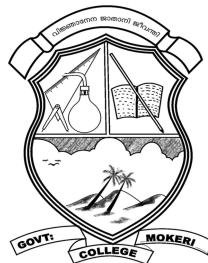


**SPACE, PLACE AND MAPPING IN FICTION:
A GEOCRITICAL STUDY OF
SELECT NOVELS OF ANITA NAIR**

Thesis submitted to the University of Calicut
In Partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Submitted by
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**UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
KERALA, INDIA**

2025

Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis entitled **SPACE, PLACE, AND MAPPING IN FICTION: A GEOCRITICAL STUDY OF SELECT NOVELS OF ANITA NAIR**, submitted to the University of Calicut by **Sasikumar P.**, in partial fulfillment of the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is a bona fide record of the research work carried out by him under my supervision and guidance. No part of the present work has formed the basis for the award of any other degree or diploma previously. I also certify that the corrections/suggestions from adjudicators have been incorporated in the revised thesis and that the contents of the thesis in both hard and soft copies are the same.

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This is to certify that the thesis titled **SPACE, PLACE AND MAPPING IN FICTION: A GEOCRITICAL STUDY OF SELECT NOVELS OF ANITA NAIR** submitted by **Sasikumar P.** to the University of Calicut in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, is an original record of observations and bona fide research carried out by him under my supervision and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma or similar titles.

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Declaration

I, **Sasikumar P**, hereby declare that the thesis entitled **SPACE, PLACE AND MAPPING IN FICTION: A GEOCRITICAL STUDY OF SELECT NOVELS OF ANITA NAIR** submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is an original record of observations and bona fide research carried out by me under the guidance of **Dr Yoosaph A.K.**, Associate Professor of English, Govt. College, Mokeri, and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma or similar titles. The contents of the thesis have undergone a plagiarism check using *iThenticate* software at CHMK Library, University of Calicut and the similarity index found within permissible limit. I also declare that the thesis is free from AI generated contents.

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Date:

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SPACE, PLACE AND MAPPING IN FICTION: A GEOCRITICAL STUDY OF SELECT NOVELS OF ANITA NAIR

Abstract

This study examines the literary cartography of Anita Nair's novels, which consist of heterogeneous and interwoven spatial structures that have evolved from social, cultural, and geographical interactions. It also probes how Nair's narrative universe is structured in her fictional narratives and how spatial patterns and geographical identities are juxtaposed within them.

Geocriticism, an interdisciplinary field in cultural and literary studies that focuses on geographical space, encompasses both aesthetics and politics, aiming to understand the ever-changing spatial relations that shape the world. It unlocks the possibilities of new literary readings that interpret complex spatial relations and embedded cultural patterns through various critical practices of geography, politics, history, and related fields. The geocritical methods and spatial critical practices formulated by Bertrand Westphal and Robert T. Tally are employed in this study to examine the issues of spatiality and the mapping of spaces and places in Anita Nair's fiction.

This study identifies recurring motifs such as spatial and geographical emplacement, place attachment, and nostalgia, and probes their links to Nair's lived experiences. The study utilises maps to trace the spatial trajectories, rootedness, displacement, and reterritorialisation of characters, revealing Nair's sense of place and spatial consciousness. The study not only focuses on the literary cartography in Nair's works, which comprise diverse spatial structures influenced by social, cultural, and geographical factors, but also distinguishes between geospaces and literary spaces, revealing that while core narrative regions resemble real geospaces, other locations deviate significantly. It also examines the cultural patterns of Kerala as substrates of space and place in her novels, where cultural practices and symbols, as part of territorial identities, recur in her fictional narratives, producing cultural maps of locations that are the core regions of her narrative world.

Key Words: Geocriticism, Spatial Critical Practices, Literary Cartography, Spatial Consciousness, Cultural Identity, Rootedness, Spatial and Geographical Emplacement, Spatiality, Displacement, Reterritorialisation, Place-attachment, Nostalgia

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കഥാസാഹിത്യ രൂപങ്ങളിലെ സ്ഥലങ്ങളും ഇടങ്ങളും: അനിതാനായരുടെ തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത നോവലുകളെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള ഒരു ഭൂസാഹിത്യ വിമർശനപഠനം

സംഗ്രഹം

സാമൂഹിക, സാംസ്കാരിക, ഭൂമിശാസ്ത്ര വ്യവഹാരങ്ങളിൽ നിന്ന് പരിണമിച്ച വൈവിധ്യമാർന്നതും പരസ്പരം ബന്ധപ്പെട്ടതുമായ സ്ഥലഘടനകൾ ഉൾക്കൊള്ളുന്ന അനിതാനായരുടെ നോവലുകളിലെ സാഹിത്യ രൂപങ്ങളെ ഈ പഠനം പരിശോധിക്കുന്നു. അവരുടെ ആഖ്യാന പ്രപഞ്ചം യഥാർത്ഥവും സാങ്കല്പികവുമായ സ്ഥലഘടനകളുടെ സങ്കലനങ്ങളിലൂടെ രൂപപ്പെടുന്ന വ്യത്യസ്തമായ ഭൂസ്വത്വങ്ങളെ എങ്ങനെ സംയോജിപ്പിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നുവെന്നും ഈ ഗവേഷണം അന്വേഷിക്കുന്നു.

സ്ഥലത്തെ കേന്ദ്രീകരിച്ചുള്ള സാഹിത്യ പഠനങ്ങളിലെ ഒരു അന്തർവൈജ്ഞാനിക മേഖലയാണ് ഭൂസാഹിത്യ വിമർശനപഠനം. അത് ലോകത്തെ നിർണ്ണയിക്കുകയും നിരന്തരം മാറിക്കൊണ്ടിരിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്ന സ്ഥലബന്ധങ്ങളെ മനസ്സിലാക്കാൻ രൂപകൽപ്പന ചെയ്തിരിക്കുന്ന സൗന്ദര്യശാസ്ത്രത്തെയും രാഷ്ട്രീയത്തെയും ഉൾക്കൊള്ളുന്നു. ബർട്രാൻഡ് വെസ്റ്റ്ഫാലും റോബർട്ട് ടി. ടാലിയും രൂപപ്പെടുത്തിയ ഭൂമിശാസ്ത്രവിമർശന പഠനരീതികളും ഭൂമിശാസ്ത്ര സങ്കേതങ്ങളും അനിതാനായരുടെ നോവലുകളിലെ സ്ഥലപരതയുടെയും സ്ഥലരാശികളുടെയും ചിത്രീകരണത്തിന്റെ വിശകലനത്തിന് ഈ പഠനത്തിൽ മുഖ്യമായും ഉപയോഗിക്കുന്നു.

അനിതാനായരുടെ നോവലുകളിലെ സ്ഥലബോധം, സ്ഥലബന്ധം, ഗൃഹാതുരത്വം തുടങ്ങിയ ആവർത്തിച്ചുവരുന്ന മുഖ്യ പ്രതിപാദ്യ വിഷയങ്ങളെ സ്ഥലപരവും ഭൂമിശാസ്ത്രപരവുമായ പഠനങ്ങളുടെ വെളിച്ചത്തിൽ ഈ ഗവേഷണം പരിശോധിക്കുന്നു. കൂടാതെ, അവരുടെ ജന്മദേശവും ജീവിതാനുഭവങ്ങളും അവരുടെ രചനകളെ എത്രമാത്രം സ്വാധീനിച്ചിരിക്കാമെന്ന് അന്വേഷിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു. കഥാപാത്രങ്ങളുടെ സ്ഥലബോധം കണ്ടെത്തുന്നതിന് ഈ പഠനത്തിൽ രൂപങ്ങൾ ഉപയോഗിക്കുന്നു.

അനിതാനായരുടെ കൃതികളിലെ സാമൂഹിക, സാംസ്കാരിക, ഭൂമിശാസ്ത്ര ഘടകങ്ങളാൽ രൂപപ്പെടുന്ന വൈവിധ്യമാർന്ന സ്ഥലഘടനകൾ ഉൾക്കൊള്ളുന്ന സാഹിത്യരൂപങ്ങൾ യഥാർത്ഥ ഭൂപ്രദേശങ്ങളെയും ആഖ്യാനസ്ഥലങ്ങളെയും എങ്ങനെ വേർതിരിക്കുന്നു എന്ന് ഈ പഠനം അന്വേഷിക്കുന്നു. അവരുടെ നോവലുകളിൽ മുഖ്യ ആഖ്യാനമേഖലകൾ യഥാർത്ഥ ഭൂപ്രദേശങ്ങളുമായി ഏറെ സാമ്യമുള്ളപ്പോൾ, മറ്റ് ഇടങ്ങൾ യഥാർത്ഥ ഭൂപ്രദേശങ്ങളിൽ നിന്നും ഗണ്യമായി വ്യതിചലിക്കുന്നുവെന്നും ഈ പഠനം കണ്ടെത്തുന്നു. അവരുടെ നോവലുകളിലെ സ്ഥലബോധത്തിന്റെ പ്രധാന അടങ്കുകളിൽ കേരളത്തിന്റെ സാംസ്കാരികസ്വത്വം ചരിത്രം, കല, സാഹിത്യം, ആചാരങ്ങൾ, പ്രാദേശിക ആഘോഷങ്ങൾ, ദേശചിഹ്നങ്ങൾ എന്നിവയിലൂടെ ആവർത്തിക്കപ്പെടുന്നുണ്ടെന്നും ഈ പഠനം വെളിപ്പെടുത്തുന്നു.

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A NOTE ON DOCUMENTATION

For the purpose of documentation, the Ninth edition of the MLA Handbook is used.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The discourses on spaces and places are fundamental to human existence. They can answer cardinal questions about forms of social existence and direct individuals to reclaim their identities, which are always entangled with spatial and geographical formations. As literature and space are closely interrelated, spatial analysis is inevitable to reveal the various contours of the meaning of literary narratives. Spatiality studies could interpret the labyrinthine and heterogeneous structures of human life juxtaposed on the innumerable spaces and places of the world and its projections in art and literature. Besides, it deals with spatial and geographical identities, reconfiguring human experience and realisations, and locating referentiality and polysensorial multifocalisations in narrative places. It also demarcates the role of individuals in the complex system of spatialisation as territorialisation continually develops a sense of rootedness emanating from place attachment and place satisfaction, redefining the way of reading spaces and thinking about the relationship between narrative and social spaces. It also helps individuals to map the real and imagined spatial organisations of their own world, calibrating their perceptions about their relative locations in everyday experience and individual realisation.

Space, an intrinsic constituent of fiction, is essential for the conceptualisation of narratives and the instilment of verisimilitude to the plot, and it could not be conceived without allying with the natural terrains of life. As the interplay of diverse spatial structures creates the story-world of novels, the place is inevitable to set a

narrative and develop trajectories of plots as well. Dietrich and Sundell point out, “Characters do not exist in a void, of course, nor are they static entities. They have their being in a certain context of action” (115). Even in children's stories and folk tales, spatial organisation is indispensable for the natural evolution of narrative structures. The place can reveal spatial and temporal structures where characters confront myriad manifestations of reality and imagination. However, the narrative place may be either a very small landscape or an all-encompassing territory; it would have several entangled and coalesced spaces infusing cultural identity and spatial consciousness of territories. The places may be real, imaginary, or a blend of both real and imaginary, expressing varying degrees of similitude with actual geospaces. Despite the effort of writers to depict actual locations, it would undergo debilitation in representation due to variations in their spatial perspective, and therefore, the precise plotting of places is undoubtedly not realisable. So, readers have to recreate and imagine the intricate components of space while deciphering the narrative in their reading process.

Individuals without a geographical identity can never be imagined in the world, and people are usually identified based on places in which they were born or have been living for a long time. Soja indicates that “the spatial order of human existence arises from the (social) productions of space, the construction of human geographies that both reflect and configure being in the world” (*Postmodern Geographies* 25). Writers select suitable geographical regions to situate their characters, which could be “real, imagined or real-and-imagined” depending on the occurrence of spatial cognition and socio-cultural assemblages in the narrative

structures, which indirectly unravel polyvalent discourses emerging from the interaction of those complex patterns (Tally, *Spatiality* 146). If they ideate that the selected places are either inadequate to depict the narratives or insufficient to sustain the story, it is natural that they choose places familiar to them and then use their faculties of vivid imagination to alter the socio-cultural environments for forming life-sustaining spatial textures. The readers' visualisations of those narratives reveal plausible paths of reality, which might produce almost coherent geographical and spatial imaginations when they react to the writers' fictional world-making process. Creating a suitable background, they produce an atmosphere for infusing reality into characters and allowing them to act upon where real and imagined terrains overlap with various spatial identities. In some contexts, it becomes a trope for the primary theme of the novel, along with lateral locations, which constitute the textures of the supplementary themes.

Tally observes, “Literary cartography connects spatial representation and storytelling” (*Melville* 17). All literary works contain several polyvalent spatial structures, some of which are easily perceptible, some to be explored through ideological apparatus and practices, and others to be extricated from latent structures overlayed in the literary cartography. The trajectories of each character form a map, and the compendium of such maps forms the literary atlas of the work. Literary cartography is formed when they are placed along with the structures of genre, which are also patterned like primary figurative maps of fictional narratives. The mode and design of blending these variegated maps determine the composition of the plot of a literary work. Tally has noted:

Narrative is a fundamental way in which humans make sense of, or give form to, the world. In that sense, narrative operates much as maps do, to organize the data of life into recognizable patterns with it understood that the result is fiction, a mere representation of space and place, whose function is to help the viewer or mapmaker, like the reader or writer, make sense of the world. (*Melville* 17)

In fact, the maps formed by individual characters are merged, overlapped, and coalesced in distinctive textures in literary works, and the literary cartography also becomes a significant component that makes way for countless possible interpretations due to the multifariousness of spatial and cultural consciousness embedded in it.

Literature maps space, place, and landscape along with multiple layers of cultural, social, and political subjectivities. Malcolm Bradbury observes, “Our poetry, our fiction, drama, is itself a mapping of the world, wide-ranging, highlighted in some parts, dark in others, and always changing in place and space” (8). The evolution of the plot through varied narrative paths can be depicted as maps that form a complex atlas due to the addition of various maps created by characters through their linear or non-linear progressions in the real as well as the imaginary world. Evidently, mapping such spaces, which may be concrete, abstract, or a blend of both, carves divergent spatial patterns integrating layers of social, cultural, and historical experiences along with poly-sensorial imaginations emanating from territories. Literary maps have a vital role in unveiling the cultural identity and spatial consciousness of characters, exploring the vicissitudes of the human mind

from realms of reality to fantasy. Such maps could express both congruence and dissimilitude of human perception through the cognitive interaction of the reader with the text of the literary work. Writers plot locations that could express their spatial imaginations in literary representations to render them as settings of their fictional narratives. Literature, as a spatial mapping of a lived, plausible, and imagined world, traces space, place, and landscapes for answering interminable questions related to spatial anxiety and cartographical confusion experienced by individuals. As spatiality has become an approach of experiencing, exploring, and interpreting varied representations in literature, it enables us to understand the issues of spatial and geographical realisations in literary and cultural studies more vividly and distinguish our locations and cultural identities in the complex system of human spatial figurations.

The mapping of spaces and places in fiction has a distinctive pattern that determines the narrative trajectories, even though spatial identities may encode diversity in plotting locations. The literary cartography of fictional narratives can decode the key patterns of discourses and perspectives of writers so that the emplacement of narrative locations is illustrative of the latent spatial consciousness and cultural identity. They attempt to imagine, reimagine, and blend various spatial as well as geographical features in order to enliven spatial and temporal fixities in the narrative world. The real and imagined spaces merge on various levels, producing polyvalent territories where the characters punctuate their movements. Native places, lived spaces, and fictional territories may be represented in literary works which explicitly depict the writers' affixation to them.

This study examines the literary cartography of Anita Nair's novels, consisting of heterogeneous and interwoven spatial structures that evolved from social, cultural, and geographical interactions. The writer's five novels, *The Better Man* (1999), *Ladies Coupe* (2001), *Mistress* (2003), *Idris: The Keeper of Light* (2014), and *Eating Wasps* (2018), which are identical in literary cartography as well as in embedded spatial structures are selected for the present study. The study aims at probing how Nair's narrative universe is structured in her fictional narratives and how the spatial patterns and geographical identities are juxtaposed in them. Furthermore, this study examines the fundamental themes of Nair's novels, which are always related to territories and the recurrence of spatial displacement and relocation. It is interesting to note that she is attempting to follow a trajectory by redefining the spatial and geographical emplacement in her fictional works, where lived spaces and native lands reorient fictional imagination. She tries to fictionalise real and imagined territories in which the spatial features are manifested, further reorienting the notions of culture and identity. The geocritical and spatial analysis propounded by Robert T. Tally and Bertrand Westphal is primarily employed in this investigation to delve into the notions of spatiality and mapping of spaces and places in Nair's fiction.

Anita Nair is a well-acclaimed Indian English author whose literary contributions include novels, short stories, poems, travelogues, memoirs, translations, edited volumes, and children's literature. Her novels, translated into 21 languages, have won many national and international recognitions. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, has appointed Nair as a high-profile supporter to help create trust,

awareness, and advocacy for refugees in India. Although she is an avid traveller, she cherishes her roots, which is evident in her writings. Nair, born in Shoranur, Kerala, has always shared her attachment to her native region, which she has cartographed in her fiction and memoirs through spatial consciousness and cultural identity.

The literary cartography of her novels consists of heterogeneous and interwoven spatial structures evolved from interactions of social, cultural, and geographical spaces. It also identifies differences between the spatial configuration of geospaces and literary spaces in her novels. While the literary spaces approximate geospaces in her spatial representations in the core narrative region, they vary significantly from the real spaces and places in other narrative locations. The influence of the writer's native place on her writings, especially in mapping spaces and places in her novels, is also part of this investigation. She plots spaces and places of her native region in the core narrative region of her novels and makes them more vivid and alive by instilling various structures of history, culture, and politics.

The fundamental themes of Anita Nair's novels are always related to territories, so the recurrence of spatial displacement and relocation in her novels are investigated. Place attachment is one of the cardinal features of her characters, and their territorialisation expresses the perpetual nature of their spatial consciousness. Nair reaffirms that spatial rootedness is an inevitability of human beings to satiate their inner urges for territorial attachment. She sheds light on the trajectories of those who have embraced nomad thought and are either in their ardent pursuit of reterritorialisation or standing enmeshed in total cartographic confusion and spatial anxieties in her novels. She infuses structures of feeling and textures of nostalgic

emotions into the literary cartography of her novels, profoundly manifesting her attachment to her native place. This study examines the longing to return to native places and familial roots as a central motif in her novels. Furthermore, they reveal various emotions, such as nostalgia, topophilia, and place satisfaction, constituting the underlying centripetal forces in human spatial experiences.

Travel is one of the prominent themes in Anita Nair's novels. She, an ardent traveller, has also infused her passion for travel into her characters. Many of her characters are travellers and persons destined to be displaced from their native places, and they share an intense passion for journeys that redefine notions of everyday life. This study explores the interrelatedness of spatial identities and cultural patterns in their various manifestations in her novels and how her fascination for travel influenced her fiction's literary mapping of space and place. They represent not only the cultural ensemble of Kerala by identifying the dominant geosymbols and signs associated with cultural patterns but also encompass beliefs, customs, conventions, myths, legends, social behaviours, ethnic practices, and distinctive cultural patterns.

Geocriticism opens an interdisciplinary field in literary and cultural studies, propounding various critical practices of geography, politics, history, and many other fields. Tally in *Spatiality* elaborates that it is a “constellation of interdisciplinary methods designed to gain a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the ever-changing spatial relations that determine our current, postmodern world” (113). As it draws from multiple academic disciplines, it unlocks the possibilities of a new reading of literature that can interpret complex spatial

relations and embedded cultural patterns. Geocritical theories formulated by Bertrand Westphal, Robert Tally, and Edward W Soja are used in this study to examine the notions of spatiality and mapping of space in Anita Nair's fiction. It is hoped that this research can give a new direction to literary studies and criticism by revealing the cartographic structures and distinct spatial patterns of literature along with illuminating hidden interrelations of the various spaces in both fictional and non-fictional worlds.

Literary works are always situated on networks of spaces, places, and landscapes. The locations that writers have mapped may be the same places where they lived, where their intimate memories are housed, or where they have shared spatial experiences and geographical imaginations. Spaces and places mentioned in fictional narratives may epitomise geospaces, but they are also different because of the mode of perception, conception, and exploration of the imagination that is continuous or segmented in geographical interactions of individuals. The network of spaces and places also forms maps, which are always situated in the centre of the narrative as the spatio-temporal reality of human existence. Plotting spatial identities constructs new patterns of reality that shape the ceaseless movements and counter-movements of individuals through the real and the imagined landscapes.

Places and spaces are integral parts of narratives, and their primary role is to create a background to situate characters. The narrative place of the novel may be either a single locale or several places with diverse spatial intensities owing to their gradation in the collective interactions that form the key structure in which the plot evolves. Narrative places disclose not only numerous mundane realms of human

experiences but also several hidden spheres of the human mind which are submerged in various terrains of consciousness. The intricate behaviours of human beings can be explained only with the help of the renegotiated bonds they have with their native and lived places. The variegated structures of the territories, along with the ecosystem of the land, could influence every individual, which is manifested in social interactions. The climate, flora and fauna, water bodies, atmospheric elements, and the attraction and repulsion of innumerable forces entangled in the lived terrains are major deciding factors in the behaviour and social interactions of individuals.

Space and place are notions that are very hard to define as they differ depending on the discourses and their unstable, fluid, and evolving manifestations. In the present study, the terms space and place are used following the perspective of humanistic geography. Place refers to a physical location which can be identified through geographical coordinates, while space is considered abstract but related to place, as it is formed and shaped by the varied social, historical, and political forces along with the synchronic structures of ideas, ideologies, and collective human subjectivities. Manuel Castells states, “Place is a locale whose form, function, and meaning are self-contained within the boundaries of physical contiguity” (453). Eric Prieto also asserts it as a “Place, at the most general level, to designate any geographical site (of any size, scale, or type) that is meaningful to someone, for whatever reason” (*Literature* 13). Westphal elaborates on this: “Place cannot be anything other than a metaphor for space; the metaphor is that which brings things together without identifying them. Space is never really there; it's beyond, below,

and besides. There is just a place that never coincides with space. There is an empty space, and it cannot be qualified" (*Geocriticism* 163). Tuan has differentiated space and place as "space is freedom, the place is security" (*Space and Place* 3). However, Altman and Low observe that place is used in the sense of a space that is inhabited and appropriated through the attribution of personal and group meanings (31). In fact, space encompasses various significations of human experiences emanating from spatial interactions to phenomenological discourses. Space differs from a place: a place is a geographical unit that unifies several ideas and exists through such ideas. In other words, the place is concrete, whereas the space is abstract. Although space is an abstract notion, social changes influence its structure. Space is not only an organic, abstract, and dynamic entity but also multi-structured and includes various complex human phenomena related to territories, regions, and landscapes. A proper study of literature should look at spatial and geographical representations as an indispensable part of any critical inquiry since it could unlock numerous possibilities for reading literature by interpreting complex spatial relations and embedded cultural patterns. Furthermore, it functions as a method of social criticism that reveals many hidden practices and latent patterns of spatial injustices in social relationships.

Writers do not portray a place as it is in their works because the individual perceptions of space and place always vary due to the divergence of their lived experiences and textures of discrete imaginations. They plot a place in a narrative by altering its coordinates along with their lived or imagined boundaries of fictional territories. So, they depict lands as a product of reality and imagination tinged with

notions of liminal fantasies. Although the land is fictional, it would have some elements of reality experienced by them in their spatial and geographical realisations. Individuals may always have varied types of association - from intense love to extreme hate - with the geospaces of everyday life. The characters in fiction also express such relationships with the places and spaces where their identities are anchored. The change in the temporal significations also alters the contours of the narrative place in fiction.

Geocriticism, a new mode of spatial critical theory, deals with reading literary maps and analysing literary cartographies focusing on space, place, and landscapes in literature. Peraldo, in his acclaimed *Literature and Geography*, points out that “Geocriticism is a new means for reading and literary criticism, a new interdisciplinary method of analysis that prioritises space, places and geographical practices in literary criticism” (2). In *Spatiality*, Tally states that the “fundamental task for geocriticism is to analyse, explore, and theorize these new cartographies that aid us in making sense of our places and spaces in the world” (114). It can also highlight the deep structures of literary works by focusing on the inner dynamics of hidden and visibilised spaces, places, and landscapes, which are part of literary narratives. Besides, it reveals numerous embedded maps of plots that are discernible only through geocritical reading because structures of meaning are so organised that they create ambiguity in other modes of interpretation. Geocriticism is not only capable of deconstructing monolithic patterns of narratives using the tools of geography, cultural studies, history, sociology, anthropology, psychology, and other related disciplines but also interpreting the diverse strata of literary narratives in

relation to spatial imagination as well as representation. In this study, geocriticism has been used as a set of methods and practices that can visibilise the space, place, and mapping in literature.

Each literary work comprises varied spatial, geographic, cultural, political, and social maps. The organisation and placement of different spatial and geographic features and their manifold interactions on diverse levels determine the literary cartography of that work. Tally observes:

Literature functions as a form of mapping, offering its readers descriptions of places, situating them in a kind of imaginary space, and providing points of reference by which they can orient themselves and understand the world in which they live. Or maybe literature helps readers get a sense of the worlds in which others have lived, currently live, or will live in times to come. From a writer's perspective, maybe literature provides a way of mapping the spaces encountered or imagined in the author's experience. Completely apart from those many literary works which include actual maps, the stories frequently perform the function of maps. (*Spatiality* 2)

The different genres of literature also resemble distinctive maps as they include the selection, omission, and rejection of various elements. Tally further points out that “genre is itself a sort of map since the generic parameters help to establish the projected “world” of the story” (*Spatiality* 55). He also adds in the same book that “the map both uses genre and is a sort of genre, as the map also shapes the different bits of data into a meaningful ensemble to be interpreted and understood; and the map, like the genre, both structures this world and is a structure within a world”

(55). The relationship between genres and literary cartography subverts the conventional interactions of text and temporality. In short, literary cartography also has a significant role in determining the form and structure of literary genres.

Geocriticism emphasises the inherent spatiality of literary narratives and focuses on aspects of literature that give meaning to our spatialised sense of being. It “may also be used to ask new questions, to read differently, to engage with other disciplinary methods, and to interpret the ways that we make sense of our own spaces, of our own mappings” (Tally, *Geocritical Explorations* 8). Despite the vital role of spatial literary criticism, which has introduced a new set of methods for analysing literature, ascertaining the relationship between characters and their locations, writers and their native places and lived spaces, it has been largely ignored in literary studies in India. Geocriticism, along with spatial literary practices, can be used to explore the complex literary cartography of Nair’s fiction. This investigation has used literary and geographical tools to unwrap the multiple structures of signification implanted in her novels. It has also utilised methods and practices based on spatial perspective, which could unravel the hitherto unrevealed spatial significations in the organisation of spaces and places in her novels.

Although field-based studies, as part of spatial literary studies, can contribute significantly to unravel the hidden structures of meaning latent in the narratives, it has more or less ignored in the critical probing of variances and similarities in mapping real and fictional landscapes in literature. As theoretical frameworks have not been fully developed in locating the coordinates of imagined territories and the represented geospaces, which are merged with indiscrete borders due to the

interactions of diverse human and territorial subjectivities and the similitude of the represented terrains in fictional works are not analysed to identify the distinctive spatial factors. Field studies have also been employed in this investigation to determine the actualities of fictionalisation in Nair's literary representations.

Even though maps are excellent tools for topographical analysis of territories, they are rarely employed in literary and cultural studies. Since geocriticism has appropriated many tools and methods from geography, such as maps and cartographic methods, they have been used to disentangle the intricate structures of Nair's novels and reveal the totality of representation of spatial and geographical experiences in her novels. The study investigates spatial and cultural structures in Nair's fiction, emphasising real and imagined places and spaces.

Human geography, which has primarily contributed to the evolution of spatial practices, probes the diverse factors that regulate, modify, and condition individual life, the forces that exert influences on the human environment, the spatial organisation and geographical setting that infuse similitude in the structures of human consciousness and imagination, and the interconnectedness of spatial arrays, which are attached to individual consciousness. Social and personal spaces dictate the human movement in concrete physical realisations through displacement and rootedness. As human geography can analyse literary and cultural texts by emphasising human spatial engagements, this study aims to use such methods to map Nair's fictional narratives.

As travel is one of the recurring themes of Nair's novels, her novels are primarily travel narratives that encase the spirit of wandering and wayfaring. Like

the writer herself, many of her characters also express a deep-rooted desire for exploring strange, unfamiliar territories and cultures as a means of self-discovery and for recentring their spatial and geographical placement through their interaction with new landscapes. As travel is integral to human discourses that configure human destinies and imagination, spatiality studies can considerably contribute to travel literature and narratives. Besides, travelling is one of the significant human activities that gives meaning to life through spatial cognition and signification. Spatiality theories can also explicate the deterritorialisation of the rootless individuals in her novels.

As this study focuses on place, space, and mapping in Anita Nair's novels, critical spatial theories and geocritical methods are used to probe their latent structures. Nair's fictional and non-fictional works are analysed to trace the structures of signification and the maps of imagination. The relevant theories of space, spatiality, and culture are also employed to explore her works and identify space, place, and other potential spatial structures in her novels. Moreover, the study has critically evaluated earlier research findings and critical studies of her novels.

Cartography tools and methods have been utilised to plot the places and spaces mentioned in Nair's novels. The local maps of varied regions are used along with literary maps to identify the divergences between the spatial configuration of geospaces and literary spaces in her fiction. As Mundakkottukurissi, her native village, has been a source of incessant inspiration for her, a field study has been conducted there to identify the real and imagined spatial assemblages that are compared with the literary cartography of Kaikurissi and neighbouring areas that

appear in her novel *The Better Man* and recurs in her later literary works. In addition, literary maps of Nair's selected novels have also been prepared employing the tools and methods of cartography. Nair's articles, reviews, interviews, and travel writings in various magazines, journals, and edited books have been gathered to probe her literary and spatial imagination in novels. Besides, all available auto/biographical materials are surveyed for appropriating relevant information. A structured interview with the writer was conducted to collect crucial facts otherwise unavailable in other sources. As historical narratives are part of her novels, historical research methods have also been used to supplement literary research methods.

The present study comprises an introduction, four main chapters, conclusion, and recommendations. The first chapter outlines the history and evolution of theories of space, especially those related to spatial literary criticism and spatial literary practices. The contributions of seminal spatial thinkers such as Robert. T. Tally, Bertrand Westphal, Michel Foucault, Henri Lefebvre, Gaston Bachelard, and Edward. W Soja have been critically evaluated concerning space, place, and mapping in literature.

The second chapter investigates space, place, and mapping in Nair's selected novels and explicates the scope and significance of spatial literary criticism in them. Spatial and geographical emplacement, place attachment, and nostalgia, which are the recurring themes of her novels, have been identified, and their close association with her lived spaces, places, and landscapes are probed in this section. The study has used various maps to determine the spatial trajectories, rootedness, displacement, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation of her characters and to

identify the writer's sense of place, place attachment, and spatial consciousness associated with native locations and lived territories.

The third chapter of the thesis identifies lived territories, houses, and travels as the key elements of Nair's fictional narratives and looks into the mapping of various manifestations of rootedness and deterritorialisation in them. Nair's novels are analysed with the theoretical tools of geocriticism and critical spatial practices in order to determine spatial consciousness, territorial identity, rootedness, and deterritorialisation. The chapter also examines the significance of travels in Nair's novels as a spatial practice and the spatial perplexities expressed by her characters who desire to travel far and wide. At the same time, they represent an overwhelming inclination to return to their roots. The personal and communal displacements of Nair's characters have also been studied based on her travelogues, travel writings, and other published articles.

Nair's novels always attempt to present the complex socio-cultural structures of her native place in her novels. The fourth chapter examines visibilised cultural patterns as substrates of space and place in her novels. The cultural practices, values, and symbols, which are part of territorial identities, recur in her fictional narratives, producing the cultural maps of locations that are the core regions of her narrative world. Besides, this chapter probes the spatial consciousness of her characters associated with the locations of diverse cultural and literary traditions in her novels.

A summary of the major arguments and findings are given in the concluding chapter. Nair's novels visibilise various spaces, places, and territories along with patterns of spatial consciousness and cultural identity. The writer has also infixed

the spatial structures of her native land along with multiple arrays of place attachment and topophilia emerging from close bonds with the native territories. The writer situates space, gender, and politics of power in her novels as the interplay of latent spatial structures. Recommendations, proposals for future actions and suggestions for further research are also included in this thesis.

The study primarily focuses on probing spatial and geographical patterns in Nair's select novels. However, many allied disciplinary fields, such as ecocriticism and topo poetics, and urban studies are closely associated with geocriticism; they cannot be employed in this study. Nair's novels demand an intensive analysis using notions of feminist geography that interrogates the spatial politics of the interned structures of space and gender in her writings, which is exempted from the research. Moreover, as spaces always include power structures, the theories of power and authority could have been elaborately employed to reveal the intricate patterns in her novels. Despite the possibility of studying the evolution of cyberspace in Nair's fiction, it is also left unprobed.

Chapter 2

Spatiality to Geocriticism: Space, Place, and Mapping in Literature

Literature reflects variegated structures of human life: it depicts real and imagined spatial as well as temporal boundaries of human experience. Even though spatial and temporal elements are always embedded in literary narratives, temporality was overemphasised and over-explored in literary and cultural studies, and space had been neglected until the last decades of the twentieth century because writers, critics, and philosophers considered the linear movement as the natural course of human life. Bertrand Westphal observed that “for a long period, time seems to have been the primary coordinate of human inscription into the world” and “space only was a rough container, a plebeian frame for time” (*Geocritical Explorations* ix). Walton and Suárez also maintained:

“No longer regarded as a mere backdrop, neutral container, blank expanse, or fundamental perceptual category (as Kant influentially proposed), space has come to be seen in contemporary philosophy, literary, and critical theory as something *produced*, to cite Henri Lefebvre’s foundational term: that is, conquered, governed, traversed, mapped, and structured by such factors as class, power differentials, race and ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and different kinds of national and cultural identity” (1).

However, the spatial turn in literature and culture has reoriented both the lived and imagined structures of spatial representation, emphasising the new fluid arrays of geographical imagination, in which all reasoning and perception are revitalised in

temporal textures. Thus, it has been reconstructed to include the hitherto excluded elements and patterns of literary and non-literary representations. Therefore, places and spaces become more multi-layered in narratives, and their interpretation becomes necessary to explore their representation and signification.

As far as any form of literature is concerned, places form the setting, and they are ineluctable elements of plots as they are vital in determining the coordinates of spatial imagination. The landscapes and locations in realistic and fantastical fiction mirror polyvalent structures of imagination and actuality in innumerable patterns. In *Spatiality*, Tally suggests that “science fiction or utopia or fantasy enable new ways of seeing the spaces of our world while imagining different spaces altogether. In this respect, otherworldly literature and the literary cartography, geography, or geocriticism connected to it is valuable” (154). Though the demarcation of literary landscapes is so fluid and unstable that the mapping also faces issues of representation and signification, the new advances in spatiality studies can unwrap complex and intricate structures of lived experiences in literature. In the same book, Tally puts it:

Those other spaces are not usually associated with mimesis, realism, or the real world but also maintain a profound influence over literary cartography and geography. As becomes clear immediately, however, the distinction is rather unstable, oscillatory, and subject to reversals, as the most fantastic literature may also have clear, "real-world" effects, and the most realistic works can often mask the false or misleading truths behind everyday

appearances. Fantasy might be all the more useful for thinking about the real spaces of the world" (146 -147).

Literature encases real and imaginative spatial structures that differ only in the proportion they have assimilated materiality for creating fictional verisimilitude.

The study of places and spaces, with its numerous interwoven layers of spatial signification, could provide a more lucid interpretation of the literary texts than the linear analysis mainly based on time, history, and evolution. The territories and locations occurring in literature may vary due to the individual and collective perceptions of writers and distinctive spatial cognition of landscapes. The spatiotemporal structures of narration could also create new layers of human signification and representation that could cause the emergence of new spheres of literary discourses. The overlapping layers of culture, including myths, legends, rituals, and artefacts, can make the portrayal of lives more realistic, even in fantastic locations.

The evolution of the theories of space as an independent discourse without aligning with that of time emerged in the last decades of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the earliest conceptualisations and theories about place and space had evolved in Western and Eastern philosophies, contributing much to spatial literature, even though they are not always consistent in fundamental matters identified after the spatial turn in literary and cultural studies. It can be argued that the Western contribution is mainly from the Greek philosophers, beginning with Plato, and those thoughts were conceptualised by varying levels till their bifurcation into distinctive branches of philosophical inquiries based on time and space. David Harvey

articulates, “If it is true that time is always memorialized not as flow, but as memories of experienced places and spaces, then history must indeed give way to poetry, time to space, as the fundamental material of social expression” (218). In short, the spatial turn redefined the idea and practice interrelated to the spatial coordinates, for its existence has been relegated to new patterns of representation and signification in literature.

Evolution of Theories of Space

Plato contributed significantly to the evolution of the concepts of space and time by systematically providing an objective view of space. He envisioned the universe as visible and tangible and possessing a body (Kraut). The platonic world consisted of three components: Being, which was comprehensible to reason alone; Becoming, which was accessible to the senses; and Space, which arbitrated between Being and Becoming. He conceived the space as a pure medium, like a receptacle without any qualities in which objects existed and interacted, which had no voids and was isotropic. Besides, space was also represented as immutable, spherical, finite, everlasting, and indestructible. Aristotle's notion of space further takes Plato's thought of spatial organisation into a complex composition. He thought space was heterogeneous, finite, continuous, incorporeal, and isotropic. He denied the existence of a void in spatial organisation and propounded that space was filled with objects and that the mind had no role in its existence. He shared Plato's notion that spaces and places were immutable and had an absolute position in the cosmos. He also believed in the potency of places rather than imagining them as containers of objects (Duncan and Bradie).

René Descartes, a 17th-century French philosopher and mathematician, maintained that space was filled with matter as it was not void in content. He defined it as infinite, uniform and flat, even though he did not follow all the Aristotelian notions of space and its representation. Isaac Newton thought space was more than elementary relations between material objects, supporting Leibniz's observation and experimentation in spatial organisation. He held "an interestingly holistic identity criterion for the parts of space and time" (Rynasiewicz). Immanuel Kant advocated that space had subjective as well as ideal manifestations, and the structure of the human mind was closely related to the formation of spatial representation and signification (Ben-Zvi). Furthermore, it could be realised through pure intuition, which was also probed and testified both as a whole and in parts. He held that infinite spatial experiences could be contained in a unique representation of territorial experiences. In other words, to Kant, space and spaces are varied significations of the same conceptual representation. Martin Heidegger's theory of space introduced a new notion in spatiality studies as it attempted to be more distinctive from the existing theories. . He also "offers an alternative to the three traditional theories - the absolute theory, the relational theory, and the Kantian theory" (Arisaka 2). Baruch Spinoza believed that space was the same everywhere and had been qualitatively varied.

Michel Foucault is one of the earliest scholars who put forward the notion of the spatial turn, redefining spatial imaginations in interpreting human experience. In *Of Other Spaces*, he introduced concepts of utopia and heterotopia to explicate the intricate structures of space in the postmodern era. He asserted that the "present

epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space” (1). He undermined the narratives that were solely centred on temporality and suggested that fundamental issues of the contemporary world after the end of the nineteenth century were related to place and space. The evolution of new spaces in the conventional spatial organisation, the juxtaposition of the cultural patterns in intimate locations, and the acceleration of spatial forces of attachment emanating from lived places have created complex terrains in human spatial signification. He elaborates:

Our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites. In any case, I believe that the anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space, no doubt a great deal more than with time. Time probably appears to us only as one of the various distributive operations that are possible for the elements that are spread out in space. (2)

The distribution and arrangement of spaces in spheres of human interactions produce numerous patterns of meaning rather than a conventional explication of linear spatiality. “The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time, and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space” (3). He also states that heterotopia begins to function when men arrive at an absolute break with their traditional ideas of temporality and linear movements based on it.

Foucault conceived spatial arrangements in the social milieu as heterotopias and utopias. “Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of society. They present society itself in a perfected form or else society turned upside down, but in any case,

these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces” (3). Heterotopias are “real places— places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society— which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias. I believe that between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience, which would be the mirror.” (3 - 4). It envisions notions similar to Edward Soja's thirdspace and Henry Lefebvre's lived spaces, where the heterogeneous elements and forces interact in the spheres of human actualities to formulate the convoluted structures of everyday life.

Soja has deliberated about space and spatiality and proposed many original ideas that have advanced spatiality studies in new directions. In *Seeking Spatial Justice*, he has noted:

An emphasis on space and spatiality has traditionally been given particular attention in only a few disciplines, mainly geography, architecture, urban and regional planning, and urban sociology. Today, it has reached far beyond these spatial disciplines into such fields as anthropology and cultural studies, law and social welfare, postcolonial and feminist critiques, theology and bible studies, race theory and queer theory, literary criticism and poetry, art and music, archaeology and international relations, economics and accounting, (13 -14).

In other words, it is a reaffirmation of the accretionary significance of spatial studies in social and literary theories. Spatial studies have evolved into one of the most vibrant academic fields of research as it can bring a paradigm shift in human experience and imagination related to place, space, and mapping.

Henri Lefebvre has observed in his *The Production Space* that “every society - and hence every mode of production with its subvariants (i.e. all those societies which exemplify the general concept - produces a space, its own space.” (31). He also put forward the proposition that “(social) space is a (social) product” (26). In his view, it is not uniform, consistent or naturally evolved. However, it is an aggregate that he named a conceptual triad comprising spatial practice, representation of space, and representational spaces. The spatial practice “secretes that society's space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it” (38). He maintains “the representation of space is a conceptualised space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent - all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived” (38). Lefebvre states “representational space is a space directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users', but also some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who describe and aspire to do no more than describe. This is the dominant and, hence, passively experienced space that the imagination seeks to change and appropriate it” (39). The three elements can be “related to the spatial experience of the human body as the perceived-conceived-lived triad (in spatial

terms: spatial practice, representations of space, representational spaces)” (40). This triad could be used as a tool to study various spaces, including historical spaces, without relegating the significance of the constituent core spaces and places in the totality of the spatial experience produced by the indivisible and interconnected spatial structures of human conscience. It also tries to accelerate the social production of unique spaces that are formed by the interactions of evolving spatial as well as temporal structures.

As a scholar who studied the internal structures of spatiality and temporality in literary representations, Mikhail Bakhtin introduced the term *chronotope* to accentuate the inherent unified nature of spatial and temporal identities. The term is also closely associated with an overlapped temporal and spatial perspective in diverse forms in philosophy and literature. It was coined by joining two Latin roots, *chrono*, which refers to time and *topos*, which denotes place, indicating the intrinsic unification of temporal and spatial realisations in literary and cultural representations. Furthermore, the term acknowledges the essentiality of space along with time for understanding real and imagined narratives of the world. Bakhtin noted that the chronotopes configure even the structures of genres of literature. He puts it:

This term [space-time] is employed in mathematics and was introduced as part of Einstein's Theory of Relativity. The special meaning it has in relativity theory is not important for our purposes; we are borrowing it for literary criticism almost as a metaphor (almost, but not entirely). What counts for us is the fact that it expresses the inseparability of space and time

(time as the fourth dimension of space). We understand the chronotope as a formally constitutive category of literature; we will not deal with the chronotope in other areas of culture. (84)

As time was the central coordinate of discourses till the early decades of the twentieth century, both critical theories and philosophical discourses weakened lineaments of spatiality. The notion of chronotope has reinstated its lost relevance, asserting its significance by equating time and space in varied discourses that emphasise all modes of representation. Bakhtin elaborates:

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, and becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of the time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterises the artistic chronotope (84).

Moreover, he asserts that the artistic chronotope could integrate all temporal and spatial significations in narratives in which fundamental elements of spatiotemporality constitute multiple forms of engagements with plot and characters of literary narratives.

Edward Said discussed spatial politics and spatial practices that always disparaged non-Western societies and their cultures. He attempted to decode the Eurocentric ideologies embedded in literary narratives and philosophical discourses where the dominance of the Western gaze incorporated antipathy and cultural aversion. His critical positions are fundamentally spatial: place, space, locations, and

their mapping are the key concerns of his literary and cultural criticism. In *Orientalism*, he explains how the West represents the East in literary narratives and discourses, and in *Culture and Imperialism*, he argues that “none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography” (15). As the notions of identity, politics, and power are closely associated with geographical and spatial structures, their placement in the literary narratives and philosophical discourses illustrate diverse forms of human representation in the postcolonial world. He re-centred the spatial signification in all modes of socio-political formations, undermining the linear perspectives perpetuating the subalternity of non-European societies. In addition, he asserted that the demarcation of fluid regions of human geography along with socio-political layers of the lived territories was organised through the propagation of the ideology of colonial subaltern existence. Spatiality becomes, ironically, “the characteristic of an aesthetic rather than political domination, as more and more regions from India to Africa to the Caribbean--challenge the classical empires and their cultures” (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* 190). During the colonial and postcolonial periods, the construction and propagation of spatial inequalities and the rejection of spatial justice were employed to perpetuate hegemonic power and political authority. Tally notes in *Geocritical Legacies* that “Edward W. Said represents an important figure in the development of spatially oriented cultural criticism” (1) and “his work has been extremely influential to critics and others interested in the relations of space, place, and mapping to literary and cultural studies” (3). Both *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* critically examine the spatial and geographical structures that form fundamental motive forces even in colonial oppression and subjugation. Said has put it in *Orientalism* thus:

(The) universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space, which is "ours", and an unfamiliar space beyond "ours", which is "theirs", is a way of making geographical distinctions that can be entirely arbitrary. I use the word "arbitrary" here because the imaginative geography of the "our land-barbarian land" variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction. (54)

In fact, he affirms the significant role of geopolitical cartographies in spatially oriented post-colonial explorations because geospaces can rewrite as well as remap the deeply imbued territorial subjectivities.

Raymond Williams examined history, culture, and linear progress by redefining the notions of space, place, and landscapes. In *The Country and the City*, he put forward that the difference between the structures of the country and city was related to place and space, and he tried to assert the connection between social, political, and cultural evolution and that of the demarcation of land and its utilisation. He attempts to differentiate between country and city as given below:

“Country” and “city” are very powerful words, and this is not surprising when we remember how much they seem to stand for in the experience of human communities. In English, “country” is both a nation and a part of the “land”; “the country” can be the whole society or its rural area. In the long history of human settlements, this connection between the land from which directly or indirectly we all get our living and the achievements of human society has been deeply known. And one of these achievements has been the city: the capital, the large town, a distinctive form of civilisation (1).

Moreover, Williams advocated the idea of structures of feeling related to varied spatial formations that he defined in *Marxism and Literature* as “social experiences in solution, as distinct from other social semantic formations that have been precipitated which are more evidently and immediately available” (133). Those fundamental notions reveal that the relationship between literature and culture is inextricably associated with territorial boundaries. The basic assumptions as well as ideas he propounded directly or indirectly follow the spatial organisation of geospaces and the hierarchical ordering of places and spaces, formulating multiple forms of core and periphery in the human realisation of territories.

The Geography of Literature

Edward W. Soja has accentuated the growing importance of space in humanities and social sciences. In *Postmodern Geographies*, he accords concurrence to the thoughts of spatial philosophers like Michael Foucault, Robert T. Tally, and Bertrand Westphal, as he puts it in these words, “a distinctively postmodern and critical human geography is taking shape, brashly reasserting the interpretive significance of space in the historically privileged confines of contemporary critical thought” (11). The emergence of geographical and spatial studies has thrown light on many terrains of human consciousness depicted in literature, which has hardly been explored until then. In addition, the geographically oriented critical analysis could situate the conceptual and critical schemas of space, place, and mapping in contemporary social and political theories. In the same book, he observes that the “spatial order of human existence arises from the (social) productions of space, the construction of human geographies that both reflect and configure being in the

world” (25). This is analogous to Henri Lefebvre's notion of the production of space. Even though Soja exposits the vital significance of space, he has acknowledged the unified subjectivity of trilectics of human spatial conscience in the same book as “just as space, time and matter delineate and encompass the essential qualities of the physical world, spatiality, temporality, and social being can be seen as the abstract dimensions of human existence” (25). It highlights the complementary nature of those spatial structures even though they have varied elemental factors in their primary subjectivities.

In the preface to *Postmetropolis*, Soja points out that the promise of spatial studies is not limited to critical theories but all social constructs relating to the representation and signification of human existence. He asserts in the same book that “geographical perspective on the production of practical knowledge and the promotion of a political practice that seeks to reduce the oppression and inequities associated with class, race, gender, and other sources of differential social power” (xiv). He has reiterated the significance of geographical and spatial studies in reclaiming neglected spatial trajectories by redirecting to theories that could alter all aspects of human spatial existence. As a geographer and spatial scholar, he expanded “the scope of critical thinking about cities and regions across all disciplines by opening up new ways to understand how specifically urban spatiality is empirically perceived, theoretically conceptualised, and experientially lived” (xiv). The fact that is always undisputed is that Soja focussed on reinstating novel discourses for reconfiguring spatial consciousness in human experiences. In other words, he modifies the scope of spatial and geographical studies to unravel the

intricate structures of human life encased in various spatial arrays responsible for shaping diverse identities in the realms of human actualisation.

Soja has also introduced thirdspace, a new critical notion related to spatiality and spatial structures, and he explains the objective of developing such a notion as:

It is to encourage you to think differently about the meanings and significance of space and those related concepts that compose and comprise the inherent spatiality of human life: place, location, locality, landscape, environment, home, city, region, territory, and geography. In encouraging you to think differently, I am not suggesting that you discard your old and familiar ways of thinking about space and spatiality, but rather that you question them in new ways that are aimed at opening up and expanding the scope and critical sensibility of your already established spatial or geographical imaginations. (*Thirdspace* 1)

The new concept has realigned the existing ideas about the demarcation of spaces and places. It has transformed how people think about space and spatial organisation by introducing a unified notion of spatiality-historicity-sociality, bringing about a profound change in spatial cognition. It has also significantly modified the methodologies for probing collective spatial interactions of history and culture. “The challenge being raised in thirdspace is, therefore, transdisciplinary. It cuts across all perspectives and modes of thought and is not confined solely to geographers, architects, urbanists or others for whom spatial thinking is a primary professional preoccupation” (3). In other words, “thirdspace is a purposefully tentative and flexible term that attempts to capture what is a constantly shifting and changing

milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings” (3). Thus, thirdspace resembles Foucault's notion of heterotopia, a heterogeneous space where real, imagined, and amorphous elements produce new spatial experiences. Moreover, it is a realm formed from the interaction of the first and second spaces, producing the coalescing of the totality of experiences.

Introducing new concepts and seminal ideas about space, place, and mapping, Derek Gregory directed geo-centrality in everyday human experience. He, who believed “critical human geography can help to make social life not only intelligible but also better,” maintained the inevitability of geographical tools and methods to probe the spatial and social interconnectedness of real and imagined human experiences (*Human Geography* 76). He has attempted to approximate spatial studies into the realms of science by systematically uncovering the hidden structures of human experiences, which recur as varied, intricate spatial formations, along with the social stratification involving the human sense of locations and the veritable terrains of human consciousness.

Gregory has also studied the spatial organisation of social forces and spatialisation in the fictional and figurative representation of space. He even believed in the close relationship between territories and violence, where the poles and antipodes always become epicentres of violence and frequently manifest in societies of uneven structures. In the introduction to *Violent Geographies*, he observed thus: “This is simply a collective attempt to work through some of how a critical geographical imagination can illuminate the spaces through which terror, fear, and political violence are abroad in the world. Here, we want to draw out

several themes that run through the collection” (1). In a way, he is reasserting the close affinity of geographical theories, especially those related to locations and territories, with social theories and the evolution of human geography into spatial science in *Social Relations and Spatial Structures* (1). He further probes spatial dimensions of power and authority *by* analysing “production, spatial distribution, and application of knowledge” and “local contexts in the creation, legitimation, diffusion, and application of new knowledge” (*Geographies* ii). He has also reiterated the strong bond between power and knowledge.

Important decision-makers and highly skilled experts in various domains seem to profit from relational and spatial proximity to each other for functional and symbolic reasons. Power and knowledge depend on each other and incorporate each other; both have enabling and innovative effects. Knowledge consolidates power, and power attracts and sometimes legitimates knowledge. Throughout history, those who enjoyed privileged access to defining (sometimes divining) and distributing knowledge—priests, ideologues—have depended on support from those executing political power, but the converse is also true. (*Geographies* 3)

Gregory’s notions about the significance of geography in probing power relations and identity issues have contributed to the study of the spatial dynamics of the world. He reaffirms that “geographers had developed an interest in the rule and coordination of social systems in space, in power relations within and between territories, in the social construction and symbolic meaning of centres and peripheries and the hierarchy of settlement systems” (*Geographies* 1). In other

words, he probes the spatial organisation where some hitherto ignored spaces are demarcated to discover their role in human realisation and imagination.

Gregory has also deliberated on the relevance of mapping in spatial and temporal representations and attempted to analyse them. He remarks, “Just as individuals need cognitive maps of their cities to negotiate their spatial environment, so we need maps of society to analyse, discuss and intervene in social processes intelligently” (*Human Geography* 10). He also emphasises the ever-increasing role of geography in social theories and even in all our quotidian affairs of life. In the same book, he points out:

But my purpose is not to offer a general prospectus but to think instead about the broader implications of the contemporary interest in social theory and human geography. One of its most obvious consequences, I suggest, is that an interest in place, space and landscape - traditionally one of the central concerns of human geography has become one of the focal concerns of the humanities and the social sciences as a whole. I do not think this means that the discipline is dissolving, but I do think it implies that the discourse of geography has become much wider than the discipline. (80)

In his continued investigation of the overlapped transdisciplinary areas of Geography and Spatial Studies, he has identified new spaces, including various spaces and places that are ignored, rejected, and undermined, which formed multiple recurring patterns associated with spatial practices in the ever-changing social-cultural milieu. He also adds:

Now in this sense, the discourses of geography are not confined to any one discipline, nor even to the specialised vocabularies of the academy. We all routinely make sense of places, spaces and landscapes in our everyday lives - in different ways and for different purposes - and these 'popular geographies', personal and public, are as important to the conduct of social life as are our understandings of (say) biography and history. When we are required to think critically and systematically about social life and social space, however, we usually need to distance ourselves from those commonplaces, taken-for-granted assumptions. (81)

Focussing on the transdisciplinary scope of Geography to answer questions about spatial fixes and cartographic anxiety, he has employed “both physical and human geography for joint explorations of spatial structure - to dissolve the divisions between the two - and to equip the expedition with the baggage of the natural sciences” (86). In short, Gregory has reaffirmed the significance of the varied branches of Geography like physical geography and human geography and their relevance in interpreting our lived experiences represented in spatial formations of the mappable and the remappable world.

Eric Prieto has reiterated the interconnectedness of geography and literature in the postmodern era through his scholarly books and articles. His primary focus lies in the hitherto undiscovered spaces in human spatial significations and realisations. He examines “how literary representations help us to understand the often-misunderstood properties of emergent forms of place” (*Literature 2*). The most significant contribution of this scholar is his attempt to “emphasise the

overlooked productive potential of in-between places—like the ‘borderlands,’ ‘edge-cities,’ and ‘non-places’ which have untangled many layers of human experience and cognition as a tool for getting into the dark areas of social and cultural representation” (1-2). His theoretical framework has enabled deep mapping of the places and spaces in literature and the organisation of real and imagined layers of human spatial consciousness in cultural representations. In addition, these methods and strategies have incorporated marginalised political and social narratives into mainstream critical discourses.

Prieto has investigated various modes of representation of place beyond the limits of conventional geography and suggested the need to reveal the new structures of spatial consciousness and identity embedded in them. He observes that “the human, subjective dimension of place, which gives rise to expressions like ‘a sense of place’ and has an inherently experiential dimension that has often gone missing from geographical analyses, especially since the advent of the post– World War II ‘quantitative revolution’ in geography and the abstractive, spatialising tendencies of post-structuralist social theory” (*Geocriticism* 5). He has taken forward the geographical and spatial studies by solidifying some abstract notions and introducing new methodologies to visibilize the implied spatial consciousness evolved from place-attachment and spatio-temporal interactions.

Literature always represents various territories as they are vital elements of settings of fiction. The narrative locations in them epitomise places and spaces, both real and fictional, as writers construct literary landscapes where characters interact with them and chart their own trajectories of life. Furthermore, novels revitalise the

geographical locations in the core patterns of storytelling so that they form multiple layers in the narratives, producing fictional verisimilitude in narrative discourses and impelling reorientations in conventional plot structures, character developments, and embedded thematic trajectories of fiction.

The presence of multi-layered, polyvalent geographical and spatial elements can determine the fundamental features of literary works, forming distinctive patterns in fiction. Furthermore, their geographical orientation can infuse them with the spirit of chorographical and geographical fiction. Chorographic fiction encases a “detailed study of a country, region or province, and differs from the mere study of antiquities in that it deals with contemporary events in addition to the remote past” (Manfre 170). Such works depict the multiple geographic structures, cultural textures, and sociohistorical patterns that produce verisimilitude of the region. Christopher Witmore points out, “Chorography stands as a complete synthesis—that is, as an assemblage of disjointed fragments forged into a cogent whole—would be disingenuous” (xix). In the simplest terms, Darrell J. Rohl, defines chorography as ‘the representation of space or place (1). It also includes a description of the physical features of territories and locations, along with historical and cultural features that influence the plot and characters, particularly the distinctive spatial and geographical structures. In short, chorographic narratives are generally interwoven with the spaces and places of the location, forming an identity that may be real or fictional in their varied manifestations.

In geographic fiction, “not only does the writer present two-dimensional, geometrically accurate images, but he also drafts three-dimensional topographic

maps in which height is taken into account” (Sabiron 210). Writers give “particular attention to geographical details in order to convey “precisely delineated localities.” (Reed 5). Locations, landscapes, and territories are represented along with the spirit of the place in order to give them a vital role in the fictional narrative. They include divergent landscapes as well as locations in their realistic patterns. Though they have elaborate settings and regional focus in depiction, they generally encase larger areas or many territories where characters punctuate their life trajectories, exploring the essence through diverse form representation and signification. In such novels, there will be characters who travel a lot in the form of territorialisation or reterritorialisation. Moreover, geography fixes the core and peripheries of both individual as well as collective trajectories.

Space, Place, and Mapping in Literature

Bertrand Westphal has introduced a geocentric approach for analysing literature based on place, space, and mapping. His theory and method for probing spatial practices in literary texts are interdisciplinary, as they are closely associated with geography, cultural studies, urban studies, and other branches of humanities and social sciences. In *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, Westphal argues for refocusing spatial and geographical fields as notions of spatiality are an inalienable part of all critical inquiries. He also deliberates, “since geocriticism operates somewhere between the geography of the “real” and the geography of the “imaginary” . . . two quite similar geographies that may lead to others, which critics should try to develop and explore” (170). He has reinvented the vital significance of

place and space in interpreting literary and cultural discourses related to individual and collective spatial experiences.

It is argued that the theoretical coordinates of space have radically transformed after the Second World War, and the notions of inert and stable space have been replaced by a very intricate heterogeneous reality where real and fictional representations and significations constantly interact to create unique experiences. Westphal's *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Places*, initially published in French and translated into English by Robert T. Tally, introduced a new orientation to the geocentric theory of literature. It put forward a set of spatial practices along with a new critical perspective and suggested possibilities of a geo-critical approach in literary and cultural studies to extricate the hidden layers of signification. Likewise, it attempts to reassert the importance of space and spatial practices in all domains of human activity. Geocriticism will work to map possible worlds to create plural and paradoxical maps because it embraces space in its mobile heterogeneity (73). He advocated spatio-temporality, transgressivity, and referentiality as the qualitative referents of his theory of geocriticism. Westphal's theory of geocritical practice is always attached to the geocentered approach, and it is in this connection that he mentions, "Unlike most literary approaches to space [...] geocriticism tends to favour a geocentered approach" (112). He has also identified four focal points of geocriticism: multi-focalization, polysensoriality, stratigraphic vision, and intertextuality. Multi-focalization demands the following of varied visions and representations to comprehend diverse perspectives and shed the fallacies of singularities of representations. Polysensoriality amalgamates all forms of sensual

experience rather than limiting them to the visual registers. Stratigraphic vision enables us to realise the heterogeneity of the *topos* and understand the various modes of stratification that exist as far as *topos* are concerned. According to Westphal, intertextuality is the most important quality of geocritical research as it expands the area of study and makes it more reliable and systematic. However, Westphal's ideas about geocriticism are not without criticisms. Tally critically evaluates that "Westphal's narrowly geocentric approach fails to encompass the full range of spatial representations stretching from Dostoevsky's 'real' St. Petersburg or Faulkner's 'fictional' Yoknapatawpha County to Tolkien's 'fantastic' Middle-earth, and many more, which also offer important sites for geocritical exploration" (144). To put it another way, in its narrow perspective, geocriticism is a method and approach of literary analysis focussing on geographic space, whereas, in its wider perspective, which scholars like Robert T. Tally and Eric Prieto put forward, it extends its scope to all spaces that are produced due to the geographical interactions with varied abstract as well as concrete realities.

The term geocriticism was first used by Westphal in *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*. Tally defines it as in *Spatiality*, "Geocriticism or spatial critical theory, then, is broadly understood to include both aesthetics and politics, as elements in a constellation of interdisciplinary methods designed to gain a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the ever-changing spatial relations that determine our current, postmodern, world" (113). It is still an evolving critical theory primarily influenced by other changes in the humanities and social sciences. "Geocriticism situates mapping and spatial analysis firmly within the framework of

those other fields of study while remaining pliable enough to fit instances that are not properly situated in the domain of geographic inquiry traditionally conceived, such as literature itself” (114). It attempts to use cartographic tools and analysis to augment theoretical inquiries for unwrapping the hidden layers of signification and a representation hitherto left unrevealed in the literary and cultural narratives.

Geocriticism tries to identify various geographical assemblages to explain the complex human relationships with the land, society, and culture. Sheila Hones considers:

The whole tradition of literary geography since the early twentieth century “might be considered geocritical” in retrospect, so the question of whether that work is geocriticism or literary geography appears to be a matter not just of academic borders but also of academic history, which is to say, it has to do with academic space-time. (175)

Moreover, it reveals how the structure of society influences spatial relationships in formulating new spheres of human activity and their close relationship with literature. Tally elaborates:

It seems to me that a fundamental task for geocriticism is to analyse, explore, and theorise these new cartographies that aid us in making sense of our places and spaces in the world. As a way to analyse literary texts, but also as an approach to social criticism, geocriticism can perhaps uncover hidden relations of power in those other spaces that a critical theory less attuned to spatiality might well overlook. (114)

Due to its interdisciplinary nature, it can contribute more to spatial and cultural studies than any other field of critical inquiry related to place and space. It can also unravel and critically analyse the hidden structures of human geography and spatial perceptions. One of the significant theoreticians in spatial and geographical studies, Tally, has significantly contributed to geocriticism and spatial analysis of literary works in a systematic and organised manner. He has written several books and research papers on this topic that are considered fundamental to spatial and cultural studies. In his critically acclaimed book, *Spatiality*, he discusses the evolution of geocriticism and codifies the basic tenets of geocriticism and literary cartography.

Mapping is an activity that has always been part of human cognition. Wood observes, “Mapping doesn't just produce maps; it is fundamental to the process of bringing order to the world” (194). People attempt to understand their locational emplacement with some references and also form their personal maps in the complicated system of representation and signification to solve cartographic anxiety and spatial perplexity. Tally reasons: “This bewilderment has increased with the modern and especially postmodern condition, where the traditional signposts or divine guidance are no longer available” (1). Thus, mapping is necessary to locate and navigate the world; it helps to have a point of reference based on which places and spaces can be located and to decode the intricate, vast expanses of real and imaginative structures of space. Tally has discussed about mapping and literature in the same book:

In a manner of speaking, literature also functions as a form of mapping, offering its readers descriptions of places, situating them in a kind of imaginary space, and providing points of reference by which they can orient themselves and understand the world in which they live. Or maybe literature helps readers get a sense of the worlds in which others have lived, currently live, or will live in times to come. From a writer's perspective, maybe literature provides a way of mapping the spaces encountered or imagined in the author's experience. Completely apart from those many literary works which include actual maps, the stories frequently perform the function of maps. (2)

Mapping has a vital role in literature, and reading and analysing literary cartographies is indispensable for interpreting literary imagination.

Literary works, in general, include varied maps of the world. Writers attempt to depict coordinates of places and organise heterogeneous spaces in a plausible order in their narrative world. They demarcate real and fictional borders composed of innumerable places and spaces with diverse spatial identities. Besides, the narrative structures of literary works can also illuminate the plausible worlds in all manifestations. The cartographies of literary works always have multiple layers that situate characters and their interactions that visibilise human life. The spatial turn, the re-emergence of spatiality in all areas of critical exploration, has changed the approach to life and the realisation of individual life. Tally says: "Literary cartography, literary geography, and geocriticism enable productive ways of thinking about the issues of space, place, and mapping after the spatial turn in

literary and cultural studies” (3). In other words, geocriticism, a set of methods to explore the structures of human life embedded in literature and culture, which were hitherto left unexplored due to a lack of appropriate tools and techniques, can answer many questions about human life using spatial tools and practices.

Writer as a Cartographer

Cartography, which can also be employed to plot the spatial identities in literature, represents the geographical and spatial organisation of places and spaces. Deirdre Russell considers, “Cartography seems to replace narrative – both are modes of knowledge (and often power) that seek to create order and meaning out of chaos – in the spatial paradigm” (213). Scholars and literary critics have used literary and cultural maps to show the spatial relations and spatial formations in literature as a mode of reanalysing the spatial consciousness of writers concerning their lived spaces and imagined lands. In *The Atlas of English Literature*, Clement Tyson Goode and Roger Finlay Shannon offered “an Atlas of English Literature with the hope that it may enable the students to visualise much that has hitherto been vague and confused” (1). They emphasised locations, regions, and territories biographically connected with writers, and they remarked in the introduction that “the general plan has been to give under the name of each writer the places associated with his life” (1). For instance, they have plotted “Stratford-on-Avon, London, Southwark, Bishopsgate, Silver and Monkwell and Cripplegate” as the places associated with William Shakespeare (Goode and Shannon 25). Although the book has only peripheral locational information about English writers, it has used mapping to plot spatial data in literary and cultural studies.

In *Atlas of World Cultures*, David H. Price has included 41 maps with “bibliographical and geographical information on over 3,500 cultural groups around the world” (10). He claims that “This is the first comprehensive atlas of world cultures that also provides bibliographic background materials so the user can access information about the behaviour, habits, beliefs, customs, population size, and changes through time of different cultures around the world” (7). It is conceived as manual for anthropologists and scholars who are engaged in cross-cultural studies for quickly locating cultural groups and their location and as “a geographical guide to ethnographic books, articles, reports, archival materials, maps and atlases and other materials” (7). Nonetheless, the primary focus of this book was in the area of anthropological research, but it can also be used as a source of reference in spatial literary studies.

Malcolm Bradbury has made great strides in literary and spatial mapping from the medieval to the modern period in world literature. In his extensive study, *The Atlas of Literature*, he examined how writers use all the tools and methods available to present the maps of their narrative places and spaces. The mode of presentation of reality has been modified, altered, and even muted to mirror the changing patterns of attitude and behaviour of the people in order to create new ways of appreciating literary works. In *The Atlas of Literature*, he locates some of the prominent places, including cities, regions, and cultural locations of the world, which have not only been associated with great writers but also are part of their literary works. It also tries to map the lived spaces of writers along with the real spaces and places situated in such territories as “it considers writers and works that

are intimately connected with a place or landscape, capturing a town, a city a region in its fictional texture or its literary heyday" (8). Besides, it explores the spatial appropriation of the writers in the form of the sense of belonging and place attachment related to the locations of culture in maps in which temporal and spatial features are plotted. It includes places like Chaucer's England, Shakespeare's London, Bronte sisters' Wild Yorkshire, Twain's Mississippi, Kafka's Prague, Hardy's Wessex, and Thomas' Wales. However, this book hardly provides a critical analysis of the place attachment and the unravelling of the hidden spatial textures of literary works.

All literary works aim to make sense of the world, and writers depict coordinates of the narrative place in which their characters navigate through strange and familiar landscapes of plausible worlds. Peter Turchi compares writing and mapping in his *Maps of the Imagination: The Writer as Cartographer*. He thinks the writer is an explorer of new realms, so “artistic creation is a voyage into the unknown” He observes, "To draw a map is to tell a story, in many ways, and vice versa" (11). Mapping is a mental process in which the cartographer decides what to select for representation, the degree of verisimilitude concerning geospaces, and how to represent it in the narrative universe of fiction. The selection and inclusion of information are very significant to know the various discrete elements emanating from the writer's spatial consciousness and cultural identity. Writers are engaged in the creative process of mapping. However, the myth about it is of objective representation. He elaborates:

The first lie of a map – also the first lie of fiction – is that it is truth. And a great deal of maps or stories or poem's authority results from their ability to convince us of their authority while we expect realistic writing to be accurate when it refers to the world we know, in fiction and poetry, the authority has relatively little to do with objective reportage, or simply getting facts right.

(73)

Despite the issues of objective representation, maps are undoubtedly tools for resolving the problems of spatial confusion and perplexity in everyday life.

A map is a compendium of spatial metaphors. Turchi “identifies five general categories or processes: selection and omission; conventions (adherence to and departure from); inclusion and order; shape, or matters of form; and the balance of intuition and intention” (25). Franco Moretti asserts the same idea in *Atlas of European Novel*:

Writing itself might be considered a form of mapping or a cartographic activity. Like the mapmaker, the writer must survey the territory, determining which features of a given landscape to include, emphasize, or diminish; for example, some shadings may need to be darker than others, some lines bolder, and so on. The writer must establish the scale and the shape, no less of the narrative than of the places in it. Even one who operates in such non-realistic modes as myth or fantasy, the literary cartographer must determine the degree to which a given representation of a place refers to any “real” place in the geographical world. (3)

Westphal, in *The Plausible World: A Geocritical Approach to Space, Place, and Maps*, underlines thus: “The map situates the history of a people in the territory that is assigned to it, or within the territory, it has attributed to itself. It is, therefore, about reconciling the historic diachrony and the spatial synchrony” (41). In other words, he reveals the interrelations of spatial and historical structures in territorial boundedness and reaffirms the role of the map in situating territories. Westphal, in the same work, points out:

Cartography transmutes into text and images a reading of the world that is never unequivocal. The cartographer is not an anonymous and neutral body, but an author, a craftsman, or sometimes an artist who models a dreamed vision of the human environment, employing an alchemist’s approach—covering unknown territories with gilt that thereby become palatable. He delivers a work, just like a writer. He sets himself the goal of fitting the entire world into his product. He aims to transpose it as is, according to a natural referent, while the writer, like any artist developing an imaginative representation, transfigures it. [...] While claiming to reproduce a model- the real “objective” that the geographical vision subsumes under it— it creates a territory. It is the entire world that enters into the subtle allegory supplied by the cartographer. The map is susceptible to being read like a book. And the atlas is a book. In it, the distance between the referent and its representation is supposed to be zero or negligible. It is an illusion that no cartographer legitimizes. (158)

In fact, scholars such as Peter Turchi, Franco Moretti, and Bertrand Westphal reiterate resemblances as well as complimentary engagements in mapping and writing as forms of spatial practices where the referent and representation demarcate the verisimilitude of varied intensities.

The temporality, the focus point of critical theories and philosophical ideas until the beginning of the 20th century, has encountered many setbacks as it has failed to explain man-made tragedies and disasters. So, time as a metaphor for forward flowing river has got a setback, and people have begun to think more about space and its impact on human life. The temporality lost much of its effulgence, and it caused a radical re-emergence of spatiality studies. The relocation, displacement, and up-rootedness due to war and man-made tragedies have led to the reorganisation of space and place into new fluid landscapes that keep changing their borders. In *Spatiality*, Tally says, “Displacement, perhaps more than a homely rootedness in place, underscores the critical importance of spatial relations in our attempts to interpret, and change, the world” (13). Spatiality and spatial practices become essential in the changed circumstances to uncover the new structures that evolved in delineating the borders of human signification. Unlike in the past, developments such as the internet, computer technologies, and space travel have accentuated the spatiotemporal identities of all forms. “Geocriticism or spatial critical theory, then, is broadly understood to include both aesthetics and politics, as elements in a constellation of interdisciplinary methods designed to gain a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the ever-changing spatial relations that determine our current, postmodern world” (13). In most cases, the thinking process has to be centred on some reference points that are the spatial nodes linked to various terrains.

Thinking and imagining require saturations of polyvalent spatial structures, which are conditioned by the place attachment and satisfaction of individuals.

It is incontestable that writing resembles the mapping process. So, the writer and cartographer form maps of territories, including various places, locations, and landscapes, to enable the reader to visualise them, infusing real and imaginary spatial attributes. Tally points out:

The act of writing itself might be considered a form of mapping or a cartographic activity. Like the mapmaker, the writer must survey the territory, determining which features of a given landscape to include, emphasise, or diminish; for example, some shadings may need to be darker than others, some lines bolder, and so on. The writer must establish the scale and the shape, no less of the narrative than of the places in it. (5).

The writers' visualisation of the world, which could be a blend of real, imaginary and real-and-imaginary, would be related to the existing socio-political stratifications, ethnocultural singularities and spatial demarcations associated with the territories mentioned in the literary works. Whether fictional or realistic, all narratives have a collection of maps that interact in various ways, producing a narrative universe with multiple spatial densities and geographical verisimilitude. Tally observes: "Literary cartography, as I am using this term, need not be limited to narrative works." It becomes more specific in dealing with the plot as he says: "Indeed, the very idea of the plot is also spatial since a plot is also a plan, which is to say, a map" (49). All literary works, whether narrative or non-narrative, have distinctive cartographies that augment the reader's spatial consciousness and literary experiences.

The narratives and the narrative places are always complementarily structured, and if they are detached, they could lose many potent layers of signification in the process. In *Spatiality*, Tally reiterates, “The story and the place are inextricably bound together” (51). The significant ways to understand and experience a place are either by mapping it along with the spatial terrains of geospace or by deciphering the patterns of meaning embedded in it. The writer decides the contours of the map that are part of the plot’s trajectories and the possible pattern of realisations. The selection, omission, rejection, extraction, and blending related to the map are made by the writers themselves. Tally compares the making and writing process and explains, “The writer must select the particulars of a given place or story that will allow for the narrative map to be meaningful. This is equally true for an actual mapmaker, who must determine the function of the map and its intended ‘meanings’ for a map reader prior to setting down the elements on paper” (54). Literary cartography has multiple possibilities for exploring the real and fictional worlds. Tally points out in *Melville, Mapping and Globalization*:

Narrative is a fundamental way humans make sense of, or give form to, the world. In that sense, narrative operates much as maps do, to organise the data of life into recognisable patterns with it understood that the result is a fiction, a mere representation of space and place, whose function is to help the viewer or mapmaker, like the reader or writer, make sense of the world. (17)

He also adds that “if the narrative has always been a way of orienting ourselves, both in the relatively stable semantic universe of Lukács’s closed civilisations or in the Quixotic modern world where the centre does not always hold, then—in an era

of globalisation—the cartographic function of literature maybe even more essential to the individual and collective reconquest of the *Lebenswelt*” (17). Bertrand Westphal states, “Geocriticism is an approach whose purpose is to explore some of the interstices that, until recent times, were blank spaces for literary studies” (*Geocritical Explorations* xiii). In his opinion, it has become both an approach and method to read the complexities of the present world as it can interpret varied structures of spatial interactions, which always overlap with various modes of human representation.

Literature and Cartography

Geography and literature have many contact zones, and they intersect in various places, illuminating each other. Geoliterary encounters are represented in literary narratives in inimitable ways, reflecting numerous patterns of real and imagined human spatial experiences. Literary texts explore “the meanings of place and human experience, of dwelling, attachment and rootedness” (Cosgrove, *Geography* 47). Geographers could identify the complex and dynamic human relationships evolving from the intersections of literature and geography in literary imaginations, which are reduced in cartographic representations. Tuan has elucidated that literature forms experience, which “is made up of innumerable perceptions, acts, and environmental impingements” (*Geography* 196). The geographer’s plotting of places and locations, along with multivalent spatial attributes, encases infinite distinctive patterns of individual as well as collective realisation related to territoriality and human spatial consciousness. Enumerating the possibilities of reading literary places and spaces, Pocock argues that “the study of

place in literature “varies along a continuum between landscape depiction and human condition” (12). He also points out that “the paradox of literature lies in the fact that its fictive reality may transcend or contain more truth than the physical or everyday reality” (11). The structures of meaning that can be traced from the literary text are determined by the elements of real and fiction intertwined in the narrative patterns.

Along with spatial turn, geographic as well as cartographic turn have also evolved, use of maps multiplied in various ways in contemporary everyday culture as individuals have begun using them to map personal and collective trajectories. The advent of digital technologies such as Google Maps, Google Earth, and GPS-generated digital maps have revolutionised social and spatial figurations of contemporary everyday culture. Individuals without formal education can use cartography to prepare various forms of maps, which become essential tools for recalibrating the trajectories. The modern cartographical imagination has been infused in the social and literary representations of life, which could be interpreted with tools and methods of cartography.

The appearance of maps in their varied forms in literature has been employed for numerous purposes, and they are embedded in various structures for reimagining ordinary narrative courses. The primary use of maps is an intensification of spatial densities, marking its fluid boundaries and enhancing visual registers to represent the territories that have diverse spatial attributes. The locations of narrative paths are visualised by maps, which attempt to spatialise those territories as a way to solidify the structures of the plot in literary representations. Writers may use paratexts or

inserts in the narratives in order to bring real spatial patterns and geographical structures into the narrative world, which can be related to the real spaces in Soja's spatial imagination. They also enliven narrative places and spaces, reconfiguring the existing places along with fictional spaces, which are a product of polysensorial interactions. The events of narratives are plotted in the spatial structures that revitalise the narrative world in literary works. Tally clarifies, "The map, like the narrative, is ultimately a means of making sense of the world it depicts, which is why both have such persistent value as tools of knowledge" (*Spatiality's Mirrors* 563). In this connection, Matthew Hart points out, "Because readers inhabit real and imagined geographies— cities of the mind, as well as places of everyday lives—they bring to the texts they read a wide array of spatial memories and experiences" (7). Furthermore, the real and imagined spaces in them are predominantly placed in maps, which invigorate the reader's imagination, where the plotting has a vital role in sedimenting the multiple layers of meaning through spatial discourses.

Literary maps can be used as tools for revealing hidden structures of meaning in literary texts by decoding the discourses of real and fictional imagination centred on territories. They also contain attributes of visuality and spatiality in manifold patterns, focusing on geospatial intersections in everyday life. Moreover, they embed spatial and cultural constituents that demarcate narrative trajectories along with human spatial fixations in the narratives. Luchetta and Ridanpää point out that "Literary maps provide a way of seizing literary texts as well as a method for conceiving the space and its relationship with the actual world. Mapping, metaphorically and materially, affects how we view relationships between the

geographies of the texts and of our world” (8). So, they could interpret the intricate bonds of people and territories through narratives of diverse orientations in inanimate and animate environments.

. As maps are tools for representing and visualizing information in the realms of facts, fiction, and imagination, they have a vital role in literary narratives, whether they appear as real or metaphorical maps in fiction. A map may be seen as a text which contains a set of various imageries of a selected region, along with diverse narratives that evolve from the interplay of historical and sociocultural structures. Christina Ljungberg observes:

by juxtaposing writing and cartography, writers force readers to switch between the two and compare two kinds of representation. This shift, leapfrogging between text and map and back to the text again, calls attention to the constructed nature of both fictional and cartographic space, signalling that what we are looking at is but one way among many to represent spatial relationships. (42)

Thus, maps represent both real and imaginary worlds in which the verisimilitude could vary related to interactions of the infused features in the literary imagination, and their decoding is essential for understating the narrative trajectories.

Underscoring the role of maps in human life, Rao describes, “Maps chart locations and their relations to one another, providing a spatial and visual understanding of places, events, and processes. They may also be used as metaphors to epitomise relations between inner psychological spaces and the outside world” (117). So,

analysing the structures of literary works is essential to bring out the sedimented layers of meaning in them.

Literature has various modes of interaction with cartography, which explores the temporal, cultural, and historical patterns embedded in fictional narratives. They visibilize the fundamental emplacement locations with more plausible identities in order to reimagine them by the reader's experiences as illustrations in structured imagination. It also can function as a core setting of the fictional narrative, which may have varied manifestations that hide many inherent structures that can only be revealed by unconventional methods. Rao has emphasised that “fiction is keenly cartographical in that it constantly fashions and refashions the world around us. It makes it simpler for us, or alternatively more complex, and draws our attention to the familiar as well as to the strange. As a result, fiction can be seen as a form of geographical cartography” (117). Novel encodes signs, symbols and images of various real and fictional. Tally, in his *The Novel and the Map*, observes, “The novel, like the map, is a form of knowledge, registering accumulated information and experience, archiving and categorizing their relative significance, framing the data and their interpretations, shaping it all into an intelligible array, and projecting potential future formations” (480). In fact, he accentuates that geographical and spatial organisation appears not only in maps but also in fictional narratives and human imagination

Spaces of Power

The interactions of space and power manifest as the primal, fundamental motive force in diverse designs of human existence. Despite the implicit nature of

such interactions, it organises, controls, and conditions the individual perceptions of geographical organisation, producing diverse forms of human experiences. It is undeniable that no one can get away from the networks of power that themselves change their coordinates and attributes to adapt to the changing spatial and temporal patterns. “Every society produces its own space,” where the organising of the various elemental factors is shaped distinctively because of the discrete as well as unique organisations of space, place, and landscapes (Lefebvre 31). These organisations of power can not only be mapped efficaciously in literature and various forms of culture, but they also attune the internal structures of the genres. In fact, the interactions of space and power solidify and indirectly reinforce the existing social-political hierarchies, hegemonic cultural formulations, and geographical power structures.

The spatial analysis of power has been one of the significant areas of literary criticism and philosophy in the contemporary world. Philosophers and scholars such as Raymond Williams, Edward Said, Gilles *Deleuze*, and Félix *Guattari* have significantly contributed to this area, even though it was Michel Foucault who attempted to systematically analyse the fundamental relation among spatiality, power, and knowledge in their various representations in everyday life. All of them have focussed their studies on geographical as well as spatial representations, reinforcing the spatial turn in their evolutionary discourses. Literature embeds hierarchical, ideological, and hegemonic patterns of power that permeate the multiplicities of spatial structures and the varied manifestations of the power dynamics of social, political, and cultural systems. Thus, literature signifies the

spatial organisation and arrangements by which society produces its intricate core layers and reveals the ordinations of political authority that fortify the hegemonic cultural textures.

Foucault looked into the association between power and spatial relations. Tally acknowledges it and observes: “Foucault’s spatial analysis of power, which underlies his entire multifaceted and diverse body of work, places us in a better position today, after the spatial turn, to recognise the importance of space to our critiques of literature, society, and culture” (*Spatiality* 120). His theories are based on the intricate dynamics of space. Tally elaborates:

the spatial significance of the order of things, both in a geographical sense, such as the movement from exile to the enclosure as public response to the appearance of contagious diseases in a population, and in a more abstract sense, as with the collection and organization of data into charts or tables. Later, with his genealogical research into the disciplinary formations of individuality and the history of sexuality, he mapped the mobile circuitry of power relations in a distinctly spatial array, even as the trajectory of his historical narrative enfolded the spaces upon each other. (120)

It was Deleuze who identified the fact that Foucault’s fundamental philosophical and critical notions are largely centred on the principles of spatiality. He, in *Foucault*, a critical survey of Foucault's philosophy, called him a “new cartographer,” as he was largely involved in the production of “a map, or several superimposed maps” (44). The discourses of carceral archipelago and Panopticon in *Discipline and Punish* are based on the realigned patterns of geographical and

spatial organisations in the form of fixed positions in the spatial matrix. Tally in *Spatiality* observes, “Foucault employed methods that uncovered the layers of sedimented knowledge in order to locate the “birth” of the asylum, the clinic, or the human sciences at large” (120). It is evident that he understood the centrality of space, place, and mapping not only in geospaces but also in various lineaments – homogeneous or heterogeneous – in all spatial representations. Besides, he also emphasised the significance of the manifestation of power relations in both fixed and fluid arrays of the human conscience in the form of cultural identity and spatial consciousness.

Deleuze has propounded many seminal thoughts in the area of spatial theory and practice, and his ideas are “permeated with explanatory images of spatiality, ranging from his persistent use of spatial terminology to his insistence that all thinking is necessarily tied to space, to territory, and to the earth” (Tally, *Spatiality* 135 -136). Deleuze and Guattari observe, “Subject and object give a poor approximation of thought. Thinking is neither a line drawn between subject and object nor a revolving of one around another. Rather, thinking takes place in the relationship of territory and the earth” (*Philosophy* 85). In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they also put forward the notions of nomad thought which vehemently opposes smooth, stable, and homogeneous spaces. They expanded it as “the difference between a smooth (vectoral, projective, topological) space and a striated (metric) space: in the first case ‘space is occupied without being counted,’ and in the second case ‘space is counted in order to be occupied’” (361–362). Their geo-centred ideas

led to the evolution of geo-philosophy, a subfield of philosophical discourses, which reoriented the core concepts of traditional philosophy.

Deleuze and Guattari have also used “deterritorialization” and “reterritorialization” to denote spatial mapping in literary and philosophical discourses. They put forward such notions for expressing the fluid movements emanating from social, political and cultural interactions. Deterritorialization is related to leaving a territory where one is displaced voluntarily or forced to move out due to external factors, and reterritorialization stands for the varied forms of appropriations, including a return to the lost territory. While deterritorialization is a process of displacement in which territoriality is lost due to estrangement from the lived places and spaces, reterritorialization is the effort to restructure the lost regions that naturally follow deterritorialization. These spatial processes can be used to investigate the effect of territorial bonds on human beings when they are forced to be displaced from locations, whether in the forms of forced exile, migration, or self-willed movements.

Geography and Human Mind

Patterns of the interaction of individuals with territories that embed diverse structures and distinctive spatial formations exhibit innumerable forms of place attachment in everyday life. Besides the interplay of the individual and collective identities, the polysensorial realisations foment multiple experiences that also reveal the discourses of the sense of the place. There are several interdisciplinary branches of studies, such as geopsychology, geoneuroscience, environmental psychophysiology, and psychogeography, that probe the intricate relationships

between territories and human behaviour. Psychogeographical studies, “the point at which psychology and geography collide” (Coverley 10), explores “the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals” (Debord), and illuminate latent structures of individual consciousness in the evolving relationship between people and territories. The geographical interactions reconfigure the ordinary textures of spatial consciousness, as individual involvement may range from extreme forms of topophilia to topophobia in their multifocal and polyvalent sensibilities. They can also influence human consciousness and behaviours, accelerating interactions with environments and ecosystems. The trajectories of individuals are also acclimatised by spatio-temporal characteristics so that the individual has to choose the deflected courses of life, which are emplaced in lived territories or imagined landscapes. In short, human relations with geospaces, to a large extent, determine spatiotemporal experiences and multifarious significations.

Environment and individual consciousness have analogous textures that form, modify, and realign various spatial emotions like nostalgia, place attachment, and place satisfaction. Environmental psychology probes such analogous textures as it “is primarily interested in the interaction between humans and their built and natural environment, and explicitly considers how the environment influences behaviour as well as how behaviour results in changes in the environment” (Steg et al. 5). Bechtel and Arzah Ts'erts'man suggest

six contexts on the general level: the physical, psychological, (intrapersonal), and sociocultural contexts of the person and, analogously, the physical,

interpersonal, and sociocultural contexts of the environment. On the specific level, our view has proposed that there are an infinite number of specific situations or contexts within each of the previous six more general contexts, which include aspects of both the person *and* the environment. (11)

Lawrence's 'spirit of place' and Raymond Williams's 'structures of feeling' essentially relate to some of the patterns of human spatial relationships. Despite the deterritorialisation or various forms of displacements for more extended periods, people keep their primal bonds with their native region and lived spaces as the spatial consciousness and cultural identity create vital layers of cognition and representation. It is evident that spatial structures can dictate human behaviour and attitudes because the distinctive polysensorial elements of the ecosystems saturate some of the polyvalent arrays of human consciousness. They could be represented in literary narratives as the writer's reflection on spatial attachment and human spatial experiences. Thus, literary works can mirror the multi-structural spatial patterns and geographic organisation.

Multitudes of overlapping areas exist in human relationships with ecosystems and territories. Though individuals leave the spaces and places, nostalgic bonds in the form of realisations of rootedness and uprootedness would linger in their consciousness forever. The similitude of those spaces, which are part of spatial matrices in territories and the human mind, creates notions of topophilia in human consciousness. The structures of those polyvalent spatial organisations demarcate the spaces and places depending on the intensities of the spatial experience. Indeed, the environmental and psychological condition in individuals related to spaces can

be unwrapped through a critical probe of cultural and environmental geography, the disciplines that study the human experience related to geospaces, as both employ spatial arrangements in examining human spatial experiences.

Individual attachment to various locations can significantly affect the reconfiguration of social life. Fleury-Bahi et al. observe, "Individuals construct descriptive and evaluative versions of their relationships with their environments in ways that can be socially strategic to warrant or contest broader relational patterns of inter-group conflict, social exclusion and political struggle" (100 -101). Place satisfaction and place attachment are always structured in human consciousness and may appear in omnifarious forms, with nostalgia being one of the prominent manifestations. As nostalgic memories and experiences related to places and spaces influence individuals more than anything else, the paths of reterritorialisation and sectoral displacements are redrawn in individual spatial organisation. Routledge maintains:

Nostalgic memories involve the life experiences that people cherish.

Nostalgic memories are meaningful memories. And when people revisit these memories, they subsequently report a greater sense of meaning in life. Since nostalgia elevates meaning, not surprisingly, when meaning is under threat, people tend to become nostalgic. And this compensatory response is effective. Nostalgia restores meaning following experiences or states that undermine meaning. (99)

Nostalgia can reinforce people's existing personal and social interactions so that their spatial identities are refixed again in the familiar landscapes. "Nostalgia also

promotes growth by encouraging explorative processes. That is, nostalgia increases people's curiosity and desire to seek new experiences and ideas. Not surprisingly then, nostalgia contributes positively to the creative expression" (Routledge 83). The diverse manifestations of nostalgia always expose the potentialities of territories in forging multiple identities, producing forms of place attachment and propelling various modes of creativity.

Nostalgia is closely associated with several individual memories that reorient human life. "Research suggests that people may draw creative inspiration from revisiting their own past nostalgically" (Routledge 83). When people revisit their past, their creative faculties are enhanced in producing as well as imagination. This is an area in which more focused research is needed to solidify existing notions related to creativity. Psychological insights /growth is also permeated into the longitudinal fixities in the spatial identities and geographical consciousness in patterns of human consciousness.

The geographical coordinates determine human behaviours and their socio-spatial engagements and demarcate spatial identities along with patterns of human signification. In other words, the environments and physical locations perpetually engage the human experiences and realisations due to the interactions of psycho-spatial relationships, which vary with territorial singularities. As geographical matrices can dominate multiple arrays of individual identity and cultural consciousness, they formulate individual spatiotemporal consciousness to create variances based on distinctive spatial proximities evolved in individual interactions. Literature can be employed as a tool to map the geopsyché, "which can be defined

as the relationship between the complex matrix of static and time-varying geophysical and geochemical variables within a locality and human behavior” (Florinsky 127). In fact, it probes the core and peripheries of the spatial demarcation in the real and fictional representation in diverse modes of human discourses that can embody and decipher individual trajectories.

Space, Gender, and Travel

The basic questions about the relationships between gender and spaces have begun to be investigated in the last decades of the 20th century. Feminist geographers and critics who have probed the ordering of social and domestic spaces argue that those organisations that integrated masculine power structures where feminine subjectivities are subdued or neglected have an oppressive social pattern as the norm of the communities. Rose asserts that “geography holds a series of unstated assumptions about what men and women do, and that the discipline concentrates on the spaces, places, and landscapes that it sees as men’s” (2). Patriarchal structures are organised in the spatial textures, excluding the spatial justice of genders everywhere. Tally points out, “Feminist geography, along with feminist interventions in several other disciplines, aims to make visible the hitherto undisclosed gendering of spaces while also establishing a revisionary critique of the power-knowledge relations of male-dominated social formations” (*Spatiality* 132). Feminist geographers try to reimagine the male-dominated spatial structures of society to uncover the hidden spaces related to women.

Feminist theorists like Gillian Rose and Doreen Massey, who studied the pattern and order of spaces, have concluded that all spaces are gendered. Besides,

the conventions of society permeate into such a system of organisation where the androcentric norms have also been embedded. Massey observes, “From the symbolic meaning of spaces/places and the clearly gendered messages which they transmit to the straightforward exclusion by violence, spaces and places are not only in themselves gendered but, in their being so, they both reflect and affect the ways in which gender is constructed and understood” (179). The evolution and multiplication of spaces increase inequality and dominance even in spatial imaginations. Massey argues:

Space and place, spaces and places, and our senses of them (and such related things as our degrees of mobility) are gendered through and through.

Moreover, they are gendered in myriad ways, varying between cultures and over time. And this gendering of space and place reflects and has effects on how gender is constructed and understood in the societies in which we live. (185-86)

Feminist geographers and critics demand a new reading and analysis of the social space to reveal the enclosed spatial patterns in the structures of a gendered reality. Although professional geographers have rarely discussed, or even acknowledged, the engendering of space, Massey reports that growing up in Manchester, England, it was intuitively apparent that there were certain public places that girls and women did not (and implicitly, perhaps, were not permitted to) go. Later, she noticed the very different effects that specific places had on men as opposed to women, such as the gallery of an art museum in which figures of nude women painted by men were on display (Massey 132 -33).

The early history of travels shows that it was an androcentric discourse in which the role of women was always ignored. The new mode of female resistance, along with the reclaiming of the self, has led to a new orientation, and it has infused new vigour and visibility into women's endeavours in the once-excluded regions. The maps in fiction, formed by both self-willed and forced travels of individuals, are proof of the modified gender relations in the world. In other words, it is a yardstick that can be used to know the position of women in a society that may have its norms and conventions related to travel and displacements. The individual maps of characters can be used as a tool to probe more about their relative position in a multi-stratified society. In such a society, each individual has an assigned space determined by social and personal mobility, which is allowed as per the norms of the society and laws of agency that control the hegemonic power and authority. These powerplays are primarily spatial, which can be used to evaluate the relative positions of various genders in literary representations.

Anita Nair's Fiction: A Critical Evaluation

A proper study of literature should consider spatial and geographical perspectives as they could open up the possibility of a new reading of literature by focusing on complex spatial relations and embedded cultural patterns. Besides, it is not merely a method to analyse literary texts but also a form of social criticism that reveals spatial inequalities and social injustice. Although many scholars and critics have studied Anita Nair's novels, spatial literary practices, including geocriticism, have not been employed to interpret the intricate structures of sedimented significations in them. However, books, articles, research papers, and dissertations are available on Nair's fiction; critical literature, which probes the convoluted

structures of her literary cartography, is largely overlooked by scholars. Furthermore, the critical literature on her works is limited vis-à-vis other contemporary Indian authors who write in English.

Ashish Gupta's *Novels of Anita Nair: A Critical Perspective* identifies major themes of Nair's novels, from *The Better Man* to *Alphabet Soup for Lovers*. He probes the man-woman relationship, gender issues, and narrative techniques of Nair's novels, re-centring the humanist notions of everyday experiences. He points out that Nair portrays a society in her literary endeavours, and most of her writings delve deep into the contemporary obnoxious condition of human beings. In his evaluation, her works “explore the colossal proviso of human experiences and expresses them with the full flow of her emotions, as a mixture of realism found in Indian culture with universal appeal” (Gupta 1-2). Even though he examines the intricate structures of Nair's novels, deep probing of their literary cartographies is ignored in his critical survey. Furthermore, he fails to uncover the relationship between themes and spatial patterns in Nair's fiction.

Maya Vinai's *Interrogating Caste and Gender in Anita Nair's Fiction* identifies gender as “the manifestations of power” in her fiction (11). She examines the socio-cultural history of Kerala as part of the study and reaffirms Nair's ambivalent attitude, which is always palpable in her novels. She thinks that “fiction functions as a valuable point of entry into the complex process of identity formation that takes place in the socio-cultural space, and her fiction reinforces and solidifies some key notions evolved in the complex mapping of power in the form of social stratification based on caste and gender formations” (11). This study affirms that the

structures of hegemonical power-controlled Kerala society and the deprived, as well as the people of the lowest strata, suffered due to communal stratification.

Research papers and articles on Nair's novels have been published in various journals and periodicals. Research thesis, as well as dissertations on her fiction, are also available in research directories. The critical studies on Nair's novels can be grouped mainly into the following categories: socio-cultural, comparative, feminist, psychoanalytic, and postcolonial. In comparative studies, selected themes of Nair's fiction have been compared with that of writers such as Manju Kapur, Kiran Desai, Gita Hariharan, Anita Desai, Taslima Nasrin, Kavery Nambisan, Shashi Deshpande, Attia Hosain, Bapsi Sidhwa, Tehmina Durrani, Meena Alexander, Geeta Abraham Jose, Arundhati Roy, Nirmala Aravind, Jaishree Misra, Rama Methat, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Chetan Bhagat, and Aravind Adiga. Feminist studies on her writings largely probe the portrayal of women, marginalisation, emancipation, female experience, and feminist existentialism. In socio-cultural studies, various scholars have discussed problems of representation and issues like caste and gender, human relationships, alienation, and the problem of identity and social relationships. Some studies have employed phenomenology, reader-response theories, and ecological perspectives to interpret Nair's fiction.

As Nair's novels have become a favourite subject of academic researchers in feminism, most studies on her fiction are directly or indirectly related to varied strands of feminist theories. Santosh concludes her dissertation, "Anita Nair is one such literary voice who is pointedly devoted to the task of unearthing and unbosoming a well-estimated account of the deep rooted reality of the female psyche

and feminist issues and its operation in the postcolonial context. Anita Nair tries to furnish the reader with quintessential women by closely analysing the woman's emotional and intellectual needs, aspirations, cravings, and desires, which describe delicate layers of feminist issues in her fiction" (184). Some studies critically examine the assigned gender roles which always oppress women in India. Sacrifice, self-control, and obedience are considered as the core virtues of women who must be shackled under perpetual servility. Latha observes:

The male prejudice views her as a partner not on equal footing but born to bear and rear children and perfectly perform the role of a dutiful wife, mother, daughter-in-law etc. She is well-behaved if she is obedient to male authority. She is respectful if she is submissive to male supremacy. She is fit for family life if she is devoted to her husband and loyal to her family members. She gains reverence for her sacrifice. Her home is the field of her activity, and the world outside is the male's dominion. If she crosses her limited territory, she loses her position. Under the weight of the malevolent male hegemony, she is unaware of her capabilities. (76)

The structures of caste and gender emphasise the entrapped status of women in patriarchal societies along with class and religion, which also create many layers of servility inside the gendered subaltern spaces. Vidhya reasons, "The realistic picture of the so-called humble lives of peasantry women, the exploitation and marginalisation in the hands of the upper caste is presented through the character Marikolunthu, and the novelist presents how caste, class, gender, and religion create boundaries building up walls so as to alienate human beings" (281). However, "Nair

proves through the emancipated female characters that they have power and prestige to maintain their family successfully" (Rajasree 204). Joseph, while comparing the women characters of Nair, has observed that a study of these women characters shows that they are oppressed by multiple factors like denial of love, callous and indifferent treatment by their husbands, their suspicious nature, denial of proper space to develop their individual identities, denial of education, employment, and financial independence, denial of public space and denial of authentic and autonomous existence (234). Meenadevi notes that "the fiction of Kapur and Nair shows the various shades of conditions, problems, and changing attitudes of women, particularly in Indian society" (210). Sumy considers that the works of Amitav Gosh and Nair are embedded in cultural historiography, which includes studies based on subaltern history and language (228). In short, these critical studies on Nair have looked into various representations of gender, power, and identity in her novels, and they ascertained that notions of women's rights and emancipation are the key concerns of Nair's women characters.

Many scholars and critics have attempted to reveal various structures of representation and signification in Nair's fiction using psychological and psychoanalytic theories. Manpreet Kaur confirms that "Anita Nair's novels deal with psychological, social, cultural, political, emotional, and ideological violence. Further, an analysis of her novels reveals the tradition-bound social hierarchies, the condition of rape victims, lesbianism, and the nuisance, pain, and frustration of women" (184). Seema Rajan, in her thesis, concludes that "Nair's women are both categorically and culturally fixed to a structure, and they are new women who can

deconstruct and subvert images so that a new self is forged” (194). Agalya, in her thesis states that “her novels are protest novels against the male-dominated Indian society where women are denied the freedom of expression and action” (181). Suganya, in her dissertation, observes that, like the characters presented in her novels, in real life too, women are striving to create a world – a world which will be their own, without any inhibitions and restrictions; where they can break themselves free from the conventional norms (214). Gayathiri Devi, in her studies on the craft of Nair’s novels, mentions that “various narrative elements like an interior monologue, stream of consciousness, dream sequence, and perspective (point of view) are analysed,” is primarily focused on the techniques and strategies in the narrative design of Nair's novels (210). Despite the dearth of critical studies and literary analysis of Nair’s novels, the multi-faceted research of academic scholars facilitated, to a certain extent, the enlargement of critical literature on her literary contributions.

The studies on Nair’s novels are primarily focused on diverse critical perspectives, ranging from sociological to ecocritical, shedding light on the layers of meaning embedded in them. However, they have mostly ignored spatial analysis, employing geocritical and geographical perspectives, and the present study focuses on those ignored areas where geocritical and spatial theories are engaged to probe her novels.

Chapter 3

Literary Cartography of Anita Nair's Novels

Writers are cartographers, for they determine the settings of their stories, identify various places to include in them, and imagine various spaces to locate them in their real and imagined narrative universe. While choosing settings of stories, they use spatial imagination and cognitive mapping to plot both the centres and peripheries of their narrative world. The real places with varying levels of actualisation may orient towards ever-transforming fluid borders of locations in fictional narratives, imparting the writer's cartographic vision into the coordinates of territories. Besides, the writers bring in variation in spatial identity by transforming landscapes into imaginary territories where characters move in linear and nonlinear courses. The existing territorial features of narrative places are modified in fictional representations and may undergo alterations due to the interactions of the characters with them.

Places, an ineluctable part of settings, have a significant role in the development of the plot in fiction. The core and peripheries of narrative places are vital in literary discourses because heterogeneous elements of places decide the trajectories of characters. Moreover, characters may share many distinctive attributes emanating from places because the attitude and behaviour of individuals could be internally organised by close interaction with their physical, social, and cultural environments. Ruth Ronen points out:

Today, space is thought to function in the novel in significant ways: it is a frame of action (a place in which things happen), it conveys thematic information, it reveals information about characters and character relationships, it can influence reader expectations, and it is an active partner in the governing of how narrative progresses (i.e., certain spaces allow certain events to occur while other spaces prohibit events). (792)

It is also quite natural that one stratum of narrative place ordains the events of the story while other strata could take various manifestations in the trajectories of the plot, modifying the settings in the narration. The natural landscapes and territories can bring realism to the narration, supporting the plotting of characters proximal to the realms of actualities. Furthermore, the social and cultural environment also partake in the placement of events in stories. They fix the fluid identities around which characters have to place themselves to create a sense of verisimilitude in the narrative universe. The customs, conventions, folklore, myths, legends, and all elements of the local culture of the places, which D H Lawrence referred to as the “spirit of the place”, infuse realism into the narrative landscapes (62). In short, the writers map places and spaces with diverse textures to make the narrative place realistic so that the readers can reimagine the world of the story in their reading process.

Space, an indispensable component of the literary plots, enabling the natural progression of events and appearing in various manifestations in fiction, has a significant role in creating the form and structure of the narration by adding multiple connections to territories and imbuing real and imaginary human experiences.

However, they could fragment, replace sequential patterns, and require mapping of the plausible places and spaces for organising the extended locale for character movements in the contours of everyday experiences. The narrative space may appear either unreactive in formal textures or continually dynamic, re-configuring the notions of spatial appropriation in fantasies that always attempt to cross the conventional borders of territories. The structures of narrative spaces are very complex in novels, as they encase several distinct spatial identities; however, they attempt to appropriate territories in traditional patterns, which may also undergo perpetual modifications due to adaptations and segmentation. The transformations of narrative spaces always unwrap the cultural histories of places, whereas the counterfactual spaces produce ensembles of new spatial imaginations.

Space has a significant role in narratives as it encases the spheres of action in narrative trajectories. Moreover, the place can be significant and function thematically, structurally, or as a characterisation device in different appearances.

Prince states:

The place and places within which the situations and events represented (setting, story space) and narrating instance(s) occur. Though it is possible to narrate without referring to the story space, the space of the narrating instances or the relations between them, space can play an important role in the narrative, and the features of or links between the about mentioned place can be significant and function thematically, structurally or a characterization device. (90)

It reaffirms the significance of narrative spaces, which can function in many roles in the structures of plot and narration, and accentuates their integrative function in fictional narratives.

Space and its experience relate to the dimensions of perception, evolved from the totality of individual interactions, which vary with real or imagined spatial demarcations. Besides, various sensual experiences also contribute to the comprehensive realisation of geospaces. Mieke Bal has pointed out, "Where space is connected to the characters who 'live' it, the primary aspect of space is the way characters bring their senses to bear on space" (133). Furthermore, the narrative space in fiction can be categorised on the basis of its spatialisation properties and the various terrains it envelops to produce numerous factual and counterfactual spaces. Ronen, who has classified narrative spaces in fiction based on proximity and factuality, puts it:

The differences of proximal and distant spaces are categorised according to how close and/or how accessible they are to characters in the narrative present. The most immediate narrative space is setting: the place where characters in the narrative present interact and where story-events take place. Spaces near characters in the narrative present and accessible to them via their senses are called secondary spaces. (793)

In short, the spatial demarcations of narrative universes are perpetually evolving, and this influences the reading process.

Ryan has identified various spheres of space emerging in fiction as spatial frames, settings, story spaces, and narrative (or story) worlds. Spatial frames are

“shifting scenes of action and are hierarchically organised by relations of containment (a room is a subspace of a house), and their boundaries may be either clear-cut (the bedroom is separated from the salon by a hallway) or fuzzy (e.g., a landscape may slowly change as a character moves through it)” (421). Setting has been marked as the stable “general socio-historico-geographical environment in which the action takes place” (422). Story space includes both spatial frames and locations that are mentioned but not the scenes of action. Narrative (or story) world is

the story space completed by the reader’s imagination based on cultural knowledge and real-world experience. While story space consists of selected places separated by voids, the narrative world is conceived by the imagination as a coherent, unified, ontologically full, and materially existing geographical entity, even when it is a fictional world that possesses none of these properties. (422)

The narrative universe is “the world (in the spatio-temporal sense of the term) presented as actual by the text, plus all the counterfactual worlds constructed by characters as beliefs, wishes, fears, speculations, hypothetical thinking, dreams, and fantasies” (422). The above spatial differentiation can be one of the ways to demarcate the fluid borders of the story world and the real world.

Scholars including Barbara Piatti and Hans Rudolf Bär, who studied spatial organisation and designs of literary cartography, have identified the fundamental spatial elements of fiction as ‘setting’ where the action takes place, such as a house or a village, ‘zone of action’ which consists of several settings forming a region or a

territory; ‘projected space’ where “characters are not present there but are dreaming of, remembering, longing for a specific place; and ‘marker’ which is a place that is “mentioned but not part of the categories above and markers indicate the geographical range and horizon of a fictional space”; ‘the route’ is the pathways “along which characters are moving” in various modes (Piatti et al. 183). This spatial demarcation is very close to the natural and logical classification, which can be used for spatial studies focusing on geographical and spatial structures.

The spaces and places in Anita Nair's fiction can also be classified using Ryan's spatial categories. The significant fact is that the settings of the space in her novels show considerable variance when the narrative frames move away from Kerala. The writer's narrative spaces in her favourite territory are filled with all the features of “the general socio-historico-geographical environment” along with various ethnopolitical sensibilities revealing the sense experiences of a real world, whereas the other places lack the vibrancy of such spatial experiences (Jannidis et al. 422). Besides, those places are depicted as far from the author's lived spaces and devoid of poly-sensorial experiences.

A narrative place comprises many layers of signification depending on the magnitude and intensity of spatial features chosen by the writer. In *The Better Man*, the main narrative locations are in Kaikurissi and neighbouring areas, where she instilled the spirit of the place by incorporating social, cultural, and political significations and other locations are peripherally brought up in the narrative. Such locations may also have variance in their representation: the core narrative place where the main characters centre their actions, locations that are imagined, and

places that are only located in the memories of characters. However, all of them are depicted in narration; their signification varies depending on the individual's attachment to such landscapes and the use of spatial elements along with both core and peripheral layers of the places and spaces. Thus, geographical places in literature may have numerous manifestations because the writer's fantasies and imaginations get involved in producing them. Edward Soja has distinguished these places into three: real, and imagined, and real-and-imagined based on the fundamental features of reality and imagination. Even though imagination has a vital role in the settings, the real places and spaces have a prominent role as the characters must peg to such spaces to unravel the narrative trajectories. However, the Kaikurissi village is a product of real and fictional representation; the geospaces are plotted realistically to a great extent in *The Better Man*. In *Mistress, Idris: Keeper of the Light*, and *Eating Wasps*, the Valluvanad region is the main narrative place in which real spaces are plotted along with imagined locations. The temporal layers permeate into events so that the past can alter the settings of the narratives as an inherent part of the spatiotemporal identity, which can also be represented as imagined or real in the actual contexts of the narrative. However, temporal elements have an indispensable role in the plot's overall evolution; the spatial elements are dominant as they can unfold discourses in the textures of fictional works. Fiction always creates a story world that mainly displays a social and cultural semblance to real territories or an altered landscape, which still resembles diverse geospaces. Identifying the landscape used by the writers as their key locations is essential in the reading process.

“Writers and works intimately connected with a place or landscape, capturing a town, a city, a region in its fictional texture or its literary heyday” (Bradbury 8). The places and spaces depicted in their fictional works may be analogous with places and spaces they are closely associated with, either as native places or as lived spaces, even if they might have been moved away from them. The organisation of the places and spaces in Nair's novels closely follows that of her native place and lived spaces. In her novels, the main narrative places are plotted in Kerala, especially in the Valluvanad region, which includes Mundakkottukurissi and her neighbouring areas, the native place of Nair. Besides, she creates imaginary locations that still resemble places she has experienced in some way or other, infusing multiplicities of verisimilitude into those places. However, the influence of those lived places and native landscapes has shown significant variance in mapping places mentioned in her fictional works. The places experienced by the writer with varied intensities appear more or less in the same intensities in literary works, which symbolically signify the socio-cultural identities of the region. Valluvanad appears as a core region in her novels, while places like Madras and Bangalore are depicted as significant locations; however, they lack the spatial and sociocultural depth in their representation.

Their influence on the writer has great variance due to divergence in the levels of spatial attachments. The core region of literary cartography of Nair's novels resembles the geospaces of her lived places. The core area of her narrative world is erstwhile Valluvanad, which appears with “socio-historico-geographical” features (Jannidis et al. 422). The overlapping, merging, and coalescing of these maps are

due to interactions of cognitive and spatial mapping in the realms of real and fictional representations.

Place, Space and Mapping in Anita Nair's Novels

The places and spaces appearing in Nair's fictional world follow a distinctive spatial design, which can be demarcated as various zones with respect to how the writer relates them in her works, the magnitude of their influences on her, the presence of analogous spatial structures in narratives, and the socio-cultural textures juxtaposed in them. Nair's representation of the core zone exemplifies that distances from the core locations do not significantly affect the intensity of individual attachments. The narrative places of Nair's novels can be distinguished as three zones -- core, semi-periphery, and periphery -- depending on the closeness of the places due to personal association, the frequency of their occurrence in literary narratives, the embedded socio-cultural patterns in them, and the intensity of lived experiences. Moreover, the classification of Nair's narrative world into zones reveals the writer's spatial consciousness and cultural identity.

1. Core Zone

Nair's literary landscapes can be demarcated into three zones: core, semi-periphery, and periphery. In the spatial differentiation of her narrative world, the core zone corresponds to the erstwhile Valluvanad region of Kerala (Fig. 3.1 and Fig. 3.2). Even though there is no territorial division in that name now, it was a historically and culturally prominent region in pre-independent India, ruled by *Valluvakonathiri*, a local chieftain. It was part of the erstwhile Malabar district of the Madras presidency during British rule. It lost its territorial identity after the

reorganisation of the states of India, and now, it is part of two districts, Palakkad and Malappuram, of Kerala. Nair reimagines the region, plots various spaces and places as narrative locations, historicises the narrative patterns infusing past chronicles, and solidifies its unstable structures.

The core zone consists of two regions: the inner and the outer. The inner comprises her native place and neighbouring areas where she spent her childhood and her ancestors lived. The outer region comprises Mundakkottukurissi, and Shoranur, where Nair's ancestral houses are located, and the outer region includes all other places of erstwhile Valluvanad. The writer in *A Story about a Story-Teller* claims that her family has a history of more than four centuries in Mundakkottukurissi (5.30). It seems very difficult for the writer to ignore those places and spaces as they are the core regions of her existence, and her spatial memories are especially fettered with the territory of Mundakkottukurissi and its neighbouring areas. This zone consists of the 'setting' and 'zone of action' suggested by Barbara Piatti and Hans Rudolf Bär in their spatial demarcation of literary works, which are multi-structured and poly-sensorial in their fundamental realisations (183). While depicting the Mundakkottukurissi village and its neighbouring areas, she seems to have adopted a realistic framework.

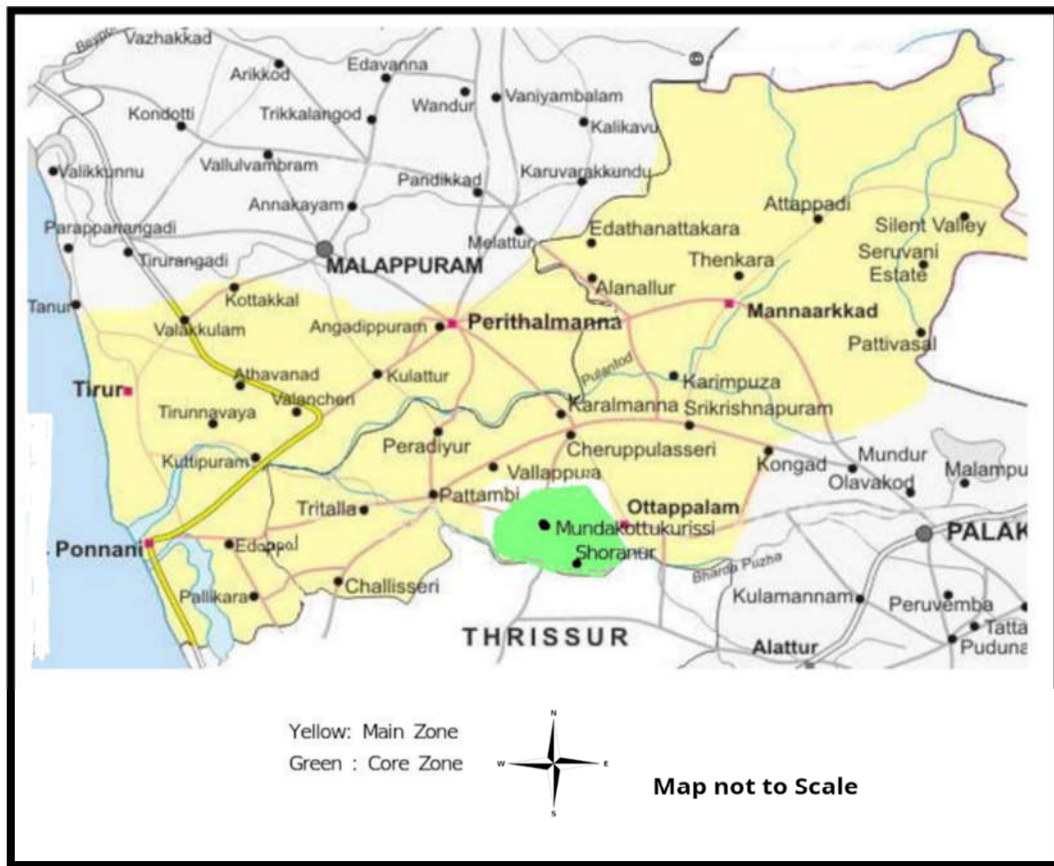


Fig. 3.1 Map of Core Zone

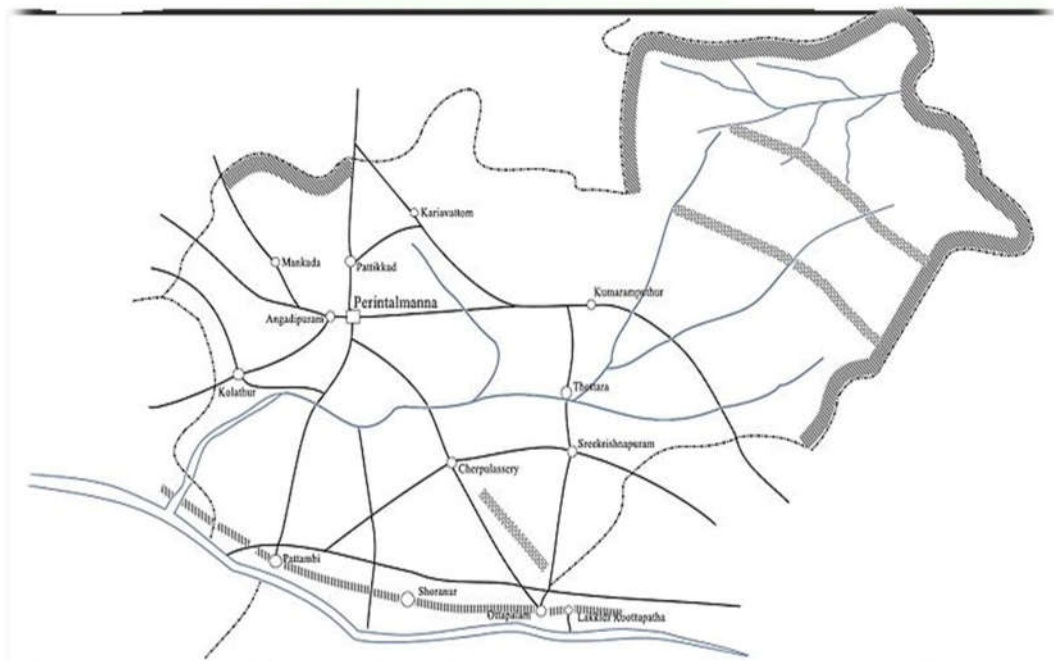


Fig. 3.2 Map of Valluvanad

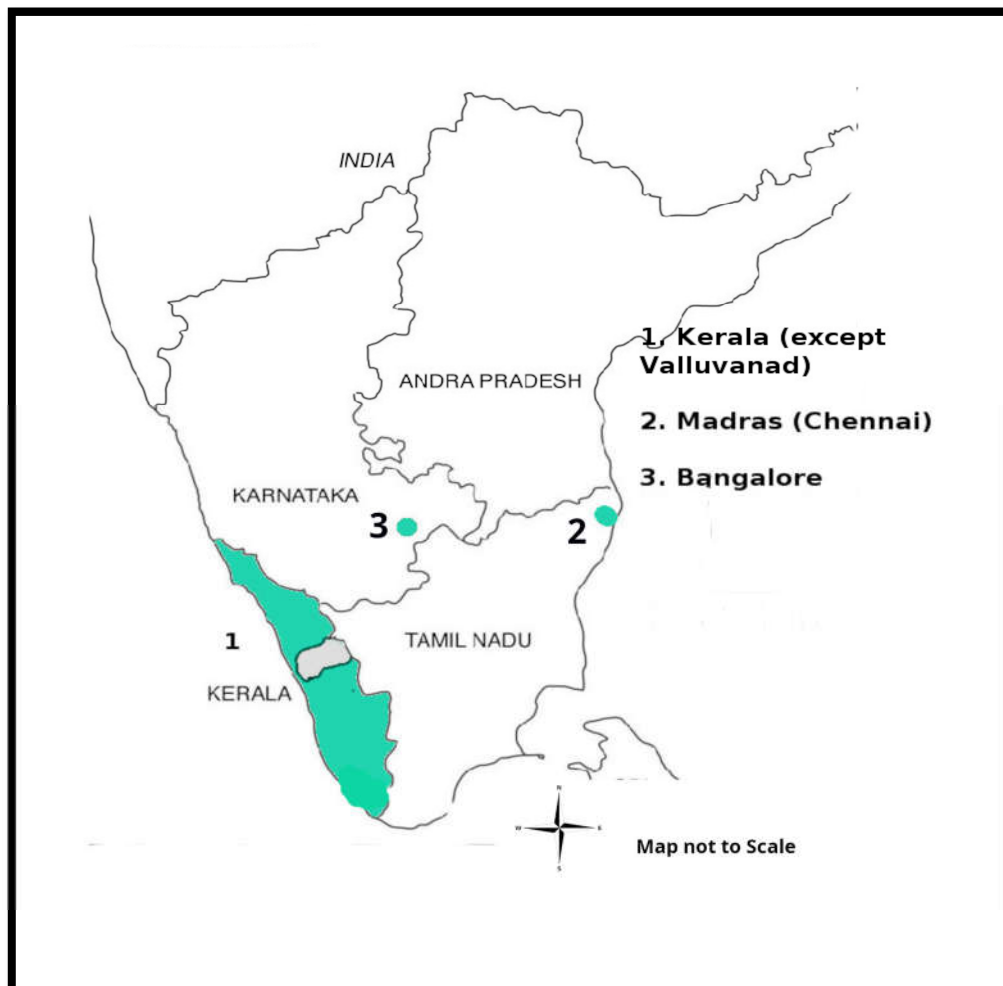


Fig. 3.3 Map of Semi Periphery Zone

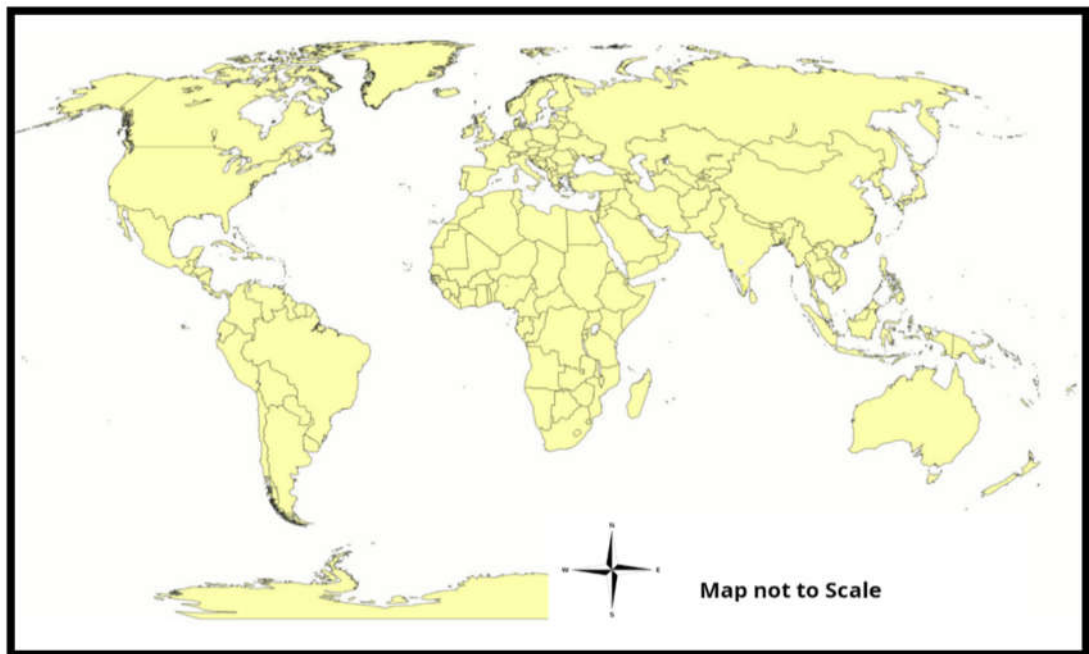


Fig. 3.4 Map of Periphery Zone

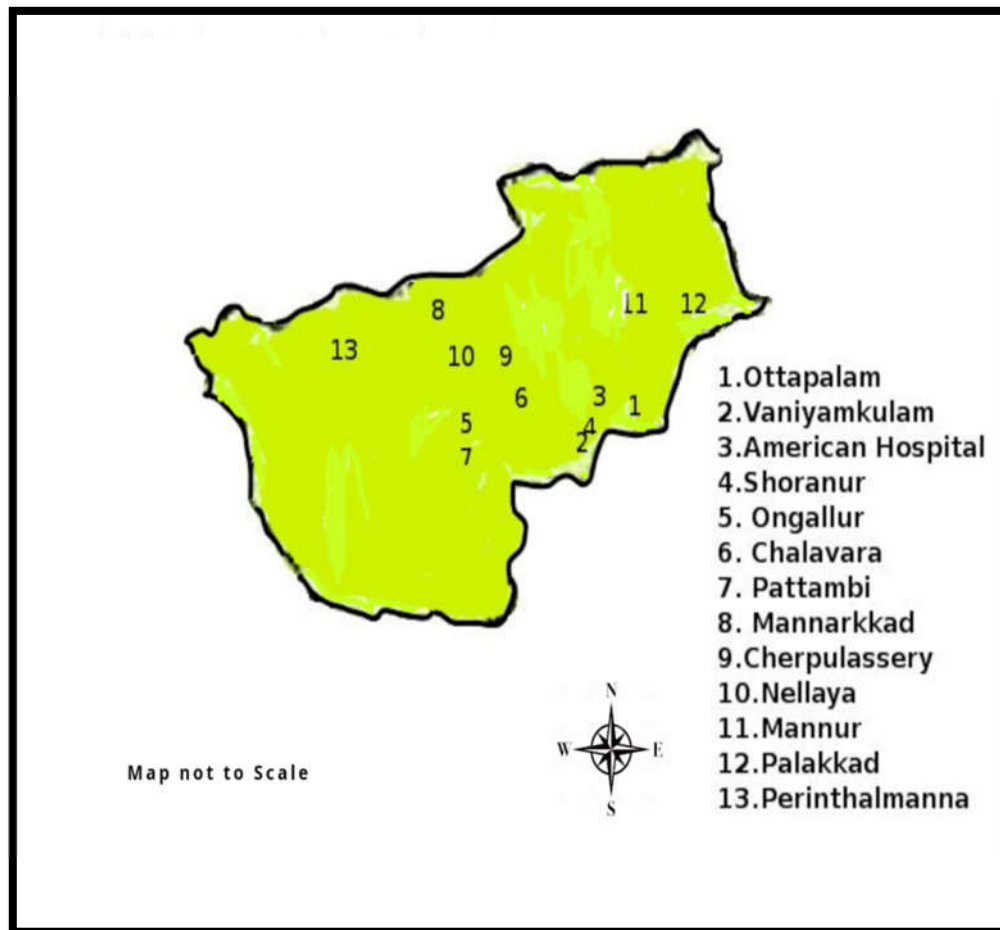


Fig. 3.5 Map of Core Zone in *The Better Man*

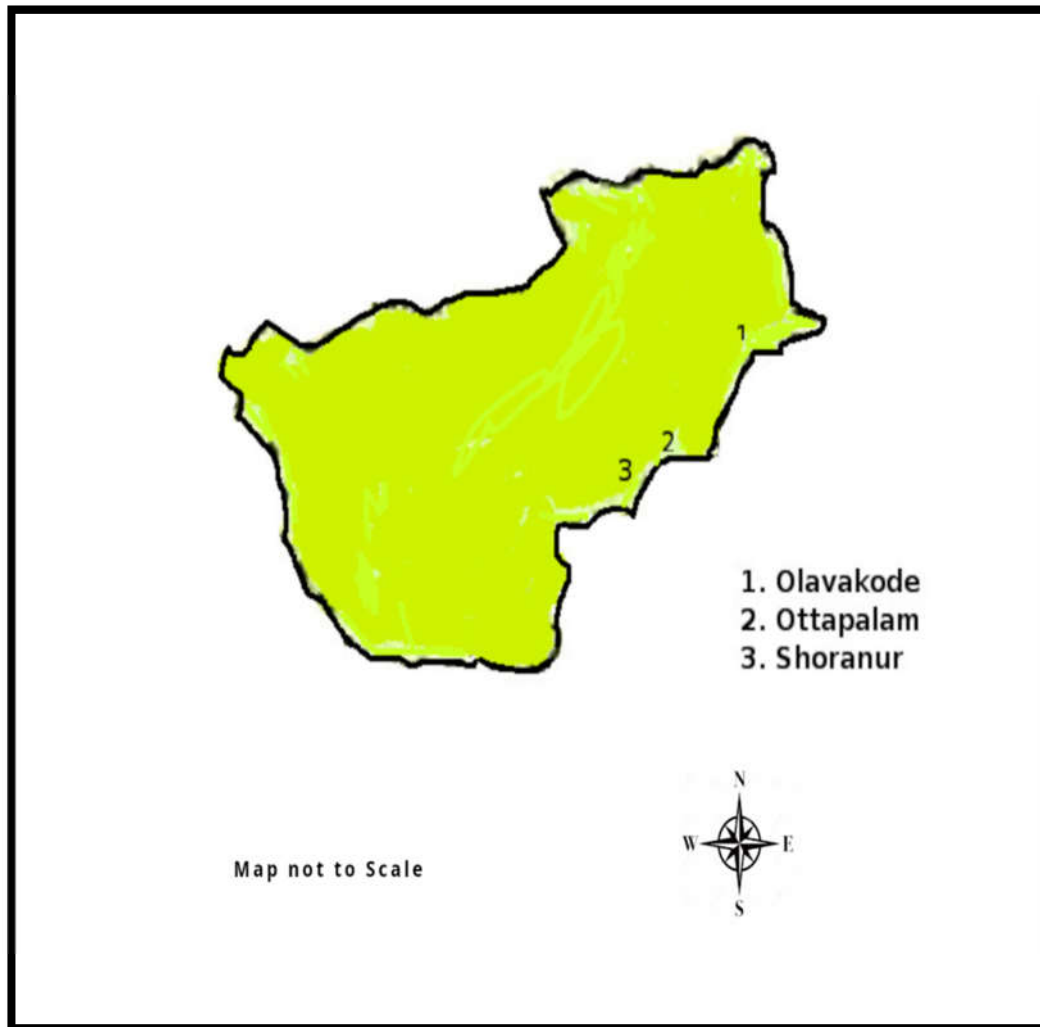


Fig. 3.6 Map of Core Zone in *Ladies Coupe*

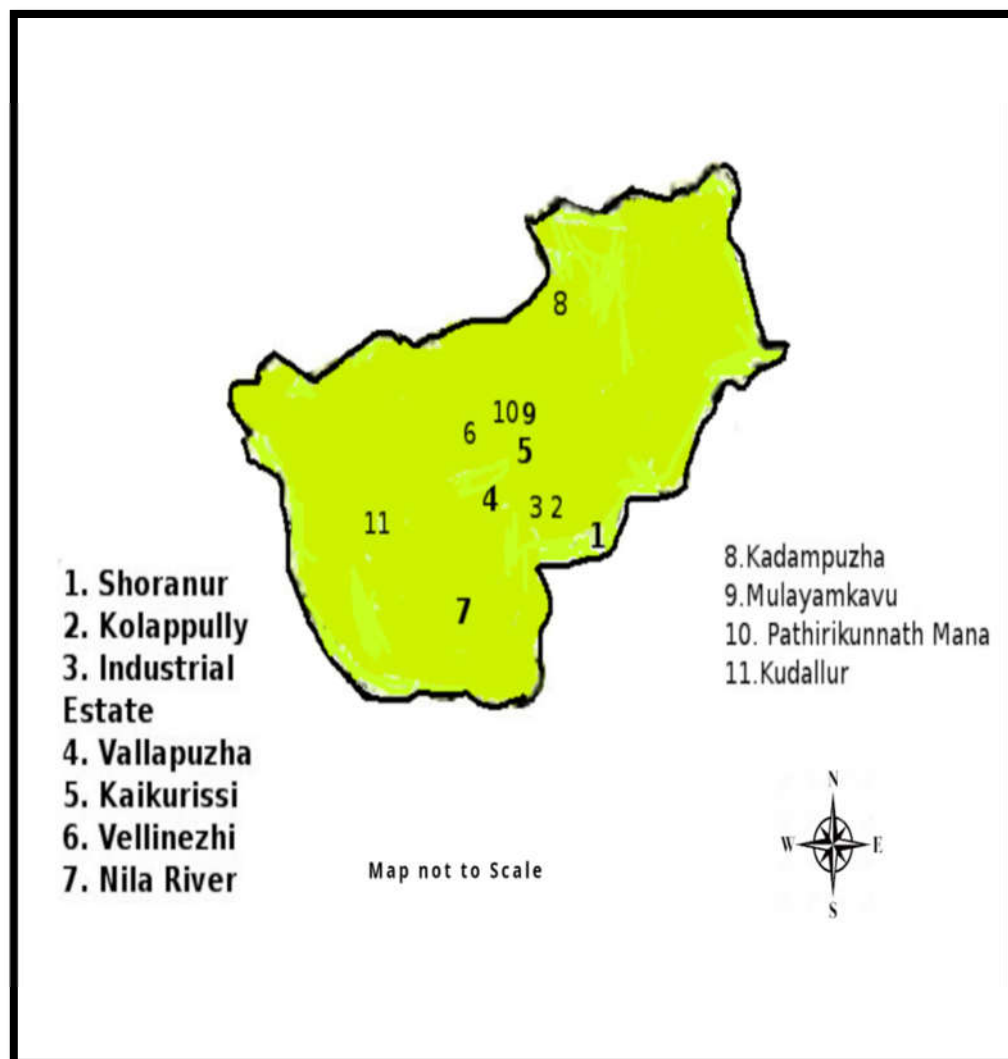


Fig. 3.7 Map of Core Zone in *Mistress*

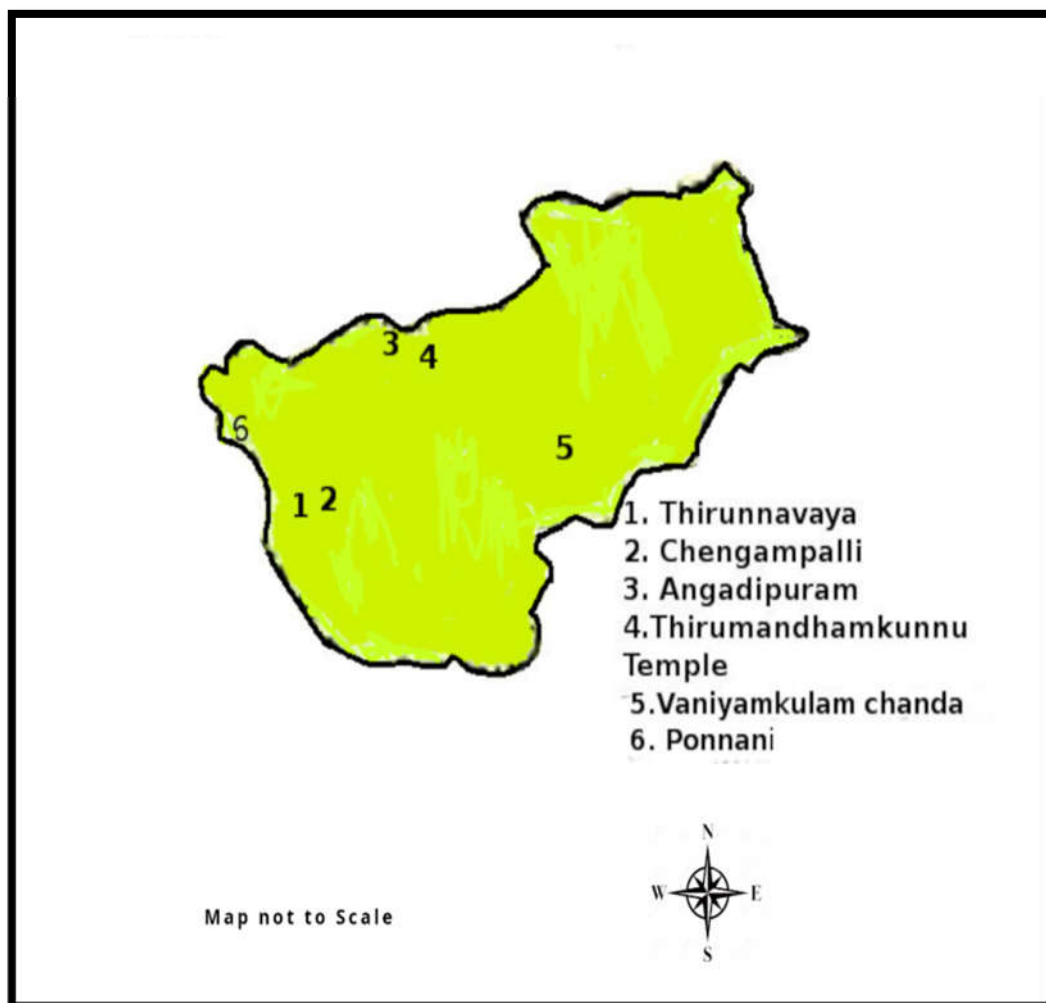


Fig. 3.8 Map of Core Zone in *Idris*

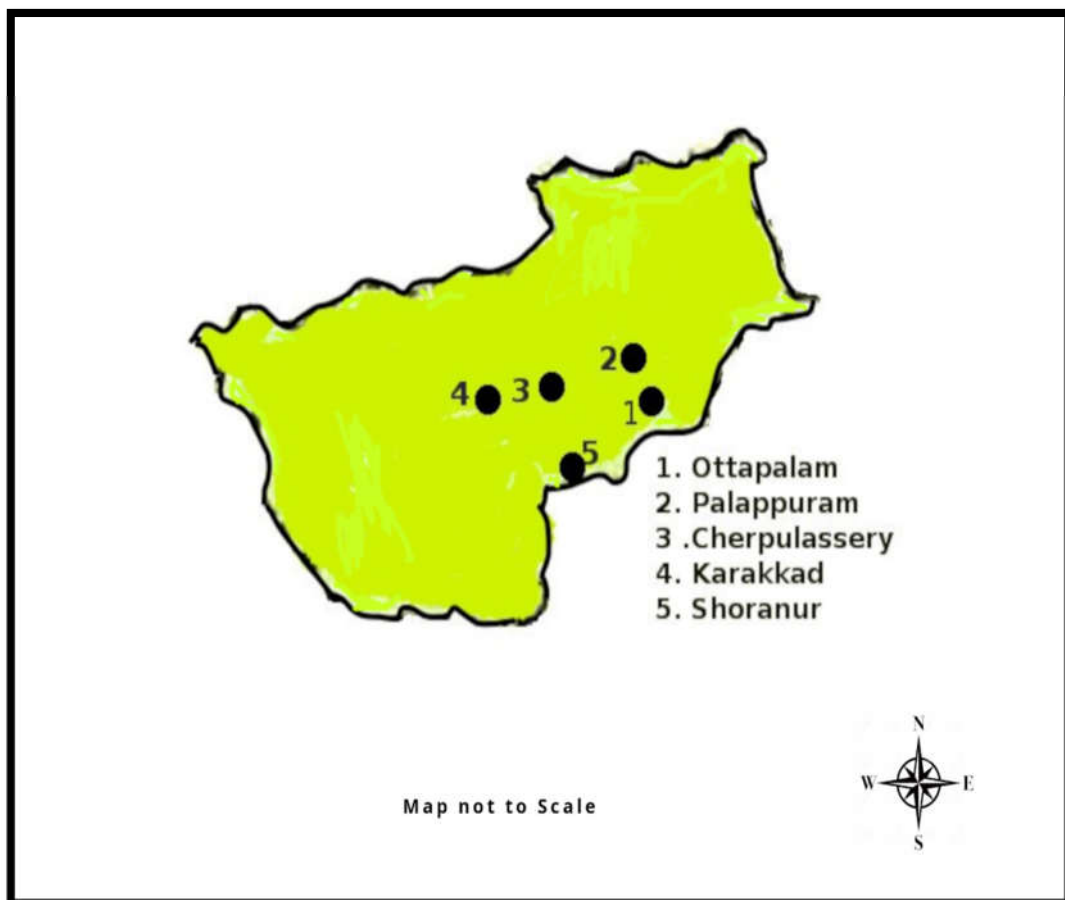


Fig. 3.9 Map of Core Zone in *Eating Wasps*

This zone is elaborately portrayed in her first novel, *The Better Man* (Fig. 3.5). It also appears in novels like *Ladies Coupe* (Fig. 3.6), *Mistress* (Fig. 3.7), *Idris* (Fig. 3.8), and *Eating Wasps* (Fig. 3.9). Although Nair does not use the same places and spaces in the literary cartography of all her novels, she makes Valluvanad a life-sustaining core region in them. In an interview, she explains that Valluvanad is more than a native territory for her as it has profoundly influenced her. She also mentions that after every journey, she returns to it, to the river Nila, and to the village festival where *Poothan* and *Thira*¹ enthrallingly perform (*Ezhuthu* 65). The influence of Mundakkottukurissi on the writer is evident from the maps of places and spaces in her fiction, and she uncovers her strong attachment to this region in her autobiographical works and memoirs. Nair's strong attachment to her own house and native places has transformed the literary cartography of her novels; her characters are always trapped by the coordinates of geospaces, which even determine their life trajectories. The plots of her novels can be seen as the struggle within individuals due to their perpetual attachment to native locations and lived spaces and their revolt towards unknown and distant locations where they are compelled to live. This has been examined in detail in Chapter 4.

The core zone comprises Shoranur, Ottapalam, Vallappuzha, Mannarkkad, Vaniyamkulam, and Pattambi, which are part of Palakkad district, and Perinthalmanna, Angadipuram of Malappuram district. All the places were part of the geographical area of the erstwhile Valluvanad of Kerala (Panickassery, *Keralathile Rajavamsangal* 41; K S Nair 233). It is a region with a unique socio-

¹ *Poothan* and *Thira* are ritualistic art forms that are essential part of *Pooram* festivals at devi temples in Valluvanad region.

cultural pattern, and it is argued that the standard dialect of modern Malayalam in its spoken and written manifestations exists there. The places and spaces of Valluvanad appear in her works more frequently than any other locations, and the writer's attachment to these places is very much discernible from their recurrent use in her literary cartography. Nair has lived in Shoranur, which is part of her native region, and Vaniyamkulam has been a historically prominent place from time immemorial as a market where foreign and native merchants came for trade. Ottapalam was famous as one of the trading centres of Valluvanad. Vallappuzha, Mannarkkad, and Pattambi were prominent regions of Valluvanad that served as agricultural centres and regional hubs. Places like Thirunnavaya and Kuttippuram, which were cultural and political centres of power, also come under this zone.

In *The Better Man*, Nair depicts Kaikurissi (Mundakkottukurissi) village and its neighbouring areas, which form the erstwhile Valluvanad region, presenting its centre and peripheries along with their socio-cultural assemblages. Despite the fictionalising of most of the narrative places, the geospaces of Valluvanad are drawn realistically to a greater extent than other locations. Nair's major characters are obsessed with their native lands, and they cherish their associations with them. This novel can only be interpreted with the help of spatial structures embedded in local politics, culture, and mythology. The core zone in Nair's narratives represents a multi-layered polyvalent territory, which includes a "general socio-historico-geographical environment" along with diversities of cultural space in the setting (Ryan 442). This zone approximates the real to a large extent than any other zone in "cultural knowledge and real-world experience", and the imagination conceives it as

a coherent, unified, and materially existing geographical entity (422). The representation of this zone adheres to the spatiotemporal patterns of the region, which, to a great extent, revitalises the concrete conceptions of spatial projections and geographic totality.

Rajendu has observed in *Valluvanad Charithram* that “Valluvanad means the country belonging to Walluvars or Pallavas. Tradition says that a member of the Pallava dynasty, when brought to Malabar, was given the country now comprising the whole of Valluvanad and parts of Palakkad, Ponnani and Ernad Taluks” (293). He also noted that the ancient Valluvanad stretched from Pandallur hills to Ponnani, which expanded during the British period, incorporating Ottapalam, Mannarkkad, and Pattambi Taluks (16). Rajendu also pointed out in *Arangottuswarupam Grandavari* that Kongad, Mannur, and Edathara were part of Valluvanad (17). Before the Independence, Valluvanad Taluk was part of the Malabar District. Nair's mapping of Valluvanad resembles that of the British period. Although its borders kept changing, under the British administration, the territory assumed a sense of stability regarding its spatial boundaries. Nair's mapping of Valluvanad is conspicuously different from the representation of other places and spaces in her narrative world. This zone is portrayed as real, concrete, and multi-layered, demarcating it from other peripheral and depthless zones that lack cultural complexities. In addition, spatial identities, cultural patterns, and socio-political structures are embedded in the primary narratives, creating a natural rhythm evoking the verisimilitude of the region. They are vibrant, poignant, and almost realistic so that they parallel the region's historical and cultural transformation, which are

efficaciously eked out in the landscapes of the core territories. She produces a social milieu that resembles the Valluvanad region, and each of her novels instills manifold versions of its spatial and temporal characteristics. The core region of the literary cartography of her novels almost shares Valluvanad in its zenith by depicting the varied manifestations of real and imagined experiences associated with the physical and cultural geography of the region. The important narrative locations are plotted inside the territory in their full vigour and vitality, whereas the outer peripheries are used to locate places used as part of secondary and tertiary narrative locations. These places vary from those of the Valluvanad region as they are devoid of any composite narrative layers and are plotted to enhance the verisimilitude of the places identified in the core region of the narrative universe. Besides, she depicts her lived experience with the territory and its influence on her narratives.

Nair infuses cultural patterns and social practices that are intrinsically bound to the core of Valluvanad in the fundamental layers of her narratives. Her fiction portrays the evolution of the region's history and culture by representing the multi-layered cartography (*Mistress* 235; *Idris* 17, 41, 51, 55). In fact, she documents the territory's past and present, reintroducing the customs and traditions (*The Better Man* 37-38; *Idris* 27, 92; *Eating Wasps* 181). The spaces and places of the region are a product of complex historical movements and cultural transformations mapped in Nair's novels as the quintessence of individual and communal experiences based on territories. She has illustrated land, climate, and environment; history, culture, and folklore; customs, beliefs, and cultural practices; festivals and festivities; art and artefacts; language and literature; food and cuisine; and flora and fauna in literary

imaginations as a method to revitalise spatial verisimilitude in her literary cartography. Furthermore, she has used spatial and cultural landmarks to imbue the spirit of the place and to demarcate distinctive spatial elements along with patterns of individual consciousness related to lived and imagined landscapes.

Nair attempts to reimagine the history of Valluvanad from its early beginnings to the present, chronicling the major events and historical movements. As a writer, she used the ancient chronicles and reinterpreted historical accounts to spatialise her novels. She had narrated the *Mamangam*, the great festival at Thirunnavaya, in which the *Chavers*² of Valluvakonathiri fought with the armies of Zamorin or *Samoothiri* to reconquer lost territories of Valluvanad and to be the chief of the *Mamangam* festival (*Idris*). She has also mentioned various social practices of the past, like *Sambandham* (*Mistress; Idris*.) and *Marumakkathayam* (*The Better Man; Mistress; Idris*), superstitions such as *Odiyan* (*The Better Man*), festivals like Poorams of temples of Valluvanad (*The Better Man*), and customs associated with birth and death in her literary narratives. She has reimagined the historical chronicles related to *Mamangam* and described the historical places like Ponnani (*The Better Man; Mistress; Idris*), Thirunnavaya (*Idris*), and Vaniyamkulam (*The Better Man; Mistress; Idris*), and described various punishments like trials by ordeal in her novels (*Idris* 88 - 91). In other words, the writer has been trying to make a journey through the past of Valluvanad. Nair not only presents the various periods of the history of Valluvanad but also critically appraises the past by criticising some of

² Members of the suicide squad of *Valluvakonathiri* of Valluvanad, who fought against Zamorin of Calicut.

the social customs and practices in which women, as well as individuals belonging to the lowest rungs of society, who were oppressed and kept on the margins (*The Better Man* 38; *Mistress* 235). She has also been fascinated by the art, culture, language, and literature of the Valluvanad region. The Valluvanadan dialect of Malayalam, regarded as one of the standard forms of the Malayalam language, is used by the writer in her novels to spatialise the geographical limits with dialectical boundaries. Valluvanad is one of the few regions in the erstwhile Kerala that has significantly contributed to Malayalam literature. Nair has mentioned prominent literary and cultural figures like M T Vasudevan Nair and his widely acclaimed short story, “*Karkidakam*” in *Mistress*, along with various *attakathas* and many great literary works of well-known writers (*Mistress*. 153; *Eating Wasps* 220, 236). She also presents *Kathakali* and its literature elaborately in the same novel, along with the reclamation of the role of Valluvanad in its evolution. She also follows the Nila and its tributaries in the formation of Valluvanadan culture and highlights the fact that it has contributed in various ways to establishing the territorial culture of Kerala (Idris 17, 106; *Eating Wasps* 162). She reminds us of the great writers who lived near its banks, the well-known cultural institutions like Kerala Kalamandalam, and the historical places around its banks.

In her novels, Nair depicts the geospace of Valluvanad, which is conditioned by the distinctive climate, flora, and fauna of the region (*The Better Man* 23; *Mistress* 170; *Idris* 121). The natural changes in various seasons and the months of the Malayalam calendar are conspicuously drawn by the writer in her texts (*Mistress* 151, 241; *Idris* 16). Furthermore, the societal structures, cultural patterns, and

historical chronicles of that territory have been embedded into the spatial narratives of the fiction. In short, she has portrayed the spaces and places of Valluvanad, representing its fundamental spatial textures that form sociocultural identities. In *The Mistress*, the narrative place is also within the geospace of Valluvanad and its peripheries. The setting of the story, which is closely connected with the plot of *The Betterman*, is Shoranur near the banks of the river Nila (Bharathapuzha), which also runs through Kaikurissi. However, *Ladies Coupe* is structured like a train journey from Bangalore to Kanyakumari through Kerala; the story draws much from the space and places of the Valluvanad region, as many of the railway stations and places narrated are part of it. In *Lessons of Forgetting*, many characters belong to Kerala or cherish their relationship with it; however, they are far away from it. The historical novel *Idris: The Keeper of Light* covers the socio-cultural history of the 17th-century Valluvanad. *Eating Wasps* is also set in Cherpulassery, Shoranur, and Ottapalam, which belong to the core geospace of Valluvanad. Moreover, these places are very similar to the writer's native geospaces. Not only the geographical location but the socio-cultural structures, historical chronicles, and political narratives beginning from time immemorial have also been narrated in her fiction. Nair's novels complement each other in mapping the diverse strata of Valluvanad, depicting its intricate layers, cultural identity, and evolution.

Mapping of Kaikurissi

Nair's native region appears in varied cartographic manifestations in her novels. Her first novel, *The Better Man*, is a chronicle of Kaikurissi, the fictionalised version of her native village, Mundakkottukurissi (Fig. 3.10, and Fig. 3.11). Nair

only changes part of the name of her native village in the novel, Mundakkottukurissi, to Kaikurissi. The writer has tried to depict the village as real as possible by drawing all the contours of her native territory in the novel. The social, political, cultural, and historical assemblages of that village have been infused in the creation of Kaikurissi. She writes:

The thing is, Mundakkottukurissi, my ancestral village (the family tree traces our lineage to the 16th century), has nothing that would make anyone come looking for it. So much so, when I set out to create *Kaikurissi*, a fictitious village in my first novel, *The Better Man*, I simply looked around Mundakkottukurissi and described it. (*A Post Office of My Own*)

The geographical area, major landmarks, and socio-cultural features of Mundakkottukurissi are homologous to Kaikurissi (Fig. 3.12 and Fig. 3.13).

Kaikurissi is an imaginative representation of Mundakkottukurissi, a village in Chalavara panchayat of Palakkad district of Kerala. It is basically rural with a heterogeneous population, which can be seen as the typical Kerala village where people belonging to various castes, communities, and religions live together amicably. “In Kaikurissi, there were no Christians. There were Hindus. There were Muslims. And in the fringes of the strictly segregated society were the Harijans³, a community by themselves” (*The Better Man* 51). Chalavara panchayat, consisting of four villages, Chalavara, Puliyanam Kunnu, Kailiyad, and Mundakkottukurissi, was part of erstwhile Valluvanad where the villagers depended on agriculture and caste-based occupations for their livelihood. They did not have any proprietary rights over

³ Harijan, which means ‘children of God’, is a term used by Mahatma Gandhi to refer to Dalits or people who were once considered as untouchables in India.

the land. They depended on Vaniyamkulam Chanda⁴ for selling and buying agricultural products and cattle trading. Over one-fourth of the population of Chalavara was scheduled castes such as Cheruman, Panan, Parayan, Mannan, and Kuravan (Chalavara Panchayat). The people of Mundakkottukurissi followed the caste system and practised untouchability, which had in fact existed there in various forms till the last decades of the twentieth century. The people believed in good and evil spirits and superstitions such as Odiyan and Machil Bagavathi, which the writer portrayed in *The Better Man*. The economic activities were more or less related to agriculture, and those with agricultural lands controlled the village society. Powerhouse Ramakrishnan bought a large tract of agricultural land from Mukundan as he believed it could provide him an exalted status in the village. After independence, everything changed: education trickled down to the lowest sections of society, and the new generation began to move out of the village as they got various jobs that brought changes in the economic condition of the families. Some people went abroad to work in Burma and Sri Lanka, and their remittance changed the village's character — transforming the agrarian village into a semi-urban society.

⁴ Chanda means market in Malayalam.



Fig. 3.10 Map of Chalavara, Chalavara Grama Panchayat. 2023.



Fig. 3.11 Google Maps, Mundakkottukurissi, 07 Feb 2023..

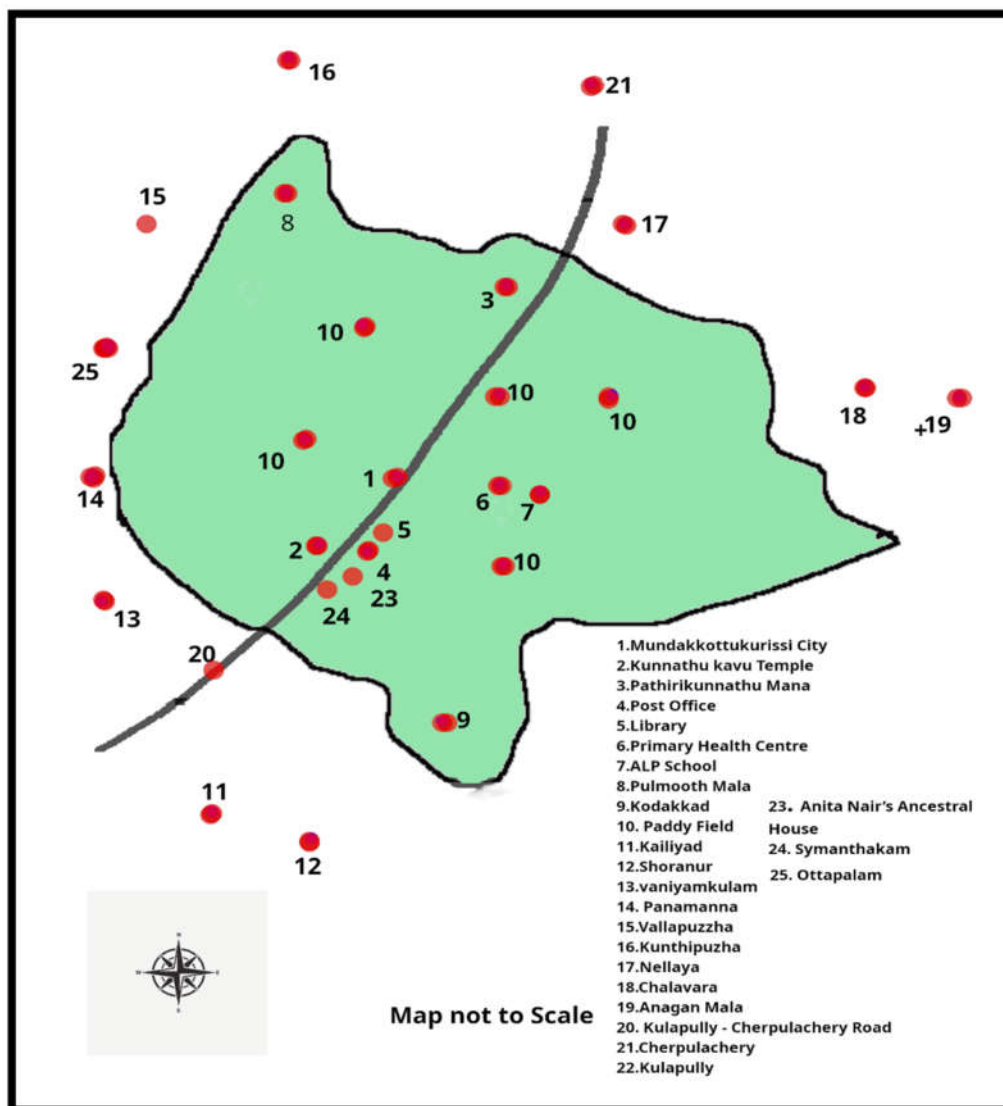


Fig. 3.12 Map of Mundakkottukurissi

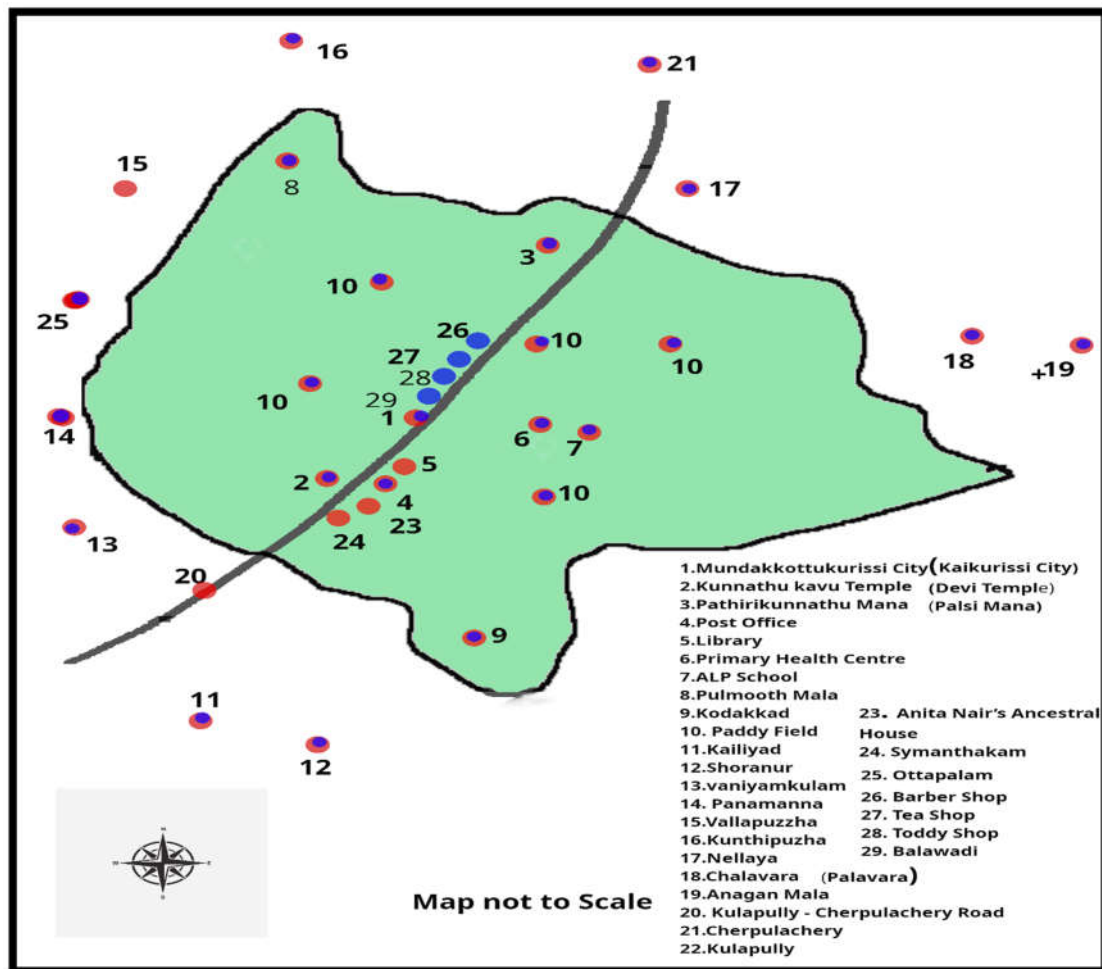


Fig. 3.13 Map of Kaikurissi

In *The Better Man*, Nair narrates the history of Mundakkottukurissi over the last two centuries. The novel reveals the social, political, and cultural evolution of the village, making it a saga of Mundakkottukurissi. The writer unravels the nostalgic past of the village, as she is also drawn to it as a place where she finds happiness and freedom. Thus, the village has a metaphorical significance in the novel.

Nair spent much of her childhood in her ancestral house in Mundakkottukurissi. She mentions Mundakkottukurissi as “my village in Kerala” (*Bipathu* 209). She owns a house, Symanthakam, near her ancestral house, which she uses as a writer's cottage. Mundakkottukurissi, which was agrarian in the past, has now slowly been transformed into a semi-urban society due to the socio-economic changes brought in by the new generation of educated youth who have been employed in both the private and the public sectors and the financial capital brought in by those who moved to the Middle East. Still, it remains one of the relatively unknown villages in Kerala. Nair has written an article, *A Post Office of My Own*, in which she gives the following description of her ancestral village.

By now, I have gotten used to the response the name of my village elicits:
 “Mundakkottukurissi? “Where is that?” “Is that a tongue twister?”

And then, as we take the turn from Kulappully Junction towards the road that leads to Mundakkottukurissi, be it a cabbie or friend driving me there for the first time, a muffled laugh with a what-is-this-place? a glance at me. A few minutes onto the narrow road, the cabbie — a town slicker from Kochi or

Thrissur — would usually mumble, “Thank god, there is still daylight. I would never find my way back in the night.”

In the same article, she reveals her delight in the status of her village, which is still untouched by the greediness of people who tend to commodify nature.

That in this time and age, there still is a village like Mundakkottukurissi is almost a conundrum. Pristine, untouched and truly god’s own village, it hasn’t been eaten up as yet by real estate sharks or turned into a setting for a resort by earnest tour operators.

The writer herself describes the village quite realistically:

Mundakkottukurissi is one among the villages along what is now an arterial road linking Kulappully or Vaniamkulam to Cherpulassery. On either side of the wooded road, you will see a medley of dated tile- and concrete-roofed homes and garish new bungalows built with money sent home from the Middle East. There are little temples that dot the landscape as there are minarets of mosques here and there. The cross and the church are conspicuous by their absence.

The writer reveals that the Kaikurissi village, the core narrative place of *The Better Man*, is a replica of her favourite village. The landmarks of Mundakkottukurissi are not much different from those of Kaikurissi in the novel. She also depicts the village in the following works: *Mistress*, *The Little Duck Girl*, and *Bipathu and a Very Big Dream*. In short, Nair has placed the village in the literary cartography of her narrative world.

Nair has wonderfully blended rural myths and reality in *The Better Man*. The realistic presentation of places and spaces reveals that the Mundakkottukurissi village has significantly influenced her. In *The Better Man*, she claims the post office, which was located on her land, as her own. This also shows that the places and spaces the writer mentions in the novel are not much different from the real places and people of the village. She describes her familiar locations:

Amidst all this, in a little dip is my little tile-roofed cottage Symantakham, 999 sq ft, of which 333 sq ft is a long veranda that runs the breadth of the house. On either end of my garden, edging the road, are the two landmark buildings of Mundakkottukurissi — the village Post Office and the library. I take a special delight in telling my visitors: Do you know of any other writer who owns a post office?

I do own the building, for which I receive a princely sum of ₹50 as rent every month.

Nair has built a cottage named *Symantakham* in Mundakkottukurissi, which is her place to learn more about her inner self and to anchor herself back into her native place.

Nair visited France and planned to stay in an interior village. When she reached there, travelling thousands of kilometres, she was surprised by its resemblance to her native village. She writes in *Dieu's Own Country*:

I felt a giant smile grow within me. I had travelled continents and miles to come to a place that reminded me of my village Mundakkottukurissi, in Kerala. Or the way it once was. Remote, quiet and heart-tuggingly beautiful.

When I would walk through Mundakkottukurissi, this is how I would feel. As if nature and I were one. The colours, fragrances, the breeze and the skies would seep into me. There might be hills and paddy fields in Mundakkottukurissi and an endless vista of fields here, but the sense of industrialization, and the hustle and bustle of town were all absent.

I sat under a tree and stretched my legs. Unlike Mundakkottukurissi, no one would stop to ask: *Enda evide? Eppala vannu? Sukham ille?* (What are you doing here? When did you get in? All well with you?).

I closed my eyes and leaned back. I was at home in my French Mundakkottukurissi.

Mundakkottukurissi, which continually inspires her, is a place of deep nostalgic emotions that direct her creativity as a writer. She has been reimagining the village in various manifestations in her writings, which underscores her attachment to the place of her longing and existence. Moreover, the places and spaces of the village appear without much variation in many of her later works.

Kaipurissi

Kaipurissi is the main narrative place of *The Better Man*. Nair has disclosed that it is a real-and-imagined portrayal of her native village, Mundakkottukurissi (Nair, *Interview*). The vital landmarks and important places of that village appear in

the renamed village, and the similitude is not limited to spatial representation and signification (Fig 3.12 and Fig. 3.13). In short, the characters and settings of the novel follow the spatio-cultural structures of the village. While expressing her motive behind choosing Kaikurissi as the native place in her novel, she says in *A Post Office of My Own*:

The thing is, Mundakkottukurissi, my ancestral village (the family tree traces our lineage to the 16th century), has nothing that would make anyone come looking for it. So much so that when I set out to create Kaikurissi, a fictitious village in my first novel, *The Better Man*, I simply looked around Mundakkottukurissi and described it.

In her novel, Nair portrays Kaikurissi with the socio-spatial structures of Mundakkottukurissi, which also resemble the core patterns of her spatial consciousness. As she has not considerably modified core spatial identities or landmarks of the village, it maintains, to a great extent, the spatial verisimilitude and geographical authenticity of her native village. (Fig.3.12 and Fig. 3.13).

Kaikurissi City

Kaikurissi City, the main narrative location of *The Better Man*, is a fictional portrayal of Mundakkottukurissi City. Nair did not alter its major landmarks and spatial textures even though she renamed it as Kaikurissi City. She writes about Mundakkottukurissi in *A Post Office of My Own*:

Whatever the people of Mundakkottukurissi may lack in, it is compensated by a sense of wicked irony. We may not have a movie theatre or an ATM

machine, but we have a cricket club called MCC (Mundakkottukurissi Cricket Club); and even though we are a village, we refer to ourselves as a city. In 1984 when a bus service started plying between Shoranur and Cherpulassery, bus stops were still being designated and so the hub of the village with a handful of shops came to be called Mundakkottukurissi City.

In *The Better Man*, she writes about how the ‘Kaikurissi’ became ‘Kaikurissi City.’:

“Many years later, when the people who ran the two buses that piled to and from between Kaikurissi and the town came to inspect the route, they looked at the motley collection of shops and jeered, 'The city, Ha'. The name stuck; it rolled off the tongue easily” (49). Nair uses various chronicles, popular myths, and hearsays of her ancestral village to spatialise her narrative place.

Paddy Fields

Kaikurissi is depicted with lush green paddy fields. The enchanting beauty of the village is vividly represented in Nair’s text: “The fields were everywhere. Endless shades of green structure into the horizon on one side and the foot of the Pulmoorth Mountain on the other. Speckled only with the bright blouses of the women as they stood ankle-deep in waterlogged mud and pulled out the young paddy plants” (50). The villagers considered possession of agricultural land as a matter of great prestige. When Mukundan sells his field as he is not interested in keeping it, Krishnan Nair, the caretaker, asks him how he could leave his heritage.

Post Office

The post office and library are the two important landmarks of Mundakkottukurissi, which Nair frequently mentions in her writings. The post office is located in one of the buildings owned by her, and she proudly writes:

On either end of my garden, edging the road, are the two landmark buildings of Mundakkottukurissi — the village Post Office and the library. I take a special delight in telling my visitors: Do you know of any other writer who owns a post office?

I do own the building, for which I receive a princely sum of ₹50 as rent every month. (*A Post Office of My Own*)

Quite similar to Nair's sense of ownership of the post office, Mukundan in *The Better Man* writes a letter to the postal superintendent asking him to increase the rent of the post office, which is located in his building:

For the past thirty years, the post office at Kaikurissi village at Palavara taluk has been in my building (...) I would be extremely grateful if the rent can be raised to match the prevailing market rents in the area. (46)

The post office of Kaikurissi has a significant role in Nair's *The Better Man*, as some characters of the novel are employed in it. Kamban, who belonged to a lower caste, was the village postman. Philipose, the postmaster, treated him rudely and always tormented him due to his caste status. However, later, he takes revenge on the postmaster, turning himself into an *Odiyan* (161-168). The constant

harassment and dehumanisation led to Kamban's retaliation, which frightened the postmaster so much that he ran away from Kaikurissi forever.

Pulmoorth Mala

Pulmoorth Mala, a real landmark of Mundakkottukurissi, is depicted as one of the natural wonders of Kaikurissi. Nair writes about it in one of her articles titled "*A Post Office of My Own*":

The terrain is hilly and interspersed with vast tracts of paddy fields. In the distance is the Anangan range, grim, brooding, dark mountains but Mundakkottukurissi has its own Pulmoorth Mala. A hill on the western side of the village where rain clouds break first, so it's possible to see the rains come sliding down the hillside into the valley. To this day women rush to the clotheslines as soon as they hear the distant hiss of the rain on the hilltop.

Nair invokes the mythic properties of Pulmoorth Mala in the novel. She describes that people do not allow little boys to climb Pulmoorth Mountain; if one climbs it, he is considered a man (*The Better Man* 51). The writer reveals that the hill is not merely a physical reality; it grows into the communal consciousness of the people of the village by reinforcing local myths and legends.

Anangan Hills

Anangan Hills, also known as 'Ananganmala', is one of the longest hill ranges of Kerala, situated in the Ottapalam forest range in the Palakkad district. The forest and wildlife in it are varied and closely related to the life of the people of the neighbouring region. These elements have a vital role in determining the climate and

lives of people in the area, and therefore, Nair makes it a point to represent them in her fictional texts. She writes:

The road ran alongside the quarry pool, a slithering grey snake between lush paddy fields fringed in the distance by the Anangan Hills. Grim and granite-faced, the Anangan range sometimes grumbled, sending showers of pebbles and loose rocks down its slopes. And the people in the village would look at each other in trepidation and say, 'Seems like Anangan's waking up. (*The Better Man* 24)

Nair depicts Anangan Hills as a geosymbol that determines even the temporal aspects of human life in Kaikurissi and the villages bordering it. It also brings about various real as well as imaginary human encounters interweaving with beliefs and myths, which form the sociocultural patterns of society.

Kunthi River

Kunthi river, a tributary of Nila or Bharathapuzha, originates from the Anginda peak in the Silent Valley, flows through it and passes several towns in the Palakkad plains. The Kunthi River, also known as 'Thoothapuzha', joins with the Bharathapuzha River at Irimbiliyam. Nair mentions the river in *The Better Man*. When Mukundan was a child, Krishnan Nair led him to the top of Pulmouth Mountain and showed him — the Kunthi river—a strip of water that slided through the brownfields of the neighbouring village several miles away (51). Besides demarcating the boundaries of the village, she uses the river to illustrate distinctive sociocultural landmarks in the realms of fictional imagination.

Devi Temple

Nair has included a Devi temple in the spatial mapping of Kaikurissi. It resembles Kunnathu Kavu, where the local deity of Mundakkottukurissi is worshipped. She has written that her favourite festival is the temple festival of *Kunnathu kavu*: “My *Pooram* is the *Pooram* of *Kunnathu* temple. That tempts me to go to the house in Mundakottukurissi in every *Makaram* in every year” (*Koo Koo Koo Koo Theevandi* 51). In *The Better Man*, it is possible to locate detailed descriptions of the various preparatory practices of the festival. Nair has also written about the village *Pooram* in her memoirs. She describes the annual festival in the temple:

They were all there, the people of Kaikurissi, thronging the temple grounds. Mountains of puffed rice, yards of Jasmine, rows of glinting glass bangles, shimmery satin ribbons in rainbow hues, trinkets, toys, mouth-watering savoury murukkus, the stamp of feet, the straw-stuffed pairs of bullocks that were the lure of the *Pooram*. (*The Better Man* 358)

The temple expresses the communal and religious ethos of the village and redefines the status of gendered spaces in territorial identities.

Kodakkad — The Forest of Umbrellas

Kodakkad forest is a place where Mukundan, the protagonist of *The Better Man*, is absolved from his guilt of sins and irresponsibility. Bhasi, the village painter, led him to the forest, using his knowledge of the workings of the human mind to transform him into an individual who realised the outside world objectively

and rationally. The painter guides him through the forest to the light like a Guru.

“The trees clung to one another like a band of desperate souls handheld together---- even as a big in his most reckless moment, he had never dared to venture into the forest that the villagers said was inhabited by a *yakshi*⁵ who liked the feast on the blood of virile men” (190). The forest, a geosymbol of the village, is associated with shared cultural patterns of individual consciousness, which demarcates the boundaries of human spatial engagements with emplaced ecocultural identities.

Ezhuthachan Lower Primary School

There is a lower primary school in Mundakkottukurissi, which is known as ALPS Mundakkottukurissi. Nair relates it to a local primary school in *The Better Man* where Mukundan and Meenakshi had undergone their early education.

Ezhuthachan, who ran the school, performed their *Vidyarambham* ceremony, where young children are initiated into education (53). The school is a real landmark of Mundakkottukurissi, which also appears in Kaikurissi.

Pathirikunnathu Mana

Pathirikunnath Mana is an ancient Namboothiri tharavad in Mundakkottukurissi, where a serpent temple is situated. The Plashi Mana in *The Better Man* resembles Pathirikunnath Mana (115). The temple is well known for serpent worship and is visited by thousands of people, especially during the Malayalam month of *Vrischikam*, from mid-November to mid-December. It has been believed that it would protect from serpent wrath. The temple is one of the

⁵ *Yakshi* appears as a female nature spirit in Indian mythology. It is also represented as a benevolent and bloodthirsty female ghost in literature and folklore in Kerala.

famous centres of the spiritual pilgrimage in Kerala and is one of the places that are well known outside the village. People visit it to avert *sarpa dosha* (curse of snakes).

Primary Health Centre

Nair in *The Better Man* locates a Primary Health Centre at Kaikurissi and introduces a doctor who works in a hospital and tries to make money by exploiting the villagers. Like Kaikurissi, Mundakkottukurissi also has a Primary Health Centre that caters to the basic healthcare needs of the villagers.

Kailiad

Kailiad, a neighbouring village of Mundakkottukurissi, is mentioned many times in this novel. When he was expelled from the village, Bhasi moved to Kailiad. Later, Mukundan offered him a piece of his land in the village, which he considered as his own.

Even though she has reimagined some of the geographical coordinates of real landmarks and added a few fictional places in the narrative universe, the place, space, and locations of Mundakkottukurissi are represented to a great extent in the novel. She also depicts the social, political, and cultural structures of Mundakkottukurissi in the novel without much alteration.

The major landmarks of Mundakkottukurissi, such as the primary health centre, *Pathirikunnathu mana*, the Kodakkad forest, the post office, the city, and the primary school, are represented as the narrative locations in the novel. The teashop, barber shop, toddy shop, and Balawadi, the inalienable part of the village, are also plotted in Kaikurissi. In short, the writer has attempted to present the sociocultural

milieu of the Mundakkottukurissi in her portrayal of the Kaikurissi village. Nair revealed that she used the name Kaikurissi when she wrote about a small village that she knew very well, like a thing in the palm of her hand. (*Interview*). In other words, she writes about a place she knows backwards and forwards.

Kaikurissi is a real and imagined representation of Mundakkottukurissi (Fig 3.9 and 3.10). She portrays the life of the village, infusing socio-cultural semblances and spatial verisimilitude. Even the fictional environments in the novel are complementary to the geospaces in the narratives as a modified version of territorial subjectivities. Along with the spatial semblance, she used temporal conditions that greatly resembled the chronological fixities of the village. Nair, to a great extent, follows the spatial demarcation of Mundakkottukurissi in her Kaikurissi and enlivens the village with the spatial as well as temporal strata along with the village chronicles and myths. She has incorporated all the significant social, political, and cultural identities into the narrative patterns. The writer, in the novel, has portrayed the social structure of the village with caste-based hierarchies and communal harmony, depicted the colourful village life, along with festivals and festivities, narrated the disintegration of the old cultural patterns, and represented the gradual awakening of the village due to education. In short, the novelist brings the chronotope of Mundakkottukurissi into Kaikurissi in her real and imagined description of the spaces and places of Kaikurissi.

The Kaikurissi village not only represents the spatial identities of Nair's characters but also her spatial consciousness. Mundakkottukurissi is Nair's ancestral village, and her parents and extended family still reside there. She claims that five

generations of her family live in the village (Nair, *Interview*). She reveals that “I am a Malayali. I come from this village, Mundakkottukurissi. I consider Mundakkottukurissi as my identification mark. Wherever I go, I wish to identify as a native of Mundakkottukurissi” (*Anita Nairumothu Itthiri Neram* 67). Besides, she is trying to reclaim her memories and attachment to her native village through the representation of Kaikurissi, suffusing elements of socio-political textures and cultural patterns of the territory. The author has reimagined the village myths and conventions, spatialising the space and places in her fiction.

Despite the infusion of fictional and semifictional elements, real identities dominate the representation of Kaikurissi. The writer has portrayed Kaikurissi as a village that has enlivened the spirit of Mundakkottukurissi, plotting the real spatial and temporal coordinates. In *The Better Man*, Nair attempts to create a reimagined version of her native village to reconfigure her connection with the village and reveal its unique socio-cultural identity to the outside world.

2. The Semi-periphery Zone

The semi-periphery zone mostly appears spatially and temporally distant from the core zones of Nair's narrative universe. Unlike the core zone, the places of the semi-periphery zone are represented as less alive and depthless in her fictional narratives. In other words, they can be related to the two-dimensional representation of places and locations without the correlated spatial and temporal interaction. In addition to Madras (Chennai), and Bangalore (Bengaluru), this zone mainly comprises the geospaces of Kerala, excluding Valluvanad, which is part of the Core Zone (Fig 3.3). The writer has shared real and fictional experiences with the places

in this zone, even though they are not part of her native region in Kerala. It was in Madras that the writer spent a few years of her early childhood, as her father was employed there, and it is in Bangalore where she is residing now. However, these places are closely connected with Nair; her primal bonds with the places of the core region are more profound due to her assimilation of polyvalent socio-cultural structures of that territory. The places in this zone are similar to ‘projected space’ where “characters are not present there but are dreaming of, remembering, longing for a specific place (Piatti et al. 183). Besides the cultural relations, they share common historical trajectories, which largely influence the personal and social life of the writer.

Nair has used numerous locations from this zone in her novels. However, their portrayal is either two-dimensional or does not incorporate the multiple strata that form the textures of those places. The author mentions the locations but does not try to imbue all the organic structures and socio-cultural features necessary to make those places as lively and dynamic as those of the core region. Rarely do they become part of the central narrative locations in her novels. It is not easy for the readers to imagine those locations like that of the core zone, which are presented with their inherent social, cultural, and political assemblages. Bangalore appears in some of the novels of Anita Nair, mostly in recollected memories and narratives of the past. In *The Better Man*, Mukundan was employed in a public sector undertaking there. Though he lived there for a long period, he could not create any sustaining bond with the place or people there. Despite his indifference towards his native place, he had to return to Kaikurissi as he had no other option when he retired.

Bangalore is delineated in this novel without distinctive sociocultural identities. The city also appears in *Ladies Coupe* as the place where Akhila, the main character, resides with her sister's family. In this novel, the city seems to be a passive background without depicting all of its hues and shades, or places are shown as passive backgrounds. The spatial and cultural identities are not visibly mapped in it. Bangalore is mentioned in *Mistress*, where Radha lived for some time. Nevertheless, the author does not attempt to vitalise the places and spaces in the novel. The author again depicts the city in *Eating Wasps*, where she portrays it more vividly than in earlier novels, marking some of the landmarks of the city along with the narration. Urvashi and Najma were living in the city, and while focusing on their trajectories, the author tries to enhance the spatial densities more than in other novels. Nair plots Bangalore in her other works, such as *Lessons in Forgetting* (2010), *Cut Like Wound* (2012), and *Chain of Custody* (2016). The recurrence of the city in almost all novels explains the strength of lived spaces in human life.

Bangalore primarily appears in the memories and recollections of characters in her novels. For instance, in *Mistress*, Radha recollects, "I drove all over Bangalore when I lived there. Yet, he talks as if I don't know my clutch from the brake" (340). In the same novel, she remembers the railway station porter at Shoranur, who was always at her service: "Later, when I was grown up and travelling to Bangalore, where my college was, he would guard my bags while I bought a magazine (10). In addition, it can be noticed that she also tries to infuse her emotional connection with the city.

Besides, some spatial and geographical features of the place are described in novels: “Najma would never forget that moment when she stepped into Bangalore East station” (54). Nair describes various railway stations in the city in *Eating Wasps*:

She [Najma] sat on a bench with a polished granite top. This was a new addition to the station. Seven stations, 51.9 km, one hour and five minutes before she reached Tyakal station. Baiyappanahali. Krishnarajapuram. Whitefield. Devagonthi. Malur. Byatrayanhalli. As the train stopped and started, she ticked the names off in her head. (55)

Nair mentions locations in the city: “Ammi found Najma a job at the school in Bangarpet” (57). In addition, some nonspatial information is added in her novels:” This was Bangalore, the city that was home to Prakash Padukone, Ashwini Ponnappa and Arvind Bhat” (124). Notwithstanding the fragments of socio-spatial information, the depiction of those places was not fully realised employing polysensorial and multi-structural spatial textures.

Madras⁶ as a city appears in *Mistress*, *Ladies Coupe* and *Eating Wasps*. In *Ladies Coupe*, Akhila and her family lived for years in Madras as her father was employed in the income tax office there. She spent her childhood and almost her youth there till she moved to Bangalore when she was transferred from her job. However, Nair does not portray the city and suburbs in vivid visual textures. Madras appears in *Mistress*, where Koman is employed as a teacher at an art institute after completing his studies. No elaborate descriptions or details of that place are given in

⁶ Madras was officially renamed as Chennai by the government of Tamil Nadu in 1996.

the novel also. In *Eating Wasps*, Sreelakshmi makes a short trip to Madras with her lover, but the author is more interested in the descriptions of the railway journey than the places and spaces along the way. This novel also lacks a detailed depiction of the city visibilising its core structures.

Like Bangalore, Madras also appears in the memories and recollections of characters. In *Ladies Coupe*, she mentions Ambattur in the city: “She took a train to work every morning from Ambattur (78). In *Mistress*, she refers to the city as the place where Koman taught Kathakali:” I would like to go to Madras. A dance school there has asked for a senior aashaan” (327). In *Eating Wasps*, Sreelakshmi remembers her connection with Madras as it was the place where she studied for graduation: “So, he [Sreelakshmi’s father] managed to get me admitted to Madras University for my graduation” (20). Again, Nair mentions it, “I was in college in Madras and then in Varanasi” (239).

Besides the spatial information, the geographical features of the place are also described in her novels. In *Ladies Coupe*, various locations in the city are described: “When they fell ill, they went to Steadford Hospital. And for their souls, Akhila and her mother visited the Shiva temple at Thirumulavayil on Mondays” (78). She mentions Kodambakkam, an important cultural location, in the same novel (157). In *Mistress*, Madras is referred related to an artist named A K “I think of his [AK’s] house in Madras: the bougainvillaea–festoon gate and the many–angled house with slits and crevices” (81). The city again appears as the native place of Maya in *Idris*. She [Maya] moved back to Chennai, where she had grown up as the flat her parents owned became hers again (194). In the same novel, Hotel Daspraksh

in Madras is mentioned as where Akhila booked a hotel room: “He booked us a room at Hotel Daspraksh in Madras (233).

Like that of Madras and Bangalore, the places of Kerala, except Valluvanad, are also portrayed, providing some geographical and spatial information. Nair writes about Ottapalam in *Eating Wasps*: “A new college opened in Ottapalam in 1962, and I decided to apply for a transfer to fill the position of Lecturer in the zoology department” (141). She explains the ritualist significance of Thirunelli in Wayanad in *Eating Wasps*: “Since I did not have children or a husband to do the annual sardham, it was decided that my nephew and nieces would take my bone to Thirunelli in Wayanad” (181). In *The Betterman*, Nair gives a detailed description of Kozhikode city:

After the wedding, Anjana and Ravindran went to live in Kozhikode. Anjana had never been to Kozhikode in her life. But she gathered information from wherever and whomsoever she could find. From childhood textbooks came a page of history – Vasco da Gama landed at a beach in Kozhikode and thus opened doors to colonial greed. A neighbour described the silvery fish one could buy there, plumb and still tasting of the ocean. East Hill, West Hill, plump dates, busy streets, Bombay Hotel, Mananchira Pond night in the heart of the city ... Anjana’s heart beat faster as the train drew closer to Kozhikode City. (224 -225)

The locations of this zone are represented as places with some descriptions which are helpful to identify them in their distinctive landmarks to a certain extent.

The places in the semi-periphery zone appear in memories, imaginations, and predictions, whereas the places of the core zone consist of real narrative places, spaces, locales, landscapes, and regions. Most of the spaces and places are mapped, visualising them as two-dimensional, whereas the locations of the core zone are three-dimensional. Natural life and vitality are missed in these spatial narrations as places are represented as passive, which has no vitality or liveliness.

Nair's *The Better Man* locates Palakkad, Kozhikode, and Bangalore in this zone (Figure 3.14); Kozhikode is where Anjana lived with her husband for some time, whereas Mukundan worked in Bangalore for many years till his retirement. She depicts Palakkad, Kottayam, Alwaye and Ernakulam in *Ladies Coupe* (Figure 3.15). In *Mistress*, Bangalore and Madras appear in the outer region of the semi-periphery zone (Figure 3.16). Radha studied and lived in Bangalore for a few years, a stormy period in her life. Koman taught in an art Akademi in Madras for some time. Alwaye is portrayed as a place where Sheela's grandmother lived, whereas other locations are mentioned as the train passes through them. In *Idris*, Vizhinjam, Kozhikode, and Ponnani are depicted (Figure 3.18 and Figure 3.18). Palakkad, Kunnankulam, Thiruvananthapuram, Varanasi, Bangalore, and Madras are plotted in *Eating Wasps* (Fig 3.19).

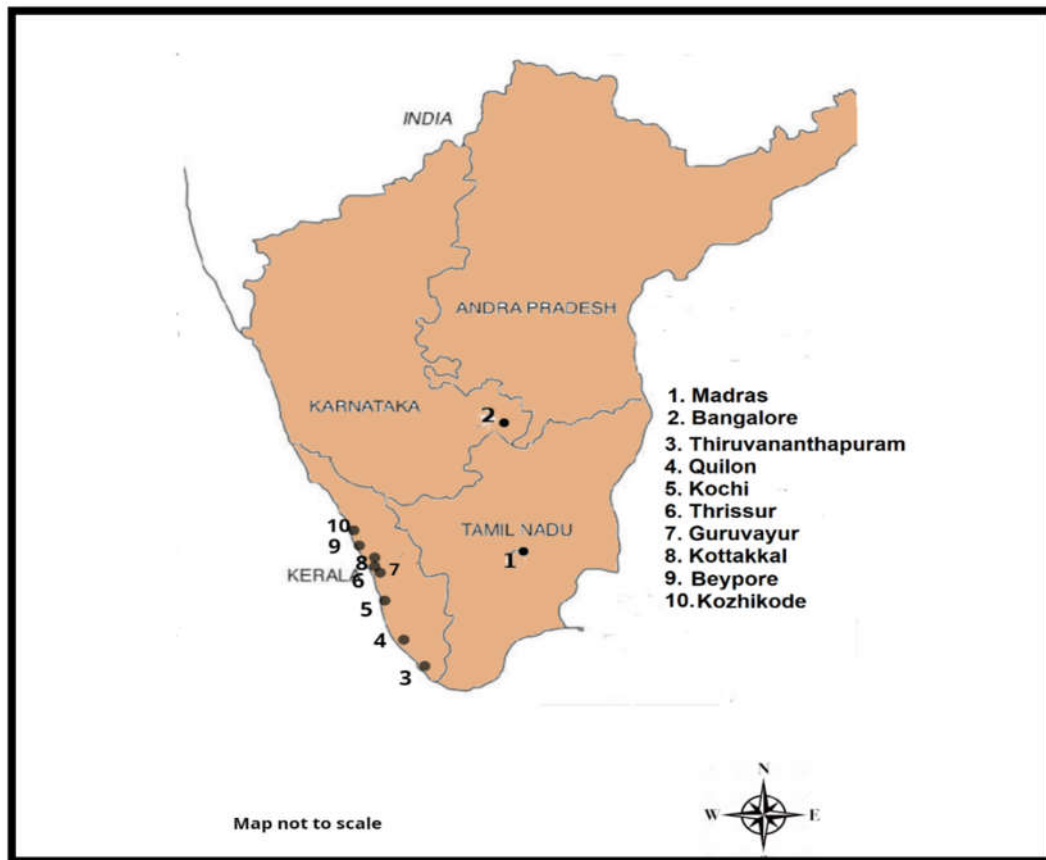


Fig. 3.14 Map of Semi-periphery Zone in *The Better Man*

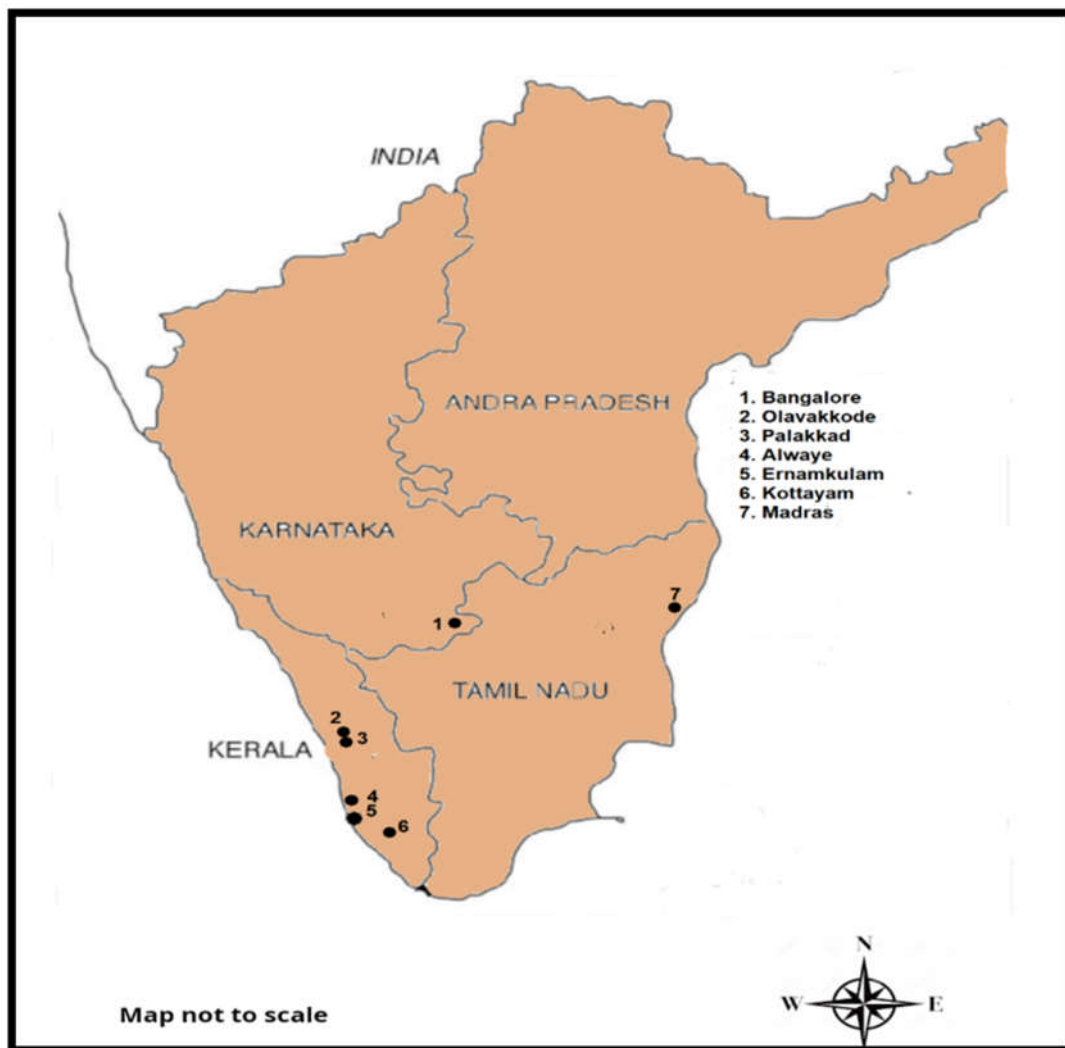


Fig. 3.15 Map of Semi-periphery Zone in *Ladies Coupe*

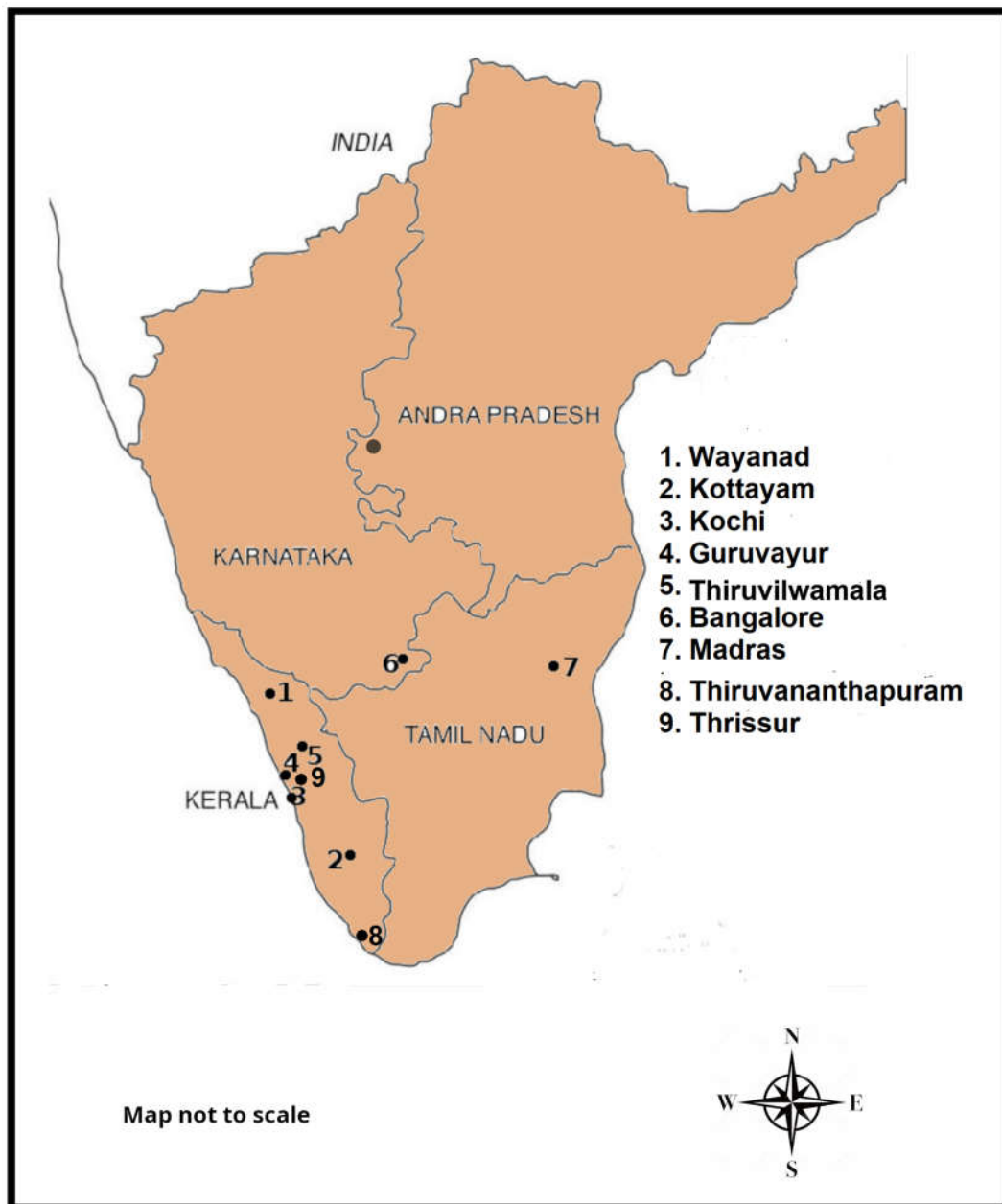


Fig. 3.16 Map of Semi-periphery Zone in *Mistress*

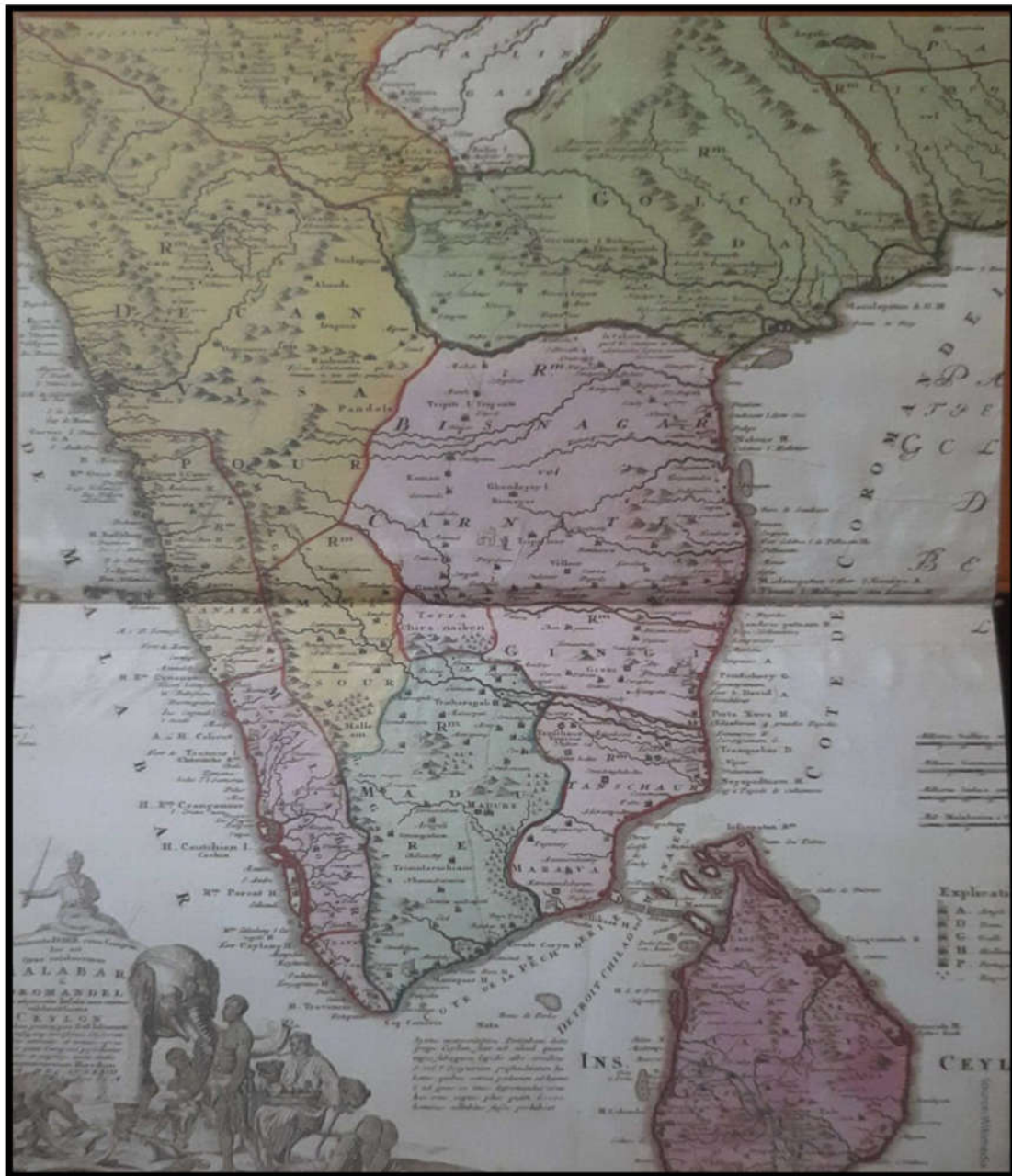


Fig. 3.17 Map of the coasts of Malabar, Coromandel and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in *Idris*

Map of the coasts of Malabar, Coromandel and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). Sarmaya. (2021, December 28). <https://sarmaya.in/objects/cartography/malabar-coromandel-2/>



Fig. 3.18 Map of Semi-periphery Zone in *Idris*

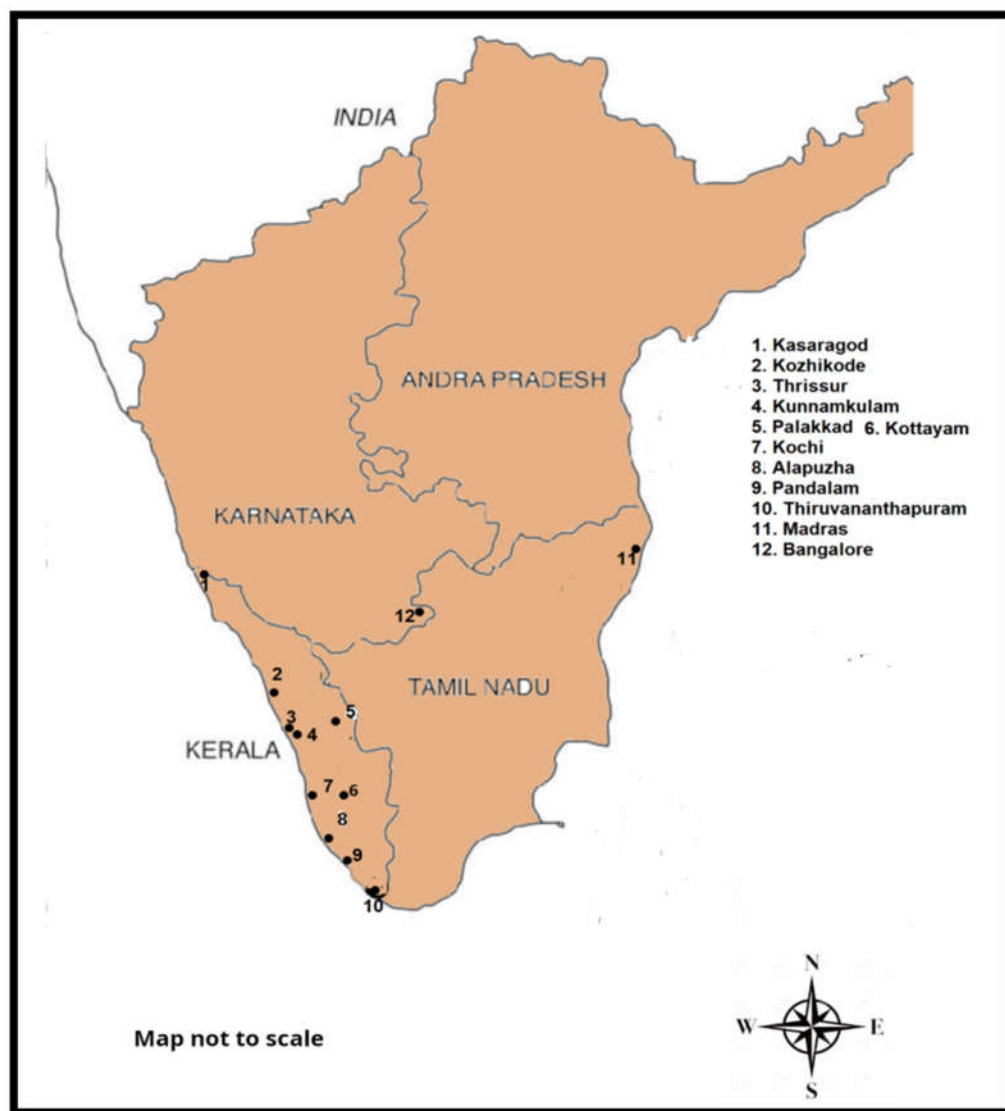


Fig. 3.19 Map of Semi-periphery Zone in *Eating Wasps*

3. Periphery Zone

This zone comprises places situated in the outer peripheries of Nair's narrative universe, which appears more or less in the characters' memories, ruminations, and recollections. Besides, they are located in the realms of imagination and fantasy, and those places lack a long-term association with the writer. The narrative locations in this zone are not only distant but also outside the core and semi-peripheral zones (Figure 3. 4). The places in this region appear as passive locations because they are not depicted elaborately with their inherent spatial patterns and textures. Nair has not attempted to unravel the intricate structures of these places but has depicted them as locations to expand the territorial boundaries to infuse more variability into the narration. Nevertheless, they do not divulge the sociocultural milieu of the narrative universe, as the author shares sparse details of the places that are in this zone. They include the places the writer visited and the places imagined fully or partly to bring out fictional verisimilitude in the narration.

The peripheral zone in Nair's novels is at the edges of her narrative world, and geographically, they are part of the territories that have no significant role in the evolution of the plots of her novels. The places in this zone resemble a “marker”, which indicates the geographical range and horizon of a fictional space (Piatti et al. 183). The author organises such locations in contrast to the places of core and semi-peripheral zones to supplement them with geographical imaginations and realise the potentialities of unengaged spatial experiences. The most important fact about these places is that they appear in the thoughts and imaginations of the characters. Moreover, the chronotopic elements of those events have not been revealed

precisely because they are presented spatially and temporally away from the core regions of the narratives, where characters have never closely interacted with the polyvalent strata of the locations. They are also depicted as linear, one-dimensional, without landmarks, geosymbols, values, socio-cultural identities, and characteristic features of the territory, which are part of the spatial consciousness of individuals.

In *The Better Man*, she mentions Delhi: “When Vasu asked him if he would be coming down to visit us, he said he was leaving for Delhi in two days’ time and that he would try” (59). Coimbatore also appears in this novel: “My second brother works as a fitter in a factory in Coimbatore” (98). In *Ladies Coupe* she refers to places such as Rameswaram, Palani and Madurai: “That was how Akhila went to Rameswaram, Palani and Madurai. There never was enough money for them to go to any tourist spot” (58). She mentions Kodaikanal (101), Vellore (226), Arsikuppam (247) and Salem (247) in the same novel. Madurai is referred in *Mistress*: “At twilight, Sethu heard a knock on the door; the doctor was in Madurai. He was to return only in the following morning” (180). Calcutta also appears in this novel: “He went to Calcutta, where someone he knew found him a job on a ship” (344). Though the places mentioned in this zone are inside India, they are also not plotted as locations without their distinctive sociocultural environments and spatial identities.

She has plotted Burma in *The Better Man*, where Achuthan Nair had worked for many years: “Mukundan was four years old when he first saw his father. Achuthan Nair had left for Burma when Parukutty was three months pregnant” (68). In the same novel, she refers to Dubai: “A home in Dubai he was meticulously putting together” (99). New York and London appear in *Ladies Coupe*: “A month

later, Prabhadevi was radiant with excitement. Jagadheesh was taking her with him on a business trip to New York, and on the way back, they would stop over at London” (174). Again, London comes in *Mistress*: “Once in a while, she trots off to London for a literary lunch” (215). Manhattan is mentioned in the same novel: “It’s a lovely neighbourhood, he says, you wouldn’t think it was Manhattan. There is a tree that overlooks my apartment. My bed is by the window, and I can see the tree from there. It’s an old apartment” (210). Nair plots Paris in *Mistress*, where Koman visits the city for Kathakali performance: “Some years ago, I was in Paris, on a whim, I took the metro. As I went down the steps into the station, I saw posters on the wall” (416). Evidently, Nair largely ignores the geographical subjectivities and territorial identities of the places mentioned in this zone.

The places mentioned in the zone are neither closely related to Kerala's social and cultural space nor have any intimate personal association with the author. It is evident that even though many of the locations of the periphery zone were visited by the writer, they have failed to evoke a deep spatial experience in her. She might have seen them as a person obsessed with travel, but they could neither instil nostalgic sensibilities nor place attachment in her. Furthermore, they are not represented like the places in the first or second zones. They are like one-dimensional landscapes without solid attachments to core layers of individual spatial signification. The zone can be grouped into places that belong to India and those outside India, although the author portrays them as more or less alike without segregating them. The spatial representation of places in the periphery zone has revealed a lack of social interaction, absence of subtexts of embedded culture, neglect of socio-political history, and absence of the spirit of place in such territories.

In *The Better Man*, Nair has plotted Burma in the peripheral zone of her literary universe as a place where Mukundan's father worked for years (Fig. 3.20). Trichy is also part of the zone where Mukundan worked in a public sector company for a few years. Nair depicts Ambattur, Arsikuppam, Salem, (Palur) Kanchipuram, Kanyakumari, Nagarkovil, Trichy, Mahabalipuram, Vellore, Kodaikanal, and Coimbatore in *Ladies Coupe* (Fig. 3.21). New York also appears in the novel, where Janaki makes a trip with her husband. Nair has included several places in *Mistress*, such as London, where Koman lived with Angela for some time; Houston and Paris, where Koman performed Kathakali; Colombo, where Sethu lived for a few years; and Burma, where Achuthan Nair worked for a long time. The writer has also created a fictional place, Arabipatanam, near the Kerala -Tamilnadu border, which shares a distinctive social-cultural milieu (Fig. 3. 22).

Nair portrays Tharangampadi (Tranquebar), Thoothukudi, Gali, Nagapattinam, Karaikal, Pulicat, and Masulipatinam in *Idris*. The author also mentions Dikhil, an area between Somalia and Abyssinia, where Idris was born, the Silk Route, Soren Island, and Ceylon in the outer region of the Peripheral Zone in *Idris* (Fig. 3. 23). The names and spatial identities of many of the plotted locations in *Idris*, a historical novel that depicts the seventeenth-century Kerala, have been changed. In *Eating Wasps*, Nair plotted Varanasi, where Sreelakshmi studied for her post-graduation. Connor and Lake Chilka (Orissa) are also mentioned in it; Galle (Sri Lanka), Milan, the hometown of Liliana, and Burma are also plotted in the peripheries of the narrative world of the novel (Fig. 3. 24).

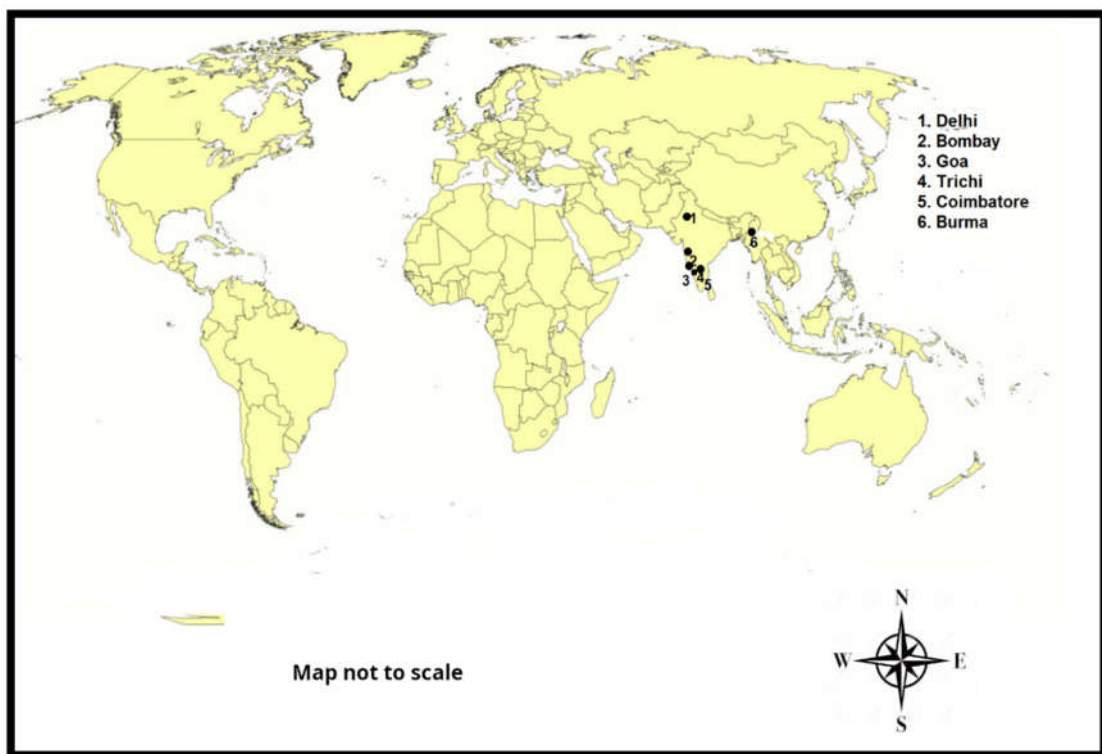


Fig. 3.20 Map of Periphery Zone in *The Better Man*

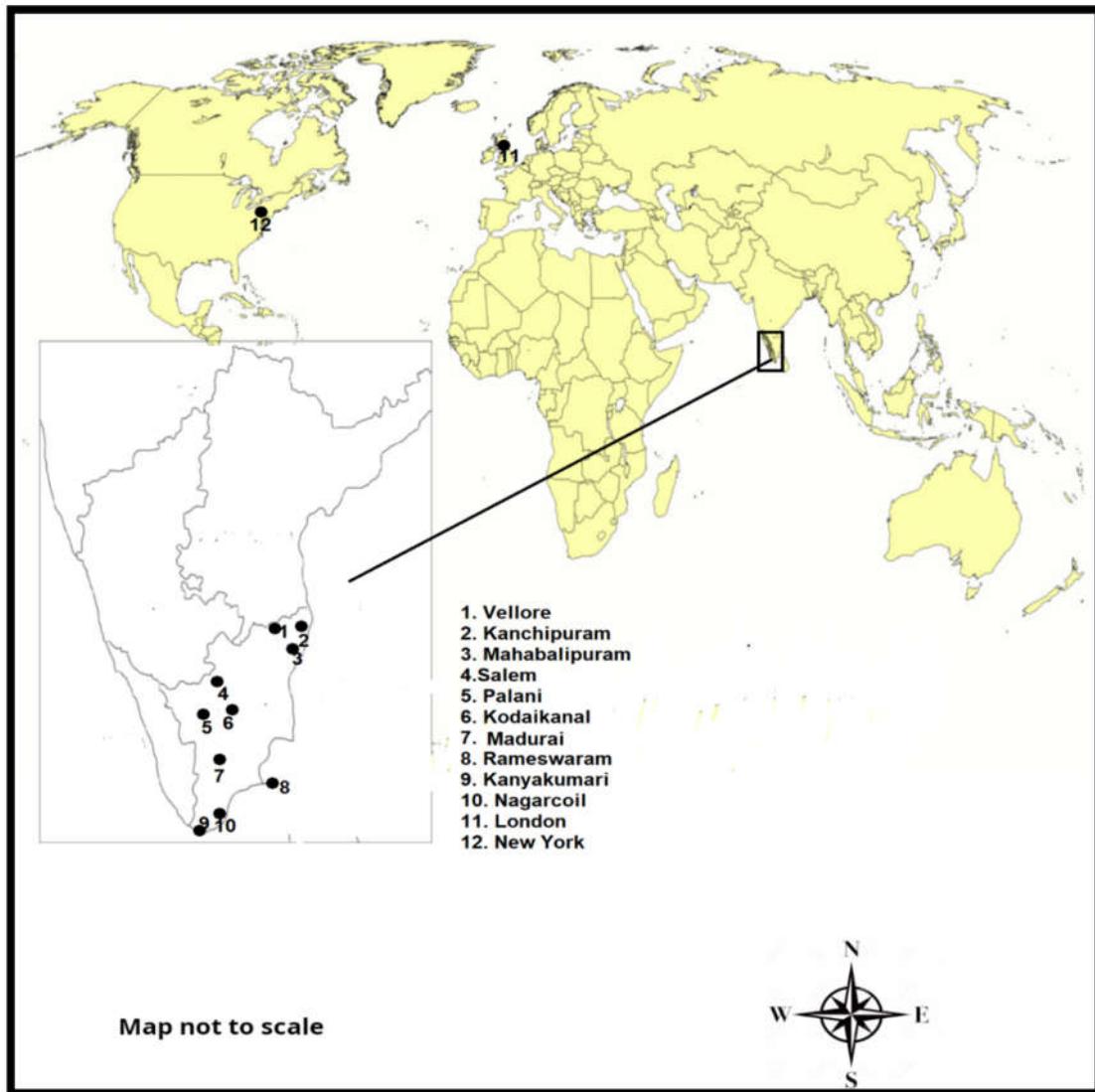


Fig. 3.21 Map of Periphery Zone in *Ladies Coupe*

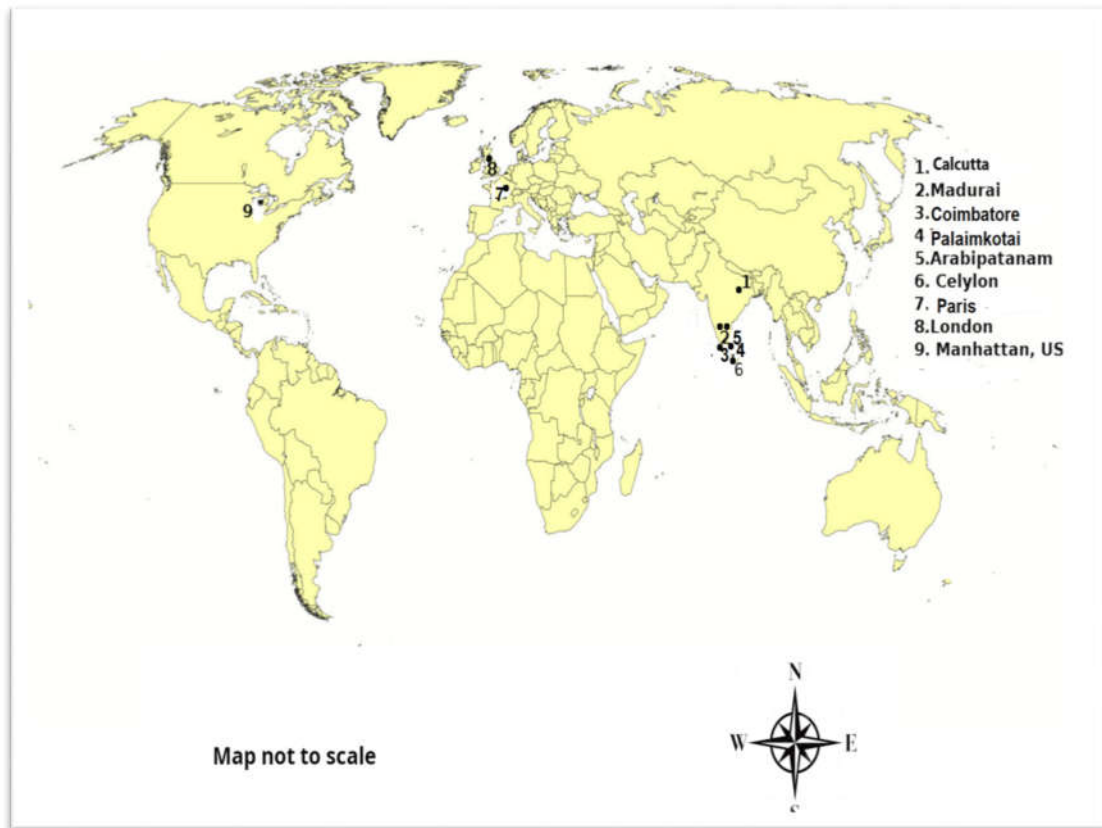


Fig. 3.22 Map of Periphery Zone in *Mistress*

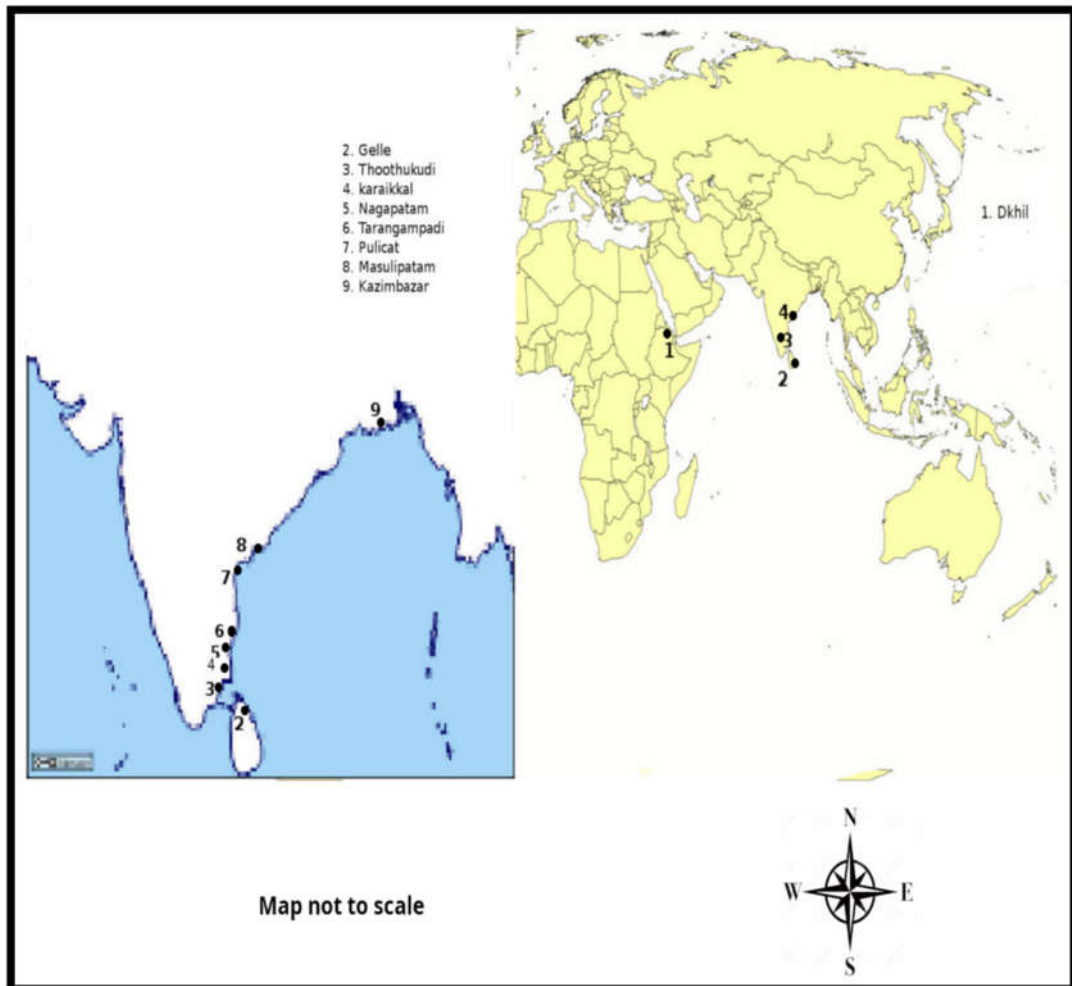


Fig. 3. 23 Map of Periphery Zone in *Idris*

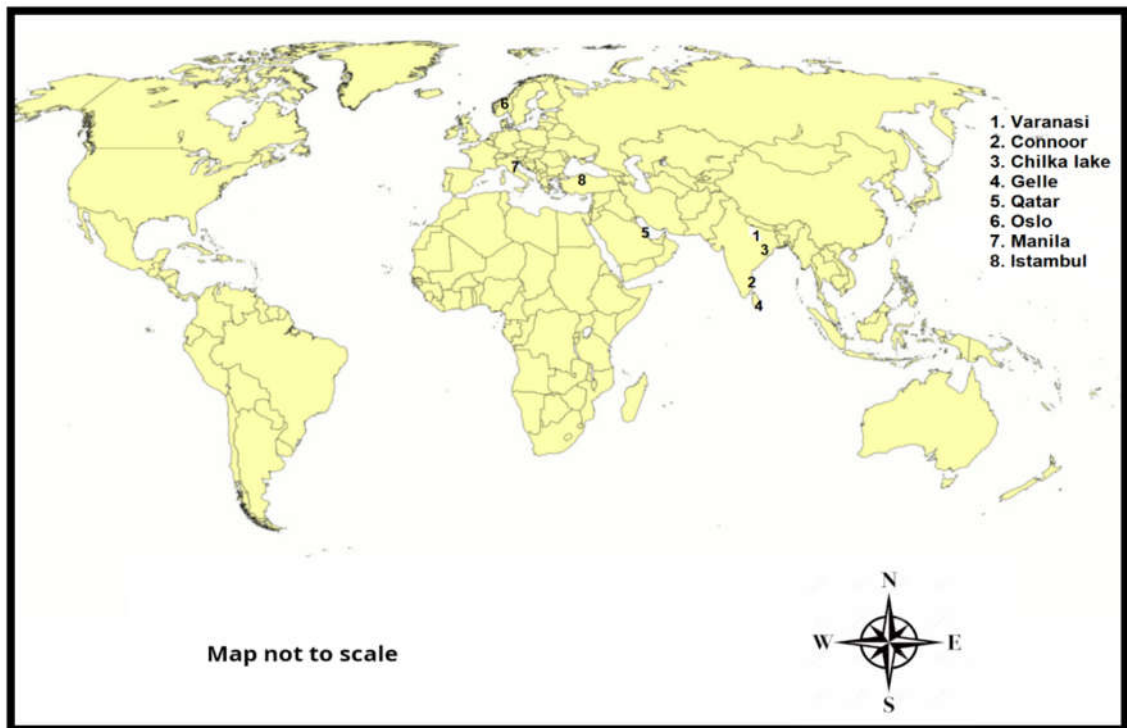


Fig. 3.24 Map of Periphery Zone in *Eating Wasps*

Mapping Thirdspace

Nair's literary cartography, consisting of narrative places and spaces in her novels that evolve from her conceived, perceived, and lived spatial experiences, can be interpreted using the spatial classification of Edward Soja, who categorised places and spaces into three-fold divisions focusing on individual experiences and spatial realisations. The native region, including the ancestral village where she lived, forms a significant spatial consciousness in her, which permeates into the cartographies of her fiction. These places continue their hold over the writer as an individual and as a member of a spatial community and dictate her trajectories. They comprise the core zone of her narrative world, infusing spatial and cultural identities into her characters and determining their courses of life also. She has plotted one-dimensional as well as linear places without suffusing any individual identities or cultural consciousness related to those locations. The places and spaces in her novels are closely related to her personal cartography, which reveals her spatial consciousness and cultural identity along with her characters.

The spaces and places in Nair's narrative universe express palpable variation in spatial densities and cultural assemblages. The centre of it always overlaps with Valluvanad, a region of imagined homogeneities where multiple structures of the real and imagined interact in order to produce a world with vivid, heterogeneous, and polyvalent spaces that resemble real spatiotemporal coordinates. The geospaces of her narrative world display similitude in varying degrees – highest in the core zone, gradually reduced in the semi-periphery zone and hardly present in the periphery zone. The spatial organisation of her narrative world illustrates

individuals' bonds with various real and fictional experiences. The space and place of the core region can quickly identify with the physical geography of Valluvanad, which is recurred in her fictional narratives. She has portrayed many places and spaces in the core regions without significant changes, whereas some are geographically altered without losing fictional verisimilitude and imagined spatial identities. In other words, the core regions of her narrative world, which share the textures of the notion of "thirdspace" introduced by Soja, expressing the same characteristics in spatial realisations, blend real and imagined, where factuality outweighs counterfactuality in literary representations.

The semi-periphery region of Nair's narrative world resembles the "imagined" place in Soja's spatial demarcation and the "conceived" place in Henry Lefebvre's trilectics of spaces. They are distant or inaccessible to the proximal interactions. The coordinates of geospaces and spatial demarcations are fluid and amorphous in this region, where imagination plays a significant role in spatial organisation and representation. These places emulate secondary regions of lived experiences as many are not factually appropriated territorial attributes. As cultural consciousness and spatial identity are not inherent in the textures of those regions, the readers can experience depthlessness in narrative locations plotted in this region. Nair's narrative world ostensibly shows the absence of enlivened personal associations and lived experiences in creating the semi-periphery region. Moreover, they are emplaced in the main narration through the writer's realisation of places and spaces that are more or less away from the realm of actualities and in the form of rumination and fancies without any lived experiences.

The periphery region does not resemble with any of Lefebvre's trilectics of space or the spatial demarcations of Soja. The places and spaces of these regions are devoid of textures of spatial densities or cultural assemblages, and they are used to differentiate the other locations which are plotted in the core and semi-periphery regions with varied spatiotemporal textures of reality and imagined verisimilitude in the narrative trajectories. However, these places do not contribute significantly to the characterisations or development of plots; they broaden the narrative coordinates without spatialising the structures of the narrative world of her fiction, and they diversify the spatial heterogeneity of peripheral locations. These spaces are produced by the interactions of multiple spatio-cultural layers revitalising the writer's lived spaces. The core zone of Nair's narrative universe enlivens a "thirdspace" that unifies opposing forces, which evoke turbulence of multipolarity and form patterns of homogeneity, while sociocultural landscapes of that region invigorate the distinctive spatial ecosystems of territories. It also stands demarcated by incorporating several little cultures emanating from various socio-political interactions, along with the dominant forms of cultural traditions and territorial identities. Thus, the new space becomes a territorial signification of homologous heterogeneities in spatial and geographical representation, where the spatial pattern of Nair's core narrative region exhibits a space where both interactions are non-hegemonic and non-totalitarian. The territories of core strata are embedded with social, political, historical, and cultural assemblages, with diverse spatial relationships forming their prominent patterns. In other words, the "thirdspace" integrates various spatial and non-spatial entities and accommodates all levels of the

individual as well as the collective experiences, visibilizing patterns of place-centeredness and place attachment.

The "thirdspace" represents a synthesis of the real and imagined, producing a space which is greater than the sum of the two individual structures, along with new heterogeneities and divergences. . "It allows the minority speech to express itself alongside the dominant discourse, which has lost its privileges. Those who are not aligned with the dominant one – be it ethnic, sexual, class or gender- find a place of formation. It is a sort of the centre of the periphery, or more precisely, a contact zone between a centre that dissipates and a periphery that affirms" (Soja, *Thirdspace* 69). He has also asserted that "Real has an essence that fiction cannot subsume" (86). Nair's novels reflect the essence of the real and the invisible bonds of fiction with the real, especially as literature reflects both real, imagined, and real-and-imagined. The core zone of Nair's fictional universe, Valluvanad, including Mundakkottukurussi/Kaikurissi, is represented by infusing the trilectics of spatial demarcation, expressing more than the essence of the real and imagined in multiple forms of signification. The narrative maps of Nair's fiction demonstrate the spatialisation of individual consciousness undergoing a transformation in their bond with the territories.

Soja observes that the "thirdspace" is "fully integrated to place" (*Thirdspace* 71). It also amalgamates the various elements of historicity, spatiality, and sociality to form an invigorated and alive space that also maps the possible world of reality and imagination. The verisimilitude of factual and counterfactual spaces of the literary terrains transforms into a world that is more real than imaginary and more

imaginary than real, establishing the “thirdspace” in Nair’s literary narratives. The spatiotemporal coordinates of the narrative locale not only demonstrate the fixities of the borders but also show the discourses that formulate fictional interactions with various territorial identities. Thus, the space, place, and landscapes blend enlivened poly-sensoriality, invigorated cultural textures, and deterritorialised nostalgic experiences in the core zone. The perpetual struggle between those emblematic spatial demarcations revises and reinstates the conventional spatial patterns and reveals a new network of spatial influences, producing a unique experience as well as the realisation of the structures of the “thirdspace”.

The places and spaces of Nair's novels always situate the spatial consciousness and identity of her characters. In *The Better Man*, all the major characters, such as Mukundan and Achuthan Nair, share their spatial consciousness and cultural identities with the Kaikurissi village, where they find their roots of existence. In *Mistress*, Nair plots Shoranur as the main narrative place. In *Idris* many places of Valluvanad are depicted as main narrative locations. Cherpulassery, Ottapalam, and Palapuram are the major narrative places in *Eating Wasps*. The temporal element in her novels provides a peripheral chronological base for the coordinates of spatial structures that dominate over all other aspects of settings in her novels. Moreover, her novels depict native places primarily as a manifestation of an individual's communal consciousness even after their territorial estrangement from lived spaces. The narratives are so connected with the landscapes and regions that a disentanglement from them would destroy the sensual and cogitative patterns of human consciousness depicted in them. Places in her novel take various forms: as

an element of setting, as a region of distinct cultural assemblages, an area emanating poly sensorial images, a location of topophilia as well as topophrenic memories, a figurative character without any unfamiliar qualities, but with identifiable features, and a substitute of an individual who epitomises the cardinal traits of cultural space. She also uses diverse territories and locations for depicting singularities of characters along with their trajectories reflecting their spatial identities.

Narrative places are an inevitable part of novels, and the elements of temporality imbue coherent patterns in their spatial and geographical representation. The portrayal of spaces and places in Nair's novels shows the spatial verisimilitude in all modes of narration, and even imaginary locations replicate real places in them. Most of the narrative places of core regions almost appear as real locations without much change in the spatial as well as temporal coordinates in her works. The spatial mapping of Nair is similar to that of Thomas Hardy. For example, Hardy created Wessex, his fictional narrative world from Dorset, his native place; Nair renames her native village, Mundakkottukurissi, as Kaikurissi in *The Better Man*. Hardy expanded Wessex in his successive novels, which is also true of Nair's fiction. She uses Kaikurissi as the setting in her first novel, *The Better Man*, whereas in her later novels like *Mistress*, *Idris*, and *Eating Wasps*, she broadens it. Still, they all enclose Mundakkottukurissi and neighbouring regions as the centre of the narrative universe of her novels. Ralph Pite situates Hardy's novels as "Novels of Character and Environment'," because it reflects the way that his books join character and environment together, making the two appear equivalent to one another" (1). It is

also essentially true in Nair's novels, where character and environment are interwoven in the narrative trajectories, enlivening the territorial identities.

Nair's novels, from *The Better Man* to *Eating Wasps*, are about a search for one's own place and identity, and they portray the endeavours of individuals to reclaim their spatial and geographical identities along with cultural consciousness. In them, individuals believe that they are connected not only to the places and spaces but to everything that is rooted in the soil, and they are trying to reclaim or continue their associations with the places and spaces to which they belong. People may transform into great travellers who traverse the whole world; however, their journey begins from their native land, and nobody can escape the pull of their primal bonding with their native places and lived spaces wherever they go.

Nair has used the spaces, places, and landscapes of Kerala as her favourite narrative location. She revealed that *The Better Man* and *Mistress* could be written only in Kerala because their narrative locations could not be substituted to any other place as they could only happen in any one of the small villages of Kerala, and there was no other culture that could replace that of Kerala (*Sambhashanam*). Nair's later novels like *Idris* and *Eating Wasps* are also stories that happen only in Kerala because the writer tries to reclaim Kerala, its culture and various embedded spatial structures. Spatial representation of Kerala recurs in *Ladies Coupe*, *Lessons of Forgetting*, and *Alphabet Soup for Lovers* also. Indeed, the writer is always fascinated by the infinite variety, endless wonders, and uncommon spatial patterns of her native land and she always tries to explore the roots that sustain her and her creative imagination in varied forms in fictional as well as non-fictional narratives.

The novels of Nair always follow a pattern of revitalising spatial rootedness and assimilation in its core structures, resisting the forces of displacement. The agonies and anxieties of her protagonists originated from the deterritorialisation of polyvalent relationships with their native territories as well as lived spaces. The culture and identity of places transform individuals as their deep structures of spatial patterns are always in tandem with a latent social consciousness that determines human interactions. Due to the pull of their native places and their helplessness in continuing in strange places, they may suffer intense inner turmoil and agitation.

Spatial identity and cultural consciousness can dictate an individual's journey from the beginning to the end and decide the courses one must take to further their desires and ambitions. As spatial relations and perceptions interact with all notions of personal fixities, they become significant in human life in producing new social and cultural experiences. Nair's novels encompass many such experiences that decide the paths of individuals' lives, redefining the gravitational pull of places and spaces. Human movements and journeys are directly or indirectly influenced by spatial cognition and attachments closely related to the homelands. Territory may have varied bonds with human beings depending on their shared experiences. Mukundan and Achuthan Nair in *The Better Man*, the grandmother in *Ladies Coupe* Shyam, Radha in *Mistress*, and Kandavar and Kuttimalu in *Idris* have intimate relationships with their lived spaces and native territories. Idris in *Idris* is portrayed as a person who does not value spatial attachments and who does not foment good relationships with his native place or lived spaces. There are characters such as Margareetha (*Idris*), Bhasi (*The Better Man*), and Koman (*Mistress*) who are

deterritorialised to their lived spaces where their spatial consciousness is located.

Thilothamma in *Idris* and Krishnan Nair in *The Better Man* are representatives who do not set out to any other place than to their houses in their native place where they find their ultimate happiness. In Nair's novels, persons with such varied spatial relationships appear to represent diverse forms of association with territories.

Chapter 4

Mapping Rootedness and Deterritorialisation in Anita Nair's Novels

Territories anchor human beings in various manifestations, which include individual and communal realisations. Relph has pointed out, "The relationship between community and place indeed a potent one in which each reinforces the identity of the other, and in which the landscape is very much an expression of communally held beliefs and values and of interpersonal involvements" (34). As each place engenders multifarious patterns in which the geospaces are modified by social, political, cultural, and economic forces, the spatial intersections embody diverse geographical coordinates and topographical identities. Place attachment, "the emotional bonds that form between people and their physical surroundings", solidifies both communal and individual emplacements (Manzo and Devine-Wright 4). Furthermore, it directs man to unusual orbits in which individuals reposition themselves in order to cognise the unmarked spaces in the ordinary realms of human existence.

As the polyvalent arrays of spatial consciousness may have numerous gradations in human realisations, place attachment determines various human spatial practices such as place satisfaction, territorial situatedness, displacement and travel. Riley observes:

Attachment, a feeling for the congruence of culture and landscape, is familiar in the sense of region and regional identity. This can vary from a simple, strong sense of fitting into a regional landscape to a complex as sophisticated

as the Southern literary regionalism in the United States. It can operate at scales from neighborhood to entire regional, even national, landscapes. (17)

People may form bonds with various locations due to negentropic emotions evolved from the multi-structural engagements with habitations. Altman and Low elaborate, “Place attachment may contribute to the formation, maintenance, and preservation of the identity of a person, group, or culture” (10). The patterns of topophilia and geographical interactions could realign the existing notions of lived experiences related to territories. Place attachment, topophilia, and displacement, one way or another, represent the territorial association, whether it is the contentment one experiences in one’s own house, the struggle to acquire a place or space of one’s own or the journey to distant interiors deterritorialising from one’s own roots, they will embed spatial emplacement which regulates emotions for stabilising human existence. The individual movement may be altered due to forces emanating from territorial subjectivities, and it may deflect the courses of individuals in everyday life. In addition to such variations, spatial relations also undergo alteration because of evolving endogenous forces that undermine normal human relationships with society and nature. In other words, human trajectories are more or less determined by the territories by their multivalent interactions with human spatial consciousness.

Nair represents the interior spaces of the human mind which are aligned with spatial as well as geographical subjectivities. Joel Bonnemaïson considers, “The territory is a fragment of space that gives roots to one’s identity and unites those who share the same feelings” (116). The profound and intimate relations of space and place on individuals reveal that human emotions are largely tied to territories.

Furthermore, she demystifies the human - territorial relations that are the root of individual as well as social interactions, focusing on anthropocentric social formations. Moreover, the spatialisation of communal configurations precedes the nuanced process of spatialisation restructuring territorial subjectivities whereas territorial interactions produce diverse spatial practices that construct multiple forms of reassignments and transferences in human interactions. Some may solidify the lineament of human existence by augmenting the networks of spatial movements in everyday life. On the contrary, some may deviate from the situatedness, resisting the forces of primal attraction and taking part in journeys, exiles, and migration. Although a few leave the traditional courses, they voluntarily return to the familiar homesteads as the coordinates of intimate locations could condition the human mind and memories of lived spaces. The heterotopic structures of society could direct spatial emplacement in societies, for they always embed the customs and conventions entangling human existence.

Struggle for Places and Spaces

Anita Nair's characters are always in a perpetual struggle for places and spaces which stand not only for security, contentment, and felicity of life but also as a location that can satiate their longing to establish their identities. Sometimes, it becomes a search for their roots, where their spatial consciousness is in complementary interaction with cultural identity in the variegated structures of life. Some of her characters try to find their roots to return to them; some undertake long and arduous journeys to discover their lost life trajectories, and others attempt to reinvent their lived spaces to reclaim nostalgic memories. The search for places and

their laborious journey to those longed spaces recur in her novels, whereas their variation is only in the placement of intricate spatial structures. An incessant search for places and spaces is palpable in her novels, beginning from *The Better Man* to *Eating Wasps*, where her major characters are individuals who can be identified by their attachment to their native places and lived spaces. Even though many of them are deterritorialised from them for a long time, they preserve their spatial memories to reterritorialise into their cherished lands.

Polyvalent interactions between territories and people generate deep bonds that determine the coordinates of individual existence. Ellen Churchill Semple attests it saying, “Man is a product of the earth’s surface” (1). Hirsch and O’hanlon also maintain that “People are known in relation to places where they were born, lived for a long time, or have been living because the identity of individuals primarily emanates from the identity of places” (198). As their consciousness evolved from patterns of individual and collective cultural memories, people are attracted to places and spaces closely associated with them, especially those producing patterns of discrete childhood experiences. Besides, the attachment to such locations naturally intensifies when people are away from them for a long time as they are always drawn towards their lived spaces and, to a certain extent, to places where their dreams and imagination are rooted. Writers are also drawn to such locations: they use them as the setting of their works, a source to gather raw materials for their literary works, and a fountain of creative inspiration. According to David Morris, “The Sense of Space is the basis of all social experience and of perceptual experience in general. Without it, we would have no sense of a world

beyond us” (vii). As writers naturally receive vigour and vitality from the soil of their land, the most fertile territory for their imagination, the soil in which writers are rooted is also a part of the organic structure of their writing. Nair is one such author whose writings always fix the varied sensibilities of the soil of her lived spaces.

The key themes of Nair's novels are always related to rootedness, uprootedness, displacement, and territorialisation. From *The Better Man* to *Eating Wasps*, the main characters have, more or less, the same motives and desires along with issues related to individual existence and survival even though the emplacement alters and they struggle to create a place of their own that is aligned with native places and lived spaces. From the interior spaces of the family to the open and boundless spaces of the outside world, it forms a spatial continuum with fluid and ever-changing borders, which determines spatial and temporal spheres of individual existence.

The Better Man depicts an individual's search for his own place. Mukundan, the novel's protagonist, returns to Kaikurissi, his native place, after he retires from a public sector firm in Bangalore because he could not find a suitable place to spend the rest of his life in that city. Being an unmarried man, he felt he was on a ship without anchorage as he could not resolve the problem of where he had to go after retirement, and he realised that the only place he could look for was his native village, which he hated earlier due to some harrowing childhood experiences. “He didn't want anyone to know that he had nowhere else to go. Instead, he defended himself by saying, ‘Why wouldn't I come back here? This is where I was born, after

all. This is where I belong” (23). When he returns, he experiences isolation in his native place as villagers are reluctant to consider him a true native and treat him as a stranger. Even though he did not marry in his youth, he shows an urgency for marriage because he thinks setting up a family would help him create his place in the village. Mukundan feels irritated when he sees a non-native as Bhasi succeeds and has created his own space in the village, whereas he, who was born and brought up there, miserably fails. However, he has his *tharavad*, his ancestral home, to stay in; he cannot find any solace in it as the house triggers terrifying memories, amorphous fears, weird thoughts, and unusual anxieties that haunt him.

Bhasi, who is a foil to Mukundan in the novel, has not experienced an intense existential crisis like Mukundan. He wishes to be a part of the Kaikurissi as he thinks: “This is my land. This is my home. This is the life I choose to live” (93). Although Kaikurissi is Mukundan's native place, he cannot establish himself there it was Bhasi, a painter and who is considered a “one screw loose” by the villagers, helps Mukundan find his roots and transform from an indecisive, feeble-minded individual into a better man. Bhasi can transform Mukundan's disappointment, diffidence, and unresolved sorrows into a constructive force that helps him redefine himself. Nevertheless, Mukundan tries to save himself by sacrificing his friendship with the painter. He thinks, “No matter what anyone said, he was not a native of the village in its true sense. He might have been born here. But that was all. He didn't belong here. And he didn't want to” (115). He tells Bhasi, “My family goes back at least six generations in the village. Everyone knows who I am. I don't have to go around building relationships and hoping that I will be accepted” (125). Mukundan

could understand: "The thing about living in a village, he decided, was that you could never do anything right" (20). It is Bhasi who dissects his fragmented mind in order to reveal the spatial structures that are latent in it. Nevertheless, after that, he turns against his mentor as he is compelled to foreswear his friendship.

Later, Mukundan recognises that his roots are firmly fastened in his native village. Notwithstanding his apathy and indifference, he decides to stay in the same ancestral home with Anjana, a woman with whom he likes to share anxieties and anguishes about his life. Before that, he succeeds in finding a place in the mind of both a woman and a friend who helped him reclaim his self and identity. As a token of gratitude, Mukundan offers him a plot of land when he is banished from Kaikurissi due to the machinations of one of the crooked businessmen of that village. When he gives a portion of his ancestral land to his friend, he also gives him a place in his heart. Mukundan and his father, Achuthan Nair, left their native place for a long time: Mukundan had gone to Trichy and Bangalore, while his father went to Burma. They return to their native place as they feel they can survive only in Kaikurissi, the land which sustains them. This central conflict of the novel relates to spatial consciousness and the cultural identity of individuals deterritorialised from their native places and lived spaces.

Likewise, Nair's *Mistress* depicts the enlivened paradigmatic struggle of individuals for a place to reclaim the familiar trajectories of their roots. The main characters of the novel, namely Koman, Chris, Sethu, and Angela, are individuals who have ventured out of their lived spaces in search of love to reclaim their own identities and map their interiors. Sethu returns to Shoranur as he realises that native

territories are more enthralling and satiating than all other lands he has wandered.

Koman, his son, follows him to Shoranur, learns *Kathakali* and becomes a renowned *Kathakali* artist, but later, he deterritorialises himself from Shoranur to London as he falls in love with Angela, a woman from London. However, he realises very soon that he is a misfit and can only be content with his life in Shoranur near the bank of Nila, which encases places and spaces that make him the man he is now. Whenever he tries to move away from it, somehow or the other, he returns with a firm decision that he will not attempt to deterritorialise from the spatial structures of his lived spaces.

Sethu, Koman's father, spent much of his life away from Shoranur. In his early youth, he left his house to go to Madras, but he embarked on the wrong train and thus happened to acquaint with a couple who were going to Ceylon. He reached Ceylon with their benevolence, where he spent a few years. From there, he arrived at Arabipattanam, which borders Kerala and Tamil Nadu, where he lived for a few years as an assistant to a doctor and married a girl named Sadiya. After her death, he returned to Shoranur with his son, Koman. There, he realised that native territories could satiate individuals in numerous ways and spent the rest of his life.

Chris, a tourist and travel writer, arrives at Shoranur to find an answer to a question that has haunted him throughout his life: Who is his father? Chris, Angela's son, suspects that Koman is his father, and the real purpose of his visit to Shoranur is to ascertain it. Like Sethu, he also goes back to his lived spaces, which have embedded structures of spatial attachment in varied forms. Earlier, Angela could also not live in Shoranur for long as she felt that the call of her lived spaces was

much stronger than her attachment to other territories. The novel begins with Chris's arrival in Kerala and ends with his return to America. It underscores the fact that spatial consciousness and cultural identity determine the trajectories of individuals despite their attempts to overcome them.

Akhila, the main character of *Ladies Coupe*, tries to reinvent herself by undertaking a train journey from Bangalore to Kanyakumari. Moreover, it is a journey to free herself from the clutches of her exploitative sister and selfish brothers. She plans the journey because she is so desperate and broken-hearted, and she feels that if she continues her life as it is, she will go mad. Through the journey, she tries to find the answer to the question: can a woman live alone? When she poses the same question to her fellow passengers of the Ladies Coupe, whose ages ranged from fifteen to sixty, they share their varied experiences in response, as if it is a cardinal problem related to women's identity and existence. Margaret, one of the travellers, replies: "All have to find an answer themselves; nobody can help others" (26). It is an indirect assertion that individuals should discover, create, and establish their own places among the perpetual power play of spatial and cultural relations. When Janaki states that she could still lead a married life, Akhila retorts, "Men need a wife only to keep their house clean and to cook food for them. If one can live happily without marriage, then what is the need for marriage?" (26). The novel seeks answers to Akhila's questions through the lives of various characters like Janaki, Mari Kolunthu, Prabha Devi, Margaret, and Sheela, which helps Akhila to make a final decision about her life – a solution for her anguish and anxieties.

During the journey from Bangalore to Kanyakumari, she considers all her fellow travellers as a family; Janaki is the mother of the group, and the others are siblings. They become members of an imagined family, even though they have only met on the train for the first time. Akhila realises that the thing that she most despises is a lack of identity. Karpagam, her friend, said, "I am who I am. And I have as much right as anyone else to live as I choose" (202). She challenges the notion that after the death of her husband, a wife has to live in such a way, conforming to the norms and conventions of society. That assertion influenced Akhila, who, after her father's death, shouldered her family's burden as the eldest member, sacrificing everything for them. She decides to find her way, and when she reveals her plan to her sister, Padma, she cannot understand it. Her opposition becomes vehement, and she snubs Akhila, saying she is envious of her family. She transforms herself into a free woman from a cash cow of the family. Now, she is not ready to allow herself to be exploited at any cost. In such a way, she finds her place in the world. She thinks she needs two things to establish her identity as an independent and dignified individual: a house and a partner. She says, "If you want the truth, I've had enough of you. The noise your children fill my home with. The way your husband and you have been sponging off me for years" (204). Her announcement to Padma is a declaration of independence from all exploitative familial bonds. Nobody could stop her when she said: "I'm forty-five years old. And older than all of you. I will do exactly as I please, and I don't give a damn about what you or anyone else thinks" (204). She wishes to live in her own way and enjoy freedom. She also wants to live alone and discover the wonders of living alone.

Sheela, the youngest member of the imagined family of *Ladies Coupe*, had a grandmother who had several houses, rice fields, and a teak plantation in Kerala. Even though she is rich enough to live by her own means, her children compel her to live with them in the city. In Bangalore, she is like a fish out of water. The old woman longs to live in her village, but others are unwilling to allow her to live there. "Ammumma wanted her sons to know that they had driven her away from her own house" (4). It is death that paved her way to her village. "She had always wanted to die in her own bed, and they had a long drive ahead before they reached home. Her home" (74). She longed for her own house and lived space more than any other character in the novel.

Idris: Keeper of the Light deals with the conflict between those rooted in their native land and those who wander rootlessly. Idris, introduced as "an eternal traveller" comes to Kerala with a group of traders (Nair 19). He reached Vaniyankulam Chanda, which was well known as one of the biggest markets of South India. On his first visit to Kerala, he met Kuttimalu, a woman from a well-known Nair *tharavad* and established an intimate relationship with her. When he arrives in Kerala a second time, he meets Kandavar, his son by Kuttimalu, whom he can identify by his dark complexion and the diamond the boy wore, which he had given to Kuttimalu at the time of his departure. Even though he is a man who does not value familial bonds and relationships, he experiences a stirring in his soul for the first time when he sees the boy.

Idris gets an opportunity to spend time with his son as Kuttimalu and her family request him to help them to change the boy's decision to join *chaver pada*.

Kandavar has been entrusted in his hands, taking him along on his travels, strengthening their relationship. As it changes his life goals, he longs to lead a settled life with Kuttimalu and his son. Native land is the most treasured thing to them, so they are not ready to separate themselves from it; Idris earnestly requests Kuttimalu that he is prepared to settle in whichever place they like, away from the caste-ridden conservative society of seventeenth-century Kerala. She is not ready for it, as she cannot leave the places and spaces of her native territory. Even though Kandavar realised the hidden bond between him and Idris, he is also not ready to express it. Furthermore, he is not inclined to go with Idris, deterritorialising himself from the native land. The mother and the son stand with their places and spaces, whereas Idris, who has no such place as his own, has to find his own place. In the end, Kandavar advises him to settle somewhere rather than wander throughout his life.

Idris realises that everyone he encounters is drawn towards their native place and space. Even Margareetha, a lady of pleasure, whom he met at Damascus, was not prepared to leave her familiar place and spaces even when Idris offered her a better future. Thilothamma, another woman who lived in Golkonda, was also unwilling to part her ancestral land despite her husband's fervent appeal. She replied:

I will not sell this land. This is the land my great-grandfather lost his life for. This is the land my father killed my great-grandfather for. This is the land that robbed me of my youth and dreams. This is the land that defines me and my past. I will not sell it as long as I breathe. Please try to understand. (322)

Later, she cherishes her relationship with Idris but is reluctant to leave her native land. Even Idris's close associate, Sala Pokker, has a strong feeling for his land, and he advises his friend against his incessant wandering.

The characters like Kuttimalu, Kandavar, Thilothamma, Sala Pokker, and Hussain have found their places and spaces, and they are steadfast in their relationship with it, whereas Idris is in a dilemma and being shattered by the rejection of all, especially Kuttimalu and their son Kandavar. Idris has begun a frantic search for his own place in vain. He, who always told everyone that he was an eternal traveller, is even ready to settle in Kerala or move out anywhere with them, but they are unwilling to go with him. As he stands alone before the ancestral house of Kandavar with an uncertain future, he experiences the tragedy of a rootless wanderer who does not have a place of his own.

Nair's *Eating Wasps* also follows a plot line in which all the major characters are in a frantic search for a place of their own in diverse terrains of human life. The novel is in the form of interconnected narratives, in which almost all major characters are women who face either great tragedies or misfortunes. In this novel, all the major characters, including the spirit of a dead writer, meet in a resort near Bharathapuzha in Shoranur. Sreelakshmi, the protagonist of the novel, commits suicide and appears as a ghost who cannot depart from this world because a part of her physical body, a finger bone enclosed in a pen case, remains on earth. She closely resembles Rajalakshmi, a well-known Malayalam writer who won the Kerala Sahitya Akademi award and created a great storm in the conservative minds with her views against the traditional patriarchal attitudes and orthodox social

conventions of that time and who committed suicide in the prime of her life. Both Rajalakshmi and Sreelakshmi share many things in common: their birth, family background, education, job, literary pursuits, awards and accolades that they won, their unorthodox views, and iconoclastic attitude. Even their names also have partial similarities. *Eating Wasps* presents a writer who follows the footsteps of another writer who attempts to travel through uncommon realms to reveal the agonies, anxieties, and apprehensions experienced by a fellow woman.

Sreelakshmi was trying to create a place of her own in a society that followed orthodoxy and a rigid caste system. She was a woman who could not follow the dictates of the family and society, which were against individual freedom and the right to choose what one likes. She realised that to be an independent woman, she had to find her course, rejecting the existing customs and conventions. As she wanted to create her place in the overlapped interiors of her collective human existence, she went on a journey with Markose, challenging notions of man-woman relationships in a society forbidding heterosexual proximity and close interactions. It became bitter later due to her lover's incompatible social consciousness and enigmatic interactions. Thus, her attempts to create a place of her own, along with the desire to etch out a place in the literary world, have been shattered due to the scathing familial and social criticism aimed at ostracising and silencing her. Nair believes that her total failure to attain these life goals might have led to the ending of the life of “the Kerala Virginia wolf” (1). Nair postulates that the tragic end of the writer’s life is instigated by existential alienation and her inability to situate herself in the uncanny spaces of everyday life.

Besides Sreelakshmi, this novel also has several prominent female characters who are more or less involved with endeavours to create a place of their own, satiating their self and identity. Some of them miserably fail, while others partially succeed. Urvashi, a journalist from Bangalore who was fed up with her commonplace, mundane middle-class life, was looking for an alternate course in her life and moving through territories of unknown desires; she falters. The man with whom she developed a close relationship victimised her for a long period, and she ended the traumatic phase of her life by telling him:

I was never your prisoner to escape. You are just a silly boy throwing a childish tantrum. I am not your mother to indulge you. So, listen to me: it's over. You and I are finished, no matter what you think. Nothing you say or do is going to change that. (205)

In short, she also fails to discover her place due to her inability to overcome the forces that have tried to exploit and silence her. Finally, she returns to her old familial space without further entering the murky waters of trespasses and failed adventures. Najma is another character who fails miserably to create her place in the novel. Having been born into the lowest stratum of society, she is eager to get a job as a teacher by which she can move higher on the hierarchical ladder of the multi-structured society. But it has been shattered as she becomes a victim of an acid attack. She covered her face and neck from others, fearing their response to her deformed face. Later, she decided to live as she was and revealed her face to her co-passengers on the trains she regularly travelled.

When the train began to move, and everyone had settled down, she pulled the top part of her burkha away from her face. She heard the collective gasp of horror. Her melted face, the stretched-out skin of her neck, was not easy to look at. (66)

Though she cannot achieve her ambitions, she does not let down her life; with Urvashi's help, she joined the Near-the-Nila resort in Shoranur as a housekeeper. Like other characters, she also shares space with those women whose lives were shattered in the middle of their pursuits.

Radha, whose marital life was troubled due to her inability to come to terms with her own stormy and self-indulgent past in *Mistress*, was leading a contented life, voicing her opinions and helping her husband in his business ventures in *Eating Wasps*. She could save the stormy phase of her life, which was about to engulf her life itself; when Chris left forever, she reinvented herself and could lead a more or less contented life. Her realisation was natural, and she had undergone a significant change, embracing the customs and traditions she had discarded earlier.

In *Eating Wasps*, female characters search for a place of their own; however, many fail in it. Sreelakshmi cannot cope with the conflict between family and society, so she ends her own life whereas some individuals like Maya and Najma are ready to continue their miserable lives, even though they suffered much, drawing peace of mind from whatever happiness they enjoyed. Radha and Urvashi have realised their pursuit for happiness lies in them, and they have changed from their old self to new ones – a person who can accommodate and adjust to the changing environment. It is due to the change in their perception of places and spaces. It is the

places and ardent desire to possess or discard them that make up the plot line of this novel, like all other novels of Nair.

Houses: The Places of Real and Imagined

Place attachment has varied manifestations in individuals and its intensity differs due to diverse factors, including proximity to the places that agglomerate intimate experiences. Robert Freestone acknowledges, "Some places hold considerable social, psychological, and emotive meanings for people. The places of greatest personal significance are often referred to as home" (109). Home is a compendium of spaces that usually share innumerable experiences and memories that are both euphoric and tragic, and that might have deep resonances throughout the lives of individuals. "Houses and homes are dynamic and complex spaces within and through which people work to secure and organise their lives, livelihoods, and relationships" (Hentschke and Williams 1). In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard states, "A house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability" (17). It can be seen as a receptacle of myriad experiences which are very significant in the lives of individuals due to their continual influence on their conscience and social interactions. It can also "generate intense psychological and emotional attachments which could well determine the way people relate to space and organize reality" (Pallejá-López 96). In this connection, C. G Jung describes, "The house represented a kind of image of the psyche – that is to say, of my then state of consciousness, with hitherto unconscious additions" (184). Besides, the house is a compilation of innumerable spaces which irrevocably construct, organise and condition human behaviour and attitudes, which can create and reclaim

cherishing unforgettable memories and also form sources of incessant individual subjectivities radiating power relations at personal as well as communal levels.

Relf observes, “Home in its most profound form is an attachment to a particular setting, a particular environment, in comparison with which all other associations with places have only limited significance” (40). A home is where one can have several spaces of happiness, sorrow and other innumerable emotions, hide countless personal secrets, and find ease and comfort. Witold Rybczynski indicates that “domestic comfort involves a range of attributes—convenience, efficiency, leisure, ease, pleasure, domesticity, intimacy, and privacy—all of which contribute to the experience (231). Colin Ellard points out, “If any kind of space is built for intimacy, it is the one to which we retreat at the end of a hard day in the world of work for rest, succour, and protection” (60). Like people, houses are subject to change. Antje Flade says, “An intimate connection between the person and the building, by which people personalise the living space according to their own identities, transforming a generic house into an individual home” (72). It is a fact that human memories are closely associated with lived experiences of spaces and places and each household item, like a cot, table, shelf, window, or door, can unleash individual and collective memories in the minds of people. The taste and flavours of food experienced in childhood could not merely resurface later but could influence the gustatory sensation throughout our lives. Jon Bird and others argue that “Home is (often) associated with pleasant memories, intimate situations, a place of warmth and protective security amongst parents, brothers and sisters, loved people” (90). Our fundamental emotions are always related to houses: the nostalgic textures

of childhood memories are one of the essential parts of our consciousness as well as identity. When one builds a house, that person creates a place of his or her own. As an individual who has lived in many places in different phases of her life, houses have a significant role in Nair's life, which also manifests in variant forms in her novels.

Houses may also be places of traumatic and harrowing experiences for individuals as they may engender torturing and agonising encounters emanating from the festering of patriarchal norms, social conventions, and routine activities within the houses and neighbourhoods. Some people could have felt that the houses are where everyone returns, where unavoidable responsibilities await them, and where individuals are regarded as normal human beings. It is also said that humans may lose a sense of belonging but might be chained in it because of the torturing social and familial issues. Some people experience traumatic emotions in topophrenic locations, and the house would be a hell-like abode where the residents feel enigmatic and miserable. Such places make the lives of individuals meaningless and make them feel lost or disconnected, and they never produce emotions of attachment in them.

House is a key metaphor in Nair's novels, and her novels are always stories of houses: they portray people's close affinity with them, reveal spatial affixation within their boundaries, and uncover the internal struggles that individuals experience when moving away from them. They also chronicle the trajectories of people who leave their houses only to return to them after wandering for a long time. In an interview, Nair speaks about her house in Bangalore:

She believes that a home reflects one's personality, and her house also reflects her personality. She reveals that her house is open and has only a few walls, but her reading room maintains its privacy. She also mentions that although she interacts with many people, she doesn't let anyone intrude into her personal space. (*Chembaka Puvinte Perulla Veetil* 46)

A house is a place of experiences that can satisfy all human senses: the taste of the food prepared in the house, the smell of the objects and things, the spatial qualities of the house, and even the vacant corner of the house could make an imprint on the memories of the inhabitants. Moreover, houses function as a connection between individuals and the world, a reservoir of discrete human experiences, and a place where individual thoughts and perceptions evolve and mature. In “The House is Waiting” in *Malabar Mind*, Nair writes:

The house is old
 How old no one knows
 Nobody remembers
 But the house has always been there.
 The house
 silent and motionless
 the house. Eye closed
 as if it wishes to see no more
 knows no more. (50-51)

In fact, Nair shares her opinion that although people may attempt to forget houses associated with their spatial identities and where they grew up, their lived spaces

linger in individual consciousness as an ensemble of meanings, values, and emotions.

Nair has many houses. *Frankipani*, her house in Bangalore, is away from the overcrowded cityscape. As a person who cannot live in a clustered and structured house, she lives in a house with enough space for plants and trees. In *Chembaka Puvinte Perulla Veetil*, Nair ruminates about Raj Vilas, her father's *tharavad*, a big house with wooden works, a spacious compound, a cow shed, a granary, a storehouse for firewood and an attic. She recollects her visit to that house in her childhood, especially during vacation when the mangoes were ripened, and she still remembers that there was enough space for children to play hide and seek (46). She writes about the house that lingers in her childhood memories. The joys and sorrows shared in the house in her childhood have influenced her as an individual and a writer.

Nair has a small house near her *tharavad*, the ancestral house where her parents live, which she calls *Symanthakam*. She reveals that the journey to *Symanthakam* is a trip to her childhood, and she longs to sleep in that house as it turns her into a child (*Chembaka Puvinte Perulla Veetil* 47). Nair also owns a house Zanzibar, in Chennai near the sea, in Choramandalam artist village away from the city, and it was named in memory of the African coast of Zanzibar. She thinks the elements of Raj Vilas are in all three houses (47). Nair points out that houses and lived spaces would naturally share structures of feeling and organic connection with territories.

Experiences related to houses are a vital part of Nair's novels, and polysensorial experiences of houses become part of the consciousness of her characters. *The Better Man* tells the story of a tharavad, an old house where many generations lived, which gives the inhabitants painful and distressing experiences that none of them wishes to cherish. Nair writes:

This was the house he had been born in. He had spent his childhood in its rooms and the cashew groves around it. Long, silent days as he plotted and planned his escape from the confines of its walls and the tyranny of his father. And then, when he thought he had left it behind him forever, he had to return. This was his home, though he knew deep in his heart that it would never feel like home. (26)

However, Mukundan did not like to return to that uninhabited house as his mother died, and his father left it to live with another woman; as he had no other place to go, he returned to it. That house becomes a metaphor for the Kaikurissi village itself. He felt as if spirits haunted it and those who were dead returned in the night to blame him. He narrates his harrowing experiences:

She (his mother) sits on the staircase every night, waiting for me. No matter how much I try not to go there, she lures me for what happened to her. She says I could have prevented her death. As she speaks, she gets angrier and angrier. Night after night, she tells me she wants me to know what she went through, so she drags me to the top of the staircase and pushes me down. I wake up screaming. (44)

But to Krishnan Nair, the former servant and caretaker, it was a place of pleasant experiences, and he told Mukundan that the only thing left in his life was memories that cascaded into his mind, one after the other, when he was in that house. He says: “When I am here, it seems like I am back in time when your mother was alive, and this house was what I thought paradise would be like” (40). The house, frightening to Mukundan, is a shelter of cherishing memories for him.

The people of Kaikurissi consider Mukundan a stranger. “He was an outsider. Achuthan Nair’s city son, reluctant native, misogynist, misfit ...” (83). He is challenged not only by villagers but also by his own consciousness. He sacrifices his friendship with Bhasi, a painter of the village who has rerooted him to his native village, to enter into the good books of Powerhouse Ramakrishnan, who has become the wealthiest man in Kaikurissi after winning a lottery and who owns Powerhouse, the biggest house in the village. He, along with Ramakrishnan, forces Bhasi to leave his house in Kaikurissi as he is eager to be considered a native of the village by supporting them. Bhasi understands that the villagers make him realise that he is an outsider in the village.

In *Ladies Coupe*, in which the house symbolises freedom, self-actualisation, and self-reliance, Nair depicts Akhila's journey from an individual without a house of her own to an owner of a house. It is also about the importance of the house, which symbolises human consciousness and identity. Individuals are always identified with the spatial coordinates of the house in which they reside, and the possession of a house becomes a much more significant issue in the lives of men. The conflicts among human beings for houses represent their inner yearning for

rootedness. Akhila, the protagonist, lives with her family in a rented house, longing for their own house. First, they lived in Chennai, where her father was employed in the income tax department, and being a person with many responsibilities, he could not buy or construct a building for them. He dies without owning a single plot of land or house for his family. When she gets a job in the income tax department as her father died in service, and the whole burden of the family is on her shoulders. She struggled to cope with her salary and could not save anything for a house. When she was transferred to Bangalore, "All that she had to do was pack the few things that were hers and give the keys to Narayan. The house was not their own, and all they had to do was divide between Narayan and Narsi the few household things that they owned" (55). When she loses her peace of mind due to the pestering of her sister and other family members, she realises the need for a place of her own. She tells her sister, Padma: "I'm thinking of buying a house." When her sister questions her, she asserts, "I wish to be by myself. It is time I did this – lived alone. And it is time you did as well" (203). She buys a small apartment, tells her sister to mend her ways, and expresses her desire to live alone. Akhila discovered that to be independent, individuals need a house of their own, which shelters them and makes them realise their position in the house and the world.

House itself is the key theme of *Mistress*, forming an interminable map of human cognition and imagination. There are two houses: a very large, old *tharavad* filled with memories and mysteries and a small house that embodies peace and calmness near the Bharathapuzha. The first one, in which Radha and Shyam live, always hides many secrets of the past, and that also reveals discordant spatial

transformations in the minds of inhabitants, which are more concealed than revealed. The second house belongs to Koman, an artist with a satiated temperament who has reinvented a contented life. Like the dweller himself, the house has experienced the ebb and flow of human relations and witnessed the transformation of the vagrant youth to the satisfied life of an old, mature individual.

House has always been an obsession for Shyam in *Mistress*. Being an individual who suffered much due to grinding impoverishment and poverty in his life, a house of his own had been a dream for him. He was always fascinated by the possession of the big house, which he got as he married Radha, and which stands for his ardent desire to find a space and place to satisfy his longing to stamp his identity. However, he has developed many businesses and even has a resort using the wealth of Radha's family; he values the house as his most treasured possession.

The second house near the Bharathapuzha, which belongs to Koman, has a significant role in this novel. When it was given to him, his father, Sethu, told him: “You have to inherit at least some of my wealth. That apart, you will love this little house by the river” (327-328). The house is in the most enchanting location near the river bank and has stood as solace and inspiration for Koman throughout his life. Radha visits his house occasionally to seek the comfort and consolation it offers besides the hearty companionship of her uncle. The writer enlivens the house near the river Nila:

That house stood right at the edge of the Nila. Countless floods had eaten away the land around it, so it perched a grain of rice on a tongue of earth stretching into the river. On one side were steps descending into the river;

here, the stones had stilled the erosion. On the other side, the dip was sudden and abrupt. I will have to shore the side, Koman thought. Build a wall so the river won't encroach any further and take away what's mine. That last notion took him by surprise he had a house of his own. (328)

The river and the house have an inextricable bond with Koman, and that even dictated his life choices, especially those related to rootedness and territorialisation.

When Koman decided to go to London with Angela, she insisted on selling that house to meet their expenses. Opposing that idea, he told Koman, "I will not let you sell the house. If, in a year's time, you find that all is well there, you can rent it out. But there is to be no talk of selling it till I am dead" (379). When they had to live in a shanty apartment in London's congested area, he felt disgusted by their residence as a person who had lived in spacious dwellings. Angela also curtailed his freedom by reminding him, "This isn't Shoranur, Koman. This is London. You can't do such things here" (383). Koman thought: "In my little house by the river, I was content. I did not desire anything from life or art. So, who planted the thought in my mind that I wanted more? When did *Kali* creep into me?" (383) He realises that his decision to move to London was a mistake on his part, and he returns to his house, where he experiences freedom, joy, and rootedness.

Sethu was emotionally and mentally shattered when his son, Mani, died, so he frequently visited Koman's house on the riverside. Koman felt that even though several houses were associated with Sethu, he also had a close attachment to it. Nair reveals that some houses are like stations on a long train journey: people spend their lives in various houses and always move on without deepening their roots. For

some, it is impossible to leave their houses, which have become part of their existence, where they can lead a life of comfort and ease. The house gives protection and peace of mind to Koman when he feels desperate and disappointed in life. The feeling of ignominy and mental turpitude is relieved when he returns to his house, where he receives freedom from the curses of life that he experienced in London. He is sure that he can reclaim his former self in his home, for it can give him the much-required solace and inspiration as an artist.

House is a metaphor in *Idris*, as in Nair's other novels, which shows that a house can fill the hearts of individuals due to intimate memories and nostalgic imaginations, whether they are living in it or away from it. The central conflict in this novel lies in the fluidity of experiences related to the house: the innumerable places and spaces of the house can instil varied realisations of emotions in human beings, which cannot be distinguished easily from the bundles of spatial and temporal attachments in stratified mental structures of individuals. The central conflict of *Idris* occurs between those who have a house in their native place and those who do not have any place of security like that of a home. Idris, the protagonist of the novel, is from Dikhil, a place near Somalia, and engaged in trading in various places around the world. To him, displacement was more or less inherited from his father, who had a group of merchants pursuing transnational trade, and he followed in his father's footsteps when he became a grown-up man. The adventure of journeys, the enthrallment of strange lands, and the call to new geographical locations lead him to various places.

Idris abounds with references to houses, recapitulating Nair's notions about houses and their significance in individual and social life. When Baapa Gurukkal asks Idris why he wanders all his life without settling down anywhere, he replies, "To have a home of one's own would necessitate routine and regular hours. How can I sleep?" (49). He reminds Baapa, "His home had been a haven to many a traveller and trader from a distant land" (50). Travelling is his passion, which determines the trajectory of his life. When Kandavar became part of Idris's journeys around Indian coasts, he seemed enthusiastic in the beginning. However, later, he eagerly wished to return to his *tharavad*, where his mother and young sister were waiting for him. "Kandavar had his first glimpse of a ship from the raft. He stared at the floating house that Aabo called 'Kappal'. Kandavar felt a wave of homesickness wash over him like the foam crested waves of the ocean" (155). Again, after many days of journey with Idris, Kandavar lost his spirit for more adventures; he "sat motionless, trailing his fingers in the water." When Idris repeatedly asks him, he opens his mind and confesses that he "can't stop thinking of home" (238). As his home was solace, support, and succour to him, he could not live away from it for long.

Even though Idris was a perennial traveller, he realised the people's attachment to their houses from people who came in contact with him. In Damascus, he came in contact with Margarida, a harlot, whom he asked: "What if I decide to take you away from here?" She told him, "I wouldn't go. This is my home. This is where I belong" (197). Later, Kuttimalu, Thilothamma, and Kandavar also shared the same emotion with him. When the surgeon of the ship *Hercules*, who was on his way to Petapolee, asked Idris where he was going, his reply was evasive and enigmatic. He thought, "Who was he when he was home? For that matter, where

was home for him?" (215). It was astonishing for the man who had always longed to be in his home with his family and could not understand the aimless, anchorless, wandering African's mind. To him:

In the heat of the night, when even the finest cotton clung to his skin, he would close his eyes and imagine his wife and him strolling the wide streets with trees on either side and stepping into the fine townhouse with its white-washed wall and cool stone walls. (216)

He feels sad for Idris as he thinks, "Home was that piece of life, and knowing that it was waiting for him. But this man, what did he have? Not even a plate to call his own" (216). That is the same sentiment many of the characters of this novel express when they are acquainted with Idris. When Golla, an expert in diamond mining, asks his servant to show the way to Idris in Golkonda, he retorts, "You think I can't find the way home?" (305). He told Idris, "It is not about knowing the way home. It's about going to their houses" (305). It indicates how Idris' idea of territorialisation and rootedness is entirely different from that of ordinary people, which also resonates with the writer's untamed wanderlust.

During their journey, Idris and Kandavar docked at Masulipatanam, and they rented a house to stay in because Kandavar was very upset about his long stint on the ship. On the other hand, Idris was discontented as the spirit of wanderlust always determined the trajectories of his life despite his intense longing to live with his son and Kuttimalu. Even though Kandavar always suffered due to his homesickness, Idris thought he would like the journey. But when he told his father, "The sooner we find your diamonds, the sooner we can go home", Idris replied, "If the place we

travel to is just like home, why to bother travelling at all, inan?" (259). Idris shared his philosophy of life, which also unwraps his emotions related to rootedness and home. Idris's response to Saala Pokker's advice, "Enough of this wandering the earth like a homeless nomad, " echoed the same thought (289). When Idris is about to leave Golkonda, Thilothamma tells Kandavar, "Now must tell your father that if he ever wants a place to rest his head, he has a home here. And that I am waiting" (367). However, she reveals her desire and inclination to be part of the wanderer's trajectory if he is willing to settle in her native land and lived spaces; she discerns that she could not change his intense passion for the journey to uncharted territories.

Idris was troubled when he approached Kandavar's home after their long journey because he had to return Kandavar to his mother. A conflict was brewing in his mind between his ardent desire to explore the strange lands and the passions of a family man. He contemplates, "Home? What was he thinking of? How could it be home? Men like him had no home. The world was their home" (371). Even though he feels shattered when Kandavar tells him, "Aabo, when we come to the next *athani*, you must return. I know my way home" (373). He realised, "Kandavar will find his own way home" (375), and he had to return alone as he came. The writer ends the novel by stating, "Kandavar was home" (375). Idris, the wanderer, realises not only the variance of rootedness and rootless wandering but also the pleasure and pains of both territorialisation as well as deterritorialisation.

In *Eating Wasps*, the house is also one of the fundamental issues that triggers conflicts in human relationships. Sreelakshmi, who grew up in her *tharavad* in

Cherpulassery, is always tied to it emotionally and cannot cut off her bonds with it.

She remembers everything in the house:

There was a glass jar in a cupboard in the Vadakkera. The storeroom was filled with mud pots of sun-dried tamarind. From the ceiling hung ripening bananas and giant cucumbers and yams. The cupboard held dried ginger and pepper, and each time it was opened, a rush of spicy sweetness would run up my nostrils. (16)

As a writer, she shares her spatial consciousness and cultural identity through the characters in her fiction. Even after her education in Varanasi, she rarely moves out of her familiar places and spaces; when employed, she stays in a rented house near the college in Palapuram, which is not far from her native place. She has been susceptible to personal and familial problems, and that is the cause of her alienation from family members and relatives who pestered her with criticism of her writings. Due to the pungent criticism of the dear and near ones, the fault lines evolved with her familial and social interaction, which was the main cause of her untimely death. In fact, the incompatible and troubled relationship with her lived spaces and places, in which the house has a significant role, accelerated her decision to take her own life.

Travels

Humans have always been wanderers: they always desire, cherish, and strive for freedom, and travels manifest such freedom. Simon Adams and others point out that Our distant ancestors were nomads for thousands of years before they founded any settlements (10). The life of every individual consists of a collection of real and

metaphorical travels. According to Taylor, “Travel is defined as going from one place to another, usually over some distance, and in many ways, the modern world is defined by people travelling around the world” (2). Thompson attempts to define travel in simple terms, “To travel is to make a journey, a movement through space” (9). Travels are not merely a conscious movement from one place to another but a crossing of man-made borders and lines of authority created by human spatial demarcations. While animals generally occupy a place and live there, humans always try to enlarge the boundaries of their territories. So, human travel manifests in redefining space, place, and locations of engagement related to spatial consciousness and territorial identities. “Humans have travelled ever since Homo sapiens began to walk out of Africa and populate the world” (Taylor 2). The early travels of men and women were in search of either food or shelter or in order to protect themselves from wild animals and inhospitable surroundings. When movements of the human race were restricted after they started agriculture and began a settled life, the nature of their displacements was also largely altered. Taylor observes, “The modern era is differentiated by the number of people who travelled, where and why they travelled and how modes of travel have evolved” (2). In fact, travel also transformed people as traditional ways of engaging with the spaces and places are altered due to advancement in the modes and manner of transportation.

In the earliest known literary works, including oral and folk literature, travels were key elements of plot structure. Casey Blanton observes:

the journey pattern is one of the most persistent forms of all narratives—both fiction and nonfiction. Works as various as the *Odyssey*, *Gilgamesh*, *Moby-*

Dick, and the travel books of Mungo Park, Gertrude Bell, and Jan Morris all follow this ancient pattern: departure, adventure, and return. Yet, these works resonate with a symbolic and psychological truth that goes beyond their compelling narrative surfaces” (2).

In this connection, Rubiés has also pointed out that travelling gods and heroes played a substantial role in the early mythologies and epic poems of a variety of cultures; important themes such as initiation, learning and exile, in which human standards are defined in the face of the world and the unknown, found expression through the metaphor of travelling (7). Literature represents the shifting desires and aspirations of individuals more deeply reconceiving the “theme of self-discovery or, more accurately, the search for a shattered and scattered self that one sees in much modernist literature is itself often expressed in terms of travel” (Blanton 9). Besides, the major characters of such narratives are either ardent travellers or adventurers who have assimilated experiences of passionate journeys throughout their lives. Travels have a significant role in the formulation of human culture as well as the dissemination of cultural heritage in societies that tolerate exogenous and endogenous relationships. Besides, the collective cultures of mankind have evolved through travel. In fact, the story of an individual is the story of travels in which one attempts to cross and recross the spatial and temporal demarcations. The motive to go from one place to another is a common human instinct that makes individuals avid travellers. An individual lives with five senses, but a traveller knows the world with eyes by making all the perceptions of other senses part of the sight.

Mobility is the spirit of travel, which is homologous to the human body and intimate spaces of houses, which are undergoing perpetual transformation.

Robertson and colleagues argue, "Life is a journey, even for the stay-at-homes, and we are all exiles whose return is always deferred" (6). Indeed, the history of mankind is of chronicles of various spatial and temporal displacements. The earlier journeys of human beings in the form of migration and reterritorialisation were in search of locations which could provide food and shelter. Then, the travels of great adventurers and explorations were followed by colonial domination, which paved the way for the desire for geographical and political exploitation and territorial expansion in various parts of the world. The worldwide travels of missionaries were also part of colonial travel history, and they also came to Kerala, beginning a new era in socio-political life. The travels of people as immigrants and refugees worldwide are the prominent mode of displacement marking the present world.

Travel narratives can trace embedded practices and conventions of human societies along with revealing the structures of gendered spaces in domestic and public spheres. It was believed that the construction of roads and tracts for travel was the responsibility of men as they belonged to public space, while the role of women had been limited to domestic space. That is why a man becomes the controller of travel, and the male gaze ordains all travel narratives. History, literature, and travel narratives are marked by the experiences of men and their world. Travelling is one of the prominent themes in Nair's fiction, and it "serves not merely as a motif or theme, but is just as important for plot, structure, and character development" (Kaasa 474). Being an ardent traveller, she has enjoyed travelling

from childhood and has continued her passion for travelling around the world with the intense fascination and curiosity of a child to know more about diverse cultures, lifestyles, ways of living, and spatial experiences.

Nair has infused her passion for travel into many of her characters. She reveals her passion for travels in *Koo Koo Koo Koo Theevandi*, acknowledging that she is a wandering traveller and a solitary adventurer. She does not need any reason to travel. Ever since her school days, she has longed to wander to escape the monotony of everyday life (126). She even undertook solo journeys in public buses without any predetermined destinations to feel the emotions related to the strangeness and awe of such travels. When she grew up, the spirit of travel was strengthened, leading her to become addicted to wanderlust. So, to the writer, travel is both her means and the end of her life: she has drawn not only to the unfathomed bliss of surveying the unexplored wonders of the world but also to move around the world, looking for opportunities to unlock her wanderlust. The writer's main purpose of such travels is to redefine and reinvent herself. In addition, Nair's travels are for enjoyment and to satiate her inner urges to know more about how territorial emplacement forms human consciousness.

She has written two travelogues in Malayalam, *Koo Koo Koo Koo Theevandi* and *Kakke Kakke Koodevide*, in which she has recollected such journeys and shared her experiences, revealing that Nair is an avid traveller who has imbibed a spirit of travelling from childhood and even cherish the memories of her family's odd visits to relatives' houses. She has written many articles and travel narratives in English and Malayalam in various publications, including travel magazines, which

uncovered her inner urge to travel around the world. She has shared her intense fascination for travelling in her novels: some characters share a strong passion for travel, redefining notions of quotidian life; some are travellers and persons destined to be displaced from their native places, and others return to it as they fail to territorialise in foreign and strange lands. The writer has expressed her dreams and desires to travel and savour delightful experiences through them. In short, most of the journeys the writer narrates in her works are coloured by her own experiences, which are presented imaginatively and realistically in the form of discourses emanating from the interiors of characters.

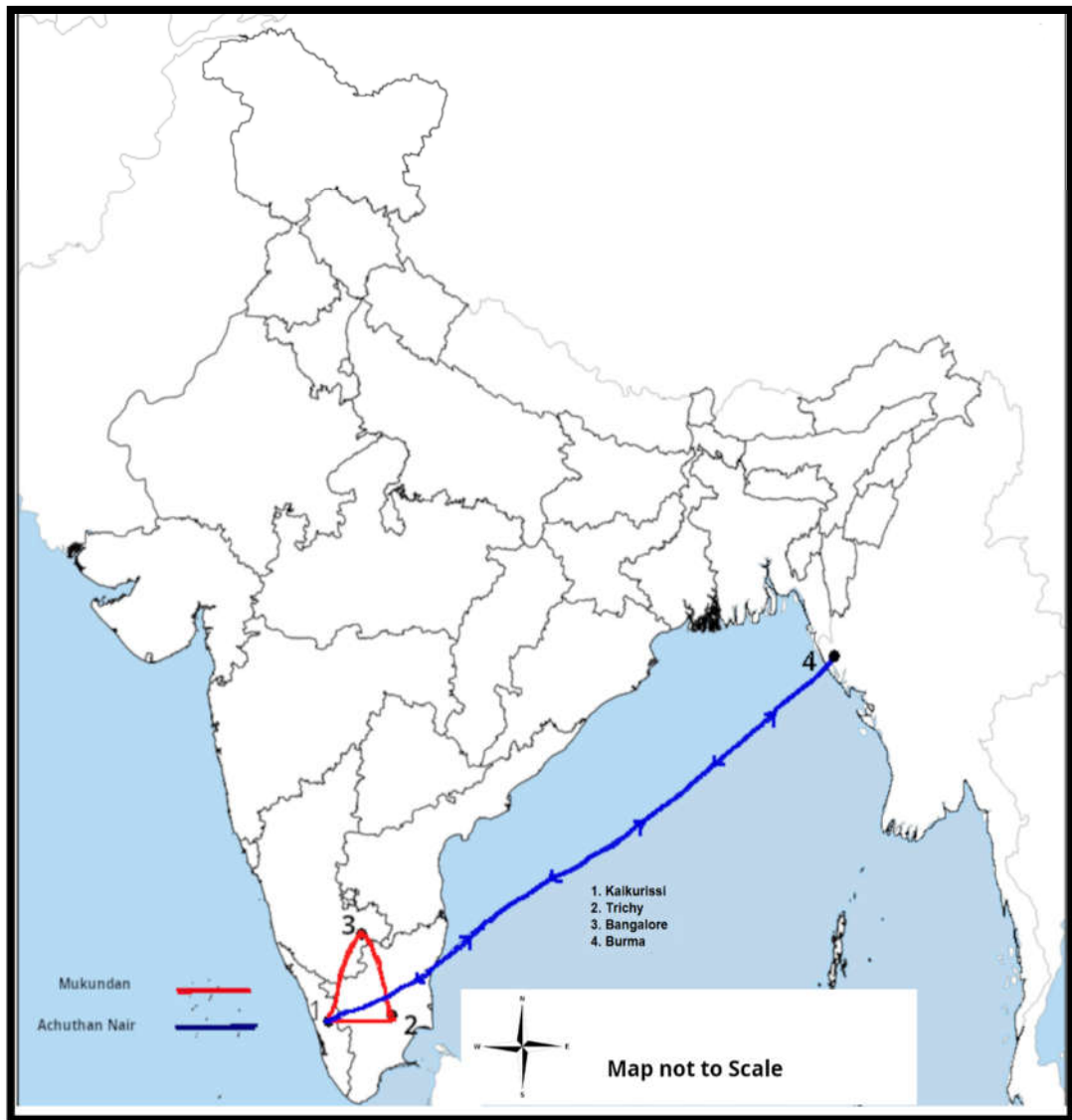


Fig. 4.1 Map of Travels in *The Better Man*

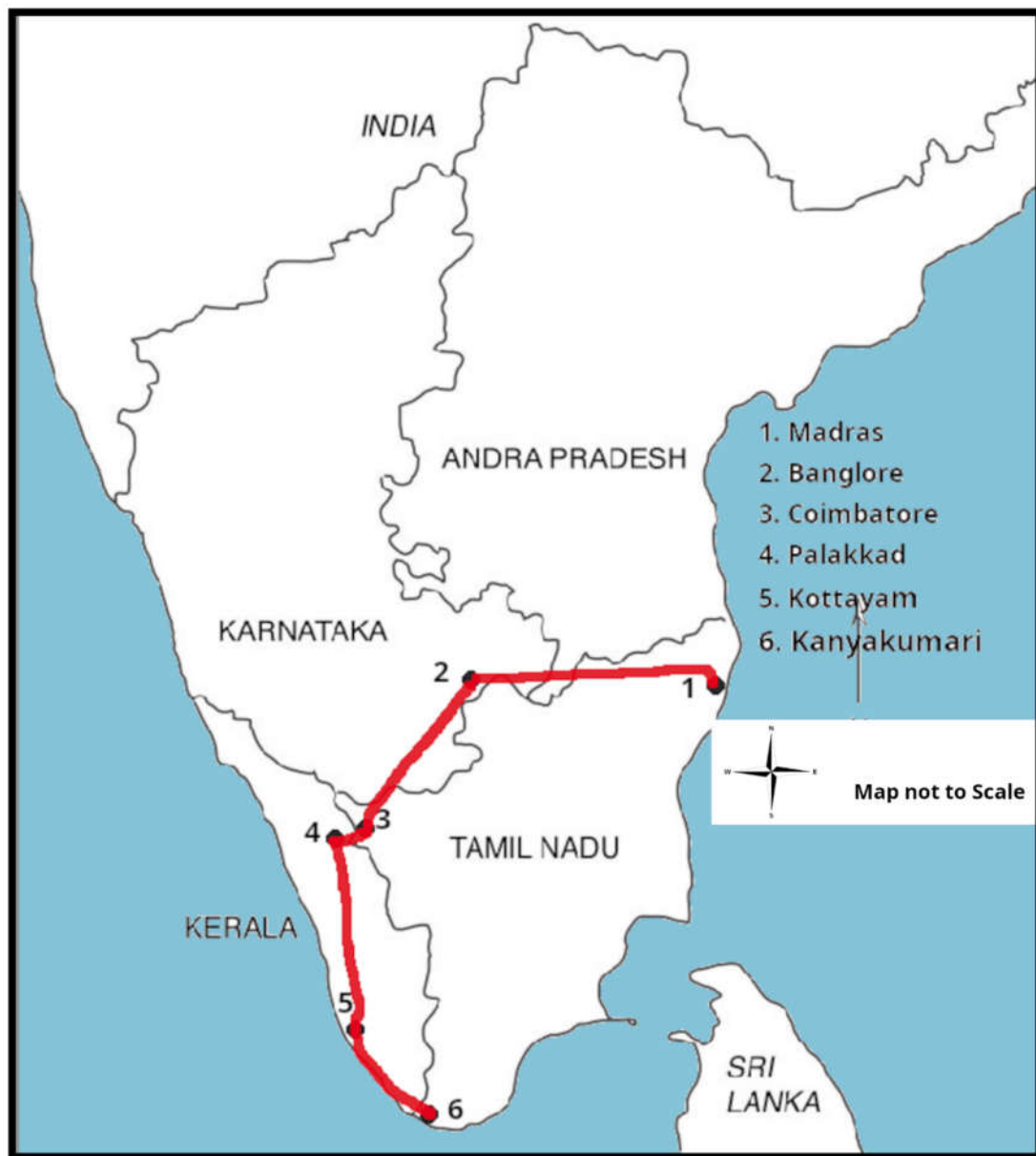


Fig. 4.2 Map of Travels in *Ladies Coupe*

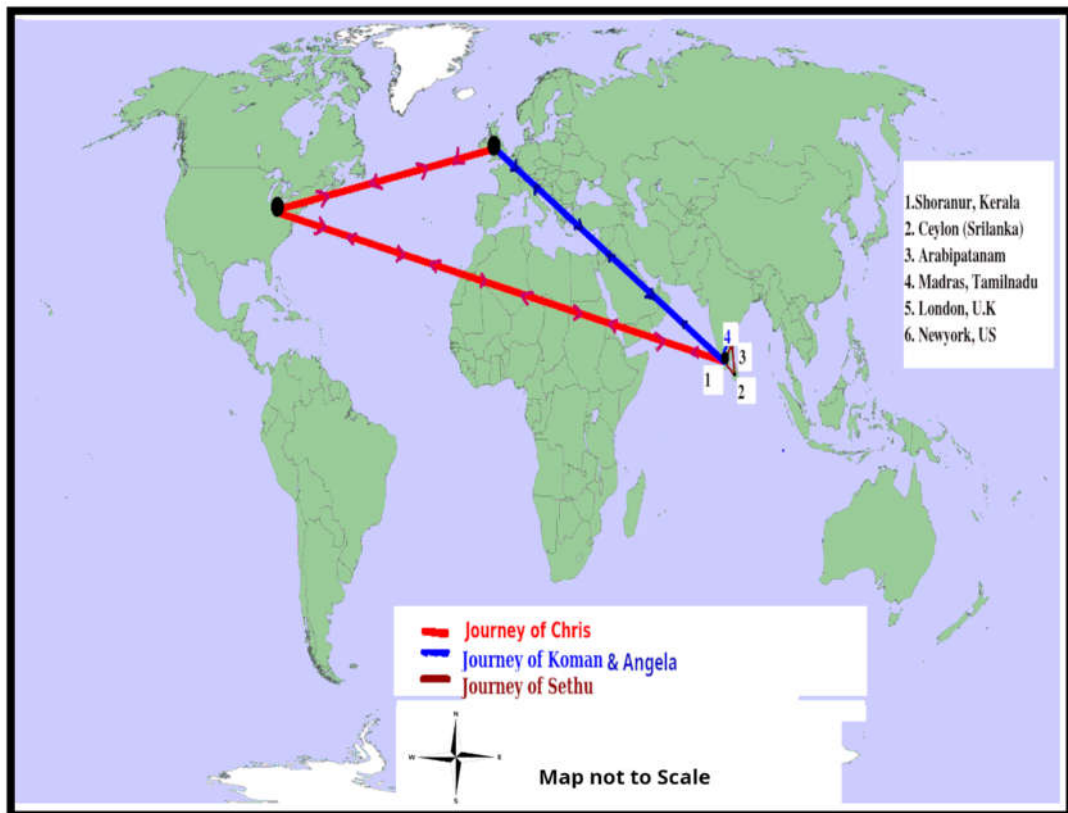


Fig. 4.3 Map of Travels in *Mistress*

Nair's *The Better Man* is the story of journeys in which individuals try to discover the coordinates of their spatial existence (Fig. 4.1). Mukundan's journey from Kaikurissi to Trichy was the first long journey in his life. He was looking for a way to leave his house as he was always at loggerheads with his authoritarian father, and his journey was actually in search of a place of solace away from his father (18). His second long journey was from Trichy to Bangalore, a kind of deterritorialisation from his native place as he spent more than thirty years in Bangalore and visited Kaikurissi to meet his mother until her death. Nevertheless, after his retirement, as there were few options, he returned to Kaikurissi with little enthusiasm (83). During his stay in Bangalore, he was not eager to visit his native place frequently as it was a place which had given him much pain and unhappiness. As he had no other place to spend his life after retirement, he returned to Kaikurissi and he does not make any long journeys afterwards.

Achuthan Nair, Mukundan's father, who had been working in Burma, returned and settled in his native village at the end (89). Though both spent many years away from their native place and had to return to their native village, the father willingly and the son unwillingly. But Mukundan's unwillingness gradually transforms into affinity towards his native village, and he becomes so attached to the native territory that he reclaims whatever he discarded. In fact, their travels are temporary reterritorialisation from their lived spaces, society, and culture, ending with their return to their roots.

The travel to distant and unexplored lands, where men realise the strength of spatial and geographical attachment, is a theme endeared by Nair, which appears in

various patterns in her novels (Fig. 4.3). The main characters of *Mistress* are travellers or those with a strong passion for travel. The novel reflects the writer's passion for travelling and the influence of spatial consciousness on such travellers, which manifests in diverse ways. Chris, a culture enthusiast and travel writer, arrives at Shoranur from America to find an answer to some haunting questions (77). He narrated his stories to Radha, who enthusiastically listened to them and tried to satiate her inner urge to be intimately connected as an individual (249). However, he returns to his own lived space after realising that Koman is not his father. The story of his mother is also not different from his: Angela, who came to Shoranur, also had relationships with various people, and she returned to London as she could not live there for long away from her long-lived territories.

Another important character in the novel, Sethu, spent most of his life away from his native place. However, in his early adolescence, he undertakes his first journey to Madras and gets on the wrong train; a couple on the same train takes him along with them to Ceylon. When he returns to India years later, he makes many trips with Dr. Samuel to Arabipattanam. After his wife Saadiya's suicide, he wanders through many places again, and in one of such journeys, he happens to travel through Kerala and is captivated by his native place, Shoranur. It is the nearest railway station to his house – from where he has begun his journey outside. He enjoys the smells and colours of his native land and is overwhelmed by them. When a boy asked Sethu what was outside their village and what the difference was between the village and the outside world, he replied, "Sometimes I feel it is the same everywhere. Sometimes I think just entering another room in a house is a

different experience" (236). Then, he decides that he will not go anywhere thereafter. He says, "I always wanted to come back to my ancestral land. And this time I decided I would" (234). Finally, he begins a new life in Shoranur, ending a phase of his life consisting of numerous journeys spanning many years, as he can find a place for himself in his native place. Finally, he realises that only the places and spaces of that land can satisfy him. It is the same thing that Mukundan in *The Better Man* learned: he also returned to his native place, Kaikurissi, after many years of wanderings and settled there.

Koman, who was born outside Kerala, follows his father to Shoranur, where he has to learn a new language, culture, customs, and lifestyle. Sethu was with him for everything; his support and love helped him move on and adopt the new spatial identities and cultural consciousness. Besides, his family is also very affable to him. He learns *Kathakali*. When he mastered it, his teacher, called *aashaan*, sent him to Madras, where he worked as a teacher for some time. But he cannot stay there long because he feels unfamiliar and strange. Then, even though he moves to London with Angela, seeking a new beginning, it also turns out to be a tragedy as the unfamiliar surroundings are very much inhospitable to him. He returns to Shoranur as his inability to align with the strange culture and lifestyles of London creates fissures in his relationship with Angela. But the house near the river is his comfort and solace (395). No other place gives him consolation like that place, as the rhythm of Nila has become the rhythm of his life. All the travels in his life, in the end, led to the starting point, Shoranur. Despite his attempts to reterritorialise many times, they all failed as his spatial consciousness was anchored in his ancestral land.

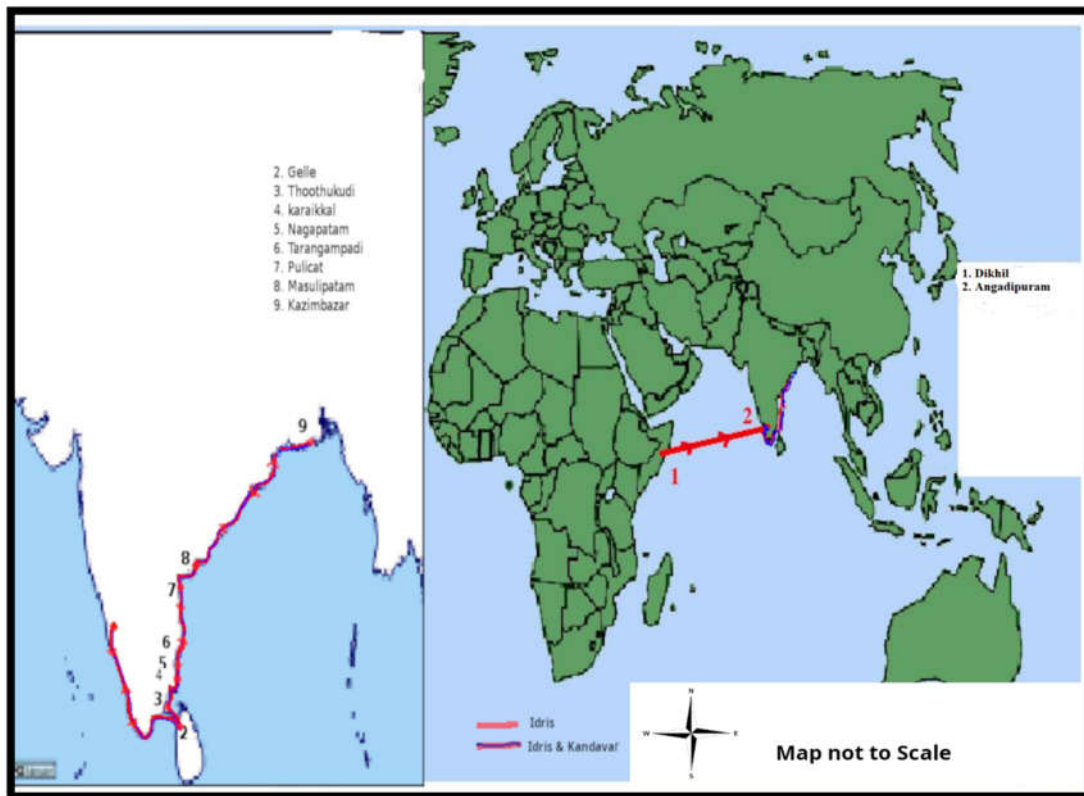


Fig. 4. 4 Map of Travels in *Idris*

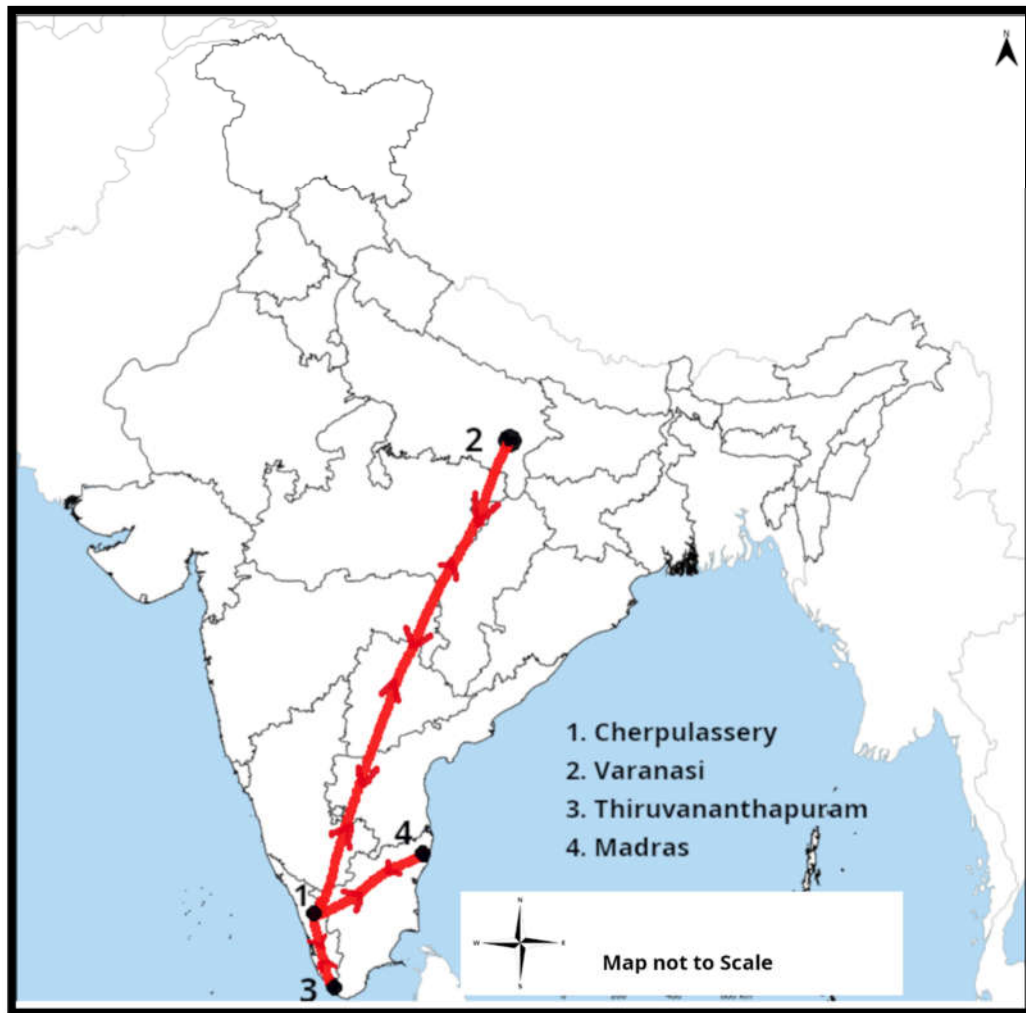


Fig 4.5 Map of Travels in *Eating Wasp*

As discussed elsewhere, the novel *Ladies Coupe* is organised as a train journey from Bangalore to Kanyakumari through Kerala (Fig. 4.2). The main characters are women who get into the Ladies Coupe, the reserved compartment for women, from various stations and narrate their life stories. The train journey is a recurring motif and unites the novel's structure. Six women, without companions, embark on the train from various stations and travel to experience all the pains and pleasures of travelling alone. Despite the uncertainties waiting for them, they value the myriad experiences of such journeys. They have diverse temperaments, their age range varies significantly, and they are from varied socioeconomic backgrounds; they form friendships on the journey, sharing their predicaments and destinies.

Akhila, the protagonist, is always with her family, who has not ventured out for long journeys alone; she plans a trip to Kanyakumari as she feels that she cannot pull together amid the unending demands of her family members, who are always exploiting her. She, who has passed the prime of her youth, understands they are exploiting her unmarried status. She longs "To leave. To go somewhere. Land's End, perhaps. Kanyakumari" (3). When she reached the cantonment railway station,

She stood at the entrance of the railway station, skimming the faces in the crowd. I am here, her heart galloped. A tiny foam-edged wave of pure emotion rushed through her. She felt her lips stretch into a smile. I am part of a ripple that will escape this city tonight. I will board a train and allow it to lead me into a horizon I will not recognize. (10)

In short, she searches for a new world, a world of her own, and she succeeds in the end. She thinks, "I am not the Akhila who boarded this train last night, she thought"

(167). That journey, which she planned alone, is the test of her self-reliance and inner urge for freedom, and it is not only for a space of her own but also for a world of unfettered freedom, which turns out to be her declaration of independence as well as her reclamation of her identity.

Idris is a story about an ardent traveller who began his journeys in his early childhood along with his father, a merchant adventurer from Dikhil, a place between Abyssinia and Somalia and now part of Djibouti (Fig. 4.4). He introduces himself: "My name is Idris. Idris Maymoon Samataar Guleed. Previously of Dikhil. Now an eternal traveller seeking the measure of earth and man" (19). The experiences in his childhood encouraged him to travel around the world. Idris is a great traveller whose passion for travel is unparalleled and who is more than an adventurer seeking polysensorial experiences in strange and unexplored lands. So, his journey from Africa to various parts of the world is not only for business but to experience the unseen wonders of unexplored lands. He visited Kerala twice: he visited Malabar the first time along with a group of merchants on their way to the Vaniyamkulam Chanda, and his second visit was mainly in search of his lost love. Despite his willingness to locate in the land of his dear ones, they are averse to that proposition as they are not ready to uproot their identities in the orthodox society.

Idris is an individual who represents wanderlust incarnated. It seems that both the writer and the character share an intense passion for travel and have travelled a lot in their childhood. Idris begins his long travels with his father, a daring merchant adventurer who led a group of traders to many strange and unfamiliar lands. Those early wanderings have structured his passion for journeys all

over the world. Nair also travelled to distant places in her childhood due to her father's job. She happened to watch a movie titled *Ulakam Chuttum Valiban* by the veteran Tamil actor MGR, and she confessed that it had influenced her to a great extent to be an ardent traveller, and her real love for travel began from there (*Koo Koo Koo Theevandi* 68). Idris has always been on the move. The journey of Idris and his father had to be postponed due to the accident that occurred to Idris. Yet, he continues his journeys as his passion for travel led him to many strange and unknown lands of unimaginable wonders. One such desire also made him land in Kerala. It attracts him very much. When Idris took Kandavar with him for his journeys around Southeast coasts, he assured Chandu Nair, the Karanavar of Kuttimalu's *tharavad*, "He will be more than a child when he returns. That is what going away from home does" (149). Many people like Sala Pokkar, Hussain, and many unnamed travellers have been part of Idris' journeys. Even he can take his son, Kandavar, in some of his pursuits. Though they are interested in travel, their attachment to their native place is more than their passion for journeys.

Hussain, one of Idris's companions, is from Petapolee in Dabhol, which was in ruins, and nothing is left of its grandeur. Nevertheless, he likes that place so much, and he tells Idris, "Dabhol is a beautiful place, with mountains, with mountains and rivers and greenery everywhere. I almost died of shock when I arrived here. One day, soon, I am going back to Dabhol" (227). In other words, although he follows Idris in his endeavours as a faithful supporter and friend, he reveals his happiness lies in his native land. Even after travelling around south India, Kandavar cherishes his native place and longs to return to it, which he finally does.

Nair's *Eating Wasps* interprets travel as freedom from everything. The main characters, except the spirit of Sreelakshmi, hail from varied places, to Near-the-Nila resort, Shoranur, for a short stay. Among them, a few have travelled from Bangalore to Shoranur, and some have even lived abroad. They have to travel not only due to their inner urge but also because their family demands it. Sreelakshmi, residing in Palapuram, has gone to Thiruvananthapuram for her academic purpose and Madras on a secret trip with her soulmate, Markose (Fig. 4.5). Even though both are utter failures, she can overcome them as she transforms desperation into writing. As an individual, she is not always confined to her native place; even after getting a job in a college at Palapuram, she almost spent her time there. She completed her post-graduation in Varanasi. However, all her journeys are presented as circular, and she returns to her native place at the end. Sreelakshmi enjoyed her journey to Madras with Markose, which awakened her fascination for train journeys again. Her father, a railway employee who always enjoyed and was thrilled with his job, instilled in her a passion for train journeys.

Urvashi, a journalist and a frequent traveller from Bangalore to the Near-the-Nila resort in Shoranur, has also visited several foreign countries. She visits the resort to take a break from her hectic life in Bangalore. Najma, also from Bangalore, reaches Shoranur as she is compelled to do so due to an unfortunate tragedy. As a victim of an acid attack, she failed to get a job in her home town and with Urvashi's help, she got a job in the resort. She is not actually obsessed with travel, as her only wish was to get a job as a teacher in order to support her mother, which failed miserably because of the unfortunate incident. Other characters of this novel arrive

at the resort at Shoranur, and it becomes the place where all of them come together, even though their lives are not entwined anywhere else.

Nair is passionate about train journeys; many of her characters also share it. Nair recollects childhood journeys from Vallapuzha to Shoranur on the Nilambur train to her mother's house (*Koo Koo Koo Koo Theevandi* 16). In one of her travel articles, she mentions, "I have a train from the beginning of my memory. Both of my grandparents were employed in railway. And so, my childhood was filled with stories of trains and those wonderful men who tamed them" (9). Nair believes that Trains are unpredictable as anything can happen on them: rekindling lost friendships, enjoying a good meal, getting a restful sleep, forgetting everything, experiencing a murder, hearing a confession, facing an attack, starting a new love, or even getting married (11). Nair's passion for travel by train is shared by many of her characters, Akhila (*Ladies Coupe*), Sethu (*The Better Man*), and Sreelakshmi (*Eating Wasps*). The characters of *Ladies Coupe* meet on a train journey from Bangalore to Kanyakumari, and the narrative trajectories develop in it.

The train is a symbol of the human journey. For instance, in *Ladies Coupe*, the train is one of the narrative places, and it has been embedded in the narrative structure. In this novel, many female characters arrive, meet, form friendships, and depart. Akhila feels "Ladies Coupe as a mother: How effortless it was to remember when the coupé cradled and rocked, a mother that stroked the brow and said: Child, think on. Child, dream on" (75). The train becomes a possibility for not only the protagonist but also for the writer. Even though they have many differences, the five women who get on the train share their lives and open up their minds to free

themselves from the shackles of familial and social oppressions. In *Koo Koo Koo Koo Theevandi*, Nair Expresses her deep passion and emotional attachment to train journeys and compares them to love. (9). In the same book, she reveals, “Those train days have opened several new senses which we have not ordinarily” (10). She eagerly wishes, “When I can see a train which travels through a world created by dreams?” (13). Akhila shares how she experiences a train journey in *Ladies Coupe*:

Akhila has often dreamt of this. Of being part of such a wave that pours into compart-ments and settles on seats, stowing baggage and clutching tickets. Of sitting with her back to her world, with her eyes looking ahead. Of leaving. Of running away. Of pulling out. Of a train that trundles, truckles and troops into a station. Akhila is seated by a window. Everything but the train is still. The moon hangs at her shoulder and rides with her. She travels through a gallery of nightscapes, each framed by a window. A light in a house. A family huddled around a fire. A howling dog. A distant town. Black oily waters of a river. A menacing hill. A curling road. A railway- crossing with the streetlight glinting on the glasses of a man on a static scooter, hands dangling at his side, the heel on the ground, head cocked, watching, waiting for the train to hurtle past. (5)

She has included many detailed descriptions of train journeys in her fiction and nonfiction, which also expresses her own obsession with such journeys.

Nair depicts various types of travels in her novels: some of the travels are attempts of individuals, such as Idris, to go beyond the limits of human capabilities, some are an assorted whole of numerous journeys of individuals, such as Kuttimalu,

and Thilothamma, in an insignificant location, and others are travels of individuals destined to be displaced, but reterritorialised later. Nair's novels are about those who depart from home and find places they think of as their own but later return to the place where they began their journey or to their home. In *Chembaka Puvinte Perulla Veetil*, Nair confesses that even though travels always enchant her, she gets energy from her house when she sets out to unknown and strange places without knowing which places are waiting for her (46). Travels also become adventures for her. Her writings also share an interest in local foods and tastes she has experienced in her journeys. She states that she marks her travels through tastes (105). In other words, she is trying to plot places and spaces in her culinary cartography. She depicts various types of travels in her novels: some are attempts by individuals, such as Idris, to go beyond the limits of human capabilities; some are an assortment of numerous journeys by individuals, such as Kuttimalu and Thilothamma, in insignificant locations; and others are travels of individuals destined to be displaced, but later reterritorialised.

The title of Nair's first book of travel narratives, *Koo Koo Koo Koo Theevandi*, is taken from the first line of a popular Malayalam folk song that imitates the sound of the train running by a steam engine. The word *theevandi* in Malayalam means train itself. She shares the awe and wonders she had about train in her childhood. She wrote about the wonderful experience of the Vallapuzha - Shoranur railway journey. She recollects that even though it was a very short distance journey, it was planned days before. These journeys from Mundakkottukurissi have not only led Nair to be a great traveller and writer but also gravitated her into her own house and native place. She reveals that she learned a lot

from her travels, and as she matured, her concept of travel evolved, her mind grew slowly, and her senses flowered in the new encounters. Her awareness that travel is the medicine for her inherent restlessness and she cannot tolerate anything hindering her journeys transforms her into an unconventional traveller who cherishes new experiences, thoughts, and worlds. Besides, she acknowledges that her creativity is profoundly rooted in travel (126). Nair admits that her untamed spirit of travels determines the course of her life and marks boundaries in her spatial consciousness. Besides, she thinks that even her creativity is an offshoot of her wanderlust, which loses its vigour whenever she stops travelling.

As the writer grew up, the spirit of travel from Mundakkottukurissi transformed into an intense desire for more journeys and a passion for writing. Travels inspire our senses, leading us to strange lands, and when journeys to distant lands become impossible, we attempt to find the hitherto unknown strangeness, enchantment, and exquisiteness of our neighbourhoods. The writer has expressed the true nature of her spirit of travel in her *Koo Koo Koo Koo Theevandi*, describing herself as a wandering and lonely traveller who needs no specific reason for travelling. In her journeys, she states that the destinations or goals are irrelevant; what matters is getting away from the boredom of daily life (26). The self-revelation of the writer attests that her spirit of travel and uncontrollable passion for spatial as well as territorial mobilities, which are also shared by many of her characters, such as Idris (*Idris*), Sethu and Chris (*Mistress*), Akhila (*Ladies Coupe*), Achuthan Nair (*The Better Man*), and Sreelakshmi (*Eating Wasps*).

The spatial practices in the form of travels, displacements, and territorialisation are intended either to resist or protect one's communal consciousness associated with territories. They also reveal the urge of the inner conscience of individuals to wander through strange, unfamiliar, and unseen territories as an attempt to be internally displaced as a mode of resistance to the force of place attachment emanating from one's own familiar geospaces, including native places and lived spaces. Journeys materialise the inherent rootedness of human beings; most journeys consist of a beginning, movement, and an end, and then they complete the cycle by returning to the point of beginning, which would almost be their locations such as lived spaces or native places where they are rooted. In other words, the rootedness and deterritorialisation function as modes of spatial practices satiating the wanderlust. There are different modes of displacement, mostly for safety, security, and asylum, when individually and culturally, people get deterritorialised. Though the paths of displacement may not be circular, people crave to be reterritorialised to their homelands.

Mapping Rootedness and Spatial Consciousness

Territories define human existence because both rootedness and displacement are determined by human affixation to territories. As places and spaces are various manifestations of spatial formations evolved from geographical locations, individual realisation of territorial interactions produces novel arrays of spatial experiences. Territorial attachment may have divergent materialisations in which the human attachment to houses and territories appears in spatial boundedness. The attachment to lived and native territories reveal basic human

rootedness related to natural and built environments, the socio-political ecosystem, and cultural patterns. In other words, they reflect the macro spatial relationships of individuals as spatial differentiation is apparent in geographical demarcations in both real and fictional representations. The territories comprise various spaces, producing many significations that may overlap, juxtapose, or stand independently concerning the overwhelming territorial realisations.

The characters in Nair's novels exhibit varied levels of place attachment and spatial affixation due to their interactions with spaces and places in which native and lived territories formulate deep spatial embeddedness in human beings. The characters such as Parvathy amma, Mukundan, and Achuthan Nair in *The Better Man*; Koman and Sethu in *Mistress*; Kuttimalu, Kandavar, and Sala Pokkar in *Idris*, and Sreelakshmi in *Eating Wasps* experience such spatial attachment, even though their spatial densities are varied. Here, Nair is exemplifying that spatial relations are one of the most significant forces determining human disposition and interactions. Above all, geospace can dictate the human trajectories involving deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation owing to their polysensorial influences.

In geographical identities, houses are more significant in influencing spaces and places in their polysensorial experiences. A house is a place which encases diverse real and fictional experiences of individuals in which human consciousness is structured with native terrains, homeland, or lived spaces. They weave spatial realisations ranging from intimate to hostile, whereas the houses are a territory of a limited extent but produce deep territorial experiences. Houses, one of the core locations in geospaces where the individual spatial coordinates are plotted, are

mostly locations of intimate experiences and spaces of personal memories. The territorial attachments are generally more prominent when the houses are in locations of core zones than in other locations due to the intensity of spatial interactions in the organisation of intimate spaces. Nair's characters, such as Parvathy Amma and Mukundan in *The Better Man*, Koman and Chris in *Mistress*, Kuttimalu and Kandavar in *Idris*, and Sreelakshmi in *Eating Wasps* are always engrossed with their houses, and they also share intimate territorial attachments. She affirms that cultural identity and communal engagement establish a strong and resilient human attachment to their dwellings, and they can exert great influence on the inhabitants through their multilayered and polysensorial interactions.

The houses and native places vary in their range in geographical subjectivities. The intensity of individual attachment with them may also differ related to the degrees of temporal fixities of the locations, especially the duration by which they invigorate their spatial consciousness in those territories. Likely, travel is a spatial process in which territories are experienced and imagined through polysensorial interactions emanating from spatial patterns and geographical structures. The houses assign primary identity, whereas the native or lived territories approximate experiences that recreate the territorial emplacement, revitalising the intimate arrays of individual spatial consciousness. Nair's characters corroborate that the attachment to houses is, to a great extent, more potent than the territories, but both can influence human spatial figurations and social interactions. In *Idris*, Kuttimalu and her son, Kandavar, reaffirm that the significance of home is greater than that of others; Thilothamma also shares a strong bond with her house.

Mukundan, who hated his tharavad once, later realises its pivotal role in his trajectories in *The Better Man*, Koman and Sethu also resolidify their bonds with their houses in *Mistress*, and Akhila realises the relevance of the house in reclaiming one's own independence and identity in *Ladies Coupe*. In short, Nair underscores that houses are a formidable stabilising force in human affixation to territories and locations.

The spatial practices in the form of travels, displacements, and territorialisation are intended either to resist or protect one's own communal consciousness associated with territories and they also reveal the urge of individuals to wander through strange, unfamiliar, and unseen territories. The latter attempts to be internally displaced as a mode of resistance to the force of place attachment emanating from one's own familiar geospaces, including native places and lived spaces. Journeys materialise the inherent rootedness of human beings; most journeys consist of a beginning, movement, and an end, and then they complete the cycle by returning to the point of beginning, which would almost be locations such as lived spaces or native places where they are rooted. In other words, the rootedness and deterritorialization function as modes of spatial practices satiating the wanderlust. There are different modes of displacement, mostly for safety, security, and asylum, when individually or culturally, people get deterritorialised and though the paths of displacement may not be circular, people crave to be reterritorialised to their homelands.

The spatial demarcations in Nair's novels depict the inextricable connection of individuals with territories, such as native places and lived spaces. She illustrates

that reconfiguration of territorial affinities in the form of reterritorialisation occurs in convoluted spatiotemporal interactions in individual and communal experiences, which also unwraps fundamental patterns of place attachment with their native and lived regions, largely fomenting their spatial consciousness and cultural identities. In *Mistress*, Sethu, Koman, Chris, and Angela undergo deterritorialisation; still, they return to their locations where their identities are primarily rooted in order to reclaim them. The trajectories of Mukundan in *The Better Man* and Radha in *Mistress* also follow such a course, illustrating the failures of individuals in forming their own spaces in locations which are far away from the places of spatial densities and nostalgic experiences. Kuttimalu, Kandavar, Thilothamma, Sala Pokker, and Hussain reveal their strong bonds with their lived spaces in *Idris*. In short, Nair's novels illustrate how human affinity towards places and spaces infuses individual spatial consciousness and determines their notions of spatial and geographical interactions.

As a spatial practice, travel reveals the conflict between rootedness and reterritorialisation of individuals, it shows the complex human engagement with space, place, and culture, and how individuals experience varied spatial realisations. Nair's novels have characters who are symbols of perennial wanderlust and who always desire to wander around the world such as Idris in *Idris*; and characters such as Koman and Sethu in *Mistress*; Mukundan and Achuthan Nair in *The Better Man*; and Sreelakshmi in *Eating Wasps* who encounter spatial mobilities in their own way, without reterritorialising anywhere else. In *Mistress* Kris a travel writer, sees travel as a way of self-exploration and discovery, but he does not like to reterritorialise

anywhere than his lived spaces where he desires to anchor his identities. Sethu also travels for long, but finally he realises that spatial embeddedness can bring back individuals to their roots.

As territories and human beings are closely related to each other, they have the potential to mould individual attitudes and behaviours. In addition, they influence the formulation of the trajectories of individuals, which is prominently evident in the case of homelands and lived spaces. The relation with territories in the forms of place attachment, place satisfaction, and nostalgia condition individual spatial consciousness by infusing the spirit of the place into the multiple arrays of spatial identities situated in the core layers of its textures. The native place, homeland, and lived space are places with coordinates which fix the temporal and spatial patterns, and however, they are generally located in broader territories; their influence may be the same irrespective of spatial densities associated with it. Furthermore, the various territorial assemblages, such as history, culture, politics, and ideology, reinforce the territorial association, producing complementary layers within the human consciousness.

Chapter 5

Spatial Consciousness and Cultural Identity in Anita Nair's Novels

“Does the world really know what Kerala is all about? Only if you have lived here will you understand”, writes Anita Nair in her *Where the Rain is Born: Writings about Kerala* (ix). In fact, the writer is trying to reveal the varied facets of Kerala: its infinite wonders, mysterious and enigmatic past, and fascinating as well as enthralling cultural patterns, which are either hitherto unknown or only partially known and which are experienced or imagined in the writings of various writers. It seems she is trying to reflect them more intensely in her fictional as well as non-fictional works: she has tried to present the evolution of the history and culture of Kerala from the beginning to the present in her novels, she meditates on the spatial identities that evolved from her real as well as fictional encounters with various landscapes, locations, and territories in her poems, and she unwraps the varied trials of Kerala as a land of imagination and memory from time immemorial in her travel writings. Furthermore, she attempts to bring out complex and multiple layers of the territory to reveal her attachment to the land, including diverse places, spaces, and cultural identities embedded in the interiors of her spatial consciousness.

Evidently, Nair's novels are cultural ensembles of Kerala as they encompass all elements of Kerala culture, such as beliefs, customs, conventions, habits, myths, and legends, and they also express social behaviours, ethnic practices, and distinctive cultural discourses. She portrays the visible and invisible elements of the cultural space of Kerala in her novels. She has added the distinctive geosymbols of the territory, which emanate emotions and fervour of distinctive cultural experience in her narratives, along with embedded geographic as well as temporal identities.

Cultural space is one of the layers of spatial structure that can exert its influence when it is socially and culturally connected to the territory. She has created “a geosymbolic space laden with emotions and meaning; in its strongest expression, it becomes a sanctuary-like territory, that is to say, a space of communion with an ensemble of signs and values” (Bonnemaison et al. 47). Cultural space is clearly networked by social groups, identities, and hierarchy. It is a ‘space or community which has its own culture. In other words, the configuration of community constructs meanings of various places. Martin and Nakayama think, “The cultural space may be physical or metaphorical” (295). It integrates varied types of visible and invisible things, ideas, and institutions, which are the cardinal notions of cultural practices. They are places influenced by cultural practices – the language spoken, identities enacted, rituals performed – and often change as new people move in and out of these spaces (295). She has also included other constituents that create the cultural spaces: religious practices, food, and social networks. Individual identities are formally made by the interaction of temporal and spatial structures. As the cultural space is prominently spatial, it reflects everchanging and dynamic relations within the networks of space, place, and landscapes and their influence on human experience in everyday life.

Culture is “a whole way of life; material, intellectual and spiritual” (Williams, *Culture and Society* xiv) and it is the collective deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving (Samovar et al. 22 - 40; Duranti 23). It is also a

pattern of codes, customs, beliefs, and behaviours that exist in every society, which is rooted in multiple structures of local, national, and universal realisations forming the identity of that territory. Kroeber et al. have pointed out:

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action. (181)

By far, culture is a product of the continual selection and ordering of segments of patterns that include traits as well as ideologies latent in the customs and traditions of territorial communities. Alfred L. Kroeber and others further elaborate on the idea as:

Part of culture consists in norms for or standards of behaviour. Still, another part consists in ideologies justifying or rationalizing certain selected ways of behaviour. Finally, every culture includes broad general principles of selectivity and ordering ("highest common factors") in terms of which patterns of and for and about behaviour in very varied areas of culture content are reducible to parsimonious generalization. (189)

The patterns may be simple or complex depending on the signs, values, and structures involved. The interaction of various types of geographical and spatial

patterns constructs the basic textures of a society. Based on the underlying factors, they form simple and complex patterns.

The simplest patterns are the explicit and more or less objective patterns of behaviour expressed in customs of dress, diet, work, and salutation, and in artefacts. Then there are the more complex patterns underlying social, political, and economic organization and the systems of religion, language, law, philosophy, science, and the arts. (Sills 529)

In this connection, William A. Haviland and others opine, “Culture is the common denominator that makes the actions of individuals intelligible to the other members of society” (151). It has a powerful influence on all aspects of human behaviour as the patterns of culture can shape human trajectories and imagination that form ethnic and national identities. Bhabha attests, “Cultures are never unitary in themselves nor simply dualistic in the relation of Self to Other” (52). Moreover, it is a social inheritance that connects spatial interactions in which individuals modify their cultural identity and spatial consciousness. Benedict clarifies:

The life history of the individual is first and foremost an accommodation to the patterns and standards traditionally handed down in his community. From the moment of his birth the customs into which he is born shape his experience and behavior. By the time he can talk, he is the little creature of his culture, and by the time he is grown and able to take part in its activities, its habits are his habits, its beliefs his beliefs, its impossibilities his impossibilities. Every child that is born into his group will share them with him, and no child born into the opposite side of the globe can ever achieve the thousandth part. (172)

Nair has depicted the distinctive patterns of Kerala in the cultural space of her novels. Both the simple as well as complex patterns are evident in the sociocultural representations of the territorial demarcations. The texture of the cultural space is organised by various elements such as codes, customs, values, signs, and symbols, which are integral parts of territories. She has ordained intricate patterns by integrating the great and little traditions emanating from geographical and spatial networks. The social organisation produces the cultural assemblages consisting of core and peripheral heterogenetic features prevalent in territorial communities in her novels. The patterns, structures, heterogeneous assemblages, and embedded textures are woven into the cultural consciousness of Nair's characters. In short, culture, both as a set of patterns and organisation of social traits and behaviour, is embodied in her narratives.

Nair portrays prominent festivals, art forms, and cultural practices of Kerala, such as *Kathakali*, *Mohiniyattam*, *Kalaripayattu*, *Vallom Kali*, *Mamangam*, and *Onam*, in her novels. Her fiction acknowledges that "The novel is for us a great anthropological force, which has turned reading into a pleasure and redefined the sense of reality, the meaning of individual existence, the perception of time and of language" (Moretti ix). Besides, she has also intermixed the historical memories of Kerala in her novels, in which she attempts to bring light to some of the darkest periods of Kerala's history. In other words, for readers who are not very familiar with Kerala, her novels are assemblages of narratives of cultural spaces in endless diversities. Nair attempts to portray Kerala as 'God's own country' to the outside world. She has not merely depicted the evolution of various distinctive cultural patterns but also included all fundamental ideas, norms, and values related to

Kerala's history and culture. Furthermore, she has also revealed her fascination for Kerala through her articles, travelogues, and other non-fictional works.

As the spatial structures and territorial cultures are inextricably connected, the spatial textures could assign distinct characteristics to places through the variant forces of interactions evolved from diverse socio-cultural exchanges. Although territorial cultures are always subject to dynamic alterations, in Kerala, the core patterns exist unaffected because similarity and variance in the great traditions of the land always coexist in cultural interactions. Sills asserts, "Society and culture are mutually dependent, and social relations are carried or exemplified only in cultural behaviour" (533). The peculiar position of the land is more or less exposed to the physical, locational, and social forces that produce new spaces through the cross mobilities of evolutionary forces. In short, the territory can essentially decide the deep structures of cultural experience as identity is integrally connected to places and spaces.

The culture of a society is an aggregate of various representations of the social, political, and biological systems of its territory, and it is deeply intertwined with the inextricable relationships of territories and individuals, reflected mainly in cultural consciousness and spatial identities that evolved from individual and collective spatial interactions. Hirsch and O'hanlon indicate, "Individual identity is so closely associated with the landscape that the one can act on the other" (198). It also can modify even the borders of geographical coordinates through the diffusion of identities. The cultural consciousness locates, alters, and territorialises for human realisation and representation through the polyvalent relationship with territories.

Kerala's culture, an ensemble of various assemblages such as art forms, social practices, festivals, and celebrations, also manifests as territorial and spatial identities. There are art forms such as *Kathakali*¹ and *Mohiniyattam*², martial arts like *Kalaripayattu*³, historical narratives about *Mamangam*⁴, *Chaverpada*⁵, practices like *Marumakkathayam*⁶ and *Sambantham*⁷ and institutions like Kerala Kalamandalam, festivals like *Onam*⁸, *Vallom Kali*⁹, and *Pooram*¹⁰, unique characteristics of Malayalam language and literature as salient features of Kerala culture. Food and cuisine, along with its varied sensations and gastronomic sensibilities, produce a seminal pattern of culture that distinguishes the polysensoriality of culinary culture. Festivals and festivities, which exhibit the visual splendour and the cultural panorama of Kerala, stand apart in their spatial and geographical identities.

¹ *Kathakali*, one of Kerala's great classical dance dramas, is an art form that necessitated years of training, hard work, and dedication. It has become a prominent cultural form popularised and celebrated in various parts of the world along with the growth of tourism.

² *Mohiniyattam*, a well-known classical dance, originated in Kerala. The term *Mohiniyattam* signifies the dance of Mohini or the dance of enchantress. Mohini is also regarded as the female incarnation of the Hindu God Vishnu.

³ *Kalaripayattu* is a martial art form developed in ancient Kerala which was used in battlefields.

⁴ *Mamangam* is an ancient festival organised in Thirunnavaya on the bank of the river Bharathapuzha once in twelve years.

⁵ *Chaverpada* is a group of warriors who behaved like a suicide squad of Valluvakonathiri, the ruler of Valluvanad, who planned to recapture his authority over the *Mamangam* festival from Zamorin of Calicut.

⁶ *Marumakkathayam* is the matrilineal system of inheritance prevalent among some sections of people, such as Nairs in Kerala.

⁷ *Sambantham* is an informal type of marriage that existed among the upper-class men, such as the Namboothiri community, and the lower-class women belonging to Nair and allied communities.

⁸ *Onam* is an important festival of Kerala which is celebrated in the Malayalam month of *Chingam*. This ten-day festival is also considered a harvest festival.

⁹ *Vallom Kali* is a boat racing competition in which long snake-like boats participate.

¹⁰ *Pooram* is a festival celebrated in temples of Kerala, especially in north Kerala.



Figure 5.1 Cultural Map of Kerala

Physical Space: Land, Climate, Environment

The landscapes of Kerala have diffused unique characteristics into its socio-cultural structures, which have a very significant role in the evolution of regional and subregional cultures, evidently, in diverse socio-political manifestations.

Namboothiri acknowledges that the distinctive nature of the landscape of Kerala has determined its history and culture (*Nattu Vazhikal* 3). The famous historian Menon, who also held the same opinion in his *A Survey of Kerala History*, observed:

The peculiar geographical position of Kerala in the southernmost part of the Indian peninsula, separated from the rest of the country by the natural barrier of western ghats and the rest of the world by the high seas, has helped the people of the land to develop a culture marked by the virtues of unity and cohesion in every sphere of life and activity. Its insularity also enabled Kerala from the very beginning of its history to develop its own outlook and way of life, art and architecture, language and literature, and economic and social institutions, which despite some similitude with those in other parts of India, have retained their own distinctive character to this day. (9)

The spatial consciousness and cultural identity of Kerala are very much apparent in Nair's novels, mostly through her characters, who have imbibed the spirit of the territory and revealed their spatial bonding in their interactions.

“Every socio-cultural system is affected by its terrestrial and celestial environment” (Sills 548). Due to the spatial interactions in territorial subjectivities, spaces and places could formulate and instil varied traits in social structures and cultural patterns. They also produce interminable spatial consciousness along with

the arrays of social experiences in the inhabitants. In this connection, Jackson points out:

A landscape should establish bonds between people, the bond of language, of manners, of the same kind of work and leisure, and above all, a landscape should contain the kind of spatial organisation which fosters such experiences and relationships; spaces for coming together, to celebrate, spaces for solitude, spaces that never change and are always as memory depicted them. These are some of the characteristics that give a landscape its uniqueness, that gives it style. These are what make us recall it with emotion. (16-17)

Undoubtedly, the spaces and places generate polysensorial emotions in individuals due to their relationships with various territorial structures, which revitalize personal and communal interactions. Thus, the topophilic orientation of people leads to new spatial organisation focussing on the historical and cultural significance of human spatiality of everyday life.

Nair's *The Better Man* depicts a typical Kerala village, Kaikurissi, which seems to be a fictional version of Mundakkottukurissi, the writer's ancestral village. The narrative universe of the novel consists of Mundakkottukurissi and its nearby regions, such as Kailiyad, Shoranur, Cherpulachery, Pattambi, Vaniyamkulam, and Ottapalam of Palakkad and places such as Perinthalmanna, Kozhikode, Ernakulam, and Thiruvananthapuram. The *Mistress* takes place mainly in Shoranur and its neighbouring areas and in the peripheral locations such as Palakkad, Kadampuzha, Guruvayur, Thiruvilwamala, Thrissur, Kochi, Wayanad, Kottayam, and

Thiruvananthapuram. The main narrative places of *Eating Wasps* are Shoranur, Palapuram, Ottapalam, Karakkad, and Cherpulassery. The secondary narrative places in it are Palakkad, Kunnamkulam, Thrissur, Thirunelli, Wayanad, Pandalam, and Thiruvananthapuram. *Idris* is a revisit to Kerala's past, and the novel is mainly set in Valluvanad, consisting of Vaniyamkulam, Angadipuram, and Ponnani, whereas peripheries consist of places such as Kozhikode, Kodungallur, Kochi, and Vizhinjam. *Ladies Coupe* is a train journey through Palakkad, Ottapalam, Shoranur, Alwaye, Kochi, and Kottayam in Kerala. Nair has located almost all significant places and locations in her works with cultural, social, and political structures merged with the spatial identities so that the writer can create a substantial level of similitude to the actual places with their spatial and temporal significations.

Kerala has numerous rivers that have significantly contributed to its history and culture, and all inhabitants have rivers in their lived experiences, resonating in their minds in many ways. Nair's characters always cherish their connection with Bharathapuzha, also known as Nila. In *Eating Wasps*, Sreelakshmi recollects, "Once I used to swim in the Nila. Once I floated in its waters and gazed at the clouds, spinning stories about men and women" (140). She also feels: "I could see the railway bridge across the river, the old collapsed bridge, and the new one. Nila seemed to be rising. Maybe it would rise and rise, till it swept me away to salvation" (162). It is believed that the river can redeem departed souls, and she also thinks it will provide her salvation after her death (162). In *Idris*, the turbulent Nila is portrayed as:

The river ran alongside. In that stretch, even the sluggish Nila became turbulent, bouncing over the rounded rocks with the youthfulness of a stream, curling and curving and never for once hinting at the treacherous currents that would suck even an able-bodied swimmer and smash him against the jagged rocks that lay hidden in the depths, ripping his skin open and gouging out chunks of flesh as if he were no more than a palm fruit fallen into the currents. (106)

Nila delineates Kerala's sociocultural identity, representing a composite and heterogeneous consciousness that is always in flux in her novels. In *Malabar Mind*, she writes:

The river Nila
 Sandbanks rising yellow and gritty
 Once flourished triangular hate
 The cow worshippers, the pig haters
 And the sunshine-haired cow eaters. (26)

In other words, Nair not only represents the cultural, ritualistic, and religious relevance of Bharathapuzha but also signifies that it is a river that epitomises Kerala's past and present.

The two main narrative locations in *Mistress* are two houses: one on the bank of Nila and the other is a Nair *Tharavad*, which is distant from it. Nair depicts the first house, “The house stood right at the edge of the Nila. Countless floods had eaten away the land around it, so it perched, a grain of rice on a tongue of earth stretching into the river. . .” (328). This house again appears in *Eating Wasps*, where

Radha built a cottage by the river after her uncle died (41). The story of *Mistress* evolves, revealing the close relationship of its characters with the river Nila. Shyam, Radha's husband, owns a resort Near-the-Nila, which he uses as a cultural artifice to attract tourists who visit Kerala Kalamandalam. Koman, the protagonist, has always found comfort in the lap of the river and even returns to Shoranur from London because of his nostalgic feelings about the river and his house on its bank. Like many other characters, Radha also recognises the river's influence on her. In *Idris*, despite its visualities being hidden from the outside world, the river again manifests as a symbol of lost temporalities where past tragedies have been interned, and its influence is very much experienced. Thirunnavaya, a prominent place on the shore of Nila and one of the important locations related to *Mamangam*, is mentioned by Nair in *Idris*, “All of Thirunnavaya town was prettied up to celebrate the *Mamangam* that took place once every twelve years as on the banks of the Nila River” (17). Ponnani, where the river Nila joins with the Arabian Sea, is also brought in the novel. Ponnani is one of the politically, culturally, and historically relevant locations in Kerala, contributing immensely to the land’s history and culture.

Shoranur, a major town in Valluvanad, appears in Nair's novels, and she has depicted it along with many of the landmarks and historical sites on the banks of Nila. In *Mistress*, Nair plots many real places and institutions like Basel Mission Lower Primary School, St. Theresa's Convent, the Shoranur High School for Boys, and Pappachan Textiles. Mayilvahanam Motors, one of the earliest public

transportation services of Malabar, based in Shoranur, also finds a place in the novel. In *Mistress*, the Shoranur railway station is described as:

The station was busy. It was the most important junction that connected Malabar, Cochin and Travancore to the rest of the country. The Shoranur station hummed with movement. Engines and passengers, porters and vendors – the train and the junction determined the life of the town and its people. (233)

The writer presents the railway station, one of Kerala's most important railway stations, as a junction station that connects not only the leading towns and neighbouring states but also as one of the most important landmarks and cultural locations. Moreover, it is also a symbol of the incessant urge of Keralites to travel and explore unknown territories.

The climate of Kerala is unique due to various factors like topography and location. However, the seasons show much variance; the moderate temperature and high rainfall in almost all parts of Kerala make the climate enthralling and fascinating. Nair has delineated the climate of Kerala in her novels, which reveals her keen observation of Kerala weather, rainfall, and alluring seasons. She describes the Kerala monsoon in many of her writings with awe and wonder. In *The Better Man*, Mukundan ruminates about the Malabar monsoon:

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 for school, and for people to leave their homes without an umbrella before it came hurtling down from nowhere”. Persisting vigorously till everything was

wet and sodden before it stopped with the same abruptness with which it had begun. (23)

Nair has depicted various manifestations of rain in her novels. In *Mistress*, when Chris tells Shyam, "I have never seen rain like this. Not even Indonesia, which is very much like Kerala", he replies, "You should see the October storms. They are frightening. Thunder comes rolling in, and lightning tears the skies" (170).

Thulavarsham, one of the rainy seasons of Kerala, is also portrayed in her novels. In *Mistress*, she elucidates, "The end of October brings the *thulavarsham*. And this is the rain that doesn't fall quietly, but rages and roars" (151). She describes the characteristics of the northeastern monsoons as they are "accompanied by low, rumbling thunder and great flashes of lightning that lit up the land even the night" (*Idris* 121). It is evident that Nair uses Nila not merely to express the various beauties of seasons in Kerala but also to employ it as a symbol of continuity, confluence, and spiritual consciousness in the territory.

Malayalam calendar, or *Kollavarsham*, which embeds the natural rhythm and mobilities of the ecosystem of Kerala and the spirit of the place, is part of the cultural consciousness of the people of Kerala. It also encases the recurring climate cycles of the territory. People take into account the dates of the Malayalam calendar for special occasions in their lives: there are months for religious festivals, festivities, and pilgrimages; months for solemnising marriages, agricultural activities and the beginning of auspicious events; months to remember dead ancestors and to do rites for their salvation. Nair has written about almost all months of the Malayalam era, describing its characteristics and influence on nature and people.

Among them, *Karkidakam* is her favourite month. She alludes to M T Vasudevan Nair's short story, *Karkkidakam* in *Mistress*, "It was the month of Karkidakam. Like Unni in MT's story, I feared the onslaught of the monsoon" (157). She has included a translation of that story in her edited volume about Kerala. In *Mistress*, she calls *Karkkidakam* the "month of penury" (153), and she illustrates the month as:

Previously, I told you how the rain in Karkidakam symbolises sorrow. Nevertheless, there is another kind of rain. It begins with a gathering of grey clouds as the afternoon wears. There is a hush punctured only by the rasping circle of the crows, the rumble of thunder, an old man heaving and snoring as he sleeps. The leaves resonate with silence. Then the rain falls. On leaves, on treetops, on dried palm leaves. Rain through the undergrowth. Rain dripping down the eaves. The fat plops. The crystal drop. (151)

In *Idris*, Kuttimalu narrates the hot and unbearable weather of the Malayalam month of *Medam*. The month of *Magharam* is again drawn as:

In the month of Magharam, the seasons cusp. Half the month is cold, with a vicious bite in every breeze. Dawn is sheathed in mist, and dusk is early and abrupt. The stars shine brighter than ever, and the night skies are enough to make every man believe in the power of the unknown. The wind winnows through the paddy fields, making the heads of burgeoning paddy shiver in anticipation. Fruit trees unfurl tiny blossoms. And then, slowly, the month moves into summer.... (16)

Nair describes the month of *Meenam* in *Mistress*:

So, it is with the stillness of Meenam – the month of April. As it dawns, the heat wraps the day, stilling every moment, hindering every thought and breath. The fields lie brown, and baked tufts of paddy splay out like brown flowers that crackle even as you look at them wells dry up. Sweat prickles every brow and rushes down the temple. Exhaustion lives every face and dog at every step. The nights are still. The fireflies have gone into hiding. In the morning, the heat reappears, a ghost straggling the breath of the have, harder and harder. In your heart, you know a fear. The worst fear of all: Will this ever end? When it does, what next? (241)

Nair depicts various moods and emotions related to Kerala's unique landscapes, which she has experienced. Furthermore, the spaces and places are significant in her novels because they fix the courses of individual life by altering their trajectories in spatial discourses.

In Nair's novels, the land, climate, and environment of Kerala are portrayed infusing spatial and geographical verisimilitude, which illustrates that landscapes could formulate and reorganise human experiences along with their spatial imagination. In her writings, the land and climate of Kerala, especially of the Valluvanad region, are depicted, revealed, and revitalised as an attempt to share vital spatial patterns to enliven them in their literary representations. She has pictured the territorial bonds of the characters, and along with them, she reveals her attachment to her lived spaces and native territories.

Nair employs realistic, graphic and natural descriptions to depict the narrative locations of the core zone of her story world to impart local colour in her

novels, which illustrate territories calibrating individual trajectories in their numerous formations pervading the contours of human consciousness. The narrative places expresses spatial realism and geographical identicalness by totalising spatial and territorial imagination in her novels. Furthermore, the spatial organisation in her novels reveals that the spirit of the territory and sense of place also shape the fictional imagination as they are situated in the networks of human mobilities. In other words, she pictures the core zones of her narrative world by plotting the geospaces and spatial structures within the territorial coordinates, which shows congruence to a great extent, even in temporal patterns.

Malayalam Language and Literature

“Language is both the foundation and the instrumentality of the social construction of reality. Language focalises, patterns, and objectivates human experience” (Berger 376). Language always embeds culture, and they are inextricably bound together. Even though Nair writes in English, she uses Malayalam in varied contexts to spatialise territories and locations in her novels. She has also used it to situate both the core and peripheries of society because language can map the borders of landscapes where polyvalent cultural manifestations exist, demarcating people based on language varieties. As language is a tool through which various latent elements of culture are disseminated and handed over from one generation to the next, she uses it to unearth the hidden cultural discourses of societies through the uncommon use of the various sediments of the past. Spearman considers “The influence of language is, however, the influence of tradition as much

as of sociological or even of social factors” (234). So, language, along with spatial structures, is used effectively to plot the coordinates of territories in the narration.

As a native of Kerala, Nair has always shared different attributes in her writings to create an analogous socio-cultural milieu in her narration. She has also employed it in a manner that will not cause any barriers to non-Malayali readers in the reading process. She has included a lexicon at the end of *Mistress* because it has a number of unfamiliar *Kathakali* terms. She uses Malayalam vocabulary without losing its contextual and literal meaning so that the readers can situate the region and culture along with it, as culture is always embedded in territories. Nair uses Malayalam vocabulary, expressions, proverbs, and aphorisms related to art, music, folklore, local myths, and superstitions to spatialise the characters to the structures of culture. The writer has also used Malayalam words related to places, food and cuisine, and martial arts abundantly in her novels, even though many have equivalent English words. The deliberate use of ideas and expressions in her native language is, in fact, to bring place consciousness into the narration and cultural consciousness into the theme of the novels. In other words, the writer uses Malayalam to visualise the land and its culture, which she greatly adores. The use of regional language in English fiction is one of the significant ways to situate the land and its people.

Nair's passion for Malayalam literature is apparent in her writings: she has not only acknowledged famous Malayalam authors and their works but has also used allusions, quotes, and themes from well-known Malayalam literary works in her narratives. In poems, the writer has also attempted to plot the locations of culture

and its uniqueness and reveal the structures of territories. *Koo Koo Koo Koo Theevandi* and *Kakke Kakke Koodevide* are the two well-known Malayalam works of the author, which mainly consist of her travel narratives. Both titles are taken from famous Malayalam folk songs that every Malayali is familiar with in the early stage of language acquisition.

Nair also shows her enthusiasm for *Kathakali*, which is considered a symbol of Kerala and *attakatha*¹¹, a literary form written in Malayalam used as a libretto for *Kathakali* performances. Nair's *Mistress*, a novel about a *Kathakali* actor's life, follows the literary history of *Kathakali* and *attakatha* literature and is structured on the lines of *navarasas*, with each chapter begins with a few lines as an epigraph from Unnayi Warriar's acclaimed *Nalacharitham attakatha*. Besides, the author alludes to several *attakathas*, customs, and conventions of *Kathakali* performance, as well as the life of some prominent *Kathakali* artists. The author has also referred to several the *Kathakali attakathas* such as *Bali Vadham*, *Ravanaudbhavam*, *Dakshayagam*, *Keechaka Vadham*, *Kalyana Souganthikan*, *Lavanasura Vadham*, *Duryodhana Vadham*, and *Uttara Swyamvaram* in *Mistress*. In other words, the novel is an encyclopaedia of *Kathakali*, which explains *Kathakali* as an art form and *attakatha* as its literature.

In *Mistress*, Nair narrates *Karkidakam*, a short story by M T Vasudevan Nair¹² that deals with poverty experienced by middle-class Nair families after introducing

¹¹ *Attakatha* is a libretto or text used for of *Kathakali* performance. It is a literary form in Malayalam

¹² M T Vasudevan Nair is a well-known Malayalam writer and cultural icon who has significantly contributed to Malayalam literature and cinema. He has also won many awards, including the Jnanpith Award, the highest literary award in India.

new land ownership laws in Kerala (153). She has included well-known literary works of masters of Malayalam literature in her *Where the Rain is Born: Writings about Kerala*: Balachandran Chulikkad (*The Corridor*), C V Raman Pillai (*Marthanda Varma*), Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai (*Chemmeen*), Vaikom Muhammed Basheer (*The Blue Light*), O V Vijayan (*The First Lesson*), Ayyappa Panikkar (*Mattanchery in Manhattan*), Lalithambika Antharjanam (*Sesame seeds, Flowers, Water*), Paul Zakkaria (*The Garden of Antlions*), M Mukundan (*On the Banks of Mayyazhi*), Kamala Das (*The Swamp*), Arundhati Roy (*God's Own Country*), and Vijay Nambeesan (*The Thief of Memories*). Besides, the author has translated *Chemmeen*, written by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, one of the celebrated novels of Malayalam, into English. In the translator's note, she acknowledges the greatness of the novel, "A classic novel that no matter how many times you read it nudges your soul" (147). In fact, Nair's novels emphasise the spatialisation in the field of the history of Malayalam literature and highlight the need for spatially oriented reading to decode the territorial affinities and cultural patterns latent in them.

Nair's *Eating Wasps* is her attempt to follow the personal as well as artistic trajectories of Rajalakshmi, a renowned Malayalam writer who committed suicide in the prime of her life. As a woman writer who could probe into the mind of a fellow writer, Nair tries to recreate her life and times to discover the mystery behind her suicide and her enigmatic life. She unwraps everything known and hitherto unknown about the writer. Nair mentions other Malayalam writers, such as Mali and M T Vasudevan Nair, in the novel. M T Vasudevan Nair, who has won the Jnanpith award, is one of the prominent Malayalam writers. Mali, whose original name was

Madhavan Nair, is a well-known author who wrote many *Kathakali attakathas* and books for children, which are considered a must-read for the young even today. When Sreelakshmi's novel created much social criticism, her relatives advised her, "If you must write and publish your stories, why can't you write children's stories? No one will find fault with you for that. Look how much everyone loves Mali's stories!" (236). In other words, the blind adherents of patriarchal norms and customs tried to silence her from expressing myriad articulations of individual freedom and free expression.

She mentions Malayalam periodicals like *Mangalam* and *Nana*, which were read by neo-literates and lower-middle-class people, especially women, before the arrival of television soap operas in *Mistress* (70). She also indicates that Sreelakshmi has received the Kerala Sahitya Akademi awards, which are given to prominent and acclaimed writers of Malayalam in *Eating Wasps* (209). Nair also indicates Changampuzha Krishnapillai (1911-1948), a renowned poet who brought romantic sensibilities to Malayalam poetry (*Eating Wasps* 220). In *Mistress*, Nair alludes to the renowned Malayalam poem *Kaliyachan*, written by P Kunhiraman Nair, which describes the harrowing life of a *Kathakali* actor after he fell from the grace of his *Guru* and the spiritual agonies and anguishes he faced. In *Kathakali*, which is traditionally taught in *Gurukula* tradition, the teacher-student bond is highly esteemed (302-305). Koman, a *Kathakali* actor, also goes through such a harrowing experience in *Mistress*; however, he rebuilds the lost bond with his teacher and returns to his former self.

Nair believes that literature expresses the evolution of culture and tradition. Even though it is not static or monolithic, the core patterns of culture and traditions of the territory exhibit some characteristics that have a prominent role in the formation of the human consciousness of the inhabitants of the territory. To her, literature is the soul of territorial identities. Moreover, she has reimagined and gone through deterritorialisation, which unwraps the sedimented territorial attachment that transmutes in literary representations. She writes not only in English but also in Malayalam; however, it has been limited to non-fiction. Her writings reveal her notion that language and literature are part of the cardinal cultural consciousness of people, and they are also an inevitable part of their spatial identity. In short, she has used Malayalam language and literature in her writings to spatialise the narratives and reveal her cultural identities. Nair has successfully infused the spirit of Malayalam literature in her novels as she is fascinated by her mother tongue. Furthermore, she has borrowed the patterns and textures of Kerala culture, which are palpable in her novels.

Malayalam has many dialectical variants that express varied social, political, economic, and cultural diversities. Menon points out, “Dialectical varieties are the basis of regional, communal, caste and occupational factors that have been a feature of Malayalam from early days” (*Cultural Heritage* 187). The Malayalam variant broadly used by Nair is the Valluvanadan dialect, especially a sociolect of middle-class and upper-middle-class people, which is similar to the language variety used by Malayalam writers like M T Vasudevan Nair, Rajalakshmi, and Nandanar, who have lived in the geographical regions of Valluvanad. The Valluvanadan Malayalam

is distinct in vocabulary, comprising terms such as *valiyamma*, *cheriyamma*, *ammumma*, *ammavan*, and *unni*. She also uses words like *mema*, *Vadakkera*, *chekkan* etc., which are part of the core vocabulary of Valluvanadan Malayalam. As Nair's native region is in Valluvanad and is also part of that region's linguistic and cultural community, she has acquired the regional and social dialect of that region. Besides, Nair's Malayalam naturally shares the social consciousness of Valluvanadan Malayalam.

Nair indicates that Malayalam language and literature have significantly contributed to the evolution of Kerala culture. She alludes to both classical and popular Malayalam literature in her novels even though she has largely followed the canons of the great tradition of Malayalam Literature, and her intertextual references revitalise cultural patterns that are entwined in her fictional narratives. Nair uses Malayalam language, her mother tongue, not merely to linguistically locate her narratives but also to disclose linguistic notions peculiar to Malayalam language. Besides broadening the plot trajectories, she reveals her passion for Malayalam language and literature and brings out its significance to readers who are not familiar with it. Moreover, it fulfils many functions, such as spatialising the literary terrains, revealing the interconnectedness of territories and literary imagination, and displaying the relationship between linguistic identities and territorial affixation.

Art and Culture

Art and culture have a significant role in the formation of Kerala's territorial identity. Places are known for their various art forms or unique, inimitable elements of culture, and spatial identities are formed due to the interaction between people

and the locations of culture. Art and culture always solidify spatial consciousness and structures of landscapes so that they can distinguish the elemental forces of territorial attachment in their diverse forms. Gangadharan, in his *Evolution of Kerala History and Culture*, has observed:

Kerala has a rich and varied heritage of a variety of art forms. This heritage of art forms has developed through the ages into an indigenous style of assimilating ancient folk traditions. The ancient people developed their own artistic performance connected with war, victory, harvests etc. While some of these art forms did not exist through the ages without many changes, several new forms were created in the succeeding ages, especially after the emergence of the temple-oriented society. (361)

Nair always depicts the art and culture of Kerala in her novels: she uses both well-known and lesser-known art forms in them. Her *Mistress* has a plot line that revolves around *Kathakali*, one of Kerala's great classical dance dramas, which is identified with the land. *Kathakali* represents a happy synthesis of all that is best in dance, drama, and music (Menon, *The Legacy of Kerala* 44). She gives an overview of *Kathakali*, structuring it into the plot and narration. *Kathakali* is a guide to the spatiality of Kerala, and *Mistress* is also an attempt to present it to the world. The novel is set near Kerala Kalamandalam, and the main character, Koman, chooses *Kathakali* as a profession despite his father's opposition. *The Mistress* consists of three sections named books, each beginning with a reference to *Nalacharitham*. The books have also been divided after navarasas: the first book as *Sringaaram*,

Haasyam, and *Karunam*; the second as *Roudram*, *Veeram*, and *Bhayanakam*; and the third as *Beebhalsam*, *Adbutham* and *Shaantham*.

Some of the famous *Kathakali* artists are also mentioned in *Mistress*. Koman tells Radha that Kalamandalam Gopi and Krishnan Nair were considered icons in the field of *Kathakali* (289). Kalamandalam Gopi, who has won many accolades, including national awards, is a famous *Kathakali* actor known for *pachcha vesham* (Pachcha role). Kalamandalam Krishnan Nair, who was responsible for not only uplifting the status of *Kathakali* actors in his career spanning many decades but also revitalising *Kathakali* as a divine experience, is the most versatile *Kathakali* performer, as he can perform all roles with equal mastery and grace. She also indicates *Kathakali* in her other novels such as *The Better Man* in which a Kathakali actor named Balan appears as a character. She also writes about *Kathakali* in *Malabar Mind* (16). Nair's great fascination for Kathakali is largely evident in her fictional as well as non-fictional works in which even she recounts history of the art form and its popularity abroad.

As *Kathakali* has become a cultural form popularised and celebrated in various parts of the world along with the growth of cultural tourism, tourism planners and resort owners have begun scheduling Kathakali performances and short-duration shows for tourists. In some instances, the *Kathakali* costumes and even headgear also began to be sold in tourism centres. *Kathakali*, an art form that necessitates years of training, hard work, and dedication, is used as a commodity to be sold, ignoring the soul of the art. Nair also depicts the exploitation of Kathakali artists by unscrupulous businessmen like Shyam, who asks Koman, a veteran

Kathakali artist, to help him find a performer for his Near-the-Nila resort catering to tourists, especially foreigners.

Mohiniyattam, a well-known classical dance that originated in Kerala, appears in *Eating Wasps* (177). The term *Mohiniyattam* signifies the dance of Mohini or the dance of enchantress, and Mohini is also regarded as the female incarnation of the Hindu God Vishnu. It closely resembles various Indian classical dances and follows the ancient Sanskrit text *Natyashastra*, a treatise on theatre and performance arts. The art form follows the *lasya* style that illustrates feminine sensibilities as the core expression enlivening the emotions of love, estrangement, and suffering. It has elements of classical music, language, and rhythm mostly appropriated from Carnatic music tradition and Manipravalam language, a blend of Malayalam and Sanskrit.

Krishnattam, the dance of Krishna, is a classical dance drama of Kerala emerged in the seventeenth century. Manaveda, the ruler of Calicut, was regarded as its founder who wrote *Krishnagiti*, the text of Sanskrit *slokas* and *padas*¹³, for its performance. It resembles *Kathakali*, and the life of God Krishna has been presented by a cycle of eight plays. Classical and popular folk arts and music traditions such as *Koodiyattam*, *Kaikottikali*, temple arts, and *sopana sangeetham* have influenced it. *Krishnattam* also occurs in Nair's *Mistress*, in which Koman introduces *Krishnattam* to Maya as "Krishnattam is supposed to be Kathakali's mother" (254). After watching a *Krishnattam* performance at Guruvayur, Maya understands its excellence and remarks, "I never expected it to be so awe-inspiring" (254). In fact, Nair has

¹³ *Slokas* and *Padas*: *sloka* is a chief verse form of the Sanskrit epics; four *padas* consist of a *sloka*.

unambiguously expressed her fascination for the classical art forms of Kerala through her novels.

Nair has included prominent Malayalam film personalities and singers in her novels. Prem Nazir, who was called *nithya haritha nayakan* (evergreen hero), was a cultural icon of Malayalam cinema. He was a popular Malayalam actor who keeps the record as one of the film actors who acted in the highest number of films in the world. The writer compares a character named Mani with the actor in his appearance in *Mistress* (343). She has referred to the songs of Yesudas, the towering personality of Malayalam music, in *The Better Man* (66). Nair's references to Malayalam films and film personalities in her novels reflect that she considers they have not only a significant role in the evolution of Kerala culture but have also largely influenced the everyday life of people.

Nair's novels embody the spirit of various art forms, such as *Kathakali*, *Krishnanattam*, and *Mohiniyattam*, and epitomise the composite nature of Kerala's cultural space where manifold art forms are producing numerous patterns of sociocultural experiences synthesising both the little and great cultural traditions. Nair's fascination for Kathakali is evident in her fiction, especially *Mistress*, which can be considered a manual of *Kathakali*. She illustrates that the cardinal features of the cultural space of Kerala are harmony, tranquillity, coexistence, beauty and exuberance, which are identified in both classical and folk-art forms. Moreover, she uncovers the unique features of the art and culture of Kerala in her novels, revealing their cultural diversity, enigmatic charms, captivating music, visual splendours, and enthralling colours. She exemplifies those art forms elaborately, keeping in mind her

readers outside Kerala, elaborating on every detail and explaining the sociocultural landscapes of Kerala. Even though the art forms of Kerala have evolved from the core patterns enlivened by local culture and folk traditions, she has more or less overlooked the art forms of people who are part of the lower strata of the society. She largely ignores the gendered spaces in the art and culture of Kerala and depicts them in a taken-for-granted manner, neglecting the spaces of inequality, suppression and exploitation where hegemonic power structures determine individuals' roles in society.

The Food and Cuisine

“Food is a source of energy and memory, identity and encounter, relation with the Earth and nature, a symbol of social status” (Corvo 2). Food and culinary practices are significant elements of culture. Solomon H. Katz states, “Each culture, with its own tradition of literature, also maintains its own distinct cuisine and distinct traditional rules that govern acts of eating” (117). Territories can formulate food habits of people through the acculturation of sensibilities and culinary practices closely related to the flora and fauna of the land. Civitello maintains that “identity—religious, national, and ethnic—is intensely bound up with food” (xiv). As a key factor in configuring individual and collective structures of gustatory sensation, spatial identities also have a significant role in fixing the social and communal inclination to various food items and cultures. Fernández-Armesto, in *Near a Thousand Tables: A History of Food*, has observed that “Everywhere, eating is a culturally transforming — sometimes a magically transforming — act. It has its alchemy. It changes personalities. It functions like a ritual; It becomes a ritual. It can

make food divine or diabolic. It can release power. It can create bonds. It can signify revenge or love. It can proclaim identity” (29). In short, Nair also maintains that the food and culinary culture is another form of spatial projection that unfolds the geographical reality of human existence.

Nair very often mentions various food items and their preparation in her novels. Her passion for food and culinary culture is ostensibly evident in her writings as she vividly portrays the art of cooking and the pleasure of exploring varied culinary delights and wonders. She remarks that she senses the totality of a place through the food, and the best method to know a place is through the culinary culture. S. Malhotra and others have pointed out that “food is a marker of social and cultural identity, as certain foods and food habits are particular to specific places” (50). Enjoying the food and culinary sensations of places is vital in journeys and long travels away from one's homelands.

In *The Better Man*, Mukundan relishes the dishes prepared by Krishnan Nair and gives detailed descriptions of various food items. “The eggs had been scrambled with chopped onions, green chillies, ginger, and curry leaves. Coconut oil glistened on every morsel, and instead, white porcelain dish with creamy yellow morsel seemed the most delicious food Mukundan had ever seen” (42-43). There is a description of a feast organised by Mukundan when his father died, which was a prevalent custom in Kerala. Nair gives an account of Kerala dishes as part of the function:

Mounds of fat brown rice, vats of curry – creamy white deep brown, startling yellow. Drumstick, eggplant, yams, pumpkins, beans, melons, bananas, and

lintels, cooked individually together so that there are seven different curries to choose from, pickles, chutneys and two payasams made of plant sugar and coconut milk. Never a milk payasam. That was for births, marriage and auspicious beginnings. (342)

Rice, the traditional staple food of Kerala, is boiled and served hot, irrespective of caste, class, or community and has attained a prominent role in Malayali cuisine. “Kerala being the land of the coconut palm, the use of coconut and coconut oil which is indispensable in all culinary preparations, is a feature of Malayali food” (Menon, *Cultural Heritage* 299). Nair has realised the relevance of rice and coconut oil in the life of the people of Kerala. In *The Better Man*, Nair describes Kerala cuisine and culinary culture (42). She also indicates *puttu*, *paal chaaya* (113), *puttu*, *istoo* (113), *chutney* (226), *payasam* (342), and *vellappam* (346) in it. Nair (2005) also mentions *cheena mulaku* (151), *masala dosa* (155), Kerala food (156), hot *bonda* (157), *pazham pori* (158), bread omelette (158), *murukku* (243), Guruvayur *papadam* (255), *banana chips* (255), jackfruit (293), Kerala cuisine (11) in *Mistress*. She refers to some ethnic food preparations like *appam* (188), *ela ada* (222), and *ada* (234) in *Eating Wasps*.

Pamela Goyan Kittler and others assert, “Eating is a daily reaffirmation of cultural identity” (4). Nair indicates the *Chaya Kada* (tea club), which is part and parcel of Kerala culture, in *The Better Man* (48). They are not only a place for food and refreshments but also a space where caste relations, power-ordained social differentiations, and inequalities are blurred. As there were not many opportunities for entertainment in the past, villagers also frequented it to pass the time and along

with tea, they discussed various topics ranging from village affairs to global issues. It has been a place of informal education where people from varied walks of life discussed and shared their brewing thoughts with others. The fast-food culture is also slowly replacing the tea shop culture in Kerala. In *The Better Man*, Nair refers to a tea shop, Shankar's Tea Club, that was the nucleus of the village where the main events of the village are discussed and commented upon (108). *Chaya Kada* was a gendered place where females were excluded, and it was considered a place for males, revealing the prevalent notions of the gender divide in Kerala.

Toddy shops are small restaurants that are part of Kerala society where toddy, the beverage produced from the sap of palm and coconut trees, is sold. As they provided cheap drinks in the villages, some men frequented them. It also becomes a place for secular communal interaction and informal village assemblies of the adult male population of the village. Every village has such toddy shops where they prepare various hot and spicy dishes to take with the drinks. As foreign liquor and Indian-made foreign liquor are made available all over the state, their popularity has come down. Nair plots a toddy shop in *The Better Man*, where in "the complicity of the night, the men of Kaikurissi might choose to congregate" (108). She writes that Chekutty, the proprietor of that shop, mixes the toddy with various ingredients to make it stronger than it ordinarily is. She also mentions a modern toddy shop, *Chakkarapandal*, in *Mistress*, where men from all walks of life are assembled for drinking (22). She lists the food items of the toddy shop, such as "matthi - poola, meen pappas, erachi olarthiyathe" (22). Like *chaya kada*, toddy

shops are also frequented by males as they are an exclusive domain of male members of society.

Nair's *Alphabet Soup for Lovers* is a novel about food and cuisine which plots the culinary culture. This work divulges the writer's passion for cooking and her avid curiosity about various food items, both ethnic and exotic. The writer believes that food can change human behaviours and attitudes, which expresses the writer's strong notion about the potentialities of food. According to Pamela Goyan Kittler and others "Food choice is influenced by self-identity, a process whereby the food likes or dislikes of someone else are accepted and internalised as personal preferences" (3). As she represents the culinary culture of Kerala as the substrate of regional culture in the novel, she elaborately discusses the uses and effects of *cheppakizhangu*, *inji*, *karuveppillai*, *pavakai*, *thayir*, *uzunnu*, and *rava*, which are part of Kerala cuisine.

Nair's fiction tries to map the culinary cartography of Kerala by referring to traditional cuisine and ethnic food culture. She describes diverse food items that are unique to the region and which blend the territory's flavours, aromas, and textures. She depicts Kerala cuisine as always consisting of ingredients such as coconut, spices and herbs, which uncovers the distinctive and scrumptious regional flavours. Furthermore, the cuisine of Kerala is characterised by spatial diversity, cultural influences, and heterogeneous gastronomical traditions, which form innumerable vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes. While describing the plurality and diversity of food and cuisine, she emphasises that spatial identity is embedded in food culture

and cuisine, and the composite cultural traditions of Kerala have influenced the culinary culture.

Customs, Rituals, and Practices

Every community has its traditions and rituals, and cultural patterns always consist of distinctive customs, practices, and conventions: some were handed down from predecessors; some existed for time immemorial, some were newly established, and others diffused from neighbouring communities. People sharing the same spatial identities and geographical locations inherit a set of conventions and customs of the communities in the form of coherent notions of culture. Everyone recognises that the traditional social system in India was organised around caste structures and caste identities (Kothari 4). The essence of the caste system is in the distribution of power in a hierarchically ordered pattern, fixing the placement of various classes and communities in the social structure. The caste system is a form of differentiation wherein the constituent units of the system justify endogamy based on putative biological differences, which are semaphored by the ritualisation of multiple social practices (Deshpande 49). The social mobility and communal relationships of the castes have been so convoluted that it is not easy to identify the polyvalent forces that are working to regiment the diverse elements of society.

Nair depicts the caste system and practices of Kerala in her novels, unwrapping the social relationships based on status and hierarchy and illustrating the working of the convoluted structures of castes, which evolved by integrating some of the distinctive customs and conventions prevalent in the society. She recognises the idea that caste is a product of “twin notions of status (used by Weber) and

hierarchies (used by Dumont)” (Singh 9). While representing the layers of caste hierarchy and demonstrating its various manifestations, she reveals that caste has implanted various forms of inequalities and injustices in its structures. Moreover, she asserts that various exploitations are also part of the organisations of the caste system and the notions of hegemony are embedded in it. In other words, hegemony is evident in the intricate power relations of the caste system. Williams observes:

Hegemony is not equal to (...) ideology; consciousness formations of the ruling class are not reduced but include the relations of domination and subordination, according to (.....) practical consciousness configurations, as an effective saturation of the process of life in full (...) hegemony is a body of practices and expectations regarding the whole of life. Our senses and energy (...) define perceptions we have of ourselves and our world. It is a vivid system of meanings and values. To the extent they are experienced as practices (they) appear to confirm each other. It is a sense of reality for most people in society (...). (110)

The structures of hegemony are inherent in the caste system, which also maintains a set of rules and customs that limit the trajectories of individuals bracketed in convoluted cultural practices as well as in social exclusion.

The distinctive societal structures of Kerala, studied by renowned scholars and historians, are different from those of other societies due to the absence of some castes that existed in other parts of India (Menon, *Cultural Heritage* 220). Nair has not only described the evolution and transformation of the caste system in Kerala in her novels but also narrated the evils of the caste system, the oppressive nature of

untouchability, the lack of social mobility of lower castes, and the sectarian unrest that evolved from social stratifications till the late decades of the twentieth century. She reveals the plight of lower caste people like *Nayadi*, *Parayan*, *Pulluvan* and *Pulayar* in her writings (*Mistress* 155; *Idris*.17). She has not merely poignantly described the politics of caste in pre - and post-independence times but also showed some of the remnants of the caste relationships and caste-dominated social mobilities that still exist in social consciousness.

While Nair portrays caste inequalities, oppression, upper-class domination, inhuman treatment of lower castes, caste hierarchies and power-centred cultural discourses in her novels, she also expresses her opinion towards the rigid, inhuman caste system. Menon indicates, “Untouchability, unseeability and unapproachability existed in a dreadful form in Kerala” (*Cultural Heritage* 221). The hidden power relations, as well as the overt political violence embedded in human minds, are also revealed by the writer. Her novels testify that people belonging to the lower strata of society still suffer varied types of social isolation, oppression, and segregation, and they experience numerous encroachments, violence, and dehumanisation related to their lower status in the caste hierarchy.

Nair observes that the old and new generations have divergent views on the caste system. In *Idris*, an old Brahmin asks, “What is a man without his caste?” (27). In *The Better Man*, Krishnan Nair asks Mukundan when he tells him that Neeli, a low-caste woman, is helping him in the house:

How could you forget the existence of Macchilamma? Don't you know that when the mother goddess chose to make macch inside the house, her home,

she laid down certain conditions? A lamb in the granary all day and an offering of fowl's blood once a year. She is a fierce goddess and is offended easily. She has to be treated with respect and caution. If you anger her, she will not rest till not the blood of someone in the family flows. So, you need to be careful whom you let into the house. (37-38)

Mukundan replied to Krishnan Nair that his father did not discriminate against people by their caste (38). Some people follow old practices like untouchability and those who are against them because of modern education and life experiences. It also demonstrates the changing attitude of the new generation in their stand against social evils and inhuman customs, which the old consider sacred and inevitable for maintaining the social hierarchy and organisation. She criticises the brutal nature of the caste system in her writings and exposes the hidden power relations and the overt political violence embedded in human minds because of a critical analysis of the socio-political assemblages.

Nair discerns that a section of the people of Kerala believes in superstitions, ill omens, and snake worship. They are afraid of devils and devil birds. She refers to a devil bird which “shrieked poo- ah, poo- ah!” frightening Mukundan in *The Better Man* (41). As Mukundan is afraid of the spirits of his dead ancestors in *The Better Man*, he prays the Gods to protect him. Nair portrays the harrowing experience that Mukundan had in his *tharavad* when he was alone at night.

A loud shriek pierced the silence of the night. A few seconds later, the laughter began. Demonic peals rang through the room, reverberating from all sides, filling his head and clamping his throat so hard that he couldn't

breathe. He reached for the door to escape what he knew was coming next. But the door wouldn't budge. The huge wooden wedge slipped into the sleeve, and no matter how much he shook it or pounded on it, the door stayed stuck. Then he saw the figure, the flash of the diamond, the eye that burned with anger, and he began to scream, 'No, amma, let me go! (43)

Mukundan tells Krishnan Nair, "It has been the same every night ever since I came here. They wait for me in the corridors. I don't know if I'm dreaming or if I really see them" (44). He also explains, "All of them. Balamnavam, ammuamma, and cheriyammas. But at least they hate me like she does" (44). Even though Mukundan was educated and lived in cities, he is a victim of superstitions that haunted him throughout his life.

Kerala has many customs and rituals related to various stages of human life and important occasions. The writer narrates many of them in her novels: she explains in detail the customs and rituals associated with birth in Idris (126), and Vidhyarambam in *The Better Man* (53). In *Eating Wasps*, Nair elaborately portrays death-related beliefs, customs, and rituals (163 -164). Also, she mentions Thirunelli in Wayanad, which is also considered a sacred place, where performing of certain rituals endow permanent salvation for the dead (181). Nair gives an account of such rituals and ceremonies realistically, especially those performed in the Valluvanad region of Kerala.

Every society has its vast repertoire of myths, legends and folklore latent in varied fragments of the collective unconscious of individuals, which can identify territorial identities, which the community shares due to their participation in socio-

cultural experiences. Nair has shared such myths, legends, and beliefs in her writings by infusing their spirit in her literary imagination to vitalise the spatio-structural patterns with cultural identity. The beliefs, including superstitions, customs, and conventions of the people of the Valluvanad region and of the rest of Kerala, are interspersed in *The Better Man*. The people still invoke the names of gods with reverence when they fear spirits and other evil things. When Mukundan was alone in the ancestral house after returning from Bangalore, he felt terrified and prayed to Goddesses like Chottanikkara Bhagavathy and Kadampuzha Bagavathy, and Gods like Narasimham and Hanuman. He also tries to invoke *machilama*, the guardian spirit of the house, whom people believe protects them and feels their presence at night.

Pulapedi and *Parapedi* ¹⁴ were customs believed to have existed in many parts of Kerala in the Middle Ages. It was testified by various literary works and the accounts of foreign travellers who visited Kerala. Barbosa, the Portuguese traveller who visited Kerala in the 16th century, made the earliest mention of the system (Panikkassery *Keralam* 256). The customs can be termed as a reversal of the sociocultural hierarchy of power, which permits those belonging to the lower strata of society to dictate the lives of individuals belonging to the upper class. Even in the despicable state of social suffering, the *Pulayas* and *Parayas* enjoyed certain strange privileges (K N Panikkar 13 -14). “In the month of Karkidakam, when the rain falls like a sheet all morning and night, the untouchables – the Parayan and Pulayan – will hover by these *tharavads*. If they spot a Nair woman, they hurl a stone or twig

¹⁴ *Pulapedi* and *Parapedi* are customs that existed in the medieval period in Kerala. The lower-class people, especially the untouchables, were given certain rights on certain days of the year.

at her. And if heaven forbid the stick or stone touches her, she will be excommunicated and will have to make a home with these untouchables” (*Idris* 92). As per this custom, if men of the lower caste sight a woman of higher caste on certain days of the year, throw a stick at her, or claim *kande, kande* (I saw, I saw), the woman loses her upper caste status and is considered as a fallen woman. That woman has only two options: to live with the man she had claimed or to live by begging. So, upper-class women did not venture out of their houses on those days as they were afraid of being a fallen individual who would be thrown out of their caste. Ravi Varma of the Travancore kingdom abolished this custom, and in Malabar, the custom continued till the beginning of the British administration (Nadar 209). Nadar has also noted that in certain parts of Kerala, lower castes like *Mannan* also had the right to pollute and own the women of higher castes, especially in the Malabar region (209). Nair has referred to this system elaborately in *Idris*.

Ordeals, a barbaric practice employed to prove the guilt of a person submitting them to trials involving various things such as water and fire, existed in Kerala from olden times. “Ordeal by fire was popular. The accused had to dip their fingers into boiled oil or butter” (Varrier and Gurukkal 251). Various kinds of trials and ordeals have existed in different parts of Kerala for a long time. Nair mentions a trial by fire in *Idris*, in which a barber has been subjected to such a test, and Idris saves the innocent man by applying the sap of papaya (88 - 91). Undoubtedly, she shows the dehumanising system of punishments such as trial by ordeals, which were practised in Kerala, along with the tragic plight of individuals who became the victims of such punishments.

*Pambum Kav*u, or sacred grooves, is associated with serpent worship in Kerala. Nair mentions *Pambum Kav*u in *Eating Wasps* (18). Pathirikunnath Mana, referred to as Plashi Mana in *The Betterman*, is one of Kerala's famous centres of snake worship (125). A serpent grove has been, at one time, a prominent feature of Namboothiri and affluent Nair houses (Menon, *Cultural Heritage* 37). Annual pujas were conducted in which all the extended family members participated. Nagaraja, the king of snakes, and other representative snake *devatas* were installed. Some people worshipped them not only to protect themselves from any dangers from the wrath of snakes but also for their blessings for the prosperity of families.

*Odiyan*¹⁵ is a myth which evolved in the Malabar region, especially in Valluvanad. Bhaskaranunni indicates that the members of the *Paraya* community were experts of 'Odividhya' in Valluvanad (131). In this connection, famous historian K N Panikkar maintains that black magic was actively practised at one time in rural and hilly areas, especially in Palghat and Valluvanad (13). It is believed that *Odiyan* can change to any shape by applying *Odithailam* or *Odiyenna*, which was prepared using fluid made out of the foetus of unborn children taken from the womb of pregnant young women after killing them. They were regarded as the experts of black magic and martial arts who could quickly kill their enemy through *Odividhya*. *Odiyan* is a practitioner of 'Odi', an occult practice in which they take various shapes and torture or kill their opponents. It is a type of black magic believed to be practised by lower caste communities such as *Parayan*, *Pulayan*, *Panan*, and *Chakliya*. Shapeshift and magic spells are the master techniques of

¹⁵ *Odiyan* is a person who practices black magic, including shapeshifting and magic spells to terrorise and kill their opponents

Odiyans to terrorise and kill their opponents. *Odi vidhya* evolved from the superstitious beliefs and practices of medieval Kerala. It also can be seen as an attempt by the low casts to protest and resist the upper castes' unrestrained freedom and authority over them in various forms and to explain their antagonism against perpetual subordination and exploitation. Nair narrates the practice of *Odividhya* through the character of the postman Kamban as he is humiliated and subjected to inhuman treatment by the new postmaster in his workplace (*Betterman* 161-168). Thus, she reimagines a rustic myth that solidifies the rage and anger of a community which were estranged and excluded as untouchables in Kerala society.

Nair has referred to *Santhanamuttu*¹⁶, a unique offering of the Kadampuzha Bagavathi temple in *Mistress*, which is tendered for the blessing of the Goddess to have offspring. In the temple, there are several *muttu* offerings that ardent devotees perform for the blessing of the God (*muttu arrakkal*). In Malayalam, *Muttu* means obstacles, and *arakkal* means cutting. In *Mistress*, Shyam offers *Santhanamuttu* at Kadampuzha Bhagavati Temple (204). Nair has included several such customs and beliefs in her novels, which are practised by various sections of people in Kerala.

Kerala has a great tradition of an indigenous system of medicine, health practices, and treatment in which medicine, yoga, physiotherapy, and *Kalari* practices are blended. Kerala is renowned for Ayurveda treatment, about which Menon observes, "The contribution of Kerala to the theory and practice of Ayurveda is substantial" (*Cultural Heritage* 186). Even foreigners seek such treatment, which has evolved into a Kerala system of Ayurveda, which has become distinct and

¹⁶ *Santhanamuttu* is a special offering of Kadampuzha Devi Temple. Childless couples offer it for the blessing of the Goddess.

popular outside the state. In *The Better Man*, Balan is treated at Kottakkal Arya Vaidya Sala and in *Idris*, Marmachikitsa,¹⁷ “the science of how to hurt or heal by pressure on the sixty-four vital spots” is also described (*Idris* 54). In other words, Nair underscores Kerala's rich heritage in the indigenous system of medicine and health practices, revealing the distinctive traditions and progress in medical practices.

Nair depicts Kerala from ancient times to the present: she describes customs, rituals, and practices along with evolving sociocultural patterns and the spatialised organisation of the social forces of Kerala. She provides descriptions of the rituals and practices associated with the core region of her story world, making her narratives oriented towards her native land and lived spaces. Even though many rituals and practices no longer exist in Kerala, she portrays them as part of the historical imagination-

Festivals and Festivities

Every society has festivals and festivities deep-rooted in the territory's culture. Even if the celebrations are part of the dominant traditions, they would have an imprint of the local traditions that are prevalent in the land. Nair depicted some of the festivals and festivities of Kerala in her writings as an attempt to signify various manifestations of its culture. She has portrayed *Onam* celebrations, *Pooram* festival, and *Vallamkali* (Boat Race), which are a few of the festivals considered an inevitable part of the cultural identity of Kerala.

¹⁷ *Marmachikitsa* is an ancient healing technique used for neuromuscular and orthopaedic wellness.

*Pooram*¹⁸ festival, which is more than a village carnival, is celebrated in temples of Goddesses in Malabar and other northern parts of Kerala. Nair depicts the *Pooram* festival in novels and has written articles about it, especially about celebrating village *Pooram* in her ancestral village. In *A Matter of Roots*, Nair writes, “While the other festivals have to do with personal prosperity and family reunions, the *Pooram* or temple festival is about community and how deep your roots are sunk into Kerala”. She also depicts *Pooram* in *The Better Man*, where the protagonist believes being a member of the village *Pooram* committee is a matter of great prestige (121). It is a festivity where beliefs, superstitions, art and culture, sound and rhythm, and fun and frolic are merged and where both popular and high cultures appear to enliven each other.

Onam is a major festival celebrated by all sections of Kerala society, irrespective of caste, class, or religion. In *Legacy of Kerala*, Menon points out that Onam, the most typical Kerala festival which coincides with the harvest season, is an occasion for spontaneous rivalry (44). It is a ten-day-long-harvest festival related to the legend of Mahabali, whose days were regarded as the golden age of Kerala (Mathirapally 24). Nair mentions the Onam festival and celebrations in *The Better Man* (51) and *Eating Wasps* (218). Barber Nanu expresses the anxieties of a common man during Onam season in *The Better Man*: “Onam’s just a week away, and I don’t know how I am going to raise the money I need to buy provisions for the Onam feast. How can you celebrate Onam without a proper feast? Do you know what the price of a banana is?” (135). During the festive season, boat races are also

¹⁸ Pooram is an annual festival in Devi temples of Valluvanad and north Malabar

conducted in the backwaters of Kerala. Nandakumar observes that “the spectacular water regatta offers fascinating sights such as ceremonial water processions, spectacular floats, and decorated boats” (294). Nair refers to the Nehru Boat Race in *Mistress* (160). The Nehru Trophy boat race, in which magnificent snake boats compete for the trophy instituted by Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first prime minister, is the most significant event in the backwaters of Kerala.

Elephants are an inalienable part of the cultural life of Kerala, and they have a prominent role in almost all festivals and festivities, irrespective of religious and caste differences. In *Pooram* festivals and other temple ceremonies, they have a ritualistic role. In some annual temple festivals, more than one hundred elephants are used for processions and other rituals. In *Pooram*, they are adorned with *nettipattam*, *muthukuda*, *venchamaram*, and *aalavattom*¹ they carry the idol of the main deity in the sacramental procession. Individuals and temples owned elephants, and possessing them was considered a yardstick of their social status in Kerala. In *Mistress*, Shyam has an elephant in his resort to attract foreign tourists. He asks Radha, “This is Kerala. How can it be Kerala unless we have an elephant?” (19). Shyam is a representative of Kerala businessmen who ingeniously prepares plans to sell art, culture, and customs to foreigners and tourists.

Nair depicts various festivals and celebrations of Kerala, such as *Pooram*, *Vallomkali* and *Onam*, in her novels, which are part of the communal conscience of the people of Kerala. She observes that as festivals such as *Pooram* give rise to nostalgic memories, those who left their native lands return every year to their lived spaces to celebrate them. Since *Pooram* festivals replicate the unique culture,

traditions, and beliefs, she uses them to culturally locate the narrative places in her novels. She also mentions *Onam* as the most significant festival of Kerala, which blurs the borders of social fragmentation. However, she does not attempt to critically assess the assigned roles of various sections of people in festivals and the hidden forms of hegemony controlling the hierarchy of socio-economic relations.

Historical Spaces

History and culture are closely related as they share multiple overlapped spaces. As the territorial structures of culture and history are interdependent, spatial interpretation is necessary to decode their unique patterns and socio-political identities. History has a significant role in shaping the various cultural assemblages by realigning the social and political diversities and lived experiences, focusing on ethnography and social stratifications. Lawrence Buell observes, “Human history is implicated in natural history” (7). The entropic movements of history can be seen in the form of cultural history, territorial experiences, and spatial realisations. History manifests in various ways in its complex relationships with spatial identities; history and place unearth the solidified notions of life evolved in a specified location as a mode, method, and way of life.

Through historicising narratives and fictionalising historical events, Nair’s novels have encompassed the spirit of the history and culture of Kerala. She has followed real historical narratives, imagined historical events, retold historical chronicles, and represented various versions of historical interpretations without evaluating the historical truths rooted in them. As she is very much involved in fictionalising history and historical truths, the veracity and authenticity of the facts

are not a matter of grave concern for her. Even though she deviates from chronological and linear narrative patterns of history, she selects some historical events that are fictionalised and reimagined to use as material for her novels. Nair's narratives are always interwoven with various chronicles, and she has also focused on medieval and early modern periods of Kerala history. She has depicted *Mamangam*, narrated the legend of Cheraman Perumal, plotted the historical evaluation of the *Sambandham* system and *Marumakkathayam*, and refocussed the significance of places like Vaniyamkulam, Ponnani, and Thirunnavaya.

As detailed in the previous chapters, Vaniyamkulam Chanda is a famous market which had trade relationships with many parts of the world from time immemorial, and it was part of the erstwhile Valluvanad taluk. Vaniyamkulam, which is in the Palakkad district, was one of the largest markets in South Asia. Traders around the world arrived to sell and buy cotton goods and rare materials, including gold. It was well known for the cattle trade, and elephants were even traded there. Nair plots it not only in *The Better Man* but in her other novels as well. Idris, the protagonist of *Idris*, visits the market as a Yemeni trader tells Idris, "It is the biggest cattle fair in the world" and "that is a sight worth seeing" (20). It is located in an important part of Palakkad, where roads lead to various trade routes.

The name Vaniyamkulam originated from a *kulam* (pond) used by the *Vaniyan* community who inhabited near the market. It also includes 'Kothakurissi', where it is believed that Chera rulers began their contact centre. Kotha is the nickname of the Chera rulers. It is also held that Valluvakonathiri got a vast tract of land as the last Chera ruler left for pilgrimage. Jaina traders dominated the

monopoly of trade in the Vaniyamkulam market in the past. It was bought from the Palakkad ruler for 1000 *panas* for one *aanayadi*. There was a big kulam (pond) in Vaniyamkulam, where many people came in the evening to bathe, and all were allowed to use it without any restriction. The *Chettiyars* of that area brought many things to sell there as the people who came to bathe would buy things from them. As the trade developed, Vaniyamkulam chandha also evolved (Sivadas 121). Nair, through Vaniyamkulam, reveals the evolution of the medieval trade centre, which is part of her native region.

Thirunnavaya is a place of historical and religious importance situated on the banks of the Bharathapuzha river. It is well-known as the place where the Mamangam festival was organized in Kerala during the Middle Ages. Nair has described the town in Idris where the Mamangam was celebrated (377). It is a sacred place of Hindus as the location of a 6000-year-old Nava Mukunda temple and where people perform rituals to propitiate the souls of the departed.

Ponnani is another historically important place known as a centre of foreign and domestic trade and a port town even in ancient times. Sala Pokkar introduces it to Idris as “Ponnani is like Mecca” (*Idris* 371). It is also renowned for its cultural significance and religious harmony. It was once part of Valluvanad, and later, Zamorin of Calicut attached it. It is believed that Malik Ibn Dinar, the first Islamic missionary, visited it, making it the centre of Islamic learning and culture.

The legend of Cheraman Perumal is one of the most debated topics in Kerala’s history. It is believed that Cheraman Perumal, one of the last Chera rulers, was converted to Islam and went to Mecca, but on his return journey, he died in

Oman. It is also held that the Cheraman masjid at Kodungallur was built as per his instruction. Though the legend of Cheraman Perumal is a contested one in Kerala History, with divergent opinions by historians and various accounts of foreign travellers, Nair has followed historical chronicles that are largely not supported or corroborated by authentic sources in *Idris*. Narayanan has observed about the last Cheraman Perumal that “his personality pervaded everything in the past to such an extent that anyone in life wondered whether this is one individual or a whole series of them, though it was difficult until recently, to distinguish between fact and fiction” (31). In *Idris*, Nair alludes to the legendary Perumal and reaffirms the mythical narratives of Perumal and Brahmin warriors (51). Cheraman Perumal invited twelve Brahmin warriors from Tulunad who “were accomplished masters of all eighteen concepts of warfare. But it was the *padinettam adavu* or the eighteenth concept, which involved flinging sand in the enemy’s eye with a quick movement of the shield and feet, that made them invincible” (51). Nevertheless, those invincible warriors were overwhelmed by a *Nayadi*, a low-class untouchable, which led to the conversion of one of them, Deve Gurukkal, to Islam (55). Nair uses ancient chronicles to historicise her narrative, along with the reclamation of the historical trajectories of Kerala.

Nair emplaces the celebration of the Mamangam festival in *Idris*. It is also believed that all chieftains of Kerala assembled there to pay respect to the Chera emperor, who presided over the assembly of rulers as part of the festival. After the decline of the Chera empire, it began to be presided over by the Valluvakonathiri,

the ruler of Valluvanad, as Thirunnavaya was in his territory. In this connection, William Logan writes:

It is certain that Valluvakonathiri, after the last Perumal's departure in AD 825, became the protector of the Mamankam feast at Tirunavai, and this looks as if he had held a distinguished place among the Malayali chiefs before that time – a place so distinguished that he appears to have superseded the last Perumal's lawful heir as the protector of the festival. (300)

Later, Zamorin, the ruler of Calicut, became the patron of Mamangam, but the Valluvakonathiri continued his mission of reviving it through his *Chavettupada*, a suicide squad of warriors specially trained for the purpose. *Chavettupada* or *chaverpada* and their sacrifice for Valluvanad is one of the unforgettable episodes in the annals of Kerala history. Nair writes about *chaverpada*:

Only the chaver had no time for such frivolities. When honour was at stake, what man of good lineage would squander energy on appeasing his appetites and acquiring gewgaws? Honour was all. That was what the chaver lived by. An honour that could be retrieved only by the death of the Zamorin. (*Idris* 17)

Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, in *Studies in Kerala History*, explains that “The Malayalam term for suicide squad is Cavettupada. Pada means 'army' and chaver means 'one who bound oneself to death. Of course, for the honour of one's country’” (234). He asserts that “there existed suicide squads in texts from the beginning of the 16th century to almost the end of the 18th century” (287). In short, narrating the

legends of Chavers, Nair reimagines the past along with the solidified tragedies of the time and infuses the spirit of place.

When Idris visited Kerala the second time, Thirunnavaya was getting readied for the Mamangam festival. His son, Kandavar, was preparing to be a *Chaver*, a member of a suicide squad of *Valluvakonathiri*. Kuttimalu, his mother, and her family sought his help to restrain the boy from sacrificing his life at a tender age. He took the boy along with his journey, which changed his mind forever, and both returned with new experiences and a realisation of their true identity. The preparation of Mamangam has been narrated in *Idris*:

All of Thirunnavaya town was prettied up to celebrate the Mamangam that took place once every twelve years on the banks of the Nila River. Everyone knew that the mamangam festival was held so that the Zamorin could proclaim his might and all his allies and vassals could make a public display of their allegiance to him. But people also came from all over to see the sights and to buy and sell goods that traders from different parts of the world brought there. (17)

She describes the *manittara*, the elevated platform in which Zamorin stands during the festival, which is the target of the *chaverpada* (40). Historians like Namboothiri have observed that the dead bodies of the Chavers were thrown to a well-named Manikinar by elephants (*Mamangam* 76). Nair also describes the *manikinaru* in which the bodies of dead warriors are dumped during the festival:

For here was the *manikinaru*. A deep well cut into the laterite. It was here they brought the bodies of the *chaver*. No rituals, no sacred chants, no touch

of the holy fire to ease their passage to the other world. Just a cursory toss into a well of debris. Beneath each layer lay the remains of those who came before them. No one knew how many lay there. (41)

In her literary cartography, Nair always plots locations and events that have contributed significantly to the history of Kerala, embedding textures of feeling, sensation, and attachment.

Nair attempts to reimagine the Mamangam festival as a geosymbol of the cultural space of Kerala in *Idris*. Even though the historical evidence of Mamangam celebrated in the year mentioned by the author has not yet been available, she reimagines it and connects it with the plotline of the novel. As a writer who is always eager to historicize her narratives as a mode of spatialisation, she has tried to include geographical places and cultural spaces where the collective historical memories are sheltered, producing similar arrays of emotions and sentiments in the communal consciousness of the people.

Kerala had several unique customs and practices that evolved due to its peculiar socio-economic condition during the medieval and early modern times. They controlled the personal and communal lives of people through their unwritten codes, which were mostly discriminatory, inhuman and exploitative. The social and political status and position in the caste hierarchy determined the nature of marriages. *Sambandham*, among them, is a form of marriage that existed among Nair communities, allowing Nair women to have two or more husbands from their community or the Namboothiri community. Menon has maintained that the *Sambandham* form of marriage was a kind of polyandry (*Cultural Heritage* 235). It

was an informal marriage that evolved with the *Marumakkathayam* or matrilineal system of inheritance. *Sambandham*, also known as *Pudamuri* or *Pudavakoda*, allowed women to choose their husbands and end their relationships without any complicated process. Fawcett observes that the “Sambantham is always a matter of careful arrangement, in which the wishes of the parties to it are considered, and which it is expected will bring mutual benefit to the two Taravads concerned” (235). As the uncle looked after the children, the traditional head of the family, the father had no role in his children's lives. The children born out of *Sambandham* relationships are regarded as part of the Nair community, even if their father was a person belonging to the Namboothiri community.

*Sambantham*¹⁹ relationships appear in *Mistress* and *Idris*. She describes how such relationships are formed and how women are treated in such marriages, narrating Kuttimalu's *Sambantham*:

He had spotted her when she had gone to worship *Thirumandham kunnu* temple and decided he wanted her. Just like that. As though she were one of the countless cattle bought and sold at the Vaniyamkulam chanda every week. A brief ceremony followed. A lamp lit, a cloth exchanged. In the privacy of their room, he had seized her, his new bride, as he would a cow he had just acquired. (30)

In *Mistress*, Nair describes the *Sambantham* marriage system and reveals its intricate pattern.

¹⁹ It was a form of marriage prevalent in Kerala among Namboothiri, Amambalavasi, and similar castes. It was followed mainly in communities where Marumakkathayam was practised.

Sethu was the result of a Sambantham. His father was from northern Malabar. He had come visiting and fallen in love with Sethu's mother, whom he saw at a temple festival. He had asked for her hand, and she became his wife. His mother had never been a wife. She shared nothing of her husband's life except his bed. The word Sambandham was perfect to describe the marriage of nature, Sethu thought. A bond, a sexual bond, and no more. Sethu had grown up not knowing who his father was. He had moved on, and another man had taken his place. It was considered perfectly normal for a woman to change her husband if it didn't suit either of them to continue with the relationship. A boy grew up looking up to his maternal uncle rather than his father, who was little more than a casual visitor, and the women sitting on the side of the bathing pond talked about this Sambantham as if they were discussing glass bangles. It had made his teeth grit then, and it did now.

(235)

In *Idris*, Kuttimalu vehemently criticises the *Sambantham* system in which *Sambandhakaran*²⁰ treats women like cattle. She narrates how such marriages are exploitative:

Our husbands are not really husbands; they are merely sambandhakarans – consorts with whom we share some nights and the call of the flesh; they fill our wombs but seldom our hearts; they come and go while we wait; when one leaves, another takes his place. For a piece of cloth, he will buy the tenure to my body, and if my soul craves for more, I will tell myself as my

²⁰ The male partner in a Sambandham relationship is known as *Sambandhakaran*.

mother did and hers before that: Still your tongue and desires, girl, we Nair women keep our names and homes, isn't that enough? (31)

Nair expresses the predicament of individuals, especially children, who are entangled in the Sambandham system and are left unprotected. She also exposes the inherent misogynist power structure that plays a crucial role in such relationships. In addition, she reveals the emotional and personal trauma they were experiencing in such a system. Nair not merely represents the socio-political issues but shares her critical view about such customs and practices.

Marumakkathayam, or matrilineal system of inheritance, and *Makkathayam*, or patrilineal system of inheritance, were prevalent in Kerala. The Nair community followed the *Marumakkathayam* system of inheritance that offered hereditary property rights to sisters' children (Logan 162; Panikkar 17). "One of the most important problems of Kerala History is the origin of the system of inheritance and succession known as Marumakkathayam" (E K Pillai 292). *Marumakkal* in Malayalam means nephews and nieces in a joint family system, and *dayam* implies inheritance. As per the system, the children of the head of the family were not entitled to any rights over the family property. This system was prevalent among some tribal groups as well. It had a significant role in the evolution of the political formation of Kerala as it decided the control of property rights of those who owned a significant part of the territory under the feudal lords and rulers. In *Marumakkathayam*, *tharavad* is a joint family consisting of several members tracing descent from the common female ancestor and living in subjection to the power, guidance, and control of a senior male member who is called *Karanavar*. The

property and house belonged to the women of the family (Nadar 129). Though the *Karanavar* was the head of the *tharavad*, women also had considerable rights. It also encouraged a joint family system as other family members had to depend on the *Karanavar* as they had no independent means of income. Nair's *Idris*, *Mistress*, and *The Better Man* portray various phases of *Marumakkathayam* and the joint family system widespread among Nair communities in Kerala.

Kalari was the centre of martial arts, where children and youth were trained in various weapons, defence, and traditional warfare. It is a centre of composite teaching for both self-defence and the use of weapons for joining the army of the feudal lords (Menon, *Kerala History* 217). *Kalaripayattu*²¹, one of the advanced combat sciences of India, is one form of training that is given in *Kalari* and comprises many stages and complex methods (Menon, *The Legacy of Kerala* 38). *Kalaripayattu*, India's oldest surviving martial arts form, is believed to have originated three thousand years ago. Nair describes *Payattu* as:

It is more than just the body turning supple and exerting leaps and jumps. Your mind must match the body and take you to the place you wish to be, and only then the body will follow. That is what differentiates you from the animal kingdom. The rest is all preparation and practice. (*Idris* 112)

In *Kalaripayattu*, training in using weapons is given first, and then techniques of protecting and defending oneself without using weapons are given last. A synthesis of yoga, various performing arts and many ancient weapon practices, it is taught in

²¹ It is a martial art form that originated in Kerala. It unites fighting methods and self-defence strategies with physical and mental well-being.

accordance with the Indian tradition of the *gurukula* system (Francis). Even though *Kalaripayattu* was formed for ancient warfare, it is still practised in Kerala with its various weapons and combat techniques. *Kalari* is not only a centre for training martial arts but also a place for healing where Ayurveda and yoga are used for treatment.

Nair's narratives always encompass the spirit of Kerala, which she largely suffuses by embedding historical accounts in her fictional narratives. Rather than describing historical events chronologically, she focuses on some significant events that have predominantly influenced the evolution of Kerala and its culture. While narrating historical incidents and chronicles, she explores the spatial structure more than the temporal elements encoded in it. She depicts the historical events to historicise her narratives, fictionalise the historical narrative for producing ancillary plot trajectories, and territorialise the narrative in the spatial and geographical identities. In short, in her novels, she uses historical chronicles that always reject linear perspectives to complement new textures to the literary imagination along with geotopical cartographies of society and culture of her narrative place.

Mapping the Cultural Space of Kerala

Kerala culture is a composite culture of several peoples and races that have made significant contributions (Menon, *Cultural Heritage* 13). Nair depicts the composite culture of Kerala in her novels through characters who share diverse socio-cultural identities and by illustrating cultural practices and socio-political discourses. She portrays the customs and conventions of her narrative world along with incessant cultural discourses, and her writing unfolds the fascinating story of a

unique synthesis of cultural patterns and territorial subjectivities. Furthermore, the author has instilled both the great and little traditions of the land in her fiction so that she can take account of all the main currents of history that have significantly impacted territorial identities.

The representation of the cultural space of Kerala is one of the prominent features in Nair's novels. She uses both visible and invisible elements of culture to locate the varied layers of socio-cultural patterns that are an integral part of territorial identities: the distinctive territorial landmarks, climate and environment, language and literature, customs, conventions, and practices, history and traditions, food and cuisine, festivals and festivities. She identifies the dominant geosymbols, icons, and signs associated with visible elements of the cultural space. Besides, she intersperses beliefs, values, and notions of ethics in her fictional narratives in order to diffuse the spirit of the territory. She also depicts the networks of mobilities of spatial elements, which are significant in the territorial realisations producing cultural space and align with the thirdspace in her fiction. In short, Nair not only employs the networks of cultural spaces enlivening the spatial identities of Kerala but also reimagines the geosymbols and signs of Valluvanad, which is the core region of her narrative universe.

It may be really said of Kerala culture, as with Indian culture in general, that its salient feature is "unity in diversity" (Menon, *Cultural Heritage* 13). Nair has described the diversity of Kerala culture in her novels without demarcating it as classical or popular, revealing the habits, customs, and practices related to lifestyles, as well as food habits. The undercurrent of "richness and variety", which is evident

in Kerala's socio-cultural fabric, has pervaded Nair's fiction (Menon, *Cultural Heritage* 13). However, the varieties and diversities in her literary representation produce new complex patterns in cultural identicalness; the cardinal notions of Kerala culture are retained without any considerable changes or substantial alterations.

Nair chronicles the history of Kerala, fictionalising and reimagining important events and attempting to recreate the darkest periods of Kerala's history. Nair documents major events of Kerala's history from its beginnings, narrates some memorable incidents, and reinterprets some core historical notions rooted in spatial identities. She always places her novels in the historical space of Kerala and uncovers its core structures in her fictional narratives. She describes *Marumakkathayam*, *Sambandham*, the joint family system, and the social, political, and psychological issues of such practices. She reflects on the problems faced by the individuals in families where such systems existed and the internal conflicts they had to go through. The notions of cultural synthesis, religious harmony, and tolerance are discernible in Nair's novels. For example, Nair's narration of the legend of Cheraman Perumal in *Idris*, her depiction of Arabipatanam in *Mistress*, and Sreelakshmi's secret love affair in *Eating Wasps* reveal their various manifestations. The historical evolution of Kerala can be discerned in her novels, even though Nair does not see it as a passive lump impeding the narrative trajectories of her novels.

Nair's narratives have infused their core values and ideas by juxtaposing different strands of fundamental cultural subjectivities along with the significant socio-political patterns that are predominant in forming Kerala's identity. As

festivals and festivities are an integral part of Kerala society, she has narrated some of the prominent festivals of Kerala, such as *Onam*, *Vallomkali*, and *Pooram*, in her works. She also delineates the secular character of these celebrations, where religious harmony is palpable irrespective of the religious origin of many of them. Food habits are another identifiable feature of Kerala society, which, however diverse, exhibits similarity in the varied culinary sensibilities. She has included almost all the elements of the culinary culture of Kerala, including types of food and food habits, which are determined by territories.

Malayalam language and literature has a prominent presence in Nair's novels as she quotes, alludes, and comments on Malayalam literature, expressing her appreciation and admiration for great writers and their works. Besides, she has used some Malayalam literary works to augment the narrative patterns of her novels, such as Unnayi Warriar's *Nala Charitham* in *Mistress*. She also brings up notable literary figures of Malayalam, such as M T Vasudevan Nair and his short stories. In *Eating Wasps*, she also attempts to recreate the literary as well as personal trajectories of Rajalakshmi, a Malayalam writer who was acclaimed as Kerala Virginia Woolf. In other words, she rewrites the female literary traditions of the Malayalam language by depicting the interiors of female consciousness in the novel. She mentions prominent writers of children's literature in Malayalam, such as Mali, who retold Indian epics for children. The writer's translation of Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's *Chemmeen* reveals her passion for the classics of Malayalam literature. She also uses Malayalam vocabulary and idioms to spatialise the cultural patterns of her novels.

As Nair's novels are largely situated in Kerala's spatial and temporal coordinates, she always implants its socio-cultural identities and territorial subjectivities into them. She uses the elements of culture to spatialise her narratives, to saturate the social identities of the characters and to establish the cultural identity of her narrative universe. Culture is inextricably bound to various spatial formations, organisations of societies, and literature that embed multiple structures of spatiality and temporality illuminates it in varied manifestations. In other words, she has instilled the spirit of place in her core narrative regions by blending the narrative with elements of Kerala culture. In fact, the culture of the territory has been employed to spatialise her fictional narratives.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The literary cartography of Nair's novels consists of heterogeneous, interwoven, and juxtaposed spatial structures that evolve from the interactions of geographical, social, and cultural spaces. They represent "real, imagined, and real-and-imagined" spaces, manifesting diverse patterns of convoluted structures of territorial signification and representation (Tally, *Spatiality* 146). The spatial schemas of Nair's novels are formed from the interactions of structures of nostalgia, spatial attachments, territorial subjectivities, and lived experiences. Moreover, the literary and geographical topographies intersect, forming diverse spatial experiences transcending amalgamated individual and collective realisations. In other words, the literary atlas of her novels reveals the patterns of fact, fiction, and feeling associated with geographical and spatial experiences entwined with individual mobilities and rootedness.

Territories, with diverse manifestations and spatial densities, reconfigure narrative imaginations and individual realisations in Nair's novels. It also formulates core spatial identities of characters that determine both personal and collective experiences in the networks of space, place, and landscapes. As territories forge identities and mould individual behaviours, they sustain human spatial relations with the animate as well as the inanimate worlds in numerous ways. In fact, the interior space of human consciousness produces patterns of semblance with geospaces and literary spaces in her novels.

Nair's narrative world follows a spatial design that can be demarcated as core, semi-periphery, and periphery based on their spatial and geographical significance. In the core zone of Nair's narrative world, the real and imagined spaces blend, merge, and overlap in manifold ways. The depiction of spaces and places in this zone is more vibrant, dynamic, and vivid than in other zones. The region comprising Shoranur, Mundakkottukurissi, and neighbouring areas where Nair's ancestral houses are located and where she spent most of her early childhood and youth is the nucleus of this zone. The outer region of the core zone consists of places such as Ottapalam, Vallappuzha, Mannarkkad, Vaniyamkulam, and Pattambi in the Palakkad district, and Perinthalmanna, Angadipuram, Tirur, and Ponnani in the Malappuram district which are within the geographical limits of the erstwhile Valluvanad and they are depicted with all of its verve, vitality, and liveliness.

The core zone of Nair's narrative world, Valluvanad, is depicted as a converging region of various spatial structures, expressing more than the essence of the real and imagined in multiple forms of representations. Moreover, the periphery and semi-periphery zones of her narrative world are devoid of intensive spatial interaction and densities of socio-cultural assemblages, which also gradually weaken from the core to the periphery regions. The narrative maps of Nair's fiction demonstrate that the spatialisation of individual consciousness is transforming due to its association with territories. This zone produces a thirdspace by amalgamating forces, which creates turbulence of multipolarity and patterns of homogeneity. In addition to the social and cultural landscapes, the distinctive spatial ecosystems, along with temporal identities, interact with varied individual and collective

experiences emanating from the real and fictional territorial subjectivities and cultural assemblages.

The thirdspace represents a synthesis of multiple heterogeneities of the real and the imagined, producing a neoteric enlivened space that is greater than the sum of the constituents. Though it creates new heterogeneities, the centripetal force emerging from the spatial subjectivities blends everything in its centre, as a result of which the thirdspace asserts its existence. As the spatialities and temporalities of both the centre and the periphery complement this sphere, it is "a sort of the centre of the periphery, or more precisely, a contact zone between a centre that dissipates and a periphery that affirms" (Soja, *Thirdspace* 69). Like Edward Soja's notion of the thirdspace, which is fully integrated into place, Nair's narrative world is also "fundamentally focused on territories" (71). Moreover, it blends the elements of historicity, spatiality, and sociality to configure verisimilitude in factual and counterfactual spaces in the literary terrains of Nair's narratives. The perpetual struggle between those emblematic spatial demarcations revises and reinstates the conventional spatial patterns and unfolds a new network of spatial connections, producing a unique experience in the realisation of the structures of the thirdspace

The Semi-periphery zone in Nair's narratives appears spatially distant from the core zones. Unlike the core zone, the places in the semi-periphery zone are represented as passive, depthless, and less alive in her fictional narratives. Furthermore, the contours of geospaces in this zone are largely non-distinctive in their significant features, including topological characteristics. The social, cultural, and geographical subjectivities of the places of this zone are not inimitably

delineated in her novels. In other words, they can be related to the two-dimensional representation of places and spaces without the correlated spatial and temporal interaction. This zone comprises the geospaces of Madras (Chennai), Bangalore (Bengaluru), and Kerala, except Valluvanad in her novels.

The Periphery zone is primarily situated in the contemplations, reflections, and recollections of Nair's characters. Besides, they are mainly found in the realms of imagination and fantasy, where the spatial and geographical identities are not portrayed conspicuously and coherently. In addition, the places in this zone mostly do not have a long-term association with the writer. The places and spaces in this zone are spatially far away from the Core and Semi-periphery zones. Furthermore, they appear dormant, sedentary, and static because they are not depicted elaborately with their inherent spatial patterns and cultural textures in order to make them alive, animated, and multi-dimensional. The narrative places, which do not appear in core and semi-periphery zones, are part of this zone in her novels.

The fundamental themes of Nair's novels, such as rootedness, territorialisation, and displacement, are always related to territories. Both rootedness and displacement are determined by human attachment to territories, which may have multiple forms of individual experiences. As places and spaces have various living forms in geographical formations, their realisation causes reterritorialisation and deterritorialisation. Similarly, the human attachment to houses and native places manifests spatial boundedness. The attachment to lived, and native habitats reveal basic human dispositions related to natural and built environments, socio-political ecosystems, and cultural assemblages, reflecting the spatial relationships as well as

perceptions of individuals. Furthermore, Nair infuses structures of feeling and textures of nostalgic emotions into the literary cartography of her novels.

Nair's novels unfold the perpetual struggle in individuals between their desire to follow spatial mobilities and their yearning for emplacing sedentary ordering such as fixed spatial arrays and stable places. They shed light on the trajectories of those who have emplaced nomad thought and are either in their ardent pursuit of reterritorialisation or standing enmeshed in total cartographic confusion and spatial anxieties. Place attachment is one of the cardinal features of her characters, and territorialisation expresses the perpetual nature of their spatial interactions in native regions and lived spaces. Nair reaffirms that spatial rootedness is inevitable for humans to satiate their inner urges for territorial inalterability. Displacement, deterritorialisation and migration, as varied forms of spatial practices, form the primary patterns of her novels, and they underline the fact that nostalgia, topophilia, and place satisfaction are the underlying centripetal forces in human spatial realisations.

From *The Better Man* to *Eating Wasps*, Nair's main characters have, more or less, the same motives and desires, and they suffer due to various issues related to individual struggles and survival when their emplacement patterns are altered in their geospaces. Her characters are subjected mainly to spatial displacement and relocation in their life. Their longing to return to their native place and familial roots is one of the recurrent themes of her novels. Mukundan, in *The Better Man*, initially tries to abandon his native village, but later, he struggles to establish his identity in the same place, where he finds the roots of his existence. In *Mistress*, Chris arrives

at Shoranur in search of his roots, and when he discovers that Koman has no relation with him, he returns to his lived spaces. However, Koman also went to England along with Angela; he returned to Shoranur because the forces of spatial boundedness of his lived spaces frustrated his endeavours of territorialisation. Kandavar, Kuttimalu, and Thilothamma represent individuals unwilling to deterritorialise their lived spaces and identity in *Idris*.

Nair's fascination and attachment to her native place are profoundly manifested in her novels. Her love and longing for Mundakkottukurissi and its neighbouring regions in Shoranur are expressed through the intense desire of her characters for their lived spaces and native land. Furthermore, the society and culture of Mundakkottukurissi have left a deep imprint on her works. Evidently, the schematic domains of meanings, values, and organisation of social forces in her lived spaces have a profound impact on her novels. She pictures only the peripheral and exterior elements of other narrative locations, which are less vivid than those of her native place. The representations of the spaces and places in her novels suggest that the author is always inclined to the socio-cultural factors of her native place: *The Better Man* is about her native region and neighbouring places; *Mistress* is about Shoranur and Kulapulli, which are part of her native place; *Ladies Coupe* depicts the locations near her native place; *Idris: Keeper of Light*, also portrays Vaniyamkulam and places near her ancestral village; *Eating Wasps* describes Cherpulachery and Ottapalam which are also part of her native region.

House is a key metaphor in Nair's novels. She represents it not merely as a source of deep emotions that can satiate all human senses but also as a place of

safety, security, and felicity. Nair's novels are narratives of houses: they illustrate people's close affinity with them, portray their spatial affixation to various spaces and places, and uncover the internal conflicts that individuals experience when they leave them. They also record the trajectories of individuals who leave their houses in order to return to them after their deterritorialisation and those who linger in unfamiliar places imagining their reterritorialisation that never happens. Even though she also maps the trajectories of people who fail to make roots in their new territories of desire, they have rejected their cultural identity and spatial consciousness associated with their homelands.

The Better Man describes the story of a house, a Nair *tharavad*, where Mukundan and his parents lived, despite his dislike for it as a child due to his father's dictatorial behaviour. Nevertheless, later, when he returns to the house after his retirement, he realises that his self and identity are inextricably bound by it. *Mistress* centres on two houses: one, a *tharavad*, the symbol of power and wealth, and the other, a small house where Koman lived. Shyam could have lived in the *tharavad* after his marriage with Radha, which he wished to possess very much, but he understands that it cannot satiate him fully due to his incompatible married life. The search for freedom and happiness ends with Akhila's realisation that she needs a house of her own in *Ladies Coupe*. In *Idris*, a *tharavad* is the nucleus of the story where the main characters, Kuttimalu and Kandavar, live. They are reluctant to leave the house as they realise that it would result in a break from their lived spaces and their society. Idris desires to have a place with them, but he cannot, as the norms and conventions of the era prohibit it. So, he stands outside the *tharavad* as an individual without any roots. In *Eating Wasps*, Sreelakshmi lives in her parental

house, which signifies a contented, happy life, and later, she moves to a rented house where she suffers in her creative and personal life.

Travel, a manifestation of mobility, is a primal instinct of human beings, expressed as an urge for survival and confrontation. It is also related to human predispositions for seeking, exploration, curiosity, and pleasure, which are always innate to individual behaviours. Travel, the most fundamental form of human spatial practice, is focused on territories. Nair asserts that travel, which enables people to explore new territories, cultures, and experiences, transforms individual spatial perspectives and identity. Moreover, it attempts to survive in spatial and temporal conflicts emanating from real and imaginary human territorial interactions. Travel embeds a sense of place in the form of deterritorialisation, as a movement away from familiar locations, and reterritorialisation, as a return to their own lands of longing and imagination.

Nair, an ardent traveller, has also infused her passion for travel into her novels, which is one of their prominent themes. *Koo Koo Koo Koo Theevandi* and *Kakke Kakke Koodevide* contain her travel narratives in Malayalam in which she recollects, reclaims, and reaffirms her experiences of perennial wanderlust. Many of her characters are travellers and persons destined to be displaced from their native places, and they share an intense passion and yearning for travel, redefining freedom and resisting mundane life experiences. Idris, the eponymous hero of *Idris* is a perennial traveller; Mukundan and his father, Achuthan Nair, were also displaced from their native place for a long time in *The Better Man*; Chris, a travel writer, arrives in Shoranur from US and Koman goes to England with Angela and returns to

Shoranur in *Mistress*; Akhila is partaking one of the longest journeys as a free woman in *Ladies Coupe*, and the theme of travel recurs in her *Eating Wasps* also. In other words, Nair's novels can also be considered part of travel fiction as the characters explore geospaces and undergo self-discovery.

The characters, who represent various intensities of the spirit of travel and perennial wanderlust in Nair's novels, travel for personal as well as collective survival and to satiate the inherent desire to explore, discover, and possess. For example, Idris in *Idris* is an archetypal human being who wanders throughout his life, whereas the journeys of a group of women in *Ladies Coupe* and *Eating Wasps* are diverse in nature but coalesce in the exigencies of primal life force. *The Better Man* and *Mistress* reveal uncertainties, challenges, and worries that are part of human journeys, and they may not always be as gratifying as one expects in the trajectories of everyday life. At the same time, a few characters attempt to resist the forces of displacement and chart out their courses of life rooted in their homelands.

Nair's novels exhibit the cultural ensembles of Kerala by identifying the dominant geosymbols, icons, and signs associated with the cultural space. It also encompasses beliefs, customs, conventions, habits, myths, legends, social behaviours, ethnic practices, and distinctive cultural patterns. Besides, she uses both visible and invisible elements of the cultural space of Kerala to locate the varied layers of socio-cultural patterns that are an integral part of territorial identities. She also includes distinctive territorial landmarks such as climate and environment, language and literature, customs, conventions, practices, history and tradition, food and cuisine, and festivals and festivities of Kerala in her narratives. She also depicts

the networks of mobilities of spatial elements, which are significant in the territorial realisations that produce cultural space in her fiction.

Nair employs the networks of cultural spaces to enliven the spatial identities of Kerala, especially the core zone of her narrative world, Valluvanad, which is represented along with geospaces, socio-political subjectivities, and cultural assemblages forming heterotopic, polyvalent structures along with the thirdspace in her novels. Her novels express territorial subjectivities and cultural patterns of Kerala, especially of her native region, through her narrative places and spaces. The literary cartography of her novels closely encases the spirit of Kerala, and Valluvanad is the core zone of the narrative world in *The Better Man*, *Mistress*, *Idris: The Keeper of Light*, and *Eating Wasps*.

Nair's novels have characteristics of both chorographic and geographic fiction as they embed geographical, topographical, and environmental subjectivities. Her novels always organise geospaces, which have been overlaid over the fictional settings of the narrative world. *The Better Man* focuses on a locality, Kaikurissi, a fictional representation of Mundakkottukurissi, and maps the village with its varied terrains. *Mistress*, *Idris: The Keeper of Light* and *Eating Wasps* attempt to map erstwhile Valluvanad along with its physical features and the spirit of place. In other words, her novels are part of geographic fiction as they reveal geographic and physical subjectivities. Nair's novels focus on the erstwhile Valluvanad region through local chronicles, thick descriptions, and geographical identities. In fact, they are also geographic novels as they describe the physical textures of the landscapes.

Moreover, Nair's novels signify the psychogeographical concerns that realign individual behaviour and social relations in everyday life. They emphasise that the polysensorial experiences of individuals connected with territories establish diverse patterns of spatial engagements which formulate emotions ranging from topophilia to topophobia. She maintains that geographical and spatial interactions can reconfigure human relationships with geospaces that evolve from the spatial dynamics of cultural, political, and social structures. Furthermore, Nair's novels affirm that territory and individual consciousness are inextricably connected, so the complex matrix of the human mind and geographical structures saturate the polyvalent arrays of human spatial consciousness.

Territories, with their numerous manifestations, are the central concern of Nair's fiction. Both the plot and characters of her novels are acclimatised by the territorial forces, which reorient the infinite, homogeneous, and isotropic spatial organisations of imagination along with heterogeneous spatial matrices of human spatial experiences. They illustrate that due to variance in the sociocultural patterns that encode polyvalent spatial subjectivities, individuals experience divergence in territorial movements. Like her characters, she expresses various levels of territorial engagements that continually destabilise her notions of space and place in the fixed spatial and geographic situatedness. Through her fiction, she attempts to establish that individual spatial relationships vary depending on the verisimilitude of structures of personal as well as collective spatial consciousness. In other words, she reveals her own spatial and geographical emplacement along with the fictional spatial boundedness of her characters.

Nair's novels indicate notions of geographic determinism, which appear in different forms of human spatial relationships ranging from intense influence to spatial emplacement and attachment. The characters not only reveal attachment to their lived spaces and native lands but are also spatially influenced by the territories in their communal interactions and life choices. The trajectories of Nair narratives are determined by the centripetal forces emanating from territorial subjectivities. In Nair's novels, the geospaces and individual relationships produce various real and fictional orbits of recurring movements in spaces and places. Notwithstanding the predictable courses of life offered to individuals, some may deterritorialise themselves from such dreary routes to strange and unusual pathways that form the fundamental mutations in human realisations. Her novels primarily illustrate that human life is essentially anchored in spatial and geographical identities so that the human displacements reconfigure various individual realisations that certainly recentre the notions of spatial attachment and territorial emplacements.

The interactions of space, place, and landscapes in Nair's novels reveal the indissoluble bond of human beings with their lived territories and native areas. It also emphasises that the geographical structures determine the intensities of spatial fixities of individuals and the personal maps produced by them. Nair's characters exemplify the manifold patterns of human mobilities, largely affected by territorial subjectivities. Moreover, the multivalent spatial structures and polysensorial textures develop the spatial consciousness of people with deep attachment to territories. In short, such as attachment defines the individual as well as collective human behaviours in the spectrum of human experiences and their realisation.

Nair's novels enliven spatial structures, territorial demarcations, and geographical identities that engage individuals in forming new spaces that are distinctive from geospaces and imagined landscapes. Exploring such spaces is essential to probe the multiple layers of signification latent in them, especially in the territories charted by themselves. Spatial literary studies, including geocriticism, provides tools for deconstructing the polyvalent discourses embedded in her novels. The established spatial practices, along with the new modes of territorial movements, reveal the themes of her novels, enervating various narrative patterns that evolved from spatial-cultural interactions. They represent real, imagined, real-and-imagined spaces associated with the territories where the narrative locations are structured in literary representations.

Nair has employed spatial and geographical subjectivities in her novels for literary signification and representation. As the literary maps of Nair's novels epitomise the interrelatedness of space, place, setting, and narration, they also help to investigate the overwhelming crisis of representation and imagination in contemporary culture. Nair explores the issues of place, space, and mapping in her novels, which help people "to get a sense of the world in which they have lived, currently live or will live in times to come" (Tally, *Spatiality* 2). They also reveal various trajectories, which can solve the issues of spatial perplexities experienced by people in the contemporary world. The cartography of Nair's novels reaffirms that space and place construct human spatial consciousness, redefining human relationships with territories. The social and cultural spaces are the product of diverse spatial interaction, and they determine the individual trajectories in their real and imagined experiences.

Chapter 7

Recommendations

Territories influence human beings: climate, physical features, topological organisation, flora, and fauna have a direct effect on human behaviours and their interactions. Territories, especially native regions and lived spaces, permeate into the arrays of human consciousness and exert their influence even though they may be displaced somewhere else. In fact, the environment exerts influence on human beings through interactions in physical, social, and biological ecosystems. Geocriticism and spatial literary criticism could be used to unearth the deep relations between individuals and environments represented in literature.

Individuals may have varied types of attachment to territories: place attachment with deep emotional ties is one such association that realigns their trajectories of life. Myths, legends, folklore, superstitions, social interactions, and cultural patterns directly interact with individuals to form the mental structures related to territorial identities. Moreover, topography and bio-spatial sensibilities affect individuals throughout their lives. In fact, spatial mapping in literature represents place attachment with varied territories in the form of embedded spatial structures that propel human consciousness in real and fictional regions. This can be probed deeply by employing geocritical tools and spatial practices in order to show the intensities of place attachment of individuals and their topophilic orientations represented in literature.

Novelists, sometimes, do not portray a place as it is. They choose a region as a narrative place by omitting, selecting, and transforming varied elements of geospaces and infusing a spirit of their spatial imagination and cartographical perplexity. Therefore, the places created by the writers may not be the original geospaces but an imagined version of a real territory which can satisfy the intricate structure of the spatiotemporal identities of the narrative. So, a writer creates a fictional land; even though they attempt to depict a real one, it can never be the geospace as the writer's perception and conception of the place as an individual always varies. The probing of literary cartography and plotting of physical and literary maps can be used to identify the variance and similitude between them along with the levels of spatial influence on individuals. It offers a novel approach to literary and cultural studies, which could effectively be utilised for studying imaginative or fictional representations in literature.

Writers map real and imagined territories as narrative places in their story world. Even imagined places and spaces are primarily configured by the writers utilising the vital strength from their native region and lived experiences. The narrative world of writers always has some close semblance with their native lands as well as lived spaces due to the proximity to poly-sensorial experiences that weave unique patterns of communal consciousness. Furthermore, the plot could illustrate contours of cultural singularities, present divergent visual discourses, and form cultural and political assemblages enlivening spatial consciousness. Undeniably, the soil of the native place is a fundamental resource for the survival of individuals. Native lands and lived

spaces transform, influence, and condition the writers who depict those lands in their works, sometimes without the elements of verisimilitude and photographic similitude but expressing subjective perception along with cognitive visualisation. The spatial identity could be embedded in the representations of fantasies or wild imaginations pertaining to territories. Geocritical and spatial critical practices provide essential tools for deconstructing the real and fictional representations in literary works. In addition, the structures of spatial and creative imagination could be revealed by disentangling the latent spatial organisation.

Writers select material for their works primarily from their familiar places and lived spaces. They receive vitality and power from the soil of their familiar territories. When the writers record colours, sounds, odours, and other vital sensations of the land, the narratives transform them into a slice of life with a unique chronotope that differentiates all other spatial and temporal representations. The languages may also share such unique characteristics since they are attached to the spatial, temporal, and cultural life of territories. Therefore, lands and writers always have multi-structured, polyvalent, and organic relationships that sometimes fail to appear in their literary works as an ordinary reader perceives and realises the quotidian life experience because they conceive life in its totality rather than fragmented realisations. Geocritical and spatial critical practices can unravel multi-structured, polyvalent, literary and cultural representations, enabling new directions to spatial literary analysis.

Geocritical and spatial critical practices can uncover several structures of

human spatial consciousness embedded in literature. As it has not been largely employed in literary studies, it should be used to explore the hidden spatial patterns in various literary works. Studying Anita Nair's novels using geocriticism and spatial literary practices can unwrap all the spatial patterns in her literary narratives. There are many areas that have to be probed thoroughly or that are partially left out. Further studies should consider those areas which can, no doubt, provide insight into the fiction and reality of spatial organisation in her novels.

Spaces always include structures of power in them. Production, organisation, and realignment of spaces include spatial positioning: centring, marginalising, displacing, and putting in particular arrays both in open and closed societal networks. These spatial positionings would be due to forced, mutually agreed-upon, or internally evolved interactions in the prevailing customs or conventions of the society, which always direct and penalise any organisational aberrations. These orderings of spaces and places are always part of societies where hierarchical power relations are sometimes palpable or concealed in the form of unwritten codes of authority permeating the spaces, places, and landscapes. Spaces are vital in producing a heterogeneous society where even vacant spaces are gendered by interlocking territorial relations. Thus, the interplay of space, power, and gender restructures and redefines the existing human relations in territories. Feminist geographical studies have brought new methods of identifying the association between gender and space. The works of Nair can be studied using feminist geography as it could analyse the relation

between gender, society, and space.

As spaces and cultures are interrelated, spatiality studies could unearth the recurring theme of spatial cultural experiences. It can also reveal both experienced and inexperienced realms in human imagination and signification. Analysing spatial structures in Nair's nonfiction works is an area to be probed that could help solidify the findings of studies based on fictional narratives. As a writer who realised the significance of languages in constructing human consciousness, Nair has largely used Malayalam language and literature in her literary narratives to spatialise the territory and its culture. As language is an instrument through which various latent elements of culture are disseminated and handed over from one generation to the next, she uncovers the hidden cultural discourses in the different sediments of the past. Besides she has also used it to situate both the core as well as peripheries of territorial identities in her novels. As there are several areas related to the Malayalam language to be critically explored in her fiction, Nair's fiction should be analysed with the help of linguistic and cultural theories.

Historical narratives frequently appear in Nair's fiction, reimagining the chronicles of various territories. Her novels have several historical and cultural references in plot trajectories to spatialise them and differentiate them from other locations. Focused investigations with historical research tools and methods could reveal many spatial patterns embedded in those territorial structures. In fact, interdisciplinary research is possible in her writings, which could lead to the examination of some neglected areas in her literature.

Ecocriticism and topopoetics, the allied disciplinary areas of geocriticism, posit a new reading of literature focusing on space, place, and environment, orienting geopolitical interactions in natural and built environments. As geocriticism shares many spatial practices with ecocriticism, they unwrap various types of human spatial attachments and their expressions in everyday life. Nair's fiction can also be examined using these concepts to identify the ecocritical and topopoetical notions latent in them. The human relationship with ecology and the environment can be probed, which could provide more coherent insight into human coexistence in various places and spaces.

As geocriticism also provides a set of tools for studying human attachment to places and spaces, it can be used in probing diasporic literature, which represents the various manifestations of nostalgia, topophilia, and topophobia. It could open up multiple formations of human spatial dynamism and its role in transfixing human identities pertaining to space. In addition, it throws light on territorial culture as culture and territories are closely associated with various patterns in literature. The spatial analysis of cultural space, a new mode of cultural exploration, reveals multiple structures of spatial and geographical experiences of individuals who are deterritorialised or reterritorialised to various spaces and places.

Appendix

Interview

You have lived in various places, such as Mundakkottukurissi, Madras and Bangalore. It seems that you are more attached to this than to other places.

Could you tell me more about your association with Mundakkottukurissi?

Anita Nair: Mundakkottukurissi is my village, where much of my childhood memories are lingered. My parents still live here, and I have a house, *Symanthakam*, near my tharavad; I don't feel I am an outsider here. After my long journeys, I return to Mundakkottukurissi to regain lost vigour and vitality. Wherever I live, I wish to be known as a native of Mundakkottukurissi, and I consider it my village, which is part of my existence.

Has Mundakkottukurissi influenced you in writing?

Anita Nair: I like Mundakkottukurissi more than any other place. As a writer, it is a source of incessant inspiration to me. Though I am familiar with various places and cultures, I can't identify myself with any of them. I feel I am an outsider there. Even when I live in such places, I feel everything here is a part of mine. I am part of the history and culture of the place. The myths, folklore, customs, conventions and traditions of this place are part of my identity and consciousness. My first novel, *The Better Man*, is a retelling of the chronicles of the village and my own experiences. Many of the characters are real men and women of this village. I have only changed their names and some minor features so that villagers cannot easily identify them. However, these changes are only superficial as I depicted the core features intact.

You wrote, “The thing is, Mundakkottukurussi, my ancestral village, has nothing that would make anyone come looking for it. So much so, when I set out to create Kaikurissi, a fictitious village in my first novel, *The Better Man*, I simply looked around Mundakkottukurussi and described it”. Why did you rename Mundakkottukurissi as ‘Kaikurissi’?

Anita Nair: Kaikurissi is a real-and-imagined portrayal of Mundakkottukurissi.

Many of the spatial features of Mundakkottukurissi are in Kaikurissi in *The Better Man*. As it is a fictional representation, I renamed it ‘Kaikurissi’. ‘Kai’ means hand or palm, ‘Kurissi’ means a place in Malayalam, and ‘Kaikurissi’ is a place, which I know as a thing within the palm of my hand, and I am the creator of it. So, I chose the name Kaikurissi instead of Mundakkottukurissi as it gives much freedom in the characterisation and plot development.

The house is a recurring metaphor in your novels. You also own several houses in various places. Why do you give much importance to the house?

Anita Nair: The house is a symbol of permanence as well as rootedness. When individuals are displaced, they wish to have a house of their own in order to root down somewhere. My characters are mostly attached to their territories, especially to their native regions and lived spaces. Mukundan settles down in his tharavad in *The Better Man*. Akhila buys a flat to live alone. *The Mistress* also tells the story of houses. In *Idris: Keeper of the Light*, the novel begins and ends with an image of a house; in *Lessons of Forgetting*, the story revolves around a house. Like a native place, a house also directs the course of one’s life, and its influence cannot be overlooked.

Your main characters always try to return to their roots. Is it the manifestation of your spatial consciousness that is reflected in them?

Anita Nair: I am always drawn to my native place. I can't stand away from it very long. There are individuals who always wish to be attached to roots of one's own in my novels. In *The Better Man*, Mukundan returns to Kaikurissi after many years. In *Mistress Koman*, even though he went to London with Angela, he could not stay there long; he returned to Shoranur. Chris, who came searching for his father, also could not live there for long. In *Idris: The Keeper of Light*, Kuttimalu and Kandavar stick to their roots. People feel emotionally strong when they are very near to their roots.

What is your favourite novel among your works?

Anita Nair: I like all my novels, but *Mistress* has more personal involvement than others. I spent considerable time on research, and I studied in Kerala Kalamandalam under great gurus as part of the preparation for it. It was also an attempt to understand the great art forms and lives of artists. The writing of the novel itself was a realisation of the hard realities of the life of artists, especially in Kathakali, in Kerala.

Your novel, *Idris: The Keeper of Light*, stands apart from others. The historical fiction attempts to reconstruct a period of history which is considered a dark period of Kerala history. How could you reconstruct that period?

Anita Nair: It was a challenging task. Besides searching all available materials, I had to seek the help of historians and academicians. Sreedhara Menon's *A Survey of*

Kerala History, T K Gangadharan's *Kerala: History and Culture*, and William Logan's *Malabar Manual* were a great help in locating the spatial and temporal identities of that period. Though mamangam, which I depicted in the middle of the seventeenth century in the novel, is fictional, the customs and rituals were unchanged. I had to spend considerable time and energy on it.

Idris, the novel's protagonist, is an avid traveller who introduces himself as an 'eternal traveller'. Does your own passion for travelling echo in him?

Anita Nair: It is true to a great extent. I am a passionate traveller, and travelling inspires me to write. Perhaps my spirit of travel might have incarnated in Idris.

Ladies Coupe also portrays the spirit of travelling in various forms. The plot and structure of the narrative are configured in a train journey of a group of women in it.

Many critics regard *Ladies Coupe* as a feminist novel. *Mistress, Lessons of Forgetting*, and *Alphabet Soup for Lovers* have feminist themes, in which women who are trying to reclaim their spaces and assert themselves. Do you wish to be categorised as a feminist writer?

I wouldn't say I like such categorisations. I am a writer who portrays human issues irrespective of gender identity. Many of my novels have male protagonists, such as Idris, Mukundan, and Koman, and I intended to show life as it is in the midst of uncertainties, anguishes and displacements.

Your first published work is *Satyr of the Subways and Selected Stories*, a collection of short stories. Have you stopped writing short stories?

Anita Nair: No. I have been experimenting with short stories. *Ladies Coupé* consists

of short stories intertwined together. Presently, I am writing one novel in the structure of interlinked stories. I plan to write more such stories.

You have published a collection of Poetry, ‘*The Malabar Mind*’. Could you share your experience of writing poetry? How is it different from fiction?

Anita Nair: I still enjoy writing poems. The subjects of poems and fiction are essentially different. Poetry attempts to represent human life in the most impulsive and intensive moments of experiences. Fiction, especially novels, provides time and space to represent life in all complexities and varieties.

You have written novels, short stories, poems, travelogues, detective novels, and children’s literature. Among these, which of the literary forms is the most satisfying to you as a writer?

Anita Nair: The Novel is the most satisfying literary form. Its large canvas gives more freedom in plot development, characterisation and settings. Besides, it can be used for sharing our anxieties and anguishes about the contemporary world.

(Interview with Anita Nair conducted on 12/ 11/2017 at *Symanthakam*, a house she built near her *tharavad* in Mundakkottukurissi)

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