Introduction

In a land quite remarkable for its geographical, cultural, historical and linguistic diversities, the concept of regionalism becomes predominantly significant in India. Earlier novels written till the last quarter of the twentieth century have been criticised for offering a pan-Indian perspective at the expense of the complexities of Indian society. The novelists by-passed these complexities to write novels in “real” English. The nineties have witnessed a change as writers attempt to provide a strong regional base to Indian English fictional writings. The primary objective of this dissertation is to attempt to read the four selected fictional works of Kamala Markandaya (Nectar in a Sieve), Anita Nair (The Better Man), Kavery Nambisan (The Scent of Pepper) and Arundhati Roy (The God of Small Things) as constituting discourses on the problematics of regionalism in Indian English fiction. The analysis draws upon some of the concepts and theories related to postmodernist and postcolonial discourses and juxtaposes the fictional works within the theoretical framework to see how far the novels in English have become successful in addressing the pluralistic nature of Indian society. It also provides space for interrogating the role of the English novels with a pan-Indian setting and orientation. The question whether they negate the actualities of contradictions and plurality for the sake of becoming “really Indian” also falls within the purview of this research.

As the four novelists chosen are women, it has to be made clear that the study has no intention to see the problems of
regionalism from a feminist perspective. Basically, the choice has been made to facilitate a better analysis by placing women writers hailing from similar backgrounds. However, in the course of the study one understands that there is much in the arguments of the feminists that their issues have been relegated during the national freedom movement and continue to do so by imposing new slavery in glorified terms. The four novels chosen represent different regions of south India. Of these, Markandaya’s work in 1954 has been selected to represent an English novel with a pan-Indian setting and to off-set it with the other three novels selected for this study which belong to the nineties when regionalism gained a new impetus.

The first chapter attempts to give an overview of the theoretical terrains of regionalism. Regionalism has been an under-theorised area as against the discourse of nationalism which has been a major project of say, a hundred years. Hence the term needs to be described in the light of the debates on nationalism. The Western imported model of the nation fails to address the complex pluri-cultural society that India comprises of. This demands a review and reassessment of the established notions of nation and nationalism. Regionalism has been a marginalised concept in the discourses of colonialism and nationalism. The superimposition of a unified map of the nation on all internal differences has led to a homogenisation which has strongly been subverted by postmodernist and postcolonial discourses. The study draws upon Jean Francois Lyotard’s conception of language games and the “differend” that challenge all universal assumptions of
contemporary power structures and make room for different voices to emerge. The postcolonial theories have been successful in giving a distinct position to the concept of regionalism by foregrounding questions of cultural difference and diversity. Theoretical insights provided by Edward Said and other postcolonial theoreticians like Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak have been made use of to make explicit the processes that led to the creation of the Other during colonialism which later gave new ideological dimensions to nationalism. However, this study makes no claim to do full justice to the complex issues and debates put forward by these theories. What matters is the context and breadth of these debates than their subtleties. The Eurocentric assumptions of the nationalist historiography that have led to the marginalisation and suppression of regional variations have been elucidated by the scholars of Subaltern Studies. However, it has been argued that even Subalternist readings fail to incorporate the tribals and other marginalised groups into the political and cultural framework of the nation. With the advent of globalization, a concerted effort needs to be made for the resurgence of regionalism. Literature proves to be one of the ways to provide an indigenous space to resist the hegemonic forces of globalization.

The second chapter charts a survey of the rise of regionalism in Indian English fiction against the backdrop of the discussions made in relation to the problematics of colonialism and nationalism. In the name of national unity, as demonstrated in the novels of the period, it became acceptable to project particular
class and cultural identities and regional loyalties on to the nation as a whole. To capture the vibrant spirit of nationalism pitted against the colonial hegemony, the projection of “Indianness” in Indian English writing became mandatory. Though Anand, Rao and Narayan have attempted to depict their locales and mould the language to suit their milieu, their locales become a stereotype of a village in India. The eighties witnessed a remarkable shift in the approach of Indian English novelists in terms of technique and sensibility. The study notes a prolific growth in the rise of regional novels in English from the nineties. The chapter also draws attention to the problems related to the mediation between the English language and the Indian geo-cultural landscape of regional inwardness. This dissertation proposes that the novels of the nineties chosen for this study have been successful in addressing the plurality of Indian society.

Chapters three to six analyse the four selected fictional works mentioned above vis-à-vis the question of regionalism. A section has been devoted in each of these chapters to elaborate upon the language and technique used by the novelists in portraying their specific locales. The third chapter examines the concept in Kamala Markandaya’s *Nectar in a Sieve*. The novelist’s attempt is to project an “Indianness” to appease the Western reader for whom India is a cultural monolith. Her region devoid of specificities loses its singularity. The fourth chapter is on Anita Nair’s *The Better Man* and the novel discusses the existential problems of the protagonist by taking into consideration the pluralistic nature
of her fictitious village of Kaikurussi. Chapter five focuses on the aspect of regionalism in Kavery Nambisan’s *The Scent of Pepper*. The novel highlights the geographical, historical, social and cultural specificities of the Kodava community while she explores the innate rootedness of her characters. The sixth chapter explores the concept in Arundhati Roy’s fictional work *The God of Small Things*. Roy relates the smallest of the small things of Ayemenem to deliberate on issues pertaining to national and global levels. The concluding chapter attempts to inter-relate the theoretical perspectives highlighted in the first chapter and the examples considered in the succeeding chapters.