

Psychological Impact of Human Migration: Motifs and Themes in Benyamin's *Goat Days* and Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*

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Abstract:

Benyamin, the author of *Goat Days* and Kiran Desai, the author of *The Inheritance of Loss* written fiction to bring changes and drive away from the existing social evils during the post-colonial period. The immigrants find it quite difficult to adjust themselves in the host country. They experienced the trauma of non-acceptance racial discrimination and non-belongingness. In the process of migration, one has to face social, economic, cultural; and psychological changes either in terms of losses or gains. Kiran Desai, the author of *The Inheritance of Loss* herself is an immigrant. She migrated to England with her mother Anita Desai for one year and then to united states. She experienced a dual identity. Desai also depicts how the Indian community lost it identity abroad.

Key words: Immigrant world and lives, Identity in Survival Strategy, Towards Independence

(Migration is the expression of the human aspiration of dignity, safety, and a better future. It is part of the social fabric, part of our very make-up as a human family) – Ban Ki-moon.

Globally human beings have moved from one end of the world to another. In so doing some went alone, others moved in groups. The phenomena that describe the movement of people is called migration. The *Oxford Advanced English Learners Dictionary* defines migration as “The movement of large number of people...from one place to another” (“Migration”). Human migration has a history that dates back to ages. According to the International Organization for Migration, a “migrant” is “An umbrella term, not defined under international law reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons” (“Glossary on Migration” 132).

Migration is divided into many types depending on its cause. These include: “local moves or residential mobility; long-distance moves, which are typically interstate moves; and moves across national borders which are called immigration or emigration” (Bures). Irrespective of the distance of migration, for most migrants the move away from home is an experience itself. Studies in the area of migration are concentrated around two areas.

They are: “(1) The way in which the migration affects the social relationships of the migrants and (2) the differences in socio-cultural systems between areas of origin and areas of destination” (Heberle 66). Literature holds the mirror to social reality. One way to understand migrant’s experiences is through analysis of literary texts.

Benyamin’s *Goat Days* depicts Najeeb Mohamad of Kerala as an abused migrant worker in Saudi Arabia. Benyamin narrates that only in Saudi Arabia, there exists masara. Most of the illegal migrants from Kerala are shut up in the masara along with the goats. The author further narrates that there were thousands of Keralite who were trapped in the airport and taken to the masara to feed the goats and camels. They spent their days in the masara in appetite and humiliation. *Goat Days* highlights the losses that the migrants endure as a result of the immigration of Najeeb Mohamad and companion Hakeem to the gulf country. Najeeb Mohamad and his friend Hakeem were the natives of Kerala state, and they were trapped in the airport itself and then taken to the masara. Usually, the Arbab who is the owner of the masara sent back the illegal labourers after two years but in the midst, some migrants tried to escape from the masara. Najeeb Mohamad and his companion Hakeem escaped from the masara after a long period of three and a half years with the help of a somalin co-worker. Unfortunately, Hakeem died on the way due to thirsty, but Najeeb returned to his motherland.

When, Hakeem received the visa from Saudi Arabia, his father compelled him to go to Saudi, without wasting his time by playing in the house. Father also advised him to learn the new language and life in Saudi Arabia. He promised his son that within two years, Hakeem would be taken back to Dubai. Don’t worry. “Go ahead” Najeeb began to compare himself with Hakeem. Najeeb was practised with a hard life whereas Hakeem is used to fun and frolic at home. He was a naïve boy. When they were waiting for the arrival of Jeyanthi Janatha express from Kayamkulam to Bombay, Hakeem’s mother is crying and told Najeeb, to please take care of her son Hakeem. For both Hakeem and Najeeb had no such experience. This is the first time that they are going abroad.

Kiran Desai in her second novel *The Inheritance of Loss* depicts the process of migration within the country and between nations. At the outset Benyamin the author of *Aadujeevitham* a Malayalam novel was translated into English by Dr. Joseph koyipally as *Goat Days* himself was an immigrant to Bahrain. He experiences all hard ships that an immigrant undergo.

Migration takes place in different forms, and one is forced migration. In forced migration, people are compelled to move from one place to another either by political pressure or by religious persecutions or by natural calamities. The other form of migration is voluntary migration caused either by the attainment of material welfare or employment opportunities or the higher studies of their children. Thus migration occupies a pivotal place in human history. When people move from one place to another or from one nation to another, they carry their own

culture and traditions with a sense of anxiety, distress, alienation, displacement and dislocation. When people immigrated to a foreign land, they have to adopt the new culture, but in this process, the immigrants had to bare a series of problems.

Kiran Desai, in her novel *The Inheritance of Loss* exhibits Biju the son of cook, immigrate to the United States of America where he worked as an undocumented immigrant in the restaurant business. Since he failed to get a green card in America, he was treated as an illegal migrant. He struggled hard to fit in with a strange culture. Desai illuminates the pain of exile, the ambiguities of host land and the blind desire for a better life. She pictures the experiences of Biju as a sense of loss.

In the ability to coop with western culture, despair and horror of alienation, illegal migration made Biju desperate, and he becomes a subaltern In New York. She highlights the cook, a good father to Biju, who always strives to give complete assistance to his son Biju for seeing him in America and his job with educated sections in the USA. Such a goal procure him to get a false certificate for the job. Though Kiran Desai pictures the cook as a needy man, he is the one who worked hard for his son with lots of hopes and did not want to see his son like him work under somebody as a slave. Though he was bankrupt, yet he had hoped on his son to send him to the USA for a bright future. But he was exploited by unscrupulous employers.

The *Goat Days* narrates Najeeb's history as the story of a voluntary migrant to the Gulf from India who stood determined even at the point of deprivation and agony in the Saudi Arabian desert.

The Inheritance of Loss to narrates Biju as a voluntary migrant who also meets numerous sufferings, anxiety, ill-treatment and discrimination when he works in a series of restaurants. Biju's ill-treatment and difficulty in keeping a job helps to portray the wretched condition of illegal aliens in America. Though Biju had gone to America with the hope of a better future, he experienced humiliation. Kiran Desai highlights the overwhelming feeling of humiliation and their efforts to overcome these shackles. Often they evade from the immigration authorities. Yet they were caught and condiment by the immigration authorities.

Najeeb also meets the same fate. Once in the masara, Najeeb, the protagonist of *Goat Days* had to do all the backbreaking works. But he was denied of khubus and water neither to eat nor to drink or to wash his body. He mentioned one such incident in the novel when he had been tired but no one cared for him. He also described another incident in which a he-goat attacked him while he was taking him for a walk. But Najeeb was beaten by the Arbab and he became more furious and turned a deaf ear to the pain of Najeeb. The Arbab ordered him only to take care of the scattered goats in the deserts. Like these instances, there are a series of events that happens in the novel which shows the pain and sufferings of Najeeb went unheeded, unnoticed, neglected and exploited. These tragic horrible sad terrible awful situations lead Najeeb to transformation in his beliefs.

Biju's life mirrors the position of illegal immigrant. It also echoes, reflects a feeling of alienation. Being an immigrant, Kiran Desai might have experienced similar anxieties like a foreigner. In consequence, migration causes a desire for home. The desire leads to returning of home. Thus homesick, homelessness, rejection of home, and the longing for home became the central factors in their writings. Desai narrated the experience of the voluntary migrant Biju, the cook's son who had gone to America in search of a better living. She portrays the variation between the voluntary migrants and the compulsory migrants.

He also narrates that his dress code and menu also changed in this alien culture. When he entered the masara the Arbab gave him a dress called thobe to identify himself as a shepherd his friend Hakeem also got the same dress. It is a shepherd uniform it is a long white shirt like a light garment. Its fittings are loose. It is something like a cotton gown with long sleeve. It extends up to his ankle. It is accompanied by a pair of boots. The clothes worn by an individual decides his culture and identity. Thus by wearing the thobe, Najeeb become a shepherd. Though he was reluctant to wear the thobe due to its bad smell, he was forced to wear it. He was forced to adapt the culture of the alien land.

His diet also changed in this alien culture. On his arrival in the masara he was offered khubus to eat so that he can be relieved of his hungry. It is so sweet like a newly baked bread. He ate four khubus without dipping it in water or any side dish. But in Kerala he had followed the custom of dipping a bread or chappati in jam or any other side dish called vegetable kuruma or mutton kuruma. But in the masara it was neglected. He had seen his co-worker, the scary figure dipping the khubus in water and swallowed it. Later he also followed the habit of dipping the khubus in water and ate them. In a day he ate khubus all the three times simply dipping in the water. In the home land, Najeeb had the practice of drinking tea after the breakfast where as in the host land Najeeb is given milk. In his native place, people use to drink milk only after boiling but in the desert there is no practice of boiling. Fresh breast warm raw milk is given to drink there is no chance for boiling. His master the Arbab and his coworker the scary figure too drank only the raw milk. These situation produced a disgusting effect on him.

Desai also remarks that certain social issues in the community affect the immigrants. The migrants left the original homes with the expectation of a better life, but they had to undergo many hardships and sorrows. In these tortured situation Biju tried to seek shelter in any corners of the immigrant world and forced to adopt the unfamiliar culture and alien languages. The problems of Biju at the United States reflect the problems of Indians in the United States. He can't fit with Americans. As he was denied a green card, he had to hide from the American police. He never adjusted with the American lifestyle. He gets tired of his existence in America. He feared a lot about the great loss that comes out from his own family. Desai also pictures the loss of man's faith in man, loss of culture, loss of identity, loss of special orders like peace and harmony, which result in the loss of human values.

To achieve the dreams and desires of his father the cook, Biju used fake documents and false recommendations and goes to America for a better livelihood. He worked in different restaurants like Gandhi Cafe, the Stars and Stripes Diner, The Bay Bistro, Le Colonial, The Queen of Tarts and Freddy's work etc. Though he works overtime for long hours, he was given only a meagre salary and had to bear the terrible insult and ill-treatment. Like the judge, Biju is humiliated and marginalized due to ethnic prejudice. At the Italian restaurant, the owner's wife complains to her husband that Biju is smelly. She tells her husband that she prefers Europeans better than Indians or Asians. Racial discrimination by the dominant section to the lower division is clearly shown in the novel *The Inheritance of Loss*. The racial prejudice is another aspect which had severe consequences. It also highlights the white community and the black community and the relations between them. It is impossible to uproot the racial discrimination from society. It becomes a desi in the society beyond redemption. Biju is not given any opportunity to defend his scars.

The immigrants are marching towards the future with great expectations of new and better things discarding their chances to realize that their past had better in store for them than the present circumstances. Not only in India but in America also people are migrating illegally, staying there and hoping for a new life. Boundaries have been changed often, and people have been migrated from one place to another, but the problem still survives.

The ultimate fleeing away from the masara was a personal choice. Filled with nostalgia Najeeb, his friend Hakeem and a new co-worker Ibrahim Kadri escaped from the masara. On their way to emancipation, the indifferent desert crushes and gobbles them. Not only the Arbab but the desert, the physical space also squeezed their energy. The long journey minus food and water pushe Hakeem in the mouth of death. At last Najeeb managed to find his way to Al-Bathaa- Riyadh, where the regular police arrested Najeeb to get deported to India. When he reaches the prison, he enjoys a kind of freedom. Thus Benyamin in his *Goat Days* puts a speck mark on the struggling humanity under the immigrant world.

In the novel, *Goat Days* Benyamin depicts Najeeb's identity before his advent to his masara and the one he had embraced after his advent to the masara. Najeeb linked his past identity by naming the newborn goats in the masara with people of his home country like Nabeel, Marymaimuna and Pochakkari Ramai. He tries to connect these names and his identity with these goats and their names.

The scary figure is the next identity which Najeeb explore in the masara. With matted hair of a savage, beard touching his belly, he wears the dirtiest of Arab clothes which gave a horrible stink. Najeeb was unable to associate himself with these identities and tried to explore his past identity. He started to give different names to the goats to identify himself with the people of his motherland. He detects all these identities because he could

no longer able to relate his past identity like a person with different ideologies of life. These are the strategies adopted by Najeeb to identify himself.

In the novel the *Goat Days* Najeeb's identity is not durable throughout his life as before his advent to the masara, he is a native of karuvatta in Kerala, leading a life of sand mining, hard labour but happy by his existence. But after his advent to the masara his identity is changed into a shepherd or sometimes merely as a goat. Hence there occurs an identity crisis in him due to his instability of identity as per the description of identity from the post-colonial view. There is none with Najeeb to whom he can negotiate his identity. He is always lonely in the masara, only Arbab is present there as a human being, but there is no intimacy between them. Thus in the absence of others, there can be no self-identity Najeeb suffers from an identity crisis. According to Erickson, an individual should have an understanding of his own identity which is exclusive to every human being.

Like Najeeb, Biju, the son of cook, also migrate to America through a tourist visa. By the end of the tourist visa, he over stayed there and worked as an illegal immigrant. But the circumstances in America began to change. A sense of cultural conquest evades him. He is terribly shocked to see the local rage and disappointment. Desai describes Biju's feeling of pain thus; "And he ultimately becomes a man full to the brim with a wish to live within a narrow purity. For him the city's endless possibilities for self-invention become a source of pain". (137 TIL). Kiran Desai, in her novel *The Inheritance of Loss* portrays the fighting between the religious groups of Muslims and Buddhist. The novel depicts that some Indians have been influenced by western culture which in turn led to forget their roots. The dream worlds of different characters of the novel like Biju, Sai, Judge and other minor characters are shattered. They searched for their identity and their lost homes.

The main characters in the novel *The Inheritance of Loss* are victims and lost their identity and nationality. Jemubhai, the judge, who was an anglophile was unable to adjust with the British, lost his identity and returned to India to get pacified. Likewise, the cook who is the servant in the jemubhai's house is humiliated and tortured by his master on many occasions. The cook is badly treated by the judge just because he is poor. All that he gets instead of his twenty-four hours of work is a few money. For this menial wage he had to do all the works in the house like cooking food, serving tea or tiffin, washing the clothes, ironing, polishing the shoes, sweeping and cleaning the floor, washing the vessels, caring the dog etc. yet for the loss of the dog, the judge beat him with his sandals. The judge blew him, and kicked him often, and the cook patiently bears it.

Today thousands of Indians go abroad and try to adjust with American culture it is a fact there is a clash between east and west. The immigrants also face this problem. Mostly disturbed by psychologically and remain under stress and tension. They are forced to immerse themselves into an alien lifestyle in this process they forget their lifestyle become unhappy and confused. They face frustration and alienation yet pretend to have come to terms with the troubling present.

Migration is as old as human history. Migration has been a unique phenomenon in the history of humankind. Man is never static. Modern life is no more confined to one place only. To migrate from one part of the world to another to settling down is transplanted to another soil. Migration of beings to a foreign land is a kind of cultural transplantation. Nothing can erase the memory of the migrants about their home culture. Socioeconomic reasons necessitate the migration of labour which is usual in the modern world. The holy book of the Christian's – *The Bible* also narrates the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan. Thus migration of a different kind for a different purpose takes place every day in different parts of the world. The dispersal of the Jews in different parts of the world away from their homeland is referred to as a diaspora. The term diaspora refers to displaced communities which have been dislocated from their homeland through migration or immigration or exile. Diaspora is a dislocation from a geographical location of origin and relocation in another territory or country.

Benyamin depicts the sociocultural impacts of migration through his novel the *Goat Days*. Though Najeeb Mohamad landed in Saudi Arabia as an Indian immigrant to work and earn enough money to send back to home, he saw his dreams only to be destroyed by a series of incidents which lead him into a slave like existence in the Saudi Arabian desert. Through the story of Najeeb Mohamad the novel mirrors the brutalities experienced by millions of labour migrants in Saudi Arabia.

The author further remarks that masara exists only in Saudi Arabia. He wanted to impart the secret stories of the masara and the invisible migrants who work like slaves. He has written a good novel which has won great acclaim both in Kerala and Saudi Arabia. Critics have recognized his extraordinary virtuosity as a faith full chronicler of the contemporary world and have borne an eloquent witness to some of the momentous events of our times. Joy Gosney illustrates the novel as the strange and bitter comedy of Najeeb's life in the desert and a universal tale of loneliness and alienation. (Back cover, Benyamin 2012)

In a fast changing global scenario diaspora refers to the hordes of displaced person and communities moving across the globe. Diaspora is used as a term to refer to all such movements and dislocation from the native country or culture. Since being diasporic is a matter of personal choice, the journey of life becomes an exploration of an individual's sense of self and a quest for the liberation of the human spirit. The possibilities are diverse and varied as there are individuals, characters in diasporic literature, particularly those in Benyamin's novel and Kiran Desai's novel provide the key to unravel the quest of the diaspora's. The awareness their dislocation is final characterizes the perpetual gaze of the diasporas towards the homeland. They relate to the country of origin and their immigrant status in different ways. In the end, it is creating one's own cultural space in the host land. In other words, diaspora is all about creating new identities, achieving cultural hybridity, acquiring spaces for growth, resolving cultural conflicts and forging a new culture, either composite or plural. Diasporic traversals

integrate the rigidity of identity hence diasporic literature addresses issues like identity, culture, hybridity, nationality, home, homelessness, and binaries like self or other, insider or outsider and margin or centre.

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