

The Theme of Alienation in Benyamin's *Goat Days*

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Introduction

Goat Days presents the story of brutal isolation undergone by Najeeb, the protagonist at the hands of an arbab, the Arab master. His movements are controlled, supervised and surveilled throughout the day where he is detained. The book goes on to chronicle his escape from the cruelty of the barren landscape. Najeeb, a Keralite, struggling with the insufficient income he earns from sand mining is elated when he comes to know of a visa for sale. By mortgaging, selling and borrowing he secures the money to reach the city of his dreams. Najeeb along with Hakeem another boy who received visa, sets to 'the outside world' together (*GD* 39).

The city of dreams soon turns out to be a nightmare, when they are taken in by the wrong arbab after waiting hours for their sponsor in the Riyadh airport. Hakeem separated, Najeeb realizes what the future holds in store for him. His job is to herd and milk goats, "Rows of goats, undulating like a sea", in addition to filling water, hay, wheat, fodder in the containers for goats and camels" (*Goat Days* 59).

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The embodiment of power in *Goat Days* is the arbab, the Arab master. The fear he instills in Najeeb even on their first meeting is appalling and capable of silencing him forever. The Arbab, the custodian of his dreams, hopes and future is not a debonair figure as he imagined, but a rugged man with a 'severe stench' (*Goat Days* 48). When Najeeb tries to reason with the arbab, the former is met with the blood-curling whoosh of his belt. Starvation and back-breaking work become the new norm for even an unconscious attempt to violate a rule. Anticipating that Najeeb might try to escape while herding goats to the wilderness, Arbab exhibits the machinery through which he is to be subjugated: a pair of binoculars and a double barrelled gun.

Escape being a distant dream, Najeeb realizes that his life has "become inescapably bound to those goats" (*Goat Days* 73). The binoculars and gun serve to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power in short the Panopticism. Thus power is visible and unverifiable. These two pieces of apparatus represents the way in which discipline and punishment should be enforced in the masara. It is this indeterminate array of actual and ideological machinery that surrounds and defines the human subject.

Alienation

Benyamin's *Goat Days* has the setting of alien land and it expresses the cross cultural circumstances faced by the protagonist Najeeb. Najeeb has gone through the exile experience in the desert land and has undergone a mental journey to his home land when he could not bear the sufferings of the alien land. Najeeb suffers to adapt himself in food habits, cultural traits and social practices in the Arab land. The entire dreams of his foreign job have been collapsed when he landed there in the masara, goat's farm. In each and every circumstance

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Najeeb experiences only the alienation which plays multirole in his life both emotionally and physically.

The main motive of this article is to depict the alienated elements found in the novel *Goat Days*. Solitude is related with the human beings' mind. Man is facing solitude in each every situation in the world. Outwardly, he depicts himself associated with the society and companions but he experiences solitude in his heart. Such kind of solitude could not be expressed outwardly. Benyamin expressed the man's desire to live happily in the world in his novel which transforms its way from happiness to torment. The mere expectation ends with the mere disappointment in the life of Najeeb.

The concept of alienation has been a part of an ordinary person's life. The alienation can be associated with the people who have gone out of the society and the young generation who have gone out of the values of life. So, it could be called the separation of one set from society. The alienation concept has been used in sociology by Karl Marx.

Now a days the concept of alienation had become part of ordinary language, much used in the media. It may be told, for example, that those groups are becoming alienated from society, or that young people are alienated from mainstream values. With such usage of the concept we get the impression of the feeling of separation of one group from society, but the concept has traditionally been used in sociology.

The treatment of alienation may be a major thematic preoccupation with Indo-English novelists. Alienation occupies a very vital place within the works of the later novelists. They are irregular in their society mostly attributable to their some defects in themselves or some evil in society. The Indo-English author isn't most curious about creating philosophical, objective statements as in presenting the plight of associate degree alienated individual and expressing compassion for him and disapproval for society. It is true that a definite quantity of alienation has affected, directly or indirectly the entire generation of Indian writers of the

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current century. In most Indo-English novels, it is to the novelists' own outlook and approach to life that gets mirrored in their themes and characters.

Alienation is one of the themes of *Goat Days*. While reading the novel, the readers could feel the complete essence of alienation through the character Najeeb. The story is the life journey of Najeeb from his native Kerala to Gulf land. He goes there to lift his family economically but he feels complete alienation and longs to see his family.

No wife in the country would accept her husband to leave her in the pregnancy period. But Sainu happily accepts and sends her husband by saying these words: "... It is a God-sent opportunity, ikka, do not waste it..." (*Goat Days* 36). Moreover she is also going to face alienation after his husband's departure. Three years of Najeeb's stay in the desert is a complete longing for both Sainu and Najeeb. She longs to see her husband with a small child and he longs to see her wife by collecting all the past memories. Even the literates who gets good job in the foreign would have an alienated situation when they think about their family. In Najeeb's case it is quite complicated because he faces agony and tortures in the desert. So, the longing to see his wife gets kindled more and more.

Benyamin's *Goat Days* is the real depiction of a person's life. Benyamin started writing Najeeb's story because of his friend Sunil's compulsion. In the beginning, he thought that the story would be similar to all the stories which have been set in the Gulf region. The continuous insistence of Sunil made Benyamin to meet and talk with him. Sunil insisted him to write about Najeeb if there was any possibility. If he attempted to write about Najeeb, that would be a moral for those who stressed themselves to give up their life even for a small obstacle.

The forceful narration of Najeeb really touched the author emotionally which made him to ask more minute details of his sufferings. Only then the author could realize the fact of Gulf life. Before that he had a different kind of opinion on the Gulf life. The different

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kind of opinion represents the luxuriousness in the life style without minding their home land. So, all those vague, superficial and the thing which is far from reality have been faded away from the author's mind. The first meeting of Najeeb never gave him the intention of creating his life a novel but the experiences which Najeeb shares with him urged him to create a huge story with the emotional touch. He says the novel Goat Days is not merely a story of a person but it is a real life of a goat Najeeb. As far as the life of Malayalis is considered, many had travelled from their homeland to the Gulf lands. Among all those persons, how many had returned to their home land is a big question. So, the serious question made him to write the novel which creates the awareness among the society to safeguard their acquaintances from the huge mental and physical sufferings.

Najeeb's hygienic alienation paves its way to physical agony. First of all leading a life without taking bath is not acceptable mentally then it would go to the physic. So, Najeeb's alienation spreads both physically and mentally. In the fourteenth chapter, Najeeb cleans his back with the help of stones. The fear on the cruel arbab made him to do so. In order to come up with the physical agony he bids farewell to his hygienic rules.

As he has no one to share his emotions, he shares everything with the goats. In the twenty sixth chapter, Najeeb's alienation of being tormented alone was expressed in such a way that he exchanged a sexual intercourse with the goat, Pochakari Ramani.

Climatic alienation has been identified in the life of Najeeb when he searched shelter in the summer as well as winter. There would be extensive hot and extensive cold in the desert lands. He discovers a small hole of shadow in the afternoons to hide his face from the blazing sunlight. In the same way, he discovers a protector from the heavy cold who is none other than sheep. He finds his own solution to come away with the climatic alienation.

“...Whenever the cold pierced through the blanket to maul my body, I would go to the

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masara and lie there embracing the sheep. I spent the winter as a sheep among the sheep” (*Goat Days* 140).

Conclusion

The major themes of *Goat Days* are diaspora, immigration, slavery, confinement, violence, suppression and religion. Among all these themes alienation is the dominated one. The desire to earn more money makes Najeeb an immigrant. The immigration gives him alienation. Najeeb’s alienated circumstances made him to long for his family. The violence of the cruel arbab makes him a suppressed creature in the foreign land. Because of slavery the suppression takes its full-fledged path on Najeeb through the brutality of the arbab. The extreme suppression and violence made him to escape from the hell on earth and landed him in the prison. Throughout his hard circumstances he acquired the will power from the God almighty. So, religion plays a vital role in the novel. Beyond all these major elements of the novel, alienation is considered to be the significant theme. The essence of alienation could be found in the hurdled life journey of the protagonist Najeeb.

Even though Najeeb faces the element of alienation from the beginning and till the end of the story, he has someone to bring him away from his solitude. The characters who brought him out from the solitude are Hakeem, the scary figure, Ibrahim Khadiri, the unknown Arab in the luxurious car, Kunjikka, Hameed and the goats of masara. They performed a role of savior in each and every hard circumstances of Najeeb.

As per Najeeb’s view Allah who safeguarded him from all his state of alienation. So, every man’s mind has the state of alienation and agony. If problem arises, there must be a solution at the end. Najeeb’s life faced different kinds of alienation but at the end it has been removed from him through some helping hands. Thus, the state of alienation cannot be

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prolonged throughout the life time of a man; there must be something or someone to bring them away from that.

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