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Redrawing the contours of Diaspora representations: with special implication to Gulf migrants from Kerala

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Abstract

Besides the growing popularity of Gulf Diasporas in economic studies, understanding the literary and cultural contributions made by the same in redefines the contemporary diaspora populations and also representing certain diasporas that lay claims of past histories of migration remains limited. The term 'Diaspora' carry various dimensions beginning from the classical Diaspora of the Jews to the contemporary diasporas consisting of African Diaspora, Asian Diaspora, Indian Diaspora, and so on. Histories prove that paradigmatic shifts produce diasporas of one or the other kind. Generally diaspora writings have a tendency to define themselves according to certain existing power equations. But if we look at the last two decades, diaspora studies have undergone a fascinating, complex evolution. There were interventions from various field of study into Diaspora Studies, including- administration, policy making, social work and the media. The launching of the journal *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* in 1991 has also brought into academic debate the inclusion of different immigrant and ethnic communities into the rubric of 'diasporic communities' (Safran et al.). Representations of some diasporas become problematic because of factors like acceptance in the host land, duration of their stay in the host land, the evolution of that group, etc. It was Robin Cohen, a social scientist also specialized in migration and diaspora studies who made an attempt to differentiate diasporas majorly labour diasporas and to highlight their importance in diaspora studies. This paper look into the shifts in understanding and representing Malayali diaspora population in the wake of literatures that are coming from the labour migrating state of Kerala.

Author

Statement: All the views expressed in the paper are of the author(s).

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New dimensions in Diaspora Studies

In the beginning of his book *Global Diasporas*, Robin Cohen proposes four phases of Diaspora Studies. First is the classical phase from 1960s-70s, the second phase from 1980s onwards, the third from the mid 1990s, and the final stage is of current consolidation. Elaborating on the third phase Cohen says that “In the postmodern world, it was further argued, identities have become deterritorialized and constructed and deconstructed in a flexible and situational way; accordingly, concepts of diaspora has to be radically recorded in response to this complexity” (2). We know that for every field of study there exists a dominant tradition that sets the rules and structures that it should encompass. In Diaspora Studies also there exist some traditional interpretations that limit the extent of the phenomenon to certain transnational communities. Robin Cohen in his book suggests some theoretical, methodological and taxonomic alternatives to give representation to more diverse experiences of other transnational ethnic or religious communities who designate themselves or are designated by others as diasporas. Max Weber’s ideal type influenced Cohen in constructing this typology. Cohen says natural science also recognizes revision. He suggests some improvisations that have to be made in Safran’s characterization of diasporic features. He says that “To the original prototypical victim diaspora we have added other qualifying adjectives identifying three types- labour, trade and imperial diaspora”(7).

Speaking about the social constructionist critiques of diaspora, Cohen brings out various interpretations into which diaspora has now entered. Now diaspora is a term that is used to describe scientists, intellectuals, engineers and football players. He also brings Gopinath’s exploration of queer diaspora and how it became a threat to the hegemonic ‘Gay International’ and male-dominated diaspora discourse of South Asia. While elaborating the consolidation phase, Cohen puts forth the idea of dialogical possibilities between diaspora scholars and their social constructionist critics. For Cohen tools like emic/etic claims, the time dimension, common features and ideal types which can help us to find a middle path in delineating diaspora.

(i) Labour diaspora according to Cohen

Cohen suggests that “...instead of arising from a traumatic dispersal, a diaspora could be generated by emigration in search of work, to further colonial ambitions or in pursuit of trade. These circumstances can give rise, respectively to a labour diaspora, an imperial diaspora or a trade diaspora” (61). He then comes up with three specific points that qualify labour diaspora such as – (a) a strong retention of group ties sustained over an extended period (in respect of language, religion, endogamy and cultural norms); (b) a myth of and connection to a homeland; and (c) significant levels of social exclusion in the destination societies. Cohen points out how Weiner restricts the notion of labour diaspora. For Weiner, labour diasporas consist of those

who “move across international borders to work in one country while remaining citizens in another” (qtd. in Cohen 61). His area of research concentrates on five countries of the Gulf – Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Oman. Cohen moves on to Armstrong’s notion of ‘proletarian diaspora’. He suggests that Armstrong seems to:

use the term in contrast to a ‘mobilized diaspora’ whose members deploy their linguistic, network and occupational advantages to modernize and mobilize- thereby offering to the nation-state valued services and skills. By contrast, a proletarian diaspora, he claims, is characterized by low communication skills and comprises ‘a nearly undifferentiated mass of unskilled labor’, with little prospect of social mobility. (61-62)

Cohen categorizes proletarian diaspora as a negative category. But at the same time he also points out two main characteristics of proletarian diaspora like- (a) within all diasporas, including the most economically successful, there are (sometimes large) proletarian elements, and (b) overtime occupational mobility can radically alter a group’s profile. While discussing labour diaspora Cohen states that “A labour diaspora might, however, arise if an unskilled immigrant group is locked for some time into a subordinate status through lack of opportunity or prejudice” (163).

(ii) How are migration and development linked through diasporas?

Cohen says that a new wave of migration from an original homeland can transform the predominant character of the diaspora concerned. In a globalized economy new forms of international migration, development of cosmopolitan sensibilities and the revival of region as a focus for social cohesion are the four aspects that have particular bearing on the mobilization of diasporas. Also with the changes in cost, ubiquity and mass transport that have brought up new destinations for migrants and as a result the oil-rich states of Middle East and the economic hothouse of

East Asia have increasingly been brought into the global migration arena. The shift in the destination patterns of diaspora occurs because of the momentous political changes that affect migration. Sudden migration flows can also be due to conflicts. For example the first Gulf crisis led to the involuntary repatriation of two million Arab and Asian workers and residents.

We can see a growth of ‘migration industry’ comprising of private lawyers, travel agents, recruiters, organizers, fixers and brokers who have links in the host and home country. Cohen says “It is at least a plausible hypothesis that increasing intercultural opportunities might, in some cases, act as catalyst to move local cultures first into diasporic space then, via multiculturalism or pluralism, to a more cosmopolitan outlook” (147). This phenomenon can be called ‘localism’. For Cohen, globalization and diasporization go together even though they are separate phenomena. Cohen also suggests the term ‘deterritorialized diasporas’ to encompass the unusual diasporic experiences. Cohen has brought out many new aspects that can be incorporated in Diaspora Studies that go beyond the traditional notions of the field. Some of the concepts dealt by Cohen in his book is insightful while we analyse works based on the labour diasporas in the Gulf.

Recent literary productions in the form of fictions, and adaptations of migrant narratives from Gulf countries into movies in the third world nations helps us to understand their social, political and cultural life out there. They also contribute in reframing the lines of diaspora creativity within Indian literature and thus establishing a renewed representation of diaspora community. There is a tendency to privilege Indian diasporas in the West in Indian literature and academia. Thus this paper try to study the need to transcend this discursive politics of the term ‘diaspora’ within the Indian context by recognizing and representing diasporas that began to evolve as a matured diaspora community since the beginning of labour migration from Kerala to gulf countries. This can be done by enabling

studies on migrant narratives that remains unexplored in the regional literature from within India, of people who migrate to the Gulf countries from Kerala.

Migration of people from Kerala to Gulf countries since the oil boom till now forms a major part of what we call as Malayali diasporas. In *National Paradigms of Migration Research* it is said that “In 1970s semi and unskilled workers from south India went on temporary migration schemes to West Asia where the oil-driven economic development of the Gulf countries demanded labour in the oil industry as well as construction workers and workers for the service sector” (Thranhardand Bomes, 272-273). There are very few regional works in literature on the Gulf migrant life and they are not critically studied either locally or abroad. Here I am focusing on two novels – *Aadujeevitham* and *Oru Pravasiyude Ithihasam* – and I am placing these novels in the changing context of Diaspora Studies. Since these literary works are very recent productions there are not much critical writings on these novels. With the available studies based on these novels, inferences are drawn to substantiate the argument that Gulf diasporic literatures that came up in Malayalam, exhibit cultural, historical and political aspects that opens up newer understandings of diaspora born of oil rich countries and thus urging to redraw the contours of diaspora studies.

According to Homi Bhabha “the characteristics of a particular diaspora can change over time; they are temporal, transitional and translational” (224). Gulf migration which began in an early period from Kerala was slowly transforming into a diaspora community with the different compositions of migration inflow since the oil boom. Because of this reason, this particular migration differs in its characteristics from other diasporas and their narratives also promotes newer debates in diaspora studies. A literary critic in Malayalam, N. Radhakrishnan Nair, in his study of *Aadujeevitham* titled “*Aadujeevitham*

Parayunnathu” says that, “*Aadujeevitham* is a novel that demolishes the prevailing definitions attributed to a novel and at the same time it opens up possibilities for newer definitions” (8). This is really true; *Aadujeevitham* is a novel that emerge out of a new wave of migration to Gulf regions during oil boom and also bring a new perspective for diasporic writings from India. *Oru Pravasiyude Ithihasam* brings a multi-layered reading of life in Kuwait. This paper researches into the new wave of changing diasporic writings by bringing novels written in Malayalam that deals with labour migrant lives in two different Gulf countries in two different time period.

The general trend in dealing with migration in Malayalam literature

There are writers in Malayalam who went to foreign countries as temporary employees and also those who moved within India. If a writer in diaspora writes, whether that can be called diasporic literature or not is a qualitative problem. There have already been some novels and short stories born out of migrant diasporas in Malayalam like *Apaharikkapetta Dhaivangal* by Anand, *Pravasam* by Mukundan, *Oru Thakkalirishikkarante Swapnangal* by Rasheed Paraikkal, *Santhasamudram* by V.V. Kanakalatha. It was only after the 1960s that literary works dealing with people who live abroad came to the forefront. Novels written by Vilasini fall under this. In contemporary writings diaspora not only serves its thematic purpose but also shows the cultural consciousness and also serves as a knowledge generator. They not only shake the classical notions of diaspora but also dissolve them by bringing new aspects for debate. Malayalam literature itself was born out of the intricacies that take into account the anxieties, the new world view that one attains- the thought of our nation, modernity, migration to lead a settled life abroad and to return from there. *Indulekha* written by O.Chandu Menon gives us a

clue to this.

To define Malayalee diaspora we have to take into account the changes that the concept of diaspora has undergone along with the history of the Indian diaspora. Diaspora is a concept that keeps on expanding its meanings. It was during 1980-90s that a different study on diaspora begun, apart from the pain stricken narratives from histories. Those who went in search of employment and as a part of trade and those who are denied to live in their home country because of some political reasons fall under this. From the people who went as indentured labourers in the 19th Century who were sent to colonies in Caribbean and Pacific islands to the people who migrated to America and the Persian Gulf, including migrant labourers becomes part of this expanded meaning. We can also call them as labour diaspora. Early migrants from Kerala fall under this category of diaspora. Before outward migration took place there happened inner migration within Kerala such as the Malabar migration that happened in the 1920s. Regarding the migration from Travancore to Malabar there are many sociological and economical studies conducted till date. *Vishakanyaka* by S.K.Pottakkad, *Orotha* by Kaakkanadan, *Nellu* by P.Valsala and *Karuthapennu* by Joseph Mattam fall under this.

We can position the migration that happened to Gulf countries whether it is temporary or permanent as belonging to a third space, similar to what Bhabha categorises the diasporas generally as belonging to an in between space or hybrid space. Migrant literature portrays the anxieties and doubts of identity formation, longing for home etc. Writers like Karunakaran, Benyamin, Abu Iringattiri, Basheer Mecheri, Mukkadan, Karoor Soman, S.K.Pillai, Thomas Cherian and V.V. Kanakalatha are all producers of literature that deal with migrant lives abroad. There are a lot of people who live in Indian cities as diasporas, and there are also some institutions being run by these diasporas.

There is another group of people who are marginalized

from the ordinary categorizations of diaspora. Anand's novel *Apaharikkapetta dhaivangal* is an example. This novel explains the socio political issues related to migration. It brings into light the life of gypsies; who can be categorized as deterritorialized diasporas. Anand says that gypsies are those who live outside history; they live in the present and do not have a past or future to demand. He tries to incorporate modern trends in gypsy culture as a different type of diaspora. Mukundan's *Pravasam* deals with multidimensional diasporas across the world. Beerankutti, a character in the novel, often says "Kondotti comes in his dreams." He is a representative of Gulf diaspora in *Pravasam*. Mukundan says that life in the Gulf is not only about money making but it presents the sad plight that humans have not known. It carries in it the sad story of thousands of separated lives. And the most shocking fact is that no one has ventured to write their stories. There is a pressing need to realise that regional literatures are the real weapons against colonialism, though many such novels does not reach to global audience.

Even though there are many literary works on migrant lives, it is for the first time novels dealing with migrant labour issues in Gulf countries are chosen as the main focal theme in Malayalam fictions. Among the recent novels that have come out in Malayalam, *Aadujeevitham* is the one that has reached a wider audience. The author of this novel Benyamin is an employee in Bahrain and he chooses a place which he is familiar with. These novels can be seen as representations of or a collective autobiography of the Gulf diasporas. In a study on this novel the writer says that "In the novel we can see a peculiar way of rendering the story. At times the writer speaks on behalf of Najeeb. It can also be seen as a union of experience and memory by Najeeb and Benyamin" (Santhoshkumar 43). These novels problematize the existing notions of diaspora.

Problematizing diaspora through *Aadujeevitham*

(Goat Days)

Aadujeevitham was the first attempt by a writer residing in the Middle East to address the issues regarding the life of migrant labourers from Kerala who left to Riyadh in search of a job. *Aadujeevitham* opened up a new world of diaspora which remained unnoticed and covers the socio, political, cultural and historical relevance of these diasporas in shaping the life of people back in Kerala. Certain initial criticisms that this work confronted and certain reflections on the same is discussed further.

Critics have come up with questions about the identity of this work as a novel. Critics say that portrayal of migrant experience has reduced the creative spirit of the book. But this book succeeded in regaining the spirit of reading among the Malayalees. Unlike other diasporic writers who write about being at home in diaspora, Benyamin portrays a diasporic life that is more realistic. He agrees to the fact that he is not writing his own experience, but narrates the story of Najeeb whom he met on the pathway of his life. There are criticisms that this novel employs the merging of life and creativity in a certain way so as to sideline the scope for creativity, and make the novel-writing become more personal. The oil boom in Gulf countries set the stage for an extensive migration, till then people did not feel the necessity to migrate. The life of people in Kerala underwent a rapid transformation from tradition to modernity with the inflow of foreign remittances. Since this novel is set in the period of oil boom some critics criticize it as a literary product of globalisation. Adding to this there arise criticisms on transformation of land as wealth and the scope of remittances taken away by commodification. But Benyamin explores a different world that lies buried by the power structures in the hostland.

This novel redefines the notion of Malayalee Gulf life and also the established narrative style in Malayalam.

Benyamin's novel can be seen as a new phase of pastoral narrative. Modernity is represented only in a very few instances in the novel. More than half of the novel speaks of slavery that generally existed before the coming of civil laws, human rights consciousness and democratic governments. In the novel, the desert is portrayed as a symbol of the prison. The identity of Najeeb as a human, leading an animal life in a goat farm in a desert near Riyadh, creates in him a personality built on the combination of human and animal life.

This theme that Benyamin brings up in his novel is relevant both in sociological and political contexts. There is a need to look into the reliability of civil laws and democracy that are formed as a part of nation building. But while we look at this in the context of the novel we can see many loopholes. The Arbab, who is meant to be the protector of his workers, behaves in a humiliating way. They are trying to preserve and follow the age old practice of slavery in this modern world. These agents are not prepared to encounter cultures and civilizations and that makes them follow the traits of the medieval age. There are attempts being done by NGOs, the media and other organisations based in Gulf countries to communicate with people who are entrapped in these ghettos of modern slavery. Thus the novel opens up the possibilities for debate about the existing practice of modern slavery in a world following the principles of democracy and human rights.

Reading *Aadujeevitham* (Goat Days)

Even though we are familiar with other diasporic writers in Indian English who write about the life of educated citizens from India who migrate to developed countries, we have not come up with accounts of the lives of people who are entrapped in the ghettos of the oil rich countries. At the beginning of *Aadujeevitham* in a study by N. Radhakrishnan Nair says that:

As outsiders we feel that the novel deals with a

simple life similar to that of our life, but there is a deep and dense observation of life in its simplistic way – we consider it as philosophical not within the dark altars of religion, but this follows the reader. During the oil boom in Gulf countries an ordinary rural man who earns his living by diving in waters dream to reach the world of petro dollar, but unfortunately he does not reach there. Instead he reaches a place where he has to pay his life for a drop of water. (10)

Certain experiences in human life will take away all our fears, as is learned by Najeeb from his experience. Benyamin, through the character of Najeeb, tries to communicate to the audience his experiences in the deserts of Riyadh. *Aadujeevitham* is a novel that has opened up really a new field of study in Malayalam literature and can be further read by placing it against the diasporic literatures in Indian English. This could be due to the new form of narrative technique it employs. This story proves that place and time are myths as Najeeb is confronted with dehumanization, oppression and disguised slavery even in the twentieth century.

Some books become famous not only because of their aesthetic beauty, but if they challenge creative endeavours with the experience that they convey to the reader. This novel introduces some new motifs that are not familiar to the Malayalee readers, like dehumanisation, castration and the personification of goats – as a relief from isolation. Najeeb's state of isolation while living among goats in the *masara*¹ is depicted in the novel with all its pains.

“Writers in every language and religion have seen the desert as a space for enlightenment and spiritual revival. There are writings that suggest life in desert can create an explosion of knowledge in the brain. But the desert did not revive me in any way”(Goat Days, 215). These are the words spoken by Najeeb that come

1 'Masara' means 'farm' in Arabic.

towards the end of the novel *Aadujeevitham* to infuse a thought process. What is the role of the desert here and what is the role of the desert in Najeeb's life and why did Najeeb feel he was not revived? These are serious questions that have to be inquired. We can draw some symbolic representation of the desert and draw conclusions.

The novel also depicts the diasporic experiences that Najeeb encounters from the beginning till the end of the novel which can be seen as a new representation in diasporic writings about the labour migrants and their experiences in Gulf countries. Further I will discuss the depiction of diasporic experience in the novel *Aadujeevitham*.

(i) Journey of worries and anxieties

In the chapter “Onward to Desert”, the author sets the background of the story. After the first Iran war there was again an upsurge in job opportunities in the oil kingdoms. This opened up the era of migration from various parts of the world towards Gulf regions. Najeeb was also a part of this wave of migration. Back home, he did the labour of sand collection by diving into water for a long time and that did not earn him much. So one day some friend of his came and asked him whether he was interested to go to the Gulf. Najeeb already had this plan in his mind and he thought now the moment has come. The preparation before his journey is described by Benyamin, which details the typical anxieties that the labour migrants show while going abroad. For Najeeb days ahead were full of anxiety, dream and worry. Benyamin writes:

The struggle I had to undergo the next one week! Every Gulf worker who had no relative in the Gulf to support him will have a similar story. I finally fixed up the total by mortgaging the house and the little gold Sainu had as jewellery, and by collecting small amounts from other sand

miners and by borrowing from everyone I knew. Yes, 'fix up' best describes it. Suffice to say I gave my friend's brother-in-law the money the night before he left. (I could have asked Sainu's brother in Abu Dhabi, but she refused to let me. She resented them for not helping me till then). Two months passed, months of waiting and dreaming. Then there was another round of borrowing. I had to arrange the remaining ten for the agent. Even that was fixed up. Meanwhile, I dreamt of a host of dreams. Perhaps the same stock dreams that the 1.4 million Malayalis in the Gulf had when they were in Kerala – gold watch, fridge, TV, car, AC, tape recorder, VCP, a heavy gold chain. I shared them with Sainu as we slept together at night. (37-38)

This is the experience of an ordinary migrant from Kerala who left for Gulf during the period of oil boom. They were mostly very young people who were unskilled and had no idea about the outer world. Here Najeeb's wife was pregnant when he was about to leave and he whispers in her ears that he will be able to see his child only after a few years and that he will bring gifts when he comes back. The family is also affected by Najeeb's migration. The onward journey of Najeeb was filled with curiosity and tension. Benyamin writes:

I was more tense than excited. The journey was fraught with all worries that crept up when one thinks about the difficulties along the way: worry about the money in the bag, worry about the city that one is going to, worry about the stories of fraudulent agencies, worry if my friend Sasi would be at the station to receive us. For three days, I feasted on my worries, not wasting any. (40)

Earlier most migrants to the Gulf countries had to encounter a kind of double displacement i.e. from

Kerala to Bombay and from there to the Gulf. Thus Najeeb and Hakeem from Dhanuvachapuram travel together to Bombay in Jayanti Janatha. Najeeb along with Hakeem stayed in Bombay for a while and from there they took the flight to Gulf. On 4th April 1992 they reached Riyadh. The journey was four and half hour long. Thus they entered a strange land that is away from their homeland for the first time in their life. They did not know the language and the people there. Najeeb describes his feeling as:

Hakeem and I alighted from the plane into a wonderland larger than what we had dreamt of. At that time, the Arab world was not shown on TV or cinema as much as it is today. I could only imagine that world from the words of those who had been there. Because of that, every new spectacle proclaiming the fullness of their affluence amazed me. (44)

The labour migrants who migrate to Gulf countries are always linked to a sponsor called *arbab*. Najeeb hears this word from a passerby to whom they enquire about their sponsor. After some moments of waiting, a badly dressed Arab came out of an old vehicle that seemed like a small truck. Suddenly Najeeb and Hakeem became curious about that person, but the dressing and overall appearance of that person was not at all appealing. The author describes the situation as:

Leaving us there, he went around the airport again. From time to time he would grab the passport of anyone who stood alone and look at it. Finally, he came back to us. Then he snatched my passport and looked into it. Similarly, he snatched Hakeem's passport. Then, without saying anything, he walked forward. Carrying our bags, we followed him. I had associated Arabs with the fragrance of *athar² and other perfumes. Hundreds of Arabs had*

2 An Arabic word meaning perfume, believed to have derived from the Persian word *atr* meaning fragrance.

walked past us wafting enticing fragrances....But my arbab had a severe stench, some unfamiliar stink. Likewise, while the other Arabs wore well-ironed, pristine white clothes, my arbab's dress was appallingly dirty and smelly...Whatever it is, an arbab had come for me. I was relieved by that thought. I too have become a GulfNRI. I too have an arbab of my own. The one who walks in front of me is the custodian of all my ambitions. My arbab! Arbab – at that moment I could not have liked any other word more! (48)

Thus both Najeeb and Hakeem without any hesitation follow that strange person whom they thought was their arbab. This initial experience itself was a sign of some impending trouble. The thoughts that flow through Najeeb's mind are described by the author as:

From that moment, like the *maniyān* 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. I would have been at ease had I shared my anxiety with Hakeem. But he was fast asleep. Let him sleep. If he listened to my worries, he might start crying....why should I worry about the time? I was travelling in the vehicle of my own arbab. In his hands my life was safe and secure. Why should I worry about the time? (52)

The arbab took them far away from the city to a desert. Hakeem was taken by the arbab to a place that seemed like a farm. Najeeb can make out the danger awaiting him, but he never intervenes in the actions done by arbab. Najeeb was having the thought that he has entered a dangerous situation and feared that Hakeem had been

imprisoned and next is his turn. The arbab returned after leaving Hakeem and drove to his next destination. Next was Najeeb's turn; the arbab left him in another farm, with another arbab, and drove away. Najeeb thinks "Is this the legendary Arab hospitality that I have heard about? What kind of arbab are you, my arbab? Don't deceive me. In you rests my future. In you rest my dreams. In you rest my hopes" (59).

Najeeb has not eaten anything and the arbab did not inquire about it and has not showed any hospitality. He also found out that there was another scary figure with matted hair of a savage in a forest, and long beard, wearing the dirtiest Arab clothes and bearing a horrible stink, whom the arbab might have brought in the same way. He told something to Najeeb, but he could not understand. Najeeb thought that he might be lamenting his fate and wailing. Najeeb got a picture of his job and the thought of becoming another scary figure arose in his mind, as also the thought of escape that which was not possible.

From here onwards the hardship begins in Najeeb's life. He even forgets the pickle made by his Ummah and his wife Sainu. Thus his dreams crumbled down within no time. Najeeb expresses this in the novel as:

My back ached. I smiled at the emptiness. What dreams I had had! An AC car, an AC room, a sofa mattress with a TV in front of it! I laughed. What else could I do in my present condition? No one else could have realized how far my dreams were from the reality of my situation. My first night in the Gulf was such a fiasco. (63)

The next stage was his effort to learn certain terms to get adapted to the situation. Khubbus was the only dish available for Najeeb and that word was familiar to him from his homeland itself. He slowly learnt words like masara, mayin etc. Najeeb slowly realised that his life was becoming inescapably bound to the goats in that

farm and there was no way out from there. And the desert seemed different from what he had heard or seen in pictures.

(ii) Identity formations

Here I am reminded of what Bhabha writes in his *Location of Culture*. Bhabha while discussing the character Chamcha in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, says that Chamcha turned into a goat and had crawled back to the ghetto, to his desperate migrant compatriots. In *Aadujeevitham*, Najeeb undergoes internal and external changes. He was not able to recognize his face and he felt time and place as strangers. The novel treats masara as an exile and as a place where one loses his/her identity. This novel can be seen as a political protest of an artist raised against the denied fundamental rights of Najeeb.

The story also follows the political thought that says over-exploitation leads to strengthened identity. Najeeb was under constant observation by his arbab, he was given kuboos³ and majboos⁴ to eat and was made to stay along with goats, sheep and camels. Some critics say that it is necessary to read this loss of identity in a postmodern sense. Najeeb's life in the farm was similar to that of a goat's and this sets the background for his slave life. This can be applied not only in the case of diasporic experiences but also to the formation of identity. Stuart Hall in his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" says that, "migration has turned out to be the world historical event of late modernity." He also talks about a 'loss of identity' within the migrant situation, one that must be healed through texts that restore "the broken rubric of the past" (225).

This novel discusses the way identity is frozen when one loses his/her home and human rights. Najeeb

3 A kind of bread used in Arab countries.

4 Also known as Kabsa, is a mixed rice dish mainly served in Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

was transformed physically into a goat. The politics of exploitation played by slavery is questioned here. Najeeb finds relief in God, though, and says, "The two factors that helped me through that phase were my desire to live and my infinite faith in Allah" (119). But Najeeb had infused in himself too much the qualities of a goat. He now thinks that even if he gets the chance for escape, he will not be able to leave this place, and even if he does leave, he will return back. The writer brings it up like this:

Even when it is set free, a goat reared in a cage will return to the cage. I had become like that. I can't go anywhere in this figure and form. I am a goat. My life is in this masara. Till I end my life or die of some disease, I don't want to show anyone this scruffy shape, this scruffy face, this scruffy life. Mine is a goat's life. (181)

(iii) Dehumanisation

Dehumanisation in the modern world is one of the main concepts that the author tries to portray through the novel. Dehumanisation happens when a person is denied the possession of his human characteristics. The title of the novel itself gives us the clue as to what Benyamin intended to present to his readers.

If we closely observe from the beginning, we can see similar acts of dehumanisation throughout the novel. While coming from home, Najeeb carried some eatables that were specially made with love by his mother and wife, but before entering into the vehicle the arbab took that bag and threw it on to the back of the vehicle. This incident can be seen as the first one in which food is denied to Najeeb. In their long journey from the airport till the masara, the arbab did not give any food to both Najeeb and Hakeem. As the novel progresses there are many more similar instances. In another instance, Najeeb was locked up in the masara by the arbab for two days. He was made to starve. But on the second

day out of severe thirst and hunger, he drank the water from the container meant for goats and also ate some raw wheat. Thus situations in the farm made him to consume foods meant for animals in the farm. Najeeb says "I slept in the masara with the goats. By then I had indeed become a goat"(149-50) There are other similar incidents where he is denied his basic needs like food, water, clothing, proper shelter, wage, life and dreams. Najeeb was given a cloth that has not been washed for years and by wearing that dress he entered an unhygienic life for the first time. The author tries to bring out each and every moment of Najeeb's life in the desert. The call of nature became severe one day for Najeeb and he somehow managed to find a place in the open desert for his purpose. But when he was about to clean himself by taking some water from the tank an unexpected thing happens. The author describes it like this:

Before the first drop of water fell on my backside, I felt a lash on my back. I cringed at the impact of that sudden smack. I turned around in shock. It was the arbab, his eyes burning with rage. I didn't understand. What was the mistake? Any slip-up in my work? Did I commit some blunder?...This was what I gathered from the arbab's angry words in between lashings. 'This water is not for washing your backside. It is meant for my goats. You don't know how precious water is. Never touch water for such unnecessary matters. If you do, I'll kill you!' Thus I learnt my first lesson. It was wrong to wash one's backside after taking a dump. (77-78)

Heat was severe in the desert and one day Najeeb even tried to find shade under a stick. Suddenly one day the scary figure in the farm disappears; this disappoints Najeeb even though he does not know his name and native place. The arbab was not bothered about these

things. After the disappearance of the scary figure Najeeb got his ruined bed. During winter he slept with sheep to get warmth. Isolation is seen as a bitter punishment that one can get in life. He felt lonely in that desert. But this loneliness did not make Najeeb fall down; he made up his mind to face it. Benyamin writes:

I was learning to face life alone, to train myself in jobs I had never performed before, to try out a new way of life, to get accustomed to an uncommon situation. It was not as if I had a choice; I was utterly helpless. Had we learned that one could get a little water only if one worked till one's bones broke, we would work till we died, not just till our bones broke... Circumstances can make a man capable of learning to do anything. (104)

The arbab continued his act of dehumanising Najeeb. When Najeeb help a goat deliver her baby, the arbab kicked him and beat him with his belt and denied him food. He was also charged with other mistakes when he took water to clean the placenta and blood off his hands and dress, for returning late with the goats after wasting time looking the delivery and the last accusation was that he tried to make the newborn drink its mother's milk.

Another act of dehumanisation happens when Najeeb was not able to converse in the language that the arbab spoke. On several instances, Najeeb finds it hard to converse with the arbab and he used gestures instead. He had no one to speak to apart from the goats. Najeeb was very much frustrated and helpless. He could not even contact his family and this make him think of writing a letter, but he never discloses his sufferings in his letter. Thus the real truth was not visible in the letter. Benyamin compares the life of Najeeb not only with goats but in a few instances with that of dog, pig, cat, snake etc. Like dogs he could recognize the smell of

different goats in the masara.

(iv) Exile

Najeeb is left isolated in the goat farm, this instills in him a state of exile. He is isolated from language, geography, and from people other than his arbab. Since Najeeb was in a state of isolation he compares his state to that of the gaze of the camels. He could see the depth and breadth of the harshness of life in the desert that reflects in the crystallized eyes of the camel. Benyamin describes it in this way as, “It must be the impossibility of its situation that lies congealed behind the camel’s impassive countenance. I would like to describe the camel as the personification of detachment. Those camels went past me and walked inside the fence on their own. It was their own masara” (79). But in order to overcome this, he finds a way out. This is presented by Benyamin very beautifully. He writes:

We can endure any misery if we have someone to share with. Being lonely is very depressing. Words twitched like silverfish inside me. Unshared emotions pulsated, bubbled and frothed at my mouth. An ear to pour out my sorrows, two eyes to look at me and a cheek beside me became essential for my survival. In their absence one turns mad, even suicidal. It might be the reason why people condemned to solitary confinement turn insane...Getting those words, expelling them, provides the greatest mental peace. Those who do not get this chance die choking words. I too would have died like that. But it was through the stories I narrated to my Pochakkari Ramani, my Marymaimuna, my Kausu and Aravu Ravuthar [names Najeeb gave to the goats] that I threw out those words accumulating inside me. I kept talking to them as if I was talking to dear ones when I walked them, milked them, filled their containers and

gave them fodder. I poured out my tears, pains, sufferings, emotions and dreams. I do not know if they understood anything. But they listened to me, looked at me raised eyes, even shed tears with me. That was enough for me. (167-68)

Najeeb was slowly realising how the right combination of circumstances can forcibly dissolve any man’s fears. He even understood the menu for the days ahead. There were milk, khubus and plain water. He used his bag as his pillow and it had the smell of the pickle. Suddenly he thinks of his home – Ummah, Sainu, and his son or daughter who grew inside her. He began to think about their situation, without any news of him. He felt like his heart is going to burst. Even though he was not at all fine, he thought of conveying that he is fine, but there was no way to convey it. Each day he was forced to learn new lessons. Thus he also learns to milk a goat. He had that satisfaction as if he got some training in a big job.

One day, in order to get some relief from his state of isolation, Najeeb goes to Hakeem’s masara, but instead of getting any relief, the sight of Hakeem worried him. What he saw there was more heartbreaking. The person who accompanied Najeeb in his journey from his land and was taken away by the arbab now seemed like a strange creature. Benyamin expresses this in the novel as:

For some time, the hideous figure started from the other side of the gate, as if I were speaking in a strange language. Then, quite unexpectedly, he hit his head against the gate and started crying. I got scared. Then, between sobs, came his heart-wrenching cry, ‘My Najeeb ikka.’ It was only then, only then, that I recognized Hakeem. Alarmed, I understood how circumstances could redraw a man’s shape beyond recognition. I could estimate how the same circumstances

must have changed me too – completely. I had not looked in a mirror since I had entered the desert. If I had, I might not have been able to recognize myself as well. (137)

Najeeb, fed up with his life in exile, can't stop himself from the thought of his home. There was a situation in which he was even forced to forget his past. He also thought that the chances of exit were not there anymore. After he finds out Hakeem's masara, the thoughts of his home arose in his mind. Benyamin writes:

Maybe because of that distance view of Hakeem, suddenly I was struck by the thoughts of the homeland. It did not happen very often during my life in the masara. All my longings rose in unison inside me. My Sainu, my ummah, my son ... my daughter ... ? My house, my canoe. How many times had I heard about the nostalgia of the diaspora? It often surprised me later that I never grieved for my shattered dreams even in those hostile situations. I think such thoughts come only to those who can see an exit. (172)

Najeeb thinks that he is living in an alien land with the arbab and goats. The visit of the water truck and a wheat trailer was the only interruption to their life. He felt a great relief when he saw those vehicles approaching the masara. He even had the thought that his loved ones had come. Najeeb even speaks of one of his experiences when a trailer came without any helper to unload. The arbab asks Najeeb to help the driver of the trailer. He was a Pakistani, and even the smell of his sweat seemed like a scent for Najeeb. He even touches him thus to break his state of isolation. Najeeb in one instance even thinks "How many goats like me must have got trapped in this masara before? Maybe the miserable outcome of trying to save one of them must have been fresh in the Pakistani's mind" (127).

(v) Home and hope

Even though Najeeb had in his mind the thought of his home, he was forced to forget memories of his home. The circumstances even made him think that he won't return back to his home. Benyamin writes:

My thoughts were not of my home country, home, Sainu, Ummah, my unborn son/daughter, my sorrow and anxieties or my fate, as one would imagine. All such thoughts had become alien to me as they were to the dead who had reached the other world. So soon- you might wonder. My answer is yes. No use being bound by such thoughts. They only delay the process of realization that we've lost out to circumstances and there is no going back. I realized this within a day. Anxiety and worry were futile. (94-95)

Past or future do not bother him, he lives in the present. He even managed to study Arabic words and started remembering them before he went to sleep. But the thought of his home and family members remained buried in his mind and came out on several instances. He could not resist those memories from coming forth. When a goat gave birth in front of him he had the feeling that his wife Sainu had given birth to a baby boy. Benyamin describes this beautifully:

At that instant, my mind shook free of all its shackles and everything I had been trying to forget hithome. My Sainu is pregnant. When I left her, she was near delivery and I've had no news of her since. Maybe this was a good omen Allah wanted to show me. My Sainu, my wife – she has given birth. A baby boy, as I longed for. In that belief, I named that newborn goat Nabeel. The name I had thought of for my son. (107)

Najeeb slowly began to see the goats in the masara as his family members, friends and relatives. He started speaking to them and he claims that they understood his sorrows. As he names the new born kid Nabeel, the

name he had found for his son, the thought of home arises once again, Benyamin writes:

One more time memory of home awakens in him, this time it was more intense. He says I don't know why, memories of homeland awakened in me. All my suppressed thoughts stirred and erupted like a volcano. I must escape from here. I must go home. I must reach ummah. I must see my Sainu. I must see my Nabeel. I must see my land. I must see my dusty roads. I must see my river. I must see my canoe. I must see my rain. I must see my earth. At such moments, I could truly comprehend the meaning of nostalgia. It is a craving. An acute craving that makes us hate our present condition. Then, that craving takes the form of a crazy urge to rush home, like a wild boar rushing wildly through sugarcane fields when it's been shot. It happens only once in a while. But when it does, it is not easy to shut down the surge of emotions. (146)

Najeeb cannot even understand his own position at times. Even though he says he is not bothered about his past, he cannot forget it. The thought of his home came to his mind like fantasies. When the hope of escape came to his mind, he began to have frequent thoughts about reaching home. He even lies that he was not having any thought of his home. He says:

It was a lie when I said I had not been thinking about my homeland and home. An outright lie. My every thought was occupied by fantasies of my homeland. I had only buried them under the cinders of my circumstances. I could see them come ablaze as soon as the wind of a chance blew. (179)

(vi) Escape

Unlike other diaspora characteristics this novel provide a vivid picture where Najeeb was forced to escape from

the goat farm in the desart in the hope of saving his life. Escape turns out to be the last resort for Najeeb; otherwise he might have died in the desert. Other texts of diaspora literature do not portray escape with the intensity that Benyamin adopts in *Aadujeevitham*. The situation in the masara became unbearable and this made Najeeb, Hakeem and Ibrahim Khadiri to run away from the masara. Najeeb, who earlier thought that he will not be having any chance for escape began to think of some plans to escape from there, but he was not ready to take up a chance just like that. He was waiting for an appropriate opportunity when he was sure of reaching a safe location. He even has doubts about his decision. There are instances when Najeeb pray to God for his release from this hardship. Benyamin writes, "Like a prophet in the desert, I would kneel on the hot sand and pray looking at the sky: My Allah, release me from this affliction. Send me a savior as you sent Moses to the Israelites. Liberate me from this captivity" (152). A ray of hope was infused in the life of Najeeb and Hakeem when a new member came in the neighboring masara. He was Ibrahim Khadiri from Somalia and he seemed like a banyan tree grown in an African desert. Finally three of them escape from the masara when the arbabs were not there. As they ran through the desert they found similar masaras scattered over the desert and also people who led a goat life similar to theirs.

Benyamin exposes the other side of life in the desert that is unknown to most people. The most awaited moment in Najeeb's life was the life in the desert. Benyamin describes this with all its grace. He writes:

If you are unfamiliar with deserts, you may wonder if this is desert at all. Swarming with living beings it was almost a forest. Snakes, centipedes, lizards, spiders, butterflies, vultures, wolves, rabbits, mongooses and so many other creatures like them. Each with their own paths, their own territories, their own laws – man, his

law and his life had no significance here. These creatures didn't value human boundaries. They were the inheritors of the desert. Allah had bequeathed this space to them. They had been created to live here. And I was the trespasser. The blisters on my body were merely their gentle chastening. (204-5)

The escape was very adventurous and the three fugitives have to come across many difficulties. On the way Hakeem died of thirst. Najeeb was still having the faith that nothing will happen to him, and he kept on thinking and praying to God that:

We came to live. To be alive. To meet once again the beautiful faces of those who love us. To wipe out the tears they shed for us from their cheeks. We have reached this spot in our effort to do so. Allah, only you, only your strength, only your way, only your safety can protect us. Please Allah, don't kill us by roasting us in the desert. (209)

(vii) Refuge

The last resort that was available for Najeeb was to get imprisoned. That was the only way out there to reach home. Toward his journey from the masara till Sumesi jail, there come three protectors in Najeeb's life. First is Kunhikka of the Malabar restaurant, second is a rich man who drove towards Najeeb in his luxurious car, and the most important one is Ibrahim Khadiri who helped Najeeb and his friend to escape from the masara. Ibrahim is portrayed as a person from Africa who is familiar with the routes in desert.

These are the various aspects that Benjamin brings forth through this novel unlike other diaspora experiences. The novel opens up new perspectives in dealing with migrant experiences like- how illiterate labourers are exploited in the host land, how they are made to stay under hazardous situations risking their lives in remote

deserts, how they loss/form their identity, their exile, thought of home, escape, refuge etc. Even though being part of the international migrant population since the oil boom and ages before that, Gulf migrants are not represented in a wider literary productions dealing with various diasporas. But recently works in regional literatures help to foster their representation on par with other international migrant population. Another novel that can be read in the context of Gulf migration is *Oru Pravasiyude Ithihasam*.

Oru Pravasiyude Ithihasam: Troubled migrants in Kuwait.

Oru Pravasiyude Ithihasam (2012), a novel by Balagopalan, is set in the backdrop of a period stretching from the oil boom till the first Iraq war. This novel has incorporated more of a historical aspect vis-à-vis Kuwait and it stands apart from *Aadujeevitham* in narrative style. Balagopalan introduces different characters hailing from different sections of society. The story revolves around the life of James, a young skilled migrant labourer from Kerala, who went to Kuwait hoping a secure life. Along with the narrative of James, Balagopalan brings out the experience of various generations by employing multiple narratives. As is the case of Najeeb in *Aadujeevitham*, here James also encounters many problems throughout his journey in life along with the other characters like Maamachan, Kochamma, Johnyechayan and other foreign nationals belonging to third world countries. An analysis of the trials and tribulations that James encounters in the host as well as home land shows real life situations that a migrant labourer encounter remaining as an unwanted guest in the host land(here Kuwait). Author opens up multiple arenas of exploration like- history being juxtaposed along with the narrative, trials and tribulations of the migrants in Kuwait, multiple narratives, factual details of migration from Kerala, about vanishing generations, celebration of hybridity,

lives at stake return migrant problems, Gulf War and its impact on migrants from India.

This novel can be seen as an exploration of the author into migrant life in Kuwait. James the protagonist comes to Kuwait as a government employee after resigning from the job that he had in Kerala. Economic betterment and well being of his family were the major reasons behind this migration. James hail from a middle class Christian family from Kerala. He migrates to Kuwait towards the middle of the 20th century, precisely during the year 1962. His journey was in a caravan that took eight days to reach its destination. Before the beginning of air transport from India to Gulf countries people moved in caravans that draws a similar experience of the onward migration of indentured labourers from India during the colonial period. There were people from different places, he made friendship with them. For the first few days they were made to live in a labour camp that was in a worst condition without proper food and shelter. They survived by eating khuboos and watermelon. Narrating the experience of James the author also brings out the historical relevance of the place and its relation with India long back.

(i) History juxtaposed in the narrative

The narrator makes use of the history of Kuwait and its connection with India and other countries. In the beginning itself, our protagonist James narrates Kuwait's history. It goes like this:

The moment I got the job in Kuwait I tried to study this place. The term Kuwait means 'the fort beside water.' Even though the place has historical relevance from 2nd century BC onwards, it is said that a tribal migrant group who migrated from Najad of Saudi Arabia were the first settlers in Kuwait. Saba became the first ruler in the year 1756. Till now they are the ruling family. Kuwait was the largest pearl

producer in the world until China started making duplicate pearls. Collecting pearls from the deep sea, fishing, adventurous trips in big caravans to India to sell Iraqi dates and also to take in return wood and other material from India on their way back were the livelihood of people in Kuwait for a long time.(9, translation mine)

These characteristics bring out the past glory of Kuwait. But now this has changed with the exploration of oil fields. The production of oil was undertaken by Kuwait Oil Company in which British Petroleum and Gulf Oil have shares. And this has helped the migrant population from different parts of the world to find jobs with good salaries in Kuwait. But the trials and tribulations that migrant labourers undergo is never discussed in studies pertaining to the proletarian diaspora populations from India and other third world nations. They are made to undergo many trials and tribulations if they need to remain there.

(ii) Migrant lives in Kuwait: Trials and Tribulations

In *Aadujeevitham* at first Najeeb was excited to see the wonders of Riyadh, but as soon as they got into the old vehicle brought by the arbab, who pretended to be their sponsor, he began to feel insecure. The protagonist James in *Oru Pravasiyude Ithihasam* felt the same. James and his two friends were made to stay in a labour camp for few days after they reached Kuwait. This made him feel insecure. Balagopalan writes, "I felt this world entirely different from what I had read. Glimpses of what I have studied rolled through my mind. Dreams that I cherished are no more now. I just want to survive anyhow" (8, translation mine). James was one among the many Malayalee people who came to Kuwait to test their fortune. James soon found out a Kerala mess with the help of some people. James narrates the reason for coming to Kuwait for a job, leaving the one he had in Kerala. He was in need of more money to protect his

family and pay his loans. At first he finds himself confused at his decision, but soon he was satisfied when he received his first advance. We come across different characters like James in this novel who migrated to Kuwait to test their fortune. Maamachan, Johnychayan, Chakochayan and his wife were among them. They all have pain stricken stories to convey as most of them are victims of colonialism. And now they are living in a place where they do not have anything to do other than eating and consuming alcohol. In the novel there is a situation that explains this. It says “Here celebrations begin and end in bottles. Beyond that there is nothing to do in this desert. We don’t have our own house or shelter or community. Everyone leads his own life. Life that begins and ends in office and mess” (26, translation mine). There are some characters, however, who attained prosperity after coming to the Gulf. Balagopalan portrays a character, Gopalan Nair, who has become a rich man after coming to the Gulf.

Balagopalan discusses the sudden change in the trend of employment in Kuwait. He writes, “KOC began Arabization and Kuwaitization. They began to send back foreign employees to their homeland and started appointing Arabs to those posts. By ’65 the number of Indians reduced from eight thousand to four thousand. In that flow Johnychayan, Antony and Matthayi vanished from Gulf” (63, translation mine). As a result of this, many foreigners lost their jobs and were compelled to return to their home land. People like Johnychayan, Antony and Matthayi were carried away in this flow. Soon James came to know about Johnychayan’s demise.

Life was becoming tougher for the migrants. Aziz, friend of James, was from Palestine. He had twelve members at home. Until his brother Nabeel came to Kuwait, Aziz was the only person who looked after the family. Soon after Nabeel came to Kuwait, a war broke on 5th June

1967 between Israel and the Arab countries. As a result of this, the family of Aziz became homeless. His father lost his earnings and now it became the responsibility of both Aziz and Nabeel to look after the twelve members at home. The author has tried to bring out the hardship migrants of other Arab nationalities in the novel, along with migrants from Kerala. The novel speaks of multiple generations who came to Kuwait at various points of time. Some of them rose to prosperity while a major part of them suffered the perils of migration. Their life became hard when they returned home.

(iii) Narrative of multiple generations

James was slowly becoming a Gulf Malayalee; thoughts of his land began to vanish slowly. He listened to what Johnychayan and Achayan told him, and learned about the culture of Kuwait Malayalees. Both of them were participants in the Second World War. Johnychayan participated in the Iraq war and Achayan in the Burma war. It was only because of poverty that people like Johnychayan joined the army. After the war India became a poor country and people began to migrate to different parts of the world in search of employment. It was during that time Gulf countries started oil production. Many Indians migrated to Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Abu Dhabi. A different world was opened to migrant people, so as in the case of Gulf diasporas. Most of these migrants were from Kerala and they made the economic base of Kerala stronger. James thinks that:

One more Malayalee was born to send money to India and also to the community of Gulf diaspora. One more Malayalee began to walk through a new cultural platform. Neither a citizen of the home land nor a citizen of the host land. A citizen belonging nowhere. Just a money machine. Leaving behind the greenery of our land, rivers, politics, gossip of women,

films, dreams and storytelling. There are a lot of people who came to this desert to help their family. This community is increasing day by day. (38, translation mine)

Though the new land in which he arrived does not provide citizenship to the migrants they make use of these people who try to assimilate with the cultural pluralism that Kuwait has. James takes the risk of being in Kuwait by sacrificing his home land. At times nostalgia crept in the mind of his home and its environment.

James got placed in an institution that is a representative of UNO. People from various part of the world worked there. There were people from India, Pakistan, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Germany and England. A major part of them were people from Palestine as that was the trend set in Kuwait during that time. Here James met Aziz and Stuart. Aziz and James used to share their dreams and stories. There were no barriers between them in spite of belonging to two different nations. All of them had the same problem. All were like migratory birds flying from a distant land to a desert to protect their families. In the new land there is no relevance for fundamental rights and duties. They are only concerned about earning Dinars. In an accident Stuart dies which was a shocking experience to all those who know him and his family background. He also cherished a few dreams in his life.

A portrayal of a typical Kerala scenario comes in between the narrative when a religious leader from Kerala comes to Maamachan's house, along with some Malayalee residents in Kuwait, asking for donation. Kuwait was seen as a gold mine not only by ordinary people who came here for employment but also by religious heads. There is a tendency to import gold from the Gulf to Kerala among the Malayalee population. There is an instance in the novel where a character,

Das, going home with around ten to twenty kilos of gold given to him by the residents to present to their respective houses in Kerala.

Balagopalan, through this novel, tries to portray different stages in the life of the protagonist James. After a short stay with Maamachan and Kochamma, James shifts to another mess run by Xavier and his wife Victoria. Xavier is a representative of the stereotypical Gulf man who boasts that he is an engineer in an ammonia factory. But soon people in Cochin come to know his real picture. Most of the people in the new mess came to the Gulf after 1958. They are the representatives of new generation migrants. They have a control over their drinking and they send money to their parents and wives back home.

(iv) Facts in fiction

The flow of Indians to Kuwait continued even during 1972. Indians were at the third position in terms of population. But day by day the Kuwaiti economic structure progressed and they began to own huge mansions having five to six house keepers. South Asians formed a large section of housekeepers. Mainly they came from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Apart from the housekeepers there were people who came in search of blue collar and white collar jobs. These professional people showed disinterest in people who came as housekeepers from the region and the higher authorities also favored this mentality. There is an instance in the novel where Balagopalan describes the transformation of migrants coming from Kerala. He says:

Migration of people from India continued. People in Kerala called the first generation of migrants ABC-s. Ayahs, butlers and clerks. Later many changes happened, the people belonging to A and B categories came mostly from Andhra and Tamil Nadu, but people belonging to category C

were from Kerala...Earlier only a few of the migrants came with their families, but later the trend changed and fifty percent of the Indians began to migrate with their families...Indian schools were established...there were schools that ran under the management of Malayalee Christians. Thus in Kuwait a Little India was formed with a majority of Malayalees in it. (90-91, translation mine)

Presence of a cultural organisation in Kuwait named as Indian Arts Circle is also mentioned. It is a government recognized institution, with more than hundred regular members. All this shows the real trend in the migration from Kerala to Kuwait.

(v) Vanishing generations from Kuwait

Slowly the first generation migrants vanish from the scene. Maamachan also prepares to bid farewell. In one instance, James tells Maamachan that he has to go, this is not their place and they are foreigners in this land. Already people like Achayan, Johneychayan and Kochamma have left Kuwait to become return migrants. James also receives a letter from Kochamma stating that Achayan is nearing to death.

On the other hand, we can also see a world of prosperity. People like Chandichayan, Gopalan Nair and many Malayalees gained prosperity after coming to Kuwait. The nation has been transforming, shepherds who fought for their lives and also the travelers who encountered the sea are no more. Now their sons and daughters populate a major part of Kuwait and they are well settled with high educational qualifications.

James is portrayed as a person who tries to cure the miseries in others' lives. One day he receives a letter from Kochamma informing him of the death of Achayan. Life becomes tougher for James. People who once loved him are parting one by one. Soon James

came across a situation in his life where he finds hard to take decisions. He says "I came here to solve my family problems and now I am facing difficulties in my own life. Transplantation from Kuwait to Iraq and then to America" (104, translation mine). One day James receives a letter from Kochamma asking for a help. Her life back home is transforming into hell. No one is there to take care of her. Her son is abroad and he never comes to see her. Later he comes to know her condition is getting severe. Balagopalan describes this instance as follows:

One more death cry from a migrant Malayalee. If she was working as a nurse in Kerala she would have had more relations. Her son might have studied in Kerala instead of Bangalore and he would have been employed and married so that she had somebody to look after her. She might not have encountered this. If she had stayed back she wouldn't have been able to make lakhs, but what is the use of it now. (140-41, translation mine)

One day James gets a call from a priest who informs him about Kochamma's death. Before her death she asks the priest to inform James, the bank, the registrar and her son Manoj. Balagopalan writes "A meaningless life of a Gulf migrant labour also ends" (181, translation mine).

(vi) Celebration of hybrid culture

After coming to Riyadh, James celebrates Christmas in a grand way with Afaf and her family members. This occasion in the novel can be depicted as the coming together of hybrid cultures. This was Afaf's last Christmas celebration in Kuwait because she was leaving for Iraq as a part of her job. Afaf stays in a seminary in Iraq. The father of that church knows much about Kerala and especially regarding the Jacobite community. He had also stayed in the Devalokam Aramana in Kottayam and had spoken at the Maraman convention. When in an

instance James was questioned about his religion he replies with his knowledge about it and its century old importance. James is showcased as a typical Christian migrant from Kerala.

(vii) Lives at stake

James, the protagonist of the novel had a relation with Afaf. She was from Iran. Both of them were working in the same office. But later Afaf got a better opportunity to go to Iraq and it became hard for James to meet her. But he use to drive kilometers during weekends to meet her. A major turning point in the life of Afaf and James was the trial they underwent in the police station for unknowingly entering the military area of Saddam. Till then they had only heard stories about the inside of a jail, but now James came to know the real face of it. James met a person named Anmar from the jail, who had a sad story to tell but because of the threat involved in it he writes it down in a small diary and gives it to James. One day James came to hear of a shocking incident about the abduction of Afaaf. He soon ran in search of her, but was not able to find her. James had lost all hope and he wanted some peace of mind, so he decides to return to his dear and near ones. But instead of getting peace James was totally distracted by the behaviour of his own brothers and sisters. Through characters like James and Kochamma, Balagopalan is trying to show the position return migrants have in the host land. Here he narrates the story of a Gulf return migrant nurse doing all her rites before her death. There is no one to give her even a drop of water. Those who cared for her earlier were not to be seen now.

(viii) Return migrants and their problems

Balagopalan portrays the problems faced by return migrants very realistically. He writes “If there comes a stage when we can’t give presents to people back home, then there won’t be any relation. All the return migrants

face the same issues” (141, translation mine). James slowly realizes that Gulf migrant lives are filled with experiences of cheating and cruelty. James receives a letter from Maamachan’s daughter informing him about his demise. Suddenly James thinks of the life that he sacrificed for his family. He remembers “He lived for Marwaris in Mumbai and also for the company in Kuwait ... He spent his entire life in Kuwait and was not able to stay with his family not more than five percent of his lifetime” (142, translation mine).

(ix) Addressing other diasporas

James, as promised to Kochamma as her death wish, travel to Netherlands to see Manoj. There James met a shop owner who explains his connection with India. His grandparents belonged to Bihar and during the 1870s and the Dutch took them forcefully to Surinam to work in the plantations, with permission and sanction from the British government. They became slaves and their successors are now citizens of Netherlands. There are lots of people like them in Netherlands. James finds out Manoj and asks him to fulfil the death wish of his mother. But Manoj was a typical second generation diaspora person, who does not have any affection towards his parents, home, friends, and who enjoys his own freedom.

CONCLUSION

All diasporas have some or the other limitations i.e, contemporary diasporas differ from the characteristics and theoretical particularities proposed by the classical diaspora. Through this paper I dealt with Gulf diaspora from Kerala consisting both skilled and unskilled labourers who remains entrapped in the power play of Gulf economy without being represented in literature and other medium of expression. Prevailing Diaspora Studies see the Gulf as an economic hub of migrants and so these studies sideline the socio-cultural aspect that goes into the framing of migrant lives there. The

journey of Malayalees to the Gulf in search of work can be seen as a paradigmatic Indian arc of migration in modern times. It is Neha Vora who confidently uses the term Gulf diaspora in her book *Impossible Citizens: Dubai's Indian Diaspora*. Lack of theoretical work on Gulf migration is really problematic. I intended to prove that regional literatures and translations of those works have the potential of exploring new cultures and narratives born out of oil encounters because most of the migration that happened during the oil boom took place from South India and especially Kerala.

Modern diaspora theories bring with them the scope for widening the representation of diasporas across the world. This cannot be merely seen as an impact of globalisation, rather it is an exploration of diasporas that are excluded from standard diaspora theories and frameworks. Gulf migrant labourers form an excluded category devoid of citizenship in the host land, and they are in a state of belonging, yet not belonging.

The representation of Gulf migrants in the cultural, economic, social life of Kerala can be studied through tracing the history of Gulf migration from Kerala till the contemporary scene. This leads to the finding that even though Gulf migrants form an integral part of Kerala, there are not many cultural and social productions on these migrant lives. But Malayalam literature has a history of consideration given to the dispossessed lives and this showed its late entry into Gulf migrant issues. Historicizing migrant labour in the Gulf is useful in pointing out all the actors that are often excluded from such discussions.¹

Indian literary theories have shown poor consideration for dealing with the phenomenon of Gulf migration, while Western theories, which hold their privilege in Diaspora Studies, have ignored it as well. But what we

1 As mentioned in Qatar Center for International and Regional Studies, "Migrant Labor in the Gulf: working group summary report"

have to look for here is that diasporic literature came as an outcome of postcolonial sensibilities and Indian literary studies also follow Western diaspora theories that arise out of very different diaspora situations. In India there are different types of migration happening and these migrations differ from one another. So instead of solely depending on diaspora theories of the West, an alternative should be brought in the form of regional narratives on migration and diaspora life that bring out new cultural dimensions to the Indian diaspora literature. Helen Tiffin, in her essay "Post-colonial Literatures and Counter-discourse", writes:

Since it is not possible to create or recreate national or regional formations wholly independent of their historical implication in the European colonial enterprise, it has been the project of post-colonial writing to interrogate European discourses and discursive strategies from a privileged position within (and between) two worlds; to investigate the means by which Europe imposed and maintained its codes in the colonial domination of so much of the rest of the world. (95)

Tiffin, taking a cue from Wilson Harris, mentions the building up of counter-discourse by evolving textual strategies which continually 'consume' their 'own biases' and at the same time expose and erode those of the dominant discourse. Post-colonial counter-discourses involve a mapping of dominant discourse to expose its underlying assumptions and also to dismantle these assumptions from the cross cultural standpoint of the imperially subjectified 'local.' (Tiffin 98) So Indian diasporic literature should incorporate migrations happening to other countries like the Middle East also, there is a need to explore the hidden traces of colonial practices in the modern world. Thus by taking up issues in the life of migrants to oil rich countries, DiasporaStudies can find out newer perspectives from

within the literary boundaries of Indian literature.

The Gulf diaspora can be seen as a sub group within diaspora studies. Gulf migrants are not allowed to be citizens in the host land. They are unlikely to ever become naturalized citizens unlike other transnational migrants and diasporic groups. Many diasporas are sidelined in the play of power between the privileged diasporas. For example, we can take the case of African diasporas to other countries, which remain sidelined by the American branch of African diaspora. So this politics of sidelining a diaspora, which has had much cultural churning in its migration experience, should be brought into notice.

When a new wave of literary writings in Indian English appeared in the form of diasporic literature it had its implication for Malayalam literature too. And while the former dealt with migration narratives to Western countries, the latter found out that Gulf migration is an area that has not been touched upon enough. As a large proportion of Malayalees migrate to Gulf countries every year and contribute to the overall development of the state, their testimonies form the subject matter of narratives from Kerala. *Aadujeevitham* and *Oru Pravasiyude Ithihasam* are two novels that deal with the migrant labour life in Riyadh and Kuwait. Benjamin and Balagopalan explore the contours of Gulf migration and take the readers along with the journey of the protagonist and make us feel the hardships these migrants underwent.

The visual media in Kerala has been adopting Gulf migration to portray one of the most important cultural components in the life of Malayalees. Earlier they stereotyped the life of Gulf migrants, but recent films are coming up with very relevant issues. Movies like *Arabikatha* and *Gaddama* are important among them. Movies on Gulf migrant lives are a kind of eye opener to the sufferings of a collective diaspora.

Diaspora Studies needs to be more adaptive to regional narratives and extend its creative scope by dealing with the excluded groups of different diaspora communities. Now Diaspora Studies has set its trend at where the migrants are looking at their home from a distant land, but there is a need to revisit the lives of people who are in a state of belonging and yet not belonging in a foreign land, like in the Gulf.

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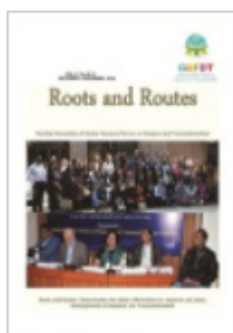
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GRFDT NEWSLETTER

***Roots and Routes* disseminates the latest information on research and policy developments in Diaspora and trans**

Newsletters



**September-
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July-August



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**March-April
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Roots and Routes is a monthly newsletter of the Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism (GRFDT). It is inclusive of articles, book reviews and news analysis, which help in disseminating latest information on research and policy development in Diaspora and Transnationalism. The newsletter enjoys readership of academicians, policy experts, diaspora think tanks etc.

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- 4. Book reviews** : 1000-1500 words.

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