

## Anita Nair's handling of Regionalism in her novel 'The Better Man'

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**ABSTRACT:** Anita Nair is a prominent contemporary Indian writer in English, who is chiefly concerned with human relationship and the evolution of Indian society. She is a well known novelist from Kerala and one of the finest writers in Indian Writing in English with international reputation. She is a gifted writer with the language of technical efficiency, curiosity, intensity of feeling and attitude of commitment. Among her novels, *The Better Man*, *The Ladies Coupe* and *Mistress* gave her the place as a powerful writer. Her first novel, *The Better Man* tells the story of Mukundan, a recently retired government employee, beset by bitterness and self doubt, who returns reluctantly to his tyrannical father and his ancestral Tharavadu in the village of Kaikurussi. Highly specific regionalism and general Indian cultural markers are very aptly appearing in her first novel 'The Better Man'.

**KEYWORDS:** [*Contemporary, Evolution, Intensity, Regionalism, Reluctantly, Tyrannical*]

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### Realistic Representation – Regionalism

The meaning 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 and other factors. Other approaches like the anthropological and the ecological, studying the interrelation between the peculiar traits of people and the geographical area and the relation between environment and people are also very close to the regional aspects. "Region", in other terms, magnifies the interests and concerns of the local group in relation to the society. According to Robert E. Park, regionalism is the long years of "association and cooperation" which brings about a kind of specificity to the region. (*The Regional Novel: Conceptual Terrains* (3)). *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 found themselves at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1707, when the Scottish Parliament ceased to exist and Scotland became the northern part of Great Britain, Scottish culture, language and literature were assimilated into British culture. It became inevitable then that Scottish writers followed 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 turned 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 of literary life.

When the novel was innovated in Britain in the nineteenth century, 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. As a result, the regional novel affirms a trend that cannot find scope in "Universal" literature. The middleclass perception of the "regional" and "universal" merely reduces it to the country and the city. But the American critics are of the opinion that, 'local colour' 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. And they observe that the 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 particular region. Every region has its own identity shaped by the age long interaction between the local population and its natural environment. Only by being faithful to its own character, the region could contribute to the welfare of the whole. The strategy of representing a country and community through literature can be used in both ways, either to glorify the nation as found in patriotic literature or it can be used to misrepresent a country and its people as it can be found in the treatment of natives in colonial literature. The images get more authentic, if it is created by an insider or a native.

Indians are proud of their country's democracy and the religious diversity. What makes India different is its cultural and religious diversity of the people. The fact is that Indians are one of the most-religious people of the world. Regionalists believe that the reality of India is hidden beneath the traditional image. In US literary studies, regionalism refers to both a type of literature and a literary movement. As a type of literature, regionalist writing has remained essentially the same a kind of writing which not only manifests but also is grounded in a specific geographical area in particular ways which characterize and constitute it. As a literary movement, regionalism is generally perceived as a part of the much larger philosophical and literary movement known as realism, which evolved in the aftermath of the Civil War (1861-1865) and dominated the literary scene well into the twentieth century. According to Meyers, Millicent Bell describes regionalism as "the impulse towards local realism"(469) and characterizes it as manifesting the localizing, specifying effects of the conviction that human events grow out of the soil of a particular time, place and race.

One significant manifestation of the above is the use of the term *local colour* by some critics, authors and editors; while some use the term as synonymous with "regionalism", others use for post – important differences which dictate employment of one term or the others. Regionalism, both as a type of literature and as a social reality, generally seems to occupy a privileged place in the hearts and minds of people. Regionalism writing is more often characterized as realistic representation of the speech, dress, manners, customs, and idiosyncrasies of a given place. Infact, regional writers create regional characters in order to enlarge the hearts and perspectives of their readers.

In women regionalist writings, "region as a geographical issue is intertwined with larger issues of women's sphere" in the sense that the local realities which constitute their basic content generally revolve around the daily lives of the female protagonists of their fiction. Those lives are circumscribed not merely by the physical limits of their immediate context, but also by the patriarchal premises underlying their sense of space and place, a social reality which has come to be labeled as women's sphere. Millicent Bell (IBID - 473) asserts that "female regionalism celebrates an older source of life – vigour which has been forgotten or exhausted by modern society [...] the immemorial linkage with all life which female wisdom preserves". Regionalism is "an alternative way of seeing life", it means that the writers see the regionalist writing as self-consciously subverting hegemonic patterns, both literary and social. Poetry perhaps somewhat ingenuously identifies those positive values as humour, heroism, stoicism, adoptability, responsibility and religious faith and suggests that there is a strong element of didacticism at work in local-colour writings.

Nair's *The Better Man* might be a description of a remote village but, even then, if discipline, punctuality and mercy are concerned, it is just like other village and an ordinary place. India is a large country, having continental dimensions and comprising no fewer than 28 states and 7 union territories. It is a multi-racial, multi-lingual nation. There are scores of regional languages, various strains of culture and different loyalties, single as well as multiple. Amidst the amazing diversities, it is natural that regional feelings, regional parties, regional institutions and similar other organizations are meant for voicing the aspirations of local people and providing different forums for them, should emerge. Indeed with the passage of years, the multi-faceted aspirations, which together may be described as regionalism, have gained strength. It is a feeling or an ideology among a section of people, residing in particular, geographical space characterized by unique language, culture, etc. that they are the sons of soil and every opportunity that exists in their land must be accorded to them first but not to the outsiders. Around 1900, regionalism became a mainstream movement. Every region has its own 'soul' and as an organic part of the nation its particular character should be studied and reinforced.

Regionalism is an excessive attachment for a particular region or state as against the country as whole. Such feelings may arise either due to the feelings of continuous neglect of a particular area by the government or it may arise because of the increasing political awareness among the people of a particular area which was once backward. Regional feelings may give rise to the demands for autonomy and this will threaten the unity of the country. The

term 'regionalism' has two connotations. In the negative sense, it implies excessive attachment to one's region in preference to the country or the state. In the positive sense, it is a political attribute associated with people's love for their region, culture, language, etc. with a view to maintain their independent identity. Positive regionalism is a welcome thing in so far as maintaining the innate tradition as it encourages the people to develop a sense of brotherhood and commonness on the basis of common language, religion or historical background, the negative sense regionalism is a great threat to the unity and the integrity of the country.

## II. NAIR'S CREATION WITHOUT WHIMS AND FANCIES

Much of the recent wave, the Indian English writing has focused only on the North India. So to have a deviation, it is a pleasurable experience to read a book, set firmly in South India, and that too in God's own country. Infact, it is considered as a major triumph for Anita Nair. *The Better Man* is set in contemporary India in a little fictitious village called Kaikurussi, in the northern part of Kerala. It was once known as Malabar. Malabar as a state, ceased to exist. Though Malabar has no geographical boundaries and no presence on the map of India, it still exists as a state of mind'. Business standard compares Nair's *The Better Man* with R.K. Narayan's, *Malgudi Days* which was the first fictional village to be made. *The Better Man* is a novel of loyalty, betrayal and self-fulfillment against the backdrop of a contemporary village in Kerala. Kaikurussi is like all fictional villages, a self contained and complete universe. It has the full gamut of human virtue and vice. The story has all the elements of what should make a good novel, the complete world, the universal themes of doubt, despair and redemption, and the character of Mukundan (The hero of the novel), flawed and damaged, yet basically well intentioned, asserts RanchanaSen Gupta.

Kaikurussi, the village is in a little hollow surrounded by several hills. Though Nair loves her soil very much, her description about her soil is very candid. Infact, there is not even a road running through Kaikurussi. And it is understood that there is no reminders, no peer pressure, and no expectations for the Kaikurussi people. This is clear through the description of Bhasi (friend of Mukundan). "There is nothing here that would make anyone come looking for it. It is the birthplace of neither a Mahatma nor a movement. There are no craft forms originating from here to fill Government Cottage Emporia shelves. No miracles have ever happened here. In fact, nothing of significance ever happens here to anyone" (BM 7). Like Kaikurussi people Bhasi also doesn't have any dream or goal in his life. Bhasi is the first friend of Mukundan in the village. He was once a college lecturer who came to Kaikurussi after his love failure and a train accident, of which he was one of the few survivors.

A father always prefers a son. Quoting the laws of Manu, Prabhusays that "a man conquers the world by the birth of a son, he enjoys eternity by that of a grandson; and the great grandfather enjoys external happiness by the birth of a grandson's son" (242). Achuthan Nair (the hero Mukundan's father) is an exception. He has not conquered any world or experienced happiness over his son. The question of grandson or great grandson does not arise as he has failed in his father's duty of getting a suitable bride for his son. Mukundan's reaction to such a father is surprising. He longs for love, affection and recognition from his father, even though his father has evoked only negative feelings on him. In most cases, it can be seen that the rivalry starts between the father and the son, when the son attains his adolescence. However, in *The Better Man*, the problem starts for Mukundan and Achuthan Nair even from Mukundan's early childhood. Four-year-old Mukundan, who has seen his father only in the photograph, is scared, when his father turns up all of a sudden from Burma. Dressed in black, he appears tall and when he starts talking to Mukundan, he is all the more afraid and starts calling his mother. When she comes to the boy's rescue and tries to pacify him, Achuthan Nair becomes wild and blames her for bringing up his son like a 'pathetic creature'. So, the very first meeting of the father and the son starts on the wrong foot. Even at the stage of eight years old, the relationship between them has not improved. On the other hand, it has become worse, when Achuthan Nair chooses to settle in Kaikurussi after resigning his job. Home becomes hell for Mukundan.

According to R. Revathi, the theme of rivalry between father and son is nothing new in the literary scenario. It was often dealt with in the Greek Stories. The theme which often recurs is the son's killing their own fathers. Uranus is murdered by his son, Cronos, the Titan, who is in turn, is murdered by his son Zeus, the Olympian. The Kingdom and the power were not handed over to their sons willingly and the sons have to usurp the throne from their fathers. The fathers never nurture a healthy and good opinion about the sons. It is always suspicion. While the son triumphs in Greek mythology, it is the father who wins in Hindu mythology. If it is *Oedipus complex* (Oedipus complex males are attracted to their mothers, whereas Electro Complex females are attracted to their fathers) which dominates the Western world, it is *Yayati Complex* (Yayati complex' is about the younger generation submitting to the older generation. It is about the shame that the younger generation feels when it challenges the older generation) which is celebrated in India. Yayati, as a consequence of his sins, is cursed to become old and impotent. Unable to bear the

thought, he begs his sons to take on his curse. While the eldest is reluctant, the youngest accepts and sacrifices his youth while his father happily enjoys his youth without any guilt.

According to Alka Nigam (India Today), *The Better Man* is a novel, rich in local colour, the under currents that run beneath the seemingly idyllic surroundings of the sleepy village are explored in fluid prose. Anita Nair has proved her mettle by fathoming the deepest recesses of man's psyche and pulling it out neat by on the surface. She will go a long way in the history of famed Indian writers. Always there is a question with Nair's readers whether her *The Better Man* is meant only for men? But there are female characters too, they simply come and go according to the plot set up. This is a story about an elderly bachelor and retired government employee, Mukundan who is forced by circumstances to return to Kaikurussi, the village he was born in. He left the place when he was eighteen, and could not cope up with things after his return. He is haunted by the sense of failure. Always he had the guilty feeling that he had abandoned his mother. At the same time he is not happy with his father too.

Mukundan finds his home as a space for domination and violence, the fear towards his father makes him to go away from his sight. Sometimes, Achuthan Nair's preaching on discipline ends up with a curse that, Mukundan is fit for nothing and he can do only 'ploughing the fields'. As a father, he wants his son to arrive home immediately after the school hours, but sometimes he has to attend games class which is compulsory. If he goes home early, he will be caned by his drill master, if he comes home after the games he will be caned by his father terribly. At the age of 13, he comes to know about David Copperfield.

An abridged edition of David Copperfield was given to him by an English teacher. 'Whether I shall turn out to be hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show'. Mukundan reads these words with a beating heart. His mouth went dry, and he felt his insights quiver with the certainty of knowing. Mukundan realized that this was what he would like to do for the rest of his life. Write. (BM 14)

Mukundan feels just like Dickens, he too wants to be a writer to overcome his sorrows. Even for that he is not allowed by his father. Wherever Mukundan turns, he finds his father as a barrier on his way. His love for escapism is evident through the words of him.

Mukundan moved away from the rest of the men and went to sit on a cashew tree bough. And as he sat there, he watched the magnificence of the landscape. There was a world beyond the valley he lived in, a world, he would someday escape to, far away from his father. Far away from the village. (BM 52).

As R. Revathi rightly feels, the obsession to escape his father is evidently the result of his upbringing. Achuthan Nair brought up Mukundan like a bonsai tree. The bonsai tree, which is grown in a small pot needs pruning very often, in a special manner. Achuthan Nair does the same with his son, Mukundan, by pruning his emotions, self-esteem and confidence at every opportunity. The rivalry between the father and the son and its impact on the later are realistically portrayed by Anita Nair with a special emphasis on highlighting every subtle nuance of emotion.

Not only Mukundan, no one dare to speak to Achuthan Nair. Mukundan likes book reading. He feels that books are unlike human beings, it never claims any rights to him. When he gets an opportunity to work, he grabs it, and he feels that it is an escape from his father. His hatred towards his father increases when he comes to know about his illicit affairs with another woman. So, the rivalry between the father and the son goes on widened and they do not find any chance to get united with each other. A few months before Mukundan's retirement, he has made plans with his close friend, Narendran about his stay and Narendran is willing to accommodate Mukundan near his house. Hence, the obsession to escape from his father remains just the same, even at the time of his retirement. But the sudden demise of his friend Narendran shocks Mukundan a lot and then Mukundan has absolutely no options except to return to Kaikurussi.

After his return, the first few days his house was a nightmare for Mukundan, because he is sure that he has seen the ghost of his mother, which is furious with him. He thinks that he has fallen from the stairs and he is unable to decide whether it is a dream or reality. However, with the arrival of Krishnan Nair, who has been the caretaker of his house since his childhood, Mukundan feels a kind of normalcy. It is exactly after one month that he ventures to go out to make friends with the villagers. He wants to go to Shankar's Tea Club which is the meeting place of the villagers. He takes great care in his appearance and proceeds to wear a shirt and mundu. Looking at the mirror, he admires himself that he appears like mature, dignified man. "A natural leader...Rather like his father had been when he returned from Burma" (BM 109).

It is surprising to note that even though Mukundan hates his father; his role model is invariably his father. During his visits, he never forgets to bring a few gifts for his father such as, fine cotton undershirts, a woolen shirt with long sleeves, a blanket, a torch and a tin of tobacco. Moreover he sends money every month saying that it is a son's duty. But the truth is that he wants to gain is his father's affection. Indian upbringing is distinct in nature. Epics depict that like the father like the son and daughters have to exhibit the sublime qualifier or whatever exists in their mothers, though, many times genetically, contrary ideas too can be observed. Nair does not miss this typical "trait". Nair is always particular about the freedom of women. In *The Better Man*, the readers can feel Anjana's love for freedom, after her marriage with Ravindaran she feels that she has been victimized in the name of custom and practices. Through the character of Anjana, Nair wants to express an idea that sexual relationship is incomplete without the involvement of an emotional relationship. Anjana's marital relation with her husband is marked by loneliness and improper communication. She moves to her parent's home in order to look after her mother. Infact she wants to respect her tradition and culture and so she patiently tolerates her relationship with her husband. "He had married her. He was her husband. It was upto her to see it that he was happy, always" (BM 227). In *The Better Man*, there are many passages, picturing not only of village life, but also its (village's) artifacts and customs. Thus, preparing a meal invokes a lengthy aside: "The old bronze urli would be dragged out and cleaned. It would be kept on the wood fire to warm its belly. A cupful of coconut oil. Shallots, ginger, and green chillies sliced fine would hiss and splutter in annoyance till the curry leaves joined them.....". And later,

Krishnan Nair's chicken curry would bubble with the weight of emotions. He would stand there by the cauldron until he knew for certain that every drop of it tasted of joyous welcome. And Krishnan Nair would do this for a man who had treated him little better than a slave or an imbecile all his life. (BM 263)

### III. NAIR'S LOVE TOWARDS NATURE

Nair is a lover of nature too. Her soil's beauty has been exploited to the maximum in this novel. Her portrayal of paddy fields, mango trees and pepper is quiet realistic. Readers can enjoy this through the words of Mukundan. Here sharp characterization and fiercely intense style creates a new world before her readers.

The fields were everywhere. Endless shades of green the stretched into the horizon on one side and the foot of the Pulmoath Mountain on the other. Speckled only with the bright blouses of the women as they stood ankle-deep in water-logged mud and pulled out the young paddy plants. When a breeze blew, the tops of the paddy rippled and turned the sheets of sedate jade into gleaming splashes of emerald. He knew that soon the sun would disappear behind thick grey clouds that would frown down unrelentingly. Then it would be time to seek the dry confines of the house. Until then he would stay here and look at the view he had banished from his memories for many years now. (BM 50)

Nair's description of the Pulmoath Mountain is another great example for her involvement towards nature. Her description about the mountain is so great which the readers cannot forget easily. Nair's respect towards her soil is proven by the words of Krishnan Nair to Mukundan. Nair wants to say that the happiness and sorrow, both are with human beings and its left to their choice, which they prefer. And she asserts that nature is the best medicine for human being's sorrow. "It is all in your mind. If you want to look around you and see mountains, forests, and oceans, you will or else you will see little mounds of earth, sponge, bushes and piddling streams" (BM 52).

She presents the Pulmoath Mountain as a world of hope and happiness. While talking about monsoon, simply, she brings the shower before her readers. It is evident through the words of Bhasi:

He had forgotten the capricious nature of the Malabar monsoon. Of rain that waited for clothes to be hung out on lines to dry, for children to set out to school, and for people to leave their homes without an umbrella before it came hurtling down from nowhere. Persisting vigorously till evening was wet and sudden before it stopped with the same abruptness with which it had begun. (BM 23)

### **The Black Magic and the Superstitious belief of Kaikurussi**

After much admiration of her soil, the readers can watch the hatred of Nair towards Kaikurussi people's trust in Black Magic and superstitious belief. The words of Bhasi to mould Mukundan shows, that it is the best example for Nair's hatred towards the superstitious belief.

What on earth had made him take the candle instead of the torch? He cursed himself for his stupidity as he hurried down as fast as he could in the dark. When he lit the candle,



portraits of fierce faced beings stared down at him grimly. ChottanikaraBhagawati, KadampuzhaBhagawati, Narasimhan, Hanuman, and Mukundan's dead ancestors. (BM 29)

Nair does not glorify the superstitious rituals. Similarly, she does not deny the existence of a strong strain of faith among the villagers in the native rituals. Infact, as S. Suganya, the researcher feels, the novel describes every individual's attempt to find a degree of inner peace and manner. Nair's characters are not attaining their goals in a day or so, they are like slow learners take much time to understand and change themselves. Mukundan remains the same for a longtime. He is a strength to the village with no connections to anyone. Nair's love towards her soil is not a mere geographical love, she loves the custom and she believes in artistic integrity of a Keralite.

There are so many associations with the word Tharavadu (Tharavadu is a system of joint family practiced by people in Kerala, especially Nair's, Tharakansand Thiyyas). It is often considered as a place where the ghost of ancestors haunts in corridors. People believe that the unsatisfied soul of their ancestors will be there till they get satisfied. Here Mukundan remembers his mother's innumerable pleas to take her away from that Tharavadu. "The evening before he left for Shoranur to board the train to Trichy, his mother clutched his arm and pleaded one more time, "take me with you, son I am so unhappy here" (BM 31).Kaikurussi people's madness after the superstitious belief is an unbearable one. Even Mukundan doubts his mother's death. Through Mukundan the author wants to show how even the educated people too believe these superstitious matters. Just like other parts of India, Keralites too have a belief that the sweet smell of flowers and fruits invites Yakshi (Female Gandharva) and Gandharvas (Gandharva is a name used for distinct heavenly beings in Hinduism and Buddhism).

In Hindu theology, Gandharvas act as messengers between the Gods and humans. People believe that the Yakshi kill men and seduce women. Valsala's (the old school master's wife) mother warns her regarding this and tells her daughter:

Tie up your hair and stay inside when the palm trees fragrance fills the night sky, the Gandharvas come prowling, looking for virgins to seduce. Once a Gandharva has spotted you, there is no escape. He'll make you his slave with his soft voice, gentle caresses and sensual magic. Now mortal man will ever be able to satisfy you then,' her mother had said in an inexplicable voice, as if she were reliving a memory. (BM 128)

But Nair through the character of Valsala, shows how people are deceiving the society in the name of custom. Valsala is fed up with her life. She wants to live her life once again. Here also Nair attacks the old traditional custom, she makes the readers feel pity for the situation of Valsala, though she breaks the custom of her soil. "Come to me, Gandharva,' she beseeched. "Can't you smell the fragrance of want in me? Look, the pala has burst into flower. I know you are there somewhere. Seduce me with your soft voice and caresses. Make me your lover, your slave,' she cried into the night" (BM 129). Nair attacks the people's habit of using black magic for their own benefits. This is proved through the new post master's experience with the Odiyans (Odi Vidya is associated with black magic. The ritual is used to annihilate enemies. Those people who performed Odi Vidya were known as Odiyans).

There were little bronze pots filled with talisman buried all around the house to checkmate the powers of the Odiyans. Young women wore gold talismans around their hips so that even if an Odiyan tried to enchant them, they could resist the pull of his magic. Pregnant women wore black amulets so that they were not lured out of their houses at midnight by the Odiyans who needed the foetus to propitiate the evil forces they worshipped. (BM 168)

### **Caste Discrimination**

One more important aspect Nair deals within the story is the caste system and particularly the position of the Untouchables. A few decades ago, the caste system controlled every aspect in the life of an ordinary Indian, like profession, marriage partner and the day to day life. One does not really know about its origin but it is assumed that the castes were introduced by priests to steady their position of power. In Hinduism, everyone believes in rebirth. There is a considerable part of the caste system which explains some facts which are difficult to understand. Hindus believe that if one lives a moral and religious life and does not commit crimes or injustice, one will reborn in a superior caste. As a conclusion, it is believed that those who violate the rules and regulations of moral and religious instructions willborn in a lower caste in their next birth. Thus the Untouchables believe and justified that they are badly treated and avoided by the community because of their Karma.

Nair introduces the character of Kamban to show the village peoples' treatment of Harizans.

Kamban had sampled social ostracism in many hues. As a little boy his classmates had avoided sitting on the same bench as he did. He was rarely included in games that ended

in a tangle of arms and legs. As an adult he had seen the office peon set aside a separate glass to serve him his tea in. But nothing hurt as much as this banishment into a corner. However, he would have accepted even this quietly, as his lot, until the day Philipose chose to humiliate him in front of the whole village. (BM 161)

The ill treatment of the villagers makes Kamban to be away from the society. Kamban hasn't made any friends in the village even after so many years. He still does have the courage to walk up to Shankar's Tea Club for a cup of tea and a chat. "Every day at half-past ten, a little boy ran down to the post office with a cup of tea for Kamban"(BM 154). Not only in the village, in his work place also Kamban undergoes so many sufferings. "He faces many problems even in promotions. "Year after year he had seen a junior promoted simply because he was born a Harijan. Year after year he had waited for his turn to come, but there was always someone more deserving than him" (BM 153).

No one can blame Nair for her love towards her own soil because her portrayals are without whims and fancies.

In Kaikurussi there were no Christians. There were Hindus. There were no Muslims. ..There was no room for Philipose here. Once Mukundan invited Kamban, the post master, a Harijan for tea at his house the care taker enquires Mukundan about it, and he says, "His father used to come here every morning to empty buckets of shit your father spewed out from his bowels with great regularity, 'Krishnan Nair said with the sort of repressed impatience that uncles reserve for moronic nephews. 'And now you expect me to serve his son biscuits and tea! (BM 148)

Once Mukundan invites Kamban for Tea at his residence, when his caretaker inquires Mukundan, he realizes his mistake, and does not want to exhibit his foolishness. The next day onwards he avoids Kamban. Through this, Nair wishes to say how the villagers are backward in their mind. When talk about people like power house, Ramakrishnan and Kamban, it is the duty of the writer to stress about the people like Philipose, who is a very sincere and dedicated person. The late arrival of the postmaster and Kamban irritates Philipose. So he shout at them, "I don't care how you ran the post office before, but as of now the post office will be run the way it is meant to be" (BM 152).

### Community Revolutionaries and Gulf Money

In the late 60s and early 70s, Kerala witnessed a sporadic eruption of violence from a group of extremist communist revolutionaries who called themselves naxalites. Following the footsteps of the extremists of Naxal Bari in West Bengal, young men and women in several parts of Kerala took the plunge into this movement. Most of them were idealists who revolted against the existing social evils, exploitation of the landless poor by the landlords, unemployment and a host of other social malady. They held study classes in remote areas, lured youth into their folds, attacked police stations, beheaded landlords and unleashed a reign of terror in North Malabar. The police crushed the movement with an iron hand and most of the leaders were either shot dead or put behind the bars. Like many, Nair too is fed up with the community revolutionaries. She is much against the rules of those people who call themselves, Naxalites. The author asserts that terrorism cannot be the way to open the eyes of the society.

Pulmoath Mountain was where they held their secret meetings. Meenakshi went up the mountains late in the evenings and huddled with the rest of them around the flickering flames of the fire. She thought she had finally found companions who would help her escape. Elsewhere Naxalites were sending out ripples of fear. Policemen were butchered, landlords killed in broad daylight; grain-laden barns went up in flames, and sons of rich merchants were kidnapped. No one dared question Meenakshi...(BM 56)

She never spares her people in the matter of Gulf money too. "Do you remember what he used to look like? And now look at him in his Dubai lungi, polyester T-shirt, and his gold plated watch. He thinks he's one of the village bigwigs now" (BM 113). She, ironically, portrays a fish seller who becomes Abu Seth after his return from Gulf. But, at the same time, she respects the people who work abroad for the upliftment of their family members. There is one more person, Mad Moidu, who has become Hajiyar after his son landed in Qatar. The gulf money has changed the total face of rural Kerala. The money has changed even the atmosphere of Tharavadu, and its old forms. The natural entertainments are slowly replaced by TV, Computer and latest electronic equipments. The gulf money has changed even the topography of Kerala. Using of fan was an unusual one during the earlier times but now because of their new style they bid a good bye to their old customs and have become slaves to machines.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Nair stands more as a critic than an admirer in many places. After reading *The Better Man*, every reader will get the idea that every Indian is a son of their own soil. From this novel, it is clear that Nair is not expecting any fundamental alteration, but she longs for some social reforms which are possible and can be done by the local people, themselves. Bell views this as, "Female regionalism celebrates an older source of life – vigour which has been forgotten or exhausted by modern society". "The Pioneer" states that it is about every human's attempt to find a degree of inner peace and happiness. There is no doubt that Nair through her simplicity has brought out Kaikurussi, one tea shop town, somewhere in Kerala alive. Her characterization proves that she has the deepest recesses of man's psyche. Astonishing nativity is the soul of Nair's writing. She has succeeded in portraying a typical village with much charm and brilliance. After reading *The Better Man*, almost every Indian will feel that it is worth reading since it is their own backyard and every foreigner will feel he or she should have a trip in down south of India.

Nair feels that writing is necessity for her. In fact it is an addiction. She wishes and feels that the best thing about a writer is to be 'anonymous in one's writing, being genderless, ageless, classless'. Search for self is the predominant theme with many writers, but Nair is totally different. In one of her interviews she says "It's a challenge writing about people completely different from myself and my kind of life". This may be the reason for her international reputation during a short span of her career. Nair never fails to share even a minute detail of that village and its people, with her readers. She clearly points out even their habit of washing vessels which some readers may feel that it is not necessary. "She put the used glasses in a gigantic aluminum basin that doubled as a kitchen sink. When it was full, she would take it outside and scour the vessels with ash and a handful of coconut fibre. In that thrifty household, nothing was wasted. Neither water nor ash nor time" (BM 250).

Nair details every plant and pedestrian footprint, every clay urn and uruli in Kaikurussi, all the banter at the village tea shop. The blood of her characters courses through the reader's veins, the heat and dust of their milieu is palpable, her plot has the reassuring rhythm of real life.

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