

Navigating Environmental Crisis: A Journey through Placelessness and Brownfields in Anita Nair's Selected Novels

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Abstract

The article explores ecological nuances in Anita Nair's novels *The Better Man* (1999), *Mistress* (2005) and *Idris: Keeper of the Light* (2014) within the framework of the Anthropocene and Ecocriticism, drawing insights from Lawrence Buell's theories. It scrutinises the impact of rapid modernisation on landscapes, particularly brownfields and explores the pervasive sense of placelessness. The narrative unfolds against the backdrop of environmental challenges, including the exploitation of biotic and abiotic elements. It seeks to unravel the intricate relationship between human societies and the changing ecology, urging heightened environmental consciousness and sustainable practices. The research article aims to explore how the characters in the texts selected attempt to foster a renewed connection between individuals and their evolving surroundings amidst exploitation and ecological vulnerability.

Keywords: Anthropocene; Brownfields; Ecocriticism; Modernisation; Placelessness.

In the relentless march of modernisation, the profound transformation of our relationship with the environment becomes evident, manifesting in a stark lack of love and care towards the places we inhabit. This detachment, fuelled by the pursuit of progress and material gain, carries serious environmental implications that resonate far beyond mere societal indifference. As landscapes bear witness to this detachment, they succumb to degradation, morphing into testaments of the ecological toll exacted by humans' persistent endeavour of advancement. The consequence is the degradation of places, a sense of placelessness, and the depletion of natural resources in a world where the ties between individuals and their

surroundings are increasingly strained. This environmental disruption finds a critical lens in ecocriticism, a discourse that explores the intricate connections between literature and the natural world. It comes to the forefront as technological advancement reaches its peak, revealing the intricate web of consequences woven by humans' modern pursuits.

At this juncture, Lawrence Buell, a notable figure in the realm of ecocriticism, emerges with his seminal work, *The Future of Environmental Criticism*. Within this influential text, Buell introduces vital concepts that dissect the evolving dynamics between humans and their environments, notably Place, Placeness, Non-place, Brownfields, and the imperative notion of environmental justice. Buell defines place as "space to which meanings has been ascribed" and "are centers of felt value" (TFOEC 63). These are spaces where humans have deep connections, whether through personal experiences, cultural associations, or historical contexts. Places are often linked to a sense of identity and rootedness and they can inspire emotional or environmental attachments. In contrast, non-places are locations that lack this depth of meaning and significance. According to Buell, "'non-place' (a term introduced by Auge) is neutrally engineered space such as an airport or a hotel, designed to provide security for the displaced without the thick palatial identity connoted by place" (TFEOC 145). These are often transient or generic spaces that individuals pass through without forming meaningful connections. They are often associated with disconnection and alienation from the environment. In conjunction with Buell's concepts, Edward Relph's notion of "Placelessness" adds a nuanced layer to the exploration, revealing the erosion of meaningful connections in the globalised world, where rapid transformations challenge traditional notions of place.

Despite being often regarded as a feminist writer, Anita Nair vehemently opposes being pigeonholed within this label, asserting her role as a writer focused on portraying actual human conditions and experiences. Her body of work brings to light the tangible realities of life, exploring how characters grapple with physical environments, emphasising the profound importance of place within the narrative tapestry. In the selected novels, such as *The Better Man*, *Mistress* and *Idris: Keeper of the Light*, Nair's exploration goes beyond mere storytelling; it becomes a poignant study of characters shifting towards lack of placeness and, subsequently, contributing to the degradation of the places they inhabit. As one delves into Anita Nair's novels, resonances with Lawrence Buell's concepts on the impact of placelessness, the nuances of non-place, and the environmental implications of modernisation become distinctively evident. Through the lens

of Buell's framework, the study navigates the rich tapestry of these novels, unravelling the transformation of greenfields into brownfields. The convergence of Buell's ecocritical concepts with Nair's literary explorations offers a compelling avenue to understand and dissect the serious implications of our modern world's relentless march. Nair's works encourage the readers to reflect on how humans' relationship with place has changed in the face of modernity and globalisation and how it impacts their sense of self and meaning in an increasingly placeless world.

In *The Better Man*, the protagonist, Mukundan struggles to reconnect with his native place, Kaikurussi, which highlights the theme of placelessness in the novel. Nair paints Mukundan as a character who grapples with a profuse sense of detachment and placelessness despite being born in the village. She labels Mukundan as a "reluctant native" (*TBM* 13) who has grown accustomed to the ceaseless pace of metropolitan life and finds himself at odds with the rustic charm and cultural intricacies of Kaikurussi. His difficulty adjusting to the native and rural way of life after years in Bangalore underscores the challenges individuals face when returning to a once-familiar environment. Nair's words echo this sentiment: "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). Navigating dissonance between cherished memories and the altered reality of his hometown, Mukundan encounters Bhasi, a painter deeply rooted in the soil of Kaikurussi. Bhasi embodies a sense of rootedness and belonging that starkly contrasts Mukundan's feelings of disconnection. Despite being a native, Bhasi's intimate knowledge of the surroundings demonstrates a deep connection, making him seem more rooted in the place than Mukundan. Mukundan asks Bhasi: "How is it you know all these places? I was born here, and yet you are more the native of this village than I can ever hope to be" (191). The above dialogue encapsulates the interplay between Mukundan and Bhasi. It enriches the exploration of placelessness, illustrating the varied ways individuals experience and relate to their native landscapes in the face of societal and personal changes.

Continuing the exploration of place and placelessness, Nair crafts a tale around the character Idris, a Somalian native who embraces the identity of an eternal traveller in the novel *Idris*. Idris is a man without roots who is "wandering the earth like a homeless nomad" (*Idris* 289). As an individual who does not like to anchor his life permanently anywhere, Idris defines himself as: "I am Idris Maymoon Samataar Guleed, previously of Dikhil. Now a traveller of the world, seeking the measure of earth and man" (21).

This self-description captures the essence of Idris's nomadic existence, devoid of a fixed native place. Nair delves into Idris's internal struggles with the concept of "home." The poignant lines: "Home? Idris's fingers clenched the wooden rail of the vessel. What was he thinking of? How could it be home? Men like him had no home. The world was their home" (371). The novel explores the complexities of identity, belonging and the search for a sense of place in a world. Idris's journey becomes a metaphor for the broader theme of placelessness, emphasising the challenges faced by those who find themselves without a fixed anchor in the world.

Buell talks about non-places, which are places of attraction, not attachments. Buell supports the view of anthropological theorist Marc Auge, who quotes, "the experience of non-place is its power of attraction, inversely proportional... to the gravitational pull of place and tradition" (*TFOEC* 69). The above quote resonates vividly in the novel *Mistress*. Angela's initial fascination with Kerala, drawn to its vibrant culture and lush landscapes, gradually reveals itself to be superficial. Her attraction lacks a deep emotional connection to the place and its people, rooted more in a quest for novelty and adventure. But Koman's journey to London with Angela further illuminates the concept of non-places. In the unfamiliar environment of London, Koman experiences a profound sense of loss and disconnection. Koman says, "All I could feel was a sense of loss" (*Mistress* 387). He longs for the genuine connections and love he left back home, highlighting the stark contrast between the gravitational pull of his homeland's traditions and the allure of the non-place that London represents. This dynamic exploration within *Mistress* exemplifies Buell's concept, portraying the tension between the superficial attraction of non-places and the enduring, gravitational force of authentic connections rooted in place and tradition.

Koman realises that the materialistic nature of the city prioritises economic gain over emotional fulfilment, leaving him yearning for the simplicity and authenticity of his hometown in Kerala. He longs for the familiar sights, sounds, and smells of his hometown, which seem absent in the cold and bustling streets of London. "At home I would have gone to the kitchen... Not these bleached white grains, but reddish-brown rice still tasting of the earth and sunshine...Where in this city could I find what I hungered for?" (*Mistress* 377). The contrast between Angela's feeling of placelessness in Kerala and Koman's yearning for his homeland in London further illustrates that genuine attachment to a place goes beyond temporary fascination and requires a deep connection to its history, culture, and people. Koman expresses this in his words: "I stared at the floor,

the red and yellow lino with triangles and squares. When I was tired of looking at the geometric patterns, I stared at the electric fire. It waited, like I did, for Angela... I am in London, I told myself, I am living on a street that I can't even remember the name of. All I know is that the Earl's Court tube station is around the corner. The bed-sit faced the street on one side and a wall to the right. There was a sash window which, even in milder weather, I wouldn't open. It looked on to a brick wall. More than anything, I hungered for a glimpse of green" (377). This perfectly highlights the idea of non-places, as Angela's experience in Kerala and Koman's in London mirror Buell's description of places that draw us in without fostering genuine emotional bonds.

The profound detachment from places in the wake of progress severs emotional ties and paves the way for exploiting environments and their non-human entities. In pursuing material gain and development, the once-sacred bonds between individuals and their surroundings dissipate, leaving landscapes vulnerable to exploitation. Anita Nair's novels vividly depict this narrative, where characters disconnect from the essence of their surroundings and systematically exploit places and their non-human entities. In *The Better Man*, *Mistress* and *Idris*, Anita Nair artfully unfolds the once pristine natural landscapes yield to the unyielding advance of urbanisation.

Buell, in his book, states that the "incorporation of urban and other severely altered, damaged landscapes- "brownfields" as well as greenfields- into ecocriticism's accounts of placeness and place attachment" (*TFOEC* 88). Lawrence Buell says, "Brownfields" is also used more loosely to characterize anthropogenically degraded landscapes, particularly in urban and industrial zone" (*TFOEC* 135). These degraded landscapes often suffer from pollution, contamination, and other environmental hazards caused by human activities. Applying this concept to Anita Nair's novels, especially in the context of her exploration of environmental and ecological themes. Nair's novels often feature urban settings where industrialisation and urban development have led to environmental degradation. These settings can be considered brownfields that carry the scars of pollution and neglect. The article analyses how these settings impact the characters and their stories, thereby revealing the influence of brownfields on the narrative. By incorporating these brownfields into ecocriticism's analysis of placelessness and place attachment, Buell highlights the need to address the ecological and social implications of these damaged spaces to foster a more sustainable relationship between humans and their environment. Nair finds that humans have mercilessly despoiled nature by

transforming large tracts of land into an endless span of buildings.

Nair presents the endangered landscape of Kaikurussi in the novel *The Better Man*. Powerhouse Ramakrishnan's decision to build a community hall on Bhasi's pastoral land shows that the transformation of vast natural landscapes into urban development reflects an anthropocentric perspective where human interests take precedence over environmental conservation. In the quiet expanse of Kaikurussi, a once serene landscape now finds itself at the intersection of progress and peril. Anita Nair's *The Better Man* unfurls a poignant narrative, revealing the tragic metamorphosis of Bhasi's land, once brimming with pastoral beauty, into an endangered landscape or brownfield. The winds of change, however, do not carry whispers of renewal but rather the echoes of destruction as the land succumbs to the relentless appetite for development. As the construction of the community hall becomes a catalyst for upheaval, the very soil that bore witness to the tales of generations is now marked by the irreversible scars of industrialisation.

In this unfolding tragedy, Nair's words paint a vivid picture, capturing the essence of loss and transformation that renders Kaikurussi's cherished landscape endangered and severely altered. The haunting echoes of this metamorphosis are encapsulated in the words that lament the destruction of Bhasi's land: "The wilderness in which Bhasi had seen cures and miracles had been ruthlessly tamed.... The land that had spread, lush and reckless green, had been dug up and turned over. Where flowers once bloomed, rectangular walls of bricks stood. A cement mixer and rods of iron. A rubble of dreams" (*TBM* 349). These poignant lines set the stage for an exploration of Kaikurussi's journey from pastoral haven to a "severely altered, damaged landscape" called "brownfields" (*TFOEC* 88). Leo Marx's insights from *The Machine in the Garden* resonate powerfully with the transformation of Bhasi's pastoral landscape. Marx opines: "Within the lifetime of a single generation, a rustic and in large part wild landscape was transformed into the site of the world's most productive industrial machine. It would be difficult to imagine more profound contradictions of value or meaning than those made manifest by this circumstance. Its influence upon our literature is suggested by the recurrent image of the machine's sudden entrance onto the landscape." (343) The usurping of pastoral beauty with industrial machinery exemplifies the broader themes of environmental transformation and the detrimental impacts of modernisation on landscapes and values.

Emerging from the echoes of Bhasi's degraded landscape, the study

ventures into the harrowing tale of Golkonda in *Idris*. In the shadow of diamond-laden dreams, the once-untouched land of Venkata Reddy in Golkonda becomes a battleground where the tireless pursuit of wealth collides with the cherished love for the land. Nair unfolds a tragic saga where diamond merchants exploit the earth and familial bonds, laying bare the brutality that accompanies the quest for valuable resources. In the diamond mining landscape of Golkonda, people from distant corners converge, driven by the allure of riches hidden beneath the earth. The ground, nurtured by Venkata Reddy's love for cultivating millets and crops, now echoes with the clamour of those seeking fortune in the bowels of the land. By drilling the earth to its core, man only destroys the land and its natural wealth. Subba, Reddy's grandson, becomes ensnared by the glittering promises of merchants from Golkonda. But he wants his grandson "to love the land as he did and find happiness in it. But the boy's eyes dazzled by the merchants from Golkonda. He had seen how the earth had thrown up diamonds big as sparrow's eggs and he knew that their land was worth a fortune" (*Idris* 315). Venkata Reddy, steadfast in his commitment to the land and its timeless bounty, refused to relinquish it for the fleeting promises of wealth. Instead, he nurtured millet on the very soil that cradled the first diamond he unearthed.

As the narrative unfolds, the clash between grandfather and grandson explodes into a violent quarrel. Consumed by the dazzling dreams of wealth, Subba thrust a knife into Venkata's belly. The act of stabbing is not only a violent crime but also symbolises the rupture in the harmonious relationship between humans and the land. In the aftermath of Venkata Reddy's tragic demise, the recital takes an even darker turn as the shadow of environmental degradation deepens. Subba's daughter, Thilothama, continues to grow millet with her mother, rears chickens and goats, and lives off the land, fulfilling the desire of her great-grandfather Venkata Reddy. However, the tranquil landscape of their home becomes a target for ruthless exploitation by the diamond merchants. The novel starkly illustrates the devastating impact of unbridled human avarice, epitomised by the lines below: "a group of three men came by and with the casual ease of a scythe cutting the heads of millet, they burnt down the house. Then they set fire to the fields and took away all the livestock" (*Idris* 316). The deliberate burning down of Thilothama's house, setting fire to the fields, and plundering of livestock disrupt the symbiotic relationship between humans and animals, upsetting the ecological equilibrium that had evolved over years of coexistence. The collective actions of arson, field burning, and livestock theft have forced Thilothama and her mother into a state of forced displacement. Nair's depiction of *Idris* underscores the

multifaceted ways human actions harm the environment, from exploiting natural resources to violent conflicts and disrupting traditional, sustainable practices. The narrative is a poignant commentary on the intricate relationship between humans and the environment, emphasising the repercussions of neglect and exploitation, and contributing to the broader theme of environmental injustice.

Similarly, the exploitation of elephants in Kerala is another example of ethical dilemmas that arise when cultural heritage falls prey to the mathematics of globalisation. The protagonist Shyam in *Mistress* is ambitious, meticulous, fastidious and has sound business acumen. He promotes eco-tourism by gratifying the needs of foreign tourists and offering tour packages that appeal to them. Shyam's promotion of Kathakali performances to attract tourists highlights the commercialisation of cultural traditions. It is noteworthy that the portrayal of Shyam as an embodiment of capitalism in the novel serves as a commentary on the tension between economic ambition and the preservation of cultural traditions and environment sustainability. When Shyam tells Radha about his idea of displaying a small sequence of Kathakali "just enough to interest a western audience," Radha retorts, "This isn't like tethering an elephant to a tree in the resort" (*Mistress* 300). By referencing the tethering of an elephant to a tree in the resort, Radha is drawing a parallel between two situations that raise ethical questions. Radha's response touches on the broader issues of the utilitarian angle of human actions.

Nair highlights the exploitation of elephants for commercial purposes, emphasising the burden placed on them to entertain tourists and participate in religious ceremonies. Elephants have traditionally been revered in many cultures and are considered symbols of strength, wisdom, and cultural significance. However, in the modern age, they are sometimes used to showcase the material prosperity of event organisers. Their presence can be seen as a status symbol or a way to attract attention and visitors to an event. In *Mistress*, Nair illustrates and says, "the elephant has to be brought to the resort twice a day, except when he has to attend a temple pooram or garland some visiting MP" (19). She sheds light on the fact that these majestic creatures are forced to perform and endure long hours of work, disregarding their natural habitat and needs. Sangita Iyer's documentary entitled *Gods in Shackles* unearths the distressing practice of exploiting Asian elephants in Kerala, for various cultural and religious festivals, as well as tourist attractions. The book brings attention to several concerning issues related to the treatment of these revered animals. Iyer talks about their deplorable conditions and says: "I was in Kerala on

a mission to end the atrocities against the elephants..." (*Gods in Shackles* 23). This portrayal brings attention to the ethical concerns surrounding the commercialisation of elephants in Kerala.

The transportation of elephants along Kerala highways for various events is a common sight; unfortunately, it often leads to incidents where these animals run amok due to the lack of rest and the high temperatures they are exposed to. It highlights the irony of the elephant's natural inclination to seek shade and tranquillity in forests, contrasting it with the demands of commercialisation. These incidents expose how the materialistic pursuits of human beings has denied the elephants' inherent tendency to find shade and spend a significant amount of time foraging in their forest habitats. Joseph. W. Meeker says in his essay titled "The Comic Mode," "we are slowly beginning to realize that we have grossly underestimated the animals" (164). This underestimation of animals is evident in the way elephants are exploited for tourism. These magnificent creatures are often used as a mere spectacle, forced to entertain tourists through tricks and rides. However, as Meeker suggests, there is so much more to animals than what meets the eye. It is high time we shifted our perspective and started treating animals with the respect and dignity they deserve rather than exploiting them for entertainment.

Having explored the nuanced complexities of human-animal relationships in *Mistress*, Anita Nair continues to probe into the intricate tapestry of these connections in her novel *Idris*. However, unlike the subtle exploitation of elephants for commercial gains, *Idris* confronts the stark and often brutal realities of animal exploitation through hunting, painting a vivid yet unsettling picture of the callous killing of animals for sport. Nair narrates an incident about a travelling merchant who kills a peacock on the road as he rides past. "Who knows why he did it? Boredom, or perhaps he wanted to prove he could kill. For whatever reason, he killed a peacock for no real reason except that it was there" (*Idris* 284). Idris also shares his experience watching how the hunters kill peacocks using a peacock-painted cloth screen on his travels. "Once, I saw a giant peacock come close to the screen, and the hunter's partner shot an arrow through its throat" (285). In this account, Nair thrusts her readers into a world where the killing of animals serves not only as a means of sustenance but also a complex interplay of tradition, spirituality, and the intricate dance between humans and the natural world.

Animals, much like humans, crave solitude and tranquillity in their lives. When animals deprived of privacy, they seek out new territories or shel-

ters where they can live undisturbed. Their desire for peace and serenity drives them to venture into isolated areas, away from areas where humans hunt or infringe upon their natural habitats. Unlike humans, who sometimes act out of malice or pleasure, animals only kill when their survival is at stake. They navigate through forests and mountains, using their instincts to find a secluded spot where they are less likely to encounter humans. Animals understand the importance of respecting others' boundaries and seek solace in undisturbed environments. In the Introduction of *Gods in Shackles*, Richard Louv quotes: "Animals have a right to exist even if we didn't benefit from them. In environmental ethics, this is called 'existence value'. Still, human culture must acknowledge that our health depends on the well-being of other species and the health of the Earth itself" (Iyer 16). As we reflect on the innate desire for solitude and tranquillity in the lives of animals, reminiscent of their counterparts in Anita Nair's novels *Mistress* and *Idris*, one finds a poignant exploration of the delicate balance between humanity and the natural world. In *Mistress*, Nair navigates the exploitation and commercialisation of elephants, revealing how these majestic creatures, much like their wild counterparts, seek solace away from the encroachment of human activities. The parallels extend to *Idris*, where the killing of animals for hunting unfolds as a stark reminder of the impact of human actions on the natural order.

However, this delicate balance extends beyond the realm of fauna. In Nair's intricate descriptions, the exploitation of plants and trees also takes centre stage. The interconnectedness of all living beings, both fauna and flora, echoes the universal struggle for survival and tranquillity in a world where human actions often disrupt the sanctity of the natural order. The exploitation of plants and trees, whether for economic gains or religious rituals, unveils the intricate web of relationships that bind every element of nature, further emphasising the need for a holistic perspective in the examination of human interactions with the environment.

The loss of plants represents one of Earth's greatest ecological travesties due to its profound and far-reaching impacts on the planet's ecosystems, biodiversity, and the overall health of the environment. Kara Roger in *The Quiet Extinction* provides a compelling and invigorating viewpoint on rare and endangered plants and exploring their connection with the land and its inhabitants. Roger opines: "The variety of species that have been affected and the massive areas of land that have been altered are shocking. But the real tragedy is that few people are aware that the region's iconic trees and beautiful plants are disappearing and that they are doing so rapidly. When people think of the extinction of plants, they likely think of rain for-

ests in the tropics, not of the forests and flowers in their own backyards or in their country's protected parks" (26). Plants constitute the landscape's foundational elements and a region's historical identity. Their disappearance signifies not just the loss of the environment but also the forfeiture of our continent's rich natural legacy, encompassing the traditions, culture, and heritage of its inhabitants. Humans consider these non-human species as an impediment to development or subjects for commodification.

In the novel *The Better Man*, Anita Nair explores the exploitation of plants for medicinal purposes, depicting the significant environmental threat posed by numerous ayurvedic drug companies. Specifically, Nair draws attention to the exploitation of the Ashoka trees' barks, emphasising how this practice contributes to the endangerment and potential extinction of the species. The following lines illustrate it: "What has happened is that Ayurvedic drug companies, quacks, and all kinds of people have methodically stripped almost every single tree of its bark. Unlike leaves and fruit, the bark of the tree is never replaced. So I was most excited when I heard that I could find a specimen of this tree here" (*TBM* 192). Nair sheds light on the delicate balance between utilising natural resources for medicinal purposes and the environmental consequences that can arise from overharvesting and exploitation. The intrusion of humans not only disrupts the ecosystem that upholds the distinctive surroundings but also overlooks the fundamental truth that nature predates the existence of humanity. It is imperative to constantly bear in mind the concept of "*vasudhivaikuntakam*" "which is the central point of Indian metaphysics which does not view Nature as resource, rather includes all animate and inanimate objects" (Sharma 2). The current global environmental crisis stems from humankind's anthropocentric perspective towards non-human life and landscapes.

As globalisation and modernisation continue to reshape society and its economics, the impacts on water resources are irrefutable. Lawrence Buell talks about his mounting anxiety about the future of the places and its endangered species of the rivers, "which are partly protected but still vulnerable to strip mining effects as well as thoughtless misuse" (*TFOEC* 74). The pollution of waterbodies and its exploitation has been sketched in a heart-wrenching manner by Lawrence Buell. Similarly, Nair also shows a sense of worth and value to the place Kerala and the river Bharathapuzha, affectionately called Nila that flows through it and shows anxiety on the future of the places and life ebbing river Bharathapuzha, which are vulnerable to strip mining effects. *Mistress* probes into the complex relationship between humans and nature, highlighting the destructive

consequences of human intervention. Nair portrays the river Bharathapuzha as a character by making it an integral part of the storytelling. The river's constant struggle against pollution and encroachment personifies the challenges faced by the characters in the novel. The novel explores into the various ways industrialisation and urban development have compromised the river's natural beauty and ecological balance. Nair laments, "Beyond the railway lines is the riverbank. Or what is left of it. Most of the sand has been carted away to build homes. The river, when it is swollen with the monsoon rain, creeps into the houses that line the riverbank. Mostly, though, the Nila is a phantom river, existing only in memories of those who have seen it when in full spate, swift and brown and sweeping into its waters all that dared stem its flow." (*Mistress* 8) Nair exposes how industrialisation and urban development have compromised the river's natural beauty and ecological balance.

In alignment with Buell's apprehensions about the fate of rivers, Nair portrays the Bharathapuzha, a lifeline of both Kerala and Tamilnadu, vulnerable to the detrimental effects of strip mining. In many memories, the river is described as a phantom river that faces the repercussions of sand mining. Nair says that much of its sand has been excavated for construction, leaving a diminished river bank. Extensive sand extraction damages the land's natural features and upsets aquatic life and the stream channel's balance. The aftermath of the sand mining leaves behind a barren landscape akin to a lifeless moonscape, with potential recovery spanning centuries or even millennia. Nair paints a poignant picture of the Nila's struggles, referring to it as "A river that's mostly dry" (*Mistress* 161). The extraction and incineration of sand not only devastates the biosphere but also have profound consequences for the plants, animals, and humans inhabiting these ecosystems. The riverbank becomes a battleground where the force of human activities clashes with the resilience of the river. "When the Nila is full, the water rises to the top step and licks at the low wall. But now it is almost dry and there is just a green pool that ribbons into a brown stream further down." (33). The author discusses the exploitation of land and other natural resources, leading to environmental issues. Being actively involved with the Nila Foundation, the author, through her fiction, informs the readers about the urgent need to save Nila, the state's largest river and lifeline.

Through her evocative depiction of Bharathapuzha, Nair also talks about the impact of deforestation on the natural flow of water in Bharathapuzha and its consequences for biodiversity. The deforestation has led to reduced rainfall and disrupted the natural flow of water into the river.

“Environmentalists point out that the state forest department made a historical mistake by cutting down natural forests along the banks and planting acacia, eucalyptus and teak trees for commercial purposes” (“Bharathapuzha”). The natural forests are used to hold back the water and replenish the groundwater table around the river. As a result, during the monsoon season, the river is now prone to flooding and causing widespread damage to nearby communities instead of being replenished.

As a result of man’s incessant material pursuits, the course of nature and the lives of characters like Bhasi, Koman, Venkata Reddy and Thilothama have experienced insecurities. In this way, materialism is shown to have triumphed over humanity. As Buell warns, the “possible future of the environmental interdependencies between human and nonhuman and within human society, made increasingly unstable and dangerous by drastic alterations in planetary environment.” (*TFOEC* 97). Buell’s warning highlights the potential consequences of our unyielding quest for materialism, which could lead to an increasingly unstable and dangerous future for both human society and the environment. Nair finds that humans have mercilessly despoiled nature by transforming large tracts of land into an endless span of buildings. The novelist directly focuses on the impact of the human desire to despoil the pristine wilderness. The intensified urbanisation, marked by the construction of numerous buildings and roads and the influx of motor vehicles, contributes to deforestation and alters the natural landscape, ultimately creating brownfields.

Anita Nair holds a mirror to the complexities of the Anthropocene era, where globalisation and modernisation redefine one’s relationship with place. The echoes of Buell’s concept reverberate through the novels, challenging readers to contemplate the price paid for unmindful progress, the thinning attachments to place, and the emergence of brownfields in the collective quest for advancement. As Wendell Berry points out, “without a complex knowledge of one’s place, and without the faithfulness to one’s place on which knowledge depends, it is inevitable that the place will be used carelessly, and eventually destroyed” (*TFOEC* 78). Efforts to address ecological destruction and its causes often involve promoting a reconnection with the place, fostering environmental awareness and education, and encouraging sustainable practices within modernised and urbanised contexts. Recognising the importance of place and its connection to ecological well-being is crucial in mitigating the negative impacts of modernisation and urbanisation on the environment.

In contemplating the subtle manoeuvring between humanity and nature,

it becomes evident that the possession of land and economic pursuits must be tempered with a significant understanding of our reciprocal relationship with the environment. Anita Nair's literary contributions serve as beacons, illuminating the delicate equilibrium between the imperative need for modernisation and the perilous loss of a sense of place. Through her characters, Nair unfolds a narrative that mirrors the organic evolution of individuals and their changing attachments to the places they inhabit. This study is not an indictment of globalisation and modernisation; it underscores the necessity for a measured approach to progress. Change, while inevitable, need not come at the expense of nature. The true yardstick of success lies in navigating a path where environmental degradation is minimised, preserving the harmony between biotic and abiotic elements.

Navigating the intricacies of environmental challenges, the concept of Earth Jurisprudence, proposed by Thomas Berry, emerges as a beacon of hope and a guiding principle for fostering a harmonious relationship with the Earth. It is a legal and philosophical framework that seeks to recognise and honour the inherent rights of the earth and its ecosystems. Thomas Berry, in *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*, proposes, "To achieve a viable human-Earth community, a new legal system must take as its primary task to articulate the conditions for the integral functioning of the Earth process, with special reference to a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship" (Burdona 31). This concept of mutual enhancement stands as a fundamental tenet of Earth Jurisprudence, which provides a blueprint for a sustainable and equitable future, urging one to navigate the complexities of modernisation with a deep respect for the rights of the earth. In essence, it advocates for a future where humanity can flourish without exploiting the very foundation that sustains it- a future defined by a harmonious coexistence with nature.

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