



A DIASPORIC STUDY OF DISPLACEMENT, TRAUMA AND ALIENATION IN BENYAMIN DANIEL'S AADU JEEVITHAM (GOAT DAYS)

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ABSTRACT

The Indian diaspora, which is present in more than 100 nations worldwide, might be considered a global phenomenon. Many people from developing nations like India have been drawn to the Gulf countries in recent years due to the changing role of migrants in their labour markets. The Gulf has long been seen by the inhabitants of southern India, especially Keralites and Tamils, as a "promised land" where they might pursue prosperous careers and achieve economic stability. In Kerala's recent past, there was a time known as the "Gulf boom" when an immense number of people moved to the Gulf countries with high aspirations. These folks are eager to work hard and prepared for a wide range of tasks. Many have been captivated by the glamorous facades of the Gulf countries, but for others, it has been like a mirage in the desert. They do not know that those dreams are still merely that—dreams—until they get there. Their misery forced them into trauma where they question their own identity, a bond of shared experience of trauma in a foreign land. This is made obvious in Benyamin's work Goat Days, the subject of this paper.

KEY WORDS: *Diaspora, alienation, trauma, goat, immigrant*

Introduction:-

In academic discourse, writers from the Indian subcontinent are frequently referred to as members of the "Indian diaspora." Critics have given enough attention to English-language diasporic writing, but Indian-language literature has not been given the credit it deserves. A considerable number of authors write in their native Indian tongues. Language is a crucial tool for preserving ethnic identity and setting one group apart from another. As literature written in English predominates, regional diaspora writing attempted to integrate into mainstream literature for a very long time but was never able to fully incorporate. Critical readings of diaspora literature written in certain Indian languages have been conducted relatively recently. In the diaspora, literary

communities developed, giving these authors a forum to present their works. Publishing firms that began to host works produced in Indian languages by the diaspora were the Vanguri Foundation in Houston. Diaspora literature is currently being read all over the world in languages like Bengali, Marathi, Oriya, Tamil, Sindhi, Kannada, Gujarati, Hindi, and many more. Benyamin's *Aadujeevitham*, (Goat Days) originally written in Malayalam, is the best example from the modern era of examining the fragmented identities of the migratory Indian population, which is the other side of the diaspora. The Malayalam version of the book has created a great change in the very idea of a 'diaspora'.

Benny Benjamin is an Immigrant Novelist, a native of Kulanada, in Kerala, with the birth name Benny Daniel, he writes under the pseudonym 'Benyamin'. He is widely recognized by his pen name, which reflects his cross-cultural identity. He moved to the Kingdom of Bahrain in 1992 and has been living there ever since as an engineer. Benyamin's novel, *Aadujeevitham* was first published in 2008, and won the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award in 2009. He wrote the novel originally for *Matrubhumi* Magazine. Translated into English as *Goat Days* by Joseph Koyippally in 2012, it was received with great acclaim by a wider readership, and reached the long list of the prestigious Man Asian Literary Prize in 2012 and DSC Prize for South Asian Literature short list in 2013. *Goat Days* is a compilation of Benyamin's own memories and the experiences of the character Najeeb, a sand quarry labourer from Kerala, who left his homeland and travelled to Riyadh with the hope of improving the quality of life and to meet the increasing demands of life but ended up enslaved for over three years on a goat farm in the desert of Saudi Arabia.

Similar to the American dream, the Gulf dream plants the seeds of idealised land dreams in the minds of millions of people. In *Goat Days*, Najeeb, along with his friend Hakeem, moves to Saudi Arabia in search of work after growing weary of living in abject poverty. He leaves behind his loved ones in the hopes of earning enough money to support his mother, wife, and pregnant child. The book is organised into four sections: Prison, Desert, Escape, and Refuge. The story highlights the difficult circumstances the narrator had faced up until that point from the beginning. The novel begins and ends in Sumesi prison. The prison blocks were divided on grounds of nationality, "One block for each nationality—Arabs, Pakistanis, Sudanese, Ethiopians, Bangladeshis, Filipinos, Moroccans, Sri Lankans and then, finally, Indians. Most of the Indians were surely Malayalis. Naturally we were taken to the Indian block" (Benyamin 11). The prison became nothing less than a haven for Najeeb

to recover from the disastrous life from which he had fled. In order to justify his voluntary admission to prison, he gives the reader a hint about his horrific history "Can you imagine how much suffering I must have endured to voluntarily choose imprisonment!" (Benyamin 12).

The second part of the novel begins in a rural village in Kerala, the native place of the protagonist Najeeb. He and Hakeem goes to Gulf with a lot of dreams, on landing in Riyadh Najeeb cheerfully exclaimed, "City of dreams, I have arrived. Kindly receive me. Ahlan wa sahlam!" (43). The city of dreams, however, soon transform his dream into an awful reality. Unfortunately for him, his Arab employer does not turn up to receive him at the airport. Instead, his passport is seized by another man who takes him and his friend Hakeem and makes them work as shepherds in his masara /goat farm.

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 life that I had been dreaming about and craving for. The Gulf I had learned about from so many people was not like this. A whiff of danger. Nothing clear. (Benyamin 52).

The man who abducted him from the airport, known locally as "arbab,"(meaning master) treated him in an undesirable manner, which was really annoying. Najeeb gives up all hopes of receiving any generosity from his arbab out of sheer misery. Najeeb, stunned and dumbfounded, is forced to work as an indentured slave and endures terrible hardships. He is flogged, humiliated, intimidated, and spanked ruthlessly while having to tend to hundreds of goats, sheep, and camels. Being exposed to the harsh climate of the Saudi Arabian desert, Najeeb spends most of his days and nights outdoors. He is only allowed to wear an old, filthy robe that his owner gave him, and he isn't even allowed to wash himself. He lived isolated from

other people in a 'masara' a place he understood to be a goat shed. He verbalizes his plight by saying that, "I lived on an alien planet inhabited by some goats, my arbab and me" (125). He could only communicate with the goats around and forbidden any human companionship. He eventually forms a close, familial relationship with the goats. More than three years later he managed to escape from masara with the help of a Somalian Ibrahim

Khadiri, but get lost in desert for days. Hakeem dies of thirst and Ibrahim Khadri disappears. Najeeb finds the Malabar Restaurant, owned by Kunjikka and a haven for Malayalis in Batha market, with the assistance of a rich Arab. From there, he found Hameed, another victim who had also fled his arbab's home, to be just like him. Together, they struggle greatly to get themselves imprisoned in the hopes of contacting embassies to assist them get to Kerala. However, Hameed's master took him away before the cops arrived. Although Najeeb's arbab was not actually in the country when he arrived, they nonetheless spared him. It was the real shock to him when he realised that what he had gone through was indeed the fate of another man. As part of a government initiative to deport unauthorised residents to their home countries, he was sent back to India.

Discussion and Analysis:-

Benyamin depicts the drawbacks and difficulties of being an immigrant in this novel. He not only highlights the prevalent themes of alienation, nostalgia, and homelessness, but also unveils the brutal reality of slavery and advances the psychological makeup of the individual. Notable aspects of this book include the conflict between remembering and forgetting and the utilisation of memory as a tool. In addition, he talks about the trauma of moving away from home, learning a new language, facing rejection and repression, etc. A crucial component of migration is dislocation. Dislocation causes a form of isolation and estrangement in the immigrants, which eventually results in alienation. It implies a unique state of helplessness. Najeeb talks about this helpless

condition, as if to the arbab, he says, "We are two poor things, arbab, who do not know anything at all. Why are you angry with us like this?" (Benyamin 54). He has never experienced anything like that before: the arbab, the gun, the language, the masara, the khubus, the goats, the camels, the desert, the weather, the job that he is given, the circumstances in which he lives, and many other things. Therefore, he must make substantial modifications to everything. He attempts to fit in and adapt to his master's customs in an effort to get over this alienation. Najeeb experiences some degree of freedom when he arrives to the prison. This demonstrates how the last three years of his life have challenged his conceptions of freedom and imprisonment: "I had desperately craved for this in the past three or four years – the chance to talk to someone" (15). His days in the prison also help him realise that he is not only one who has been victim of the other side of the migration.

Najeeb begins his journey feeling isolated and desperate. The harshness of the desert, where survival is the main priority, characterises his early experiences. He struggles with the meaning of his existence, and the isolation that he experiences becomes a catalyst for introspection. Najeeb frequently turns to memories of his past for comfort while he navigates the physical difficulties of the desert. He uses this reflective journey into his memory as a kind of meditation, a way to briefly escape the harsh reality and reaffirm his identity and purpose. He is alienated amidst the harsh desert environment and hence often calls himself an "orphan corpse" to whom the enticing serenity cannot provide any solace; on the contrary it arouses in him the sense of longing and sorrow. It is his fervent desire to survive is probably the admirable attribute in him. It is possible to draw the conclusion that the terrible circumstances caused him to undergo a self-transformation. The need to survive stemmed from their suppressed memories of native nation. Benyamin has provided a different approach to diaspora study where the migrant seldom long to return to the native land as is often the case.

Conclusion:-

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Literature has given voice to the voiceless. Literary works also reflect the lives of diaspora labourers who are dispersed throughout the world. They lived in unhygienic conditions and had a low level of living for many years, were underpaid, and spent many years away from their own families. This distressing study of Indian labour migrants has an unusual literary charm because of the authenticity of the narration and the clear description of Najeeb's catastrophe in the Gulf. This novel offers a realistic glimpse into the lives of numerous diaspora individuals who endure hardships in nations other than their own. Through this novel, Benyamin has been able to open the eyes of millions of Indians as to how the Middle East was not the so-called utopia that they had been made to believe it was. It was not the kind of place where someone could live comfortably on luck alone. For innumerable Indians who are unaware of the immigrants' exploitation and are duped by promises of financial gain, the novel serves as a lesson. The greatness of Benyamin lies in the fact that he de-romanticise the diaspora.

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