

# REFLECTION OF KERALA'S CLASS IN ANITA NAIR'S *THE BETTER MAN*

Dr.N.GUNASEKARAN,  
Research Guide,  
Head, PG & Research Dept. of English,  
Sri VidyaMandir Arts & Science College,  
Uthangarai.  
E-Mail: [ngsekaran1@gmail.com](mailto:nksekaran1@gmail.com)

Mrs.K.MEKALA,  
Ph.D, Research Scholar,  
PG & Research Department of English,  
Sri VidyaMandir Arts & Science College,  
Uthangarai.  
E-Mail: [mekamagi@gmail.com](mailto:mekamagi@gmail.com).

## Abstract

In India, caste plays a very important role. We cannot isolate caste from class. People are divided into sets based on their social and economic status. Anita Nair's novels focus on the exploitation of people in Kerala. Her novel, "*The Better Man*" is a great example for how caste in politics operates in the rural village like Kaikurrussi. Through the characters, Kamban, the post master, belongs to the *Pulaya* caste and Shri Rammappa, section manager, who belongs to the lower caste, the novelist describes how they were ill-treated like outsider by the villagers. She also describes the social reality of rural Kerala. Kamban was ill-treated but on the other hand, Bhasi was accepted even though he belongs to backward caste. In the same, Power House Ramakrishnan who belongs to backward Ezhava caste was accepted because of his wealth gained by winning lottery ticket. This paper focuses on how people suffer by caste system in society and it clearly explains about the reflection of class in Kerala.

**Key Words:** exploitation, caste, politics, class, reflection, suffering, ill-treated

Anita Nair is one of the leading novelists of this century. In her novels, she pictures Kerala's social conditions and portrays the real condition of society through the characters without hiding anything. "*The Better Man*" is her first novel. The novel set in the rural village called Kaikurissi. Mukundan is the protagonist of the novel. Bhasi is another important character who belongs to backward class. He has completed his degree in botany and post-graduate in English language and literature. Due to his unemployment he undertake painting job. Mukundan is very close to Bhasi. Once the village heads planned to build community hall they demand Bhasi's land even Mukundan also along with them. Bhasi was not ready to give that land but they forced him to give. Even Munkundan was very close he didn't help him. So, Bhasi feels helpless to protect his land.

Each one of them at Shankar's Club, my everyday cronies, had known about Power House Ramakrishnan's ploy to take control of my land and they had willfully kept it from me. Even Shankar, whom I have

always liked and trusted. In the final reconing they were all natives of the village. Bonded by birth and bonded together. While I was the outsider. (289)

Here, Nair highlighted the inequality shown to the backward people in society. All the members of community hall forced him to give his land to build Community Hall. Even though he belongs to backward class all accepted him and treated good but now they show their power on him. Finally Mukundan hands over a chunk of his land to his friend Bhasi.

Power House Ramakrishnan who belongs to backward Ezhava caste was accepted because of his wealth gaining by winning lottery ticket. He attains wealth in overnight by this he started new businesses, invests and makes extra profit. He became the chair person in the village. Without his knowledge no decisions will be taken. He is “a social climber, a status seeker, a snob and opportunist” (P- 206). He becomes nucleus of the society. He had lot of respect among the people in society. Though he belongs to backward class all respect him because of money. There is proverb “Money makes a man perfect” that is reflected in this character. In the village no one helped Bhasi because of fear on Power House Ramakrishnan. He is the chair person in the Community Hall he only had the desire to build the Power House Ramakrishnan Community Hall. Here both the characters belongs to the backward class, economy plays a vital role due to poverty Bhasi becomes helpless and Power House Ramakrishnan becomes powerful man in society. Mukundan never like his policy and he considers Ramakrishnan himself attain social status because of wealth. Anita Nair writes about Ramakrishnan,

Despite the rubberized coir mattress he slept on and his renovated house.

Despite the 2 HP motor that sucked up water from the intestines of the earth  
And filled the huge plastic drums in the newly built, tiled bathroom. Despite  
the black ambassador Nova parked in front of the porch for everyone to see,  
and the acres of fields he had accumulated like an avaricious bee gathering  
honey. Despite all this Power House Ramakrishnan still felt the sting of  
poverty and hopelessness in his dreams’ (268).

Shri Rammappa, section manager who belongs to lower caste. Like Power House Ramakrishnan he had lot of pride because of his job. Mukundan refused to share cigarette with him. Rammappa opens talks about the upper class attitude and he says that all changed now.

..... Shri Ramappa as he snarled, ‘ I am sick and tired men like you who think that being born in an upper caste gives you the divine right to treat the rest of us like animals. Look around you; the world has changed.

You are not kings any longer. Here in my office I won’t allow any prejudices to rule. So you had better watch out!’ (148)

Philipose, the senior to the post master came in transfer to serve in Kaikirusi. He belongs to Christianity. Krishnan Nair enquired about the new arrival senior post master. Unni, the post

man explained about him that he is staying in lodge at shoranur and he inquiries renting room in this village. Krishnan Nair shouted that who will rent out a room to a Christian. There were only Hindus and Muslims in the village no Christians.

‘Rent a room in the village! Who will rent out a room to a Christian? What is he thinking of?’ Krishnan Nair’s voice rose to a shrill.

... In Kaikurussi there were no Christians. There were Hindus. There were Muslims. And in the fringes of the strictly segregated society were the Harijans, a community by themselves. There was no room for Philipose here. (151)

Here, we can see the reflection that other community will not allow in rural village. S.Devika quoted, ‘Marxism touting notions of classlessness and equal rights captured the imagination of the society of Kerala and became “ a simple substitute for Christianity”, as Arundhati Roy puts it in *The God of Small Things*.’(127)

Kamban, another character belongs to the lower *Pulaya* caste. He is the post- master of the Kaikurussi village. Through this character, Nair pictures how caste politics operates in the rural village. Mukundan used to visit post office to get the magazine there Kamban became close to him. Kamban never go inside of the village because people never accept him and allow him. Tea shop boy only bring tea for him to his office. Mukundan never invite him to his home. Kamban suffers lot throughout his life by this class. Even he is not allowed to sit in bench among his classmates.

Kamban had sampled social ostracism in many hues. As a little boy his classmates had avoided sitting on the same bench as he did. He was rarely included in games that ended in a tangle of arms and legs. As an adult he had seen the office peon set aside a separate glass to serve him his tea in. But Nothing hurt as much as this banishment into a corner. (161)

Maya Vinai-points out that,

... *The Better Man*, where people belonging to various castes and religion assemble to share their political ideas as well as beliefs. Right from labourers like painter Bhasi to the bourgeoisie Mad Moidu to the aristocrate Mukundan Nair, and also an occasional visit by the capitalist PHR, it becomes a hub for all, thereby creating a sense of community. (65)

Through all the characters the class reflects. Nair reflects how society is bonded with this class system. Not only Kerala throughout India it reflects. Somehow they managed and lead their life with sufferings.

## References:

1. Devika, S. "An Equivocal Egalitarian Ethos: the Dialectics of the communist movement in select Novel." *The Quest* 31.1 (Jun 2017): 127-140.
2. Nair, Anita. *The Better Man*. Penguin Books, India Ltd, 1999. Print.
3. Vinai, Maya and Jayashree Hazarika. "Caste Hegemony versus communism: the Kerala Society in Anita Nair's Novel." *The Quest* 28.2 (Dec 2014): 59-65.

