

# ***THE PROBLEMATICS OF "REGION" IN THE REGIONAL NOVEL***

***A Thesis submitted to the University of Hyderabad in Partial fulfillment of  
the requirement for the Award of the Degree of***

***Doctor of Philosophy***

**BY**

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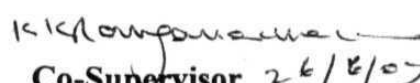
## ***CERTIFICATE***

This is to certify that *Ms. Aruna Bomma Reddy* has carried out the research work embodied in the present thesis for the full period prescribed under Ph.D. ordinances of the University of Hyderabad. The topic of the Ph.D. programme is **"The Problematics of "Region" in the Regional Novel"**.

I declare to the best of my knowledge that no part of this thesis **was** earlier submitted for the award of a research degree of any University/Institution.

  
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## *Acknowledgements*

During the period of my stay on Campus, I have accumulated more number of debts than I can ever repay. Yet I make this inadequate gesture of gratitude to the following people.

My heart-felt thanks are due to Dr. Chitra Panikkar for her austere guidance, for her understanding and tolerance of my unorthodox ways of research and most important of all for giving me a sense of self worth.

Prof. Ranganadhacharyulu for having kindly consented to be my Co-supervisor for the project.

Dr. Shivarama Padikkal for his suggestions which actually gave a new direction to the project.

Prof. Probal Dasgupta, the Dean and Head-in-charge, C.C.L., for his kind co-operation in the completion of my project.

Vallampati Venkata Subbaiah garu for his brilliant suggestions and the discussions that followed, above all for his terrific sense of humour.

Sridhar, for being the proverbial friend, philosopher, and guide.

Parameswar for his help with the tedious paper work, which made it possible for this project to see the light of the day.

The staff of the C.C.L., Mr. Srinivas and Mr. Subrahmanyam for being nice to us as a group.

My friends on Campus, Saji, Vijay and Mamatha, Shalini, Shashikanth, Rajeswari and Rohit, Smriti, Viji, Sriparna and Sujatha, Savi and Mohira for their support and

encouragement at different points of this project and for making my stay on campus a joyous one.

Mamatha and Shyam for their reassuring presence.

All my friends at Madanapalle, Jawahar, Sridhar, Raju and Ramesh, Bhanu, Aijaz and Jitendra, Kameswara Rao garu, Prof. Balasubrahmanyam and Dr. Nagaraja for all the happy times we have had together.

Prasad for his love and concern.

And to all those people who I may not have mentioned but whose camaraderie really mattered.

Finally for my parents for their love and the incredible amount of confidence that they have always had in me.

*Aruna*

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## ***The Regional Novel: Conceptual Terrains***

Embarking on a project on the study of the regional novel will require an understanding of the meanings and implications of the term region. This will invariably lead to questions on the scope and limitations of the terms region and regionalism. At the outset, I would like to make it clear that, this study does not confine itself to any particular meaning of region i.e. 'region' taken to mean one specific, geographical, cultural area. It examines the complexities and problematics of the term, 'region' in British literary tradition, Indian literary tradition in general, and the Telugu literary tradition in particular. In this chapter, I seek to theorize the term 'region' as it is viewed in the Social Sciences and Humanities and examine the problematic surrounding the term, region. By problematic, I mean the indefinable quality of the concept region which in turn encapsulates the inaccuracy that surrounds a blanket term like the region. This chapter lays out the field of study and its scope and describes the methodology used for analysis. The first part provides the theoretical base and the interpretive space of the region in the literary texts taken up for study. The second segment traces out the genealogy of the regional novel in different literary traditions, and I conclude with an overview of arguments to be presented in the chapters to follow.

My initial understanding of the term, 'region' as a culture specific, geographical area required modification as I came across a panorama of definitions given to the term in

social theory. The terms, 'region' and 'regionalism', lose exactness when they enter academic vocabulary and hence the terms are always used in inverted commas. The region is usually understood as a physical entity expressing individuality of a particular space. It represents a philosophy of self-development with its own resources and capacities. The geographical, cultural, political and domestic "regions" would also be called into question and interrogated as I progress, through a socio-economic analysis of the term.

The definitive nature of the "region" and the aspects of its homogeneity will be determined by the "functional aspects"<sup>1</sup> or the dominant aspects of the region. These functional aspects could be caste/class features or language. The social and political consciousness level of the people also determines the nature of a "region". To have a better understanding of the terms, "region" and "regionalism" and how they gained currency in literature, it is important to emphasize the diversity of usage in the meaning of these terms.

The meanings of the term "region" are manifold. It is used to refer to a broad variety of concepts. Some critics understand it essentially as a geographical category. Used in this sense, it explains social phenomenon as something that may be understood when considered in relation to physical features like geography, topography, climate etc. Other approaches like the anthropological and the ecological, study the interrelation between the peculiar traits of people and the geographical area and the relation between

environment and people. "Region", in other terms, magnifies the interests and concerns of the local group in relation to the society. According to Robert E. Park it is the long years of "association and cooperation"<sup>2</sup> that brings about a kind of specificity to the region. In all these approaches to "region" there are certain overlappings and intersections.

When we look for a precise definition of the "region" in sociological terms there is an immense amount of fuzziness around it because the "region" has not been theorized in the way the nation has been. In the context of the currently contested debates on Indian nationalism, a search into the concept of nation will be of help for an understanding of the definitions of 'region'. These debates are dismissive of the subject of whether the region existed before the nation. They argue that, the notions, "region" and "nation" are not given, but are only constructed through a skilful choice of issues in history. In this connection, Sudipta Kaviraj elaborates on the nature and history of the region as,

Actually the region, though culturally more homogenous, is as much a historical construction as the nation is. More startlingly in some cases, the formation of linguistic region is not of much greater antiquity than the coming of anti-colonial consciousness, for the rise of a distinct regional language was related to some developments linked to colonialism.

(Chatterjee and Pandey 22)

Kaviraj is dismissive of the concept of a monolithic structure like region as a completely self-contained entity pre-existing before colonial intervention. He maintains that any



attempt to define nationalism or regionalism as monolithic structure is "fraudulence"<sup>3</sup>, in the construction of history. Colonialism according to him did not destroy a homogenous culture. In fact the nationalists' attempt to construct a Hindu identity as national identity, undertook the responsibility of combining the regions forcibly under one shelter. Hence in all these attempts of locating an authentic "nation" or authentic "region" there can only be a "subterfuge of antiquity",<sup>4</sup> Though regions and regional histories have been in existence even before the advent of colonialism, the consciousness of regionalism is **resignified** with the emergence of the notion of nationalism itself. One of the chief concerns of colonialism has been the reconstruction of a supposedly unified past.

Often the process, by which the region comes into being, is through constructions available in literary texts and in history. What are the constructions and what is the method of interrogating these constructions, chiefly figure in my thesis. When the image of the Indian nation is constructed it is meant for a set of privileged sections. It is mainly **an** upper caste, Brahmin, Hindu nationalism that is selectively embedded in the narration. Along similar lines, my enquiry will also bring to perusal the several representations and constructions of the region in the regional novel. The discrepancies and dichotomies in the invocation of the "region" in various literary traditions will be examined and interrogated.

In this connection, two distinct kinds of questions can be asked about the world created inside the literary texts. Firstly, what kind of world is **it---** its structure, its limits,

the possibility, the inner logic of its working? Secondly, how did this world that the artist create relate to the world in which he lived. In other words, in the regional context, it primarily alludes to the representations of the region. Through an analysis of the regional novels, I seek to explain how the regional writer envisions the canvas of his region and what will be the support systems that are responsible for the full-fledged development of the images of the "region". Here I seek to understand the structure of the world of regional fiction. The study does not engage itself with a search for historical facts within the literary text as it holds that art can only play on variations of reality<sup>5</sup>. By implication I suggest that the ideas reflected in texts need not be taken as the given reality, these images should be treated as pointers to an alternative reality. As history reveals to us, any given concept of "region" or "nation" has never had a unified past which can be recalled in the present, because it is constantly evolving into something new by effacing the older self.

My aim, therefore, is to explore the 'problematic' of the region and not the specificity of the "region" itself since it poses large unanswerable questions like what is authentically regional and what is the reality of the region, etc. Hence what I wish to reflect upon is less the authenticity of "region" than the nature of the constructions itself within the texts taken up for **study**. The study focusing on the "problematic" of the region in the British, Indian and Telugu regional novel attempts to unravel the meanings of the projected images of the region; it accounts for this particular fabrication through **cultural/historical** compulsions. The method by which the "region" gets understood will be examined in these discursive contexts. Contrary to the simplistic assumptions of the "region" the following discussion understands the "region" as an entity, where historical

and cultural forces determine the particular shape of the projected images at a given moment in history. I will examine how their meanings emerge dynamically in different discursive contexts. I attempt to map out the different sets of stories of the "region" as rendered by the authors, in their texts.

The novelist in the process of negotiating the regional space indulges in recreating an imaginary/real story of a people, of a culture, of an identity. From Thomas Hardy down to the Indian regional novelists, all of them offer a saga associated with the "region". The images of region that recur in the novels relate to the author's sense of place to his conception of selfhood itself. Some of the Indian writers use history, folk-myths or 'sthalapurana' for the fabrication of the region. Only after bestowing a name to the region the author proceeds to narrate other issues like culture and identity of the people. Thomas Hardy creates an imaginary world called Wessex. Hardy creates this space as a foil to the polluted industrial cities. In all these narratives there is an effort to bring together a 'unified past' which is apparently lost to the present generation owing to the interventions of Industrial Revolution and Colonialism.

Hardy projects Wessex as a veritable repository of all the enduring qualities of Nature. Wessex symbolises the rhythm of the life of country folk in all their realistic modes. The portrayal of Wessex acquires completion along with Hardy's artistic perfection. Hardy has been hailed as 'myth maker'<sup>6</sup> for his poetic delineation of Wessex. Hardy's novels project the regional society, as he perceives the familiar rural life of

Dorset. To give vent to his creative imaginations Hardy invented an imaginary world " Wessex" endowing the place with the familiar features of Dorset. In the words of Hardy himself,

I first ventured to adopt the word Wessex from the pages of early English history, and give it a fictitious significance as the existing name of the district once included that extinct kingdom. The series of novels I projected being mainly of the kind called local, they seemed to require a territorial definition of some sort to find unity to the scene...

("Preface" to *FFMC* xxxix)

Wessex seems not just to give unity to the scene in the Aristotlean sense of the term, it created an imagined land amidst the tumultuous Victorian period: a romantic escape-hatch for the strife-torn Victorian world. Wessex becomes Hardy's imaginative space to explore a culture, customs and the emotional turbulence of the pre-industrial population. Wessex world seems far away from the smoky, foggy, dingy London of Dickens. The unaffected pristine "churchy" life of the rural folk forms the core of Hardy's creation.

If it is an imaginary world that comes alive in Thomas Hardy's novels, the Indian regional writers Phaneswarnath Renu, Tarashankar Banerjee and **Kuvempu** indulge in retelling the stories of actual regions like Maryganj, Shivkalipur, and Malnad. The ethos of the region is very much part of the creative consciousness of the author. In *Maila Ancal*, Maryganj is the place where all activity takes place. Renu seems to have been

inspired by his knowledge of P.C.Roychaudhury's Marygunj, which he creates in his book *Inside Bihar*. The place is named after a European lady who used to reside in that area. The fictional village of Maryganj is situated on the banks of the river Kamala. It can be reached from the railway station of Rauhthat, fourteen miles eastwards, after crossing the river Burhi Kosi. The 'kothi' of Maryganj is very famous and it is constructed by W.G. Martin, an English indigo planter. Mary is the name of Mr.Martin's wife. For his convenience, he has even constructed a road and established a post-office. To attribute a touch of credibility to his narration, Renu endows his fictional village with all the administrative units that one finds in any Indian village of that time.

Tarashankar too gives an account of the emergence of the region with its exact geographical features in *Ganadevata*. In a way, the story of the region invoked here provides the reader an opportunity to look deeper into the life and culture of the people in the past. It in fact helps in establishing a link with the unheard history of the people and the region in turn. *Ganadevata* is set in the Birbhum village of Shivkalipur. Tarashankar observes that Shivkalipur derives its name from two nominally separate villages, Shivpur and Kalipur. Shivpur gets its name from a sect of Devals who lived in that village. He says, "they had acted as priests and caretakers at the shrine of Siva in Kalipur. But they were no longer there. The few who had not died had migrated elsewhere... Shivpur derives its name from the fact that they lived there." (Banerjee 17) The relationship of people with the land is highlighted here. The fertility of the soil, the rains, plains and hills, all become part of the culture of the region.

Yet another related aspect of the "region" is encapsulated in **Kuvempu's** *The House of Kanooru*. **Kuvempu** renders the history of 'malnad' (the land of hills with plenty of rain). Water, earth, and fire stand as symbols for regional life. *The House of Kanooru* renders the story of Vokkaliga community who are basically agriculturists. If 'malnad' tells the story of a region with plenty of rain, the **Jokumara** myth exemplifies the lack of it. Rain rituals are a common feature in agrarian societies. I incorporate an interesting story of the rain, at this point to reiterate the role of myths and oral narrations in the recording of regional experience. The Jokumara (one who brings joy) myth is associated with one such rain ritual. These rituals directly relate to attempts to appease the rain deities for rain. Jokumara is considered a harbinger of rain and traditionally the people appease him for rains and happiness. He is the brother of Lord Ganesa. When Ganesa visits the earth, he overlooks the problems of people and gives a very good report to his parents about the conditions of life on earth. People become furious over the indifference of the Lord and when Jokumara visits the earth, people present him with their problems, the most important being the drought situation. This myth is popular in Karnataka and the southern part of Andhra Pradesh. The Jokumara idol is made with clay by one of the potters in the village. People parade it with its enlarged mouth and bulging eyes in the village for three days. The carriers of the idol get offerings of grain and money from the villagers. At the end of the third day they leave it with the dalits who in turn will take the idol into the nearby field and beat it. This rain ritual dramatises the scarcity of food and other societal inequalities in the villages. The rain-related myths also add to regular myths about the region. It's interesting to see the treatment meted out to the Jokumara idol. In these folk myths gods are treated to all human emotions and

passions. At one level they worship the idol at another level they express their anguish (at the prevailing drought situation) by beating up the idol. Gradually, **Jokumara** becomes synonymous with rain<sup>7</sup>.

A reality lived in the past is recapitulated in the folk myths that **Dr.Kesava** Reddy so exquisitely portrays in his novels. They are connected with the past and forgotten histories of the people. These stories are retold in the folk myths. One such myth is retold in Dr. Kesava Reddy's *Smasanam Dunneru*. Dr. Reddy observes, "nobody knows how these 'sthalapuranas' come into existence." (133) The process of retelling is interesting here, because it involves a cerebral process of going down the memory lane as well as a physical process of digging the ground. A team of dalit labourers, discover an urn full of golden coins in the process of cleaning up a burial ground. The pictures and the graffiti on the coins give scope for conjecture as to who could be the ruler engraved on the coin. After some deliberations they come to the conclusion that he is not one of those rulers whom they get to hear about in the puranas but that the figure on the coin is one like them. Finally they identify him to be Lachchumureddy who was a palegar of the place once upon a time. He is the grandfather of the present landlord Peddareddy. One of the older members of the team recollects the golden period of Raja Lachchumureddy, his generosity, his military prowess and his love of the land. He also gives the geographical outline of the Raja's region. He is supposed to have ruled the land between the present Mokallakonda and Bonthalagutta on one side and from Jillellakana to Sugalollamitta on the other. The important factor one should bear in mind is that the figures in folk myths, the landscape and their culture are identified with ordinary people and not with some invisible cosmic power.

In the previous section I have discussed the complexities implicit in the term "region" and its reflections in literature, its various forms and directions. Throughout the discussions, a background of historical authenticity is assumed and now I come to the task of presenting it ~~in~~ more detail and how it evolves in literary production. In this section, I wish to turn to a discussion of the literary term, 'regional novel'. I would like to provide a genealogy of the regional novel in the British, and in the Indian literary traditions, in order to situate the argument in the larger framework of the thesis.

"Regionalism" in literature is identified with marginalization: marginalized themes and languages find place in regional writings. Much before the word **"region"** gained popularity in British literature, it was applied to a set of writings that came up in Scottish dialect expressing the sentiments of the rural population and much later it came to be applied to Thomas Hardy's writings. It is an interesting paradoxical situation in which the Scottish writers find themselves at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup>C. In 1707, when the Scottish Parliament ceased to exist and Scotland became northern part of Great Britain, Scottish culture and **language/literature** was assimilated into British culture. It becomes inevitable then that Scottish writers follow English speech and English literary forms. Frustrated in their political hopes, Scotsmen turned to their literary past for consolation. In the process of asserting a separate national identity from that of a British identity, Scottish writers turn to the regional or dialect variety of Scottish language which was only reduced to a series of dialects, while English continued to rule the roost in mainstream literary life. Though there was a revival of Scottish verse, it was treated as a



dialect verse used for the most part for humorous or sentimental purposes, in patronizing, exhibitionist or nostalgic manner<sup>9</sup>.

As a mark of protest against standardization of English as the literary language, Robert Burns brought recognition to the dialect variety of poetry written with rural themes. Burns was skeptical about his success as a poet, when he began writing his dialect poems but he went ahead and published *Poems Chiefly Written in the Scottish Dialect* in 1784, the success of which provided him with the necessary confidence to carry out his project further. His success gave a further impetus to his own self-image as a poet from the rural area. It is noted that, Burns began to play to the demands of a particular readership once he became famous. Apparently, Burns selected the **Kilmarnock** poems with care: he is anxious to impress a genteel Edinburgh audience. He played up to contemporary sentimental views about the natural man and the noble peasant. He seems to have exaggerated his lack of education, pretended to a lack of technical resources which was ridiculous in the light of careful craftsmanship which his poetry displayed and in general. Burns' choice of dialect poetry was dual. On the one hand, he used it to consolidate his Scottish national identity, and on the other, to increase saleability for his works. **Burns'** influence was in fact termed as "sentimental vulgarization" of rustic poetry. Nonetheless, it created a space for the discussion of the regional themes<sup>10</sup>.

If Robert Burns was largely responsible for bringing about a change in the language of poetry, William Wordsworth is considered to have brought about a change in the themes discussed in poetry in British literature. He favoured innovation against

traditionalism in materials, forms, and styles in literature. The classicists and neoclassicists perceived literature, as an "art" which required innate talents and the characters as human beings who possess "representative characteristics". And the treatment of the themes was also "serious". Wordsworth brought about a change in the themes and treatment through his *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. His "Preface" to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* was written as a poetic "manifesto" or statement of revolutionary aims in which he denounced the "poetic diction" of the earlier century and proposed to deal with "materials from common life in a selection of the language really used by men." (Mason 254) Wordsworth's serious treatment of lowly subjects in common language violated the basic neo-classic rule of "decorum" which asserted that serious genres should deal only with high subjects in an appropriately elevated style.

When the novel was innovated in Britain in the 19<sup>th</sup>C, the sentiments for a lost, pure past had to be recalled once again in the new generic form. Thomas Hardy gets identified with the regional novel for his unique portrayal of Wessex. The novels that are branded as "regional", discuss themes and concerns that are particular to a specific group. And this group is demarcated based on local dialect, speech manners, culture, etc. It places emphasis on the common man and the themes are commonplace. As a result, the regional novel affirms a trend that cannot find scope in "Universal" literature. To put it in the words of Oliver Lafarge, "A certain provincialism similar to the attitudes of a Parisian towards 'les provinces' strengthened by our middle class' strong sense of security and unity has led us to accept a novel laid in New York or Boston or some such centre as being general, whereas one laid in Georgia as sectional." (Draper 30) The middleclass' perception of the "regional" and "universal" merely reduces it to the country and the city.

But the American **critics**<sup>11</sup> are of the opinion that, 'local colour'<sup>1</sup> novels deal with simple village life whereas the regional novel has a political dimension added to it. They say 'local colour' was a pursuit of defining idiosyncrasies of character and dialect in a country rapidly becoming standardized and not so rapidly shaping its culture towards an internationalism, which it was believed, laissez-faire economies would eventually make politically possible. And they observe that the 'local colour' writings merely showed an interest in portraying the curious, the odd and the picturesque rather than having any kind of serious engagement with human concerns specific to that region. Contrary to the existing notions of regional writing, Thomas Hardy's works provide a serious picture of the countryside reflecting the conflicts of the contemporary society.

An examination of the Indian literary scene takes us further to probe into the diverse forces that culminated in the evolution of the regional novel in India. There hasn't been a unified movement towards writing regional novels in Indian literatures. Regional consciousness in India is fostered by other factors like linguistic reorganization of states in 1956 and the fissiparous tendencies visible within a seemingly monolithic culture propagated by print capitalism. The printed word enjoys the status of being recognized as knowledge and thereby, the alternative modes of expression and the culture associated with them are treated as marginalized. Dialects, in this connection, are not treated as worthy of literary value. Though the evolution of the regional novel is a slow affair, it acquires significance in the light of the political movements, which fought for the rights of the oppressed and marginalized. These political movements give a special thrust to literature that represents the cause of the movement. The fact that some of the regional

writers are activists contributes to bringing the regional novel into the limelight.

The regional novel which remains unknown as a specific genre, till the 1950s takes a new turn with the publication of Phaneeswanath Renu's novel *Maila Ancal* (1954). Asserting his local identity the author declares that *Maila Ancal* is an ancalik novel. Though the term 'ancalik' has been in vogue for quite some time in literary circles, it becomes popular only after Renu's publication of the novel. 'Ancal' means a tract of land as well as the covered bosom of a woman. As such, the term invokes a maternal image. The English term "region" may not adequately carry the connotative meanings of the Hindi term '**ancal**' which evokes the image of maternal affection and is connected with the emotionally appealing concept of dharti-mata and Bharat-mata<sup>12</sup>. The jingoistic temper with which Renu began writing the regional novel is evident in his determined declaration that his is an '**ancalik upanayas**'.

With him the regional novel gets understood as a **socio-realistic** entity in which greater attention is paid to the region than to plot and characterization. This is also interpreted as an attempt to underplay the role of the stereotype to give importance to commonplace things. Phaneeswarnath Renu realizes that he has to invent a new genre to contain his new discourse on regionalism. The early regional novels discuss the "region" as unconquered and uncontaminated by the influences of colonialism and modernity, whereas Renu, Tarashankar and Kuvempu deliberately attempt to show that the "**region**" is not a self-contained unit any longer and that it is as '**dirty**' as the nation is in their novels.

The histories of Indian literatures<sup>13</sup> mention the evolution of the regional novel only in a few languages where there has been a strong effort on the part of the authors to discuss matters of local interest in all parts of the country. There may be many more voices, which may have remained submerged owing to various reasons social and otherwise. These histories do not discuss the category of the regional novel in Telugu. However, a decisive set of Telugu writers, have begun writing about the region in the regional dialect. The writers themselves have termed this act as an effort to decanonize literature. The metropolitan literature, which overshadowed the regional literature in the West, proves responsible for the ghettoization of the regional categories in Telugu too.

A different form of **fuzziness** surrounds the origin of regional literature in Telugu due to a relative lack of clarity in the formation of literary histories. While attempting to contextualize the evolution of **regional/dialect** variety of writing in **Telugu**, it is a bit complicated to unravel concrete evidence as to when exactly it took the shape of dialect writings. In the course of our search for a context for a fundamental understanding of the origin of dialect literature, we have to turn to the movement towards colloquialism led by Gidugu Ramamurthy.

The movement begins with the conducting of exams for the Telugu students of Madras University. The students who appeared for F.A. exams in Madras University found themselves in a difficult position to write their exams in Grandhika Telugu, when that was not their spoken language. However, Madras University had to concede to **the**

requests of the students, and allowed them to take their Telugu exams in colloquial Telugu in 1920. The classicists understood the change to colloquialism as an attack against Hinduism itself and they carried out a mission in defense of classical literature and language.

In Andhra the education system was to be put through a rigorous reassessment and reforms needed to be brought in as the students had tremendous problems in learning the literary Telugu. The agenda of the colloquial movement included the introduction of texts that were written in colloquial languages into the curriculum. Writers like Veeresalingam (*Rajasekhara Charitamu*) and Gurajada Apparao (*Kanyasulkam*) wrote in colloquial Telugu. We must bear in mind that, this colloquial Telugu is the Telugu spoken in coastal districts and not in any other part of Andhra. In the process of democratization and liberalization, standardization of Telugu language also took place<sup>14</sup>.

So far, neither the conservatives, nor the liberals thought of the heterogeneity of dialects within Telugu. The conservatives, who have been opposing the colloquial movement, realize that they are on a losing ground, and raise a point of objection on the grounds that when there are several dialects available, how can justice be done to all the dialects if one is going to be standardized. In the light of the contradictory opinions expressed by the members of two groups, a compository committee was appointed by the Madras University under Gurajada Apparao's membership to look into the pros and cons of the introduction of colloquialism in the education system. The conservatives in this

committee realised that, the committee is **dominated** by the liberals. They referred to the obvious drawbacks in the formation of the committee - that it is an all-coastal committee and there is a need to include representatives from Rayalaseema. The classicists cleverly won over these representatives to their side and consequently there was no case for Rayalaseema dialect. It is obvious that the conservatives in the committee expressed their willingness to include Rayalaseema representatives only to add numerical strength to their argument and not out of any real concern for the region. The battle for spoken language is not won in one day. By 1919, all kinds of information related to public relations began to be published in spoken Telugu and by 1937 Andhra Sahitya Parishad officially recognized it as the medium of communication<sup>15</sup>.

Though academic institutions accepted the spoken language, literature remained the rigid forte of the classicists and the classicists' fears of the loss of the Hindu culture proved baseless, as what came to be accepted and subsequently standardized was the Hindu upper caste culture. The system did not enlarge itself for the inclusion of the other dialects from other Telugu speaking regions under Madras Presidency. Telangana was not yet united into Andhra Pradesh and therefore the Telangana question did not arise at all. Nevertheless, after the reorganization of states there was an indiscriminate, uniform implementation of the earlier system. What Sudipta **Kaviraj** says about the standardization of Bengali is also true of the Andhra situation. He states:

Gradually, through a historical selection of the privileged dialect of some area, this elite gives rise to a new norm language. The growth of printing,

and the possibilities of standardization it contained, helped this norm language to be consciously adopted by the elites of the sub-regions so much so that they become gradually ashamed to utter the dialect which would have been in an earlier era, the cultural flag of their region. Once such a language develops, all dialects can now be differentiated from it as lower-case languages.

(Chatterjee and Pandey 24)

However, the colloquial Telugu movement led by the upper caste, Hindu intellectuals, cannot be taken as a point from where dialect literature takes its roots. In fact, the Telugu readers had to wait for another three decades for the revival of a regional literature written in dialect. Though colloquialism was accepted in the educational system, dialects were still treated as lower-case language of the mainstream language. The awareness of the region, dialect and the movement to turn to one's own culture for literary inspiration took shape only in the wake of the peoples' movements in various third world countries.

The context in which regional literature emerged in Telugu is rather diverse and most significantly influenced by the several peoples' movements all over the world. As Nikhileswar, a prominent Telugu poet and literary critic rightly points out, the existing modes of literature fail to encapsulate the existential angst of the modern man torn between several national and international influences chief among them being



•colonization and market economy. Contemporary modes of literature were either filled with pulp fiction or it was treated seriously; in addition to that only classical literature was taught, studied and discussed in Universities. According to him the contemporary literary world is "never contemporaneous with our **present**". (qtd. in Nikhileswar 37) The Telugu intelligentsia is compelled to contemplate on the changes and concerns of the contemporary world. Revolutionary spirit was in the air in the 1960s all over the world. The oppressed literatures were beginning to voice their concerns. Nigeria gained independence and African, Latin American, and African American writers recognized the need to articulate their existential predicament in literature. Black Panther Movement was actively voicing the African American communities' problems. The Telugu intelligentsia could not have remained uninfluenced by these developments. "**Digambara Kavittvam**" emerged lambasting the traditional literature shrouded in hypocrisy. The contemporary reality demanded an interrogation and disruption of all kinds of hegemonical power structures<sup>16</sup>.

Having been influenced by some of these movements, Raavi Sastry and Dr. Kesava Reddy began the trend of writing in dialects in the late 60s and early 70s as an attempt to assert the identity of the regional experience. The sources of influence on Dr. Kesava Reddy can be traced down to the American writers whom he avidly reads and emulates. John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* written in black vernacular dialect was one such source of **inspiration**<sup>17</sup>. The working class revolutionary movements coupled with caste movements have contributed to the invention of an equally **powerful** medium of expression in dialects. The cultural hegemony of coastal Telugu came to be countered

only in this fashion. Thus 'sthaniyatha' came to be reflected in literature. For instance, Dr.Kesava Reddy wrote his novels focusing on the Rayalaseema region and Raavi Sastry wrote about the everyday lives of the people of Kalingandhra. In all the mainstream histories, Maagokhale, Kavikondala Venkata Rao and Karunakumara (writers from coastal Andhra Pradesh) are celebrated as the regional writers who wrote in dialects. However after the Naxalbari movement, regional issues are discussed in literature written in the local dialects. Appalanaidu, Vangapandu Prasada Rao and Gaddar, B.Ramulu, Allam Rajiah, Jukanti, Sadanand Sarada are some of the writers who write about the region in dialects and who have been rightly recognized as regional writers. Dialect therefore is equated in most cases with 'pranteeyata' or 'sthaneeyata'.

So far, I have discussed the conditions that led to the origin of the regional novel in British, Indian and Telugu literatures from a historical perspective. In addition, I feel it obligatory on my part to explain the purpose of taking up a project on regional novel at this moment in history. One of the reasons for my interest in regional writing is that it represents, what David Jordan calls a **"decentred world view"**. (qtd. in Inness and Royer

2) The regional novel offers a heterogeneous perspective of the world, and also addresses questions of cultural identity. To put it in the words of Howard W.Odum and Harry Estill Moore, "the conception of a regionally differentiated and inter-regionally related culture has something to offer to literature, namely a subject matter (the physical and cultural landscape, local customs, character, speech etc.), a technique (folk and native modes of expression, style, rhythm, imagery, symbolism) a point of view (the social idea of a

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planned society and the cultural values derived from tradition as the liberator not the **confiner**).”(W.Odum and Moore 1-4) In other words, it offers an alternative worldview.

I discuss Industrial Revolution in connection with Hardy's novels, since my thesis begins with Hardy's conceptualization of region as untouched by the squalor and dinginess of the Industrial world. Moreover, this is a point of prominence to get an overview to provide a key to the politic played in relation to creating a Utopia out there in the 19<sup>th</sup>C. And colonial history is invoked to understand the Indian context. This phenomenon changed the whole of history transforming the face of the world unrecognizably. Native histories were either lost or retold and the present itself was shaped according to the dictates of the colonial masters. Therefore any discussion of politics after colonialism cannot escape the consideration of that phenomenon. The ideological climate changed notions of history, nation and region. The regional writers experienced postcoloniality through various filters of hegemonic power systems.

This enterprise begins with an examination of Thomas Hardy's novels to provide a space to locate the historical context of the genre, 'regional novel'. The recalling of Hardy's writings by way of tracing the lineage of the regional novel, in a study rooted in Indian literatures, I am aware, would lead to controversies. But it is fundamentally guided by my own institutional training in English studies. Owing to the comparative dimensions of the present project, the glaring spatial and temporal interstices have been overlooked in stitching together a narrative of the regional novel based in literatures as

diverse as British, Indian and Telugu traditions. Phaneeswarnath Renu, Tarashankar Banerjee and **Kuvempu** will be brought into discussion to provide us glimpses of early regional novels in India. And Dr. Kesava Reddy, Ravi Sastry and Vattikota Alwarswamy will be studied as the representative regional novelists of Andhra Pradesh.

This thesis justifies itself in the light of studies till date on regional writing. While other critical works on regional writings also have used a broad definition of the genre, this thesis offers an analysis of the various ways in which "region" has been projected by writers with greatly different backgrounds, both culturally and historically. The non-existence of political reading of the texts demands this kind of a study. The thesis attempts a precisely political reading of the texts. An enlarged interpretation of the genre permits consideration of literature from diverse writers, in a variety of formats and on a range of topics.

For my study of the regional writings in this project, I wish to follow the methodology proposed by Cornell West I wish to focus "not on the kinds of texts chosen for an enlargement of the old canon or the making of a new one but rather on a historical reading that shapes the way in which literary canon itself ought to proceed and the kind of cultural archives that should constitute this formation."(Munns and Rajan 413) This reading is informed by a particular sense in which conflict, struggle and contestation are

prominent. Such texts that will enhance and enable a deeper understanding of human predicament will be studied. The historical evolution of these novels and the successive movements, which helped the projection of different points of view along with internal developments, will be taken up for study.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Howard W.Odum and Harry Estill Moore, *American Regionalism* ( New York : Henry Holt and Company Ltd, 1938),p.2

<sup>2</sup> See *ibid*, p. 15

<sup>3</sup> See Chatterjee and Pandey (eds), *Subaltern Studies VII : Writing in South Asian History and Society* ( New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> See Gellner ,*Nation and National is* (Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1983).

<sup>5</sup> Ideas gathered from Sudipta Kaviraj's *The Unhappy Consciousness* ( Bombay : Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> See Merryn Williams, *A Preface to Thomas Hardy* (London and New York : Longman, 1976).

<sup>7</sup> Ideas gathered from A.R. Vasavi's *Harbingers of Rain* (New Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1999).

Palegars were the rulers of Rayalaseema.

<sup>9</sup>Ideas gathered from Dietrich Strauss and W.Horst (eds), *Scottish Language and Literature* (Frankfurt : am Maim, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Ideas gathered from A.C. Baugh's (eds) *Literary History of England. Vol. 3* ( London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975).

<sup>11</sup>For a detailed discussion on the differences between local colour novels **and** Regional novels, see Howard W.Odum and Harry Estill Moore, *American Regionalism* (New York : Henry Holt and Company Ltd., 1938).

<sup>12</sup>This concept which is prevalent in the Indian regional novels is inspired by Sumitra Nandan Pant's poem quoted in *Maila Ancal*.

<sup>13</sup>See K.M. George, *Comparative Indian Literature* (New Delhi : Macmillan, 1984).

<sup>14</sup>Ideas taken from the Editorial of *Andhra Pradesh*. September, 1998.

<sup>15</sup>See Arudra, *Samagrandhra Sahityamu XI* (Vijayawada : Prajasakti Printing Press, 1991).

<sup>16</sup>Ideas gathered from Nikhileswar's *Prapancha Sahityamlo Tirugubatu Udyamalu* (Hyderabad : Visalandhra, 1995).

<sup>17</sup>See Kesava Reddy's interview given to Kasula Prathap Reddy in *Suprabhatam*. June 20-July 3, 1996.



## ***Ideal Landscapes***

In an attempt to trace the beginnings of the regional novel, I examine the novels of Thomas Hardy, who has won acclaim as the writer of regional novels. This chapter focuses on Hardy's concept of "region" and the varying implications the concept carries. The chapter primarily aims at studying three important features pertaining to Hardy's novels. Firstly, it proposes to examine the presentation of landscape in the form of an imagined land "Wessex", secondly, it studies the polemics of the celebration of rural life and thirdly, it problematizes the complex positioning of Hardy as a regional novelist.

Hardy wrote his novels at a time when it was "the respectable" who formed the reading public, and it was for them that the Victorian novelists wrote. Victorian fiction had not for the most part been concerned with the actual living conditions of the contemporary rural population, except as an appendage to the luxurious lives of the rich. It is therefore common to reduce Hardy's fiction to a simple portrayal of rural England. The present enquiry however is directed towards the celebration of the 'organic community' of Old England. It is of course clear, as this journey in time is taken, that something more than ordinary history is in question. We need therefore to study this sentimental and intellectualised account of a 'timeless past' with a great deal of caution.

Hardy delineated rural life idealistically, though he was aware of the realities of the world. The perpetual retrospect of an 'organic' or '**natural**' society is a constitutive part of Hardy's fiction. In such fiction, the country embodies the longing for beauty and order, spontaneity and freedom of spirit, in the eyes of city dwellers. The hostility to industrialisation and a desire to call a halt to it therefore leads to a glorification of the country.

A survey of the early twentieth century rural novel informs us about the state of the rural novel in England. They are realistic in their portrayal of the countryside. The early regional novel itself comes in different types. There is, for example, the rural novel proper, confined to a particular locality and for the most part to that locality's native inhabitants. Studies conducted in rural/regional novel in English Literature reveal the presence of regional writing even before Thomas Hardy. William and Mary Howitt, Richard Jefferies and of course George Eliot preceded Hardy. A glance at the writings of some of the writings of the Howitts and Jefferies illustrates the tone and tenor of rural writing in England.<sup>1</sup> Lamenting the loss of rural innocence, these writers attempt to preserve the pristine environment of rural life. Merryn Williams records that, "throughout the nineteenth century the stereotype of a happy and innocent countryside where all the vicars were hard working and all the girls virtuous, remained very popular with urban readers, although it was ludicrous to anyone who knew the facts." (15) The invocation of rural life as an instance of "pure" "unpolluted" space is exaggerated to the point of sentimentality. I quote an extract from the writings of William Howitt as cited in Merryn Williams. **Howitt's** account of rural England begins thus:

Let every man who has sufficiency for the enjoyment of life, thank heaven most frequently that he lives in this country and age...

...the poetry and pictures of rural life...the scores of sweet old-fashioned hamlets, where a humble sociality and primitive simplicity yet remain .. .all those charms and amenities of country life which have inspired poets and patriots...

(18)

The rhetoric of rural England is noted to be repeated in the writings of Jefferies also. Williams' remarks on Jefferies' writings stand valid for all the regional writings of their period. He comments that,

Nature to him was the source of everything good, without which human beings could be neither moral, nor happy and this feeling accentuated the contrast between the beauty of the countryside and the degradation of the labourers' everyday lives...

(35)

The countryside is portrayed as a picturesque background for the working community and the people who work on it are seen as naturally superior to those who are the direct descendents of Industrial Revolution. This heightened sense of the "organic community" is reflected in literature with the disruption of complacent notions of life. There is an amazing amount of simplicity in the approach of these writers to country life.

The regional novel in English is concerned with the preservation of rural economy against the upsurge of an overwhelming industrial economy. Agriculture had to suffer the impact of industrialization more than anything else because the labourers had everything to gain from industry than from labour in the fields.<sup>2</sup> Merryn Williams in an analysis of the rural exodus to the cities explains the repercussions of industrialization on the rural economy,

What happened was that the agricultural labourer had shown quite clearly that they refused to stay on the land if there was any alternative. The growth of industrial towns had offered them better-paid jobs, railways had given them a means of leaving the native villages and education, it was claimed had made them dissatisfied with their conditions.

(Williams *TH&RE \*)

The quick desertion of villages meant a threat to the existing feudal social order. The deep-rooted nature of the power structure came to be questioned with the introduction of a new economic order. What we find in literature is an idealisation of feudal values of an order, based on settled and reciprocal social and economic relations. It illustrates itself in the idealization of a '**natural**' or '**moral**' economy on which so many have relied, as a contrast to the thrusting ruthlessness of new capitalism. The subliminal nature of rural life against the material life of industrialization is exoticized in the literature of this period.

Though the regional novel had its genesis in the post-industrial milieu, it acquires significant literary attention only after the publication of Thomas Hardy's writings. The credit for popularising the genre goes to Hardy because he is considered to have perfected the art of the regional novel. His predecessors did not pursue it with the same fervour and intensity. Hardy apparently had been pushed into writing regional novels for two reasons: (i) the market provided a kind of saleability to these novels, (ii) to give a new impetus to a rather insipid writing career.

In the dominant narrative of the "region", we find a discrepancy in the way it is rendered in the early regional writings of the Howitts and Jefferies', and those of Thomas Hardy. The early regional writers hailed from the region that they represented in literature. Their writings spoke of a diminishing economy of the rural belt with a great deal of authority. However, with the publication of Thomas Hardy's writings, the "region" acquires many colours and hues. Unlike the Howitts or Jefferies, with the creation of an imagined space called "Wessex", Hardy introduces an element of aesthetic distance into his writing. This space allows him to deliberate on the "region" not just as an experimental ground for a turbulent economic order, but it lets him exoticise and idealize the rural belt for an urban audience. Thus it brings in complexity to the texture of the narrative of the "region". The story that ultimately evolves of the region, Wessex in Hardy's writings is that of a world that resists any kind of metamorphosis to retain its moral superiority in a transitional period.

The nostalgic allusion to the village or region in literature is directly related to the upsurge of Industrial Revolution and the consequent exodus of population to the cities. From Oliver Goldsmith to the Romantic poets, the loss of the old country was lamented. The overtly visible change in the countryside, after the Industrial Revolution, continues to be celebrated in literature down the ages. The bewilderment caused by the industrially productive cities is evident in the writings of progressive intellectuals like Thomas Carlyle, Thomas Hardy and Charles Dickens. Hardy writes in 1887,

[it] appears not to *see itself*, each individual is conscious of *himself*, but nobody is conscious of themselves collectively, except perhaps some poor gaper who stares around with a half-idiotic aspect.

(qtd. in Raymond Williams *C& C* 215)

It is the wilderness of the city that augments the longing for the village. The growing sense of individualism devoid of any passion or sentiments among people for each other and the lack of concern, **trust/faith** are evident in Hardy's observations of London life. The deplorable human condition in the city is well diagnosed in Carlyle's *The Condition of Working Class* in 1844. He writes:

The very turmoil of the streets has something repulsive, something against which human nature rebels. The hundreds of thousands of all classes and all ranks crowding past each other...

The brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest becomes the more repellent and offensive, the more these individuals are crowded together within a limited space (217)

The above passage encapsulates the intolerable suffocation and the '**unfeeling isolation**' of cities which is the result of the intensive competition of city life. Struggle for existence seems to be the essence of city life. The chaotic situation of the cities and the pathetic human plight perhaps make the writers invoke the pristine environs of the village. One perceives a plea in these writings against growing urbanization and concentration of wealth, power and population in the cities.

The nineteenth century world under transformation, torn between several opposing forces of society, formed the source from which Hardy drew his inspiration to turn to regional novels based in the region. The response of progressive intellectuals like **Carlyle's** to industrial revolution projects a dichotomy inherent to the system. The industrial world needs and creates a proletariat and the intellectual community itself thrives on an engagement with the working classes. Industry has benefited the proletariat, but only the slums have been highlighted as a problem to the ecology of the cities. Among all these turbulent forces, 19<sup>th</sup> C British readership was looking forward to a change, an ambience uninfluenced by these phenomena. Hardy created through his writings a space which was lost and for which there was a longing, a nostalgia. Therefore Hardy has to invent a culturally unconquered image of a rural man who serves as a foil to

the physically and emotionally disturbed Victorian man. The 'status quo' of the social world requires that these two contraries are held in place, that their limits, their boundaries, are marked with absolute clarity. Though there is a visible longing for the rural environment, the urban individual is not ready to relinquish his urban existence and go back to the rural. Hence preserving the regional identity is very essential for the urban intellectuals for their superiority to be recognized and acknowledged. When there is a threat to urban identity from the exodus of villages to cities, there is a cry of cities being polluted by industrial slums. The preservation of the 'pure self of the primitive' - argument works conversely in the case of the proletariat. After the industrial revolution, when the working class grows powerful, the progressive thinkers raise ecological problems. It's true that dirt and pollution are enhanced by Industrial Revolution, but at the same time it was responsible for fostering bonds amongst the working class.<sup>3</sup>

Wessex in all its connotative and denotative meanings, let us note, represents an organic community. It is most obviously linked with Hardy's vision of life. He describes a region which he knows intimately and whose history and traditions are a major part of his consciousness. All that is utmost Wessex in character is described in terms of its people, customs, traditions, and landscape derived from certain regions of Dorset. His interest in age-old customs and the knowledge of rural life is reflected in the novels.

With this imaginary space, Hardy achieved the necessary range and realism of the novel of English country life. The saga of the evolution of Wessex is interesting for Hardy takes a problematic position by calling it a purely imagined region. While trying to establish the authenticity of the region, he can also dissociate himself from the rustic



experiences and as a writer, he can capitalize on the tastes of the readers. It is Hardy's creation of a new imagined region called "Wessex", that subsequently gained popularity.

The characteristic portrayal of Wessex gets reflected in the geographical details carried out in the texts. The descriptions of the landscape are projected in such a way that it makes the reader believe that the distances are actual. An extract from *Far from the Madding Crowd* testifies to the fact thus:

By making inquiries he learnt that there was another fair at Shottsford the next day.

'How far is Shottsford?'

'Ten miles t' other side of Weatherbury!'

Weatherbury! It was where Bathsheba had gone two months before. The information was like coming from night into noon.

'How far is it to Weatherbury?'

'Five or six miles'

(Hardy *FFMC* 46)

The descriptions of the wood come alive to the readers too. Once he introduces a place name, Hardy invariably sets out to fix it as a geographical entity in the landscape of Wessex. A reference to any of the place names like, Yalburry Hill or Weatherbury with the possible distances from all the possible routes in Wessex will make it a permanent fixture in the region even in the subsequent references to the same place in his other

novels. Though Hardy described the landscape as partly real, partly dream countryside, as the narrative progresses the reader is pushed into a credibility that the landscape is more real than just a figment of the author's imagination. But Hardy topographers are of the opinion that the descriptions of Wessex in one text and another may not exactly corroborate.

In the novels, Wessex gradually gets to be identified with the psychology of the people. It functions more as an aesthetic space for exploring a culture rather than as a geographical unit that actually existed in some part of England. As Allen and Schlereth observe in *Sense of Place* "regional consciousness is less a matter of geography than a state of mind. It is therefore possible to speak of "folk regions" as distinct from geographic or political regions". (74) By folk regions they mean a culture of a people rather than merely referring to a place. The "folk regions" of Hardy are definitely bound to project the psychology of a population living in a retreat far away from the shadows of a polluted industrial scene.

Hardy's regional novel culminates in the description of landscape and in his presentation of his society and his times. It is exemplified in the encounters of the rural world with the industrial, modern and urban spaces. This chapter takes up three of Thomas Hardy's early novels, *Under the Green Wood Tree*, *Far From the Madding Crowd* and *The Return of the Native* for perusal and analysis. These novels record a gradual growth of the landscape and also the characters. They show how Nature overpowers human beings and the manner in which it goads their destiny. These novels

show the dichotomous tendencies of rural life as well as a celebration of the pastoral element.

The introduction of the **modern** scientific inventions into Wessex undoubtedly declares the state of civilization of the countryside. However, more than the physical manifestations of modernity, Hardy projects this sense in his visions of future in an abstract fashion. He expresses his sense of modernity through a discussion of the impact of education on women, the introduction of railways, the harbingers of **modern** culture-reaping machines, and of course industries on the rural belt. He depicts themes and subjects that are **modern** in essence not necessarily **modern** in their visible manifestations- A pertinent point of discussion here would be Hardy's own conception of "modernity" by analysing his own use of the term. In his "Preface" to *Far From the Madding Crowd* he writes how he "projected a 'series of novels' about a **modern** Wessex of railways, the penny post, mowing and reaping machines, union work houses, Lucifer, matches, labourers who could read and write and National school children....,(xxxix) However Wessex life incorporates these **modern** changes also:

Reedlemen of the old school are now but seldom seen. Since the introduction of railways Wessex farmers have managed to do without these Mephistophelean visitants...

(Hardy RN 62)

The encounters between old ways of life and the **modern** ones ultimately result in proving the superiority of 'natural', pre-modern ways of life.

The metamorphosis of an old world after the encounter with modernity in the form of a faster pace of life gets reflected in the three novels. *Under the Greenwood Tree* initiates a discussion on varied themes like religion, education and class in a minor way and lays the foundation for its elaboration in the later novels. This being one of the early novels Hardy betrays signs of immaturity in the treatment and characterization of the subject. Hardy's creative imagination around Wessex takes shape in the novel. The introduction of the topography of Wessex in this novel is interesting. The descriptions of Nature and the portrayal of countryside in *Under the Greenwood Tree* signal the emergence of a larger landscape than what is envisioned in the novel. It contains some distinguished place names like Yalburywood, Casterbridge and Budmouth. In the later novels *Far From the Madding Crowd*, and *Return of the Native*, Wessex occupies a larger canvas acquiring the full-fledged status of a district.

*Under the Greenwood Tree* does not have much to say about life on the land. Mellstock is a farming community in which none of the characters are farmers except Mr. Sharp. This novel is treated more as a pastoral painting projecting a self-contained parish life. The entry of a new musician, Fancy, as a paragon of modern education and learning disturbs the 'self-contained' nature of the parish. The element of turbulence is resisted vehemently because of the change brought in by a woman who is superior to them in learning and knowledge. The organic community of Mellstock manifests itself in the descriptions of the landscape:

To dwellers in a wood almost every species of tree has its choice as well as

its future. At the passing of the breeze the fir trees sob and moan no less distinctly than they rock; the holly whistles as it battles with itself, the ash hisses amid its quivering; the beech rustles while its bows rise and fall...

(Hardy *UGT* 11)

Mellstock was a parish of considerable acreage, the hamlets composing it lying at a much greater distance from each other than is ordinarily the case. Hence several hours were consumed in playing and singing within hearing of every family, even if but a single air were bestowed on each.

(29)

The whole setting unfurls a vision that is fresh and unaffected by the influences of the city and its modernisation. The peace and harmony of country life is perceived in the opening scene itself. The simplicity of mind and the simple concerns of life constitute the major subject matter of the novel.

The nature of the people is synonymous with Nature: mild and sober, always looking forward to the process of growing up. Wessex takes its genesis and develops into a concrete entity along with Mellstock parish. A typical reception of a stranger in Mellstock explains the state of the Wessex countryside:

The gallery of Mellstock church had a status and sentiment of its own. A stranger there was regarded with a feeling altogether differing from that of the congregation below would bestow towards him. Banished from the

nave as an intruder whom no originality could make interesting, he was received above all as a curiosity that no **unfitness** could render dull. The gallery too looked down upon and knew the habits of the nave to its remotest peculiarity, and had an extensive stock of exclusive information about it: whilst the nave knew nothing of the gallery folk as gallery folk, beyond their loud-sounding meanings and chest notes.

(44)

The above passage illustrates the naive state of mind of the parishioners who don't look upon outsiders as anything beyond objects of curiosity. The use of terms like "originality" to refer to the native space and the reference to outsiders as "peculiar" indicates the pastoral ways of living entirely untouched by civilization of the city. The slow pace of life and the pastoral atmosphere act as a foil to the overwhelming acceleration of industrial cities.

The introduction of a modern, learned music teacher to the church is seen as a deathblow to the old choir group. They have no cultured means of encountering the "bitter weed" of modernity. When the Vicar of Mellstock parish wishes to introduce a new singer, the old music group questions the authority of the Vicar as that would be a threat to their own livelihood. Class concerns override all other concerns like religion and education in *Under the Greenwood Tree*. The pragmatism that underscores the role of religion in these lives is remarkable. Religion per se doesn't seem to exist for them unless it extends itself as a means of providing livelihood. Religion becomes part of the choir group because they rely on it for their livelihood. The parishioners are not prepared

to forgo everything in the name of God. The parish does not contain that class of **population**, which can leisurely take up religion as a pastime activity. Therefore, they rebel.

Fancy Day enters the community as a harbinger of modernity with her training as a teacher as well as a musician. She is responsible for the ousting of the church musicians and that too in a major way. The choir group in the church has no idea of any such training. In trying to superimpose the figure of Fancy on the parish, Hardy in a way exemplifies the inevitability of modernization even in supposedly remote areas. A discussion on the new musical instruments only succeeds in expressing their disgruntlement towards any such innovations. Mr.Spinks expresses his contempt for the new modes of musical instruments:

"They should have stuck to strings as we did and kept out clarinets, and done away with serpents. If you'd thrive on musical religion, stick to strings, says I."

(31)

Modern instruments like clarinets are resented because that is something unheard of in the parish.

Fancy Day is agential in bringing the elements of modernity to the cultural backwaters of **Mellstock** parish. Hardy introduces the catalyst of disruption in the form of a woman. It is worth noting here that it is a woman who is pitted against the traditional

society. With her entry, the issues that are at stake are not just those related to the livelihood of a set of musicians. It has to do with conflicting questions of a laid back life versus a fast growing industrial life. Fancy's presence in the novel functions as a reminder of the development of the world outside Mellstock parish. Once Fancy takes over as the church musician, members of the old team find themselves absolutely useless and out of job:

Having nothing to do with conducting service for almost the first time in their lives, they all felt awkward, out of place, abashed, inconvenienced by their hands. They stood and watched the curls of hair trailing down the back of the successful rival, and the waving of her feather as she swayed her head. After a few timid notes and uncertain touches, her playing became markedly correct. But whether from prejudice or unbiased judgment, the vulnerable body of musicians could not help thinking that the simpler notes they had been wont to bring forth were more in keeping with the simplicity of their old church than the crowded chords and interludes it was her pleasure to produce.

(78)

For Fancy, church music is not a serious occupation. As Rueben says, "music is second to the woman". (44) She plays music at the church as an activity that can be as casual as anything else. But for the musicians, that's the only occupation and they composed every note each evening after spending much thought over it. They compose music with the pulse of the rural life in it, their simplicity of life and thought. They feel so deprived of



their livelihood that they fail to see the correctness or perfection of Fancy's music. Hardy feels a deep respect for the cultural life of the parish and a deep regret that choirs like this should have been abolished all over the west country when he was young. Hardy views the musicians basically as poor men but as very good at and devoted to their work which includes playing at weddings and parties as well as in church. In those days it was normal for such groups, rather than an organ, to provide church **music**.<sup>4</sup>

In this novel Hardy resolves the conflicts between the two worlds of life as represented by Fancy and the choir group, in Fancy's ultimate decision to marry Dicky Dewy, a member of the music group over Arthur Maybold. Fancy, a teacher by profession and the daughter of a timber merchant forgoes all her chances of upward mobility in her marriage to Dicky. Though she initially entertains the idea of Mr. Maybold and **Mr. Sharp**, her final resolution is to choose the immature Dicky; this dramatizes Hardy's urge to keep the region far away from the shadows of the city.

The novel *Far from the Madding Crowd* has a much more solid social base than **any** of Hardy's earlier novels. The whole action centres on the life and work of **Bathsheba's** farm. As Raymond Williams points out, "work enters Hardy's novels more decisively than in any English novelist of comparable importance." (qtd. in Gregor 55). The plight of agricultural labourers belongs to the background of the Wessex tales. Hardy's interest in agricultural conditions is reflected in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Hardy's interest in such rural occupations as sheep farming, dairy farming and the timber industry is clear in the novel. The novel delineates the life of rural people, Bathsheba, Gabriel Oak and Boldwood.

Gabriel, the hero of the novel, has a profound understanding of nature which helps him emerge the most admirable character in the novel. We see him nursing the newborn lambs, and telling the time of night from the position of stars. Later when the sheep under his care is struck down by disease, he is the only one who knows how to cure them, and when a whole harvest is threatened by rain, he saves it by working in the rain entirely by himself feeling with his hands. Gabriel Oak's struggle and association with the land are the main events of the novel. He starts out as a farmer but by an unfortunate turn of luck he loses his farm and offers himself as a bailiff. Oak's lamentations testify to the precarious conditions which any farmer has to go through:

All the savings of a frugal life had been dispersed at a blow; his hopes of being an independent farmer were laid low-- possibly forever. Gabriel's energies, patience and industry had been so severely taxed during the years of his life between eighteen and eight and twenty, to reach his present stage of progress that no more seemed to be left in him. He leant down upon a rail, and covered his face with his hands.

(Hardy *FFMC* 41)

From the status of an independent farmer, he becomes a tramp in the streets. Oak goes to the labour market and offers himself as a labourer at the fair.

The character of Gabriel Oak is not projected just as that of a skilful farmer but he is upheld as morally stronger and superior to most other outsiders. Like Dicky Dewy of

*Under the Greenwood Tree*, Oak is a product of Wessex who epitomizes Egdon Heath in its versatility. Oak is earthy, enduring and persistent. He complements Bathsheba's efforts at farming at various stages of her life. By some stroke of luck, Bathsheba inherits her uncle's farm, and by the same turn of fortune, Oak loses his farm and becomes a small servant in Bathsheba's farm. He proves to be the protecting angel of Bathsheba's life. **Oak** is in communion with the environment. He feels the pulse of the Heath. He brings back the distracted Bathsheba and Boldwood to their actual positions. Bathsheba neglects her farm because of her love for Sergeant Troy and Boldwood in his love for Bathsheba. Boldwood though an insider to the community edges out of the harmony of the ambience and neglects farming and himself. The conversation between Oak and Boldwood is interesting to note, as it draws attention to the contrasting attitudes of Boldwood and Oak. Gabriel Oak enquires,

'Your ricks are all covered before this time?'

'No'.

'At any rate, the large ones upon the stone saddles?'

'**They are not.**'

'Them under the hedge?'

'**No.** I forgot to tell the thatcher to set about it.'

(301)

The total apathy with which Boldwood responds to Oak's concerns over his farm shows the intensity with which Oak associates himself with farming and Boldwood's falling out of the pattern of typical Egdon life.

The relationship between Bathsheba and Francis Troy calls for analysis in this context as it is filled with discordant notes from the beginning. Francis Troy enters the community as an outsider through his marriage to Bathsheba. Troy's relationship to his environment is marked from the beginning with disaster. Jean R. Brooks rightly explains the relationship of Troy with the farming community:

The soldier is death to the farm. The Soldier's Joy' with which he profanes the harvest home, enforcing it with threats of dismissal, violates traditional customs and responsibilities and the spontaneity of rustic music, seen in its true function both at the shearing feast and Bathsheba's wedding to Oak.

(170)

Troy marries Bathsheba and is constantly at loggerheads with everyone in the community. Troy is distanced from the community in two ways: firstly, his professional experience is not something that comes closer to anything that happens on the heath and secondly, he is an outsider. Troy nearly ruins Bathsheba's life, and incidentally her farm as well, before the story works itself out and she is left free to settle down with Gabriel.

The note of discord in the community life, which sets in with the entry of Francis Troy, comes to a halt with his death in the hands of Boldwood and brings back harmony to the environment. The same sort of harmony is visualised between Bathsheba and Oak after she falls out with Troy in the storm scene:

'**Gabriel** you are kinder than I deserve! I will stay and help you yet! Oh why are not some of the others here...' In the meantime one of the grisly farms had alighted upon the point of Gabriel's rod, to run invisibly down it, down the chain, and into the earth. Gabriel was almost blinded and he could feel **Bathsheba's** warm arm tremble in his hand - a sensation novel and thrilling enough; but love, life, everything human seemed small and trifling in such close juxtaposition with an infuriated Universe.

(294)

Oak once again proves his affinity with his community in his fight against Nature. Bathsheba is treated as being influenced by the flashiness of outside life, and as someone who is tempted to marry an outsider, Troy. Though she is not punished in the novel, Fanny is portrayed as the moral **superior** to Bathsheba. She wins the sympathy of men like Boldwood and Oak. Francis Troy who deserts Fanny for Bathsheba also regrets his mistake and admits to having really loved Fanny and not Bathsheba. Fanny and Oak are the representative species of the Heath. Fanny is dependent, docile and meek; most important of all, she attains motherhood before her death. Bathsheba on the other hand is quite outgoing, independent and individualistic. She finds her redemption in her return to Oak, by extension, to the Heath. Hardy projects the strength of rural values over urban values. Howard Bobb explains the dichotomy as,

At bottom Hardy's story juxtaposes two different worlds or modes of being, the natural against the civilized and it insists on the superiority of the former by identifying the natural as strong, enduring, self-contained,

slow to change, sympathetic, while associating the civilized with weakness, facility, modernity, **self-centeredness**.

(163)

Bathsheba Everdene and Fancy Day of *UGT* in their return to the region are redeemed of their cultured ways and they are finally accepted into the community. The countryside is seen as a natural retreat from the violent degeneration of cities: a degeneration that can be exemplified in terms of the loss of moral "strength", "endurance" and "self-contentment".

The landscape complements the emotional range of the characters in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *The Return of the Native*. It acquires a phenomenal proposition of exerting influence over the characters. People don't seem to function independently of the environment. Eustacia Vye and Clym Yeobright of *The Return of the Native* find Nature insurmountable and therefore feel oppressed. The disturbing descriptions of the landscape form a central part of the novel. The Heath is a wasteland which Hardy himself calls, 'a vast tract of unenclosed wild!' All the characters share certain features of the Heath as part of their growing up in Egdon. Jean R. Brooks rightly observes that,

The six main characters take their key from Egdon. They all feel its pull through some affinity of temperament. Clym, Mrs. Yeobright and Diggo Venn share its look of isolation, Thomasin, Clym and Venn its endurance; Eustacia and Wildeve though they hate it share its primal vitality and indifference to others...their environment is one, in which change and

chance, death and darkness, prevail and the overpowering of the fervid by the intimate is a recognized conclusion to human effort.

(177)

Egdon cannot contain the over ambitious Eustacia and Wildeve and hence their premature death. Diggory and Thomasin are satisfied with the modest environs. The Heath does not offer too many options to individuals. One has to acquire the colours and hues of the Heath if one wishes to be at peace with nature. The image of the 'organic community'<sup>1</sup> is evoked repeatedly in the novel. The unique characteristics of the Heath as different from any civilized space will make it conspicuous. A description of the landscape with all its crudity and peculiarity will make it clear to us, how the Heath is also a rigid and enclosed space:

Here at least were intelligible facts regarding landscape - far-reaching proofs producing of genuine **satisfaction...Civilization** was its enemy; and ever since the beginning of vegetation its soil had worn the same antique brown dress, the natural and invariable garment of the particular **formation...A** person on the heath in the raiment of modern cut and colours has more or less an anomalous look. We seem to want the oldest and simplest human clothing where the clothing of the earth is so primitive.

(Hardy *RN* 4)

The Heath demands assimilation over distinction, prefers anonymity to individuality. It proves the fact that individuals don't constitute a central part of the theme. The

overwhelming presence of the landscape engulfs individual concerns. But both Eustacia and Clym set out to establish their individuality, which goes against the very grain of the Heath.

Eustacia herself represents something of the wilderness of the Heath. The descriptions of Eustacia are similar to those of the Heath:

Eustacia Vye...she had the passions and instincts which make a model goddess, that is those which make not quite a model woman... To see her hair was to fancy that a whole winter did not contain darkness enough to form its shadow; it closed over her forehead like nightfall extinguishing the western glow. She had pagan eyes full of nocturnal mysteries, and their light as it came and went, and came again, was particularly hampered by their oppressive lids and lashes;

(53)

Then Egdon was aroused to reciprocity; for the storm was its lover, and the wind its **friend**. Then it became the home of strange phantoms; and it was found to be hitherto unrecognized original of those wild regions of obscurity which are vaguely felt to be compassing us about in midnight dreams of flight and disaster.

(4)



The two passages sufficiently illustrate the primordial nature of Eustacia and the Heath. She is not a model woman, her ambitions are not those that befit a country woman. Thomasin is the model woman. She is a native of the Heath and is destined to marry a farmer. This model woman is at one with her surroundings:

To her they were not, as to Eustacia, demons in the air, and malice in every bush and bough. The drops which lashed her face were not scorpions, but prosy rain; Egdon in the mass was no monster whatever, but impersonal open ground. Her fears of the place were rational, her dislike of its worse moods reasonable. At this time it was in her view a windy, wet place, in which a person might experience much discomfort, lose the path without care, and possibly catch cold.

(282)

Egdon in a way moulds the character of the people and those who reciprocate accordingly will survive, the others are outcasts like Eustacia and Wildeve. Thomasin and Diggory are not dissatisfied with the Heath. They know the secrets and mysteries of the Heath; their aims are modest and their desires do not cross the boundaries of Egdon. Diggory is a **reedleman**, symbolising the diminishing trade of the reedlemen of the old world. Eustacia decides to escape the influence of the Heath with the prospect of her marriage to **Clym** Yeobright. Her discontentment with the marriage emerges because of her unhappiness with the Heath. The dichotomy between her over-vaulting ambitions and the oppression of the Heath becomes too glaring and in the end, Eustacia gives into the power of Nature. In her marriage to Clym, Eustacia envisions a means of fulfilling her dreams.

The dichotomy between nature and culture acquires a visible manifestation in the desires and aspirations of both Clym and Eustacia. Both of them aspire for culture, civilization albeit their differences over the path to achieve it. Clym ventures to educate the people of Egdon Heath despite the known fact that "civilization was its enemy" (4). According to Eustacia, her wishes of attaining culture can be materialized only by escaping the impact of the Heath, because she knows the fact fully well that the Heath is impenetrable for civilization. Her dismissal of Clym's education project is a telling comment on her understanding of the Heath and also the superficial nature of his work: "He is an enthusiast about ideas and careless about outward things". (220) Clym's prolonged stay at Budmouth makes people inquisitive whereupon Clym is compelled to unfurl his future plan of action:

...I have come home; and this is how I mean to carry out my plan. I shall keep a school as near to Egdon as possible, so as to be able to walk over here and have a night school in my mother's house. But I must study a little at first, to get properly qualified.

(135)

Clym's enterprise though idealistic sounds superficial to anyone with some knowledge of rural pragmatics. He seldom gets an opportunity to unfold what exactly he means to **carry** out his mission. The contents of his abstract education scheme remain unknown till the end. Clym's lack of proper understanding of the Heath coupled with his mismatched marriage to Eustacia blur his vision of the future. Clym and Eustacia imagine the wrong

things in each other and try to arrive at a confluence of their ideas. For Eustacia, Clym stands for Paris and its extravagant life style and her view is that she can compel him to return to Paris and resume his old life as an artist. She is completely ignorant of the glossy life of Paris. Clym returns to Egdon not to celebrate a holiday but to emerge out of the frustrations of Paris life and he believes Egdon to be a natural means of salvation and Eustacia Vye a worthy companion, in his mission of civilization. The misguided union of Clym and Eustacia turns out to be disastrous for both of them. In a description of the Heath, Hardy warns the readers of the wild nature of the Heath: "to dwell upon the heath without studying its nature was like wedding a foreigner without learning his tongue." (57) Clym Yeobright has no clear cut social position in Boudmouth and is therefore isolated from other people because, Hardy suggests, he is too far ahead of them. A civilizing project like education always demands contact with the public and not intensive study of some obscure texts. Choosing Eustacia as his companion in the education programme and preferring exile to public life after his wedding are the fatal blunders. The incompatibility of his high intellectual plans with the banal realities of the heath leads to his subsequent failure

Hardy basically shows us two types of characters: the enduring, earthy, self-contained and the rebellious and outgoing as part of the regional existence. The coercion of two ways of life recur in the novels in the introduction of outside elements like Fancy Day, Sergeant Troy, and Wildeve who are forced to live on the heath as opposed to Diggory Venn, Thomasin and Fanny Robin who naturally accept the way of life on the Heath. The region is upheld as an unpolluted space and all other influences are shown as corrupting agents. In these novels there are a series of failures, and they are those who

fall out with the overwhelming influence of Nature. Hardy's region functions as a repository of all moral and ethical values and therefore any outside influence is treated as a corrupting agent. If we examine the female characters, Hardy's division shows up polarities. The strong individualistic central characters are pitted against the sweet unsophisticated damsels of the "province". Bathsheba Everdene of *Far from the Madding Crowd* is projected as too individualistic in her disposition from the beginning. She represents a density in her personality that is unique and is not achieved by Fanny Robin, 'the other' woman in her life. Fanny's simple belief in life and the man she loves ultimately leads to her death. Her vulnerability, her submissive nature, win her the sympathy of the men including Troy. In *The Return of the Native*, Eustacia Vye and Clym Yeobright are set against Thomasin and Diggory Venn to draw us into the complexity of the region. Those who accept the heath and understand its moods can live on it without much trouble. This is true of the sweet, unsophisticated Thomasin and the reedleman Diggory Venn. This rustic character, though he appears to have come from a realm outside nature, is actually very much like Gabriel Oak. He is essentially kind and unselfish, devoted to the woman whom he loves even when there seems to be no hope of getting her and like Thomasin thoroughly well adapted to life on the heath. Nature seems to work on his side, because he understands and knows how to relate to it and like Gabriel, he has his reward at the end of the novel when most of the other characters are either broken or they die. Thomasin is also blessed with the harmony and peace of life because she is neither ambitious nor would want to escape the impact of the Heath. Her simple idea of doing **well--getting** married tallies with the Egdon rate of progress. Thomasin and Diggory are grouped together to reflect the active and passive principles of life that give content to what is called Egdon.

The study of rural England must end with an emphasis of Hardy's achievement and attitude as a novelist. Merryn Williams ascribes Hardy's greatness to his ability to create a perfect make-belief world into a lively geographical region. He writes, "Hardy's greatness lies in the fact that he transformed into literature a whole area of central human experience which had never yet been explored. In one sense, his work was the climax of the realistic tradition of country writing..."(*TH&RE* 199-200) Since Hardy adopted this technique to resurrect his diminishing career, he plays to the tune of his readers. He creates an illusion of Wessex as a real place and attributes to it an air of authenticity. Ian Gregor observes that once Hardy began writing regional novels there was a demand for more of country writing. He remarks that,

*Far from the Madding Crowd* was the novel which Hardy's Victorian public wanted him to write again and again. It was a desire which did nothing to please the author, who felt himself typecast before he had even begun to explore his interests, and in the biography he remarks coldly that he had not the slightest intention of writing forever about sheep-farming as the reading public was apparently expecting him to do...

(Gregor 45)

Though Hardy expresses his dislike for sheep farming, he ends up writing more of sheep farming. This conflicting evidence of Hardy's position as a regional novelist certainly points to the dichotomy in his identity.

Hardy is often treated as a native who returned to his land and successfully represented a nuanced account of regional life to an outside public. Within his writing, his position is complex. He is neither one of the rural population nor is he completely an outsider to the rural setting- But he is an observer and chronicler, often functioning with uncertainty on his actual relation with the rural. Moreover he is not writing for them, but about them to a metropolitan and unconcerned literary public. The effect of making these two points is to turn over attention to the main point, which is Hardy's attempt to describe and value a way of life with which he was closely yet uncertainly connected, and the literary methods which follow from the very nature of such an attempt. What we need to seek out is the figure of the self-conscious observer. The man who is not only looking at the land but who is also conscious that he is doing so, as an experience in itself, and who has prepared social models and analogies from elsewhere to support and justify the experience. This has a long and intricate history. He is there in his context. Without the insights of consciously learned history and of the educated understanding of nature and behaviour he cannot really observe at all at a level of extended human respect. The essential features of Hardy's role as an observer are aptly described by Merryn Williams in his *A Preface to Hardy*:

This double movement, of loss and liberation of exposure and of advantage is the characteristic he shares with his actual rural world.

(207)

The separation of Hardy from the rural world is not only a separation from the standards

of the educated and affluent world '**outside**'. It is also to some degree inevitably, a separation from the people who have not made this journey, or more often a separation which can mask itself as a romantic attachment to a way of life in which the people are merely instrumental: like the figures in a landscape. It is then easy to observe for the benefit of others the crudity and limitations but also the picturesqueness, the rough humour, the innocence of the rustics.<sup>5</sup>

The complexity of Hardy's fiction shows itself in nothing more than this: that he runs the whole gamut from an external observation of customs and quaintness, modulated by a distinctly patronizing attitude, to a much more impressive but a difficult perception of limitations. These conflicts cannot be resolved by nostalgia, charm, or the simple mystification of nature, but this has to be experienced by all the characters in real life to which all belong. It is with this complex pressure in mind that we must look at the country, which Hardy describes. He can respond so closely to the context because his own mobility was in a mobile and changing society. Though apparently Hardy desires a change and transition in the lives of rural people, what Hardy romanticizes and wishes to preserve is definitely a primordial setting and not its metamorphosis as much.

In an age which has at last begun to think seriously about the alienation of nature and its consequences, Hardy comes across as someone who wanted to protect and preserve it. Hardy's status as a scholar professional with an '**elevated sensibility**' that distinguished him from the ordinary rural population and which was responsible for the complexities in his personality can be best captured in the words of Merryn Williams:

Complex they are bound to be because it was a complex situation and because Hardy was too intelligent and too close to the problem to come up with slogans for answers. He could not say, 'Back to the land!' like Haggard, because he was too well aware of the harm done by centuries of near-feudal tyranny, but at the same time it hurt him to see what was provincial and village culture decline.

(PH199)

Hardy did not propagate a retreat into the old world for **rmore** than one reason: primarily, Hardy took up regional writing as a technique of writing and as a space for aesthetic expression and not so much as an agent of serious instrumental change. Secondly, Hardy was well aware of the transition of an agrarian society into an industrial one though the process was slow. In the nineteenth century the metamorphosis had already settled in and people were beginning to grapple with the change rather than go for a nostalgic struggle to retrieve the past. And hence Hardy could not give a call to go back to the land. In his writings there is an attempt to preserve what is declining in a world characterized by conflicting interests. The tension between the old rural life and new urban life is clearly shown in these novels. Apart from the financial obligations that drove him to become a novelist, his commitment to the subject of his writing seems to have been genuine, since his own mind was the site of this struggle and conflict.



## *Notes*

<sup>1</sup>. Ideas taken from Merryn Williams' *Thomas Hardy and Rural England* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1974).

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Ideas gathered from Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City* ( St.Albans:Paladin, 1975).

<sup>4</sup> See Norman Page, *Thomas Hardy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977).

<sup>5</sup> See Merryn Williams, *A Preface to Hardy* (London: Longman, 1976).

## *Dirty Regions*

The previous chapter discusses Thomas Hardy's novels under the category of the regional novel. Hardy's novels basically celebrate the rural landscape even while they depict its complexity. This glorification of rural life may be seen as a continuation of the romantic tradition heralded by Wordsworth in poetry. Idealization of the region denies the possibility of understanding the region in its entirety and complexity. That happened in the case of Wordsworth's poetry and Hardy's novels. The rural region there is viewed from stock-perspectives like an "inspiring" and "strength-giving" presence and not as an ordinary setting with its own imperfections. This however does not mean that the idealized is a false construct. What is important is that there is more to the rural than the idealized image. In this chapter, I shall focus on the diverse facets of the ruralistic region talked about in the Indian novels taken up for study.

The objective of this chapter is to discuss the historical context of the emergence of a literary genre, which reflected the growing identity awareness, and consciousness of the 'regional' in Indian literatures. The chapter sets out to look into the development of the regional novel in Indian literature. It takes one novel each from Hindi (*Maila Ainal* 1954) Bengali (*Ganadevata* 1943) and Kannada (*Kanooru Subbamma Heggaditi* 1936) literatures and makes an attempt to examine the contexts in which the regional novel in India took its origin. It also looks into the cultural milieu, which facilitated the origin of the category called the regional novel in India. It is surprising to note that though novels based on regions like villages, rivers, tribes and communities existed as early as the

1920s, critical debates on the same in Indian literatures took place only after Phaneswarnath Renu's publication of *Maila Ancal* in 1954. Since then, various types of regional novels have emerged, and these have achieved a great deal of critical attention.

## EMERGENCE OF THE REGIONAL NOVEL IN INDIA

The histories of Indian literature provide us with the definition and scope of the regional novels in India as novels that are associated with the life of a people living in an enclosed space. For instance, novels that record the life and customs of a remote village on the borders of Rajasthan or the life of the tribes of Assam are treated as regional novels. The Gujarati writers Pannalal, Madia and Meghana are acknowledged as authors who have evoked village life with a great sense of authenticity. Subsequently, novels were written with similar themes in Oriya, Bengali, Assamese and other Indian literatures. Kalindi Charan Panigrahi's *Matir Manasa* (1930) was the first Oriya regional novel. It portrayed the story of a peasant family living in the village, Padanapara. The writer acknowledges that his selection of this region was not a conscious one. He noted that he had taken it as a representative village of Orissa. In **Kannada**, Kuvempu's *Kanooru Subbamma Heggaditi* deals with the life of the people of **malnad** region. In 1939, in Bengali literature, *Padmanadir Majhi* was published. It portrayed the life of fishermen living on the Padma. It problematized the issues and motivations of their lives. There, Manek Banerji makes an exclusive use of dialect to evoke the nuances of community life. Similarly Assamese novels provide a nuanced account of the community life of the tribes.<sup>1</sup>

The early regional novels give us the impression that the region has been rendered as a space to establish the authentic life of a particular community, sometimes purely as an object of curiosity to outsiders. Gradually it shapes itself into a category that deals with issues much more complex than the mere portrayal of the rural landscape and life as decorative pieces. For instance, novels like *Ganadevata* by Tarashankar Banerjee, *Kanuru Subbamma Heggaditi* by Kuvempu, and much later *Maila Ancal* by Renu deal with the complexities of regional life. They record the impact of the outside world on the regional life, because of which the region loses its characteristic features and emerges from its earlier "innocent" self into a complex entity showing tendencies of strife and disintegration.

For an understanding of the Indian literary scene during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> C we need to have insights into the literary movements in these parts of the country around that time. The main trends in Indian literature in those days have been in the direction of social realism. Progressive writers felt that in spite of radical changes in Indian society, literature was slow at reflecting them. To materialise some of their ideas the Progressive Writers Association was founded in London in 1935. According to them, literature beset with escapism ignored the hard facts of life. Their manifesto ended with the following resolution: "All that drags us down to passivity inaction and unreason, we reject as reactionary. All that arouses critical spirit, examines institutions and customs in the light of reason, and helps us to act to organize ourselves to transform the society we accept as progressive." (qtd. in Pandey 3) Sumitra Nandan Pant writes in "**Rupabh**", endorsing the objectives of the manifesto: "in this age, the realities of life have assumed such an aggressive form that the roots of our feelings and faiths established in the old

beliefs have been shaken. Therefore the poetry of this age cannot be reared in dreams. Its roots, in order to draw its nourishment will have to dig the hard land". (4) These circumstances and awareness had led to a realistic trend in regional writing. Gandhi, while addressing a Hindi Writers Conference in 1935<sup>3</sup> appealed to the writers to go back to villages. As if in support of Gandhi's call, Bharatendu Chaturvedi in his "**Vishal Bharat**" drew the attention of writers to the regional cultures and dialects of the Hindi area and thus introduced a literary movement which is known as Janapadiya Andolan.<sup>4</sup>

The growth of the Progressive Writers Association in north India received further support from the already existing movement of Kallol in Bengal. The Kallol came into existence in 1923 with a manifesto protesting against the sublimated, de-personalised image of man so conveniently presented by Rabindranath Tagore. From the middle of the twentieth century, there was a revolt against middle-class values. One reason for this revolt was that it was no longer possible for the average bourgeoisie Bengali to find refuge in the aestheticism of Tagore or in the sentimental realism of Sarath. A sense of change and restlessness was sweeping the entire country, bringing with it disruption of traditional life patterns. In Bengali literature, this is known as the period of de-Tagorisation.<sup>5</sup> As a consequence, there flourished a trend against the transcendental universal and de-localised characters created by Tagore. It is interesting to know that Kalloleans looked back even to a relatively remote past as they clung to the programme of the Russian Decemberist Movement.<sup>6</sup>

The political atmosphere of Bengal did not seem to have affected the young

writers much. They seemed to revolutionize literature, not the set up. But their spirit of revolt was roused due to the unrest in the very air they breathed. A careful scrutiny of the journals of the period like *Bharati*, *Sabuj*, *Patra*, *Manasi* including *Kallol* show that the literature of the period actively reflected unrest prevailing in society. Among the writers of that period Charuchandra Banerjee, Premankur Atarhi, Manindralal Basu and Hemendra Kumar Roy came to write with deep insight about society.<sup>7</sup>

Descriptions of rude reality and romantic pessimism seem to have been the keynote of the stories, novels, and poems published in *Kallol* in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup>C. Tarashankar Banerjee refers to this period with great sympathy and understanding:

The critics say that the trend of the Literature of the time echoed and imitated the literary trends of Europe of the same period. The critics are not wrong. Such inventiveness was underlying there but what was more true was that discontent and unrest haunted the writers. Mass movement had failed twice in 1921 and 1930. We were greatly assured by the promise of non-violence offering to work as a synthesis between spirit and reality. That promise was broken. The whole world had undergone a political and economic upheaval as a result of World War-I. Our life in general was full of unrest and discontent. Literature's objective was not of reflecting a longing for synthesis but for revolt. This was the main objective reality. So the literary trend of the young started with the theme of impatience and unrest.

(qtd. in Mahashweta Devi 19)

The general political and economic upheaval prevalent in the world has had a lasting impression on the writers of the period. Progressive writers who were fully involved in the politics of the Communist Party in the forties before the attainment of independence had lost much of their support from popular movements. They tried to regain lost ground and popularity by championing the cause of the poor and the ignorant people of the villages and party workers.

The literary scene in Kannada also seems to have been inclined towards realistic representation of life in literature during this period. G.S. Amur notes that the age of realism produced works of such lasting value as Masti's *Subbamma*, Kuvempu's *Kanooru Subbamma Heggaditi*, Sivarama Karanth's *Marali Mannige*, A.N. Krishna Rao's *Sandhyaraga* and Niranjana's *Vimochana*. He is of the opinion that, what is noteworthy is that by 1940s the important trends of Navodaya fiction were cleared and the third decade of the century was rich both in fruitful experimentation and significant achievement.<sup>9</sup> The novel *Kanuru Subbamma Heggaditi* is undoubtedly a product of the age of realism. It appeared in 1938. The 'malnad' (the hilly region with plenty of rain) region comes to life in these pages. The life of Man and Nature are splendidly interwoven in the novel. It abounds with descriptions of interiors and the quotidian routine of village life. But reading it after a gap of about a century, with the advantage of hindsight, we see this text as a potential site for discussing crucial issues about language, culture and the representation of the region itself.

Such was the literary scene in these regions of India around the 1930s. After the

foundation of PWA, Pragatiwad has been the main trend in literature written in north Indian languages in general and in Hindi in particular.

After *Maila Ancal*, a series of novels under the category "regional novel" began to come into the market. As a result, there is ambivalence regarding the exact definition, scope and structure of a regional novel among critics. Most of these debates have taken place in Hindi literature, owing to the fact that Renu is a Hindi novelist. Here I give the details of a few controversial discussions that took place among Hindi critics regarding the definition of the regional novel. Devraj Upadhyay gives a description of the regional novel in the following words: "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." (27) Rajendra Awasthi another critic of repute, endorses Upadhyaya's statement, in *Sarika* of Oct 1961: "the truth is that their region can be a village, a big city or even a mohalla of a city far away from all these, the well-wooded valleys". But two years later Awasthi expresses a different opinion in the "**Gandhadip**" of 1963: "The various regions (ancal) are the only symbols of our country. The cities have never influenced our culture, and on the basis of cities, a vast current of culture, could never be formed. Cities can be the centers of artificial cultures, but the real culture is not born there. Therefore the regional novels (against rural background) are our cultural achievements."



Maybe because of this confused thinking, Viswambharnath Manav traces the development of regional novels in Hindi to the Janapadiya Andolan. The writers of that tradition filled their writings with local colour. They refuse to consider urban regionalism as "regionalism". In this context it would be apt to recall Mahashweta Devi's comments on Bengali literature. She says, "strangely enough, almost all the notable Bengali novels are based on rural themes. Even the modern writers try their hand at the rural theme when they try to write something major. Perhaps our mind is still rooted in the villages." (Mahashweta 64) This is broadly the background, in which the genre called the regional novel took its origin. The debate continues whether a "region" actually represents a city or a village. Nevertheless, debates on region cannot be contained within the construct of a rural/urban divide. A closer analysis of representations of the region in texts may open up avenues for further discussion.

An attempt is made to analyse the nature of literary representations and the emerging consciousness of the region in the selected regional novels. The anxiety is to project the disruptive forces of the region as against the much-celebrated portrayal of the classical innocence of regional life. *Ganadevata*, *House of Kanooru*, and *Maila Ancal* share the common historiographical ambition of turning a narrative of rural community into a larger narrative of the rise and fall of a people. These novels present the history of the village against the history of the **country**. This brings home the truth that a village is very much the constituent part of the country and that the slow death of the village is bound to retard the general progress of the country as a whole.

The selection of these novels is guided by the evocative presentation of the region in these novels. Tarashankar **Banerjee's** *Ganadevata* is selected as an outstanding example of the treatment of rural theme in **fiction**. The plot deals with the decaying of feudal values in the wake of industrialization and modernity. Tarashankar presents a village society trying to grapple with the overwhelming changes of industrialization. In Mahashweta Devi's words, "for him, country is not something abstract, country is soil, people, cultivation, taxation, revenue, agriculture, loan, canal tax, crop failure, famine, flood and back-breaking labour by the landless field labourers." (Mahashweta 65) These words stand valid for all the three novels. On comparing this with Kuvempu's Kannada novel, *The House of Kanooru*, we can observe the general similarities in the realistic approach of these writers and the use of folk elements to achieve their end. *The House of Kanooru* was published in 1938 written by a non-Brahmin writer who advocated and believed in building up a **non-Brahminical** value system as a cure for the social evils besetting Hinduism. The novel while trying to preserve the value system of Vokkaliga life in **malnad**, also portends the rebellion against these very feudal values occasioned by modernity. I take up Phaneshwarnath **Renu's** *Maila Ancal* also for study, for obvious reasons. It is a trendsetter and it is in fact a book, which shaped the whole genre of the regional novel in Hindi literature and Indian literature by extension. Renu's response to the modernist phase comes in the form of giving a new impetus to the regional space, which is otherwise neglected. His novel seems to have emerged from the chaos of rural north India, which was sidelined as a result of the post-independent political manipulations.

These three novels provide us with an opportunity to study the pre-independent nationalistic prose, which sets out to break the celebration of rural landscape in literature. Though all the three novels under study are written at different times in different parts of the country, all of them share some ideological presuppositions of the regional novels that were to come up in the different literatures of India in subsequent decades. An attempt is made here to examine the heterogeneity as well as certain common concerns of these authors. Let us see how each of these novels refers to, or describes, or reflects the region.

It is significant that the three novels that I study in this chapter see the disintegration of the region as central to their narration. While they were written between the 1920s and the 1950s, their authors locate the story around the time of India's freedom movement. These novels capture the region as a space undergoing rapid transformation. In fact the recurrence of issues relating to the general upheaval of feudal authority, and peasant uprisings as a result of the atmosphere of rebellion that prevailed at the national level, make it imperative to study these novels together. The impact of modernity, and the refashioning of the self and the region are some of the questions that we may consider.

## LAND ISSUES

Phaneswarnath Renu's novel *Maila Ancal* unveils the saga of the people of Purnea district in Bihar. It unfurls the stories of Maryganj, and the river Kamala along with the

story of its people. Renu's Maryganj is not a real village but an accumulation of human backwardness, ignorance, power-struggles, religious and social perversity, corruption and selfishness. Renu makes his Maryganj a representative of the backward rural life of India. He portrays a village in a microcosm with the general features of North Indian villages. His emphasis lies in the backwardness and the pulsating turbulences of the region.

In the introduction to the first edition of this novel, *Maila Ancal* Renu makes an important statement. He says, "here is a 'maila ancal' (i.e. the soiled end of a sari or shawl or dirty region or both), ek ancalik upanyas. The place is Purnea, a district in Bihar state: on one side is Nepal, on the other Pakistan and West Bengal. If we draw the boundary lines of Santhal Paragana in the south and of Mithila in the West, we complete its boundaries. I have selected one village from one of its parts as a symbol of a backward village ~ as a locale for the novel". He continues, "in this place there are flowers and thorns, dust and (sacred) red powder, mud and sandalwood paste, beauty and ugliness - I have not been able to come out of it untouched." His emphasis however remains on rural backwardness.

The novel portrays the pandemonium prevailing in the national scene in a microcosm in Marygunj. The village is treated as the basic unit of society within which everyone knows everyone else. Their ideal of a village lies only in their imagination; what gets unveiled in the text is the actual village scenario, with its depressing poverty, squalor, disease and superstition. It is his nationalistic spirit, which makes Renu turn to the region while all the time the idea of the nation is implicit. In this novel Renu is

"decoding the lives of villagers from where, in the words of a social thinker Ramashray Rai, the *holy* had departed." (Murthy, Sharma and Nagaraj 62)

Land issues and caste wars are the significant markers in the consciousness of the region. It is highlighted in the battles between the santhals and the villagers in the novel. The rural backwardness lays the foundation for feudal authority and subsequent peasant rebellions. The region is the citadel of power and feudal authority whereupon the lower castes and the others are pushed into the fringes of society. It is through the process of education that the awareness of individual rights and responsibilities comes to the people. Some of the Congress and Communist party workers are agential in bringing about this spirit of rebellion. It is against a background of major political parties indulging in power politics along with the local Zamindars that the landless peasants are shown as submissive and ignorant. Renu explains the situation, in an interview to *Dinman* in 1975,

The story of the Purnea region is the story of the landless peasantry. So many rich landowners in Purnea have two aeroplanes. These land-owners form the second class; landowners of the first class are misers. They do not buy aeroplanes; they buy far too much land. They are not kisans (farmer-land-owner), but they are better off than any Zamindar. There are Zamindars who own only 50 bighas (about 35 acres) and there are also Zamindars who own only 3 acres. They are not praja (the subjects). So on the one side there is the large group of landless peasantry and on the other there are the farm owners. Formerly there had been some faith in the distribution of land by the other parties — the left or right for all of them

the farm-owners are the Karnas (great donors). They gave money to all parties, even to the Muslim League when it demanded Pakistan. The donations were fixed for each party. When Jai Prakash Babu was on tour the farm-owners chartered a special railway train for his visit to the district... Then it occurred to one that, if they promised land reform to the peasants, how could they snatch away land from the big farm-owners?

The Congress and the Communist party bosses neglect the honest workers, while the wealthy merchants and Zamindars take control over these parties. Renu expresses his anguish at the failure of land reforms and the lack of sincerity in those who wanted to implement them. This very situation is represented in the novel. Renu implies that, in spite of the abolition of the Zamindari system in 1947, the land problem of the landless peasants is not solved; on the contrary, it becomes more complicated and difficult.

The law says that land belongs to a farmer who has worked on it for three consecutive years; nobody can evacuate him. This was fixed by the Tenancy Act passed in 1937 by the Congress government. As **Sitaramayya** records: "A Tenancy act was passed providing for the reduction of all rents to the level of 1911; all existing arrears were substantially reduced. The existing summary and exclusive collection of rent by the landlords was greatly curtailed. A tenant could not be ejected for non-payment of rent or for any other reason except rendering the land unfit for cultivation. An Agricultural Debt Relief Act was passed which fixed 9% as the maximum interest payable on debts." (699) This Tenancy Act permitted many peasants to acquire property rights over the land on which they were working; many tenants however were ejected by the landlords before

they could legalise their claims. In fact, many peasants applied to legalise their claims, according to section 40 of the Zamindari Abolition Act, but on account of legal **loop-**holes, the fraudulent methods adopted by the landlords, and of corruption in the courts, **many** applications were rejected. In the novel, the revenue collector, Babu Biswanath Prasad resigns his post when he finds that he would earn a bad name by depriving the peasants of the land on which they had been working without any personal gain. He has already reaped the benefits of his position as revenue collector and possesses several hundreds of acres of land. Now he is worried how to retain all his land because all his tenants most of whom are santhals, claim legal rights over some of it.

Corrupt officials join hands with the landlords and debilitate the farmers in such a way that they fail to make any legal claims over the land. There is only one way out for the evicted tenants: to fight for their land. Many peasants fall prey to people like Harigauri Singh and Babu Biswanath Prasad paying their money (raised by selling their cattle) to buy land. The land on which the santhals have been working is taken away by Harigauri Singh although not in his name. Babu Biswanath Prasad appeals to the villagers and maneuvers them in view of an attack by the Santhals. The gullible villagers do not understand the stakes and become indignant with the Santhals. For the Santhals there is no option but to fight for the land on which they work. Even progressive people like Baladevaji and **Kalicaran** have been prepared to oppose the Santhals. The narrator thus prepares a dramatic climax, where a battle takes place between the village people and the Santhals. The novel emphasizes the unity of the landless peasants against the forces of the shrewd and dishonest Zamindars, their agents and the big farm owners.

The novel suggests that even after the abolition of the Zamindari nothing much has changed. The narrator while contemplating the situation of the villagers recollects Biswanath Prasad's words, "the day when people start treating the rich Zamindars, merchants, mill owners as crazy and rotten persons, that day will come Swarajya. You say that such time will come. And when it does then my wealth will be naturally taken away. But now there is no restriction to my amassing wealth." (294) The landless peasants continue to endure hardships. The chaotic conditions prevailing in Maryganj constitute the main motif dramatised in this novel. How the poor people of the village and the santhals have been involved in fighting each other by Babu Biswanath Prasad for his advantage is a good example of the attitude of the rich towards the poor. The novel emphasises the unity of the landless peasants against the forces of the shrewd and dishonest Zamindars, their agents, and the big farm-owners. The expected reform does not take place. In the story of Maryganj a solid group of landless peasantry struggles against the Zamindars and the big farm owners without any success. Not only that, these reform measures create even better chances for the already privileged people and thus cause further deterioration of landless peasantry.

No political party helps the landless peasants to win back land from the Zamindars. Whatever little political awareness is introduced, in the backward village of Maryganj, is made possible by the Congress and Socialist parties and by outsiders such as Baladevaji, Baba Bhavandas and Mangaladevi. But their efforts are annulled by their stupidity and religious influences and the sexual cravings, dishonesty and opportunism of the Zamindars of the village. However, the narrator has not credited the Socialist party



with any better performance. Baba Bhavaandas diagnoses the organizational ailment found in both the Congress and the Socialist parties. In an interview given to Dinman, Renu categorically declares,

No party has the courage to fight in the elections by taking up the question of land. Nor do the peasants and the landless tillers of their soil have any faith in any of their programmes.

(25)

No political party does anything for the peasants. The communists who could have done something fail to implement their ideas. The socialist leaders and their followers do not have a clear concept of the historical process of development, and hence have a confused socialist perspective. Youthful exuberance and enthusiasm for a better future through socialistic methods becomes bogged down in the exigencies of the times, and the problems of funds and organization become predominant, consuming all the revolutionary zeal and fervour.

If individuals and political parties fail to effect any change in the situation of Maryganj, *The House of Kanooru* shows slow yet sure signs of change in the powerful network of the region. There is no direct intervention of any political movement in the community life. Only towards the end of the novel, we become aware of the changes that occur with the influence of the freedom movement and modernity. It delineates the disintegration of a feudal order of living with the emergent notions of nationalism and democracy. The fall of the system is orchestrated with the help of external elements as

much as due to the faults that lie within the system. In chronicling the history of '**malnad**', **Kuvempu** presents the images of the region in two units, firstly, in the presentation of the feudal relations in private and public life of the house of **Kanooru**, secondly, in the ignorance and superstitious beliefs of the people.

Chandrayya Gowda, who is the head of the village stands as a symbol of feudal power and authority. The familial ties in the house dictate the **functioning** of other relations in the region. This particular family evolves as a major unit representing the '**malnad**' region. Witchcraft and magic and caste considerations rule supreme and the Zamindari system perpetually impoverishes and dehumanizes the people. On account of Chandrayya Gowda's clever manipulation, the village and the land property of the house remain under his control for a long time. He dispenses off his duties through agents like Rangappa Shetty and other tenants like Annayya Gowda and Thimmayya. He is the only true lord of the land as his family had been ruling that part of the country since times immemorial. If in one case it is people like Annayya Gowda who is denied money for getting married for a fourth time, it is Subbamma, his third wife, who is exploited at another instance. The description of the typical '**malnad**' region gives us an idea of its life and the power relations therein. Girish **Karnad** in his "Introduction" to the novel captures the essence of the community life as,

A village literally meant an isolated manor occupied by the large family of the landlord (usually a vokkaliga by caste) and his innumerable dependents and surrounded by hutments of his serfs. During the monsoons, the village would be marooned amidst unfordable streams while communication of

any kind with the world is reduced to a minimum. Death and disease were constant companions throughout the year. Even the educated were only literate enough to keep accounts. Daily life was shot through with the fear of spirits and withcraft; lending itself to easy exploitation by the priests. Women and children are entirely dependent on patriarchal protection and therefore vulnerable to abuse and violence.

("Introducton"to H K vi)

The rigidity of the region in terms of its geographical as well as cultural composition is expressed succinctly in the above passage. "Region" is depicted as a space that stands for feudal authority, ignorance and as something far from civilization. The insurmountable network of power and authority operate at all levels in this society: in the private sphere as well as in the public. Kuvempu has tried to dramatize local issues. Chandrayya Gowda has complete control over the family as well as the village. The women and children are affected by patriarchy. Men decide women obey. Though the novel is named after Subbamma, the third wife of Chandrayya Gowda, it is the Gowda himself who wields the cudgel. When a house like that of Kanooru collapses, it signifies the forthcoming opposition to the authority of Chandrayya Gowda. The disintegration of the house of Kanooru is suggestive of the disintegration of the existing structures of the region. In all this, the feudal lord's power is under radical questioning.

It is in this situation that the peasants are shown as submissive, neglecting to seek any proper redress, in spite of the rightful claims they might have made. In the story of

*The House of Kanooru*, the land issue is not explicit as it is in *Maila Ancal* or in *Ganadevata*. The conflict for land does not arise from outside, it comes from someone within the family. The claim for land is necessitated more as a matter of ideological difference than as a consequence of existential predicament. In the novel, we find only Hoovayya making his claim over land from his uncle, Chandrayya Gowda. Other than this incident, there is no other instance of open rebellion from the tenants. Yet land issue is crucial in one sense, the division of land property is symbolic of the dilapidated state of the old structure. It is an indication of the clash between two sets of values as a result of the introduction of modern education. Hoovayya is agential in bringing about this change. His introduction into the novel comes as an external source. His observation of the 'malnad' community does not evolve as an insider's perspective. He alone expresses his sense of dissension, though Ramayya his cousin, who is equally educated, abides by the forces of feudal authority.

This part of social reality is presented very carefully and a convincing picture of rural decadence is achieved in another novel of the pre-independence era, *Ganadevata* by Tarashankar Banerjee. With rare understanding and sympathy, Tarashankar depicts the history of slow economic bankruptcy forcing the peasants to utter degradation in the novel. *Ganadevata* speaks of **Tarashankar's** own times. He uses such a big canvas of the country and the people, the past and the present, that the novel stretches beyond the bounds of contemporary and becomes a representative of a whole country and an entire people. An entire people and society are the protagonists in the novel. The important characters are of the same economic order. The poor, the suffering, the landless, the exploited are the central characters and the major events revolve around them. It goes

beyond the **superficial** portrayal of village life which ultimately breaks down the corrosive reality of the post-colonial nation-state. **Tarashankar's** novel is much more realistic than Renu's and it recognises the Birbhum village of Shivpur as undergoing inevitable changes that are part of a larger historical movement that brings the poor peasants out of feudal relations to a freer cash nexus economy where they can sell their labour.

Both the novels *Ganadevata* and *Maila Ancal* initiate a discussion on the issues related to land and the subsequent rebellion after suppression of the lower castes and tribals by the upper-caste Zamindars. With the onset of independence to the country, the awareness of democratically just rights was gaining ground among all sections of the population. In this case it is not the peasants but the working classes who declare their protest against the feudal powers of the village.

The novel *Ganadevata* opens with the trial of two peasants who go out of the boundaries of village authority. Aniruddha, the blacksmith and Girish are being called for a trial for their defiance of the authority of the Panchayat. Aniruddha **refuses** to work for the villagers as they can no longer give him enough paddy to suffice his needs and according to the old system, the blacksmith, the barber, and the carpenter get paddy in lieu of their service to the villagers. Aniruddha wants to work and earn elsewhere. When chastised by the village society, he refuses to abide by the dictates of a body which can oppress only the poor and dare say nothing against Srihari Pal the wealthiest villager. The intense drive to disentangle from the feudal bonds to a freer and flexible society **is** evident through and through. Aniruddha and Girish proclaim the first war against the

system. They **refuse** to adhere slavishly to the Zamindars and opt for a system that allows not just personal freedom but also social. They refuse to work for the village in the conventional manner and demand wages for their services. As they are not satisfied with the existing mode of the village system, they prefer to work in the industry in the city. An excerpt from the text reveals the sense of rebellion:

"**Patu**, your honour", Satish said, "refused to come.

He says he's going to leave the village."

"Leave the village! Why? What's he so angry about!"

"Patu knows. He says, he's going to the market town across the river. He says he can make a living wherever he can work!"

"But he gets a share from the trust lands!"

"He'll give it up, Mahashay. He says its not enough!" Satish was emphatic.

(Banerjee 40)

This incident is symptomatic of the other disintegrating events in the novel. There is an atmosphere of rebellion all over. Every individual seems to be contributing towards the decay of feudalism in his own way. All efforts to restore the collapsing old world, fail. The village society crumbles down within a short period. The cult of individuality is elaborated further with the declaration of Ganadevata, the space meant for delivering judgement, as belonging to the public. The ultimate dream of power to people is envisioned in this novel.

**Tarashankar's** concern with retaining the unity of the village is evident at each point of the novel. But the forces of destruction are so powerful that even progressive thinkers of the village remain silent spectators. On one side, there is the revolt from people of the working classes like Aniruddha, Girish and Patu as a result of the presence of the industry. They prefer to work in industries since it does not leave them at the mercy of feudal authority. It promises wages, and along with it a certain amount of freedom from the highhandedness of the Zamindars and landed gentry like Srihari Pal. Srihari wants to suppress any opposition through the use of his power. Therefore his men set fire to the houses of the Bayers and Bauris, because they question his authority. Patu refuses to supply skin for footwear and demands payment for his work. As a consequence his whole community becomes victim to **Srihari's** wrath. The text records it thus,

Srihari had not intended to burn down the whole neighbourhood but he did not particularly mind when it happened. Low-caste people are best kept in their places by occasional calamities. They had been getting very **uppish**,

(45)

What Srihari Pal considers 'uppish' is the working classes' attempt to raise their voice for their right to lead a decent life. However Srihari Pal's power and authority can sustain only as long as the lower-caste people are kept in their place.

## IMPACT OF MODERNITY AND THE VISION OF A NEW WORLD

In all the three novels, change occurs at a strategic point in the lives of the rural people. The chaotic conditions prevailing at the national scene are reflected in the rural life too. The movement for freedom struggle is a great source of inspiration for other local rebellions such as the ones we come across in the novels. Maybe because of this reason there is an air of rebellion in all the Indian novels of this period. Yet another significant contribution of the freedom movement comes from the social reform movements. In the novels, we see the western educated intellectuals who begin to question the traditional patterns of life with the awareness of a newfound rational thinking and scientific temper.

The region beset with ignorance and backwardness encounters the forces of modernity. An engagement with the modernist project of secularism and rationality is evident in all the three novels. What is made evident in these novels is how modernity is the medium through which a new world order with a liberal spirit is imagined. Fashioning of notions of self and community go alongside notions of the individual as someone who through education can create himself and his community. In their dreams, instead of a putrefied region, the idea of a "rationally pursued Utopia"<sup>10</sup> exists.

Any idea of change has to be understood in terms of modernity within the historical and cultural contexts of its rendition. The late 19<sup>th</sup> C is seen as the period of the emergence of nationalism and the imagination of a national community. The monolithic



structure of the region, which is a repository of power, authority, and superstition, is questioned with the introduction of a new way of thought and life. While studying the novels *Maila Ancal*, *The House of Kanooru* and *Ganadevata* we need to study some of these relevant issues.

The novels depict a considerably despicable situation and into this situation, the authors introduce outsiders who eventually help in bringing about a change in the dogmatic situation. The traditional patterns of life in the village society are brought under question with the advent of higher education and awareness. The educated young men in the process of locating themselves in the village society encounter a series of problems arising from the deeply entrenched feudal attitudes of the village society and also owing to the ignorance and superstitious practices of the villagers. Renu introduces an agent of modernity in the role of Dr. Prasanth. He has a dual role to play: as a medical doctor he has to cure the disease and ill health of the villagers and as a reformer he has to instil awareness among them about better ways of living based on scientific thinking. Kuvempu introduces Hoovayya, one who is an insider to his community, to symbolize the spirit of rebellion. Dr. Prasanth and Hoovayya realise that in order to cleanse the system of these evils they have to work with the masses from the base. Hence, their first target is an attack on the superstitious practices.

Dr. Prasant selects the place for his research work in a village in Purnea instead of availing himself of his fellowship for further studies abroad. He arrives in Maryganj to take charge of the Malaria station for research and to attend upon out door patients. The Central Government Press handout declares, "the station will investigate malaria and kala

azar in all their aspects — preventive, curative and economic." Dr. Prasanth receives a mixed reception as some persons such as Jotkhiji, the orthodox brahman and the astrologer, oppose the western medical system and medicines, while others welcome him.

People of Maryganj as represented in *Maila Ancal* suffer from superstition and ignorance. The character of Jotkhiji, the prophet of doom who is never tired of prophesying utter destruction, tells **Hiru** of Poliya Tola after the sad death of his son that he was killed by the magic of the grand mother of Ganes. **Khalasji** who often visits **Tatma** Tola in order to marry Phulia, also indulges in similar activities. He invokes certain gods and goddesses and becomes possessed by them. He is said to be capable of bringing evil spirits and ghosts under control. He can assure children to barren women through his magic. He is known as a real **Ojha**, a wizard. He claims that he can cure syphilis just with just three pills. With regard to the evil days of the village, he diagnoses that, it is haunted by Banarbutta, the spirit of a dead monkey. People immediately jump to the conclusion that the doctor is the main culprit in the killing of monkeys for his experiments. Thereupon **Khalasiji** assures the villagers that, they will not be harmed by the Banarbutta, as he has immunised the area against evil influences by putting a magic cordon around the Tola.

Common superstitious practices are frequently referred to in the novel, *The House of Kanooru* too such as observance of fast and tying of amulets for recuperation from ill health, and sacrifice of animals for the well-being of the village and belief in ghosts and witchcraft. **Kuvempu** introduces this element through the character of the Joisa whose faith in magical powers is rejected by Hoovayya. The rejection of these common

practices is not so easily done. It costs Hoovayya his own life to inject rational thinking and democratic ways into the life of the community. The Joisa has a high opinion of himself on account of being a Brahman possessing pseudo knowledge about astrology and of the art of horoscope reading and carrying out his business in an impressive manner. He is on the defense when he knows that Hoovayya has the knowledge to question his authority over Hindu scriptures and the very basis of the concepts that he so strongly believes in:

'It's not that easy Chandrayya. You don't know how great scholars have struggled to interpret them. There has been no single interpretation they have all agreed on. How can these Shudra children hope to make sense of them? Getting to read them will only lead to their ruination. That's all!'

(Kuvempu 52)

If the mask around the scriptures is unraveled, there is a threat to **Joisa's** livelihood. His welfare lies in keeping the masses in the dark. Therefore he attributes all this doom to modern education. He further advises Chandrayya Gowda,

Present-day education is a curse for the young ones. It erases all thoughts of God and piety. They pick up all sorts of bad habits besides. Look, if you want your house and your property to stay intact, put an end to their education, get them married and set them to work.

(52)

The 'bad habits' also include interpretation of the scriptures by a non-Brahmin.

We find an interesting and important incident in the novel relating to the belief of sacrifice of a goat which is a major victory for Hoovayya's humanism and rational thinking. At the same time it isolates him from the rest of the community. The entire village pledges a goat to offer as sacrifice to the ghost. As the narrator notes, "the pledge for spirits was an event of great excitement in Kanooru. It was customary for Chandrayya Gowda's servants, tenants, and close relatives to participate in it. Many roosters and a few sheep would be sacrificed to Bhootha, Rana, Beterana, Chowdi, Panjurli and such other spirit-gods..."(181) Hoovayya refuses to hand over the goat **Balindra**. The rumour spreads immediately that the goat is possessed and that it works under the magical powers of Hoovayya.

The spirit of the house of Kanooru had entered the goat Balindra as a result of the knowledge that Hoovayya possessed about spells and was working under his control.

(388)

According to the faith of the people, the destined consequence of such an act is that someone in the community will suffer the wrath of the spirits. Since Hoovayya is from the house of Kanooru, the house has to suffer. When the consequences are not as drastic as expected the people of the village attribute it to the witchcraft of Hoovayya. They suspect him of indulging in black magic. It is quite possible that someone might get affected due to some other reason, but people would love to believe it as a repercussion of

the daring act. **Hoovayya's** mother **Nagamma** believes that her health deteriorates only because her son refused to offer Balindra to Bhootaraya.

In both the novels, redemption from such superstitious practices is suggested through the introduction of education and **rational** thinking. Hoovayya in *The House of Kanooru* and Dr. Prasant in *Mai la Ancal* are introduced into the main narrative to suggest an alternative way of life to an otherwise ignorant society. Against this backdrop of history, both Dr. Prasant and Hoovayya are considered communists whose romantic idealism comes from the Marxist concept of history, which inevitably moves towards a progressive change of social reality. Characters like Dr. Prasant or Hoovayya are not typical of the social reality in Indian life in which young men after getting good education do not prefer to stay in villages which offer them no chances of good employment and better prospects. This has been a major complaint against the employed class in India. Doctors and other kinds of employees congregate in towns and cities while millions of people in the countryside suffer and die, uncared for, and without proper facilities. Indian villages do not offer any encouragement to educated people nor do they offer any source of entertainment.

Renu seems to believe that the people of Maryganj steeped in superstition, ignorance, and poverty, cannot have the right ideas about their development without some guidance. The political elements of change are there in the society but in the absence of proper leadership, only bourgeois strategies prevail and people cannot succeed in their efforts. As an outsider, a Dr. Prasant remains aloof from the affairs of the village and in a detached way helps those who go to him for medical treatment or for some advice. In

spite of his romantic revolutionary ideas and dreams of a bright future, he does nothing to get those realised. Thus the author avoids a conflict between the backwardness of the village and the progressive vision of Dr. Prasant who serves only as a point of observation of village life and as a ray of hope, as a promise of a better life. Village life remains in its place with its futility and failure, ridiculousness and remoteness and the total stagnation of society, in spite of epoch-making events taking place elsewhere.

The representatives of socialist forces in *Maila Ancal*, **Kallicaran** and Calittar **Karmakar** abscond in order to escape arrest and imprisonment at the hands of the bourgeois government. Renu draws the conclusion that as the majority of the socialist workers do not have any understanding of the socialist goals, it is not yet possible to utilise the forces of society in the right direction. Therefore, it becomes necessary to depict the prospects of historical development from outside, through the story of Dr. Prasant, with his dreams and decisions. Thus Dr. **Prasant's** function in the novel is not to represent immediate social reality but a future possibility. He is unique, a dreamer **but not** a practical person. It would take several centuries to bring about socialism in India if the people had to rely on such idealistic dreamers for their rescue. If the elements of development are not present in the society which will bring about the socialistic pattern of change, it cannot be superimposed from outside. Probably that is why Renu has not attempted to push Dr. Prasant so far as to cause any change in social reality. Dr. Prasant remains as a sign post indicating better possibilities. Unlike Dr. Prasant, Hoovayya has some understanding of the social reality of the community and therefore he takes certain decisions towards the direction of democracy. He brings in some practical changes into the hierarchical mode of functioning once he is separated from his uncle and shifts to

Kelakanooru. This space provides him with an opportunity to execute his ideas of liberal humanism.

The impact of modernity can be **further** seen in the mode of social understanding and public critique. The "region" presented in **Kuvempu's** novel is much more enclosed and appears impenetrable. The picture that one gets of community life in the novel, *The House of Kanooru* is of a timeless past and not something that is even remotely connected to the modern world. Therefore it is not easily accessible to outside influence and remains irresolute, while being the citadel of feudal authority. It is in this kind of a situation that a gradual, yet sure change has been brought in through the insertion of various democratic elements. Except for the occasional mention of the national movement and Gandhi, one would get the impression of an archaic world where no kind of reform would affect **society**. The state of affairs presented in the novel can be compared with the other two novels under study in that there is no atmosphere of rebellion in *The House of Kanooru*. People are passive sufferers. Kuvempu is more interested in chronicling the history of Vokkaliga community than in making a magnum opus of revolution. Hoovayya brings about transformation through a Gandhian mode of passive resistance. This happens only after Chandrayya Gowda's death. The house is united after the death, symbolising the death of the feudal self. The division of property and the death of the landlord are perhaps the two important incidents that pave the way for a democratic way of life.

There was now a new pattern of life in Malnad. Though the main reason was the passage of time, **Hoovayya's** influence in Kanooru, Muthalli,

Seethemane and the surrounding villages was not inconsiderate.

(479)

The passage of time includes the influence of national movement, English education and the impact of scientific thinking. The narrator further records the changes thus:

The toddy shop by the side of the road which ran between **Kanooru** and **Muthalli** had collapsed and was in ruins, infested with termites. A hospital, a school, a post-office and some shops have come up to serve the needs of the few villagers and were thriving. The road which once had known not even a bicycle was burned down with motorcars and buses that were plying. Nationalism and khadi had caught on to a certain extent and wearers of Gandhi cap visited the place from time to time to deliver lectures. Civilization had come to the forest. (479)

The agents of modernity, like newer modes of conveyance and the visits of nationalist movement leaders were a common feature in India at that point of time. But these changes in Malnad must be read in view of the history of the land. Self-indulgence and the lack of education are largely responsible for a conventional kind of life style. **Kuvempu** does not make a mention of any institution, which could exert a liberal influence on the community life. There is no mention of either a school or a hospital which could exert a healthy influence on the **community**. The only reference to education is carried out in the negative. The song at the end of the novel is significant because that



signals the tone of new life in 'malnad'. The region, that looks impenetrable suddenly gives way to newer modes of influence:

Wake up and listen to the **clarion** call of New life of the  
 solstice! There the goddess of the New Age arises,  
 cutting through blind beliefs,  
 Kali incarnate, armed with the sword,  
 of knowledge and science!  
 Having mastered the skills of body and mind  
 arise with pride and faith  
 oh, children of Revolution, prosper,  
 waking up to light and peace.

(483)

The words '**New Age**' and '**Revolution**' are crucial in this context because nowhere in the novel does Kuvempu mention these words, let alone invite change. Yet it is inevitable that change will take place. It seems no community can live under feudal authority for too long. The change that occurs in the novel is abrupt. The symptoms of a metamorphosis are not visible till the death of Chandrayya Gowda. In *Ganadevata* and *Maila Ancal*, rebellion is explicit. The atmosphere of rebellion is visible from the very beginning. The slogans of people like Baladev and Sainikji echo the sentiments expressed in the song in *The House of Kanooru*. Immediately after the attack on the santhals, the response of the freedom fighters like Kalicharan, Sainikji and Baladev is to give the people an orientation towards a people's democracy:

We want the rule of the peasant  
**poorman's** party - socialist party  
 Socialist party - Zindabad  
 Capitalism will break down as  
 naturally as the sun sets. The  
 factory chimney will emit amber,  
 the day the labourer gets possession  
 of the factories is not far away.  
 The land will be owned by farmers.  
 Oh, farmer brother get up! You  
 are the true inheritor of the  
 land!

(129)

The tribals and the lower castes are represented to be actively participating in the act of nation building. **Peoples'** participation in the struggle for the achievement of constitutional rights, and developmental planning are the concerns with which the regional novels seem to engage.

In *Ganadevata* also we have a team of people who work towards redeeming the village of its evils through a democratic process of administration. These people act as the harbingers of transformation in the village society. They expect a change in the pathetic situation that prevails in their village. The educated breed of reformers make

their mark in Shivkalipur and make an attempt to educate the local people regarding the uprooting of the Zamindari system. The progressive thinkers of Shivkalipur-- Dr. Jaggan, Debu, the schoolteacher and **Jatin**, a detainee who comes to the village from Calcutta — also express their anxiety at the ruining structure of the village society. They are also concerned with the **unity** and order of village life. Among the set of progressive thinkers the perspectives on village life are different. Dr. Jaggan's anxiety about the Bayers and Bauris when their houses are burnt down, is more with getting the news published in the papers and submitting a petition to the magistrate than in feeling sympathy for the real victims of the calamity. **Debu's** and **Jatin's** interest or association with the village life has a touch of sentimental value. That the village is defiled like a "beggar **woman**" due to external influences like city and industry worries Debu a great deal. His occasional musings at the transformation of the village provide us with insights into Tarashankar's own concern with the region:

He loved his village with all his heart. He had to sit by and watch it going from bad to worse day by day in front of his **eyes...Nobody** listened to anybody or had any consideration for the good of the village or anyone in it. Traditional customs were **disappearing**. When anyone died, it was no longer easy to **find** someone to carry out the corpse. When feasts were held a distinction was made between the rich and the poor. The blacksmith, the carpenter and the Bayer stopped working. The midwife and the barber were defying the traditional order. Those with an income of five rupees a month were spending them and living like babus. Land was sold to pay debts. Even household utensils were sold, so that people could

have pump shoes and good clothes. There was a hurricane lantern in every home.

(Banerjee 54)

The above passage encapsulates the changing order of the village society. The influence of the industry, and the lackadaisical attitude towards rural life are some of the reasons for the metamorphosis. Debu refuses to understand that the economic structure of the village undergoes a forcible change due to the burgeoning pressure of urban economy. The monstrous growth of Calcutta and the adjoining industrial belts is responsible for the impoverishment of the villages. Debu fails to realize that if the distinction between the rich and the poor has to vanish, the feudal set up must be wiped out, and that can happen only if there is strong enough opposition from the working classes like Aniruddha, Girish and Patu. Land is sold off because cultivation of land is no easy job when the farmers are asked to pay more taxes than they can afford to. The indications of modern life like pump shoes and hurricane lanterns are resented, while the inclination prevails to preserve feudal values. Traditional patterns of life include the feudal rigidity. One who desires liberation must be prepared to welcome changes like the introduction of hurricane lamps.

As against **Debu's** pessimistic perspective of the village, **Jatin's** view of village life is projected vis-a-vis the urban life of Calcutta.

Within the narrow confines of this small village, Jatin had found the whole of Bengal. It had become his home as soon as he set foot on it. Every

person on it seemed near and dear to him, the closest of **kin**...**He** was a city boy. His home was in **Calcutta**. He had never seen a village before. When he was arrested under the **act**, he was at first kept in jail. Then he was placed in various district towns. The influence of the village was much in evidence, large areas were still open, and agriculture played an important part in the lives of **people**...**The** presence of the village was felt more than seen, like the canvas beneath oil colours of a painting.

(143)

For Jatin the village still holds charms as against Calcutta's ugly face. Jatin, in a way, romanticizes his perception of the village in spite of the fact that he witnesses some of the gruesome accidents at Shivkalipur. He attributes some healing powers to the village. Jatin considers the village as being closer to his heart, and also thinks that the influence could **be** "felt". His comprehension of the region is always that of an outsider. Being an outsider, he can afford to have fanciful ideas about village life though the reality proves otherwise. "The lack of education was painfully obvious. Still he liked it." (256) He finds the village a "dreamy," "enchanted" place. As he himself admits, the village appears to his urban eyes only as a landscape. Hence his concern is also superficial where as Debu, a village born man can see through this enchanted guise of the village. As said in the novel:

For a day Shivkalipur showed itself to Debu in a wonderful and moving guise. He not only saw it, he felt the touch of it, tasted the flavour of it. It was full of sweetness, warmth, tenderness. A single day. From the very

next morning Shivkalipur was its old familiar self. The people were as spiteful as before, as base, as envious, as poor. The village was as poverty-stricken, as sorrow-laden, as riddled with disease.

(139)

The working class' vision of the region collapses and that's why people like Aniruddha, **Patu** and Girish choose to go to the city. Their disillusionment with the village community is clear and therefore they have no problems in leaving a society that doesn't offer them a living. In fact Aniruddha is even ready to entice other working class men to the industrial belt. His rebellion is complete, in a sense: being a blacksmith, he has never been dominated by a loyalty to the soil and therefore naturally and logically he rebels against a village society which is no longer alive and which lives in the past denying the rude reality of today. That is why he asks other poor villagers to leave the village for the nearby town in search of industrial employment.

The aim of this chapter is not to glorify the "region" rather it is an attempt at observing the concept of "region" through the kaleidoscope of these novels while trying to grapple with a significant phase of literary history itself. A representative Indian village is treated as "region" in all these novels. The Gandhian idea of a village permeates through these novels. The region is endowed with all the characteristics of a nation. Since these novels are set around the time of India's independence, there is an attempt there to dream of the nation, a free, independent nation. The debate about the nation to be, is all around. Whether it is Renu's Dr. Prasant, or Tarashankar's Jatin, Debu

and Dr. Jaggan, or Kuvempu's Hoovayya, all the heroes of these novels are projected as participants in the making of the nation. The authors of these novels, in emphasizing the representative nature of the regions assert the fact that it is very much part of the nation. The next chapter seeks to understand the concept of the "region" as portrayed in Telugu regional novels. The "region" here is associated with myth, history and local culture. In other words, the drama of regional life depicted in these novels digs deep into the internal structure of human life by referring to the spatial and social co-ordinates of local life.

## *Notes*

<sup>1</sup> See Sisir Kumar Das, *History of Indian Literature Vol. VIII* (New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1978).

<sup>2</sup> The Progressive Writers Association was founded with a number of intellectuals and students as its members with political views ranging from the radical socialist nationalism of Nehru to the Communism of Sajjad Zahir.

<sup>3</sup> Gandhi in his presidential address to the annual session of Hindi Sahitya Sammelan held at Indore made this appeal to Hindi writers.

<sup>4</sup> Banarasidas Chaturvedi the editor of Vishal Bharat drew the attention of the writers to the regional cultures and dialects of the Hindi region and this introduced a literary movement known as Janapadiya Andolan.

<sup>5</sup> Ideas gathered from Mahashweta Devi's *Makers of Indian Literature* (New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1975).

<sup>6</sup> This movement reiterated the credo of "intelligentisia inarod" i.e. the linking up of the intelligentsia and the people.

<sup>7</sup> Ideas gathered from Mahashweta Devi's *Makers of Indian Literature* (New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 1975).

<sup>n</sup> The Communists' declaration of their support of the peoples war against the patriotic Quit India Movement of 1942, was seen as a great setback to their ideology. And their alleged support of an equally unpopular cause of the establishment of Pakistan demanded by the Muslim League made the Communist writers unpopular. Gradually writers like Tarashankar **Banerjee**, **Sumitranandan** Pan, Rahul Sankrityayan and many others parted company with them.

<sup>9</sup> See G.S.Amur, *Essays on Modern Kannada Literature* (Bangalore: Kannada Sahitya Academy, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> See Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Early Indian Novels*, (New Delhi: Sahitya Academy, 2002), p. 72.



## ***Regions of Strife***

The previous chapter deliberated on the dynamics of "region" in the Indian literary tradition. It examined "region" specifically in the novels of Tarashankar Banerjee, Phaneeswarnath Renu, and Kuvempu. This chapter studies the polemics of "region" in a select few Telugu regional writings. In this context, "region" is a much more contested space and calls for a nuanced analysis. These texts are imbued with remnants of feudal power and with tensions of caste wars. They focus on the histories of the "region" in terms of peoples' experiences of feudalism, famines and drought. The negative images of the "region" are the stock in trade of the realist prose of socially engaged writers in Telugu. These varying contestations are embedded in the narrative of the regional novel through an inclusion of local myths, local histories and local cultures.

"In his work an artist creates a world," (1) writes Sudipta **Kaviraj**, in the context of presenting the images of "nation" in Bankim Chandra **Chatterjee's** fiction. The point is relevant here precisely because this chapter attempts to explore the images of "region" in the writings of three Telugu writers, Vattikota Alwaraswamy, Raavi Sastry, and Dr. Kesava Reddy. In trying to negotiate the cultural complexities of the region in the text, the authors project the various implicit structures of the region. The multidimensional probe into the concept of "region" uncovers the underlying politics in a postcolonial context. In other words, in trying to see the artist's world what gets centrality is the way he sees it. His way of seeing or perceiving things draws the distinction between art and the world. This chapter seeks to understand the structure of the world in the regional

writings. The narration of "region" in these writings is fissured rather than singular. The fragmented nature is what is examined here.

A quick overview of key theoretical concerns that inform the discourses and with it the problematic narration of the "region" seems appropriate here. To begin with, literary discourse engages in "writing cultures", i.e. they are involved in the subjective making of texts. Cultural accounts of regional literatures cannot help but be constructs; they mediate forms of authority and power.

Dipesh Chakraborty, while addressing issues of minority history and alternative voices, notes that the recent struggles and debates around the concept of multiculturalism in western democracies have led to discussions of minority histories.<sup>1</sup> What he means by minority histories is all those pasts which have been subjected to long term negligence in the mainstream accounts of the nation. Democracy requires hitherto neglected groups to tell their histories and come together in "accepting shared rational and evidentiary rules." This in fact is the origin of the examination of the problematic narration of the "region". Chakraborty argues while making a case for alternative voice that,

The task of producing "minority" histories has, under the pressure precisely of a deepening demand for democracy, become a double task. I may put it thus: "good" minority history is about expanding the scope of social justice and representative democracy.

As is well known by now, an explicit aim of regional writings is to write a distinct history of the region as different from the nation and combat all biases in the writing of literature.

The lacunae in research and representation of "region" in literature can be overcome by focusing specifically on studies of "region". Such texts represent the social relations and the cultural complex in which they are located. In delivering the regional subject what prominently reconfigures is points of view and sensitivity of the author. The point that the author's position should be rationally defensible is also of critical importance in this context. The author's position may reflect an ideology, a moral choice, or a political philosophy. The crafting of a "region" into literature tends to the imaginative and creative realm in its research and narrative strategies. The strategies of the authors are illustrated in a discussion of local myths, local histories and feudal caste wars.

Similarly, the regional writers in Telugu are trying to recount a history of "region" in the literary text that goes contrary to the popular conceptions of "region" as a romantic space blessed with divine grace and beauty. The texts under study portend a region fraught with poverty, ill health, ignorance, factionalism, casteism, feudal oppression and so on.

This chapter concerns itself chiefly with the study of literary texts from the three backward regions of Andhra Pradesh— Rayalaseema, Telangana and Srikakulam. It seeks to examine three different texts from these regions. They are Vattikota Alwarswamy's *Prajala Manishi*(1955), Raavi Sastry's *Sommalu Ponayandi* (1981) and Dr. Kesava

Reddy's *Mugavani Pillanagrovi* (1993). Raavi Sastry and Dr. Kesava Reddy began writing at a time when regional writing was making its mark in the Telugu literary scene. However, in my selection of the text *Prajala Manishi*, I have overlooked the discrepancy in the time period, because the text engages itself actively in a dialogue with feudalism and other forms of power and authority that are contemporary. Though the text is placed in pre-independent times in Hyderabad State, in 1938, when the category of regional writing had not yet taken shape, it is included in the discussion mainly because of the author's engagement with the visions of the "region". Alwarswamy initiates a discussion in the novel on the region, when the consciousness and ideology of "nation" was predominant in literature. Raavi Sastry and Dr. Kesava Reddy are credited as the creators of a special category of writing, the regional novel. In order to understand the structure of the world in these writings, one has to get a glimpse of histories of the regions for all three writers see themselves as being part of the history of the region. In their renderings of "region", flashes of the past are prominently visible. As Bernard Cohn aptly observes, "a historical region is one in which there are sacred myths and symbols, held by significant groups within the area, regarding the relationship of people to their past and their geographical entity." (102) The accounts of the region definitely transact with **myths** and symbols while recapitulating a past. In a sense, the past is recalled to grapple with the present. Here, I offer the evolution of the nomenclature of the specified regions as a starting point for a discussion of the images of "region" in the regional novels under study.

## II

Within Andhra Pradesh, the Telangana region, the northern part of the coastal **belt**-- the Srikakulam region, and the Rayalaseema region are considered backward in terms of development of people vis-a-vis the people of coastal Andhra Pradesh who have made progress in all spheres of life. An estimation of causes and effects of underdevelopment in these regions will open up new vistas for us to comprehend the literature produced in these tracts. The causes of backwardness of the regions are to a large extent man-made and not natural as is the case, in most instances of **underdevelopment**. Telangana and Srikakulam areas are backward because of the stubborn survival of the feudal property relations and the corresponding socio-political practices. In addition to the stringent feudal relations, the people of Rayalaseema are burdened with famines and droughts. The nomenclature of the three regions has an interesting historical process by which these regions have been subjected to marginalisation despite the prevalence of rich natural resources. This will provide us with the necessary tools to actually look into the world **of** the regional writers. .

Historically speaking, the entire region of Andhra Pradesh is known as "Telangana". "**Anamu**" means country and "Telangana" literally means the land of Telugu speaking people. It derives its name from the original "**Trilingadesamu**". It is called so because of its location between three Shiva temples in **Srisailem** (Rayalaseema), **Draksharamam** (coastal) and **Kaleswaramu** (Telangana). This "Trilingadesamu" has gradually metamorphosed into "Telangana".

Now only one segment of Andhra Pradesh is identified as Telangana. The Qutb Shahis ruled Telangana with Golkonda as its capital till Aurangzeb annexed it to the Moghul Empire in 1687. Quli Qutb Shah **Mulk** was appointed as the subedar of the Golkonda province in the Bahmani kingdom and he later declared independence from them. In 1713, **Asaf-Nizam-Ul-Mulk** was sent to Hyderabad as the Moghul Subedar who declared independence from the empire in 1724. This period in history has come to be known as the period of Nizam's rule. Soon the French and ~~the~~ British entered the sultanate and the Nizam government was reduced to a mere tributary of the British, as a consequence of the struggle for power. Nizam Ali Khan, the second Nizam seceded the coastal districts to the British in 1766 and the Rayalaseema districts in 1800. And that's how the entire landscape was divided into three parts and only the Telugu speaking area of Hyderabad State has retained the name "Telangana".<sup>2</sup>

Telangana has rich mineral resources from Adilabad to Khammam; the coastland of the Godavari is full of coalmines. Telangana consists of nearly six lakh acres of forest area. Approximately five crore acres of fertile land was under Diwani Khalsa. Another **10%** was under the control of the Zamindars and yet another **10%** was directly under the control of the Nizam, the income of which would go to the family of the Nizam. By the 1940s, control of land was under various landlords, Deshmukhs, Patwaris and various other feudal lords. Ordinary people were virtually left with nothing to live by,<sup>3</sup> Telangana got independence in **1948** while the rest of the Andhra Pradesh got it in **1947** itself.

Though the districts of Rayalaseema were seceded to the British government in 1800, and they came to be known as Ceded Districts since then, the consciousness of the region as a distinct entity has existed from the times of the **Sathavahanas** and perhaps prior to that. When we track down the origin of the region Rayalaseema, we come across three prominent variations in nomenclature of the region. Here I shall try and explain the evolution of these regions and how they represented a regional sensibility of a people at different points of time in history. The earliest recollections of the land go back to 6th C A.D. The identity of the region in all the cases is directly linked to political power. Arudra records that the present Rayalaseema was originally known as “**Renandu**”. It is said to have acquired its name from the Renaati Chola dynasty that reigned that portion of Andhra Pradesh in the 6<sup>th</sup>C A.D. Another interesting parable alludes to the quality of the soil. Because of the availability of the ‘**regadi**’ variety of the soil, it was called “**Reenadu**”. Later when it was seceded to the British authorities, it came to be known as Ceded Districts. As the new name shows the subjugation of the people to foreign authorities, it was considered a mark of insult to the self-respect of the people. Therefore in 1928 a group of progressive thinkers got together and renamed the four districts of Anantapur, Kurnool, Cuddapah and Chittoor as Rayalaseema in reverence to their erstwhile ruler of the 16<sup>th</sup> C, Sri Krishnadeva **Ravulu**.<sup>4</sup>

The history of Rayalaseema is unique. Once it came to be under the British rule, feudalism came to be firmly established as a consequence of the fraudulent British policies. It is evident that the deprivation in Rayaleesma is not just a consequence of the

non-cooperation of the elements of nature. A cursory glance at the developmental projects undertaken by various government authorities will provide us with some tools to have an overview of the situation in Rayalaseema. In pre-independent India, the British government took up the construction of several dams and canals for the improvement of agricultural facilities in what was formerly Madras Presidency. But the undercurrents of imperial power are not to be missed here. The construction of the Kurnool-Cuddapah canal was more beneficial to British trade than to the farmers of Rayalaseema. The layout of the canal reveals the hidden agenda of the British. It was laid along the trading centres of the British and therefore took a circumlocutory route. Since it was done with a commercial view, it was not at all effective for cultivation. The cost of taking water from the canal was burdensome and only the moneyed-landlords could afford to bribe the authorities and get water during famines. But the poor farmer's land would remain barren and hence famine is a permanent feature of the region.<sup>5</sup>

If the British authorities had vested interests which blocked the developmental projects in this region, the government of India proved no better. It promised the limited construction of Krishna Pennar project, but after the formation of Andhra Pradesh in 1956, it was transformed into the Nagarjuna Sagar project. Rayalaseema consists of 20% of the total population of Andhra Pradesh. But the developmental grant, the government sanction for the past forty years for this region has been less than 3%. And Rayalaseema receives approximately 4% of the total grant issued for the development of water facilities in Andhra Pradesh. This dispelled the hopes of the people of Rayalaseema, that they can ever secure water in all their lives for cultivation. This left the farmers at the mercy of rains. Water acquires a predominant place in Rayalaseema life. Digging bore wells to a



depth of 350 - 400 ft has become a common feature and farmers are easily reduced to labourers in the process. There has not been a single year without famine.<sup>6</sup>

The last segment of the discussion contains the narrative of Srikakulam. It is interesting to note that Srikakulam is a sanskritized version of the colloquial "Sikha **Khol**" which literally means, untying the knot. The reference dates back to 16<sup>th</sup>C, when the farmans of the Nawab of Golkonda were officially unsealed and the **farman** would be implemented in the province. Gradually the place got identified with "Sikhakhol". Later due to the influence of Hindu Kings and Lords the name of the place was sanskritized to Srikakulam.<sup>7</sup>

The condition of the peasants and farmers in terms of agriculture and economy proves to be a duplication of the situation prevailing in Rayalaseema and Telangana. Srikakulam is heavily dependent on agriculture than any other district in Andhra Pradesh. And 67% of the land available in the district is cultivable. It occupies second place in the order of reception of rainfall. In spite of the availability of sufficient natural resources the growth rate of the development curve shows a decline here. The British laws bestowed absolute powers to the feudal lords. Empowered by these laws, they continued their atrocities on the peasants and the landless labourers. The peasants could cultivate the land only if they paid the land revenue. Therefore they were always at the mercy of the landlords. The Land Estate Act of 1906 gave powers to the landlords even regarding the community's land which only added to the burden of the small farmers and labourers. As a consequence of continuous oppression, resentment of the public culminated in the

form of an armed struggle in November 1968 and continued up to July 1970. One of the aims of the rebellion was the redistribution of land.

The landlord-class in Andhra Pradesh consists predominantly of the non-Brahmin upper castes "the naya kshatriyas" as Kancha Ilaiah calls them. They controlled the rural economy, society and polity during the colonial period. It has been observed that the Kammas and Reddys could maintain and improve upon their lands mainly because of their 'attachment' to land as well as the extraordinary care they take in agriculture. The rural poor in Andhra are a divided lot in terms of caste. It is clear from the above analysis that political power and power structure in Andhra rural society is decidedly influenced by land-ownership, social status and economic dominance.

From these accounts it becomes clear to the reader in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that the concept of "region" and regional consciousness existed much before nation and nationalism became euphoric. The process of finding a name for a tract of **land** necessitates in revealing the story of people, their history and their political aspirations. The piece of land evolves into a region, into an identity, into a living culture. The sense of the "region" diffuses along the furrows of water resources like river basins and cultivable land. Due to the facts of sociology and history, the residents of these regions have a highly developed regional historical sense.

### III

By way of contextualizing the regional novel in history, a brief account of the histories of the three regions, Telangana, Srikakulam and Rayalaseema is recalled above. With this sense of history in mind, the regional writers approach the concept of “region” in their writings. The ideas of "region" and "regionalism" are drawn from a particular set of symbols. Bernard Cohn while referring to regionalism in India comments that "the symbol pool has usually been made up of religious and/or literary and/or political, historical symbols." (120) When we examine these specific symbols, they can be identified with, feudal authority, caste-class network and land ownership in the texts under study.

Vattikota Alwaraswamy's text *Prajala Manishi*, Raavi Sastry's *Sommalu Ponayandi* and Kesava Reddy's *Mugavani Pillanagrovi* deal with conceptualizations of "region" as localised and located within the personal experiences of the authors. Alwaraswamy uses history to come to terms with the region, as he was part of the movement against Nizam's rule. Raavi Sastry uses his own experience as an advocate to represent the exploitative nature of feudal relations which are a common feature of the region. Dr. Kesava Reddy resorts to a unique method to envision a "region." He makes use of folk myths to understand his "region".

Alwaraswamy's visualizations of the Telangana region are related to those of independence and the establishment of democracy. The ideas that express a regional sensibility are entwined with the immediate local problems. Alwaraswamy's ultimate idea

of the land of Telangana finds expression in the resolution of land issues, caste issues and in the final break down of the Nizam's tyranny. In a nutshell, it is associated with the political freedom of the region. While the nationalist prose of the time was filled with sentiment of nationhood, Alwarswamy makes a unique effort to reassert the regional identity in the novel.

*Prajala Manishi* deals with sets of problems as presented in the caste relations and land issues of Telangana during the 1930s. The novel is set in pre-independent Telangana which was under the Nizam's rule. Though the novel was published in 1955, it was written much before that.<sup>9</sup> The gap between the time of publishing and writing can be understood as a telling comment on the prevailing conditions in Telangana. The region is portrayed as being torn between the tensions of feudal authority and the working classes at one level, and the war between tradition and progressive ideology at another level.

I shall explore the possibilities of development of the ideas of the region in three different spaces in the novel. One is the village of Dimmagudem which forms the centre of activity in the novel. The second space is the prison to which Kantheeravam is sent. The prison cell is agential in bringing about a transformation in the hero of the novel. Prison is a space, which breaks all the boundaries of societal norms. And therefore, in the absence of any kind of formal education, it acts as a means of reformation for the central character. The third space is the library in Nizamabad which helps Kantheeravam to get an awareness of the political struggles at the national level and of the struggles of the people within his region.

The novel begins with an instance of the infliction of feudal power and authority on the people of Dimmagudem. There is a demand for contributions from all families for the wedding of the Dora's daughter. The socio-political situation in Telangana during the 1930s was infested with terrible social practices like "Vetti",<sup>10</sup> Zagirdari system and to crown it all, the dictatorship of the Nizam. People of lower castes were compulsorily brought under bonded labour. If the Dora is sitting in the front yard of his bungalow, nobody should walk in front of him. If someone has to, they have to remove their footwear and headgear and go saluting the Dora. Under such oppressive conditions, the people don't have a choice but to oblige the Dora Rambhopal Rao. The chief issue of concern in Dimmagudem is the usurpation of land from two upper caste families. Raghunathacharyulu's family is supposed to have got the land as a gift from Rambhopal Rao's father and therefore when it is retrieved from the family, they have to satisfy themselves that they are not the actual owners of the land and hence they have no right to protest. **Komarayya**, a kapu farmer, gets an order from the Dora to stop cultivating the land, again on grounds of ownership of land. Komarayya's family has taken the land for rent from a Brahmin family which no longer lives in the village. They have been cultivating it from the times of his father. All of a sudden, Rambhopal Rao decides to do justice to the invisible owner of the land and he asks his men to seize the land and cultivate it. The allegation is that Komarayya has been enjoying the fruits of the harvest without having to pay rent. This becomes an eye sore to Rambhopal Rao. To check the individualistic tendencies of these upper caste farmers, he adopts these devices. He takes up the maintenance and protection of the land. When the news is broken to Komarayya's family, his mother **Annamma**, loses her patience and rushes to her fields to protect her land from the hands of Rambhopal Rao. She sits across the fields blocking the way for

cultivation. Komarayya who reaches the Dora's bungalow to make an appeal, is chained down and beaten up thoroughly. These two incidents **figure** prominently in the novel and deserve a closer analysis because of the composition of the caste groups involved in these incidents.

This is the first instance of protest in the novel. The voices of dissent have been suppressed so far. The Dora usurping lands is normal in these areas but protest against it is not normal. The caste composition of Dimmagudem is a conglomeration of the Brahmin and non-Brahmin upper castes, the Dalits and Muslims (we have only Hyder Ali as a proof for the existence of Muslims in the village). Komarayya's loss of the land acquires centrality due to the fact that he is an upper-caste. His confinement and subsequent thrashing up in Rambhopal Rao's bungalow is a shock to the entire village. Never before was an upper-caste man treated in this fashion. Also **Annamma's** protest is treated with respect basically because she gets the cooperation from the men of her own caste like Kanakayya. He warns a dalit man who was about to manhandle Annamma from the furrows of the fields. He says, "being a **Madiga**, how can you touch a Kapu-**woman?**" (58) The tension within the two groups is resolved along caste lines. The first battle against the Dora gets strengthened in the solidarity expressed by the Kapu community in Komarayya's struggle for land.

In the novel these battles are fought in isolation. Though people of all castes are subjected to similar kinds of oppression, only the Kapus get united, because the forces acting upon the consciousness of the people are not external, they lie within the individual experiences of people. The many layers of the protest are visible in the vertical division

of people along caste lines. The illegal occupation of Komarayya's land leaves the Kapu community in a disturbed state and they realise that they are on the losing ground only because of their financial status. Though the entire village resents **Rambhopal** Rao's atrocities, the punch of the power is felt only by the Kapus. Kanakayya stops working for the Dora after this incident as a mark of fear and protest. The awareness of getting together based on commonality of suffering doesn't arise in this case. It surfaces at a later stage in a different setting in the novel. And it is in the better interests of the feudal lord to keep these castes apart. The hardships, though experienced collectively, are understood only in **isolation**. The education necessary for a collective identity is not visible at this stage.

Peoples' movements cannot be inspired by natural and inevitable causes alone, argues Kodavatiganti Kutumba Rao. Annamma's rebellion doesn't succeed because her struggle only knows the base but not the superstructure. Superstructure is concerned with the changes in the surroundings while bringing in change inherently. **Annamma** is not in a position to do so. So far, she has neither questioned the feudal attitude that exists within and outside the sphere of domesticity. In fact it never occurs to her that the feudal attitudes within domesticity and her class struggle in the village are two sides of the same coin.

The land-question is responsible for bringing about an awareness among the people of their rights. This gets epitomised in the 'chintala harraju' incident. Varavara Rao defines the modern awakening as "a collective consciousness of a people working towards common social and economic goals, transcending the barriers of caste, class and

religion." (Varavara Rao *POP* 67) The people of Telangana did get united, ignoring caste, class barriers in their struggle for existence. But it has remained alienated from the rest of Andhra Pradesh owing to the region specificity of the problem. No other part of Andhra was under the Nizam's rule except Telangana. Though feudal system prevails in all parts of Andhra in one form or the other, peoples' movements are fought individually in Srikakulam and Telangana alone. In Rayalaseema, the struggle has not taken the dimensions of a peoples' movement. However, the traces of struggle cannot be denied.

The Library is a space that functions as a medium in bringing about a change both in Kantheeravam as well as in the villagers in Dimmagudem. Kantheeravam emerges as a Gandhian hero as a result of his association with the Library in Nizamabad during his self imposed exile. He gets to read about Gandhi and Netaji and is inspired by their writings and activities. He participates in building and improving the Library space as that proves to be the centre of all political activity in Nizamabad. In the process of educating the public of their rights and demands, religion is brought in. Kantheeravam uses the "**Harikatha**" mode to attract people for the Library movement. Though religion is a powerful tool to attract the masses, in the text, there is a deliberate attempt to propagate Hinduism, as there is an immediate threat, from the Muslim rule. Even in the village, Vijayadev is brought in with an intention to retain Hinduism. But finally, the space in the Library is used for all kinds of revolutionary activity in Dimmagudem. The process of educating the villagers of their rights and responsibilities takes place here.

Conversions to Islam are inserted into the main fabric of the novel to show the direct influence of the Nizam's rule superceding the power of **Rambhopal** Rao in the



village. To keep power equations intact, both the parties have to work upon the most vulnerable sections, those of the dalits. There is severe opposition to conversion to Islam whether forcible or not from all quarters in the village. The groups that openly express their resentment against the organization "Anjuman" are Rambhopal Rao and the newly enlightened **Kantheeravam** and his friend Komarayya while the rest of the village is a silent witness to the whole affair. Rambhopal Rao's intentions in opposing the conversion are very clear. This incident is bound to reduce his powers while at the same time it increases the dominance of Hyder Ali. These conversions ultimately prove to be a threat to his power and check any further conversions. He brings in an **Aryasamaj** priest Vijayadev into the village to win back the converts to Hinduism. Kantheeravam and Komarayya truly believe that conversions to any religion will only worsen the situation and voice their sentiment in the meeting where 'Anjuman' converts the dalits. The dalits agree for a change of religion as they are beguiled into a belief that their lands which are under the control of Rambhopal Rao will be returned to them if they convert to Islam. "Will you get us the lands that the Dora has taken from us?" (101), asks a gullible convert. The dalits never win back their land; in addition, they have to undergo ostracization from the upper-castes as a consequence.

The prison where Kantheeravam and Komarayya are sent operates as a space that breaks the boundaries of nation, region, caste and class. It shows Kantheeravam a new world transgressing the boundaries of normal society. It is this distinction between the two institutions that brings in a change in **Kantheeravam's** perception of things. Kantheeravam, born into a Vaishnava family, rises to the heights of accepting the hospitality of other caste people like Komarayya and Basheer as a consequence of his

involvement in the struggle for land. After **Kantheeravam's** association with Basheer in jail, the change in his perception of class, caste and other related social subjects becomes intense. His circumstances compel him to see and accept these changes. The torture he undergoes in the prison cell enables him to understand a petty thief like Basheer. Kantheeravam learns to accept a scavenger like Basheer. When he takes Basheer to his friend's house, they **find** it difficult to accept Basheer but still allow him to have meals with them only not to hurt Kantheeravam. Kantheeravam realising the situation appeals to them,

Don't think that I am mocking at your beliefs and traditions. During my prison life I have lost faith in these things.

(Alwarswamy 214)

Cultural revival should normally take place as part of political movement. Kantheeravam **has** actually participated in these political movements whereas Venkateswar Rao, a friend of Kantheeravam has only read and heard of these struggles. And therefore the necessary **awareness** to accept a casteless/classless society doesn't come to him immediately.

Kantheeravam shows his progressive ideas only due to an extremely oppressive experience in the prison. The peasants do not have to go away from their everyday reality to realize and win their socio-economic battles unlike Kantheeravam who realizes the enormity of the problem only when faced with a challenging situation like prison life. The turbulence of the "region" can be seen in all the struggles of power as represented in

these spaces. Kantheeravam recounts his prison life as a real eye-opener in understanding the situation of Telangana. He says,

How can it be a waste? I was able to see the state inflicted horrors on one side and the nakedness of society on the other side, I have known the real building blocks for an ideal society. I have realized the responsibility of a true lover of the country...

(Alwarswamy 169)

Kantheeravam's problems within and without the prison are purely social, whereas the problems of the villagers are economical. An understanding between the two arises only when it is bound with practical experience. By the time Kantheeravam regains liberty, his village has undergone a great metamorphosis. It is no longer a question of either caste or religion but of class-struggle between the poor and the exploited peasantry with their common antagonist Rambhopal Rao.

Alwarswamy's novel *Prajala Manishi* projects a collective vision of the region. Though the battle against feudal oppression takes place in isolated pockets, the scene acquires unity in the final resolution to overthrow the rule of Nizam. Raavi Sastry delineates yet another phase of feudalism in the text, *Sommalu Ponayandi*. Raavi Sastry selects a representative victim out of the many common stories in the region. The repercussions of feudalism as experienced by an individual who is isolated in his struggle against an oppressive system are narrated in the novel. He resorts to his own personal experience as an advocate to understand the region. The exploited villagers who

approach him for justice everyday seem to be the inspiration for a work like *Sommalu Ponayandi*.

A democratic institution like the judiciary where method rules the roost reduces the unmethodical, emotional appeals of gullible rural folk to nothingness. It would be apt to recall the distinction Sudipta Kaviraj makes between the two kinds of language the judicial and the human:

Rationalism claims to use a peculiarly clear language, a language of the literal which holds in unambiguous forms its objective images of the world. Science speaks the clear, literal language, and so does judicial process and law, the field which, like science, claimed to reach undistorted truth.

(Kaviraj 85)

What happens in the novel is a methodical destruction of the human concerns through **the** rationalistic methods of judiciary. The conflict between the methodical, rational techniques of modern administrative institutions like courts of law, the revenue offices etc. versus the ethical, moral appeals of the protagonist relegates him to the confines of prison.

*Sommalu Ponayandi* cannot be adequately understood without decoding all the pretences of judiciary. The text refers constantly to the paradoxical alternative construction of judiciary. The complete inextricability of the text lies within the

paradoxical situation of Dasari Bodigadu. The key to the inner logic of understanding, the story lies very much within the narrative of Dasari Bodigadu. The logic of **functioning** is internal to the text. In the text he faces a head on collision with the power structure. The battle is not between equals: it is between the absolutely powerful and the totally powerless. The conflict arises between these two **socially** distinct categories, because the security of the social world requires that these two sections are held in place, that their limits, their boundaries are marked with absolute **clarity**. In spite of these differences the characters in the novel operate in these spheres of intersection, where opposites come to play with each other. In *Sommalu Ponayandi* Dasari Bodigadu's encounter is always with people decidedly from the upper strata of the society. There is no escape from these spaces of intersection in a feudal set up.

I shall take up the issue of the identity of the person who speaks in the first person monologic narrative of the text towards the latter part of the chapter. However the point of relevance here is what he narrates and why he narrates. The narrative presents us with a powerful condensation of all bureaucratic institutions. There is of course a judicial case at the surface level with its defenders, pleaders and judges. But it is easy to see that their surface layer of meaning is attached to the narrative. The question of "why?" is of seminal importance to me in this context because it leads us to the basic concern of this chapter, that of the making of a story (or perhaps the breaking of the story of Dasari Bodigadu). The text operates at various levels. If we unmask the dense, many layered meaning of the text, the identifiable reasons emerge as an answer to the narrative of Bodigadu. These reasons according to Dasari Bodigadu are: the President's elemental desire to feel that he is absolutely powerful by making the poor suffer and to the

unconquered lord of the land. Bodigadu analyses the rationale of the President's thirst for power as,

Why should a scavenger like Bodigadu be so arrogant? How can this fellow escape the punch of my power? If I can't bind over these beggars, won't I be looked down upon by the entire village?

(Raavi Sastry 33)

An explanation of the proof of **Bodigadu's** claim is attempted here by unfurling the many layers of his narrative. With this, the power game begins. In the process of reclaiming his powers over land, Dasari Bodigadu primarily encounters two kinds of power structures. One is the feudal system in the village and the second is the system of judiciary. In trying to seek refuge from one system of power and authority he falls into the trap of the other. The efforts of Bodigadu to protect his land from the feudal system result in his encounter with various other modern institutions of power. The exploitation of Dasari Bodigadu begins with the loss of cattle and extends to the land question (Bhumi Samasya) and finally ends in the destruction of his family. It portrays a single individual's appeal for justice against the dominant castes'/classes' oppression which is supported by the state mechanism. Appropriation of each and every powerful position by the dominant classes blocks all possible channels of freedom for Bodigadu.

Some themes and some incidents happen in the novel too frequently to be dismissed as incidental attributes. I wish actually to distinguish between a surface and deep structure in the story and since the deeper can be revealed through an initial

resolution of its initial characteristics, let us **first** look at why the narrative takes place at all. Dasari Bodigadu's story is entwined with the problem of land. He loses his land and cattle in the hands of the feudal lord and decides to seek justice in a court of law. But the village heads withhold him from seeking justice elsewhere, beyond the premises of the village. On the other hand, the same people provoke Bodigadu's enemy into lodging a complaint against him. Bodigadu at each stage is drawn into a situation, where he has to trust his enemy for all kinds of valuable information, owing to the wretchedness of his situation. In the novel, the President of the village never directly deals with Bodigadu. He always operates through his power mechanism. The protagonist is provoked into a situation where he beats up the nephew of the President, Chinna Rao. A case of land and property has been cleverly subverted into that of attempt of murder. An implementation of the power game needs disarming the powerless farmers like Bodigadu. As a first strategy, Bodigadu is implicated in a scuffle.

With this, Bodigadu enters into an outright battle with the people involved in the power structure. The battlefield falls outside the village once a lawsuit is filed against Bodigadu. So far he has seen only the brute power of feudalism. Now, he encounters the seemingly logical, judicious and democratic powers, where the making or breaking of justice is done systematically. What happens in courts of law is a "systematic practice of injustice in the name of justice" (Kaviraj 34). He's taken into custody and subsequently punished for his alleged involvement in beating up Chinna Rao. Bodigadu is all set to take up the challenging situation and answer the constitutional powers suitably, but then

he's implicated in yet another case of litigation and mischief. Extrication from one case leads to another set of problematic situations.

Dasari **Bodigadu's** lamentations all along have been that of loss of his land. It **tantamounts** to the fact that he actually owns land. But once he enters the bureaucratic institutions, his claims on land are questioned. In order to bail himself out of the prison he's asked to prove his ownership of land. His appeals for justice once again bounce back onto the upper caste/upper class maintained structure, which is invested with powers to declare that Bodigadu actually owns land in the village. He's bewildered at this eventuality, yet prepares himself to face the challenge. Once Bodigadu equips himself to colloid with the power institutions, the process of weakening Bodigadu begins as a next device to suppress him. The political clout of the dominant castes/classes always overlooks the marginalized. Since Bodigadu has rebelled against the President, he becomes a powerful threat to the power of the President. Therefore he decides to deprive and weaken Bodigadu in every way, physically as well as psychologically. As a next strategy, the President begins to target the families of **Bodigadu's** co-brother and brother-in-law who have been supportive of **Bodigadu's** rebellion from the beginning. The President wins over the family of the co-brother to his side through unfair means. The President contrives a 'bind-over' case against all three families. He feels threatened and gives in to external pressures easily. Bodigadu expresses the irony of the situation under which he and his relatives have been handed over to the police by the President, and his nephews:



If we are not **'bound-over'** to law, they fear we will behead them and hang them in the village. That's why we have to be under 'bind-over'

(35)

The tragedy of the situation is that, **Bodigadu's** rebellion is highlighted as savage power against civilization while the President's crafty methods of implicating innocent people have immediately been protected. There is no social system which comes to **Bodigadu's** rescue. The relatives think that the **fire** of the whole agitation will spread to their houses too and in order to keep peace with the world, they succumb to the pressures of the President. Bodigadu is ultimately left with no defense mechanism.

The only power of Bodigadu is his power of one acre and forty cents of land that lies between the President's and another person's lands. The acquisition of that forty cents of land is significant for the President for more than one reason: primarily that it makes him the unconquered land of the lord and secondly, that Bodigadu will lose his last claims on anything remotely connected to power. The President's acquisition of absolute power lies in his ability to reduce Bodigadu to nothingness: Bodigadu who has a quick grasp of things reasons out, while he realizes that he's playing a losing **game**:

My forty cents of land lies adjacent to our President's lands. On the other end of my land lies Seepurupalli Seerammurthi's two acres of land. That fellow has bartered his land to the President. Never in his life can he regain the land from the President. Hence his two acres of land will

automatically be acceded to the President's land. That's for sure. Between this patch of land and that other patch of land my forty cents stands as a block. If this be included into his own land, the President can cultivate the vast stretch of land all by himself. (71)

The maze of the power structure descends on Bodigadu frame by frame capturing him firmly in an invincible grip. Once, the mission is accomplished, the President can crush any number of men like Bodigadu. More over, the region, according to Bodigadu's statistics, is littered with people like him.

The character of Bodigadu needs some observation here. Though he evinces extreme naivete in matters of legal issues, his grasp of the mechanism of power structure is astoundingly quick. Though he realizes his limitations as an ordinary individual, nowhere does he show the inclination to surrender himself before the higher-ups. Though he reminds the readers at every point **that**, "I am Bodigadu (tonsured one) by name and loin-cloth person by standards of living. "(59) The pun on his name Bodigadu stands symbolic of his entire life. Bodi stands for nothingness and he as a person at each point of his encounter with the power structure is reduced to nothingness.

His untiring spirit of questioning is amazing. Though he's pushed into extreme situations of life he doesn't quite give up the battle. On the contrary, he goes to the extent

of losing his family to protect his right over the land. His ego is something that needs analysis here. The education necessary for rebellion doesn't come from any external source in the case of Bodigadu or for **Annamma** of *Prajala Manishi*. It comes from the presence of extreme oppression within their lives. Throughout the novel, we see Bodigadu being worried at the thought of the usurpation of the land, yet he never gets down to arms as he does when he learns that his land is usurped by unfair means. He can no longer show the restraint that he could show for so long. He describes his response when the news is broken to him that the President's men have usurped the land. He is infuriated with rage, he describes his response as, "as soon as the word reached me, my body was in fire, with shivers all over".(87) And it is this strength of character that goads him into a direct battle with the President and his hired goons. Bodigadu is supported by his family in his retaliation. Only at a later stage, "all those who have suffered the attack of the President's claws join him in the battle".(93) The public is shaken out of its fears only when the turmoil begins to diffuse from one family to another. Bodigadu battles between a sense of perpetual tension between the desire to defy authority and the subsequent inability to do it. He sees the world in alternatives and sadly alternatives fail at every stage.

Yet another feature of the novel which helps understand and unravel the intricacies of a regional write up in this particular context of *Sommalu Ponayandi* is the narrative technique employed by Raavi Sastry. The protagonist Dasari Bodigadu narrates the entire story from the prison cell. The author could have designed this strategy for two reasons: one to distance himself from the context of the narrative and two to attribute

legitimacy to the narrative of Dasari Bodigadu. In this device the onus of being an upper-caste is transferred to the shoulders of the protagonist. Raavi Sastry is clearly different from his creative offspring Dasari Bodigadu in his social positioning as well as in his intellectual attributes. Raavi Sastry is a Brahmin advocate and is popularly known as an intellectual in his circles. Dasari Bodigadu, on the contrary is a working class man, uneducated, relatively poor and ignorant. The subject matter demands a certain internal understanding of the land issues and therefore, Sastry wisely uses a character like Bodigadu, who has experienced the pressures of feudalism to speak about the rural situation in the first person. Raavi Sastry in that sense retreats "from the more demanding task of 'changing the world' into merely offering an **interpretation**."(Kaviraj 30) An interpretation of the region is attempted here. Raavi Sastry clearly makes a conscious attempt to erase the authorial self from the text. Here, the language of Raavi Sastry and that of Dasari Bodigadu are obviously of two different kinds. The learned world of judiciary is totally unknown to Bodigadu. Yet he has to deal with that subject throughout. That's why Raavi Sastry cleverly employs a technique wherein Bodigadu is made to admit that he has acquired the knowledge of the judicial system through his constant encounters with the system. Clearly, there are two levels of meaning in the text. At the first level, there is a judicial issue, but at a secondary, deeper level, there is a caricature of the judiciary. Clearly Raavi Sastry goes to the heart of the matter cutting through the pretences.

Another remarkable feature which is of paramount significance that could be woven into the vision of the "region" is the caste of the protagonist. The caste ties are not

strongly built into the text. People of Dasari Bodigadu's caste don't come to him in times of hardship. Raavi Sastry deliberately keeps the caste of the protagonist ambiguous. Dasari Bodigadu's monologue from the beginning gives the impression that he speaks from the position of a lower caste man. However, in the middle of the narrative, he reveals his upper **caste.alliances**. He says that his co-brother is related to the President's wife and therefore he can no longer expect support and co-operation from him. Caste-links are shown as negative attributes in the novel. Caste nexus doesn't help him at any rate. In fact it does a great disservice to him. His co-brother leaves him all alone in his battle and joins the camp of the President by accepting an alliance for his daughter from the President's family. Suddenly there is a shift in the positioning of the novel, when the categories of caste get mixed **up**. The earlier references to caste do not bring in this drastic change because those allusions go well with the narrative. The first of these references seemingly sets his community apart from the upper caste higher ups in the village. Bodigadu recollects this in the context of speaking of the futility of caste inter-links.

**Ramdas** was the Head of our community. A man with good land property: he could judge well what is good and what is bad. But all his property has been spent on Bhajans, Brahmins and Harikathas ... Now his son is made the Head of our caste as a mark of respect for the father. He is a nice fellow. But he is always with those who can buy him a drink.

(17)

Within the text, there is little evidence about what the caste of either Dasari Bodigadu or

**Ramadas** is. Raavi **Sastry's** intentions in the blurring of categories of caste demonstrably indicate that the sufferings of a person like Bodigadu are not restricted to any one caste. It is in fact symbolic of the sufferings of all the downtrodden. It presents a Marxist perspective of the world: that under feudalism, all castes suffer equally under the iron hands of the powerful feudal lords.

Yet another prominent phase of the "region" is focused in Dr.Kesava Reddy's novel *Mugavani Pillanagrovi*. He introduces an innovative way of conceptualizing the region in his novels. He in fact delves deep into the folk myth of the region to portend his own story of the region. The unwritten, oral narratives of the local people attain the status of literature in the creative imagination of Dr. Kesava Reddy. There is an overlapping of myths recollected in his novels. Novels like *Mugavani Pillanagrovi* and *Ramundadadu Rajjivundadi* reconstruct the story of a farmer who acquires mythical proportions. The village has other affiliated myths which refer to the sagas of the land issues once more. It is interesting to observe that the repercussions of drought and famine are mythologized in the novel. In fact the novel, *Mugavani Pillanagrovi* begins with myths alluding to the symbols of the famine.

The regional sentiments find their expression in the oral and written tradition of the mass, of the people. Folk myths (instead of Sanskritization) are made use of in the rendering and recounting of the images of "region" in these novels. One way to delineate an agrarian universe and contextualize the activities of people in a changing

Universe can be by focussing on a study of "region" through different but interlinked perspectives. Firstly, one has to examine the local meanings of land and the way it is conceptualized, related to and used by the local people. Secondly, one has to study class caste ties that form part of a feudal set up. Land, especially agricultural land, mirrors and represents the key cultural categories of a feudal society and the political economic factors impacting upon it. These myths are an integral part of the local culture. They are fraught with the knowledge of the region's history, ecology and religious beliefs.

The novel *Mugavani Pillanagrovi* begins by recounting some of the local myths. The first of these refers to the worship of a big boulder by the villagers. It epitomizes the prevalent drought in the region in several ways. It is symptomatic of the dry land area, consequently the status of those dependent upon farming and the general socio-economic conditions that dominate the lives of people in the locality. Dr. Kesava Reddy attempts to reveal the strangeness of the situation to outsiders: "you'll wonder how anyone **can** worship a boulder?" (75) True, but the people of Rayalaseema cannot just ignore an overwhelming phenomenon like famine or drought in their life. As people worship water, it is customary for the people of Rayalaseema to worship boulders with a mythological significance attached to it. Recurrent droughts and famines in the region of Rayalaseema have left an indelible mark on the collective consciousness of the people. Droughts are addressed not only in the agricultural domain but also through a plethora of myths in which the people locate probability of rains and their viability for successful production.

The next myth in the text explains and elaborates why people have to worship a boulder, without attributing names of gods and goddesses. The absence of water is conspicuously responsible for the prevalence of famine in the region. This myth refers to the temple of Sinnamma on the banks of the lake found at the entrance of the village. The village suffers from extreme penury and drought and the bridge built to preserve water, collapses each time it is built. Therefore the goddess of water, **Gangamma** demands the sacrifice of a virgin from the village. The palegar of the village is astounded and shocked at such a demand. However his daughter Sinnamma expresses her willingness to undergo the trial herself, as she feels that they being the protectors of the village it's not right to ask anyone else in the village for such a big sacrifice. When her father is deeply worried as to whom he can approach for such a demanding task, Sinnamma consoles him with her words. She says,

Father, why should you feel sad over this? Is it right for a Palegar to sleep like this in his cozy-bed, when people are suffering from water-problem? You want to give them life or death? Get up, get up. Do whatever Batakada Gangamma says. Take me and build a tomb over me...

(76)

Like epidemics of smallpox and plague, in villages, droughts are seen as afflictions or punishment from beings of a higher order. As the word connotes, affliction is understood as imposed harm, danger and threat from an external agency or source. All forms of epidemics and droughts are understood as being symptoms of the anger of specific deities. Village-level rituals seek to alleviate disorders that affliction causes and reinstate



the order of the village. One such ritualistic remedy is the sacrifice of the virgin. When the village suffers from famine, they immediately connect it with the increase of sin in society and accept the geographical phenomenon as the disgruntlement of their local gods and goddesses at such worldly behaviour. The remedy is immediately sought in propitiating the gods and goddesses.

Local culture locates droughts within a cosmological configuration in which the people collectively comprehend, apprehend and attempt to come to terms with droughts. A drought in this case is culturally constructed as a comment on the loss or lack of morally valuable actions and conditions in the village. Far from being a denial of human responsibility, in the instance of drought it is actively attributed to the activities of gods and goddesses. Human actions that negate or deny moral values and codes are considered to entail divine retribution. In the aforesaid myth, the goddess of water, Gangamma is pacified in order to establish an equilibrium in the society, with the supply of enough water for the people dependent on agriculture. Water, and water resources are a rare phenomenon in the lives of Rayalaseema farmers. Under such excruciatingly testing times, if the goddess of water decides to unleash her wrath on the people, the situation will be like adding fuel to fire.

There are several symbolic dimensions to the ritual. The goddess asks for the sacrifice of a virgin, a virgin being symbolic of the purity of mind and body. This kind of a sacrifice is seen to purify the land that has sinned. The ritual is essentially a

transformational ritual. By appeasing deities, attempts are made to eliminate misfortune and distress. Emanating from a conceptualization of drought as affliction, the prescribed regimen of the sacrifice of a virgin seeks to alleviate the distress of drought in a manner akin to the treatment of a disease.

These myths are not only discourses on the relations between nature and society, but are also often 'a total social phenomenon' which encapsulates all the social relations of a society. They actively reproduce cultural ideas and social selections. The third myth described in the text brings us closer to one such culturally reproduced idea. It unravels the predicament of farmers after the arrival of modern institutions of administration. The third myth alludes to "Bakkireddy **Kana**". It unfurls the story of why a piece of land is identified with the man Bakkireddy. The 'Bakkireddy Kana' literally translates itself as the forest of Bakkireddy. In the course of the narrative, the readers are given to understand that before it became "Bakkireddy Kana" it was known as "Batakada Kayyalu". The significant transformation lies in the fact that "Kayyalu" (cultivable land) has been reduced to "Kana" (forest). The broken dreams of the farmer remain as the bitter weed of "Bakkireddy Kana", in the middle of the village. It speaks of the saga of the methodical destruction of farmers by man-made institutions and nature. We get a glimpse of institutional frameworks that form spiral systems of oppression.

The protagonist of the myth is an ordinary farmer. The tragedy of the situation is that Bakkireddy dies with a sense of being an outcaste because of the loss of his land.

The ownership of land for an upper caste man and the emergent **frustration** at the subsequent loss of land form the central part of the myth. The opening scene itself reveals the destruction and debris into which an ordinary man in all his senses has been reduced to:

The jeep entered the village by the time sun the leaped up but by sunset everything was over. The seizure was complete. **Bakkireddy's** land was sold in the seizure. The papers related to the auction were prepared. Bakkireddy signed on the papers as the seller of the land, and the Maniam signed as the buyer of the land. The officer who conducted the auction signed in English. The attendant put two seals below the officer's signature.

**(78)**

In a nutshell, the above passage captures the constitutive forces responsible for the destruction of a farmer. The presence of the bank officer and his interference in conducting the transactions of the sale between Bakkireddy and the Maniam marks **the** beginning of the entry of systematic institutional oppression. The vicious cycle begins with the lack of harvest, which compels Bakkireddy to approach the bank for a loan to dig a well for the cultivation of his land but ultimately he is caught in a maze without realizing that there is no way out of it.

A conversation between the Maniam of the village and a villager uncover the

several hidden stories of famine in the village:

"Even after investing so much money, not a drop of water was visible" said the villager.

"Forget about water. The bottom of the well was not even damp. But he insisted on going ahead. He wanted to dig deeper and deeper. He approached me asking to write another application for loan from the bank. I warned him again, 'you are neck-deep sunk in loans. How will you repay the loan? Think of that first'. But the man twisted his mustache and said, '**there** will be water in the well, during the first harvest half of the loan will be paid and the rest in the second **season**' "

(94)

In a sense though Bakkireddy is affected by the traditional famines that are part of Rayalaseema life, the loss is a double loss for Bakkireddy : at one level, he loses his material property through the loss of the land and at another level, he is upset because his complacent notions of life, land, property and personal relationships are to be reconfigured in this context.

The importance of land for an upper caste man becomes evident in the way Bakkireddy describes his father's attachment to land:

My father never looked at land as something that could be bartered. He treated the fourteen acres of "Batakada Kayyalu" like children, like

friends, like his kith and kin, like his wife. Land was not just a geographical entity for him but he attributed life and soul to it.

(82)

The emotional backlash at the loss of land **emerges** perceptibly in the novel because of the value attached to it by the upper castes. With the possession of land also emerges the identity of caste and class. The ownership of land in India at a very **superficial** level, is based along caste lines. **Bakkireddy's** promise to his father on the deathbed helps us get a deeper understanding of the text.

He says, "Why should I sell the land? I would protect it like my very own eyes. Am I not born to a Kapu? Or is it that I am born to a Dommara?"

(84)

The eulogization of upper caste male ego is seen in the passage above. The qualification to be a true Kapu is to protect the land. The spirit of patriotism of protecting the land is assumed by upper caste men. An assertion of identity through ownership of land takes place here. The social significance of land is explained in so many words. It places man in a respectable position in society.

The transformation in the position of man is visible immediately after the dispossession of land. Bakkireddy perceived himself as an individual who is thrown out of the society. According to his own norms, he loses his caste, his class, and most important of all, his self-respect. The new status as a landless, casteless man is

intolerable to him. He bursts **out** in a delirium, "I am a nomad now. I am a Picchiguntalodu. I am a beggar." (92) Bakkireddy cannot get over the illusions of the earth. He cannot contemplate on a livelihood other than farming. He becomes obsessed with land after he loses hold over it. For him, land becomes even more desirable because of its absence. It becomes a mirage for Bakkireddy: the more he wishes to get hold of it, the more it gets away from him. He can't believe the idea that he has actually lost the land. To reinforce the idea that he has not truly lost the land Bakkireddy goes to "Batakada Kayyalu" which no longer belongs to him and begins tilling the land:

He has finished tilling two square feet. Now he has entered the third. Gradually he's overcome with fatigue. It gets difficult to crawl along the **tiller...slowly** the hoe gets slower and slower. The land circling the hoe doesn't move.

(110)

Bakkireddy dedicates his life to "Batakada Kayyalu". In doing so he stresses the fact **that** land is the ultimate source of life for a kapu man. In rural Andhra Pradesh, land holds **the** key to a **Kapu's** existence. It is inextricably linked with their lives. A man who fails **to** protect his land is treated as unworthy of mention in history. Bakkireddy laments, "in the village, no child will be given my name nor the likes of it." (90) History would like to ignore such men. Here lies the significance of this novel. An upper caste man, who treats land like his mother is harassed so much, and perhaps that's why the land goes barren for

ever once seized from Bakkireddy. Bakkireddy who considers himself unworthy of mention in history finds place in literature and thereby in history.

Droughts are **significant** markers in the collective and personal histories of people. One failure is not enough to illustrate the mirage of water. They have to try and test the validity of the case time and again from their own experience. If it is not Bakkireddy, its another farmer who dreams of "**w**ell must be dug another feet or two deeper" (98). The reality of digging the well is just another myth of prosperity. This is a continuous process where farmers are relegated to the backwaters and later on to the position of landless labourers. If the plan of digging wells doesn't succeed, wait for the rains is an inevitable existential crisis for them. The **maniam** of the village who has seen the oppressive situation from a distance recollects the many stories of the farmers who helplessly follow the path from landowners to the deprived poor. Bakkireddy is victimized in all possible power relations. It is their vulnerability which exposes them to disasters. Bakkireddy is completely paralysed with just one stroke of the combined forces of nature and man.

In an industrial economy, the equations that work out are necessarily formed by a capitalist outlook. The possession of capital in a few hands leads to class struggle. Here if we delve deep into the system of capitalism, it shows availability of goods to that class which is within the reach of capital, and that class which fails to produce it will suffer a sustained subjugation in the hands of market forces. Bakkireddy is definitely a victim of market economy. The causes of his inability to reproduce the loan are not probed into by

the bank authorities. The investment of capital on a seemingly hopeless exercise like digging well in a dry land area like Rayalaseema will result in consumption of capital without actually materializing the benefits. In this context Vadrepu Chinaveerabhadhrudu's comments on market economy are pertinent:

In the story, **Bakkireddy's** land is left barren. This is a semi-feudal trait. This semi-feudal system cannot all of a sudden become capitalistic, but this will pave the way for the accumulation of capital in a few hands turning landlords into capitalists and reducing a large number of farmers as landless labourers.

("Foreword" to *MP* xii)

Famine cannot be eradicated even if all the international economic actions bear immediate fruit, unless the primacy of small-scale farming is restored. Unless this action for implementing aid are shifted decisively from large programmes to smaller ones, there cannot be development in the fate of small farmers like Bakkireddy.

Bakkireddy's ultimate failure in his death is seen as a classic case of defeat all over the village. But the other farmers are not redeemed from the plight of encountering famines and poverty. The novel *Mugavani Pillanagrovi* deals inadequately with the subject of women's attachment to land. Bakkireddy's wife is shown to be a passive recipient of the plight meted out to her. Her affinity to the land is not talked about in the



novel. Love of the land is invoked as part of manhood, the representative man happens to be the upper caste man. Like all other important oral narratives and recollections, the landmarks on all three, entry points of the village are invested with significance and social meaning. These myths can be seen as significant narratives that represent historical and social experiences of the region.

Prior to delineating the social and cultural images of "region", the novels succeed in projecting peoples' conceptualizations of the region's ecology and land and the social and cultural order that together constitute their Universe. The local politics and caste-wars are appropriated into the agricultural, land relations in the region. Yet another strand of cultural aspect is that of land relations observable in the innumerable myths of the land indicating a historical significance. These novels introduce a new idiom of the regional novel in the creative realm while exploring the depths of human experience.

## *Notes*

Ideas gathered from Dipesh Chakraborty's *Provincializing Europe* ( New Delhi: OUP,2001).

Ideas gathered from Varavara Rao's *Telangana Vimochanodyamamu Telugu Navala* (Vijayawada: Prajasakti, 1983).

See Puchchalapalli Sundaraiah, *Veera Telangana Viplavaporatamu—Gunapathalu* ( Hyderabad: HBT, 1992).

See Arudra, *Samagrandhra Sahityamu IX*. (Vijayawada: Prajasakti Printing Press,1991).

For a detailed discussion on this issue see, Vavilala Gopalakrishnaiah, *Visalandhramu* (Visakhapatnam: Telugunadu Prachuranalu,1951).

Ideas gathered from Vallampati Venkata Subbaiah's *Sahitya Vyasalu* (Hyderabad: Visalandhra,1997).

<sup>7</sup>See Muthyam, *Srikakula Udyama Sahitayamu* (Hyderabad: Dristi Publications, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> See Kancha Illiah, *Why I'm not a Hindu* (Calcutta: Samya, 1996).

Alwaraswamy could not publish the book in 1938 because of the obvious threat for his life from the Nizam.

<sup>10</sup> The practice of Vetti can be equated with bonded labour.

## *Rethinking the Regional Novel*

In the previous chapters, I have discussed the polemics of the regional novel during the course of its evolution as a special category. An attempt was made there to trace their development in the British, Indian, and Telugu literary traditions. The British regional novel is a different phenomenon from that of the regional novel in India. Yet, there have been some important continuities in the genre. Preoccupations with landscape as also with identity conflicts have continued as distinctive components of the regional novel. As the introduction discusses, such developments are partly products of the socio-economic milieu of the writers. In this concluding section, I return to that assertion and draw together some observations, discussions and arguments to offer my views on what might actually have gone into the making of the regional novel.

Firstly, I review the major queries regarding the nature of the "region" and **the** "regional novel" that have cropped up during the course of the thesis and consider how they might be explained. "There is no universally accepted definition of the region," observes Norton **Ginsberg**. (qtd. in Cohn 101) The study comes out with the hypothesis that the "region" cannot be given one particular identity and definition. When we come across labels like Regional College of Education, Regional Engineering College, etc, we are bound to associate the region with something local and inferior as opposed to the National and the superior. The renaming of institutes like Regional Engineering College as National Institute of Technology gives us an idea of the common assumptions

associated with the terms "region" and "nation". In these appellations, the region is measured as inferior to the nation and therefore renaming it enables it to shed its smaller, provincial, local identity in favour of a broader, democratic influence. In the above instance, the region is clearly pitted against the nation. Similarly when we say "regional novel", similar kinds of assumptions are expressed associating it with something which serves parochial interests. There is a certain amount of marginalization associated with the regional novel. This thesis attempts to grapple with this slippery category which defies all classification and acquires its own meaning. Even at this juncture, if one asks a question like 'what is a regional novel', clear-cut answers cannot be suggested. Though critics have tried to define it as something that "emphasizes the setting, social structure and customs of a particular locality, not merely as local colour, but as important conditions affecting the temperament of the characters and their ways of thinking, feeling and interacting." (M.H.Abrams 134), the regional novel in some contexts transcends these set definitions and proves itself to be of larger significance. Therefore it is possible for us only to observe how the term "region" emerges dynamically in different contexts.

Each of the chapters studied reveals a new definition of the region. These definitions while transcending the accepted notions of the region explore and bring out a much more vibrant picture of it. The diverse nature of works discussed maps out the diversity of meanings within the concept, while trying to trace the development of the genre itself.

Thomas Hardy's regional novels evince a tendency to retreat into the rural landscape to project an "idealistic" picture of rural England. In its setting, Hardy's novels are as far away as they can be from the rest of the Victorian novelists. His subject matter is the countryside and its people, but their life provides him with no less a powerful metaphor for the condition of England than did urban life for Dickens. In retreating into the rural landscape, Hardy is being an essentialist in his approach to the subject matter. But Hardy's concern in retreating into the rural landscape must be viewed in terms of his association with his life at Dorsetshire. His portrayal of Wessex is imbued with a strong sense of his personal life. Hardy could not adjust himself to the ways of London and after his unsuccessful attempts at architecture, he turned to creative writing. He therefore endows this alternative imaginary space with features of Dorset. What is of paramount significance in this context is Hardy's assertion and idealisation of the regional identity. In his writings there is an attempt to present what is declining in a world presently characterized by conflicting interests. The tension between the old rural life and the new urban life is clearly shown. Hardy expresses his resentment of London life while preserving the superiority of Wessex life. The urban and the rural spaces are created as contesting each other. One is superior to the other. The rural landscape is presented as "enduring" "natural", "emotional" whereas the city is presented as something "complicated", "cultured" and as a result unfit for human habitation. Hardy illustrates this point sufficiently through his female characters in novels like *FFMC* and *RN* wherein, the "enduring", "emotional", "simple" heroines are shown to be morally superior to the more "cultured", "complicated", "tactful" heroines like Bathsheba Everdene or Eustacia Vye.

Perhaps the predominant strain in the regional novel is engaged with preserving the 'organic unity' of the past. We find writers expressing anxiety over the fact of disintegration of the region as manifested in the Indian regional novels. All the regional novels studied as part of the Indian literature component examine the complexity of the small piece of society, which they have made their own. All the regional novels present a **powerfully** argued case for a comprehensive, unified account of the "region" that depends upon the close analysis of particular examples. In *Maila Ancal*, Renu makes a powerful use of people and places to represent concepts, which then acquire a wider significance than what they initially represent.. Maryganj becomes a symbol of squalor and degradation of the region. We find helplessness depicted in the novels. A dark and dismal picture of regional societies suffering passively is also shown as part of regional experience. For example in *Maila Ancal*, in trying to expose the dirty politics of the region, Renu reiterates the importance of a village in the construction of the nation. A sense of patriotism is visible in his anxiety to reform the "region". The Gandhian belief that India's strength lies in villages seems implicitly followed in the regional novels that have emerged in India.

*Ganadevata* and *The House of Kanooru* narrate the history of the region. Tarashankar and Kuvempu respectively in these novels, lament the loss of the 'organic community'. *Ganadevata* records the slow decay of regional life in the Birbhum village of Shivkalipur with the impingement of the market economy (created by industrialization). Mahashweta Devi observes that in his anxiety to show industry as the biggest enemy of

rural economy, Tarashankar creates industry in a place like Birbhum where there is actually no industry at all. Tarasankar feels that regional life in India is beset with all kinds of evil forces. He observes, "One could not become a freeman as long as he remained a slave of superstition, avarice, ignorance and narrowness. Political freedom would never free India's exploitation, illness, illiteracy and fatalism." (qtd. in Mahashweta Devi 9). In Tarashankar's view the external forces are as much responsible for the destruction of the region as the evils within. The self-destructive nature of the region is amply illustrated in *The House of Kanooru* too. The preoccupation of these writers with the village can be interpreted in terms of wider issues concerning Nation and Nationalism. Since the village is the basic unit of administration, any reform has to begin in the village first and then extend to the rest of the country. Hence the "rural" acquires centrality in these narrations.

The Telugu regional novel goes beyond the haze of nostalgia in the portrayal of the life of three regions, Rayalaseema, Srikakulam and Telangana. They provide insights into the interiors of these regions through realistic representations of the experiences of the people. In these writings, there is an attempt to assert the regional identity, but at times peoples' experience transcends the physical boundaries and project a catholicity that is so much part of human experience in a neighbouring village. The message of the poor and the downtrodden is loud and clear in these writings. Here also, the definitions of the "region" defy all categorization. The fluid nature of the category can be substantiated through Dasari Bodigadu's encounter with the multiple frames of bureaucracy in *Sommalu Ponayandi*. The existential angst in Bodigadu's character can be equated with

that of any other oppressed character in novels that are not so 'regional'. Yet, the dialect employed in the narrative to highlight the authenticity of the experience, and the author's location, within the context of the text is a feature that ascribes specificity to the experience. In a situation as this, one can only conclude that the definition of the "region" very often is context-bound.

The specificity of the "region" can be exemplified in some cases like in Rayalaseema writing. This manifests in terms of drought, the incredibly high temperature and the poverty of the region. The poverty is illustrated through a description of environment and life. The interrelations between society, environment and the individual can be seen in the working-class life. Almost all the chapter beginnings in Dr. Kesava Reddy's novel *Ramundadadu Rajjivundadi* begin with a reference to heat and summer. I give a few examples here,

As it was summer, daybreak was quite early. The sunrays gradually rising behind the eastern hills were making their way piercing the sky. Those beams had spread all over the earth, reflected from the sky.

(Chapter 1)

The heat falling slantingly is bursting into the hut.

(Chapter 2)



He turned to the east and did "**suryanamaskaram**" even while water flowed from his face.

(Chapter 7)

The unbearable heat is a feature singularly identified with Rayalaseema. Rayalaseema has a unique history of being an underdeveloped region in the history of Andhra Pradesh - a region once ruled by the Vijaynagar ruler Sri Krishnadeva **Ravulu**. That is how it gets its name Rayalaseema. Now it is ironically referred to as Rallaseema (region of stones) indicating the drought situation of the place. The descriptions of people, places and even names of people are in keeping with the internal structure of the region. The peculiar story of Pulligadu (a character in *Ramundadadu Rajjivundad*) is shockingly symptomatic of the depravity of the region. The imagery used for naming a child reflects the ghastly reality of the region. He narrates his story to the lorry driver he is traveling with, thus:

...a leaf rotten with food, ready to be thrown away into the gutter is called pullaku. I had a sister and three brothers. When I was a child, all **of** them died of some disease! What else can it be, but starvation? Within a **year** all my siblings, including my mother-five of them dropped dead. My father and I are left alive. My father has prayed to **Batagangamma** that at least I should survive. She is believed to have prophesied, 'if you give him an atrocious name, he'll **survive**'. Accordingly my father has named me after a rotten leaf.

(Reddy *RR* 20)

Pulligadu becomes an incarnation of poverty. The depravity reflected in the imagery even in the name of a child is a telling comment on the poverty and drought of the region. Pulligadu is physically and metaphysically a representative of the region.

If such realistic trend of portrayal is still in vogue in literature, an entirely different kind of image of the region is projected in films. These projections attain the status of stereotypes in popular conceptions of the region. Rayalaseema characters figure in the visual media as comedians. Though in literature there has been a marked difference with the advent of the new brand of Rayalaseema writers depicting the life of Rayalaseema in their local dialect in their own terms, the visual media remains a closed terrain for **Seema** people. Only the stereotypical and dominant perceptions of the region are available— inevitably produced and directed by people from coastal Andhra Pradesh. Self-assertion that is possible in literature, is not visible in the visual media, perhaps owing to the fact that filmmaking is still in the firm grip of a few coastal, landed gentry. What we see of Rayalaseema in films is the perceptions of the coastal Andhra people of this region. In their scheme of things, Rayalaseema means only one thing: faction politics. It is convenient to believe in this kind of stereotypes, since they are commercially successful.

I shall address a few issues related to the stereotype of Rayalaseema in films as a contrast to the realistic portrayal of Rayalaseema life in literature. My focus on Rayalaseema is guided by a personal note since I myself hail from that region and am

clearly aware of the kind of stereotypes circulated about the region. The fourth chapter of this thesis attempts to discuss some of the works that have debunked the existing stereotypes and presented a heterogeneous picture of the "region". The visual media, which has a larger audience and acceptance, indulges in irresponsible depictions of Rayalaseema. From the 90's onwards a series of films have been released that are set in Rayalaseema. The recently released movies "*Antahpuram*" (1999-2000) directed by Krishna Vamsi and "*Okkadu*" (2003) directed by Gunasekhar project two kinds of stereotypes. Let us note that Non-Rayalaseema people have directed both the films. Their presentation of Seema life conforms to the dominant patterns of the existing stereotypes. *Antahpuram* dramatizes the celebration of faction politics and there is an adulation of these feudal attitudes, whereas, *Okkadu* caricatures the same faction politics, with an equally feudal attitude.

The film *Antahpuram* depicts the encounter of a modern educated woman with a feudal family of Rayalaseema. Bhanu, an urban educated girl, is **married** into a feudal family. Nevertheless, once she begins her life in the family, she realizes that the family is caught in faction politics and very frequently indulges in murder and violence. She begins to hate the family and she wants to extricate herself and her husband and child from that claustrophobic atmosphere and run away as far as Mauritius. However, before her plan works out, her husband Prakash becomes a victim of a bloody encounter. With the death of her husband, Bhanu's worst fears get confirmed and her determination to escape from Rayalaseema increases so that she can at least protect her child from the "savage" atmosphere that prevails at her in-law's home. Bhanu eventually is compelled to

wage a war against her father-in-law. Each of these encounters reinforces the "savage" image of Rayalaseema. These encounters can be interpreted as savagery versus civilization. The character of Bhanu comes across as someone, representing all the values of an urban educated world, who naturally hates the conditions in her in-law's house. She is an outsider to the experience, culturally and otherwise. As her resentment increases towards faction politics, her attempts at escape also increase. In each of her attempts, she is suppressed in a blatantly violent fashion. Ultimately a saviour, an outsider to the region, rescues Bhanu and her child in a dramatic climax.

In *Okkadu* the battle clearly is metropolitan city versus Rayalaseema, and factionalism is opposed in a way that is part of the dominant cultural paradigm. *Okkadu* portrays a similar story of confinement and escape. But this time it is an insider who hates the bloody politics and escapes to Hyderabad and eventually to the U.S. Swapna wants to escape to Hyderabad from the ignominious fate of marrying Obula Reddy, the local faction leader. Her two brothers are slain as they refuse to give her in marriage to Obula Reddy. In her attempts at escape, an outsider (who belongs to the Telangana region), Ajay, helps her. **Clichéd** images of Rayalaseema recur throughout the film. The anti-hero hails from Kurnool of the Rayalaseema region; naturally, he believes in brute power either in love or war. He is foiled with a smoother, educated, urban character like Ajay who ultimately wins the battle and the girl. The film abounds in a profusion of violence and bloodshed. All the violence in the film happens in Kurnool. It is quite natural for the girl to hate her own life in Kurnool and run away to some other greener

pasture. Life in Rayalaseema is portrayed so as to show that anyone with some education and civilization would find it difficult to live there.

The films *Antahpuram* and *Okkadu* picturize the natives of Rayalaseema as being beastly and as being capable of only one kind of negotiation, that of brute power. They come across as extremely emotional and illogical as opposed to the cultured, logical and educated people of Coastal Andhra (who incidentally are from the cities). Violence is shown as something very natural in Rayalaseema existence. But life in this region reveals another facet of the people. poverty and hunger are part of their everyday life but not violence and atrocity as much.

Evidently there are problems with this kind of portrayal as are common to arguments of representation. Outsiders identify Rayalaseema with faction politics and all the dark aspects of life. Though faction politics has to be detested and opposed by any civilized society as it goes against the grain of civil society, the point that one has to bear in mind is that Rayalaseema alone does not foster sectarian violence and Rayalaseema does not mean only faction politics engineered by feudal lords. Rayalaseema seems to be caught between various contradictory representations, as the stereotypical dirty region as fostered by popular cinema and the realistic 'region' of misery and struggle, promoted by the regional novel. On one side, there is a vibrant literary movement, questioning the canonical forms of literature as also the injustice meted out to the region and its people;

on the other side there, is a powerful popular medium like the **film** working against this movement.

The bottom line is that in all these instances of representation there is an amount of power politics at play. The practice of hegemonic representation does not obliterate the '**reality**' of the existence of the other but only reinforces the idea of it as its true representation. Due to its economic and political power, Coastal Andhra as a region possesses much authority over the other regions in Andhra. It enjoys **this ability** in a perverse way, and feels the necessity to produce negative stereotypes about other regions. In order to establish itself as the superior version of human civilization, Coastal Andhra has to invent the 'inferior other' by virtue of the economic power it possesses. One way of resolving the crisis in the field of representation can be by being sensitive to other cultures and traditions. When one talks, rooted in the context of one's own politics, as some of the writers of the region do, and call for the building of a region as a marker of identity and cultural consciousness, one is giving a solution that is supposedly immediate and relevant. It is undeniably valid. But the problem of representation does not stop there. In order to effectively deal with any representation, we have to simultaneously engage with it at an *ontological level*.

These examples, from literature as well as from the visual media, stress the fact that the "region" should not be regarded as an absolute and discreet cultural unit. Struggle and conflict form an inevitable part of the experiences of the people of all regions.

However, one cannot say conclusively that these regions symbolise only these rebellions and movements. Similarly, the literature emanating from these regions should not be treated as propagating only one particular ideology. Changing human relations in the face of globalisation and other related interventions also form part of the experiences of these regions. Associating any region with one label, say for instance faction politics or the **naxal** movement or some exotic landscape will not give us a comprehensive view of the concept. Like any other critical term the "region" also cannot be confined to one specific identity and thereby denied the possibility of fluidity and change. A genuinely productive and useful thinking requires that we should not fall prey to abstract theorizing. Maybe one of the first requirements of understanding a process, as 'regional' would be to recognize the heterogeneous nature of the concept and to engage with it.

The method by which certain regions are marginalized applies to the marginalisation of certain writers of the region as well. The novels studied in the thesis while delineating the historical contexts within which the respective regions evolve, collectively foreground questions of identity. In this context, the basic act of writing a regional novel itself is an assertion of identity. Though there has been a stream of writing ever since the genre novel was invented, which discussed themes based on a particular locality, the regional novel as a separate genre was recognized because of the protest of some writers like **Phaneswarnath Renu**. His emphatic declaration that what he writes is a regional novel signifies some important facts about the till-then neglected region of Purnea in Bihar which chiefly figures in his novel *Maila Ancal*. This assertion of the regional identity comes as a consequence of negligence meted out to some of its subjects

by the State and the Center and to issues related to these areas in mainstream literary histories. The note of protest that accompanies such conscious writing actually takes us not only to questions of identity but also to questions of canon formation. Canon formation in fact decides what is literature and what is not. It is in accordance with that, that literary histories, the tastes of the reading public, and University curriculum get moulded.

An examination of the rationale behind canon formation in any literature will provide with us insights into the way in which some authors are made cult figures while some others are subjected to negligence in the process. Institutional as well as theoretical factors are involved in the making of the canon. The theory of canon formation defines the essence of artistic criterion as an amalgam of "mastery of figurative language, originality, cognitive power, knowledge, exuberance of diction..." (Leavis 29) The mechanism of imparting the aesthetics of literature is Eurocentric and tends to be laden with the British system of values and judgment. The great tradition of writers is supposed to follow and bequeath these values to the younger generation of writers. Let us remember that the concept of greatness, aesthetic sense and such other values of literature vary within the European context. The dubious distinction accorded in *Histories of Literature* to Thomas Hardy itself speaks volumes on the politics of canon formation. Harry Blamires in his *History of English Literature* makes a comparison between George Meredith and Thomas Hardy privileging Meredith over Hardy. He says:



Meredith is cosmopolitan, Hardy local; Meredith is the flamboyant stylist, Hardy a penman who sometimes knocks sentences roughly together like a **man** building a rough stone wall....Meredith can portray aristocrats, intellectuals and social stars with devastating brilliance, controlling their talk as a conductor directs an orchestra. Hardy knows his Wessex countrymen like the back of his hand but has little skill with characters of the more sophisticated classes.

(Blamires 375)

While attributing greatness to Hardy, his literary genius is undermined by his image as a regional novelist. His brilliant portrayal of Wessex is viewed as his inability to handle subjects that are urban and sophisticated.

In the Indian context some of the writers discussed in the thesis are part of the canon while others are not. Though it is a welcome fact that Phaneshwarnath Renu in spite of his signaling a note of protest through writing *Maila Ancal* is canonized and subsequently included in University courses, many of the writers of the region go unnoticed. It required a revolution in literature for the regional novel to get recognition and acceptance as a special **category**. And when that finally happens, what subsequent histories and glossaries would include is a set definition of the 'regional' that doesn't cover the complexities of the term, and a set range of recognised writers talked about as its only

practitioners. And these are the features of narrow literary categorizations and canon-formation that I seek to question through my inclusions (an array of conceptual definitions of the region and many non-canonized writers of the region) in this thesis.

As for the Telugu literary scene, literary canon was basically built on the model set by C.P. Brown who took up the mission of reviving Telugu literature. Subsequent versions of the canon are simply extensions or revisions of the original canon of **C.P.Brown**. The principles that governed the construction of Brown's canon continued to dominate academic bodies. Writers of the region like **Dr.Kesava** Reddy and Naamini Subrahmanyam who also write about the region in the local dialect are not mentioned in the canon while writers like Raavi Sastry are acclaimed as stalwarts of Telugu literature. Though Raavi Sastry delineated regional themes in the regional dialect, both conservatives as well as liberals accept his style of writing. It could also be because Raavi Sastry belongs to the Brahminical sections of Andhra society, which considered literature as its own forte. Most of the writers of the regional narrative belong to the non-Brahminical sections. Moreover, Rayalaseema and its language and issues are not considered worthy of being accommodated in literature. Though these writers have been recognized in recent years they have not been included in any major literary history. The publication and circulation of their writings are limited to a reading public associated with various peoples' movements. '•

In all these cases, the struggle of writers of the region has been against the establishment. The problem is that ages of institutionalization of the tastes of the

reading public must be undone to accept a new genre of writing like that of the regional novel. In this situation, postulating an alternative canon is not an answer to years of academic disregard meted out to some writers including women writers. One way in which the crisis can possibly be resolved is by showing sensitivity to literatures of other regions and cultures as well, thus rendering the space of the regional novel dynamic.

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