

DEROMANTICIZING THE DIASPORIC LIFE AND EXISTENTIAL CRISIS IN THE NOVEL *GOAT DAYS* BY BENYAMIN

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Abstract

This novel tries to explore the existential crisis and the diasporic life of Najeeb, in Benyamin's *Goat Days*. The paper aims in bringing out his crisis - economically and socially which is indeed reflecting the theme of existentialism. Najeeb is found in existentialism as he is an alien in a distant land. He is also an alien to the profession as a shepherd tending goats in a desert land. This existentialism leads to separation and estrangement which further leads to alienation. He does a major adjustment to live his living and to overcome his alienation. He tries to adapt and adjust to the culture of his master. Benyamin, in this novel, brings out the harsh realities, the downsides of immigrants, the challenges of life and exposes not only the common themes like alienation, nostalgia, homelessness, and poverty but also brings us closer to the dirty path of slavery and the psychic disposition of the individual. The paper has tried to bring out the Deromanticizing the diasporic Life and Existential Crisis in *Goat Days*.

Keywords: Diaspora, Deromanticizing, Disposition, Existentialism, Estrangement.

This paper tries to bring out the diasporic life and existential crisis portrayed in the novel *Goat Days* by Benyamin through the character of Najeeb. Indian Literature is one of the major domains of English Literature. Numerous Writers are competing with each day to add credits to the Literature. Malayalam Literature too has contributed their best to it. Benny Benjamin is a leading writer in Malayalam Literature who writes under the pseudonym Benyamin. He has published many Malayalam writings like *Euthanasia*, *Irunda Vanasthalikal*, *Abishagin*, etc., He has written the novel *Goat Days* (2012) from the real-life excerpt of a young migrant who has faced a lot of bitter experiences as a part of his diasporic life. The novel which is originally written in Malayalam as "Aadujeevitam", is later translated into English by Dr. Joseph Koyipally as *Goat Days* in 2012.

Benyamin describes *Goat Days* as a compiled piece collected from his own memories and the experiences of his character Najeeb. In order to improve his standards of living and to increase his quality of life, Najeeb moves from Kerala to Gulf. He imagines Gulf as an ideal land and Hakeem, his companion, too thinks it shows his dreams. His imagination boat

captured in the desert land when he reaches the airport. They were taken to their workplace as slaves by the guards. Benjamin proceeds to describe the continual torture and threat to death he faced given to him by a ruthless Arab in his workplace. A very kind-hearted person named Ibrahim Khadiri helps Najeeb and Hakeem to finally escape from the Masara. Hakeem's life is explained through the wear desert travel. In the end, Najeeb reaches Jail and he is back to his homeland.

The problem and challenges in the life of an immigrant are portrayed in the *Goat Days*. Alienation, nostalgia, and homeliness are the major themes. The slavery and psychic disposition of an individual are related in this novel. The notable features of this novel are said to be the tension between remembering and forgetting and the use of memory as a tool. Benjamin also deals with the traumas of leaving home and facing problems like dealing with a new language, coping with rejection and repression, etc., by entering a new place. Dislocation may be said to be a major part of the migration. Dislocation makes the immigrants experience a kind of estrangement and separation which would further lead the character to alienation. It suggests a special condition of powerlessness. Najeeb in *Goat Days*, expresses his helpless condition in one of his monologues, as if to the Arab he says, "We are two poor things, arabab, who do not know anything at all. Why are you angry with us like this?"(54). The arabab, the gun, the language, the masara, the khubus, the goats, the camels, the desert, the climate, the job that is assigned to him, the life situations, and each and everything in that land seems new to him; Thus, a massive adjustment is demanded from his part. Not able to withstand the alienation he experiences; he tries to adapt and adjust to the culture of his master Arabab.

This shared-world representation can be viewed as his act of giving the names of people he already knows from his earlier life, to the goats and he tries to relate those names. This can be interpreted as his attempt to place his identity along with the goats and the names he gives. It is part of his subjective choice. Excusing a basic definition or basic information of identity crisis it is difficult to have any researcher to research some aspects of the above-mentioned topic. In this article, he approaches the postcolonial view of identity and identity crisis and analyses the difference between the traditional discourse of identity and the postcolonial view of identity. Traditional discourse devises identity as being related to a fixed point, fixed to a particular set of values that serves as an assay mark for the individual in society. Stuart Hall goes to a greater extent and suggests that identity is a discourse that does not alter or changes the person over time.

In *Goat Days*, humorous situations or events are not a product of enjoyment of the characters in the novel. It emerges from the tragic situation Najeeb undergoes, and there arise incompatible emotions. While reading *Goat Days*, the absurdity of human life can be explicitly found. So, Conrad's perspective is important to take up this study. Horney defines the concept of Real self as the inner core of the personality of individuals that they recognize about themselves. (qt.in Friedman 135) Najeeb did diving for a living before his journey to Gulf. He worked as a person who did sand mining from the river. His individualism revolved around his

family. The important element of his real self is shaped out of his habits, likes, and dislikes, his love and care for his family, etc. He had a feeling that he is the one who needs to look after his family.

In the novel, we cannot find a trace of self-development or self-growth. Najeeb came to Gulf for a construction job. Due to his ill fate, he got trapped or maybe otherwise he was forced to work in a Masara, under a cruel Arabab. Even though he does not like his job by force he learns how to look after goats and camels, and this disinterests him. There is a marked difference between learning through force and learning with interest. Forced learning serves to be the major cause of the identity crisis. Because, when someone is forced to learn something like Najeeb, there forms a forced identity. Our interests and desires which constitute the major part of our identity are get suppressed in such contexts as Najeeb's.

In the novel, the extent to which Najeeb gets suppressed makes it difficult to see his self-growth even to a small proportion. One cannot find even a single scene where his skills and talents are expressed. The experiences he undergoes and the expectations he had contradicts considerably. Because, he came for another job, but the job he got and the bitter lessons he learns in Masara was not the one he was expecting. As mentioned previously he dreamt of building his life by building constructions. His expected job was a part of his occupational identity. When he faces a conflict in that identity, he happens to face an identity crisis, since he was forced to keep away 'what he actually is' (i.e., desired identity) and forced to 'what he should be' (i.e., forced identity) which was disgusting for him. From his observation, Henry Tajfel puts forward that Social identity can be an individual's "understanding" of who they are and what they are when viewing from their group membership.

In Najeeb's case, there is no social identification, as he has no group to get identified with, but the Goats. Other than the Arabab Najeeb cannot see any human beings. Arabab's superior power and Najeeb's ignorance of language silence him from expressing himself to Arabab. But Najeeb wants to pour out himself to any person. He wants his social identity to get developed, as social identity is an important part of individual identity. When a person is not able to build up his social identity, there an identity crisis occurs. Likewise, Najeeb is also facing an identity crisis, since he is unable to communicate or express or identify with others; because he is denied to do it or he cannot find any context to do it. Arabab didn't allow Najeeb to have contact with anyone. The following scene illustrates Arabab's disallowance.

A driver arrived with water tried to communicate with Najeeb, the Arabab jumped out with his revolver, yelling at and beating the driver of the water truck with his rifle butt because of the only reason for trying to speak to Najeeb. The enhancement of the individual's self-esteem is directly proportional to the status of the group in which the individual exists. If the one gets increased the other too gets increased and vice versa. For an individual to be socially identified,

one should accept the identity of the community in which he/she has categorized himself/herself as one thinks it is the right place to belong to.

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