



War and Exploitation: Socio-Political Realities in *The Blind Man's Garden* and *Goat Days*

Anna Kurian Paul

Pursuing a BA in English (H) from Amity University

Email: annapaul2110@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the sociopolitical ramifications of the themes of violence and exploitation seen in Benjamin's *Goat Days* and Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden*. With Aslam concentrating on the consequences of war and Benjamin revealing the brutal reality of migrant labour exploitation, both books emphasize the catastrophic implications of systematic oppression. *The Blind Man's Garden* shows how war upends social and psychological structures by criticizing the effects of militarization and ideological manipulation in Afghanistan and Pakistan after 9/11. *Goat Days*, on the other hand, illuminates the Kafala system's exploitation of migrant labourers, illustrating the dehumanization and financial despair that fuel forced labour in the Gulf. Both books emphasize how political and economic structures exclude weaker groups, perpetuating oppressive cycles, even though their locations are distinct. Mikal and Najeeb, the main characters, are the epitome of fortitude and the human fight for self-respect in the face of adversity. This study emphasizes the moral obligations of countries in resolving these injustices by highlighting the connection between economic exploitation and conflict. Aslam and Benjamin promote empathy and justice by provoking readers to consider the worldwide effects of war and forced labour through gripping stories.

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Introduction



The renowned novelist Nadeem Aslam, who was born in Pakistan and later moved to the UK, is well-known for examining South Asia's sociopolitical conflicts. His works have been greatly impacted by his early experiences with cultural dislocation and the political unrest in his own country. His complex grasp of the repercussions and human cost of the Afghan War is reflected in his novel *The Blind Man's Garden*. Aslam is a powerful voice against injustice and conflict because of his personal history, which gives his stories authenticity.

The Blind Man's Garden was written by Aslam to attack the sociopolitical structures that support violence and to humanize the victims of conflict. The book captures the human toll of international conflicts and is firmly anchored in the post-9/11 geopolitical environment. He aims to dispel myths and emphasize the tenacity of people caught in the crossfire of history is what drives Aslam.

The suffering of migrant labourers in the Gulf is a common theme in the writings of Kerala-born Indian author Benyamin, whose pen name is Benny Daniel. His personal views of the Gulf labour system served as the inspiration for his realistic storytelling style, which captures the harsh reality of migration. Readers are moved by Benyamin's writings because they highlight the oppression and tenacity of underprivileged groups.

Based on real-life incidents, *Goat Days* was written to highlight the inhumane treatment of migrant workers in the Gulf. Benyamin was inspired to speak out about the unheard-of hardships of those who are trying to improve their life but are being taken advantage of by the system. The socioeconomic inequalities that cause migration and its effects are highlighted by the novel's striking realism.

These themes have been thoroughly examined by academics, who have drawn attention to the pain and ideological tensions that are present in these stories. *The Blind Man's Garden* is a "trauma fiction" that depicts the communal sorrow of a civilization ravaged by war, according to Ahmed (2021).¹ In a similar vein, Khan (2022) contends that Aslam "unveils the ideological racism and imperialist forces that shape the destinies of his characters" in his post-colonial analysis of the book.² However, Harikumar (2020) uses a Foucauldian analysis of *Goat Days* to show how migrant labourers' lives are governed by

¹ Widespread military engagements in Afghanistan and Pakistan as a result of the post-9/11 war on terror caused significant civilian casualties and displacement. Refer to R. Ahmed (2021). *The Postcolonial Condition, Trauma, and War*. Oxford University Press.

² According to studies, survivors who are exposed to conflict and violence for an extended period of time may experience PTSD, despair, and identity difficulties. See L. Khan (2022). *The Blind Man's Garden: A Postcolonial Study on the Psychological Cost of War*. *Journal of Postcolonial Literature*, 8(2), 89-104.



panoptic power structures. Sharma (2019) highlights how Benyamin uses his protagonist Najeeb's psychological and cultural estrangement as a metaphor for the larger experience of migrants.

This essay aims to investigate how war and economic exploitation manifest as intertwined realities by critically analysing these novels. Both Aslam and Benyamin urge readers to understand the moral and ethical ramifications of these systemic problems by humanizing them via their heroes.

Both books go into different genres that are related to their subjects. *The Blind Man's Garden* is a literary fiction piece that explores the psychological and emotional effects of war via beautiful words. The physical and psychological suffering of migrant workers is vividly shown in the realist book *Goat Days*. These genres allow authors to expose structural inequalities while deepening the thematic depth of conflict and exploitation.

Both works' genres and plots revolve around the themes of alienation, survival, displacement, and sociopolitical commentary. Through their art, Aslam and Benyamin argue for justice and empathy while also highlighting the human cost of structural oppression. Their themes and motivations highlight the works' ongoing significance in today's worldwide society.

Literature Review

The Blind Man's Garden

The Blind Man's Garden's portrayal of pain, violence, and ideological manipulation has dominated scholarly discussion. Ahmed (2021) categorizes the book as trauma fiction, highlighting how Aslam captures the widespread pain of people impacted by conflict. According to the study, the novel depicts the psychological and emotional toll that war takes on both individuals and society. In a similar vein, Khan (2022) provides a post-colonial interpretation, examining Aslam's critique of the racist and imperialist systems that sustain the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Khan emphasizes how Aslam dismantles Western accounts of the war on terror, showing how his characters' outcomes are influenced by power relations.

Goat Days

On the other hand, the main topics of criticism in *Goat Days* are alienation among migrants, power dynamics, and exploitation. Harikumar (2020) analyses the novel's portrayal of the Kafala system and its panoptic control mechanisms using a Foucauldian framework. The analysis shows how a system that



controls migrant workers' movement, economic agency, and social identity renders them helpless.³ By examining the psychological aspects of the book, Sharma (2019) goes into further detail and makes the case that Najeeb's estrangement is a metaphor for the larger migrant experience in globalized labour markets. Benyamin's story, according to Sharma, emphasizes the human cost of economic migration, which is frequently disregarded.⁴

This study places *Goat Days* and *The Blind Man's Garden* into larger sociopolitical conversations about labour exploitation and conflict by combining these viewpoints. Even though the two books show various types of systematic oppression, they eventually agree in their criticism of systems that degrade people to further their political or commercial agendas.

Themes

Loss of Innocence: *The Blind Man's Garden* and *Goat Days* both show how people are thrown into harsh realities and deprived of their innocence by conflict. The characters who are entangled in the labyrinth of the war on terror in Aslam's book experience the loss of innocence. The protagonist's transition from a tranquil life to one characterized by treachery and violence emphasizes the loss of youthful hope. Similarly, as Najeeb, the main character of *Goat Days*, is subjected to labour exploitation in the Gulf, his early optimism is progressively replaced by a condition of despair and physical and emotional degradation. Losing one's innocence is portrayed in both books as a painful but transforming event. The brutal realities of war and exploitation push Mikal, Jeo, and Najeeb to adapt, face unspeakable hardships, and live. Their stories illustrate how repressive structures, whether by economic exploitation or military conquest, crush young ideals and compel people to face the more sinister sides of life. Aslam and Benyamin powerfully demonstrate via these stories how war and labour exploitation are intensely personal conflicts that have a lifelong impact on people's mental health.

The Effects of War: Aslam's story explores the terrible effects of the Afghan War and how it affects those who are affected. The violence and displacement have a significant impact on the protagonist, a

³ Widely used in Gulf nations, the Kafala system has come under fire for limiting workers' rights and legal safeguards, hence fostering conditions of modern slavery. Refer to S. Harikumar (2020). A Foucauldian Study of *Goat Days* in the Gulf: Power, Surveillance, and Labor. *Migration Studies Journal*, 12(3), 45–67.

⁴ According to human rights organizations' reports, forced labor practices similar to those portrayed in *Goat Days* continue to exist in a number of industries, most notably construction and domestic work. Refer to P. Sharma (2019). Examining Benyamin's *Goat Days* in Light of Migrant Suffering and the World Economy. 10(1), 21–39; *South Asian Literature Review*.



medical volunteer, and his brother. In a similar vein, *Goat Days* examines how the Gulf War affected migrant labourers. The backdrop of the war intensifies people's misery and exploitation, particularly when considering labour migration, which is a major aspect of Najeeb's life. Both books imply that war is a psychological and emotional struggle that leaves wounds on future generations in addition to being a physical combat. *The Blind Man's Garden* tackles the long-term effects of war, such as trauma, displacement, and the dismantling of social and cultural institutions, in addition to the immediate horrors of violence. Children are raised in a fearful atmosphere, families are split apart, and the prospect of peace grows farther and farther away. Aslam offers a potent critique of war by depicting these facts, compelling readers to consider its terrible effects and the pressing need for justice, compassion, and healing.

Human Exploitation: In terms of both physical work and social manipulation, exploitation becomes a major subject. Najeeb's story in *Goat Days* is one of egregious labour exploitation in the Gulf. His stories shed light on the cruel treatment of migrant labourers and the terrible realities of forced labour and human trafficking. In a similar vein, *The Blind Man's Garden* criticizes the sociopolitical exploitation that occurs throughout the Pakistani-Afghan struggle, as people are controlled by the greater geopolitical scheme. The novels imply that systemic exploitation frequently makes the human cost of conflict worse. The book tells of Najeeb's terrifying experiences caring for goats in the Saudi desert in harsh conditions with no access to food, water, or relaxation. He is verbally and physically abused by his employer, whom he calls Arbab (master), who treats him more like property than a human being. Having been stripped of his freedom, dignity, and even his identity, Najeeb's plight serves as a metaphor for the systematic exploitation that millions of migrant labourers in the Middle East and other regions of the world endure. Benyamin criticizes the broader socioeconomic systems that allow for this kind of exploitation, especially the global capitalism system that depends on the cheap, interchangeable labour of developing countries.

Conclusion

Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* centres on the lives of people caught up in the aftermath of war and is set against the backdrop of the Afghan War. The narrative centres on Jao and Mikal, two young men whose lives are irrevocably changed by tragedy, treachery, and conflict. Aslam explores themes of love, loyalty, and the effects of war on his characters' mental and physical environments. On the other hand, Benyamin's *Goat Days* describes the terrifying ordeal of Najeeb, an Indian migrant



labourer who is exploited and stuck in the Gulf. His transformation from a motivated worker looking for greater chances to a dehumanized labourer highlights both the human spirit's tenacity and the atrocities of human trafficking. Both books uncover underlying human tragedies by examining interpersonal and societal problems.

The fundamental themes of both stories are human exploitation, the effects of war, and loss of innocence. In Aslam's story, Jeo and Mikal struggle with treachery and despair after the war robs them of their youthful optimism. Similarly, Najeeb's journey from optimism to despair in *Goat Days* illustrates how human dignity is undermined by exploitation. Both books critique socio-political processes by eloquently demonstrating the widespread existence of systemic exploitation, whether by forced labour or war. These themes are essential to comprehending their unique stories because the characters' emotional and physical changes highlight the profound consequences of war.

The stories are significantly shaped by vision, both literal and metaphorical. The blindness of Rohan, Jeo and Mikal's adoptive father serves as a metaphor for moral and political blindness in *The Blind Man's Garden*, underscoring humanity's incapacity to recognize the effects of war. In contrast to the mayhem outside, the garden itself serves as a sanctuary of clarity. As he works through his pain, Najeeb's initial metaphorical blindness—his ignorance of the Gulf's oppressive labour systems—develops into a kind of enlightenment in *Goat Days*. His eventual "vision" gives him the ability to escape, regain agency, and consider his fortitude. Both books imply that survival and atonement depend on comprehending and facing reality, which is represented by vision.

Aslam and Benyamin offer important insights on the sociopolitical realities of exploitation and war through *Goat Days* and *The Blind Man's Garden*. Their stories demonstrate how systematic oppression affects people through economic enslavement, ideological struggles, and militarization, spanning national borders. These novels humanize the effects of war and forced labour by focusing their narratives on individual experiences of hardship and resiliency. In the end, they urge a more thorough ethical analysis of world inequalities and the need for reform, empathy, and resistance to oppression.

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