

PATHOS OF THE GULF MIGRANTS IN BENNYAMIN'S GOAT DAYS*Neethu M B, Guest faculty, Sreekrishna College, Guruvayur, Kerala*

Abstract: Kerala is one of the states in India from where people have been migrating consistently to the Gulf for the past 50 years. The Gulf boom refers to the vast migration of a large number of people from Indian state of Kerala to the Gulf cooperation Council from 1972-1983. About 10% of Kerala's population of over 30 million does not live in the state. Every third house in Kerala has a man working in the Gulf. Kerala's tryst with Gulf began as early as the fourth century BC when Arab traders used to follow the monsoon winds blowing in from West to East and made a trading for spices in Kerala. The Gulf dream has found its expression in Malayalam film and literature. Over the years Malayalam films have tried its part well with unique themes which have won national as well as international accolades. Film makers here have dared to attempt on controversial subjects avoiding threats and bans from across the states and even from the county.

Keywords: migrant, subjugation, Gulf Malayalee, dream.

Introduction:

Indian novelist and short story writer Bennyamin's novel *Goat Days* was shortlisted for the DSC prize in 2013 has written extensively on a variety of issues, including the experiences of migrant labour in the Gulf States originally written in his native Malayalam. A novel that chronicles the ruthless violence and hardships of desert life has sold millions of copies of "Aadujeevitham" or "Goat Days" has completed more than 100 editions. The story "Aadujeevitham" by Bennyamin as told in the book is from the real life experience. The author interviewed and extracted best out of the person who suffered the life of Najeed and mixed it with a lot of thoughts and imagination to make it as a reading experience and positively different. The prose is simple which makes the impact more powerful. The book is garland of motions. One cannot read it by personally involving in it and feel for the characters. When the author was asked about the scope of the topic he dealt with in the novel; he said

I am from Kerala and I know millions of people have travelled to the Gulf state for employment. Some have come back and yet no one has talked about what the reality is and what type of life they are living there. As a writer I decided to go myself and experience first-hand the reality of life there. I needed to do so to portray what happens there. Am not saying every person goes through such an experience, but there are realities that need to be told.

About the particular chord with which the novel struck the readers, he answered

Firstly it is an unknown story that had not been told. Secondly, it is related to a person who has actually worked in such conditions. His story bears resemblance to the lives of millions. It is a story of anticipation of struggle and survival. So it is for everyone; not just for a person who has lived in the Gulf and worked there but for anyone who is struggling in the world.

When sorrows fill our thoughts, tears spill out. When life spills out from a book, the reader gets its tears. Bennyamin's "Aadujeevitham" (Life of Goat) is one such book which will fill our minds with thoughts, helps us to appreciate the conditions we live in and look at life on a positive note. More than this, the book will raise the humanity in an individual to sympathize to fellow humans sufferings.

This is the chilling account of extreme subjugation of body and mind; a journey into darkness that could easily lead to defeat or self-annihilation but for the existence of the third entity, the spirit. 'Goat Days'

is based on the real life experience of a Gulf escapee in the 1990s. Najeeb, a sand-miner in Kerala, dreams of better times. His wife is pregnant and he needs to sort out his life. Perhaps the same stock dreams that the 1.4 million Malayalees in the Gulf had when they were in Kerala gold watch, fridge, TV etc. He reflects, worse that scorch with hideous irony when we later think back on them.

After a long wait in Bombay, he lands in Riyadh one evening with a companion. There's no one to pick them up the airport. It is night when their journey almost endlessly, from bright city to dark desert, from expectation to despair. Najeeb is separated from his companion and dumbered unceremoniously in a masara-a goat farm in the middle of Saudi desert. From now on, he will live with his boss, his Arbab and a scary figure. 'A stinking unkempt, long beard fellow who had 'matted hair like that of a savage'. And the starving and scared Najeeb realizes his dreams are set to fade away, and yet he has hope, faith and the innocence to imagine. The scary figure is the shape of things to come; during the course of the next three years this is what he will become.

'Goat Days' is about Najeeb's life in the desert and his painful escape. It is not what you would expect to bring with you that comfortable. The narrative is like a diary. And yet, it's one of the most gripping books you will read. And instant best seller in the original Malayalam.

The depth of tragedy bought home in the mutilation and death of a kid he identifies with his own unseen child. The horror of his situation strikes him when he discovers the bonus of his predecessor buried in the sand. He grabs the chance to escape. The flight across the desert is painfully poetic. A companion dies, another disappears, and he is alone again. Finally, he reaches civilization without papers, without identity and gives himself up to the authorities. Jail is like heaven and there is a possibility that he will be picked up and send home. And even here, there is a shocker as he comes face to face with his Arbab, but he survives to tell his tale and Bennyamin will write it down.

The book leaves us in the middle of the desert and we see a world which is never heard before. Life of the desert opens before the reader to whom there is nothing left but to go astonished. The author emphatically asserts that Najeeb catastrophic voyage cannot be tempered with, or redesigned for securing popularity or critical acclaim. He says, I didn't sugarcoat Najeeb's story or fluff it up to please the reader. Even without that, Najeeb's story deserves to be read. This is not just Najeeb's story; it is real life-"a goat's life".

The migrant laborers in Gulf because of their inability to settle down, keeps strict vigil about their identities such as caste, religion, political association etc. In Gulf countries large majorities of migrant laborers are living in ethnic enclaves where they engage themselves in a kind of self-denial about other communities. The return migrant largely cut off from the reality back home, comes back with all kinds of deprivation and loneliness ; suddenly finds themselves in a society which is entirely different from what he dreamt of. Thus the return migrant who is unable to cope up with this change feels that home doesn't belong to them and develops an attitude of denials and again make attempts to escape. Years ago desperately poor Malayalees with no hope, little skills and a growing belly, hung on to the sails that took them to an unknown land of plenty. The newly gushing oil wells of the Persian Gulf were beckoning cheap labour in the mid-1960s. The first generation of the migrant Malayalees who ended up in the deserts of West Asia knew not where they were headed for. They only know their Dravidian language, the virgin paddy fields, the bountiful rivers and the sound of the never ending rain, but soon they were all Malayalees of Arabia, turning their desert dreams into mansions back home; building a New Kerala

Reference:

1. Benny, Bennyamin. "*Aadujeevitham*". Green Books, 2008 print
2. Koippally Joseph. "*Goat Days*", Amazon.com, 17 July, 2012
3. _____. "*The Return of Gulf Malayalee*", www.livmint.com, 16 September 2014.html
4. _____. "*The Return Migrants in Kerala*". Kerala diaspora. Blogspot Com, 13 March 2015,html.