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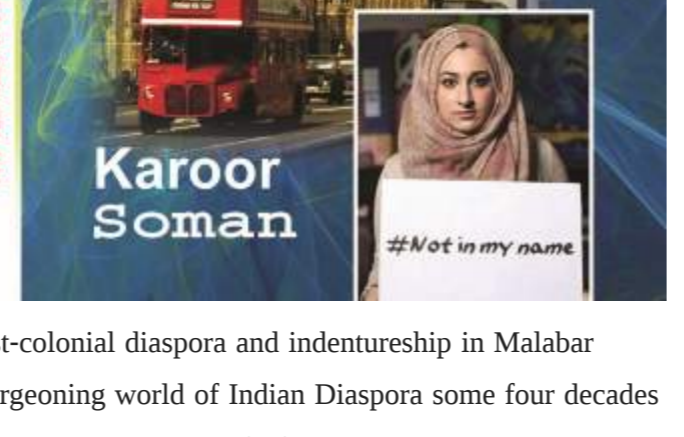
POST-COLONIAL DIASPORA: RESISTANCE AND REMINISCENCE IN MALABAR AFLAME

October 25, 2022



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Abstract: The paper is an attempt to explore issues of post-colonial diaspora and indentureship in Malabar Aflame by Karoor Soman, the novelist who joined the burgeoning world of Indian Diaspora some four decades ago to end up in the United Kingdom and passionately join the mainstream of life there.

The objective of the paper is to identify the experiences of postcolonial diaspora and indentureship narrated through the lives of the characters that undergo "double discrimination"- caste system in Kerala and racial discrimination in US.

Keywords: Indentureship, Discrimination, Memory

The paper traces out the characteristics of labour diaspora and indenture projected through the lives of the characters in Karoor Soman's Malabar Aflame. This labour diaspora goes through two stages, that is, obedience during colonization to resistance during post-colonization.

Ella Shohat in her article "Post-colonial" describes the word "post-colonial";

"Recently "post-colonial" has been transformed into a noun, used both in the singular and the plural designating the subjects of the "post-colonial condition". The prefix "post" aligns the "post-colonial" with another genre of "posts"- "post-war", "post-cold war", "post-independence", "postrevolution"- all of which underline a passage into a new period and a closure of a certain historical event or age, officially stamped with dates. (4)"

With the passage into a new period comes a change in behaviour of the citizens of these post-colonial countries. They have ultimately got freedom after years of subjugation resulting in a change in attitude towards their colonizers- a shift from obedience and compliance to resistance.

The novel begins with the year of 1945 when London is recovering from the wounds caused by the end of World War II. India is still under the clutches of the British colony. This is when Antony is placed in Peter Scott's race horse enterprise. He is loved by Peter Scott for his obedience, honesty and dedication that he pays in bringing Antony's wife Mary and his two children to UK.

Years later, in 1952, Antony goes to attend a horse race where he meets Scott. A Post-colonial attitude of resistance is etched into Antony's personality when he meets his previous employer there. Though he could have accepted Scott's offer, he resisted it as he was once booted for no fault of his.

Robert Cohen puts down a few guidelines to distinguish Labour diaspora in his Global Diasporas:

An Introduction:

"If, however, among overseas workers there is evidence over time of (a) a strong retention of group ties sustained over an extended period; (b) a myth of and connection to a homeland; and (c) significant levels of social exclusion in the destination societies, a labour diaspora can be said to exist." (Cohen 61).

Since Antony hailed from a poor low caste family in Kerala, he knew the hardships of life and thus is seen to carry dreams of making money out of his employment abroad. His friend Ali, a Kashmiri soldier, is also undergoing a similar struggle to succeed in life.

Indenture was a world-wide phenomenon which started in the nineteenth century. It was initiated by the British in Mauritius and was considered as an experiment;

"The Great Experiment after the abolition of slavery was to demonstrate to the world the superiority of free labour over slave labour. Indenture involved the mass migration of workers from India, China, Africa and South East Asia to labour- importing colonies. Mauritius was the first country which had recourse to indentured labour.

Antony loses his job due to a misunderstanding between him and his employer. He later takes up work at an underground rail tunnel construction site for a menial pay. This is where he describes the construction sites all over Britain after Second World War as a hub of workers indentured from different countries.

"1948. Britain was recouping from the destruction caused by the Second World War. Construction work was in plenty everywhere. Importing workers from Ireland and West Indies was one way of fighting labour shortage. Antony was one of the latest addition to thousands of new workers added to reconstruct London out of the destruction of the War (82)."

Therefore, he enrolls as an indentured labourer and starts from scratch- in such a manner saves money enough to buy a house and educate his children.

Throughout their survival in UK, there is a constant connection and reminiscence of their homeland. The characters might be busy in their day to day lives struggling to figure out a way to sustain themselves, nevertheless, there is a constant urge to return to their homeland.

Mary, Antony's wife, remembers her life back in Kerala; "Our land is the slaughter house of untouchability. Some poor are massacred there in the guise of some wretched laws codified by the country lords. (60)" Though their native homeland has given them many hurtful memories to recollect, the urge to return to the land that they love and hold dear never fades.

"Antony and Mary dreamed of a day when they would take their grandchildren for a tour of the land of their ancestral home of milk and honey...They would be wonder struck when told that in their neighbourhood in India, they had a family that had a dozen elephants under their care and in a temple town called Thrissur, they had an annual festival of Poomam where a hundred elephants are paraded!" (183-184).

At first all the characters consider their host country as "a dream world (59)" but eventually they understand that they can never cultivate a feeling of "belongingness" in the foreign land. No matter how hard they work or how well they gain proficiency in English, at the end of the day they are considered to be outsiders.

Antony remembers how happily he had once boarded the ship to UK hoping that he would never see colour discrimination but on the other hand "these idiots here have their look and expression as if the world is under their feet (51)." Many a times his white co-workers hate him as they can't believe that the white master would entrust the store to an Indian.

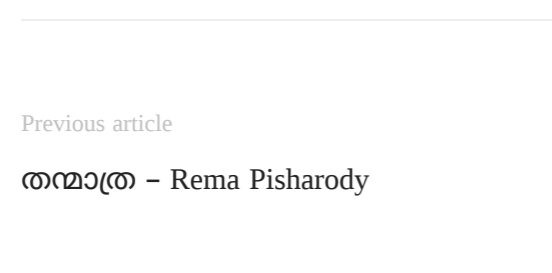
This accomplishes the venture to categorize the diaspora experiences of the characters in the novel under Labour Diaspora. This also advances the idea of absence of belongingness in the host land as the characters struggled to carve a niche in their host country- symbolic of Indian diaspora narration.

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