Bioregion and Indigeneity in Literary Imagination

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To them who strengthened my roots.

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FROM BIOREGION TO *kuṭi*: A PROLOGUE

NIRMAL SELVAMONY

Today "bioregion" is commonly understood as "a region whose limits are naturally defined by topographic and biological features (such as mountain ranges and ecosystems)."[1] Scientists have identified 185 such bioregions on the earth.[2] This word was coined in the 1970s by Allen van Newkirk, the founder of the Institute for Bioregional Research.[3] According to him,

> Bioregions are tentatively defined as biologically significant areas of the Earth's surface which can be mapped and discussed as distinct existing patterns of plant, animal, and habitat, distributions as related to range patterns and complex cultural niche-habits, including deformations, attributed to one or more successive occupying populations of the culture-bearing mammal.[4]

Three years later, Peter Berg and Raymond Dasmann wrote,

> We define bioregion in a sense different from the biotic province of Dasmann (1973) or the biogeographical province of Udvardy (1975). The

[1] Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "bioregion," accessed February 21, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bioregion.
[2] "Bioregions 2020," One Earth, accessed February 21, 2023, https://www.oneearth.org/bioregions-2020/.
[3] Don Alexander, "Bioregions vs. Biosphere Reserves: Which is a Better Vehicle for Sustainability?" *The International Journal of UNESCO Biosphere Reserves*, accessed February 21, 2023, https://biospherejournal.org/vol1-1/bioregions-vs-biosphere-reserves-dr-alexander/.
[4] Allen van Newkirk, "Bioregion: Towards Bioregional Strategy for Human Cultures," *Environmental Conservation* 2, No. 2 (1975): 108. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0376892900001004.

> term refers both to geographical terrain and a terrain of consciousness—to a place and ideas that have developed about how to live in that place.[5]

Though the authors contrasted bioregion with related concepts of Dasmann and Udvardy,[6] they did not say in what relation their definition of the term stood to that of Newkirk's. To Berg and Dasmann, bioregion did refer to the natural region though it is only one of its aspects. According to them,

> A bioregion can be determined initially by use of climatology, physiography, animal and plant geography, natural history and other descriptive natural sciences; the final boundaries of a bioregion are best described by the people who have lived within it, through human recognition of the realities of living-in-place.[7]

Though it is a natural region, a bioregion cannot be clearly mapped because its boundaries depend on the "attitudes" of its inhabitants.[8] However, the authors provided a physiographic description of the bioregion, in this case northern California, that they focused on: "The northern California bioregion is ringed by mountains on the north, east and south and extends some distance into the Pacific Ocean on the west." In the south are the Tehachapi mountains, and they extend through the Transverse ranges to Point Conception on the seaward side. In the east is the Sierra Nevada Mountain, and the in the north is the volcanic Cascade Range and the Klamath mountains. "Since the boundaries depend in part on human attitudes they cannot be clearly mapped."[9]

What is more, Planet Drum (the organization Berg founded in 1973 to promote bioregionalism) named this bioregion "Shasta" after a mountain in the Cascade Range located on the southern California-Oregon border, and

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[5] Peter Berg and Raymond Dasmann, "Reinhabiting California," in *Reinhabiting a Separate Country: A Bioregional Anthology of Northern California*, ed. Peter Berg (California: Planet Drum: 1978), 217-220.
[6] Miklos D. F. Udvardy, "A Classification of the Bioregional Provinces of the World," *IUCN Occasional Paper 18*, (Morges, Switzerland: IUCN, 1975). https://www.iucn.org/sites/default/files/import/downloads/udvardy.pdf.
[7] Berg and Dasmann, "Reinhabiting," 217-220. .
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

produced a map of it. Further, it is one thing to say that the inhabitants' attitudes to their bioregion are shaped by their living-in-place in it and quite another to say that a bioregion is not only a place but also a set of "ideas that have developed about how to live in that place."[10] This is problematic because the authors suggested that any kind of life in a particular place would be a bioregional one, which, in fact, is not the case. As the phrase, "to live in that place"[11] is not necessarily an equivalent of the technical term, "living-in-place," the former phrase could even denote the lifeway of the invaders who prefer political rather than natural boundaries to the places they have occupied. In other words, "to live in that place" should be substituted with "live-in-place," which means, "following the necessities and pleasures of life as they are uniquely presented by a particular site, and evolving ways to ensure long-term occupancy of that site"[12] Apparently, the definition, rather, the redefinition the authors have provided for bioregion is problematic. It is a redefinition because the authors modified the existing scientific definition.

According to Berg and Dasmann, a bioregion is not a mere natural region; it is an invaded place where one tries to reinhabit like how the original inhabitants of that place lived there. But in Newkirk's, and in present-day dictionary definitions, a bioregion is only a kind of natural region, not necessarily a reinhabitory place. Berg moved away not only from the conventional scientific definition of bioregion, but also from the new definition he and Dasmann provided in their 1978 essay though Berg's bioregionalist vision depended entirely on his redefinitional project. The project was part of Berg's quest for an alternative lifeway which commenced as an experiment of the countercultural movement of the 1960s in the USA.

After four decades of activism and planetary drumming of bioregionalism, where does Berg's bioregionalism stand now? Evidently, present-day definitions of the bioregion have conveniently left out the idea of "living-in-place," perhaps in the name of science. Admittedly, this idea is only an

[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.

embarrassment in a progressively industrializing and globalizing world. Berg, like many of us, struggled hard to live-in-place and hold on to his original idea of the bioregion. But over the years, his idea of bioregion began to delink itself from the indigenous model of reinhabitation and gravitate towards the industrialist model of life.

In the 1980s, Planet Drum launched a Green City initiative for San Francisco and promoted the concept of "urban sustainability."[13] In 1986, this organization conducted a series of Green City symposia in the Fort Mason Center, San Francisco, in order to explore possibilities of greening the Bay Area cities and towns by pressing into service the concept of "sustainability." Sustainability[14] is certainly not an equivalent of indigenous lifeway, which Berg considered the ultimate model for living-in-place in his 1978 essay jointly written with Dasmann. Though it is future-oriented, its endorsement of modern idea of development undermines its interest in future wellbeing. Du Pisani admits that sustainable development is not a wholly refined concept. But he is hopeful that "it would, indeed, evolve in subsequent decades."[15] But Donald Worster is not so optimistic. To him, sustainability is only a shaky ground to build a future society.[16] If sustainability was a compromising future goal, so was the acceptance of the notion of "green city" considering bioregionalism's emphasis on the reclamation of natural boundaries by discarding cultural boundaries like those of a city. In short, Berg seems to have acquiesced and arrived at a

[13] Cheryll Glotfelty, "Peter Berg: Living a Making" in *Biosphere and the Bioregion: Essential Writings of Peter Berg*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Eve Quesnel (New York: Routledge, 2014), 12-32.
[14] Nirmal Selvamony, "From Sustainability to Harmony" (keynote address at National Conference on "Synergizing Sustainability Continuum: Multidisciplinary Explorations in Eco-Literary Praxis," Loyola College, Chennai, December 8, 2017).
[15] Du Pisani, Jacobus A. "Sustainable development – historical roots of the concept" *Environmental Sciences* Vol 3 , No. 2 (June 2006): 83-96, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15693430600688831.
[16] Donald Worster, "The Shaky Ground of Sustainability" in *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century: Readings on the Philosophy and Practice of the New Environmentalism*, ed. George Sessions (Boston and London: Shambhala, 1995), 417-427.

compromised bioregionalism which accepted "sustainability" in lieu of "living-in-place."

Sustainability is part of the mainstream industrialist society's vocabulary and it provides a sort of bridge between bioregionalism and industrialism. No wonder, the organization One Earth can now enumerate bioregions and tell me that the "Greater Deccan-Sri Lankan Forests and Drylands" is my present bioregion (wherein Chennai, the Indian city where I live, is located) and that it is situated in the realm of Indomalaya! To some, this stubborn dismissal of the redefinition proposed by Berg and Dasmann could be great achievement, but to me it is not. In my opinion, it is necessary to resist the efforts to uproot the 1978 definition and ensure that the bioregion thrives in its indigenous soil.

To replant the theory we need proper understanding of it, which in turn, requires reconsideration of the following terms: "consciousness," "geographical," "bios," and "place," among other things. The first problematic concept that requires attention is the idea of consciousness. As consciousness cannot exist independent of a body and a mind, we might presume that bioregional consciousness is that of an embodied individual. If Berg assumes in the essay he wrote with Dasmann[17] that the agent is someone like him, then, there could be as many ideas of bioregion as there are such individuals. While Berg would like northern California to be a separate country so that he could live-in-place and reinhabit it realizing the kind of relationship he envisages between the place and the individual, another Californian, probably a politician, would fight tooth and nail to abort the prospect of northern California becoming a separate country. The latter may find the state a more functional category than the bioregion. Obviously, the politician has his own ideas of how to make a living out of that place. Indeed, Berg might argue that only in a bioregion can you live-in-place and reinhabit it, not in a state. But then, it will not be easy for him to convince the politician as the two do not share a common understanding of the bioregion. Different ideas about life in a place are inseparable from the disagreement on the nature of the life-place.

[17] Berg and Dasmann, 217-220.

Consider the so-called bioregional descriptions of northern California. What Berg and Dasmann called the northern California bioregion, to others, consists of more than one bioregion. According to the Fire and Resource Assessment Program of California, northern California has the following bioregions: Modoc, Klamath/North Coast, Sacramento Valley, Bay Area/Delta, Sierra, San Joaquin Valley and Central Coast.[18] But One Earth has another version of this bioregion. While a large part of California lies within the "Greater California Bioregion," the remaining part of the state lies within the two bioregions, Central-Southern Cascades Forests, and Baja California and Southern Deserts.[19]

Obviously there is no single idea of what constitutes a bioregion. Nor is there agreement on the reason why the natural boundaries of a place have to be taken seriously. To a scientist, it is a great way of understanding the earth physiographically.[20] To a politician, it is a door that opens up possibilities of new political strategies to gain more political power.[21] To an economist, it is a kind of ecological economics[22] which, as we know, is not necessarily grounded in kin relation to humans and beings other than humans. Different definitions of bioregion and approaches to it, in the final analysis, do not so much enrich as undermine bioregional theory. They do so by relativizing it. A timely and essential theory such as the bioregion need not be dumped in a relativist blackhole.

The second problematic concept is the geographical aspect of bioregion. If one part of the definition is problematic, one part of the compound word, bioregion, namely, "region" is also equally such. Region, as I have shown elsewhere, is a kind of space where anything that occupies that space is not

[18] "Map of State of California Bioregions—CA.gov," FRAP, accessed February 21, 2023. https://www.fire.ca.gov/media/2134/inacregmap.pdf.
[19] "Bioregions 2020."
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ranjit Bakshi. "Bioregions: India's Strategic Imperative," Gateway House, accessed February 21, 2023.
https://www.gatewayhouse.in/bioregions-a-strategic-imperative/.
[22] Molly Scott Cato, *Bioregional Economy: Land, Liberty and the Pursuit of* Happiness (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

easily locatable[23] quite unlike place. Berg is not actually talking about region; his bioregion is a place, not unlocatable region.

The third problem pertains to the idea of "bios." Most English words with the prefix "bio-" (biology, biosphere, biocentrism, and biology) include all life forms. Similarly, one would expect the term "bioregion" also to refer to all life forms, and consider all beings other than humans also potential inhabitory agents. But that is not the case. Berg and Dasmann are only talking about humans, invaders who have colonized the North American continent at that.

Yet another problem is the conflict between the two paradigms – the industrial and the indigenous. On the one hand, Berg and Dasmann look upon the indigenous lifeway as the paradigm of living-in-place. On the other, they seek to base their principles of living-in-place on the industrialist discourses, "economics" (which they call "ecologics") and "politics." If their economics is devoid of the respect and reverence they idealize among the indigenous people, their politics surrenders to statehood. The counterpart of the economic concept of self-sufficiency is the political concept of separate statehood. Another key concept, namely, "resource"[24] is also borrowed from modern economics. Soil, water, tree, and fish are desacralized materials and resources devoid of their earlier power to command respect and reverence, and now used in the industrialist society in a manner that is ecologically sound in order to uphold values such as employability and sufficiency. If respect and reverence for beings other than human are impracticable or inconvenient (and regarding those beings as resources is practicable and convenient) to the authors, defining the bioregion in terms of reinhabitation is impracticable and inconvenient to the scientifically minded of the industrialist society. It is not hard to see how

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[23] (i) Nirmal Selvamony, "Serving Flesh and Fish Blood as Neopostcolonial Poetics," *Journal of Contemporary Thought*, No.3 (2013): 95-112.
(ii) Nirmal Selvamony, "An Ecolinguistic Window on Globalization," in *Globalization and the Teaching of English*, ed. Sanjay Goyal and N. Krishnaswamy. (Delhi: Vijaya Books, 2015).

[24] Nirmal Selvamony. "The Ecohumanities in India, 1980-2019," *The World Humanities Report*, Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes, accessed February 21, 2023,
https://whreport.thewebsitebuild.com/whrauthors/nirmal-selvamony/.

the theory of bioregion slides down the industrialist skid road, and why this slide has to be dealt with positively.

The key to the redemption of bioregion from the clutches of the industrialist death dealers is to reimagine it in the light of the indigenous worldview. Arguably, the indigenous people who are upheld as the ideal ones who live-in-place, did not leave their idea of lifeway to individual consciousness lest it slipped into the mire of relativism. Such a possibility did not exist because there was a common understanding of the bioregion that was shared not only by the present generation of the indigenous society but also by the ancestors of that society.

Evidently, Berg and Dasmann did not dismiss the inhabitory (on the analogy of reinhabitory) ideas (of living in place) of the indigenous people, who in their opinion, inhabited the place the authors desired to reinhabit. If the entire onus of reinhabitation were to be upon an individual modern bioregionalist like Berg, his idea of the bioregion would exclude the inhabitory ideas of the indigenous people. But that is not the case, because his idea of the bioregion would not be what it ought to be without the inhabitory model from the indigenous past of the bioregion.

Though the authors' definition of the term bioregion under discussion does not include the lifeway of the indigenous people, the latter cannot disassociate itself from the term bioregion. It is the indigenous lifeway which is responsible for the longevity and conservation of the place (the authors call bioregion) where the indigenous people lived. This is why the essay reproduced the following long quotation from Forbes:

> Native Californians felt themselves to be something other than independent, autonomous individuals. They perceived themselves as being deeply bound together with other people (and with the surrounding non-human forms of life) in a complex interconnected web of life, that is to say, a true community […] All creatures and all things were […] brothers and sisters. From this idea came the basic principle of non-exploitation, of respect and reverence for all creatures, a principle extremely hostile to the kind of economic development typical of modern society and destructive of human morals.[25]

[25] Berg and Dasmann, 217-220.

From the very beginning, the indigenous lifeway has been a specter bioregionalism could not exorcise. But it was only a spectral semantic entity of the term bioregion because the teleological orientation of the term came to be determined not so much by indigenous lifeway as by the concepts of sustainability and green city within a decade since Berg's adoption of Newkirk's term.

Narrating the life-journey of Berg, Glotfelty tells us how the stories of such indigenous people as the Pomo, Maidu, Karok and those of Pit River were performed in the 1970s by the Reinhabitory Theatre founded by Judy Goldhaft, the wife of Peter Berg. These performances attempted "to forge a path from industrial to indigenous consciousness."[26] Indigenous lifeway was the theme of some of the objects contained in what Planet Drum called a "bundle", which was the official medium of the organization to share bioregionalistic ideas with a large number of people. Of the six items enclosed in the very first bundle circulated in 1973, three were about the indigenous people:

a. Redwood journal which documented the lifestyles of the Indian people, the La Guajira and the Cabo.
b. Drawing of a Lapp shaman's drum.
c. Black and white photographs of the Hausa tribe of Kano, West Africa.[27]

Among the topics explored by the nine "bundles" published between 1973 and 1985,[28] some (such as land-based identity, and totemic species) pertained to the indigenous lifeway.

A central feature of indigenous lifeway is communitarianness, which is impossible without a shared understanding of all aspects of life. Though Berg and Dasmann seem to play into the hands of western liberalist notion of the individual (the smallest unit of the modern discourses of economics and politics), their idea of reinhabitation ought to be communitarian rather than individualistic. Significantly, communitarian action is a rare common

[26] Cheryll Glotfelty, "Peter Berg," 12-32. .
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.

ground shared by *tiṇai* and bioregionalism despite their other key differences. Probably the adjective, communitarian is redundant because action cannot be anything but communitarian because it involves the self, the other and their context.[29] Context involves a particular place-time occupied by the people, and other entities both material and non-material including the ultimate values. As place-time is never a vacuum but filled with other people, and beings other than humans, action can never be solipsistic. Even thinking is not wholly solipsistic because it uses one semic system or the other as an instrument validated only by a community.[30] Arguably, thinking is inseparable from the embodied agent's associated emotions communicable to others who share the agent's context. But thinking does not always involve the patient who shares the place-time of the agent. Only in such contexts as when the agent thinks in the presence of the patient do the gestures, postures, and embodied emotions of the agent become communicatively significant, especially to the patient. Otherwise, thinking, as symbolized by Rodin's "The Thinker," is a type of action that excludes the physically present patient, and in this regard, it is only a partial action because normative complete action is one where the patient (the other) is physically present. Complete action is communitarian involving not only the embodied agent, but also the physically present patient who share a common stage of action.[31] Despite the presence of multiple actors in the world occupying different stages of action located in innumerable locations (place-time complexes), no instance of action is global or planetary or cosmic. Action can only be local. Only the self's thought, which is incomplete action, can transcend a particular stage of action and qualify as something that is global.

When interpreted in the light of communitarian agency, living-in-place may not be understood as a kind of praxis of the self but as that of an agent who is only one persona of the triadic personaic community, the other two being the patient (the other) and the context. As the context-persona is a specific

[29] Nirmal Selvamony, "*kaLam* and Free Space in *The Yearning of Seeds*," *Kavya Bharati*, No. 27. (2015): 199-221.
[30] Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge and London: Harvard U P, 1980), 321.
[31] Selvamony, "*kaLam,*" 199-221.

and local one, no action can be global or planetary or cosmic. Global living-in-place may be the ideal of the detractors of bioregionalism; but it is certainly not the kind of bioregional theory Berg and Dasmann advocated. Living-in-place can only be local and it is this localness which could be described as "global" when there are several instances of local bioregional practice in many parts of the world.

It is true that Bergian bioregional theory does not speak of communitarian agency overtly. But without the latter, living-in-place will be an impossibility. Therefore, communitarian agency is a non-dit element in bioregional theory. Such agency is not possible without shared understanding, which may be denoted by the Tamil word, *marapu*, not easily translated into English. The English word "tradition" may be a near equivalent. *marapu* includes both the collective conscious and the unconscious, which contextualize anything that is significant to the community in question. Literally, *marapu* is "treeness" because tradition is imagined as a tree that has its hidden roots, visible flowers, foliage, branches and trunk, and also new shoots or leaves or fruits which will appear in the future. In other words, it is a metaphor for the three aspects of time – past, present and future. *marapu* of anything involves not only the present but also the past and the future. For example, the people of *tiṇai* enjoyed a shared understanding of what a *tiṇai* was, as that understanding was *marapu* of the people of that *tiṇai*. *marapu* involves not only time, but also a specific place, because we cannot speak of one without the other, and also the performers of the action. In short, we begin to see how *marapu* is not so much a thing as action people perform.

marapu is not easily dismissible if you acknowledge that you are a communitarian being. The word bioregion had already acquired a semantic *marapu* in which the word has been contextualized. Such contextualization has already lent the word authority, and endorsement. Therefore, when Berg and Dasmann gave the word a new meaning – as a place where one lives-in-place – three years after the word was coined, it was not easy for the new meaning to oust the earlier one and find its own *marapu*. Even the problem of mappability of the bioregion is resolved by *marapu*. When there is disagreement or dispute regarding the boundary, people invoke *marapu* or

tradition to resolve it. This would be difficult if such matters are left to the consciousness of a single agent.

As *marapu* is community consciousness and unconsciousness, its proper location is the community. The basic unit of the community is an extended family or home with members who are humans and beings other than human bound to each other by kinship ties. The members of this family are not probably "all creatures and all things"[32] as Forbes put it, but specific humans and beings (including ancestral spirits) other than human in a specific location. What Berg and Dasmann identify as "ideas about how to live in a place" are those of this extended family. If this is true, living-in-place is also a set of ideas which form part of the *marapu* of the extended family.

Both the extended family and the place where this family live are called "*kuṭi*" in Tamil. All the members of the family have face-to-face contact with each other and this is one of the reasons why they enjoy the kind of kin relationship they do. This is true of the Native Americans too:

> The smallest American Indian groupings are extended families. Many modern American families are 'nuclear families' consisting of a mother and/or father and their children, with other relatives such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, or cousins sometimes living hundreds, if not thousands, of miles away and having little contact with each other. In contrast, many American Indian families are 'extended families,' where grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins often live nearby and are in constant contact with each other. All members of the extended family may help with child rearing. In some tribes, uncles have an important role in disciplining their nieces and nephews. In some tribes, an aunt is addressed with the same term of 'mother' as a child's biological mother.[33]

[32] Berg and Dasmann, 217-220.
[33] "American Indian Knowledge Base," University Outreach, Edutas, The University of Oklahoma, accessed on February 21, 2023, https://outreach.ou.edu/educational-services/education/edutas/comprehensive-centers-archive/knowledgebases/american-indian/structure-tribes-clans-bands-extended-families/.

In other words, what Forbes calls the "true community" of the original inhabitants was not an imagined one as in a state or a nation.[34]

Evidently, the locus of the kin relationship where the original inhabitants lived-in-place was not a bioregion like northern California but a much smaller place, not unlike the *kuṭi* of *tiṇai* people. This is endorsed by the fact that present northern California was not the home of just one Native American tribe but several: Shasta, Tolowa, Yurok, Chilulo, Whilkut, Hupa, Chimariko, Sinkyo, Nongati, Mistole, Karuk, Wiyot, and Lasik (of the Northwest); Atchumawi, and Atsugewi (of the Northeast); Yuki, Cahto, Pomo, Wappo, Coast Miwok (of the Northcoast); Wintu, Nomlaki, Yana, Konkow, Patwin, Lake Miwok, Nisenan, Maidu (of Sacramento valley); Northern valley Yokuts, Southern valley Yokuts, Foothill Yokuts, Miwok, Monache, Yokuts, and Tubatulabal (of San Joaquin valley). For example, the Shasta tribe after whom Berg named northern California bioregion, was not confined to northern California. People of that tribe occupied a vast area which included the southern part of the present state of Oregon also.[35]

Though each tribe was often called a "nation," it had its subdivisions like the clan or band which consisted of several extended families originating from a common ancestor. So, effectively, the locus where a tribal extended family lived-in-place was not a vast area like northern California but a *kuṭi*, the site where an extended family lived. If living-in-place is what defines a bioregion, only the dwelling site of an extended family could be one. On this count, northern California cannot be a bioregion where one could live-in-place.

Living-in-place is possible only in a land area in which the agent (the one who practices it) can have face-to-face contact with all of the members of the community of the agent, not in an Andersonian imagined community where such contact is not possible. Further, the *marapu* of living-in-place shared by all the members of this community is another prerequisite for living-in-place. As the members of a state society are not likely to share a

[34] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983).
[35] "Our Story: Traditional Shasta Life," Shasta Indian Nation, accessed February 21, 2023, https://www.shastaindiannation.org/

marapu, living-in-place is not practicable in a state society. For this reason, the state societies of such Native Americans like the Mayas, Incas, and the Aztecs, will not serve as models for living-in-place.

tiṇai is also constituted by small, kin communities each of which is known by a name appropriate to the land area to which that community belongs. While the common name for the community is *kuṭi*, it might be known by a name which indicates the land area in which the community is located. For example, a *kuṭi* in a scrubland is known as "*pāṭi*," which is also the generic name for hamlet in Tamil and Kannada. Each *tiṇai* has its various types of hamlets. Significantly, hamlet derives from the Old French, *ham*, which is a settlement smaller than a village. The ultimate meaning of "*ham*" is "home" or *kuṭi*, an extended family with a common ancestor. Consider the term, "*ci̲rukuṭi*," which means "small extended family" employed by the female lover who asks her male lover how he managed to find her "*ci̲rukuṭi*" on a stormy night.[36] A *kuṭi* itself is an extended family of kinfolk (*kiḻai*, as in *ku̲n̲rakac ci̲rukuṭi kiḻaiyuṭa̲n̲ makiḻntu* [members of a small extended family of a hillside home enjoying the company of their kinfolk], *tirumurukā̲r̲ruppaṭai* 196)[37] who enjoy face-to-face contact. A *kuṭi* itself can be traced to the smallest praxemic unit I have called elsewhere *kaḻam* and its *tu̲rai*.[38]

Every *tiṇai* agent performs actions only in a *kaḻam* with its *tu̲rai*, the adjacent land area the agent does not occupy but depends on in a *kuṭi*. This means that the context of the action is not just *kaḻam*, but the *tu̲rai* also, which constitutes both material and non-material entities including communitarian values. *kaḻam* is the stage of the action whose scale is proportionate to the bodies of the agent and the patient. To describe this scale as "small" is relative, it is an inapt characterization as the size of the

[36] "Kurunthokai 355," Sangam Poetry, accessed February 21, 2023, https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/ettuthokai-kurunthokai-201-400/.
[37] "*tirumurukā̲r̲ruppaṭai*," Sangam Poetry, accessed February 21, 2023, https://sangamtranslationsbyvaidehi.com/pathuppattu-thirumurukatruppadai/.
[38] Nirmal Selvamony, "Justice and *tiṇai*: The Strange Meeting of *tiṇai* and Industrial Societies," in *Contemporary Contemplations on Green Literatures*, ed. Suresh Frederick and Samuel Rufus, (New Delhi: Authorspress, 2021), 11-35.

human body cannot be anything other than what it normally is. In other words, the scale is proportionate rather than small and what is proportionate or fitting (rather than small) ought to be beautiful. For example, intermediate technology which Schumacher recommended in his magnum opus, *Small is Beautiful*[39] is beautiful not because it is small but because it is the best fit for the *kaḷam* of the user of technology.

As most fitting or proportionate action is possible only in a *kaḷam*, a specific locus, neither is global action possible nor is *kaḷam*-action parochial. *kaḷam* makes agency local. Further, *kaḷam*-action, in itself, is holistic in the sense that it is not a kind of action that excludes any action element that ought not to be excluded from its *kaḷam*. Therefore, *kaḷam*-action is neither fragmentary nor does it fragment a whole that ought not to be fragmented. Consequently, *kaḷam*-action need not balkanize nor promote balkanization. Yet another point to deal with is the fear that *kaḷam*-action does not contribute to the need for constant growth. Growth is not an end, it is only means for an organism to live well. Both growth and the actions of the growing organism are possible only in a *kaḷam*.[40] Parochialism, balkanization, stagnation, insularity, and ethnocentrism are neither innate to *kaḷam* nor effects of *kaḷam*-action. They are negative attitudes of some agents (such as the Nazis) wrongly attributed to the stage of action (the local place), a striking instance of what I have elsewhere called the "attribution fallacy."[41] If local agency were negative, we may have to conclude that the indigenous people who are exemplars of such agency are potential or real Nazis, which is ridiculous. It is unfortunate that this fallacious argument is employed time and again by pretentious whistle-blowers. To reiterate, action is innately local because its stage (*kaḷam*) is such.

To give an example of the localness of agency, let me describe the way my grandparents lived-in-place in their *kuṭi* called marutaṅkōṭu [now known as Maruthancode, in Kanyakumari District of Tamil Nadu], which itself forms a part of *kuṟiñcit tiṇai* whose land area is part of a mountain range called

[39] E.F Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics As If People Mattered* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).
[40] Cato, 34-39.
[41] Selvamony, "Ecohumanities."

the Western Ghats. According to One Earth, this mountain range is only a part of a larger land area identified as the bioregion called "Indian Tropical Coastal Forests."[42] They could live-in-place in a manner dreamt by Berg in their *kuṭi* because their stage of action was not the vast area called "Indian Tropical Coastal Forests" but *kuṭi* in which they enjoyed face-to-face contact with everyone. They cultivated only some plants for food, gathered honey, hunted occasionally, did not have to rely on electric power, and hardly ever had to use money because fish, salt and other things the family needed were obtained by bartering produce from their own homestead. Though they relied on the world outside their homestead for some of their needs, their lifeway was what I would call "partial subsistence," which approximates what Berg calls "living-in-place" though it is not wholly the *tiṇai* way of life. A complete *tiṇai* way of life will be wholly self-sufficient without ruling out necessary exchange. Though Berg also mentions self-sufficiency as a characteristic principle of living-in-place,[43] his principle derives from the industrialist discourse called economics, and what is more, the different geographical scales of *kuṭi* and bioregion imply different kinds of self-sufficiency.

If the geographical extent of reinhabitation is the bioregion, then, it would have been impossible for my grandparents to live the life they did. They had total control over their own *kaḻam* and its *tuṟai*, and near total control over their *kuṭi* because my grandparents were looked upon as *cāṉṟōr* (respectable elders) of their *kuṭi* who commanded the respect of the people of their *kuṭi*. This implies that they did not have such control over the rest of the bioregion in which their own *kuṭi* was located, and that their own actions in their *kaḻam* and *tuṟai* were possible because their *kuṭi* (in which their *kaḻam* with its *tuṟai* was located) was supportive of those actions. Though some of the residents of the *kuṭi* of my grandparents were not their relatives, they could, for the most part, live-in-place until the late 1980s mainly because they did not have to deal with major obstacles to their subsistence mode of living from the outlying areas over which they had no control. My grandparents lived well over ninety years. From what I have said so far, it may be evident

[42] "Bioregions 2020."
[43] Berg and Dasmann, 217-220.

that living-in-place is possible only in a *kuṭi*, not in a bioregion (as large as northern California).

That *kuṭi* is the proper locus of living-in-place is endorsed not only by the praxis of *tiṇai*, but also by the lifeway of the indigenous people who the bioregionalists like Berg and Dasmann look up to as the original inhabitants. Though the pioneering bioregionalists acknowledged the lifeway of the indigenous lifeway as their model, they did not define the bioregion in a manner compatible with such lifeway. Instead, they attempted to borrow their lifeway principles from the industrialist discourses of economy and politics resulting in a grave mismatch between the ideal of the communitarian indigenous lifeway and the economic and political strategies of the individual-centred industrialist society. Corroborating my efforts at redeeming bioregional theory from the denaturing clutches of industrialist ideas, Aleena's volume takes this redemptive project further in a significant manner by interpreting bioregionalism from the perspective of *puttiṇai*.

Aleena's engagement with bioregional theory is inseparable from *tiṇai*'s tryst with this theory. The connection between bioregional theory and *tiṇai* was first explored in my postgraduate course called "Ecoliterature" at Madras Christian College (MCC). When this course was launched, it was called "Tamil Poetics" because its central theoretical component was *tiṇai*. It was, shall I say, a proto-ecocritical one because it was introduced at a time when the term "ecocriticism" was, for all practical purposes, unknown in India. But this course was part of the *tiṇai* movement, which can be traced to the group called "*tiṇai*" I launched in Chennai, in 1980. This group sought to promote *tiṇai* as an alternative (lifeway model) to the industrialist one. When the ecocritical course was renamed "Ecoliterature," it included indigenous literary texts from several nations including the aboriginal texts of Australia, with *tiṇai* as the unifying theme of all indigenous traditions. As *tiṇai* songs of both Tamil and non-Tamil traditions including aboriginal Australia are eminently performable,[44] the performativity of these songs

[44] In a public event called "Dreaming of Home: A Cross-Cultural Collaborative Performance of Music and Poetry," in Davidson College, Davidson, NC, USA, on 21 March, 1995, I sang *tiṇai* songs (I had set to music in the ancient Tamil musical mode) to the accompaniment of traditional South Indian and Korean musical instruments. In this event, comparable *tiṇai* songs from indigenous traditions other

was an important component of the course. I am glad Aleena chose to study aboriginal drama rather than aboriginal poetry or aboriginal prose because when it comes to re-performing the indigenous lifeway holistically, poetry and prose are no match to drama.

As *tiṇai* movement has some similarities with bioregionalism, I wanted to meet Berg, and when an opportunity presented itself in 2009 (two years before he passed away), I did meet him and Judy in their house in San Francisco along with my friend, Vasanth, who made that meeting possible. It was a pleasant surprise when Berg recognized me as an Indian scholar supervising research on bioregionalism even before we opened a conversation. He had known my wards Aleena Manoharan and Susan Deborah through email correspondence. Aleena had become a member of Planet Drum and had been corresponding with him even before she had been awarded her doctoral degree.

The introduction of Australian aboriginal texts, *tiṇai* and bioregionalism in the ecocriticism course at MCC helped students take up pre-doctoral and doctoral research on Australian aboriginal texts. Further encouragement came from a formal forum for the study of the literature of Australia (called Indian Association for the Study of Australia) which was formed in India in 2000. My presentations in this forum attempted to interpret Australian art (including poetry) from a *tiṇai* perspective and show how *tiṇai* could be a viable critical tool to study aboriginal Australian lifeway.

Aleena's interest in aboriginality or indigeneity and bioregional theory commenced as doctoral research and it culminates now in a book-length study of bioregional theory from a *puttiṇai* perspective. Being the first detailed exploration of the relation between bioregional theory and *puttiṇai*, Aleena's book is an important contribution to *tiṇai* studies, the *tiṇai*

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than Tamil were also performed by other performers (Emily Simmons, "Dreaming of Home: Departments collaborate in a unique celebration of cross-cultural music and poetry," *The Davidsonian*, 3 April 1995, p. 10, https://library.davidson.edu/archives/davidsonian/PDFs/19950403.pdf; Laura Leibfreid, "International Arts Presentation" *The Davidsonian*, 27 March 1995, p. 13, https://library.davidson.edu/archives/davidsonian/PDFs/19950327.pdf).

movement and also to the discourse of Indian ecohumanities. Future research will show how this work resonates with many other areas of study.

Already I can see how Aleena's volume engages those who deprecate bioregional theory as a parochial one. She has ably countered them by affirming the "localness" of the bioregion. Those who frown upon bioregional theory as a parochial one should consider the nature of praxis bioregion requires. Bioregional praxis cannot be anything other than communitarian. Though her volume does not discuss communitarian agency, it is a tacit conceptual tool that can be deployed when necessary. This is possible because *tiṇai* is the prototype of communitarian agency. By approaching bioregional theory from a *puttiṇai* perspective, Aleena's book already collaborates with the redemptive project I have been describing in this prologue. In order to redeem the theory of Berg and Dasmann from the scientizing efforts (which separate bioregion from reinhabitation), and root it back in its indigenous ground of communitarian reinhabitory praxis, bioregion has to make way for *kuṭi*. This substitution is an essential part of the redemptive project, and Aleena's present volume contributes in no small measure to this project. I have great pleasure in commending it to all its readers and especially to those who want to participate in this timely project in whatever way they deem fit.

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