt boli, for shuddh Hindi kothārin sāheb ne bāt boli (the Kothārin Sāheb said); ham sāstar purān nabā parāye hai for ham ne sāstar purān nabā parāye hai (I haven't read the scriptures); and ham sevak kā bānā le liyā for ham ne sevak kā bānā le liyā (I donned the garb of a servant).
20Thus we find jitanā bāt for jitanī bāte (whatever things). Similarly, sab se bāre dokhi ham bāi should be sab se bāre dokhi ham bāi (I am the most to blame), making the adjective dokhi agree with the plural subject and verb, ham bāi. Also note ham to sabō kā sevak hai (I am everybody's servant), where again ham and bāi, both plural forms, require the predicate sevak to be in the plural and take ke instead of kā preceding it.
are the same that have been noted above—observance of gender and number agreement and use of the passive ne construction.

Such simplified Hindi poses less of a problem of comprehension for the Hindi reader than the innovative spellings discussed earlier. It is spoken and heard daily in the streets of both areas where shadāv Hindi is the written standard and areas where it is not. Furthermore, readers from the eastern regions of Uttar Pradesh or Bihar and Bengal may have greater familiarity with this variety of Hindi than with the cultivated written form, which is further from their own spoken dialects. Nevertheless it assails the educated reader’s sense of proper usage. Purists object to such a “degraded” standard of Hindi being represented in a literary work.22 The argument perhaps is not unlike that surrounding the use of “black English” in contemporary American literature, with one major exception. Simplified Hindi is not the dialect of a racially or ethnically defined subgroup; it is rather the lingua franca of all of northern India, the common tongue used to communicate between groups.23

Renu’s use of simplified Hindi again allows him to achieve fidelity to the rural linguistic environment without the sacrifice of intelligibility that would have resulted had he used the grammar of a regional dialect. In its forthrightness and simplicity, such language urges acceptance of the little man of the Indian village. It is a democratic medium, which overrides differences of caste, class, education, and even region (within northern India). Ignoring the complex rules of the sophisticated speaker’s grammar, Renu, using simplified Hindi, aims at direct communication. There is a wholesome bluntness about it, which reflects positively upon the village characters who speak it. At the same time it suggests in a tangible way their lack of schooling and contact with urban speakers, without necessitating explicit comment by the author.

Simplified Hindi, like the use of modified Sanskrit loanwords, brings with it associations of the past and of traditional culture. The simplified grammatical forms of the villagers are typical of the older forms of Hindi. Historically, the ne construction was introduced quite late, and gender and number agreement were not consistently observed until the late nineteenth century, as can be shown from premodern written texts. The older style endured in the spoken language, and, when Renu draws upon it, he conveys a certain charm and nostalgia for the past. Appreciation for the enduring, traditional side of the village reality is thus communicated through these grammatical forms.

The language of Renu’s villagers incorporates a number of other features that distinguish it from standard Hindi prose style. Variations in syntax are common, especially positioning of the subject in final place in a sentence. When Hirābāī in “Tisrī Kasam” asks Hirāman, Bhaiyā, tumhārā nām kyā hai (Brother, what is your name?), he answers, Merā nām? Nām merā hai Hirāman (My name? Hirāman’s my name!) in contrast to the normal word order, merā nām Hirāman hai (my name is Hirāman).24 Inverted syntax is colloquial and highly expressive, and, in passages where it is frequently used, it adds to a sense of drama and excitement.

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Renu is fond of proverbs, and his characters often cap their remarks with quotations of conventional wisdom. Depending on the bent of the speaker, such sayings may be derived from religious texts (particularly those of Tulsidas or Kabir), from political slogans, or even from film songs, or they may be genuine folk proverbs. Proverbs exemplify the love of the village people for metaphoric expression. Through the proverb the villager articulates the element of the universal in every personal event. Proverbs redefine situations from daily life in the light of the past experience of the community. Citation of proverbs in the village is a means of proving one’s point and asserting authority. It can also become a form of one-upmanship and develop into a contest. Renu’s adoption of proverbs into his text brings much of the flavor of rural discourse to it.

Samples of dialogue in Renu’s novels also illustrate the frequent occurrence of vocatives, both in the form of salutations and in the form of abuses. Recognition of status, a necessary prelude to conversation in village society, is inherent in these terms of address. A wide variety of salutations and abuses are found in Renu’s fiction, and most have a distinctive rural ring. They add another touch of spice and local color to the prose style, while also conveying valuable information about the attitudes of approval and disapproval felt by the villagers in their mutual relationships.

One could go on enumerating specific colloquial expressions adopted by Renu, but perhaps enough has been said to give a sense of his village style. His attempt in fashioning this style appears directed, above all, by a desire to capture the vitality of rural speech. The language is fresh, pointed, concrete. It is close to the villager’s tongue, but equally close to his mind and heart. As the various characters appear on Renu’s stage, the style of language varies. In Mailā Ánchal, the wild Naga ascetic from Banaras speaks a Bhojpuri dialect laced with abuses. The old-fashioned Bundelkhandi Rajput’s speech is heavily adorned with Avadhi expressions and quotations from the Rāmcharitmanas. Women’s language is vividly captured in passages such as the Tarmāroli quarrel (see Appendix B) and in stories such as “Lāl Pān ki Begam.” In Parī Parikhthā, Renu pokes fun at the pretentious Communist leader Maqbul who artifically Urduizes his Hindi by turning every /k/ to /q/, /j/ to /z/, and /g/ to /g/. In another bit of political satire, the Socialist leader Rājballi in Mailā Ánchal stutters helplessly, making his Marxist rhetoric sound ludicrous. The village gossip in Parī Parikhthā, who is appropriately named Sūchītāl Nākbajnā (loosely translated as Know-It-All Nose Tooter), has a way of talking through his nose and nasalizing every vowel sound. On occasion, even non-Hindi languages are brought into Renu’s text as a means of characterization. Thus samples of Santhali are put in the mouths of the Santhals in Mailā Ánchal; Jītān’s Nepali guard in Parī Parikhthā converses in Nepali, and in the novel Julūs, which describes a Bengali refugee settlement in Purnea District, extended conversations in Bengali appear.

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25Several examples of proverbs used in conversation are given in Appendix B.
26Note the quarrel of the Tarmāroli women, quoted in Appendix B.3: Reṇu, Mailā Ánchal, pp. 62–63.
27For salutations, see examples in Appendix B.1 and B.2: parnām jotkhi kākā (salutations, Uncle Jotkhi); jai bo sarkār kī (may you be victorious, Governor!). An abuse (gāll) is illustrated in Appendix B.3: nīrgī (slut).
29Ibid., p. 11; example quoted in Appendix B.2.
30Reṇu, Parī Parikhthā, p. 172.
31Reṇu, Mailā Ánchal, p. 95.
32Reṇu, Parī Parikhthā, p. 158.
33Reṇu, Mailā Ánchal, pp. 164, 184.
34Reṇu, Parī Parikhthā, pp. 43, 60–63.
Throughout all this, Renu reveals a linguistic virtuosity unrivaled in modern Hindi literature. The patchwork of diverse ethnic groups that constitute the population of Purnea District, far in the northeastern corner of Bihar bordering on Nepal and West Bengal, has been recreated in the linguistic texture of his fiction. Beyond the sociolinguistic realism of Renu’s style, however, lies another dimension to his artistry. Renu loves to play with language. On one level, as we have seen, he forces the reader to play the guessing game of archaic ardāb taisams. But elsewhere, when he is writing in his own voice and is not trying to suggest the sociocultural background of his villagers, his fascination with sound comes through in other ways. He loves to imitate nonhuman sounds and devise onomatopoetic phrases for the noises of animals, machines, or the weather. He never passes up an opportunity to create a punning name for a character or play upon the similarities of sound between words. The joke about Kanpur and Nagpur (literally, Ear City and Nose City, from Hindi kān, ear, pur, town, city, and nāk, nose) may have been told a thousand times, but Renu instils new life into it at a tender moment in the story of Hirāman and Hirābāi.

Furthermore, Renu uses affinities of sound, including alliteration, assonance, and rhyme, to guide his choice of wording much as a poet would. At first, repetition of consonants or vowels in a sentence may seem accidental, but, once attuned to this type of patterning, the reader finds it appearing everywhere. The possibility of coincidence is ruled out by the concurrence of sense with patterning of sound. Generally the like-sounding word or phrase fulfills the meaning the reader anticipates from the initial occurrence of the sound in the earlier word. Sugandh (smell) anticipates sūngkhar (sniffing); maustkhor (free-loader), kāmchā (loafer), and chaṭor (glutton) are all similar in meaning; mēri (Mary) and maleriya (malaria) share the attribute of being English words. Echo constructions are yet another instance of this playing with sound and are expectedly common in Renu. Hirāman in “TSIRI Kasam” is described as a hattā-kattā, kālā-kalūtā debāti naujavān (sturdy, dark-skinned village boy) who refuses to haul contraband after being caught: chori-chamārī kā māl-vāl to nābī (no smuggled goods).

In short, Renu skillfully manipulates the rhythms of the language, the potentials of sound to imitate sound, the double-entendres, for both comic and poetic effects. He wants to make language fun, and sheer playfulness, rather than self-conscious literary design, seems to inspire much of his invention. This is not to deny the suitability of such language play in Renu’s stories. It is one of the major elements that endow Renu’s characters with their gentle childlike quality. The playfulness of Renu’s language also sustains the dominant mood of cheeriness and optimism in his writing, which always seems to prevail despite the desperate situations in which his villagers sometimes find themselves.

It is clear, in conclusion, that Renu did not abandon the Khari Boli inheritance of earlier Hindi prose fiction but rather expanded upon it in new and imaginative ways. He included a wider variety of language styles in his writing than previous authors, encompassing dialects such as Avadhī, Bhojpuri, and Maithili in their modern and medieval forms, Bengali, Nepali, tribal language, as well as Sanskritized Hindi, Bazar Hindustani, English, and Urdu. Through his language he created a metaphorical

36 For example, the sounds of a tractor: bhat-ta-ta-ta—bhār-bhār-bharr-r (Reṇu, Parī Parīkṣā, p. 46); of rain and thunder: phar-phār-phār-phār-r-r, gur-gur-guddam (ibid.); of insects and frogs: lorr, mork-lorr-lorr . . . munkū, ḍīṭā-chī, kār. kīr. ti, khitā (Reṇu, Mailā Amchul, p. 194).

37 Reṇu, Thumrī, pp. 118–19.

38 Some examples are listed in Appendix C.

39 These examples are found in Appendix C, C.4, and C.2, respectively.

40 Reṇu, Thumrī, pp. 118, 116.
rendering of his multi-ethnic society, reproducing the polyglot world of Indian rural life in which the diverse rhythms and tones of speech—representing different communities, times, and places—are drawn together in a single universe of sound. To achieve this, Renu did not mentally record and transcribe the actual speech of his village. He did not present the reader with a facsimile of local language. Rather, he consciously surveyed the richness of linguistic forms around him and selected from among them samples that would suggest authentic voices and yet remain intelligible to the reader. In so doing, he deliberately reclaimed some aspects of the living oral medium that had been lost from written Hindi in the course of the evolution of modern prose. The preference for local and spoken forms in his text represented a major choice for the writer—a choice for intimacy, liveliness, and simplicity, a choice against distance, flatness, and artificiality.

The parts of Renu’s language that are the newest, the most distinctively his own, are those that possess an archaic, provincial, or folk character. In these Renu reveals his regional sensibility most clearly. At the center of Renu’s vision lies a hope for the synthesis of the old and the new in Indian culture. In Renu’s view, traditional village-based society had much to offer modern urban man. One of the things it could offer was the richness of the spoken word, the sensitivity to sound and resonance, which even the illiterate villager possessed. Language had to be revived and made real, and that could only occur if a more favorable balance were struck between its traditional and modern components. By introducing older oral patterns of pronunciation and grammar into a written medium intended for an urban audience, Renu not only made Hindi prose more flexible and powerful, he effectively demonstrated the complementation he saw possible between rural and urban world views. At this level of abstraction, his language is a symbol of the integration of the two poles of Indian culture: traditional/rural versus modern/urban.

We have seen how Renu expanded literary Hindi to encompass a variety of regional dialects and languages within the fundamentally Khari Boli linguistic medium. Through Renu’s innovations, the written language of the twentieth century received into it the older traditional forms from the spoken realm, thus giving it the versatility necessary to imitate the many voices of Renu’s characters. In a parallel fashion, Renu expanded the form of the Hindi novel to include a variety of genres from the oral literature of traditional India. He altered the novel, a modern written genre inherited from the West, so that it incorporated within it indigenous forms recited and sung through the ages—the lyric song, the folktale, the rural drama. Out of this emerged a new genre based on the integration of the older structural features of traditional literature with the contemporary fictional medium.

As my analysis of Renu’s language was restricted to examples of his prose style, I have not yet mentioned the many song texts interspersed with the narrative in his novels and short stories. These songs are a striking feature of Renu’s style and pose fascinating questions about their origin and function. The songs include a wide variety of types, from political songs in Urdu to Hindi film tunes to traditional lyrics of Vidyapati and Kabir. Most songs are folk compositions in Maithili. In Maila Änvahal alone twenty different Maithili song types appear, such as sobar (birth songs), nachari (marriage songs), samadäun (songs of mourning), phág and jogirä (Holi songs), pürvä, bhatgamanī, and so on. Although some of these lyrics have recently been published in anthologies,41 the songs are the product of living oral tradition,

41 Tejnärayan Läl Shästrī, Maithili Lokgīthā, Räm Iqbl “Räkesh” Singh, Maithili Lokgīthā kā Adhyayān (Agra: Vinod Pustak Mandir, 1962); (Allahabad: Hindi Sāhitya Sammelan, samvar
which has preserved and transmitted them faithfully for centuries. Renu, as a member of the rural community with a particularly keen ear, learned these songs by rote from his fellow villagers and has drawn on his personal repertoire to enrich the pages of his fiction.

One might assume, as some Hindi critics do, that the songs are included as samples of local color to show off the charm of rural life. No doubt the songs do articulate the voice of the village people and represent their cultural heritage, but their function in the prose narrative goes further. The songs are one of the major means by which Renu brings the shape and feeling of traditional literature into the fictional medium. We will examine the manner in which they are used in two chapters of Mailā Ānchal, chapters 11 and 24.

In Chapter 11, portions of the traditional ballad "Surangā and Sadābrij" are juxtaposed with the narrative recounting Khalāsī’s courtship of the young widow Phuliyā.\(^{42}\) Twelve lines of song text open the chapter, establishing the context into which the "real" Maryganj-world action must later fit itself. A scene in miniature is laid out: the hero Sadābrij has just fainted, having been pierced by a daggerlike glance from a woman on the road. The woman declares her infatuation with Sadābrij to a companion and goes to revive him. The reader notes the exaggerated passion of the characters—the swooning at the first exchange of glances, the willingness to sacrifice family and kin for the sake of the lover, the seduction of the man by the woman with the invitation to spend the night. The love of which the ballad sings is an idealized, heightened form of sexual attraction, which transgresses social norms, inspires the lovers to break the moral code, and yet glorifies them for doing so.

The ballad then recedes to the background, and the reader is told by the omniscient narrator that it is being sung by Khalāsī. Khalāsī’s efforts to negotiate his engagement to Phuliyā now take central place in the narrative. Khalāsī’s position contrasts sharply with that of Sadābrij. He has been pursuing Phuliyā for a year, bribing the elders of Tantrimā Ṭoli with hashish, offering various terms to Phuliyā’s father, and now even flattering the garrulous go-between, Ramjūdās’ wife. His love has to struggle along the tortuous paths of social connection, and he must conquer the hearts of the entire caste to win Phuliyā’s hand. The contrast is borne out as fragments from the ballad, which Khalāsī continues singing in the background as it were, drift into the main narrative at various points in the chapter. While the woman in the ballad invites Sadābrij to sleep on a beautiful red bed, seductively offering him betelnut, Khalāsī’s position is the reverse. It is he who must proffer gifts, and not to his beloved even, but to the notorious gossip, Ramjūdās’ wife, in exchange for some consideration of his suit.

Despite these differences, Khalāsī fantasizes that he is Sadābrij himself as he sings the ballad. He too is on the road, searching for his beloved Phuliyā, trying to gain union with her, as Sadābrij is with Surangā. Here the ballad elevates the fictional character’s perception of himself, encouraging him to share the exalted feelings of the ideal lover and participate in a liaison that is illicit from the point of view of society and yet is lauded in the cultural tradition.

Phuliyā too is infatuated, but, far from renouncing family like the woman in the ballad, she cannot even open her mouth for fear of what people will say. Being a

young widowed woman, Phuliyā's activities are severely circumscribed by social custom, and, when romance enters her life, it is generally through the machinations of an older woman like Ramjūdās' wife who extorts as many favors as possible from the suitor. Nevertheless, such affairs do occur somehow, and in the quarrel between Ramjūdās' wife and Phuliyā's mother, the reader gets a glimpse of the true nature of village romance. Intercaste alliances and even incestuous connections take place but surreptitiously and with unpleasant aftermaths, such as illegitimate squint-eyed babies or beatings in front of the caste council—a vast difference from the idealized passion of Surangā and Sadābrij. At this point a line from the ballad describing Sadābrij fainting is inserted as if to express horrified reaction to the scandalous incidents brought out in the women's quarrel.

Finally, near the end of the chapter, Khalāsī and Phuliyā meet. Although they feel the throbbing emotion of Surangā and Sadābrij, they are far from entertaining each other on a red bed; in fact, they meet in Ramjūdās' wife's cowshed. Their talk is not of love but of strategies to bring about their marriage. Phuliyā does not seduce Khalāsī, but rather insists he bring more presents and contact other influential people like Bāldev. Here Renu gives Phuliyā and Khalāsī the names Surangā and Sadābrij, suggesting that this is how they perceive themselves and each other. The reader knows from previous statements in the chapter that the recitation of the ballad has encouraged both Khalāsī and Phuliyā to identify with the mythological ideal lovers. But this naming enhances the ironic contrast between the rustic couple in the cowshed and the courtly lovers of the ballad. Love affairs in the village cannot be conducted with the intense passion and disregard for social custom that figure in the ballad. Phuliyā and Khalāsī, in aspiring to such heights, win the reader's sympathy, but their failure to reach the goal turns them into comic figures.

In this chapter, the oral ballad, with its idealized concept of love, forms the background against which the main line of action is delineated. By opening the chapter with it, Renu lets the song set the frame for the love affair of Phuliyā and Khalāsī. The extraordinary, fantastic world of heroes and heroines and their passions is then contrasted with the limited, socially constrained courtship of the village couple. The song recedes to the background, but lines from it keep emerging to bring out the contrast. Finally, at the end of the chapter, the ballad merges with the narrative; the two couples become one. The village lovers see themselves as mythic personalities, the reader notes the identification and projects the emotion of the song onto the characters, but also laughs at the difference in their circumstances. The song element thus provides a subtle ironic commentary to the narrative. It enriches the fictional incident by suggesting the heroic models for village courtship and lets the reader witness the inner thoughts and emotions of the characters as well as their outward words and actions.

Chapter 24 of Mailā Ānchāl relates the celebration of the Holi festival in the village. On Holi the villagers give free rein to the spirit of play normally restrained in daily life. They drench each other with colored dyes, water, mud, and cow dung, and indulge in teasing, flirting, and sexual play. Social distinctions are temporarily abolished, and high and low join together as equals. The festival permits the release of tensions usually held in check by the rigid mechanism of the social order.

For Renu the primary significance of Holi lies in the possibility of attaining union—with a lover, with society, or with God—at the end of a period of painful separa-

43Renu, Mailā Ānchāl, pp. 130–36. Trans. in Hansen, “Phanishwarnath Renu,” Appendix B.
tion. The movement of the chapter as a whole is from separation to union, as indicated by the opening and closing songs, which frame it. The opening song, *ab nā jīyabha re saiyā* (oh my lord, now I can no longer live), presents the classic stance of the *virabhisṛ, the lovelorn woman wasting away from the pain of separation. She laments her weak condition, which is such that she cannot gather the strength to comb her hair, and calls her lover, protesting that she will soon die if left like this. The song that closes the chapter, *atis machāyo bori bo* (such a Holi played Shyām), is in contrast a song of joy and wonder. The verse marvels at the divine sport of Krishna and the *gopī* (cowmaids) playing Holi. The words “such a Holi” express amazement, as though Krishna’s Holi is beyond human description, certainly beyond the human Holi described in the preceding chapter. The joyful union of Lord Krishna and the *gopī* in the gold palace, a luxurious abode of sensual pleasures, represents the opposing pole to the extreme of painful separation that opened the chapter.

In between, narrative material describing the excitement of the villagers and their efforts toward involvement and union on Holi is woven together by a number of songs. After a description at the beginning of the chapter of the economic hardships imposed on the villagers by the festival, the narrator returns to the theme of love in separation. The *virabhisṛ*’s role is now taken over by Phuliyā, still separated from her fiancé Khalāsī. She teases Khalāsī coquettishly in the folk song *nayanā milāni kari le* (make eyes all you want), refusing to accompany him to his village so that she can celebrate Holi with her old lover, Sahdev Misar. She then fantasizes being embraced and, identifying herself as a *gopī* in the arms of Krishna, recalls the song *bāhiyā pakari jhakjhore shyām re* (Shyām grabbed me by the arms and shook me).

This song serves as a transition to narration about Kamalī, for both women share the attitude of the *gopī* desiring union with Krishna. Kamalī, like the unnamed lady in the first song, is in the throes of separation, which take psychosomatic form in her fainting spells and nervousness. She too is worried that her lover, Dr. Prashānt, will fail her and not appear when she so desperately needs him. Her gnawing pain of frustration is only intensified by the familiar sights of Holi—the red powder symbolizing love and *pichkāris* (squirt tubes) suggestive of male potency.

The next song fragment, *āju braj mē chahudisha upata gulāl* (today red powder flies everywhere in Braj), completes the identification of the village world with Braj, the scene of Krishna’s amours in mythology. Previous songs have already established the comparison between the village women and the cowmaids of Brindavan, and the connection between Brindavan and Maryganj is now made explicit. Renu thus urges the reader to view the villagers as personages in the re-enactment of an earthly Krishna *līlā*, suggesting that this is also how they see themselves.

Dr. Prashānt appears next, still untouched by the colors flying around him. His relationship to the village since his arrival has been one of separation, distance, and limited participation. But today the villagers will not let him remain aloof, and Prashānt himself longs to be included in the festivities and drenched in the spirit of affection and joy. So he is splashed with colors and initiated into the play.

As a follow-up to the inclusion of the high-placed doctor in the celebration, a series of songs elaborate the inversion of the social and political order on Holi. In the satirical *jogīṛa*, the Congress party is accused of corruption and its leaders compared to croaking frogs and howling jackals. The *batgamanī phaua* of Mahanthā, however, speaks favorably of the Congress, expressing a brotherly regard for its leaders. Caste privileges are attacked in Bāsudev’s *bhīramuva*, in particular the double
standard of "touchability" which bars a Brahman from accepting water from a low-caste woman but allows him to pursue her sexually without censure.

In the final incident of the chapter, the doctor confronts Kamali. As a result of the suggestions in the earlier songs, the meeting assumes a special significance. The reader expects an imminent union, an extension of the Holi play that will bring Prashânt and Kamali together. Kamali is the youthful gopi and Prashânt, by implication, the sportive Krishna, but in reality Prashânt is overcome by awkwardness and hesitation. Unable to play the part of the dashing suitor, he only arouses Kamali's laughter.

But Prashânt does not totally fail in the task of contacting his beloved. Union may not be possible in the manner of the gods and heroes, much as the village characters strive to imitate them. It is possible however in a human context, and Renu shifts the analogy at this point to the distinctively earthly ceremony of marriage. Contrasted with Lord Krishna, Prashânt appeared ludicrous, but, compared to a shy bridegroom, his behavior seems appropriate, and union with Kamali may still result. In the final section of the chapter, three references are made to Prashânt's role as a bridegroom. Kamali first mentions that he holds the red powder as though he were about to apply vermillion to a woman's part, a ritual performed during the marriage ceremony. Then the doctor views his perspiring forehead in the mirror and is reminded of the sandalpaste makeup of the traditional bridegroom. Finally, when he pours the powder over her head, the narrator, echoing the thoughts of the couple, interprets the act as a favorable sign of the future love between husband and wife because some of the powder touches her nose as well. Through these hints, the exchange of colors by Kamali and Prashânt acquires meaning beyond the standard game of Holi, and comes to symbolize the marriage ritual. The couple then achieve a union which partakes of the spirit of frolic and merriment of the village Holi, which shares some of the glory of the great mythological and literary unions of the past, but which also reveals the seriousness and vulnerability of humans in contact with each other.

The songs in Chapter 24 are highly instrumental in bringing about the merging of mythological, social, and personal themes. On a purely expressive level, the songs of Holi establish the joyful mood of the day with its expectations of playful activity, sexual contact, and debunking of usual social categories. The songs also encourage the villagers to enter into the celebrations, urging participation by all. The songs of Holi in Braj further offer models of the divine celebration of union, which humans struggle to emulate. Renu uses these references to construct subtle patterns of comparison and contrast. The chapter grows from a dry anthropological description of a festival to a multidimensional pageant of human separation and union played out against the backdrop of the sacred lilâ of the gods. The songs give this spectacle much of its aliveness, vibrancy, and emotional depth. They facilitate the linking up of ideal and real realms of vision and allow the reader to perceive a complex cultural event on several different levels at once.

Structurally, the songs in this chapter are employed as signals for scene changes. They occur primarily at transition points, as the narrative moves from one group of characters to another, and they link these separate incidents or scenes by highlighting the common themes connecting them. The songs distract the reader from one action identifies himself as Madhava. Renu, Mailâ Anchal, p. 135.
and direct him to another. Their presence breaks up the feeling of narrative unity or directionality in the chapter. Instead, the suggestion latent in each song helps create the larger mood of the chapter. In traditional aesthetic terms, the songs establish the *shrīnāra* and *hāṣya rasas*—the dominating sentiments of eroticism and humor intrinsic to the Holi festival. The chapter itself appears as a poem composed of stanzas, whose overall unity lies in the thematic ties between the stanzas rather than in a continuous story line. The songs thus break down the logical, sequential structure of the chapter while they integrate it with respect to mood and theme.

Since the songs employed by Renu are the products of the indigenous oral tradition, they share some common features: metrical composition, often rhyme, an older local language, and a largely conventional vocabulary of symbols and figures of speech. These features lend to the songs a greater density and compactness than the surrounding prose. At the same time, the suggestiveness of the lyrics and the rich opportunities for allusion and expression of mood in them make them expansive and open in a way that prose narrative cannot be. Both the compactness and the expansiveness of the songs affect the structure of the surrounding narrative in which they are embedded by Renu. The effect of compactness is to cause the reader to pause and take careful notice, and almost everywhere that song material appears in Renu's writing, we find the rhythm of the passage slowed down and the feeling of its significance intensified. The quality of succinct statement also makes the songs appropriate for commentary or captions to the main action and for beginnings and endings. The breadth of the lyric form, on the other hand, its suggestiveness and potential for representing emotive states, makes it an ideal vehicle for entering the inner space of characters. Through the lyric, one can move out of the rational, cause-and-effect world of prose narrative, into the irrational image-rich realms of memory and fantasy. Through the songs, Renu succeeds in adding the dimensions of mythology, of the dream, of the private reverie, to the publicly perceived experience. This is done while Renu stays within the traditional repertoire of the oral literature. In this way, the traditional song genre has been integrated into the narrative mode to serve conscious artistic purposes. The result is a new type of text, which shares the attributes of both narrative prose and lyric poetry and which interweaves their effects for common ends.

Renu's adoption of the oral song tradition would be apparent to any reader of his novels, but his assimilation of indigenous techniques of storytelling is somewhat less obvious. Renu is as indebted to the tradition of the *kathā* (Skt., tale) and *qissā* (Urdu, tale), in fact, as he is to that of the *gīt* (song) and *gāthā* (ballad). But, whereas song texts are metrically fixed and amenable to direct quotation, tales are more amorphous and lack the compact form that would render them easily quoted. Consequently Renu has adopted the structural features of the traditional story form rather than the literal texts and applied them to his own narrative material.

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43A number of contributors to the memorial volume, Rām Bujhāna Singh and Rāmvachān Rāy, eds., *Renu: Sansmaran aur Shraddhān jal* (Patna: Navnīta Prakāshan, 1978), have mentioned Renu's fondness for relating anecdotes and his skill as a storyteller. Kumār Vimal calls him a "story-teller [qissāgo] of the highest rank" (p. 54). Vijendra Nārāyaṇ Singh says he was a "natural-born storyteller [gulphār]" (p. 65). See also Madan Mohan Upendra (p. 80) and Rāmvachān Rāy (p. 240) who use the term *qissāgo* in reference to Renu's storytelling craft. *Kathā* and *qissā* are the Sanskrit and Arabic words, respectively, for "story, tale" and are used in modern Hindi to refer to tales of a traditional type, in contrast to *kabāñī* which refers to the modern short story. By calling Renu a *qissāgo* instead of a *kabāñīkār*, these writers suggest his traditional narrative style and indigenous sources of inspiration.
The best example of this is found in Renu’s novel Paritī Parikathā (Legend of the Fallow Land). The novel, as the name implies, is based on the model of the extended tale or legend, whose subject matter is the fallow land around the village Parāṇpur and its history as the area moves into an era of technological change. Contained within that larger story are many lesser tales, each an independent tale in itself. Many of these are legends forming the body of folklore about the fallow land. Some are authentic folktales recited in the region. Others are new “tales” or histories of various characters invented by Renu to fill out the cast of characters. These character histories are told in much the same fashion as the traditional tales, in an improvised, rambling style, with emphasis on character sketching and comic touches. No one tale is essential to the forward movement of the plot, and yet together they create an elaborate narrative structure in which central plot material is densely overlaid by detail and subplots.

This structure is made manifest in the opening segment of the novel. The reader finds the idea of the partī kathā (tale of the fallow land) introduced on the first page. Here the narrator suggests that the Tantric masters could tell us much about this land, as could the rivers and hansā and chakenā birds which descend annually from the Himalayas. All these storytellers and their tales make their appearance later in the novel. At this point, the narrator expands on the idea of the barren land with the tale of the pandukī bird and her lost son Jittū. This charming story, with its childlike language and simple rhymed songs, introduces Jittū, who is symbolically Jittan, the hero of the main plot of the novel introduced later.

At this stage, however, the introduction of human characters is postponed, and the narrator moves directly to another story, the tale of Kosi Maiyā, the mighty river who periodically devastates the land by her flooding. It is told in a highly dramatized, improvised style by an old buffalo herdsman, who alternates between description of events, acting out of parts, singing of Maithili verses, and sound effects of the storm and flood over the next five pages. Through this folk narrator, the mythological history of the region is related and the village Parāṇpur introduced.

The original narrator then introduces two minor characters, Bhavesh the photographer and Surpati the research student. Surpati is collecting the tales connected with the various ghāts (bathing steps) of the rivers in the region. This leads into a brief tale of Rāṇiḍūbī Ghrā. Then for several pages a section of census-style demographic description intervenes, which provides the main facts about Parāṇpur village. By juxtaposing this cold, journalistic account with the fanciful tales that began the novel, Renu seems to suggest that one can look at a phenomenon—the village Parāṇpur, for example—in various ways. One can approach it through the mythology and tales of its people or through the scientific eye of the educated outsider. Each way is valid; each enhances the reader’s understanding of the subject.

Renu’s preference, however, lies with the chatty anecdotal manner of the local storyteller. As soon as the capsule summary of Parāṇpur is finished, he launches into an account of the traditions and lore of the old Mishra estate. The tales of the brahma demon and the five plots of land occur next, and then the narrator again switches back to the present and tells of Jittan Mishra’s return to the village. Mention of the Land Settlement Survey calls for the interpolation of a number of incidents or tales relating to the various settlements. Finally, about twenty pages into the novel, the narrator

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40 This fallow land must have its own story too.
41 "Reṇu, Paritī Parikathā, p. 9.
42 Ibid., pp. 10–11.
43 Ibid., pp. 11–16.
44 Ibid., p. 18.
focuses in on the main plot line, the current dispute between Jittan and his rivals Samsuddin and Lutto for the plots of land. But even here, each new character is introduced by means of a history, which in itself is a short tale, meant to interest or amuse the reader rather than relate directly to the main plot. 52

In this way, Renu shuttles between different levels of reality in this part of the work. The characters of the "present," of the "actual" world of Parānpūr which is the author's primary subject, are mixed in with talking birds, rivers, demons, and ancestors. Each has his own tale, and each is equally worthy of presentation in the larger frame of the parī, the vast expanse of land which embraces all. Sometimes the reader encounters supernatural beings and fairy tales in the text, sometimes histories of a dubious truthfulness, and sometimes the characters of the central story, whom the reader is clearly supposed to believe in as "real," and yet who have acquired something of the magic and ambiguous status of the fairy tale creatures in the process.

Structurally, the effect of the tales is to contain reader interest in short episodes, much as the teller of the oral tale would do. The series of episodes does possess linkages and transitions, but these are instrumental and often somewhat spontaneous, rather than tied to any propelling forward movement of the plot. Finishing one tale, the reader has no clear idea of what the succeeding incident or tale is to be.

As a corollary, character "development" or linear history receives little attention. Various scenes of Jittan's childhood and early life, which are not arranged in chronological sequence, occur throughout Parī Parikathā. 53 By the time the novel ends, it is finally possible to piece together a complete biography of the hero, but clearly this is not the intended result. The scenes from Jittan's past are really to be viewed as independent tales having their own intrinsic value as tales or as subsidiary scenes reinforcing the primary story line with which they are juxtaposed. Their recurrence in the text forms a cyclical pattern: the reader sees Jittan in adulthood, then as a child, then again as an adult, and so on.

Here we find the diffusion of linear time so characteristic of the traditional Indian tale. While interest on one level is focused on narration of an event or series of events, this narration is repeatedly interrupted and disturbed at another level by digressions into other sequences of action, by elaboration of setting or mood, or by extemporaneous philosophizing. 54 A completed tale generally has an established beginning and end, but the internal sequence of events and nonnarrative content is very flexible, and a single recitation need not attend to either the conventional beginning or the end, for the tale can be taken up at any point and temporarily halted whenever convenient. 55 Each tale is in fact a composite of other tales; each incident in a tale can be fully expanded into a series of tales by analogy, digression, and citation of parallel

52 Examples are the histories of Dibahādur (ibid., pp. 60–64), Tājmānī (pp. 66–67), Bhimml Mānā (pp. 70–73), and Maqībh (pp. 122–26).


55 The improvised character of oral narrative has been described in the classic study by Albert B. Lord, The Singer of Tales (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964). Referring to the epic tradition of the bards of Yugoslavia, Lord notes the importance of audience interest and its effect on the length of a recitation; see p. 17. Although the basic story of a given song is preserved from singer to singer and performance to performance, the text actually sung may be changed to include fewer or more lines, expansion of ornamentation and description, changes of order in a sequence, addition of material from other singers, omission of material, and substitution of one "theme" or episode for another; see p. 123.
tales. Interest is focused on the present and its potential for dramatization, aesthetic elaboration, and moral edification, rather than on the attainment of climax or the sequential development of character.

Using the traditional storyteller’s method, Renu breaks down the linear concept of time and creates instead a feeling for time’s cyclical nature and the simultaneity of events. The Western concepts of time and causality (B happens after A and because of A) which were inherited with the nineteenth-century novel form are here being replaced, in part, by the traditional Indian view of time. In the Indian concept, time is structured in large units and subdivided over and over until one reaches the human timescale. This subdivision of time suggests the structure of traditional narration, which moves more and more inward. One tale contains another, which contains another, and so on. Time is also infinitely expandable and is patterned in cycles. There is no single moment of creation or dissolution, but rather an infinite number of alternations between periods of being and nothingness. A tale, analogously, can be inflated at will, and although a beginning and end must be placed somewhere for convenience, the tale is really indefinite and theoretically infinite in length. It can be started at any point or left off “in the middle.” The idea of development from point A to point B in time has been rejected and replaced by a notion of coexistence: point A, point B, point C, and so on, are really the same. Hints of such a time concept are suggested to the reader when a chapter of Maiṭā Ṭrabbahl ends abruptly, when events are left unresolved, when narrative strands overlap in Partī Pariṇṭhā, when the narrator never seems to bring the reader out of a chain of digression. By following the model of the indigenous storyteller and working these strategies into his writing, Renu has taken a step toward integrating the Indian concept of time within the modern novel genre.

To sum up, the genre that Renu has created by assimilating oral literary modes differs from the conventional novel in several ways. It does not confine itself to prose but uses the special properties of poetry, such as its allusiveness, compression, and rhythm, to provide additional layers of meaning. The new genre begins to move into nonlinear realms of time by adopting cyclical tale structures and avoiding the development of suspense and climax. Characters are approached through disconnected episodes rather than through sustained focus upon individual history. A multiplicity of local narrators, rather than a single omniscient narrator, relay their accounts to the reader, producing a diffusion of viewpoint. The presence of multiple narrators and numerous characters of equivalent weight, in addition to the deemphasis on linear time, inhibits the development of a strong individual voice or personality. On the

56 Excellent accounts of the concept of time in India are found in Heinrich Zimmer, Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 12–22; Dimmitt and van Buiten, Classical Hindu Mythology, pp. 19–24, 36–43.
57 The embossed tale also reproduces the visual configuration of space in Indian thought. Space is conceived in the form of a “cosmic egg of seven concentric spheres” with earth and India at the center. Dimmitt and van Buiten, Classical Hindu Mythology, pp. 24–29.
58 Richard Lannoy considers the cyclical time concept to be one of the four significant thought patterns of traditional India essential to an understanding of the modern Indian mind. See Richard Lannoy, The Spinning Tree: A Study of Indian Culture and Society (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 271 ff. Betty Heimann also expresses the contrast between Indian and Western thought in terms of circularity and linearity: “. . . the West thinks in straight lines . . . Hinduism thinks in a circle or a spiral of continuously developing potentialities, and not on the straight line of progressive stages.” Betty Heimann, Facets of Indian Thought (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), pp. 68–69.
other hand, the many weak voices converge to form a strong community voice in Renu's fiction. This community voice frequently appears in the form of an unidentified narrator or speaker who expresses public opinion in the village. The individual identity of such a speaker is unimportant; what is significant is that the attitudes and mind of the village as a whole are articulated. The experience of the community thus appears as the central subject matter of Renu's novels, and the villages of Purnea, not particular individuals, become his heroes and heroines.

These features of the form of Renu's novels—the integration of poetry and prose, the nonlinear sense of time, the focus upon community instead of individual character—define the regional genre in a meaningful way. The Hindi critics' definition of the genre rests upon the particular subject matter of regionalism, the description of a region in its manifold aspects, but such a definition says nothing of the structure of this depiction and the ways in which it differs from conventional novel form. Renu's regional novel with its unique ordering of the flow of time and narration challenges the reader's concept of the novel genre, just as Renu's language challenges his standards for written prose. Old expectations of unity of action, suspense, and character development are broken, and in their place the reader finds himself immersed in the culture of a rural community and drawn into its own modes of perceiving and structuring the world.

The goal of regional fiction, to my mind, is not to describe a region, for that would give us merely a journalistic report or anthropological study. The objectivity and flatness characteristic of these genres are lacking in Renu's work. What his novels do, I believe, is to recreate village experience in such a way that the reader is drawn into the village, into awareness of its customs and traditions perhaps, but more crucially, into awareness of its patterns of thought. The reader becomes a participant in the community. He is forced to vocalize the inflections of its speech and learn the magic of the spoken word. He is compelled to abandon his adult sobriety and journey back to childhood on the wings of folk songs rich in emotion. He must give up his rational cause-and-effect view of the world and grasp the order of traditional time. These transformations, which succeed through Renu's structuring of language and form, move the reader into a state of consciousness that is closer to that of the villager than his original position, but that never merges entirely with it. The reader does not lose his identity, although he may suspend it temporarily in the pleasure of experiencing another state of being. Rather, he participates in and enjoys village culture with an inner understanding that ultimately allows him to value it in a new way.

Renu's value system, his morality, to return to Verma's phrase, seeks to integrate village and urban consciousness. His regionalism concerns itself not solely with the "region," with the fringes of society, but with the intersection of the two perennial cultures of India—the urban and the rural. His fiction has been interpreted to imply that modern man should move back to the land, back to the village. As I understand the meaning of his fiction, however, he intends the modern Indian to revisit the village, through the imaginative experience of literature, and then move beyond the dichotomy of city/village. The unification of rural and urban consciousness, he

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60 The opening passage of Malālā Ḍānchāl (p. 9) provides an example of movement from an omniscient, depersonalized narrator at the beginning to a personal, conversational voice who relates village gossip and rumors at the end. Public opinion is frequently expressed in judgments about character, such as the following from Malālā Ḍānchāl: saṃsāra gīyānt ādī hāt bālaṃvī (Bālaṃvī was really a wise man, p. 22), mahanī bāhe sīdhī paraithe (Mahanī Sāheb was a realized soul, p. 47), dhātār ādī nāhī, dhātā hāt, dhātā (the doctor was not a man, he was a god, p. 151).

61 A similar idea is often encountered in Hindi criticism, where it is said in a regional novel "the region itself becomes the hero" (ṛūjini svarūp ek nīyak ban jāta hāt). Purjadev, Renu kā Ṭamālk Kathā-Sāhitya, p. 12.
implies, will enable the modern Indian to maintain both self-worth and the capacity for growth.

Fundamentally Renu is addressing the same question as many modern writers: Who are we? Unlike his contemporaries, however, who generally mourn the absence of old easy answers or occasionally identify themselves with the lost generations of the West, Renu offers a positive solution. We are both what we are now, educated intellectuals of the cities, and what we were before, members of a traditional society. As long as we choose to value our roots, we do not lose our connection with the past. This, I believe, is the central meaning of Renu’s fiction, conveyed through the multiple frames of theme, character, and especially language and form, which marks him as one of the outstanding writers of his time.

Appendix A

Styles of Language

1. धूसर, बीरान, तन्दूरी प्रान्तर।
   पतिता भूमि, परती जिमीन, वक्ष्या घरती...।
   घरती नहीं, धरती की लाश, जिस पर कफन की तरह मैली डूबी है वालुरों की पक्तियाँ। उत्तर नेपाल से गुड़ होकर, दक्षिण गंगा तट तक, पूर्णिमा जिले के नक्सों को दो महसूल भागों में विभक्त करता हुआ—पूर्व-पूर्वत् यह विशाल भूभाग। लाखों एकड़ भूमि, जिस पर सिक्के बरसात में क्षणिक प्राया की तरह हुब हरी हो जाती है।
   A dusty, deserted, boundless tract.
   Fallen land, fallow land, barren earth.

   Not earth—a corpse of earth, shrouded by flocks of gulls.
   Stretching from Nepal in the north to the bank of the Ganges in the south, this vast territory divides the map of Purnea District into two unequal portions. Lakhs of acres of land, where the grass turns green only in the rains, like a momentary hope.

   (Partī Parikathā, p. 9)

2. “पियारे माहूयो! कोठारित साहेब जितना बात बोली, सब ठीक है। लेकिन सबसे बड़ा दोष हम हैं। हमारे कारण ही गाँव में उड़ाई-संगड़ा हो रहा है। हम तो सब्जों का सेवक हैं। हम कोई विद्रोहित नहीं हैं, सात्तर पुराण नहीं पढ़े हैं। गरीब आदमी हैं, मूर्ख हैं। मगर महत्मा जी के पर्वताप से, मार्ग-मार्गा के पर्वताप से, मन में सेवा-मात्र जन्म हुआ और हम सब सब का बाता ले लिया।”
   “Dear brothers! All that the Koṭhārīn Sāheb said is true. But I am the most to blame. It’s only because of me there’s fighting going on in the village. I’m everybody’s servant. I’m no scholar. I haven’t read the scriptures. I am a poor man, a fool. But thanks to the glory of the Mahatma and the glory of Mother India, the spirit of service took birth in my heart, and I donned the garb of a servant.”

   (Mailā Ānchal, p. 31)
Appendix B

Proverbs

1. जोतकी काका आजकल बहुत लुशा रहते हैं।
   पाँच के लोग आजकल दिन में पाँच बार पर्नाम करते हैं।' 'अलबत्र
   बरामियादी हैं जोतकी काका! कहनुक में मैं यदि कुछ तेज बांटू हूँ तो
   ब्राम्म में ही।' 'जोतकिस बिडा हैसी-बेल नहीं है।' 'बरामदेज कभी भी है।
   सोना यदि कीढ़ में रहे तो उस पर काई नहीं लग सकती।' 'पर्नाम
   जोतकी काका!

   Uncle Jorkhī is very happy these days.
   The villagers now salute him five times a day. That Uncle
   Jotkhi is a real mine of wisdom. “If there’s any brilliance left in this
   dark Kali Yug, it’s only in the Brahman.” The science of astrology
   is no child’s play. There’s still some divine splendor left. “Even if
   gold lies in the mud, moss won’t grow on it.” Salutations, Uncle
   Jotkhi!

   (Mailā Āńchal, p. 262)

2. “जै हो
   सरकार की! डूर, पबल की मलाय के बाले इतना दूर वे कुट उठाकर
   आया है, और हम लोग डूर का कोई सेवा नहीं कर सके। गुसाई जो रेमेन
   में कहिए हैं—यह घात प्रमु दरण वीलका...’ ’!’ ”

   “May you be victorious, governor! Your honor has taken the pains
   to come from so far away for the welfare of the public, and I haven’t
   been able to do your honor any service. Gusāin said in the
   Rāmāyaṇa: ‘Blessed is my fate that the Lord has given me his
   auspicious sight.’ ”

   (Mailā Āńchal, p. 11)

3. “मानती हूँ कि जबान वेदा वेदी उधार गाय के बरबर है। मगर इतना मत
   दूरो कहे के दूहा बाल्य भी सुक जाय!”

   “अरे हो-हो, वेदा-वेदी केरो, धी बारी के मंगरो! चालनी कहे सूई
   से कहे तेरी पेंडी में छूद!”

   “हूँह समालकर बात कर नंगड़ी! बात बिगड़ जायेगी।”

   “I admit that ‘a young widowed daughter is equal to a milch cow.
   But don’t milk her so much that her blood dries up!”

   “Oh, sure, you can talk! Whose daughter is it, that you pour on
   the ghee and make it all sacred? ‘The sifter says to the needle, you
   have a hole in your tip.’ ”

   “Watch your tongue, you slut! You’re going too far.”

   (Mailā Āńchal, pp. 62–63)
Appendix C

Alliteration and Assonance

1. एक बच्चा मी बच्चकर नहीं निकल सका।
   Not even a child could escape.
   (Mailā Ānchal, p. 9)

2. मेरी की मलेश्या निगल बुका था।
   Malaria had swallowed up Mary.
   (Mailā Ānchal, p. 14)

3. बात-बात में गाली और डेग-डेग पर डाली!
   A curse at every word, and a gift at every step.
   (Mailā Ānchal, p. 26)

4. प्राज शिर्जन को मुकलबोर, कामचोर या चोटकर कहू ले कोई।
   Today anyone might call Sirchan a freeloader, a loafer, or a glutton.
   (Thumrī, p. 54)

5. जोरी की खालों में एक नई भलक भिलिमला गई—धड़पप-रूप।
   The jeweler’s eyes glittered with a new sparkle—beauty unparalleled.
   (Thumrī, p. 9)

6. धी की सोधी मुगचं शुभकर ही धा रहा हो, कामी!
   I’m coming, auntie, just after sniffing the smell of that fragrant ghee.
   (Thumrī, p. 55)

7. पुत्तहु की गला-खोल बोली गुलाल की गोलियाँ की तरह दनतनती हुई गई।
   The daughter-in-law’s loud remarks shot [into Birjū’s mother’s courtyard] like pellets from a slingshot.
   (Thumrī, p. 152)

8. गोबर की ट्रेंड में कान बेला फंके!
   Why throw a clod of dirt on a heap of manure?
   (Thumrī, p. 152)

9. बाड़ी गड़ी के बद़े सेटजी की तरह नकाशन लगाएः
   बिना वधाईं गथ बरदास्त नहीं कर सकता कोई।
   No one could stand the smell of a tiger without wearing a noseband like the big merchant
   (Thumrī, p. 115)