



Reciprocity of Past and Present in Benyamin's *Goat Days*

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ABSTRACT

Diasporic writings have conglomerate factors to expose before the readers which varies from names of people to names of places to different languages to different food habits, different cultural inhabitations to manipulated versions of behavior of different people. Some of the major Indian diasporic writers are Anita Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh, Vikram Seth, Sunetra Gupta, Rohinton Mistry, Jhumpa Lahiri etc. These writers have their own special ways of writing in Indian English Literature. Diaspora writings can be graded into two. Literature or writings pop up with a voluntary migration or forceful migration. *Goat Days* or *Aaadujeevitham* is a diasporic novel written by Benny Daniel who is well known by his pen name Benyamin. This novel was originally written in Malayalam and was translated into English by Joseph Koyippally. The present paper is an analysis of the novel *Goat Days* as a diasporic novel. The analysis is presented through protagonist's struggle and sufferings.

Introduction

Diaspora is a Greek word which originated from Greek word *diaspeirein* which means dispersal or scattering. The term diaspora can be also termed as fragmentation, scattering, hybridity, doublenature, ambivalence etc. For a writer diaspora is a particular situation in which he/she will badly misses his/her native land. Not only writer but also characters resemble the feeling of fragmentation from the homeland. Homeland always brings togetherness and closeness like family. Once the feeling of this closeness breaks then there is a lostness. This lostness leads to nostalgia. The novel *Goat Days* or *Aaadujeevitham* is written by Benny Daniel who is well known by his pen name Benyamin. This novel was originally written in Malayalam and got translated into English by Joseph Koyippally. *Goat Days* is a well-structured story which takes the reader to a next level of understanding and to the reality of a common man's life in the Gulf country. The novel depicts the real life of a person called Najeeb Muhammad who is an emigrant from India, went missing in Saudi Arabia. The novel depicts Najeeb's life for three years in the desert of Saudi Arabia. Najeeb is given visa to Saudi Arabia by his friend But, unfortunately, he was held captive in a place where he was given the job of looking after the goats in the desert of Saudi Arabia.

Representation of Life

Goat days is not just a simple depiction of migration literature but it's something which penetrates into the reader's heart and shakes the entire thought process of the reader. It is a real story and the experiences and incidents which are depicted in the novel are raw life experiences of a common man who have all the feelings like other human beings. For many people, Gulf is a dream land and paradise. Gulf is a place where Najeeb wants to make money and send his savings back to India. This is a common thinking process which can happen to any migrant just before reaching Gulf country. Najeeb also migrated voluntarily. Situations forcefully made him

to think of a resettlement. He doesn't like to leave his wife and his beloved mother. But for earning money he doesn't have any option left with him. Najeeb also had dream of travelling in a plane and landing in the Gulf and earning enough money from his job. He came to know about the availability of Gulf Visa through one of his friends. He did not give a second thought. Somehow, he managed money to an agent by "mortgaging the house and the little gold Sainu has jewelry, and by collecting small amounts from other sand miners" (Days 36). When Najeeb and his friend Hakeem were over excited when they landed on Riyadh, Najeeb says "City of my dreams, I have arrived. Kindly receive me. *Ahlan wa sahlam!*" (Days 43).

The situation becomes darker when an *Arbab* kidnapped both of them from the airport and both Najeeb and his fellow Hakeem got separated, and they were forcefully sent to an unknown desert. *Arbab* is a Persian word which means "boss", "master" or "landlord". For Najeeb it was such a tiring and exhaustible journey from airport to the desert. Najeeb's distress is visible from his words. "From that moment, like the *maniyam* fly, an unknown fear began to envelop my mind. An irrational doubt began to grip me, a feeling that this journey was not leading me to the Gulf like that I had been dreaming about and craving for" (Days 52). The long journey in the car of an *arbab* had made tired and he was made to land in a goatshed in the desert. From far distance itself Najeeb had overheard the noise of goats and lambs. So, he got a rough idea that what will be his assigned job. Najeeb describes: "I was somewhat aware of the situation I had ended up, and about the nature of my job. I shuddered for a second thinking about becoming another scary figure" (Days 62). This is the turning point in the novel, and a life changing incident for Najeeb. From this point Najeeb is left alone, nothing left for him. His close friend Hakeem is also separated from him. Literally, Najeeb is left out with nothing except goats. He can only hear the sound of goats.

Identity Crisis

Najeeb faces a problematic situation of identity crisis once he started to live in the *masara* with goats. Erik Erikson in his article “What is Identity Crisis? How Identity grows out from Personal Conflict?” defines the basic notion of identity as a personal sense as well as a quality of identity of personal sameness and permanence of some shared world representations. Najeeb always had a lost feeling of his past identity. To balance this traumatic state of mind Najeeb had given names to the goats which were familiar to him in his hometown Kerala. And interestingly, these names have connections with the people whom Najeeb have a contact in the past. In the novel, Najeeb explores multiple identities at a time. He always tries to relate himself with goats. He says, “I ate the wheat with the salt... I slept in the *masara* with the goats. By then I had indeed become a goat” (Days 150). In a passage of ‘A Turn in the South’, V.S. Naipaul states identity crisis as a result of ‘losing one’s history and one’s past identity in the complex world of the present’ (qtd in Sen, 18). ‘Moratorium’ is a term defined by Erickson. This is a state where a person is difficult to associate with the multiple identities when there is a clash between his existing identities. In the *masara*, Najeeb is not only tries identifying himself as a goat, but also he keeps seeing the scary figure who neither changes his clothes nor takes a bath. This is the exploration of another identity by Najeeb. The end result is that he is not able to associate himself with these identities. He tries different ways, but he fails to attain his past identity like a person with different dogmas in his life. Thus, the situations don’t allow him to get a hold onto his identities in the past. Najeeb’s present situation in *masara* is that he is not belonging to anywhere.

Shuttling between Past and Present

Prolonged loneliness had made Najeeb to contemplate his previous years. Some memories about his hometown and family used to haunt him while he was in the *masara*. While eating *khubos* and raw goat milk he used to think about his memories. These recollections always

took Najeeb to a different world of emotions. Memories of eating rice and fish curry made by his wife used haunted him like anything. At different situations in the novel Najeeb is shuttling between past and present. There is helplessness, dislocation, separation, alienation due to migration. From these adjectives, memories use to have a trigger. An inner pull can be felt. A trigger towards the old memories or the good old days which a person wants to cherish always in his life. Because of this congruent change of memories there will be sudden change of mind. This sudden change will be from present to past and from past to present. Najeeb is helpless throughout the novel. For Najeeb each and everything is new because he is an alien and there, he needs to adjust a lot from his end. But alone Najeeb is not able to make it possible from his end. But still Najeeb is trying hard to adapt the new settings in the *masara* and the life with goats. Najeeb's diasporic life is not at all a life in paradise. For Najeeb the lost paradise was his home, that is Kerala his homeland and his family. Memories always haunted him. Past memories and nostalgia use to prick Najeeb like anything. These memories are like thorns, and it is crowned in his head. So, he himself bears the pain of these nostalgic feelings which are lost to him. Immigrants must face a huge existential crisis while they are being separated from their homeland. Isolation, unpopularity, melancholy, desolation is the major in-depth feelings of Najeeb. Not only his mind but also almost all things which he encounters in the desert and *masara* reminds him of his past life. Knowingly or unknowingly Najeeb is moving to and from the present to the past and vice versa.

Reciprocal Acculturation

Najeeb is a perfect figure for a man who is been acculturated or in other words a person who had assimilated a lot from his completely new surroundings. When there is an adjoining of two cultures there will be an exchange of two cultures. This is called a 'reciprocal acculturation'. This acculturation or assimilation is forcefully imposed upon Najeeb by the *Arabab*. *Arabab*

himself had made Najeeb to have limited interaction with himself and no interaction with anyone from outside. It is defined in *Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity and Culture* as “a particular intercultural relationship established between a superior and an inferior culture when the later has no choice but to accept the traits of the dominant culture”. Najeeb is forced to speak and learn Arabic at the same time he doesn’t know Arabic, and then he is forced to eat *khubos* which his master eats. So, there is always that interchange between dominant and submissive. Najeeb made a huge effort of adaptation in the *masara* and in the desert. He himself had done a sacrifice to many of his habits which he had followed in his home and in his family. Najeeb says “I neither bothered about yesterdays nor worried about tomorrows. Just focused on managing the todays” (Days 96). As a snake sheds of its skin to adapt to the new climate or migrating birds shed in feathers while migrating Najeeb had also trades off all his values and practices. A normal person like Najeeb is not even allowed to use water; at many instances in the novel, it is evident that Najeeb is restricted to use water. “I had never faced such a predicament in my life. It was almost as if I lived in a river. Without water nothing happened in my life. Cleanliness had been my ideology” (78).

Conclusion

The character of Najeeb is a representation of a common youth from any Indian village who is obviously or desperately in need of a job, to look after his family and children. Like any educated person Najeeb is also not able to submit himself for any low-class job for meager wages. So, his fate himself made him to think of migrating to Gulf Country, where he thought he will be able to make a decent living, earn a proper saving and can support his family in India irrespective of the desert or arid lands or the ruined conditions which he is about to face doesn’t force him to take back his step. This also paves light to the Gulf migration which happened in the early 70’s in Kerala, due to the lack of job opportunities in our country. Najeeb is just a

small representative of many of our youngsters who are in search of a job, and he is an example of many untold stories of Indian diasporas who live all over the world.

In a larger subset vast majority of the diasporic writings portrays separation, alienation, displacement, memories, loss of identity and the survival or the struggle to gain the new identity. As a migrant in the case of Najeeb who lives in another place away from his homeland he experienced a great misery. The aberration of heartfelt feelings entangled with emotions make diaspora literature more relishing. Though there are a large number of diaspora writings available and explored for research purpose which includes South Asian diasporic writers and their works also. But there are not much number books or works available in Gulf diaspora or diasporic literature available from Middle East countries. Among all the Indian states Kerala is one of the states which consists of large number of people who settled in foreign countries which includes Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia, Oman, Muscat, Bahrain, Dubai etc. Initial phase of migration started with Gulf countries but later on people started moving to other European countries like London, Germany, Sweden and later on to New Zealand and Australia. *Goat Days* by Benyamin is a novel with tint of Gulf Diaspora in the South Asian diasporic novels.

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