Chapter 5
The Regional Elements in Basavaraj Naikar’s
Short Fiction

I Basavaraj Naikar’s Novellas:

Any regional literature is primarily based upon the local color heritage, which can be:

1. Traditional writings like the vacana or abhanga poetry
2. Folklore
3. Any writing limited by time and space, or thesis—the region specific things.

Regional literature is a sub-genre in any great literature. In fact, it is part and parcel of canonical literature. Each culture has its own nativity or nativization. Balachandra Nemade is of the opinion that any literature can stand upon its native linguistic group.

The authors and works do not need any sort of support from the international dimensions. The greatness of a literary movement, a work or an author is not decided by international standards; it is determined by how many functions ranging from spiritual elevation to linguistic experimentation it serves. A great writer writes primarily for his own time and for his own community. No great writer whether Sophocles, Dostoevsky, Flaubert, Kabir or Tukaram – no one ever wrote for prosperity or for a foreign audience. If at all any international recognition comes in his way, it is purely incidental, contingent upon non-literary factors, often accidental and, therefore, cannot be a substitute for its raison d'etre. In fact, all genuine literature including the classics is essentially
nativist in character, and the very core of literature. Dante and Shakespeare, considered ‘world’ writers, were basically nativist writers.

Indian English literature has a galaxy of native writers or regional literature. It is full of local colorists. Many great writers moved from local to the global prominence. Basavaraj Naikar is one among them.

Naikar has written three novels and four novellas. He has authored two books of short stories. Both his novellas and short stories are analyzed for their regional elements in this chapter. Some of his novellas like “Kanakadas…” are reflected in his short stories. Naikar published Rayanna: The Patriot and Other Novellas in 2011. Gnosis of New Delhi brought it out nicely. The author has dedicated the book to his friend – academician Dr. O.P. Mathur.

The book has four novellas or long short stories as follows:

1. Jakkanna, the Architect Divine
2. Kanakadas: The Golden Servant
3. Raja Mallasarja, and
4. Rayanna, the Patriot.

1. Jakkanna, the Divine Architect:

Jakkanna, as the popular architectural myth indicates, was a great sculpture in the court of the Hoysalas in the Middle Ages. King Vishnuvardhana and his queen Shantala sheltered him. Jakkanna then led a group of trained sculptors for erecting thousands of temples in Dravidian style. Then the religious advancement was seen mainly in the architecture. Naikar’s novella speaks of this in great depth.

Jakanacharya was born in a small village called Kaidala, 9 km from Tumkur, Karnataka. The original name of the town as per records
was Kridapura. His life was one of love and dedication to art. His career began when Nripa Haya ruled as a local chieftain of the area. He left home shortly after his marriage seeking fame in his field of work. He travelled far and wide building many temples and became so engrossed in his work that he forgot all about his wife.

Jakanacharya's wife gave birth to his child, named Dankanacharya. Dankanacharya himself grew up to become a famous sculptor and set out to find his father. At Belur, he found a job as a sculptor and noticed a flaw in a figure sculpted by the great Jakanacharya himself. Dankanacharya told Jakanacharya that the stone which he was carving had a toad living inside which was considered to be a flaw by the sculptors. Furious at this, Jakanacharya challenged to cut off his right hand if the young sculptor was correct in his assessment. Dankanacharya chiselled the place where the flaw was present and a toad jumped out with a little water flowing out. The flaw was indeed revealed and Jakanacharya kept his promise and cut off his right hand. Eventually, the two sculptors became aware of their relationship as father and son.

The title story is related to Jakkanna’s wife the good woman noticed that she did not have her monthly period. Though inwardly she felt happy, she did not divulge the matter to Biregouda, mostly an elder at home, who was busy with his local administration. She wanted to confirm it before letting him know about it. She waited for another month patiently. She was happy to notice that she did not have her monthly period for the second time. Besides she observed a slight bulge in her belly. Now she was so happy that she could not contain herself. She waited eagerly for him to come home from the village chavadi. Suspecting his wife’s chastity Jakkanna left his wife and later the baby was born.

The story is filled up with mystery. The husband and wife have a family reunion later. Everything occurred as God had willed. The gathering of the
father, child, spouse and mother made every one of them happy and they lived in peace.

Jakkanna built Belur, Halebidu and other architectural towns. R. K. Narayan’s story *The Image* is based on Jakkanna.

2. **Kanakadas, A Golden Servant:**

Naikar has written a short story called “The Golden Servant” published in *The Rebellious Rani of Belavadi and Other Stories*. The story is about Kanakadas, a Vaishnava saint poet of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Deccan. Naikar expanded the short story into a novella which is quite popular today. He calls it “Kanakadas, A Golden Servant.”

Thimmappa Nayaka was the original name of Kanakadas and he belonged to a chieftain family of Kaginele in Haveri district today. Thimmappa was born to the couple Biregowda and Bachchamma at Baada. He belonged to Kuruba Gowda Community. He came to be called Kanaka Nayaka as he found many treasure-troves of gold (*kanaka* means gold in Kannada) during his childhood. Kanakadasa was well-educated and capable of analyzing society microscopically. Based on one of his compositions it is interpreted that after he severely got injured in a war and was miraculously saved, he gave up his profession as a warrior and devoted his life to composing music and literature with philosophy explained in common man's jargon.

It appears that he started traveling to places to gain knowledge. At a young age he authored poetry like *Narasimha Stotra*, *Ramadhyana Charite*, and *Mohanatarangini*. The orthodox Brahmins disturbed him.

The Haridasas benefited from the Vachanakaras. They made melodies in Kannada, effectively fathomable, musical in rendering and communicating divine feelings. While the Vachanakaras rendered Vachanas in applause for Hara (Shiva), the Haridasas wrote the Keertanas in commendation of Hari (Vishnu). Both enhanced Kannada literature. Among the different Haridasas,
Purandara Dasa and Kanakadasa stand pre-eminent. Both were adherents of Vyasaraja, the profound preceptor of the Vijayanagara Emperor, Sri Krishnadevaraya.

3. **Raja Mallasarja:**

Naikar’s novel *The Queen of Kittur* delineates the Kittur dynasty’s fight against the British. The main king who developed Kittur state was Raja Mallasaraja. He had 800 villages under him. He defeated both the Peshwas and Tippu Sultan once. Finally, Tippu Sultan defeated and imprisoned him. Raja Mallasaraja escaped. He regained his state. Once when he met Bajirao Peshwa at Pune, the latter almost wounded him to death.

Raja Mallasarja died shortly. His son Shivalingasarja was weak. His another son by Chennamma Sivabasavasarja died in a war with the British against the Peshwas in 1818. Thereafter Rani Chennamma ruled Kittur for a couple of years. The Kittur regained great glory when it defeated the British two times, and killed Dharwad Collector Thackeray. But Kittur lost its glory in 1824. Naikar gives a graphic picture of how like Tippu Sultan, Rani Chennamma overawed the British.

4. **Rayanna the Patriot:**

*Rayanna, the Patriot* manages the eponymous legend Rayanna, who was the beloved bodyguard of Rani Chennamma of Kittur kingdom.

When the British wanted to annexe the kingdom to their empire by putting forward the doctrine of lapse as Rani Chennamma’s son was adopted, the queen refused it. Aided by Rayanna, she fought the British bravely but was defeated and imprisoned.

Sangolli Rayanna continued to fight the British. His land was confiscated, and of what remained of it was heavily taxed. He taxed the landlords and built
up an army from the masses. He used guerrilla tactics to attack government property; burnt land records and extracted huge sums of money from notorious kings and bureaucrats. Rayanna is considered by many historians as the pioneer of guerrilla warfare in India. He continued this warfare till 1829.

The landlords along with the British forced Rayanna’s father-in-law Laxman to cheat Rayanna. When Rayanna was having a bath in a river near Dori Benachi, the British attacked; at that moment Rayanna's sword was in Laxman's hand. When Rayanna asked for his sword, Laxman gave it to the British soldiers. Rayanna was overpowered and captured. Thus, he was captured by treachery. Rayanna was executed by hanging to death from a banyan tree about four kilometers from Nandagad in Belgaum district on 26 January 1833. At the time of hanging he said "My last wish is to be born again in the country to fight against the British and drive them away from our sacred soil". (Rayanna 298)

Rayanna resembled a flash which touched off the fire of patriotism.

II The Thief of Nagarahalli and Other Stories

This is Naikar’s first book of short stories first published by P. Lal’s Writers’ Workshop (Kolkata) and then by Sarup Book Publishers, New Delhi in 2008. The book was short-listed for the Commonwealth Fiction Prize for the Best First Book from Eurasia in 2000. As the author himself tells in his Preface, these stories ‘represent various aspects of human relationships in life.’ Like the local color writers of the latter part of the 19th century America, the stories represent a few districts of north Karnataka, particularly Dharwad, Naikar’s own district.

The Thief of Nagarahalli and Other Stories has ten stories as follows:

1. The Thief of Nagarahalli
A work of literature which concerns itself with the basic instincts shall never lose its relevance. Asha Choubey observes,

Prof. Basavaraj Naikar’s debut collection *The Thief of Nagarahalli and Other Stories*, falls precisely in this category. All the ten stories reflect instincts which are not only basic but also base and all that comes in mind after one has finished this engrossing collection is – Isn’t life like this? Fear, greed, sex, ambition (*All for gold, She Wanted a child, The Invisible Face, When the News Came, Coffin in The House*) are the basic instincts that rule the life of human race. All our acquired strength and projected loftiness notwithstanding, we are basically prone to some basic weaknesses and this is what has been made the pivot of Naikar’s stories. (Choubey 149)

Eminent critic Christopher Rollson in his article “The Tale as Useful Artefact” adds a new dimension to Naikar criticism. The specifically Indian typicality of Naikar’s writing has been finely brought out in an essay published in 2002 by Asha Choubey, “*The Thief of Nagarahalli and Other Stories: Essentially Indian Stories.*” Taking an authenticist approach, Choubey argues
that Naikar’s ten stories may be interpreted in terms of a psychological model. This is not that of Freud or Lacan, but the eminently Indian model of the nine rasas (emotions or states of spirit), as first adumbrated in the classical Sanskrit treatise on the theatre, the Natyasastra of Bharata.

1. The Thief of Nagarahalli

The title story is “The Thief of Nagarahalli.”

Once the north of Karnataka region was known for heroic thieves like Sangolli Rayanna and Sindur Laxman. They would steal things from the rich or the British and distribute the wealth for the poor. B.M. Jabannavar writes,

The story reminds us the story of the thief of Bagadad and acts of Robbinhood. Some such heroic acts by the village youths were quite common in India under the British rule before India’s independence. Grand Mothers or grandfathers used to tell such stories to their children. (Jabannavar 88)

These stories look like tales as they are steeped in local / regional epic traditions. Pier Paolo Piciucco thinks Naikar’s journey back to the roots is indeed the first peculiar trait any reader can easily detect (and appreciate) while approaching the stories that constitute this anthology. The plot runs thus:

Malla, the central character in “The Thief of Nagarahalli” is an excellent master in the art of thieving. He goes in search of rich men of neighbouring villages to rob their wealth. For Malla, the job of a thief is a challenging one and he enjoys it. He had tried his hand in many professions like ploughing, carpentry and masonry but could not succeed. He present job filled with thrill. Thieving tempted him immensely. His lust for golden ornaments was well known all over Nagarahalli. According to the author, “Ever since Malla had started thieving, he had never experienced failure in his profession.” (Thief 7)
Provoked by his master Marigouda, Malla gets ready for his new adventure at Morab village where he has to steal precious things from a dead body. This was a challenge and he has to prove his efficiency to stun his master. Malla, hardening his heart for not to sob but only to rob, reached the backside of the corpse arranged in a sitting posture. With his masterly knowledge he burrowed a hole just behind the dead body and clapped the dead’s forearms. The naïve mind of the relatives thought it to be the work of the ghost and everybody fled away. Malla had ample time to rob off all the ornaments. The author is so deeply associated with the natives that he knows the Indian superstitious mind that finds a devil in every dark place.

The story is a superb example of the narrative power of the author. The author describes all the expeditions of Malla with complete detail and projects him to be a sincere person in his profession. The story speaks of local orthography.

2. All for Gold:

“All for Gold”, the second story, is a fine blending of conjugal love and extra-marital relationship. The story is a true example of lust, which has been treated with equal proportions. The first few pages narrate the strong relationship between two friends namely Sangappa and Balappa. Both are intimate friends. Sangappa is attracted by a beautiful girl named Ganga, the wife of Virabhadra, a businessman of the same village. Sangappa desired to have her. To fulfil the sexual desire he engages Balappa to act as a mediator. Balappa fails in his attempt. Sangappa employs old woman, Paramma and promises her a golden necklace. Paramma tries her best. She blackmails Ganga by keeping the turban of Sangappa in her house. The meeting of Ganga and Sangappa under pressure starts blooming into a game of sexual pleasure which she needed badly.
There is a particular article on Naikar’s shorty story “All for Gold” by Pashupati Jha and T. Ravinchandran. The two think that within a month’s time they grew up to be expert paramours enjoying their fill of sex without any inhibition. “During daytime Ganga would remember her husband who had gone to Bellary on business and feel uneasy for a moment for betraying him, but would soon manage to forget it by recalling Paramma’s secret advice about making the best of the golden opportunities of life.” (50).

Aroonima Sinha comments:

Ganga, in the story “All for Gold” is perhaps the most vulnerable of all female characters. The title of the story “All for Gold” is misleading because Ganga’s predicament comes not for her love of gold, which is universally accepted as the greatest temptation for women. It is Paramma, another female character whose love for gold motivates her to drag the unprotected Ganga to an ignominious end. (Sinha 131)

Sangappa and Balappa’s story is a India famous lust story. Later on Virabhadra kills Sangappa, while Balappa escapes. The British police authorities imprison Virbhadra Setty and his two brothers for the act of murdering Sangappa. They are released only after their agreement to be converted to Christianity at last.

3. Her Husband went to America

“Her Husband Went to America” is a story of a young lady, Girija, who is married to Rajasekhar, who is working in a college as a temporary lecturer. Rajasekhar is granted a scholarship for Ph.D in Princeton University, USA. There he marries an American girl and has children. On his visit to India he gets the signature of Girija, a true Indian lady having full faith in him, signs the papers. Rajasekhar leaves for America and sends his wife the divorce letter. Thus his true story comes as a shock to his family.
Finally Girija accepts separation and lives with a child in her parents-in-law’s house.

4. Mother’s Husband

This is a strange title as if a Kannada translation into English.

Incest, though a taboo and the most outrageous of sexual behavior, has ever attracted the attention of writers since ancient Greece. The criteria of incest vary from culture to culture. Psychologists give several explanations for this deadly sin.

Setavi, the celestial scribe, engraves the fate of to-be-born human beings on their foreheads. She is flabbergasted to know the future of her yet-to-be born daughter, “who is going to have sexual intercourse with her own son according to the strange course in her life” (Thief 79).

The Greek concept of Oedipus sex is ingrained here. G.A. Ghanshyam adds:

The story reminds us of D.H. Lawrence’s Sons and Lovers. Naikar has tried his best to delineate the theme in a cosmic context thereby showing the inexorability of the law of karma. (Ghanshyam 73)

5. The Invisible Face

Bangarasetty, whose name is synonymous with gold in Kannada, the famous merchant of Dharwad, is a close friend of Mr. Patil, the narrator of the story. Bangarasetty is known as an honest man and has won the President’s Award. Behind the mask, Bangarasetty turns out to be a man secretly engaged in the printing of fake currency notes. He is assisted by a minister, a legislator,
two merchants and a landlord. These people have bribed doctor, Deshpande, who is taking care of the patient Setty to give poison injection to the patient because their crime has been detected. To keep themselves out of the bars, they have sent Setty far away from the mundane world with the help of money. Thus a person, who should have saved the life of Bangarasetty is actually responsible for his death.

The story is full of irony.

6. She Wanted a Child

Manjula in the story, “She Wanted a Child” needs a child desperately. She does not conceive during the first two years of her married life. This has created a problem for the Indian traditional lady, Manjula, because she loses familial status. In Dharwad, while working in a Post Office as a clerk, she comes in contact with a smart colleague Sekhar. She enters into an adulterous relationship with him for the sake of a child. She needs Sekhar to fulfil her desire to be a mother of a baby, whereas Sekhar needs her to fulfil his lust. But this relationship does not blossom. The gynecologist tells her that she needs a minor operation to become a mother. Scared of the operation and to get rid of the social stigma, Manjula steals a baby from Civil Hospital. Later she is imprisoned. Naikar has shown us the strong instinct of motherhood in Manjula. The story is in naturalistic mode.

7. When the News Came

“When the News Came” is a strong attack on the indifference of police. Chennappa of Navilur is a driver, who goes on business trips to nearby Belgaum. There is another driver by the same name of Kavalur. The police mistakenly enter the name of Chennappa of Navilur as dead in place of Chennappa of Kavalur. All the rituals related to the burial are arranged at police station. When the real Chennappa returns, he is surprised to see the nervous
faces of villagers, who mistake him for his ghost. Chennappa with the help of the same police, gets reunited with his wife family.

The story has a lot of fun and mystery.

8. Coffin in the House

“Coffin in the House” relates to the sexual desire of an elderly bachelor, who rapes and murders the young daughter of his neighbor, Prema, and keeps the dead body inside a coffin in his house. Mr. Patil, the protagonist of the story, is treated with care. The author shows that man is a mere slave and he becomes helpless due to his biological instincts. Mr. Patil is not a pervert. The physical need leads him to a tragedy. He undergoes treatment in a hospital because of his broken leg. There he confesses his crime before a friend, Mallikarjuna and tells him the complete episode when one day he “had an uncontrollable erection” (Thief 154) and committed the crime of raping a minor girl.

9. The Anonymous Letter

Prema Nandakumar appreciated this story when she said, “While thievery, plates of roti and sex hold the collection in thrall, Indian English gets a rip-roarer in “The Anonymous Letter.”” (Nandakumar 175)

Nowadays universities and colleges have become the centres of narrow mindedness, jealousy and pettiforgging. We can experience the same in Naikar’s story, “The Anonymous Letter”, which is written on the basis of his own experience as an academic for years together. The Professor and Chairman of the English Department of a university uses the students against his own staff by instigating them to complain against their teachers. Many professors do not do their work properly.

10. Fulfilment
The last of the ten stories, “Fulfilment” is a romantic love story of Bharati, a Brahmin girl and Chandrasekhar, an untouchable. Bharati is highly impressed by the acting of Chandrasekhar and his physical charm and falls in love with him. The social custom in Karnataka is so strong that the patriarchal society will not agree for their marriage. So the two fly to a far-off village with the help of friends and get married. Alienated from the daughter, Bharati’s father, a retired judge wills his property to the Sringeri Monastery of Sankaracarya. Bharati is so devoted to her husband that she lives a life of poverty. After the birth of a son, Viswanath, Chandrasekhar is falsely implicated in a criminal case. After twelve years, he comes back to his wife and “both remain in a paradise of silent sweetness” (Thief193). Aroonima Sinha thinks ‘it is a true love story.’

The stories of The Thief of Nagarahalli speak of a region as George Eliot in England and Willa Lather in America should have written of their regions. Even Raja Rao’s stories sound the same. G.A. Ghanshyam observes:

The author has a great potential to pen down his observations and experiences and I hope to see many more collections of short stories from him in the times to come. Despite looseness and repetitiveness of statements made by different characters, the anthology presents a cross-section of Indian people, who come alive in the book. (Ghanshyam 78)

III The Rebellious Rani of Belavadi and Other Stories
This is Naikar’s second collection of short stories, published by Atlantic Publishers of New Delhi in 2001. The author feels these stories speak of Indian life. This book has the following twelve short stories.

1. The Rebellious Rani of Belavadi
2. Change of Heart
3. Blood for Blood
4. Cross-Roads
5. Bloodbath
6. The Circle of Vengeance
7. Felicitation
8. Pilgrimage to Kashi
9. The Spider’s web
10. Basavanti
11. The Golden Servant
12. A Chronic Patient Became A Doctor

With an extraordinary imagination Naikar has expressed his primary concern on the existential problems of man and his struggles to achieve finality. Bhagabat Nayak observes:

Through his thematic apperception it seems that Naikar is both directly and indirectly influenced by the Bloomsbury Group of the Mysore Generation consisting of T.S. Satyan, the photographer; R.K. Narayan, the distinguished Indian English novelist; R.K. Laxman, one of the greatest cartoonists of the world; C.D. Narsimhaiah, the most celebrated English teacher and critic of his generation; Doreswamy Iyengar, the
finest Veena player of his generation; B.S. Kesavan, pioneering librarian and historian of publishing; A.K. Ramanujan the great poet, folklorist and translator. Naikar is very sensitive to history and culture and specific in his narrative techniques. With a sound historical sense embedded in historical perspective some of his stories look like historical biographies in his fictive world. (Nayak 33)

S.G. Vaidy divides these stories as historical and contemporary. Of the twelve stories three stories may be listed under the first category, namely, “The Rebellious Rani of Belavadi,” “Blood Bath” and “The Golden Servant.” The rest of them deal with contemporary issues.

1. The Rebellious Rani of Belavadi

This is a story about the history of a local kingdom at Belavadi near Dharwad, and about its queen Mallamma.

The title story “The Rebellious Rani of Belavadi” is a historical biography written in the genre of popular fiction. The diachronic description of Mallamma’s life and career from her childhood to becoming the Rani of Belavadi kingdom are marked, like those of many great queens of Indian history. When the Indian kings were lacking worthy male progeny or losing faith in the existing ones, they were choosing their female progeny to be the worthy inheritors of dynasties. Madhulinga Nayaka, the king and Viramma, the queen of Swadi Kingdom had a son Sadasivanayaka and a daughter, Mallamma, with the blessing of Lord Kartika by conducting Putrakameshi yoga. By imploring yogi Siddhabasava they got necessary spiritual guidance. This act of noble job made them popular in the Vijayanagara Empire during the reign of Shri Krishnadevaraya. Mallamma, the “jasmine” of their eyes, had classic youth, mythic beauty, exemplary patriotism, “purity of mind and body” (Belavadi 40).
Naikar has inscribed the best aspects of a woman character in Mallamma as a daughter, wife, mother, well-wisher and protector of her kingdom. Her love for her parents, husband, subjects and kingdom, nostalgia and regalia make her one of the best women-rulers of Indian history. Naikar inscribes all the Indian sensibilities with regional culture and practices in her character. He portrays woman as Shakti, the woman incarnation as the destroyer of evil. His Mallamma appears as Shakti, the destroyer of evil. Apart from loss, shock and suffering in her life Mallamma appears as the fine specimen of Indian womanhood. The story has a colonial setting at the backdrop of history.

The story marks the superhuman power and uncontrollable heroic feats of Rani Mallamma in her fight with Sivaji.

2. Change of Heart

When the Sharanas lived in the 12th century Deccan, Basava set examples. He would give and forgive people. Once a burglar tried to rob his house, and Basava allowed it.

In “Change of Heart” Naikar’s narrativisation of an incident has its holistic approach through magic realism. He conveys the message that forgiveness is a great virtue. Philosophically it purifies the heart like a solvent and functions like a catalyst for the cause of truth. Through the realistic description of a burglary in the house of Sivalila and Siddhalinga he brings out the essential necessity of truth. Sivalila and Siddhalinga are God-fearing and devotees of Goddess Yallamma and Lord Virabhadra. One day they get shocked when three masked burglars enter their house to plunder gold at the point of dagger. Sivalila gives them all including her mangalya sutra. However, Sivalila advises one of the thieves not to waste the gold. This has a cathartic effect upon the bad guy.
Within a period of fortnight the lead-burgler comes back to the couple and falling at the feet of Sivalila says that he has decided to stop thieving. These are his words,

“Dear madam, you are not an ordinary lady, but a veritable goddess. You are like my elderly sister…. You advised me like a sister to make use of that money for some useful investment…. Your words have been ringing in my ears, without my knowing. My heart had accepted you as my sister. I have now decided to stop thieving and start living a respectable life. My dear sister, please take back this gold and bless me to lead a pious life” (Belavadi 50).

Naikar expresses his concern for the detioration of values in human character and apprehends its cathartic effect on life.

3. Blood for Blood

This is a revenge story reminding us ‘Monk’ Lewis and Edgar Allan Poe. Naikar conveys the message that no crime solves a problem and each crime prompts another crime of greater intensity. He regrets the people’s foolish involvement in such nasty jobs that spoil their lives.

Viranagouda arranges the murder of Kalappa through the police people themselves under their own custody. The Inspector agrees to undertake a risk for a handsome amount of money. Here are the words of Viranagouda, “I need your co-operation for this task. Please don’t think that I am asking for any favour gratis. I shall give you Rs.2000/- if you oblige me” (Belavadi 61). Herein we witness the callousness of the police firing at a snoring man, which they do much against their own conscience.

S.G. Vaidy thinks: “Many times the society, the environment and the political as well as bureaucratic set-up itself propel the corruption motif among the officials.” (Vaidya 77)
4. Cross-Roads

Naikar’s first collection of short stories has an incest story entitled “Mother’s Husband,” speaking of Karma theory. Likewise, one has to accept life “whether it is natural, or inevitable or necessary” (Belavadi 87) by realizing that fate plays a strange role. This seems to be Naikar’s philosophy in the story “Cross-Road” that deals with the sentimental separation of two lovers. The context of the story is Indian while the approach is Tolstoyeque. Man proposes but God disposes and everything is not right in this world for Sivaraj and Kalpana, the leading characters. Ten years is not a long time to forget one’s first love. Ten years ago reasonable Sivaraj and love-sick Kalpana had met each other near Baage Aam Public Garden at Hyderabad and the intensity of intimacy grew more with the former’s voluntary help to the latter in searching out her sister Pratibha from the zoo side. From that day Kalpana had become a flower on a creeper for him and he thought himself to have been born as a tree to support it. The affectionate words of Kalpana’s mother Saradamma to Sivaraj had made him loyal. Yet the fate separated them.

As far as the effective use of setting is concerned the story is comparable with that of Chinua Achebe’s “Marriage is a Private Affair.” S.G. Vaidya thinks many of Naikar’s stories are philosophical. He writes:

The story “Cross-Roads” is also full of reflections. The protagonist Sivaraj reflects again and again on time. “Time is a strange thing indeed. Time, they say, has stood still. It moves neither backward nor forward. It has no limits to this side or that. Is it then infinite?... Time is travelling eternally … We breathe but an infinitesimal moment of this eternity and thread our sensations and disappear into oblivion.” In the same way the other story, “The Golden Servant” being a life story of the great saint, poet, philosopher of Karnataka, Kanakadasa, is full of reflective passages.(Vaidya 85)
5. Bloodbath

While narrating the affairs of a royal family Naikar presents the defeat of virtues like moral responsibility. The historicity of the fact is fictionalized in the excellent account of King Devaraya II’s family of Karnataka. King Devaraya II is represented as a man of great learning, and idealism. His love for his orphan nephew, Jayadeva, after the death of his parents is proverbial.

After attaining maturity Jayadeva lives in a separate palace and marries without the knowledge of the king. Prince Sivaraya goes to attend Jayadeva’s marriage. The joyous occasion turns into a melodrama with the murder of Sivaraya in a pre-planned conspiracy. King Devaraya is disillusioned when he discovers the dead body of his son. Thus portraying the nobility of Devaraya’s character Naikar seems to agree with the dictum that unwarranted love can become disastrous.

6. The Circle of Vengeance

“The Circle of Vengeance” is a story on the contemporary theme of underworld. The story raises concern for the failure of societal values. It focuses on a criminal’s choice of lifestyle that ultimately entangles him into a circle of vengeance. Giving an account of Nagappa’s career Naikar presents the long stride Nagappa has taken from a porter to a hardcore criminal in his endeavor to become rich. Nagappa’s self-evolution takes place in his ambition. He earns money, gets married and settles down for a better prospect. But nothing runs smooth and every step he takes leads him to his own destruction.

7. Felicitation

“Felicitation” appears to be based on the writer’s study of someone’s experience. In the story Naikar has inscribed a creative writer’s instinct for writing novels, stories and his desire for availing the opportunity of being
felicitated with garlands, shawls, sandal chips, idols of Bidariware, printed scrolls of honour and printed certificate.

The narrator feels elated with the invitation of three persons from Channagiri, who invite him to grace a function so as to enable them to felicitate him for his literary contributions. He gloats for being recognized by the larger mass. He accepts the invitation happily when he comes to know that two important personalities – a poet and a writer-critic on Dalit literature are going to be felicitated. Taking it as an opportunity for self-aggrandisement he prepares a speech. He with two other dignitaries moves to the venue. On the way the three discuss the perspectives of their prepared speeches. Funny ideas rush to his mind. He thinks of owning a car, which is not materialized. In a flash of recollection, he thinks of Sasikala’s liking for the shawl, which she would like to give their daughter Daxayini. But the irony is that he discovers everything to his utter desperation to be a fiasco.

The man publishes his writings, and agrees for honours. However, his wife abhors women felicitating him.

8. Pilgrimage to Kashi

“Pilgrimage to Kashi” is a story on moha, maya and mukti. As the former two confine man to the cocoon of a narrow self the latter mukti liberates life. The irony is that a man who possesses everything laments for having nothing. Naikar conveys this philosophically. He narrates the life and experience of Govindacharya, a widower whose expectations are larger than life. He struggles to get out of the labyrinthine maya of his phenomenal existence but fails.

Finally, Govindacharya’s illusion vanishes and he gets enlightened by Nagesharaya’s aphoristic explanation:
We have to generate happiness in ourselves. Happiness lies in being contended with whatever life we have. Happiness and sorrow are two states of our mind. Our happiness lies in what good we do to others … We can attain peace of mind in feeling contended and satisfied with whatever little is given to us… in this mortal world … (Belavadi 13)

In the narrative technique of the story Naikar has made a socio-psychological study of a family-head discovering the complex psychology of obsessed Govindacharya.

9. The Spider’s Web

“The Spider's Web” is a moving story on man’s politics, corruption, and existential suffering. The story presents the vicious circle of Indian administration and bureaucracy where many sincere officers are dragged into the muddle to be dishonest. Naikar delineates the energetic, euphoric and reforming zeal of a newly elected minister who is committed to bring perestroika and glasnost in the state administration by abolishing the practice of corruption.

10. Basavanti

“Basavanti” narrates the life of a lascivious woman, Basavanti. Her choice of illegal and immoral existence for the sake of pleasure earns nothing but suffering. Basavanti, Kalmesh’s wife, enjoys the euphoria of her married life but snaps it for good with her husband for her paramour Chinnappagouda, the man who robbed her of her virginity before her marriage.

11. The Golden Servant

Reading biography beyond personal history is an important feature in Naikar’s world. Judging the characters in their respective social milieu and
analyzing them on an ethical perspective he portrays them as living legends. “The Golden Servant” is an interesting story about a low caste boy Timmappa who with a miraculous spiritual progress becomes a great saint.

The story is about Kanakadas about whom Naikar has authored a novella as described in Part I of this chapter.

12. A Chronic Patient Became a Doctor.

This story sounds bizarre at the outset. This is about a teacher’s failure to complete his research (PhD) in time -- all because of his bad guide. The protagonist Nandiswar is Naikar’s another self. The despicable saga of the guides in Pan-Indian situation is exposed in the personal suffering of Nandiswar.

In brief these stories speak of the place and time which Naikar lives. B.M. Jabannavar feels Naikar’s stories are written in the native brand English. He writes,

North Karnataka life-style, particularly the life style of Dharwad district, is mirrored through his stories, Life of the Goudas, Deshapandes, Patils and others before India’s independence is projected vividly. The popular story of Sangya-Balya the folk-drama of Karnataka is modified. Other stories are marked by lucidity of expression; some of them have a strong auto-biographical flavor -- he language by adding some of the idioms popular in Dharwad. The stories abound in traditional symbols. The imagery he uses is a North-Karnataka imagery. (Jabannavar, 87)
References:


