Conclusion

This concluding section draws together the observations, discussions and arguments pertaining to the concept of regionalism. As the individual chapters have arrived at their own conclusions, this chapter only makes an attempt to string them together. Reviewing the various definitions of the term region, as indicated in the beginning of this thesis, one has to agree with the geographer, Norton Ginsberg who claims that “there is no universally accepted definition for the term region (qtd in Cohn, “Regions Subjective” 101). As they “are far from fixed, enduring things” and “are not absolutes” (Cohn 132), any attempt to define a region is therefore a difficult and impossible task. Likewise, the concept of regionalism is complex and is not easily definable. As stated earlier, it involves a consciousness of the distinctiveness of an area. This emphasis on the uniqueness of a region summarily dismisses all attempts of universalisation and homogenisation propagated by the discourses of modernity and nationalism. Arguing explicitly against these concepts that ignore the inherent multiplicities in societies, regionalism offers a refreshing counterpoint. The concept of regionalism in contemporary Indian English fiction endeavours to challenge the canonical assumptions of “Indianness” as projected in the novels written till the 1980s. These interrogations necessitate a rethinking of the very concept of “Indianness” to promote a better understanding of the immense diversity of a country like ours. Narrativising the region, hence, becomes a covert form of resistance. As an act of providing a new space for these communities to express themselves, regionalism
becomes “a more appropriate frame within which to read literature than is nationalism” (New 13). While nationalism “becomes a political imposition on art” by cultivating a notion of a single cultural identity which is distant from the people’s actual political experience, regionalism strives to comprehend all “social variations affected by economics, gender, race, creed, region, and so on; these in turn have their effects upon language and hence upon the voice and structure of literature” (New13-14). Describing a terrain is to gain a hold over it, an argument expressed by Said in *Orientalism* and elaborated upon in his *Culture and Imperialism*. Since the coloniser considered the native to be incapable of describing his land, they took upon it as their task to simplify it for him. The complexities of the native which were far beyond the comprehension of the coloniser, could be expressed indirectly only through local traditions, myths and folklores. The nationalist elites (as well as the Indian English writers of the period) sought to suppress the plethora of local cultural traditions of India to create traditions of a pan-Indian nature that became instrumental in the construction of a unified nationalist narrative. Hence, to resist the glorified national narratives deeply rooted in the Enlightenment project of modernity and rationality, it was essential to posit an alternative discourse. The novelists in Indian English render this complexity of their locale into the aesthetic space of the novels by imparting a dimension and depth to it.

All the four novels taken up for discussion have unearthed the sagas of their respective regions. In each case, the region emerges as a dynamic entity. Markandaya’s *Nectar* becomes a
representative of a pan-Indian village and the characters are stereotypical representations of Indian farmers. All the specificities of the region have been suppressed to package India for the Western reader. It falters to become an outsider’s dispassionate depiction of a locale. This homogenous rendering by suppressing the multitude of local experiences fails to capture the intricacies of the region.

From Markandaya’s novel to that of Anita Nair’s in the nineties, one discerns a quantum leap. The village in The Better Man stands in sharp contrast to that of Markandaya’s, as Nair successfully brings out the pluralistic aspects of her locale. Unlike Markandaya, the other three novelists—Anita Nair, Kavery Nambisan and Arundhati Roy draw the region from their intimate knowledge. The region is very much a part of the creative consciousness of these writers. Details of landscapes, the time frame of the narrative and other specificities documented, bolster the effect of authenticity of their regions. Similarly myths, folklore, customs and traditions are elaborated to describe the life of the community in Pepper and The Better Man. Such descriptions are absent in Nectar and very scantily used by Roy in Small Things. Placing the novels of the nineties within the theoretical framework of the postcolonial and postmodernist discourses that gained prominence during the period has provided a strong foundation for the concept of regionalism by foregrounding cultural differences and diversity. What had once been construed as an Otherness to be subsumed under the grand national narratives, now finds its voice through the “silenced” communities of the regions.
Nair uses her region as a trope to explore the psychological apprehensions beleaguering her protagonists. She projects a Self as cut off from the social and political environment. The novel portrays the existential angst of the inhabitants who bear the ignominy of Indian feudalism and patriarchy. This angst in Nair’s novel is akin to the concerns of any modernist novel. It presents the transformation of the protagonist from a self-centred, myopic being into a thinking, feeling subject who is a true social being. Nair’s prerogative here is to show an individual’s potential for change, which ironically is achieved through myths and “predestined individuals.” The novel also brings to focus the issues of nativity while raising the question of true belongingness to a region. The codes of Orientalism that have been internalised by the coloniser and later by the nationalist elites find its legitimisation even in the regions. The region is further depicted as a space that exhibits the rigidity of a feudal system. Patriarchal dominance and the subordination of women prevalent in traditional Kerala society which continues to date is conveyed through the high caste Hindu family in this novel and the Syrian Christian family in Roy’s Small Things. Nature though vividly described, at times tends to lapse into a picturesque background against which her characters perform. Nevertheless, she grounds her novel in a specific region, and probes into its intricacies.

Nambisan is one of the first writers to deal with the region of Kodagu in Indian English fiction. She evokes her landscape in meticulous detail and the descriptions of it are as significant a part of the novel as the people who inhabit it. The unique relationship
between man and nature crystallises in a way not found in any of the other novels. Nambisan explores regionalism by way of the geographical, historical and cultural specificities of the region. In *Pepper*, regionalism equates itself to the realisation of the immense potentiality of the individual by being firmly rooted in one’s region. An outstanding feature of the novel is the absolute intensity with which her characters blend with their region.

Roy perceives her region to be heavily weighed down by the grand narratives of Marxism and Christianity as also by the all-engulfing impact of globalization. Through depiction of life in the small town of Ayemenem, she lays bare the poignant issues such as the civil war, global capitalism and gender inequality. Roy deflates the concept of a linear historiography based on Enlightenment rationality to re-assign and re-affirm the existence of “small things.” Her preoccupations with the socio-political concerns also finds expression in the environmental issues raised in the novel. An engagement with ecology of the region and the need for its preservation has been emphasized in all the novels.

The novelists attempt to resurrect the past of their regions which is often juxtaposed with the present. Retrieving the past of a locale is done through memory of a particular region which draws upon stories narrated, myths, traditions, folk songs and impressionable experiences of the past. As this “rooting” of memory in a place draws upon a number of sources it reflects the multiple facets of life itself without privileging any one such memory over the other (Nayar, “Postcolonial Literatures”46). As the novels unfold, the reader is made aware that there is no sense
of any idealisation or glorification of their respective regions by the authors.

All the novels selected have failed to seriously address the issue of caste, a system unique to the Indian society with its clear gradation in the exercise of power and privilege. In Markandaya’s novel, caste is left unmentioned. In her attempt to project the Indian rural reality for the Westerner, such subtle variations in caste would mean little to them. In *The Better Man*, although Nair presents a Dalit who is educated and holding office, she fails to develop his character. The only way the novelist enables him to stage a resistance is by resorting to black magic. Nair discusses the crippling social and civil disabilities that they were traditionally subjected to. Despite the legal abolition of untouchability and the official reservation of jobs, the novelist shows that their discrimination continues even today. Though Nambisan seriously embarks on the issue of the upliftment of the varied tribes of Kodagu, they are left to remain on the fringes. Nevertheless, the novelist emphasises the close ties shared by the upper caste families with their workers. In *Small Things*, although Roy makes a valiant attempt to empower the Paravan, it culminates in his brutal death for transgressing ancient caste laws. The social positions of the four novelists adding to their education and exposure to the world, have lent them a space to view their communities from their own perspectives. These novelists have only treaded familiar grounds by writing about their own communities. While (non-Dalit) novelists in regional languages (e.g. in Malayalam-Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai [*Thotiyute Makan*] and Valsala [*Nellu*]) have
probed into the lives of the Dalits and the tribals with considerable ease, the Indian English fictional writers have always been wary of confronting such issues.

Though these novelists have succeeded to a considerable extent in evoking their regions through their works, the fact still remains that the richness of bhasha literatures can never be achieved through the novels written in English. The added advantage the Indian English novelist has over the bhasha novelist is that by allowing “the horizons of the language itself to be extended” (Ashcroft et al., Empire Writes Back 44) they have captured the essence of their ethos in a global language to convey the cultural complexity of India to a world-wide audience. By seizing the English language and positing it in a specific cultural location, these writers underscore the Otherness of the language used as well as the communities depicted. Markandaya’s language mainly reveals her reluctance to mould her language to suit her “Indian” context. Nair’s poetical and crisp prose combines with her skill in capturing the nuances of her locale of Kaikurussi in her narrative. Nambisan’s simple prose though lacking in any of the innovative techniques employed by Roy becomes a filter through which the reader perceives the landscape and the social relations carried on it. She resorts to both ethnographic and literary techniques to present the life of the Kodava community. Small Things presents a new paradigm of Indian fictional writing in “english”. With Roy, her innovative linguistic virtuosity transforms her language into a veritable tool to exploit the cultural and linguistic matrices of her region. Another commendable feature is
the narrative technique she employs to subvert the linear, coherent world view projected by Enlightenment modernity.

It becomes difficult even at this stage to pinpoint any one of the novels chosen as truly depicting the regionalism as discussed in the first chapter. Each novelist has been successful in attempting to project a different facet of the concept. With the rapid erosion of traditional cultures and societies, such studies become all the more relevant to safeguard the very essence of our diversity. Novels exploring regionalism in English lead to the development of an open dialogue bridging gaps between cultures. These novels have been successful in putting the regions of Kodagu or Ayemenem on the world map and to make that given “dot on the map come passionately alive” (Welty 236). The distinctive regionalism of Indian English fiction needs an in-depth exploration to open avenues for further research. A land of myriad regions brimming with sagas, holds immense potential for future generations of writers. Reclaiming the region has been one of the primary objectives of the novelists of the nineties. There is further need to relocate the issues of gender, caste and religion which are the main contentions of struggle in a living society of India. Globalization which attempts at diffusing all differences makes the concept of regionalism all the more relevant. It calls for a constructive and creative resurgence of regional identities into contemporary Indian English writings.