

## MIGRATION AND MINORITY: GUISE OF COMMUNAL DISCRIMINATION IN BENYAMIN'S JASMINE DAYS

**S. Sathiya Gnanambigai,**  
Ph. D. Research Scholar,  
Department of English\*

**Dr. R. Rajavelu,**  
Associate Professor,  
Department of English\*

\*Kanchi Mamunivar Government Institute for Post Graduate Studies and Research,  
Lawspet, Puducherry

### **Abstract:**

*The word 'diaspora' is a Greek origin, means scattered or dispersion. Generally, Diaspora literature emphasizes the group of minorities who leave the homeland by force or voluntarily, and their settlement in the new land. Migration and immigration are the two different terms, always collide with diaspora narratives. Yet both have distinct features. Migration refers to the people who move from the homeland as workers of the country and consequently, they set down in the foreign land; whereas Immigration refers to the people who shift their home permanently to another continent. Many writers have focused on these two broad subjects with multifarious connotations through startling stories and bizarre backdrops. Some of them are Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureshi, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Banerjee, Uma Parameswaran, Shyam Selvadurai, and Joy Kogawa. Benyamin is one of the modern diaspora writers and also a settler of Kingdom of Bahrain from 1992 to 2013. Primarily known for his Goat Days, he attempts the second novel, Jasmine Days (Mullapoo Niramulla Pakaluku), recently, to dramatize the agony of the immigrants in the borrowed land. Yet, he specifies the identity and the rights of the immigrants with the origin of the territory. Through the protagonist Sameera, Benyamin clearly shows the domination of communal issues and the denial of basic rights for the minority. The critical purposes of the paper are, to highlight the conflict of the immigrants who have been living in the foreign land as much as time the natives have ruled and occupied the country; and to reveal the "second-class" discrimination towards the citizens of the region.*

**Keywords:** Patriotism, Arab Spring, Sunni-Shia Conflict, Home and Hegemony

“A Caste System is an artificial construction, a fixed and embedded ranking of human value”, says Isabel Wilkerson, the first African-American woman to win Pulitzer Prize in American Journalism, in *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (2020). Class and Community are the imaginary ideology of humans who create the divisions in order to implicate the power of authority to the top rank of hierarchy and control the bottom rank in the triangle of institution. One faces many discriminations and challenges in the society to feature one’s identity in the midst of many narrow-minded citizens and the ruling party.

Diaspora Literature is the intensified study on cross-cultured homes which define the existence of one’s ethnic community. Unlike homeland, the migrated people confront many demands, even to get a proper job for the survival, even though they fulfill the eligibility criteria for the desired occupation. To elaborate this notion, Benyamin’s *Jasmine Days*, a docufiction, is interpreted in the view of immigrant characters who settle in the unrevealed city of Middle East. Sameera Parvin, the former radio jockey in Orange Radio, is known for live show “Rush Hour” (JD 9), is under house arrest. She searches for the opportunity to escape from “the City of the Sumerians” (39). She feels that it is no longer her home. Once, she believes that Taya Ghar is the safest place and the large town where she realizes her own worth is no longer her “village” any more.

With the support of Programme Manager Imthiaz Sir and her father’s brother Bade Taya, the protagonist Sameera changes the outlook of alienation in the migrant land, “that knowledge that this place is not mine, these ways of talking are not mine, these silences are not mine, this etiquette is not mine...sometimes you have to work hard to earn your little corner in it. Till that place becomes yours, till you find your own equilibrium there, there will be a gap between you and the place” (16). Being a Pakistani, she is born with the attitude of “Indians are enemies” and “Wars are daily events”. By observing different colours of people ranges from Sri Lanka to Filipinas, she flies away her first impression on her colleagues: “...I was shocked to see all the Indians walking around. How would I work among so many monsters? Impossible! What if they all turned against me and killed me?” (17) Yet she sees the other side of the coin after seeing Ali Fardan, a technical staff at Orange Radio.

Benyamin always represents the untold stories of marginalized in his novels. He exposes the alienated feelings of the scattered groups in the host place; they try to accommodate themselves to the new society, yet they are rejected in the names of “Hybridity”, “Orientalism” and “Displacement” (Samuel 95-96). Friendship with Ali, Sameera spots the autocratic status of the country that they belong; also, she finds the huge disagreement between the Shia-Sunni Community (though both comes under the roof of Islam). At one instance, Ali reciprocates the sufferings of one class of the immigrants who leave Iran and settle in the foreign land many a time; still, they consider as “second-class” (JD 62). However, the major problem is the rights of second-class citizens are decided by

“His Majesty” (62). They do not get any sort of respect, equality and freedom in their second home: “Do you know for how many years we’ve been suffering this discrimination? The curse of not belonging to the ruling majority! You will never understand how terrible it is till you experience discrimination in your own land...someday, we will also be acknowledged as humans” (63)

Sameera Parvin was born in Faisalabad as an established Muslim girl. She transfers into the new place even before getting her degree certificate. After coming to the alien land, she realizes that she has “an extra identity” (64) i. e. she belongs to the Sunni Community which is the highest and prestigious group that His Majesty belongs, and moreover, Ali introduces her, there is one more community---Shia which is hated by the government and the authority oppresses that group of people by usurping all the resources from them.

Once, Sameera sees a parade full of people marching on the road; they wear black dress and for every rise and fall of the songs, they beat their chest violently. It is the procession of packed people from the child to the old man. Each one of the groups has the same passionate urge of emotions. In history of Muslim, there has been an internal conflict between the Shia-Sunni Community to choose the next Caliph after the death of Prophet Muhammad. The Shia people choose Hussain as the next ruler whereas the Sunnis select the person outside of the prophet’s family. During the fighting of Injustice, unfortunately, Hussain of Shias dies at Karbala. The incident brings the radical change to the both communities. The Sunnis become the major ruling party and the Shias, the originators become the minorities and oppressed people. The history repeats the war between the groups in each decade.

To remind of the Martyr Hussain, every year Ashura is celebrated. The Fanatics “sing songs, beat our chests and hurt ourselves with chains and swords so that we remember Hussain’s courage and sacrifice. By wounding our bodies, we re-create Hussain’s sacrifice” (66-67). Robert Lowell, in his poem “After the surprising conversions”, shows the religious madness and despair of the people during the war. Based on the letter of Jonathan Edward in 1736 of Southern New England, Josiah Hawley reveals the salvation sermons of Edward which highlights that suicide is the power to win the war of religion and politics. Thus, Ali in *Jasmine Days*, in the side of Minority, believes that affliction is the weapon to fight against injustice and dictatorships: “...these rulers should remember that we have thousands of young men ready to become martyrs” (JD 67).

Every rebel has a starting point. An irresponsible incident becomes the major cause for a big revolt; As Coretta S. King, wife of Martin Luther King Jr. notes down the experience of black discrimination in the white country in the book of *My Life with Martin Luther King Junior*. In one of the chapters, Coretta S. King describes an episode happened on December 1, 1955, which later dilute the reservation treatment of whites in the Montgomery government bus service. Mrs. Rosa Parks, the middle-aged tired woman occupies the front seat of the bus due to her tiring day. However, it is “unlawful” in the regulation of whites

because they have to occupy the prior rows. Hence, she gets arrested and asked to pay the penalty of ten dollars. The imprisonment news of black woman spreads like a wild fire. With the guidance of Martin Luther King Jr., the protest is begun by boycotting the bus services; consequently, the court breaks the “segregation” in bus services on 20<sup>th</sup> December, 1956.

Similarly, the protest of minorities begins firstly in the neighbouring city in *Jasmine Days*. Jasmin and his elder brother are immigrant college students. They do sell fruits and vegetables as a part-time job to support their education. A policewoman arrests the brothers in the case of “breaking the Business Act of the country by running a vegetable business without a license” (JD 85) and she mocks at by saying that “...bringing shame to the country and its ruler by riding a donkey cart through such an important road...” (84-85). Despite the lady releases the brothers by evening, she never returns back the cart which is “the only source of livelihood” (85) for them. The Mayor rejects the proposal of the brothers of returning the cart. Despairingly, the young brother Jasim fires himself in the front of the office of the Mayor. The whole country watches the fire shot in every corner of social media.

The author writes this event inspired from the true story of Mohammed Bouazizi who kills himself because of police harassment in Tunisia. This incident formulates much protest which named as “Arab Spring” and aims for the modification in the reign of Totalitarian. As a result, President Zine El Abidine terminates from his position and lots of changes proceed in the country. Based on this scene, the single combat in *Jasmine Days* collects the big crowd of Shia Minorities in the Square of Pears to voice out the discriminative acts of the ruler and his followers.

Leon Trotsky, the prominent leader of Bolshevik Revolution wrote, “Let us not forget that revolutions are accomplished through people, although they be nameless. Materialism does not ignore the feeling, thinking and acting man, but explains him” in his Introduction to *History of the Russian Revolution* (1917). Taking the above quote, it is clearly evident that revolution is done by the community not an individual. Yet their goal is common, which is to bring the change in the ruling government. Ali demonstrates the purpose of rebellion to Sameera in *Jasmine Days*. He clarifies that the Power Elite of His Majesty denies the fundamental rights of Shia immigrants though they are smart and intelligent, “...how much we express our patriotism, how much we declare our love for His Majesty---we could never join the army or the police. Because we are Shias. This is life as a second-class citizen” (JD 91).

Ali points out that the Sunni Immigrants are used by His Majesty to destroy other immigrants like them. He dishonors the father and uncles of Sameera who are also the adoptive citizens like Ali but for the sake of their profession of police, they fight with their own community to save His Supremacy. During the attack of Square of Pearls, the soldiers kill the people ruthlessly. Many protestors run for their life. Among them, one-legged man is saved by a mother and daughter. They distract the soldiers by throwing trash cans on

the path of vehicles. Yet, they are caught in the hands of the troopers. The merciless men shoot the wounded man and woman and take away the teenaged daughter. They molest the girl inhumanely. Sameera shocks at the depraved behavior of the soldiers who are also working along with her father and uncles: "But perhaps the soldiers who had just taken away the young woman were also loving fathers and uncles and brothers at home? How did they turn into animals in heat on the street? Were all men angels at home and beasts outside it? (196)

To justify the murder of Sameera's father by Ali, a friend of Ali's uncle said once, a granddaughter always tells that, if one eats an onion, one will become beautiful and if one eats fish, one will become a good swimmer. He hears the words often and at one point, the old man starts accepting it. The same situation happens with the police and the soldiers of His Majesty. They just forget their semblance in the foreign land and their neighborhoods and attack their own people by hearing the "smooth-talking politicians and religious leaders kept talking to us, insisting that they along have the truth. Our biases and beliefs have a lot to do with what we grow up hearing" (232).

Discrimination is a wide term, encloses specialized sects of favoritism. Sometimes it measures with the stereotypical abstraction. Countless individual or groups face such inequalities in workplaces, institutions and even in neighborhoods. Disparately, the administrators treat groups of immigrants with the notion of prejudices of race and ethnicity in *Jasmine Days*. During the war of recognition, Ali's father goes out to buy foods for the family. He is investigated by the police force. He shocks to hear that the way of handling the person is decided with what community he or she belongs in the city. He has lived in this place for twenty-seven years; he believes that it is his home.

Notwithstanding, the persistent government categories the citizens in two separate voices of commonality: "Are you Sunni or Shia?" (101) Obviously, Ali's father is an innocent Shia, arrested by the police mercilessly without acknowledging any of his position in the society. Ali has been three years boy when his father is gone away. His father is "just a dream" (101) for him. Before move out of this trace of trauma, he is mortified by the tortures of his uncle in the "cell was only as long as my body. I could not stand upright in it. I lay on the bare floor" (114).

Ali's uncle is an Arab school teacher of speaking hypnotizing English. Happened like Ali's father, he too is stopped by the police when he is returning from the school in 1981. Three policemen voluntarily asked him to wait in the police station for six hours. He is beaten by the police to admit that he has plotted against the government. He is a hard-shell, persists all torments for three years. Yet the police men never release him. They put him in the dark prison and he stays there for eighteen years, like a living dead. "I had no connection to the outside world. A hole in the ground in the same room was my toilet...No soap, no brush, no toothpaste, not even a candle for some light...I ate the exact same meal three times a day--- two kuboos, some curd...some prisoners... died in those cells. For days their corpses lay there. I can still smell all that rotting flesh" (114).

The frozen sufferings of his father and his uncle create a scar in the minds of Ali, like many youngsters go through. Once, he denies the offer of Sameera spending a good time of watching Justin Bieber's concert and play happy music with the friends of String Walkers. Later, he confesses that the raptures of songs are trembling nightmare for him. The tunes remind the agonizing days of his uncle in "a secret prison under a huge auditorium in the middle of the city" (114). Ali imagines, "My guitar is for the songs of the abandoned and oppressed...whenever I see a stage where music or dance is performed, I feel a shiver of fear. For how many years my mamu lay under a stage like that...who knows, maybe my baba is still lying somewhere under a stage. How can I stand on top of all that terror to sing and dance?" (116-117).

Religion and politics are two distinct branches. They have a common goal of acquiring power. The former conquers the power in order to preach the morality and divinity, whereas the latter acquires the power to rule the people and the society. Yet the former is a customary and the latter is dynamic. Religion, not in the least, crosses the path of politics. But the politicians often exploit the ideology of religion, to acquire the domination over the population. There is a customary thought that politics have dominated the religion in the medieval period only, and the millennium does not have this kind of domination; But of course, analyzing the struggles of Ali's uncle in the adopted land during the close of 20<sup>th</sup> Century War. It clearly indicates that the religion is oppressed and manipulated by the politics. The devotees of doctrines are still fight for freedom and humanity and in the process of battling; they are ready to sacrifice their lives: "Thousands have sacrificed their lives for the freedom in the city; perhaps you wonder why we keep throwing our lives away. I could have easily escaped my cell if I had confessed to some crime or betrayed some innocents. But my self-respect was too precious to me" (115).

After 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 attacks, many Pakistanis are labeled as "terrorists". As the name indicates, "War on Terror" is still reached high in Pakistan after 2000. The minds of youngsters are corrupted in the name of religion. They are influenced by the actions of corrupted leaders. They have believed that revenge is the solution for the freedom, basic rights and separation of land. The similar thing happened with Ali while he grows up in the family of adversity and shocks. Without proper guidance, he chooses "leaders taught them to throw a bomb at the slightest provocation. Like a child insisting that onions make you beautiful, Ali's leaders kept telling lies till they became true...he grew up thinking that killing a policeman would help overthrow the government." (233). Harinder S. Sikka, too, wrote on terrorism in Pakistan and tension between India and Pakistan in his debut spy novel *Calling Sehmet* in 2008. Like Ali in *Jasmine Days*, Sehmet moves to the new land for her new life. Yet she struck in between the promise of her father Hidayat Khan to do a spy service to Indian Government. Her whole mission is circled with the thoughts of collecting information for the handlers rather than to see her innocent husband Iqbal Syed and his family. Finally counterbalancing the emotions, the Indian Army saves INS Vikrant with the help of information given by Sehmet.

Although the story ends in positive note in *Calling Sehmet*, Ali's anger in *Jasmine Days* turns into brutal action of killing Sameera's father during the attack of Square of Pearls: "Perhaps when he was hitting your father he was remembering how, centuries ago, when the prophet's grandson Hussain was killed in Karbala, the soldiers of Ubaidullah rode their horses over the corpse again and again" (JD 233). Thus, youngsters are easily affected during the war and the previous generations pass their sufferings and venges to the succeeding generations. The past discrimination of First generation set as a default memory for the present generation. It makes them fight for the past causes, leaves out their identity in the society and forgets that the other humans may affect in the progress of conflict.

Considering the history of Shias and Sunnis, the Shia is the originator of the Muslim land. The Sunni community is considered as the successor. Additionally, the Sunni immigrants are considered as "intruders". During the times of protest at the Square of Pearls, people come from various places to join the riot. Sameera and her family watch the enthusiastic crowds from the balcony. Among the protestors, one point at her that she (includes all foreigners) is the reason for the discrimination and the revolt. Even Ali states the same statement when all the colleagues converse about the protest. He blames the Sunnis immigrants are blocking the benefits of Shia minorities in the country: "The reason we never get these jobs is because you are ready to work for such meager pay. If you were not here, one of us would be paid well to do the same job...why should the people of this country live like the citizens of India, where millions live below the poverty line?" (130) Though she prefers to stay in this city and mingles with other citizens, Sameera feels guilty after seeing the continuous fumes and glares of haranguers. "I had indeed played a part in making their lives unhappy...this food is not my food. It is stolen from the people of this country" (131).

Once, when she organizes the show, she is stopped by the co-operators; they get the information that both the government and the fighters jump the gun each other in the public places. It is dangerous to continue the show and other hatreds break the gate of radio station. Escaping by the car, Sameera and her friends are stopped by the objectors. She never fears to reveal her identity of Pakistani. She is a brave and upright lady, always relies on that righteousness is humanity. So only, she saves the wounded man, without flash any of his identity in riot, when she travels in the car, with her aunt. She fights with the hospital of minorities that service to humans is different with the pride of belonging to one's community, when the nurse rejects to treat the injured man: "this hospital is not for your likes. This is for our own people...should I treat people like you who go around singing that bastard's praises? ...Why don't you take him to your hospital? We will not waste even a drop of medicine on you" (154). Stopping the car by the strangers, she hides herself; because she does not know whose side does the person belong to and if she reveals her identity to the wrong person, her life will get worsen like a hell of tortures.

Children and Youngsters are the most stimulated person in the war and riots. The violation builds traumatic memories in their mind. They torment with the war scenes. Laila is the former receptionist at the Orange Radio. She has a cheerful personality and pride of being Shia. After the protest, Sameera meets her unexpectedly; she feels that Laila has lost her tone. Laila exposes that many people, like her, participate in the riot because of their angry towards the mass of other class. She assumes, "they were getting rich off us" (211). However, she realizes that the consequences of conflict reflect at the attitude of her seven years old daughter: "The Sunni kids won't play with her. And that's not the worst part. She now tries to imitate the Sunni kids. She wants to dress like them, talk like them. Who are we any more in this country?" (212) The expectation of Shias is to stabilize the identity of their community in the foreign land; because of resignation from the revolt, they pay "a high price" (212) for their dashes. Two women Sri Lankan writers Yasmine Gooneratne and Chandani Lokuge have written on second generation diaspora communities in the novels *A Change of Skies* and *If the Moon Smiled*. The characters struggle between the birth place and the homeland. They are, though, born in the foreign land and ponder it as their "Home", the culture difference deduces them stand apart in the crowd.

Likewise, Farhana, cousin of Sameera in *Jasmine Days*, is born and brought up in the unnamed city. She, until now, credits that the country is her belonging and identity. But the clash between the two communities makes her to realize, stubbornly that, she too has the same right to stay in this place as far as the protestors' concern: "why should I return to Pakistan?...I was born here, I grew up here and I have every right to continue my life here...this land belongs to me just as much as it belongs to the protesters...this city where we had made our homes for so long---were we to pack up everything and leave like refugees..." (150) Not only youngsters, but also the adults, have built lots of memories and experiences in the land, feels heavy hearted. They never fantasize of "having to fill ten-or-twenty years' worth of life into one suitcase" (168).

At the Closing point, Salman Rushdie's "Imaginary Homelands" (1991) states, "How long can one remain a foreigner and not take root? What is home?" The immigrants arrive to the alien land with the glimpse of hope and recognition. They move to this place for many reasons, by voluntarily or by forced. Their minimal expectation is to get recognized in the foreign land and lead a peaceful life. But they are oppressed by the host in the names of community and colours. Over again they fight with the adopted land to get back their rights or citizenship in the migrant place. But the government suppresses the one generation to the extent of war and conflicts. Subsequently, they root to the revenge mind and angriness of another generation. Considering that, the paper concludes with the thoughts of the author that an individual is developed and shaped by the society. The Dictator is the key player of giving probabilities to form a harmonious and ingenious society.

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