

Cultural Hybridity and Identity Politics in the Writings of Indian Diaspora in the Middle East

Akhil Ansar

(Corresponding Author)

Department of Islamic and

West Asian Studies

University of Kerala,

Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala

akhilansar7863@gmail.com

Hassan J.

Assistant Professor

Department of Islamic and

West Asian Studies

University of Kerala,

Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala

Abstract

This paper examines how Indian diaspora writers in the Middle East negotiate cultural hybridity and identity politics through their literary works. Drawing on postcolonial and diaspora studies, it explores how these writers articulate belonging, displacement, and adaptation in a region that itself is a historical crossroads of migration. The analysis will focus on themes such as the tension between cultural preservation and assimilation, the role of language in identity construction, and the negotiation of socio-political realities unique to Gulf States. Authors like Benyamin (*Goat Days*), Anees Salim, and Deepak Unnikrishnan (*Temporary People*) offer subtle portrayals of migrant life that reflect both the challenges and creative resilience of diasporic existence. Through situating these works within the larger framework of decolonization, the study will highlight how Indian diaspora literature from the Middle East contributes to the reimagining of cultural memory beyond national borders.

Keywords: Indian Diaspora Literature, Cultural Hybridity, Identity Politics, Gulf Migration, Decolonization

Introduction

The discourse on decolonization has expanded beyond the political realm to encompass questions of language, literature, and cultural memory, particularly in contexts shaped by migration and transnational exchanges. Postcolonial studies have emphasized how the legacies of colonialism continue to inform cultural identities, practices of belonging, and literary expression in diverse global settings (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2007). Within this broader field,

diaspora literature occupies a significant place as it reflects the lived experiences of displacement, cultural negotiation, and identity construction. Diasporic texts not only engage with the politics of memory but also create new spaces of hybridity where identities are continuously reimagined.

The Middle East, more precisely the Gulf region of West Asia, represents a unique arena for examining Indian diaspora literature. While the term “Middle East” is used in this study due to its prevalence in migration and literary scholarship, it is acknowledged that “West Asia” offers a more geographically grounded alternative; both terms here refer to the Gulf-centered migration context. Unlike the well-documented Indian Diasporas in the West, Gulf migration is characterized by temporary labour contracts, restrictive citizenship policies, and deeply stratified social hierarchies (Khalaf, 2015; Gardner, 2010). This transitory nature of settlement produces a distinctive set of challenges and opportunities for cultural expression, making the writings of Indian migrants in this region a crucial site for scholarly attention. The intersection of multiple languages, such as Malayalam, Hindi, English, and Arabic, further enriches the literary landscape, highlighting the complex dynamics of cultural hybridity. Indian writers such as Benyamin, Anees Salim, and Deepak Unnikrishnan have foregrounded these concerns through their literary works. Benyamin’s *Goat Days* explores the alienation and exploitation of migrant workers in the Gulf, while Unnikrishnan’s *Temporary People* employs linguistic experimentation and fragmented narratives to capture the precariousness of diasporic life. These texts, along with others emerging from the region, provide subtle yet powerful portrayals of displacement, belonging, and resilience. In doing so, they contribute to broader conversations on how cultural memory is reconfigured in postcolonial and transnational contexts.

The selection of Benyamin, Deepak Unnikrishnan, and Anees Salim is deliberate and theoretically grounded. These writers represent three distinct yet complementary strands within Indian diaspora writing connected to the Gulf region: Benyamin foregrounds the lived realities of working-class migrant labourers and the structures of exploitation underpinning Gulf economies; Unnikrishnan offers an experimental, formally innovative engagement with migrant precarity and linguistic hybridity; and Salim’s fiction, though not always geographically located in the Gulf, articulates psychic displacement, memory, and marginal subjectivities that resonate strongly with diasporic conditions. Together, these authors allow for a multi-layered exploration of diaspora literature that encompasses labour, language, memory, and identity

politics, thereby enabling a more comprehensive analysis of cultural hybridity and decolonial consciousness in the Middle Eastern context.

This paper situates the writings of Indian diaspora authors in the Middle East within the framework of cultural hybridity and identity politics. Drawing on theoretical insights from Homi Bhabha (1994), who conceptualizes hybridity as a “third space” of cultural negotiation, and Stuart Hall (1990), who views identity as both “being” and “becoming,” the study argues that these literary works extend the discourse of decolonization beyond national boundaries. By examining how Indian diaspora literature in the Gulf navigates the tension between preservation and assimilation, as well as the politics of visibility in host societies, the study underscores the role of literature in reimagining decolonization as a transnational, ongoing process. Their narratives challenge readers to rethink concepts of home and nation, acknowledging the ache of nostalgia without erasing the inventive joys of cultural blending. In reclaiming cultural memory and contesting simplistic notions of assimilation, these writers show how diasporic literature can reimagine exile not just as loss, but as a fertile ground for new forms of community, artistry, and hope.

Historical and Socio-political Context

The migration of Indians to the Middle East has a long historical route, predating the colonial and postcolonial eras. For centuries, the Indian Ocean functioned as a corridor of exchange linking South Asia with the Arabian Peninsula, enabling trade, cultural interaction, and the movement of people (Chaudhuri, 1985). Coastal communities from Kerala, Gujarat, and other regions maintained sustained maritime ties with ports in Oman, Yemen, and the wider Gulf. These early exchanges laid the groundwork for the large-scale labour migration that would follow in the twentieth century.

The discovery of oil in the Gulf in the early twentieth century, followed by the post-World War II modernization drive, created unprecedented demand for foreign labour. The oil boom of the 1970s accelerated this process, attracting millions of South Asian workers, particularly from India, to build infrastructure and sustain service economies (Khalaf, AlShehabi, & Hanieh, 2015). Kerala emerged as a major source region, with migration becoming a defining feature of its economy, society, and cultural imagination. The Gulf became so central to Kerala’s social fabric that scholars often describe migration as an essential “social contract” binding Kerala and the Middle East (Osella & Osella, 2000).

What distinguishes the Gulf migration model from diasporic experiences in the West is its temporality, embedded in the sponsorship or *kafala* system. This legal framework ties the residency status of migrants to their employers, thereby curtailing their autonomy and rendering them vulnerable to exploitation (Gardner, 2010; Longva, 1997). Migrants remain economically indispensable yet politically marginalized, as Gulf States restrict pathways to naturalization, long-term settlement, or political participation. As Vora (2013) argues, Indian migrants in Dubai and other Gulf cities embody a paradox: they contribute to the nation-building projects of their host societies but are denied the possibility of becoming “citizens.”

This precarious existence shapes the socio-political realities of Indian diaspora life in the Gulf. Migrants navigate stratified labour markets marked by sharp hierarchies of class, nationality, and ethnicity. Western expatriates and Arab elites often occupy privileged positions, while South Asians, particularly unskilled and semi-skilled workers, remain confined to low-paying jobs under exploitative conditions (Khalaf et al., 2015). Such stratification is not merely economic but also cultural, influencing the visibility, representation, and recognition of Indian migrants in public life. The experience of “temporary settlement” means that migrants live in a state of perpetual liminality; neither fully integrated into the host society nor fully detached from the homeland (Gardner, 2011).

At the same time, migration has profoundly transformed sending communities in India. Remittances from the Gulf have become a critical pillar of Kerala’s economy, driving improvements in housing, education, healthcare, and social mobility (Zachariah & Rajan, 2012). The “Gulf dream” has reshaped aspirations and consumption patterns, while also creating new forms of inequality within Kerala between migrant and non-migrant households. These socio-economic transformations are deeply intertwined with cultural change, influencing practices of religion, kinship, and modernity (Osella & Osella, 2000).

For the diaspora itself, cultural life in the Gulf is simultaneously constrained and vibrant. Restrictions on citizenship and cultural expression produce a sense of invisibility, yet Indian migrants sustain rich cultural worlds through literature, cinema, language, and community organizations. Migrant writers articulate these contradictions, capturing both the alienation of exclusion and the resilience of diasporic creativity. The literature of Benyamin, Deepak Unnikrishnan, and others must therefore be read within this broader historical and socio-political matrix where temporary migration, economic

dependency, and cultural negotiation converge to shape a distinct diasporic condition.

Themes in Indian Diaspora Literature from the Middle East

Belonging

The question of belonging is a recurring concern in Indian diaspora literature situated in the Middle East, particularly because the Gulf region embodies a paradoxical space for migrants; one of opportunity yet simultaneous exclusion. Belonging in this context is rarely straightforward, as migrant lives are shaped by legal, cultural, and social structures that prevent complete assimilation into the host society. Indian diaspora writers often portray characters whose experiences oscillate between inclusion through labour and exclusion through socio-political barriers.

Benyamin's *Goat Days* (2012) captures this tension with stark realism. The protagonist Najeeb, like many migrant workers in the Gulf, embodies the migrant's search for dignity and recognition while trapped in an environment that systematically denies him social rootedness. His yearning for connection is not only personal but emblematic of a larger collective desire among Indian migrants for acknowledgment within the host society. Yet, belonging remains fragile, tethered to the temporality of labour contracts, the absence of citizenship rights, and the lack of cultural integration in Gulf States (Gardner, 2010).

This duality reinforces Avtar Brah's (1996) concept of the "homing desire," which emphasizes that belonging is not necessarily tied to an actual return to the homeland but rather to the creation of "home" within dislocation. For Indian migrants in the Middle East, home becomes simultaneously plural and fractured: it resides in memories of Kerala or Hyderabad, in the solidarity of migrant communities, and in the spaces they carve out within alien landscapes. At the same time, the impossibility of permanent settlement in the Gulf produces what Steven Vertovec (1999) calls "transnational belonging," where identity is constructed across borders rather than firmly rooted in one place.

Thus, in diaspora literature, belonging emerges not as a static state but as a process; an ongoing negotiation between memory, displacement, and lived reality. The writings of Indian diaspora authors capture this fluidity, portraying belonging less as possession of space and more as a fragile, deeply felt yearning for stability and recognition within transient conditions.

Displacement

If belonging reflects the search for rootedness, displacement in Indian diaspora literature from the Middle East highlights the inevitable ruptures caused by migration. Unlike voluntary cosmopolitan mobility, the displacement experienced by many Indian migrants in the Gulf is marked by compulsion; economic necessity, poverty, and lack of opportunities in their homeland. Migration to the Middle East, especially since the oil boom of the 1970s, was rarely imagined as a seamless relocation; rather, it was undertaken with the burden of sacrifice and the awareness of a precarious future.

Literary works often underscore the psychic and social costs of this uprooting. In Benyamin's *Goat Days*, displacement is dramatized through Najeeb's entrapment in the desert, where he is stripped of his humanity and alienated both from the host society and from his own cultural roots. The physical dislocation is compounded by emotional estrangement: the migrant is caught in a liminal zone, belonging neither fully to the homeland nor to the new environment. This echoes Salman Rushdie's (1991) assertion that migration is always shadowed by "the loss of roots," where the migrant becomes a figure of in-betweenness, haunted by the absence of stability. Displacement also extends beyond the migrant individual to encompass families and communities back home. Letters, phone calls, and remittances create a fractured form of presence, but also accentuate absence. Writers such as Unni R. and Benyamin depict how the family unit itself undergoes dislocation, as relationships are restructured around the absence of the migrant breadwinner. Displacement thus emerges as both spatial and relational; an uprooting from the homeland and a disruption of familial intimacy.

Moreover, the displacement in the Gulf context is intensified by the lack of pathways to permanence. Migrants are positioned as temporary "guests" regardless of decades of residence, which makes the sense of settlement perpetually deferred. Edward Said's reflections on exile (2000) resonate here: the Gulf migrant embodies the paradox of being necessary yet unwelcome, present yet denied permanence. Diaspora literature from this context exposes how displacement is not only the migrant's entry point into the Gulf but also the condition that defines their entire existence there.

Hybridity

Hybridity in Indian diaspora literature from the Middle East emerges as a central analytical category, reflecting the everyday cultural negotiations undertaken by

migrants in structurally unequal host societies. While postcolonial theory often approaches hybridity through Homi Bhabha's (1994) notion of the "third space," where new identities emerge through cultural interaction, the Gulf context complicates this formulation. Here, hybridity is not simply a creative fusion of cultures but a constrained and uneven process shaped by legal exclusion, labour hierarchies, and social marginalization. Migrants absorb elements of host cultures while remaining institutionally barred from full participation within them.

Literary narratives often depict how migrants embody dual cultural registers. They carry the linguistic, culinary, and religious practices of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, or Andhra Pradesh, while simultaneously adapting to the rhythms of Gulf life, whether through language acquisition, workplace discipline, or the codes of surveillance in host societies. For instance, Benyamin's works describe how migrant workers navigate the paradox of praying in mosques side by side with Arabs, while still being treated as outsiders within the same religious community. This fractured hybridity reflects Stuart Hall's (1990) idea that identity is not fixed but "a matter of becoming," continually reshaped in relation to new socio-political conditions.

Hybridity also manifests in the lives of second-generation diaspora, who, though fewer in number in the Gulf compared to Western diasporas, embody a complex duality. They are born into societies that legally and politically refuse them citizenship, yet their cultural sensibilities, language, clothing, and social etiquette bear the imprint of the Gulf. This tension is poignantly captured in short stories by Indian writers in Malayalam magazines published from the Gulf, where children struggle to situate themselves between a homeland they scarcely know and a host land that will never accept them as its own.

At the same time, hybridity in the Gulf is not only cultural but also linguistic. Migrant speech often becomes a creolized mix of Malayalam, Hindi, English, and Arabic, reflecting both adaptation and resistance. This everyday hybridity signifies what Ananya Jahanara Kabir (2010) terms the "lived palimpsest," where multiple layers of identity co-exist without necessarily resolving into a singular whole. Thus, in Indian diaspora literature from the Middle East, hybridity does not connote celebratory cosmopolitanism but rather a fraught negotiation; an unfinished blending shaped by inequality, exclusion, and survival. It marks both the resilience and the vulnerability of migrant existence in the Gulf.

Alienation

Alienation is a recurring and powerful theme in Indian diaspora literature from the Middle East, reflecting the existential disconnection that migrants experience in the host society. Unlike displacement, which foregrounds the physical rupture of migration, alienation highlights the psychological and emotional estrangement that follows sustained encounters with exclusion, marginalization, and cultural dissonance.

For Gulf migrants, alienation often begins with the structural inequalities embedded in the region's labour regimes. The *kafala* (sponsorship) system places workers in a state of dependency on employers, where even basic freedoms such as movement, association, or protest are restricted. This precarious existence fosters a profound sense of being "present yet absent," indispensable for the economy yet socially invisible. Benyamin's *Goat Days* is perhaps the most striking literary representation of this alienation, where the protagonist's dehumanizing life among goats becomes a metaphor for the isolation and disempowerment of countless migrant labourers.

Alienation also operates in the domain of identity and belonging. Migrants live in spaces that blur the line between home and exile: company accommodations, labour camps, and gated apartments. These are not sites of integration but rather enclaves of segregation, where cultural life is reproduced in miniature yet remains disconnected from the mainstream of Gulf society. Diaspora literature frequently depicts characters who oscillate between nostalgia for their homeland and the emotional void of their hostland, caught in what Salman Rushdie (1991) describes as the "imaginary homelands" spaces of memory and longing that can never be fully recaptured.

Furthermore, alienation extends across generations. Children of migrants, though exposed to the culture of the Gulf from birth, face legal exclusion and an uncertain future. Literature captures their "in-between" existence: alienated from the homeland through distance and alienated from the host land through denial of rights. In short stories and memoirs, second-generation migrants articulate feelings of rootlessness, highlighting the paradox of being socially integrated yet politically invisible. Language further deepens alienation. Many migrants in the Gulf operate with limited Arabic proficiency, restricting them to occupational spaces where communication is utilitarian rather than enriching. In literary texts, dialogues often shift between Malayalam, Hindi, and English,

with Arabic as an alienating presence; a language of authority and distance, rarely of intimacy. This linguistic estrangement reinforces the boundaries of exclusion that migrants navigate daily.

Thus, alienation in Indian diaspora literature from the Middle East is not merely a personal condition but a structural and collective experience. It reveals the psychological cost of economic survival and foregrounds the human toll of systems that sustain migration. In doing so, the literature functions as both a testimony and a critique, illuminating the hidden fractures beneath the narrative of Gulf prosperity.

Language

Language occupies a central role in Indian diaspora literature from the Middle East, functioning both as a bridge of connection and a marker of alienation. Migrant experiences in the Gulf are mediated through multilingual encounters; Malayalam, Hindi, Tamil, Urdu, and English coexist alongside Arabic, yet these languages operate within unequal hierarchies of power, access, and intimacy. Literature from the diaspora often explores this linguistic complexity, capturing the tensions between communication, identity, and exclusion.

For first-generation migrants, language is primarily tied to survival. Limited proficiency in Arabic confines them to low-paying jobs and reinforces their outsider status. Literature reflects this struggle, portraying characters who navigate daily life through fragments of Arabic words functional for labour but insufficient for cultural integration. The absence of linguistic fluency often parallels a broader social exclusion, where migrants remain trapped within their own linguistic enclaves.

At the same time, Indian languages, especially Malayalam in the Gulf context, serve as powerful tools of cultural continuity. Migrants recreate their homeland through linguistic practices, whether in literature, theatre, or everyday conversation. Gulf-Malayalam literature thrives on this retention of the mother tongue, transforming it into a repository of memory and belonging. Writers like Benyamin deliberately employ Malayalam idioms and dialects to preserve the rhythms of migrant life, ensuring that the diaspora's stories remain rooted in their linguistic heritage.

English occupies an ambivalent space in diaspora literature. On one hand, it functions as a language of aspiration and mobility, opening doors to better

employment and education. On the other hand, its dominance in literary production often marginalizes vernacular narratives, creating a gap between migrant experiences and their literary representation. English writings about the diaspora sometimes reflect the perspectives of more privileged migrants, whereas vernacular texts more directly voice the struggles of working-class communities. For the second generation, language becomes even more complicated. Children of migrants often grow up fluent in English and Arabic but disconnected from their parents' mother tongues. Literature captures this linguistic dissonance, portraying hybrid identities that emerge when young migrants negotiate multiple languages but belong fully to none. The inability to master their parents' native tongue intensifies the generational gap, while their lack of legal and cultural recognition in the Gulf prevents full ownership of Arabic. This liminality often results in a fractured linguistic identity.

Ultimately, language in Indian diaspora literature from the Middle East is never neutral; it embodies power relations, generational tensions, and cultural negotiations. It is a site where migrants struggle for dignity, assert cultural continuity, and articulate the unspoken fractures of diasporic life. By foregrounding language as both a unifier and divider, diaspora writers reveal the complex ways in which words, idioms, and silences construct the migrant condition.

Resilience

Resilience emerges as one of the most profound themes in Indian diaspora literature from the Middle East, highlighting the ability of migrants to endure hardship, adapt to hostile environments, and construct meaningful lives in conditions of precarity. Despite legal restrictions, social exclusion, and the transitory nature of their existence in Gulf societies, migrants carve out spaces of survival and hope. Literature becomes a witness to this resilience, capturing not just suffering but also strength, creativity, and endurance.

For many first-generation workers, resilience is expressed through their capacity to withstand exploitative labour conditions while maintaining familial responsibilities across borders. Poems and short stories often portray migrants who suppress their pain and loneliness to fulfil the economic dreams of their families back home. Their sacrifices are narrated not only as individual struggles but also as collective acts of perseverance that sustain entire communities in India. Cultural resilience is another recurring motif. Migrants preserve their

traditions, rituals, and communal practices in foreign lands, transforming the Gulf into a cultural extension of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, or Hyderabad. Literary works depict festive gatherings, religious practices, and cultural associations as acts of resistance against erasure, ensuring that migrant communities retain a sense of continuity and dignity amidst alienation.

Women's narratives add further dimensions to resilience. Literature portrays women migrants, whether domestic workers or nurses, negotiating multiple vulnerabilities: patriarchal control, economic exploitation, and social isolation. Yet, through networks of solidarity, faith, and inner strength, women demonstrate remarkable resilience in reconfiguring their identities and asserting agency within constrained circumstances. For the second generation, resilience takes on different shades. Denied citizenship rights and often marginalized in Gulf societies, they nonetheless cultivate hybrid identities that draw from both India and the Middle East. Literature depicts their resilience in negotiating belonging through education, cultural creativity, and transnational networks, even when their futures remain uncertain.

Resilience in diaspora literature is not romanticized as mere endurance; rather, it is portrayed as a complex negotiation with power, loss, and aspiration. By foregrounding resilience, writers challenge stereotypes of migrants as passive victims, instead presenting them as active agents who continuously reconstruct life in hostile terrains. In this sense, resilience becomes not just a survival strategy but also a literary metaphor for hope, continuity, and transformation within the diasporic condition.

Textual Analysis of Selected Authors

Benyamin's *Goat Days* (2012) has emerged as one of the most searing accounts of the Gulf migrant experience, particularly in its portrayal of alienation and dehumanization in labour camps. The protagonist, Najeeb, undergoes profound psychological and physical trauma while being forced to herd goats in extreme isolation, stripped of human dignity and social connection. The novel exemplifies what Ghosh (2018) describes as the "literature of captivity" within migration studies, where the migrant's body becomes both a site of exploitation and resistance. The text not only foregrounds the exploitative labour regimes of the Gulf but also highlights migrant resilience through Najeeb's capacity to endure and ultimately survive. Scenes such as Najeeb's forced identification with the goats, his gradual loss of language, and his bodily degradation in the desert

intensify the novel's critique of migrant dehumanization. The erosion of speech and memory in the text symbolically represents how migrant subjectivity itself is dismantled under conditions of extreme isolation.

In *Temporary People* (2017), Deepak Unnikrishnan presents a radically different aesthetic approach, using linguistic experimentation and fragmented narrative structures to mirror the fractured identities of Gulf migrants. His stories blur the boundaries between the real and surreal, capturing the precariousness of belonging for communities perpetually labelled as "temporary." The hybrid linguistic style, mixing English, Malayalam, Arabic, and even invented words, embodies Bhabha's (1994) notion of hybridity, where language itself becomes a site of negotiation and subversion. This experimental narrative underscores the impossibility of fixed belonging, reflecting what Nair (2020) identifies as the "liminality of Gulf existence." Stories such as "Gulf Return" and "Temporary People" foreground absurdity, bureaucratic violence, and linguistic distortion to depict migrants as spectral figures; socially present yet politically absent; thereby formalizing precarity through narrative technique.

Although Anees Salim's works, such as *Vanity Bagh* (2013) and *The Blind Lady's Descendants* (2014), are not set explicitly in the Gulf, they resonate with themes of displacement and fragmented memory that align with diasporic conditions. His characters often grapple with histories of marginalization, silenced voices, and estrangement, evoking a diasporic consciousness rooted in absence and longing. As Varughese (2016) notes, Salim's narratives articulate "subterranean geographies of loss," making them valuable for understanding how diasporic subjectivities emerge even outside the immediate migrant milieu. In this way, Salim broadens the spectrum of Indian diaspora literature by connecting everyday alienation to larger cultural dislocations.

Together, these authors illuminate the complex experiences of the Indian diaspora in the Middle East. While Benyamin foregrounds physical suffering and survival within exploitative labour systems, Unnikrishnan exposes the structural precariousness of migrant identities through experimental storytelling, and Salim offers subtle, memory-infused reflections on displacement. Despite differences in style and context, a common thread emerges: the resilience of migrants who, even in conditions of profound dislocation, construct identities, memories, and cultural continuities. These narratives underscore what Clifford (1997) terms the "routes" of diaspora, where movement and adaptation define community more than roots.

Literature as Resistance: Reclaiming Visibility, Voice, and Cultural Memory

Indian diaspora literature from the Middle East often functions as a site of cultural resistance, challenging dominant narratives that render migrant labourers invisible within host societies. Migrant workers in the Gulf are frequently positioned as an anonymous labour force, reduced to economic units sustaining national development projects without recognition of their personal histories, cultural identities, or struggles (Gardner, 2010). Within such a framework, literature emerges as a powerful medium of resistance, reclaiming both visibility and voice for these marginalized communities.

Benyamin's *Goat Days* (2012), for instance, exposes the dehumanizing conditions of migrant labourers through the traumatic experiences of Najeeb, a Malayali worker trapped in servitude. Through narrating the untold suffering of Gulf migrants, the text functions as an act of cultural witnessing, contesting the silence imposed by both sending and receiving states. Similarly, Deepak Unnikrishnan's *Temporary People* (2017) employs experimental narrative forms to represent the precarious lives of expatriates in the UAE, whose identities are suspended between belonging and exclusion. The linguistic fragmentation in his work reflects the fractured subjectivity of migrants, simultaneously asserting their presence in a space that attempts to erase them. The act of writing itself becomes a strategy of resistance by recording migrant experiences that are systematically denied institutional recognition. Scholars argue that diasporic narratives not only document lived realities but also provide counter-discourses that subvert hegemonic representations of migration as purely economic success stories (Clifford, 1994; Brah, 1996). In the Gulf context, where strict labour hierarchies and restrictive citizenship regimes prevent migrants from articulating dissent publicly, literature performs the political work of giving voice to silenced communities.

Furthermore, these works contribute to the preservation of cultural memory, ensuring that the sacrifices and resilience of migrants are not forgotten. Literature allows migrant stories to enter the collective imagination, challenging the amnesia of both host societies and homeland audiences. By doing so, it asserts the humanity of migrants, affirming their agency and resilience in the face of systemic marginalization (Hall, 1990; Brah, 1996). In this sense, Indian diaspora literature from the Middle East transcends its role as artistic expression, functioning as a form of cultural resistance and political intervention.

Reimagining Decolonization through Diaspora Literature

The discourse of decolonization has traditionally been centered on political independence, territorial sovereignty, and the reclamation of indigenous cultures. However, diaspora literature complicates and extends this conversation by situating decolonial struggles within the lived realities of transnational migration and displacement. Indian diaspora literature from the Middle East, in particular, offers powerful reimaginings of decolonization that are not confined to nation-state frameworks but engage with the fluidity of belonging, the persistence of colonial hierarchies, and the production of cultural memory across borders.

Diasporic writings foreground the continuities of colonial legacies in contemporary global labour regimes, where migrant workers from South Asia often face conditions akin to indenture, servitude, and systemic exclusion (Gardner, 2011). Through narrating these experiences, authors such as Benyamin and Deepak Unnikrishnan expose the persistence of exploitative structures that replicate colonial hierarchies within Gulf economies. Literature thus becomes a medium through which migrants not only record their struggles but also challenge dominant narratives that render them invisible. In doing so, these works reposition decolonization as an ongoing, unfinished project that extends beyond political independence to encompass cultural representation, dignity, and justice (Mishra, 2007). Diaspora literature also reimagines cultural memory by moving beyond the constraints of national borders. Writers articulate hybrid forms of identity that draw simultaneously from homeland, host land, and transnational circuits of migration. For instance, the “homing desire” articulated in such literature (Brah, 1996) resists essentialist notions of return by emphasizing the creation of belonging in in-between spaces. This construction of cultural memory across geographies destabilizes the Eurocentric and nation-centered models of decolonization, foregrounding instead a pluriversal approach rooted in lived migrant experiences. The act of remembering, whether through narratives of Gulf labour camps, fragmented family histories, or linguistic hybridity, becomes itself a decolonial practice, reclaiming agency from structures that seek to erase or silence migrant lives (Hall, 1990).

In reimagining decolonization, diaspora literature functions as a mode of resistance that critiques power relations sustaining both colonial and neo-colonial orders. The depiction of migrant precarity in texts such as *Goat Days* and *Temporary People* highlights the systemic displacement produced by global capitalism, authoritarian state structures, and restrictive citizenship laws

(Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2020). Yet, these works also resist cultural erasure by giving voice to silenced communities, preserving vernacular expressions, and foregrounding subaltern subjectivities. As such, literature not only critiques structures of domination but also reconstructs alternative imaginaries of community, belonging, and justice. It asserts that decolonization is not simply about rejecting colonial authority but about reconstituting cultural and political spaces where marginalized voices can thrive (Spivak, 1988). Indian diaspora literature from the Middle East reimagines decolonization by weaving together narratives of displacement, resilience, and cultural memory that transcend national boundaries. Through their textual interventions, these writers contribute to decolonial thought by exposing persistent inequalities, reclaiming erased histories, and envisioning futures beyond colonial and neo-colonial constraints.

Conclusion

Indian diaspora literature from the Middle East emerges as a vital site for examining the entanglements of migration, memory, and identity in transnational spaces. These writings not only document the lived experiences of precarious migrant lives but also move beyond narrative testimony to function as acts of cultural resistance. Authors such as Benyamin, Deepak Unnikrishnan, and Anees Salim highlight alienation, hybridity, and resilience, foregrounding the social and psychological realities of communities whose lives remain shaped by both aspiration and marginality. In doing so, they complicate the binaries of “home” and “abroad,” instead presenting a diasporic condition that is fluid, fragmented, and yet constantly seeking meaning. Moreover, the thematic engagements with belonging, displacement, and identity underscore how diaspora literature contributes to reimagining postcolonial subjectivity in global contexts. Through reclaiming visibility and voice for otherwise silenced migrant populations, these texts not only critique structures of power and exclusion but also expand the boundaries of cultural memory beyond the nation-state. As such, they resonate with broader decolonial discourses, challenging hegemonic narratives and offering alternative modes of seeing and remembering. Ultimately, Indian diaspora literature from the Gulf is more than a reflection of labour migration; it is an archive of survival, resistance, and creativity. It testifies to the ability of marginalized communities to transform dislocation into cultural production, thereby contributing to both regional and global literary landscapes. This body of work thus compels readers and scholars alike to reconsider the intersections of migration, literature, and decolonization in ways that remain deeply relevant to the twenty-first century.

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