

**A BIOREGIONAL STUDY OF SHIVARAM KARANTH'S
*A RETURN TO THE SOIL***

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Nature writing shows how an author looks at nature and presents the relationship between human beings with their natural world. Human beings cannot avoid interacting with and affected by their specific location, place or bioregion. Bioregionalism is a part of environmental philosophy. The Online English Oxford Dictionary defines bioregion as “a region defined by characteristics of the natural environment rather than by man-made divisions”. Bioregional perspective encourages sustainability. It brings out harmony between human culture and natural environment. This desire of living in harmony with nature is depicted in Shivaram Karanth's novels. Shivaram Karanth was a major Kannada writer, social activist, environmentalist, yakshagana artist. Shivaram Karanth was born in Kota near Udupi in the Udupi district of Karnataka. His novels are known for their strong characters and portrayal of environment. His novels show a vivid and permeating presence of nature and its forces. Karanth always is fascinated to depict natural places, far from the artificial touch of man. He presents coastal life, animals, trees, birds, moon, sun, sky, rivers and seasons and their impact on human beings. His novel “Marali Mannige (A Return to the Soil)” is one such novel in which he portrays a village called Kota with its natural beauty. Shivaram Karanth writes about his own place which is a part of coastal area. Koteshwara is one of the villages in Karnataka. It is located in Kundapur taluk of Udupi District. This part of Karnataka is geographically unique with its vivid combination of plants, animals, geology, climate and water features.

This paper attempts to analyse how the novelist explores the interconnectedness between man and nature especially with the land. Nature becomes very important tool for deciding the characters' life. It clearly shows that man's dependence on nature is inextricable. It even focuses on the relationship of women with nature. They are care givers, nurturers and also closer to nature. The female characters like Paroti, Sarsothi, Satyabhama and Nagaweni all spend their lives being connected with the nature. The text presents through the characters human hardships, struggles for the betterment of their lives but one or the other they must return to their soil (nature), because nature only heal all the problems and the only option for them. Though modern capitalism attracts humans very much they can't thoroughly move away from their natural life.

The representative characters of the first generation are Rama Aithal, two of his wives Parothi and Sathyabhama, and his sister Sarasothi. Their lives throughout are governed by traditions, customs, and rituals. Rama Aithal's occupations are the ones that are handed down to him by tradition and he has no choice in them: agriculture and officiating in the religious

ceremonies of others of his caste in the village. Since his first wife Parothi is childless, he marries another (Sathyabhama) who gives birth to a boy and girl. Rama Aithal's is a hard life: paddy cultivation depends upon the vagaries of nature; and people, owing to English education, have begun to lose their faith in customs and rituals. Tired of his hard and traditional life, Rama Aithal decides, for the first time in his family, to give his son modern English education.

Laccha (Lakshamana), the son of Rama Aithal, represents the second generation, the generation that attracted by the sparkling modernity. In order to get 'modern' education, he has to go from one city to a bigger city. Freed of all parental control and community-restraints, he begins to indulge in gambling and women of loose morals, squandering his father's hard-earned money irresponsibly. Even after marriage, he does not change his ways of life; and, after his father's death, he sells off all of his property, leaving his mother, his wife and his only son as destitute.

Rama, his son, represents the struggle, conflicts, and dilemmas of the third generation just prior to independence. Amidst untold hardship (since he and his mother are abandoned by his father) and grinding poverty, Rama succeeds in getting a good education, culminating in a Bachelor's degree. But then like many of his generation, he suffers from unemployment, and moves from one small job to another. Also since these are the days of National Movement for freedom under the charismatic leadership of Gandhiji, he-like thousands of other young men-joins the Congress Party and participates in the Movements. Finally, he makes a decision as different and as consequential as that of his grandfather-he decides to return to his village and take up agriculture as his profession.

Shivaram Karanth grew by the side of ocean and used landmark events from his own life to illustrate the challenges and opportunities to "life-in-place." In his present novel we can find out the bioregional elements. Bioregionalism developed in the decades between 1950 and the early 1970s. A society which is based heavily on technology one can see the significant loss of identity with native landscapes, bioregions and natural communities. It expresses the idea of staying in home. It is based on local control, nonviolence, sustainable lifestyles. The story also unfolds returning to one's home after many hardships. It shows that man can live peacefully at home.

Contemporary bioregional thinker Peter Berg defines bioregion in this way-"A bioregion is defined in terms of the unique overall pattern of natural characteristics that are found in a specific place. The main features are generally found throughout a continuous geographic terrain and include a particular climate, local aspects of seasons, landforms, watersheds, soils, and native plants and animals."

Shivaram Karanth brilliantly used nature as an important entity for his novel. As an environmentalist he gives all the minute details of the surroundings. His novel passes through all the seasons. He describes Rama Aithal's home.

Their house was on the edge of sandy beach, and all around were cashew trees...There was a stream at a little distance from the house. The sea was to the west, the river meeting the sea to the south, and the river to the east.
(p.n.4)

Literary works of all kinds have emerged that focus on the importance of place, the region, and community in human relationships that shape political, economic, and religious practice. One's region of nearness, the ecosystems and social institutions that we depend on for survival and well-being, can be understood as a bioregion whose boundaries are defined by a combination of ecological and cultural factors. A bioregion is often reflected in indigenous

religious practice, such as the celebrations, the language spoken and songs of important places and landmarks, or in the form of mimetic rituals of animism or nature writing. Shivaram Karanth comes with his own place Kota and the deep relation with this place in his work *Return to the soil*. He focuses on the rituals, traditions followed by the people around this place. The characters of the first generation are very much attached with their natural world. Karanth writes:

Women would wake up as soon as the cock's crowed, Take out the utensils used for cooking and scrubbing them with ash. The floor had to be swept...milking, grazing the cows, collecting fire woods. As soon as they left the cowshed, cow dung would be gathered and thrown into the manure pit...after that, they go for fields. Work outside and work in the fields were all the same. (p.n.6)

Bioregionalism focuses on the emerging and organic forms of human relatedness, ecological design and the patterns and interdependencies of living systems, and the need for regional economies that support place-based inhabitation. The characters of the first generation are very much closer to nature. Rama Aithal and others were busy in the field by sunrise. They all took the help of Soora and his wife only for the job of getting the paddy seedlings. All three women getting wet in the rain pulled out the seedlings made them into bundles and flung them across. Aithal's family lived too close to the mouth of the river; they couldn't be adventurous and go deep into the sea. There were people who had enough firewood for themselves and sold the rest.

The characters in the novel share interconnections with the region they live. They have shown lots of respect to the place they live the food they take and even with the animals they have maintained closer relationship. According to Michael Vincent McGinnis -"To be bioregional means to respect and care for the natural world that exists in a place, such as a watershed or mountain range or river basin." He explains that the place-based lifestyle of bioregionalists is first and foremost found in the ancient and native traditions that embrace the poetry, storytelling, mythmaking and religious practice of a sacred bond and common heritage that human beings share with specific landscapes, seascapes, and regions. In indigenous practice, the region of nearness, which is the place inhabited, includes a broader circle of animals and plants that are part of the language spoken, religious and cultural practice, and local or regional knowledge of ecosystems.

This knowledge of the ecology of a place is passed on from one generation to another by various practices or oral traditions. *Return to the soil* is saga which spans for three generations begins in mid nineteenth century. It tells the story of a poor Brahmin family in a coastal Karnataka. Winds of colonial modernity bring about sweeping changes in this tradition bound community. The English educated second generation loses its links with the land. Unemployment haunts to the third generation which wanders to cities in search of better living. But at the end Rama comes back to his soil where his forefathers set a life on the shores of sea.

Significance of place and the region is found in the voice of the sacred landscape. This could be seen through human homecoming, which also takes place in the present story. Rama of third generation fails to make a separate life; back home in his Karnataka sea shore village. He learns from the other inhabitants of the distinct place and community. He makes an attempt to prevail the bioregional ecology, biodiversity, and local knowledge handed down to him by his ancestor. He does not forget that knowledge.

As an ecological philosophy, bioregionalists support local economies of scale, place-based activism, native species protection, social and environmental justice, and rejoice in the

interconnections and interdependencies between human beings and the circle of animals, plants, and insects that define a more than human community or home. Rama always fascinated towards the sea life. He used to go to the sea shore every now and then with his mother Nagaweni. And this fascination at last makes him to come back his home and stay there permanently.

Bioregional activists defend the natural values that are carried by ecosystems, and the relationships, links, and connections between native species that are supported by these ecosystems. Bioregionalists stress the importance of becoming “native” to the place. Becoming native to a place requires an act of “re-inhabitation” to support the self-propagating, self-nourishing, self-governing and self-fulfilling qualities of living-in-place. The boundaries of a community are based on the relationship, interaction and connection between human beings, the soils, waters, plants and animals. Thus Shivaram Karanth in his *Return to the Soil* stresses the re-inhabitation in a natural world. The impact of English education detaches the second generation from nature; however there is a relapse to nature and its modes of living in the third generation.

Workscited

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