



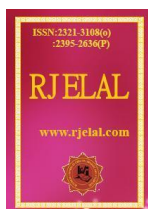
Memory, Migration, and Cultural Survival in Girmitiya Literature

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Abstract

Literature of Girmitiya is regarded as diasporic literature with the history of Indian migrants to the plantation of the colonial period. This literature is important as part of the collective memory and diasporic identity of the people who lived through and experienced displacement, exploitation and adaptation to another culture. Focusing on the diaspora literature, cultural memory and postcolonial criticism, this paper examines the notions of memory, migration and cultural survival in the writings of Girmitiyas. The paper focuses on literature of prominent works by the writers of Girmitiya origin like Totaram Sanadhya, Khal Torabully, Satendra Nandan, David Dabydeen etc., which remembers the homeland, records the traumatic nature of the migration process and talks about the ways of sustaining their own culture when they were away. It is said that Girmitiya literature is able to make a counter-archive, a counter-archive which opposes colonial power and the attempt by the colonial power to erase Girmitiya identities by preserving the memories of the oppressed people. Girmitiyas were able to convert the process of displacement into the process of forming their identity through storytelling, oral traditions, religious practices and other cultural processes. According to the research, memory is more than just remembering the past. Memory is one of the ways in which one can survive and create diasporic identity. Thus, literature on Girmitiya should be considered as an important field of study in context with cultural resistance, identity and migration.

Keywords: Cultural Memory, Migration, Diaspora, Cultural Survival, Indenture, Postcolonial Literature, Identity.

INTRODUCTION

The history of Indian indentured migration plays an important dimension in the

global history of migration, labour in the colonial system and in the history of diasporas. After the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1833, there was a great need for

labour on the plantation farms in the colonies. To help rectify this deficit of labour the British established the indenture system and began to recruit Indian labour through contracts to cultivate sugar, tea, and rubber on various colonies such as Mauritius, Fiji, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Suriname and South Africa. It is only since 1834 till date that more than one million Indians were removed abroad on contracts, which took the name of 'girmits' from the English term 'agreement' which was used in India too. It was these immigrants who were recruited into this system and their history has been studied and is known as "Girmitiyas".

Migration of the Girmitiyas cannot be reduced to a simple geographical shift from one place to another, rather it is an important change in their social, cultural and psychological identity. When the indentured laborers left their villages, families, languages, customs and social milieu, they came to live in the unfamiliar colonial setting with much racism, exploitation and cultural alienation. The crossing of "Kala Pani" (the black waters) was symbolic to Indians as a loss of caste, being cut off from society and so on, so migration was a trauma, a cultural disruption and an identity reconstruction.

Despite all the difficulties connected with the life on plantations, the communities of Girmitiyas showed great ability to maintain their culture. But they used a variety of means, including religion, folklore, tales, holidays, music, languages, and memory, to establish cultural space that they could use to make it through in the new place. So, they could keep up with their Indian homeland and adapt to the foreign society.

Experiences of indentured migrants have been captured in a wealth of literary pieces referred to collectively as Girmitiya literature. Literature of this kind includes novels, poetry, memoirs, oral histories, history books and modern diasporic literature by former indentured migrants and their descendants. Taram Sanadhya, Satendra Nandan, Khal

Torabully, David Dabydeen, Subramani and Brij V. Lal are some of the authors who have contributed with valuable documentation of the experience of migration, displacement, labour exploitation, acculturation and identity. These pieces are literary, but also serve as witnessing to resurrecting voices in colonial texts.

Memory is one of the characteristic aspects of Girmitiya literature. Memory can be an important tool for communities who have been displaced, as it is for the recording of a history, cultural practices and collective identities. When diasporas are geographically removed from their homeland, they still have a memory of their homeland and its culture, and it becomes an important means for them. The feeling of homeland in imagination – through memories of the village life, family relations, religious practice, indigenous customs, landscape and language – continues to create community identity.

Humanities scholars have studied and discussed the concept of cultural memory in recent years in great depth. Cultural memory is the ability of societies to remember, save and pass on their history collectively, in stories, rituals, symbols and culture. Cultural memory is distinguished from individual memory because although the former is an individual process, the latter is communal and is an important element in the building of communal identity. In case of diasporic communities, cultural memory becomes especially significant due to the conflicting nature of continuity and change. Current understanding of Girmitiya literature is providing us with insights into the role of memory in diasporic context.

Another important theme in the Girmitiya literature is migration as well. In literature the figure of migration always concerns the emotional and psychological aspect of the phenomenon of migration, which can be: the feeling of loss, feeling of displacement, feeling of insecurity, feeling of nostalgia, feeling of culture. It has always been

referred to as a transformative experience which brings about changes in the identity of individuals and also new identities. Examples of the new social connections formed in migrants' migration and plantation experiences include the notion of "jahaji bhai".

Tightly related to the themes of memory and migration is that of cultural survival. The survival of the Indian culture in faraway colonial settlements constitutes one of the most amazing features of the story of the Girmitiyas. The immigrants managed to keep some aspects of their language, religion and culture despite all of the conditions of their working life, and despite their attempts at assimilation. This survival was in the form of temples, festivities, recitations of the Ramayana, folk songs, weddings, and in oral storytelling. The traditions were, at the same time, continuously undergoing change due to local traditions and changes.

Girmitiya literature is not just of historical importance. In the current discourse on migration, globalization, diaspora and transnationalism, more and more connection is made with memory and identity as important elements that shape migration. The issues explored in Girmitiya literature continue to be of importance in the present-day world where there are vast numbers of migrants, cultural mixing, and issues of belonging and citizenship are discussed.

In this paper, the relationship between memory and migration and cultural survival is explored using the works of the Girmitiya in relation to cultural memory, diaspora and postcolonial theory. The paper will present and defend the thesis that human memory is a priceless treasure and can help preserve cultural identity and save from forgetting one's cultural heritage. The paper looks into the specific texts of Girmitiya literature and illustrates how literary narratives provide a means of cultural survival during the migration process. In addition, it showcases the potential of Girmitiya

literature as a counter-archive, which can subvert the colonial discourse, both in its political and cultural aspects, and continues the narrative of indentured labourers and their descendants. So, the paper participates in contemporary debates around the issues of migration, memory, identity and cultural survival.

Theoretical Framework

This research is interdisciplinary research which involves Cultural Memory Studies, Diaspora Theory and Postcolonial Criticism in the study of Memory, Migration and Cultural Survival in Girmitiya Literature. Theories can be helpful in providing some level of understanding of how the Girmitiya literature has been able to sustain the collective memory, think and reflect on migration and provide strategies of cultural survival. Obviously, there is no single explanation to Girmitiya experience as it has problems to deal with and the concerns of the problems which are being addressed are such as migration, exploitation of labourers, formation of identity and cultural survival etc.

Cultural Memory

It is essential to consider cultural memory in comprehending experiences that have been documented in Girmitiya literature. Cultural memory: The way a collectivity of peoples keeps, transmits and interprets information about the past over time. Personal memory is based on your own experiences and situations, cultural memory is stored in cultural practices and institutions within a community, the collective identity of this community is based on it.

The memory is social, as scholars like Maurice Halbwachs, Jan Assmann and Aleida Assmann have stated. Halbwachs has said that the memory of each person is formed and stored in social groups. In turn, Jan Assmann distinguishes between communicative memory and cultural memory. Cultural memory is carried on through texts, rituals and symbols,

while Communicative memory is passed on orally from generation to generation.

This is particularly relevant for communities of cultural memory, like the diaspora groups, where the continuity of the relationship with the country of origin is often broken by migration. When there is a distance between people and their culture, memory is a critical means of maintaining cultural identity. Local language, songs, religion and family and village traditions give local identity. Memories are an informal link to a place that might no longer exist; by remembering, migrant communities are establishing a symbolic connection to a place that may not be available.

In Girmitiya texts, memory serves two purposes, as a personal and communal memory. Rural life, the family, their practices and their religious celebrations and beliefs are often the themes of literary compositions. Memory, in this context, is not only about reminiscing but is a way in which migrants try to maintain their cultural identity while at the same time relating to their past.

Moreover, cultural memory is a means of resistance to the erasure of history. The indentured laborers were regarded as “data” “statistics” in colonial archives. The Girmitiya literature was a protest against the treatment of the labourers by the colonists; it is the record of their feelings and traditions none of which were recorded anywhere else. Consequently, memory was one of the possibilities of reclaiming the voice of the subaltern.

Diaspora and Migration

The diaspora theory is another important theory which can be used in the analysis of Girmitiya writings. Originally diaspora was conceived as the process of leaving one's homeland but today it has been extended to include a multitude of other processes of migration, displacement and creation of transnational identities. The work of diaspora scholars such as William Safran, James

Clifford, Robin Cohen and Vijay Mishra, has been significant.

Displacement, a sense of attachment to the homeland, memory of the homeland and cultural connection to the homeland are typical traits of diasporic communities. But diaspora is more than just a physical movement, it is an ongoing negotiation of identity, adaptation and transformation of culture.

The migration of the Girmitiya people is regarded as an unusual case of diaspora as it does not occur by choice but due to colonial indenture. While the current migrants are willing to travel to other countries for better economic opportunities, the migrants from Girmitiya were forcibly and fraudulently taken to other countries. Thus, by migrating they suffered a great deal.

The idea of diaspora can shed light on the challenges of the community of the Girmitiya in addressing this issue. In literature, the journey of the immigrants is represented as an event that undermines current social structures but creates new identities at the same time. The ocean crossing, or crossing of the Kala Pani, is a metaphor for separation and cultural change.

Migration is one of the major effects on creating new social networks among workers. “jahaji bhai” or ship brotherhood is about the building of unity among migrants who have had the experience of migration. But Diaspora Studies speaks of the fluidity of cultural identity and there was no continuity of cultural identity in the Girmitiya communities. Literary texts articulate the ongoing process of identity formation that takes place in the context of interaction with other cultures and historical times.

Girmitiya identity becomes a cultural formation, which combines both memory and migration. In this context, it can be said that diaspora studies reveal the formation of social networks in migrant communities, and the

fluidity of cultural identity. Literary texts are used to gain insight into how the identity of immigrants has been altered by a number of factors since they emigrated from their home countries.

Postcolonial Perspectives

Postcolonial theory is a theory that can be used to interpret colonial power and cultural representation in the text of Girmitiya. Postcolonial criticism is an academic movement that emerged from the work of thinkers such as Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Frantz Fanon and examines the political, cultural and psychological consequences of colonialism.

The issue of postcolonial theory is how the colonial discourse has represented and created the colonized peoples. Edward Said shows the colonial epistemologies that created stereotypical images of non-European cultures to justify colonialism by imperial powers with the help of the example of Orientalism. Likewise, within colonial discourse, indentured labourers are often conceptualized as a form of exchange of labour services but not as a bundle of history and culture.

In this way, Girmitiya literature is oppositional to colonial representations of migrants as it presents stories and ideas of those who lived through the colonial period and suffered its oppressive nature.

The concept of homi Bhabha, hybridity and cultural negotiation is also relevant in the study of literature of Girmitiya people. The colonial encounters produce a hybrid cultural identity and Bhabha argues for the dislocating of the binary opposition of "colonizer" and "colonized. In the latter case, the cultural practices in Girmitiya texts can be seen as instances of "hybrid identity" because the cultural practices of the texts are a combination of Indian culture and local social environments.

Unfortunately, one can take advantage of theories of Gayatri Spivak on subaltern

representation to understand the significance of the topic. Spivak poses the question whether there can be self-representation of marginalized populations. The answer to this question is the literature that the Girmitiya has produced, it is their own experience.

Postcolonial criticism is interested in the impact of the residue of the colonial structures on the contemporary social circumstances. The colonial organisation of labour has been reflected in the literature of the Girmitiyas, in a process of migration, in the process of identity formation and in cultural change. Furthermore, it offers meaningful insights to the current discussions around issues of colonialism, migration, memory and cultural survival.

The book offers a theoretical and conceptual framework to explain the representation of memory, migration and cultural survival in Girmitiya writings, which are presented under three sub-headings: Cultural Memory Studies, Diaspora Theory and Postcolonial Criticism. These theories can be used to interpret literature composed by Girmitiyas as an unbroken memory of individuals and opposition against erasure of history.

The memory box is a container that holds the memories of the homeland

Another theme that can be found in Girmitiya literature is that of the preservation of homeland via memory. The importance of the memory of home in sustaining culture and connection to ancestors could not have been more critical for Indians who were forcibly cleared from their native lands, and then transported to various plantations overseas in the colonies to work. Thus, memory was not only remembering the past but it was also a place of homeland.

The indentures were people of Indian origin, away from home, families and communities. Almost all of them were from rural areas with their life focussed around the village, the kinship, the religion and the

agriculture which prevailed in Northern India today, as in Uttar Pradesh or Bihar. This was a significant shift from this way of living going through the "Kala Pani". Memories of homeland were now important since these people were now unable to physically contact their homeland. Family connections are emotional links that migrants can recall, even when they are not real, in their villages, rivers, fields, temples, festivities and elsewhere.

For the Girmitiya literature, the concept of homeland does not refer to a geographical area but to a symbolic one, which is expressed in images. The writers create the images of India by depicting nature, farming, traditional festivals and cultural practices. In this way, the authors set up symbolic representations which create the memory of the homeland a cultural space, and which can be a way to preserve their identity and culture. For migrants, memory can act as a means to feel at home and find solace from the memories of their previous lives and cultures if they encounter hardships, loneliness and cultural disorientation.

Another important factor of memory is language, a repository of the homeland. The migrants who helped preserve their culture introduced various languages, such as, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Hindi and others. Language became a symbol of identity to migrants in the new foreign colonial surroundings. Oral narratives, folklore, religious prayers, and other forms of spoken communication helped to maintain migrants' linguistic heritage. The significance of language in the remembrance of the homeland is frequently emphasized in literature and language is important in the retention of culture, history and collective feelings of people.

The religious rituals also formed a part of the process of maintaining memories of India. The temples, the prayers, the recitals and Ramayana became pivotal places of maintaining cultural memories, as well as the celebration of religious festivals such as Diwali, Holi and Ram

Navami. Thus, an environment typical of the culture could be recreated without actually being there, which was essential to the project in order to gauge the reactions of the women. Thus, even though physically away from the motherland, it was possible to recreate the environment characteristic of the culture, and assess the reactions of the women. The sense of collective identity was generated and handed down from generation to generation, by means of active engagement in the religious rituals. In many settlements of the Girmitiya, religion institutions were cultural hubs which were able to preserve and share collective experiences and memories.

The oral memory is another important way of keeping the memories of the homeland alive. Folk songs, proverbs, family legends and stories are among the items that are retained within the memory bank of the diaspora communities. Again, the memory of experiences such as migration, separation and hard work, cultural practices and past events were kept alive through the oral traditions. For this reason, even those born abroad had memories of their heritage, they passed that on through the oral tradition. This is also frequently found in the literature.

The concept of 'return to the homeland' is prevalent in Girmitiya's literature. However, it is important to note that the nostalgia in these works does not only manifest itself as a romanticized sense of 'nostalgia' for the past. Nostalgia is a culture and a mental state developed during the displacement process in which the memory of homeland is idealized. The land is portrayed as one's country, a place of security, and of true culture. Idealization of the past is a psychological reaction not only to the past, but also a construction of identity on the part of a migrant. Thus, experiences in the homeland can be used as a yardstick to describe experiences elsewhere.

It is necessary to recognise however that memories are not static and are dynamic in the

sense that they can move and change over time and across generations of descendants of labourers. Children and grandchildren of migrants continue to hear stories and traditions from India; but not from the mouths of their ancestors. It is therefore appropriate that memories are not a permanent condition, but a reconstruction process instead. The homeland would thus be a 'virtual' or symbolic homeland for migrants.

In addition, memory is employed for a number of political reasons by the Girmitiya authors in their writings. The colonial documents look at indentured labours as solely a productive part of the labour force and without a face. Literature focuses on the individual's experiences of memory, feelings and culture in order to bring in the idea of an image of migrant societies. Home-remembering leads to resistance against the historical amnesia of the colonizer and shows respect for the dignity of the colonized – the indentured labourer – in Girmitiya.

Moreover, the memory of home in memory is of great value in diasporic identity building. The ability to remember the past helps people and community to remain in touch with the past as they adapt to new circumstances. Rather, the recollections of homeland are not replaced, but are critical elements of identity-formation along the way.

In conclusion, the importance of the memory in the maintenance of the idea of homeland in the Girmitiya literature cannot be denied. Even when the people of the Indian subcontinent were physically divided, the landscape, language, rituals, religion and familial connections remained with the people of India, keeping them united. The memories were also emotionally supportive, and were a means to maintain identity, and to resist oppression. The study reveals that in Girmitiya literature, homeland would not only be a geographical location but a remembered and an imagined one.

Migration, Trauma, Displacement

Migration is integral to the Girmitiya literature because migration is an inherent part of indenture and in the context of indenture, there are several barriers that need to be overcome – geographical, cultural and psychological. The migration of Indian indentured labour was different from the migration of personal choice or profit; it was done in the context of the demands of colonial labour needs. While the national authority and the individual may have signed a labour contract, they were in some form or other tricked, duped or in dire need.

The Crossing of the 'Kala Pani' (black waters) is one of the most unique photographs in the literature of the Girmitiya. In the 19th century, travelling abroad in India was often associated with the process of caste-scrutineering and ritual contamination, and the loss of social network, including the familiar structures that had been accustomed to. For migrants when they boarded a ship, it meant severing not only ties with family members, but also cultural ties with the entire environment.

Traumatic experiences of migration can be followed in these topics, for example, loss and separation. Often workers were forced to abandon their families, their homeland and their connections. All these feelings are aptly captured in the stories and in memories of the Girmitiya community, folk songs and literary stories. The feeling of nostalgia and uncertainty followed migrants from their departure till they reached the new destination, where they would not forget about their parents, spouses, children and native villages, where they could never go back to.

The other part of the experience of migration related trauma was the harsh plantation experience which migrants encountered upon their arrival. The language, climate and the way of life and work on the plantations were all strange. The movement of the workers, their employment and other

activities were strictly controlled. A large number of times, it was the recruiters promises that differed from the actual situations of the plantations, leading to feelings of betrayal and disappointment in many cases.

Girmitiya writing is also concerned with the experience of geographical displacement, as well as cultural and emotional displacement. Migrants became caught up in between two societies: the one that they left and another into which they should have integrated. Feeling 'between' led to feelings of alienation and split in identity. Plantations became irrelevant, as the roles of castes and village ties were stripped away. Thus, migrants had to make new identities for themselves.

While there is a considerable amount of literature on Girmitiya about the suffering of the oppressed and the tribulations he faced, there is also some indication in the literature about the formation of new social relations and new collectives are also being formed as a result of migration. For instance, the word "jahaji bhai" illustrates how the group of displaced people was able to form new relationships with others in the light of their shared experiences of travelling and working.

Thus, literature that depicts migration is a mixture of traumatic and transformative. While the migration experience truly was traumatic and resulted in psychological anguish as well as dislocation, there remained the opportunity for the development of community and adaptation in the conditions. This is how Girmitiya writers are showing the multifaceted experiences of their own people and in doing so capturing the psychological legacy of indenture in history.

Finally, in Girmitiya literature, migration is not only an historical experience, but also a psychological experience. Migration is a loss and separation from the native culture; however it is also a symbol of the beginning of a new life, new identity. This is why Gilgit people

literature provides an insight into human aspects of migration and consequences.

Cultural Survival and Community Formation

One of the most distinguishing features of migrant communities and communities of people who are marginalised, such as the Girmitiyas, is the fact that they have retained their culture in spite of being displaced and oppressed by the colonial state. Maintaining a culture is one of the constant theme that occurs in the works on the life of Girmitiyas and it shows that the indentured labourers and their son/daughters have maintained their identity even in their alien environment. The Girmitiya groups through the practice of their religions, the retention of their languages, oral history, festivals and other institutions were able to come up with ways how the culture was handed from one generation to the next.

The culture survival strategy has now become a part of religious survival. During troubles, religion provided comfort and a sense of community to the migrants. Temples and prayer meetings and devotional gatherings were among the religious institutions that assisted migrants in creating familiar cultural environments. Migrants were gathered during festivals like diwali, holi, ram navami and janmashtami to strengthen the cultural customs they had from their homes. These events have found a place in the literary writings in affirming their cultural identity.

Another way of the survival of culture was language. In spite of the multi-lingual colonial society, some aspects of the Girmitiya culture survived in the form of Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Hindi, and other languages which they brought with them from India. Language was a means of cultural memory, as they could transmit their songs, stories, traditions and values that had been passed on to them by the generations that came before them. The language changed as a result of contact with the local and colonial language culture, but as

important means of asserting their identity, the language was not forgotten.

Oral tradition was a very important aspect of cultural maintenance and formation of community. The migrants can pass on their culture and history through folk music, folktales, proverbs and storytelling from generation to generation.

The creation of community structures and networks was another way in which cultural survival could be ensured. These trying times at the plantation resulted in the development of mutual aid and cooperation systems. Common experiences of work, discrimination and migration facilitated the development of trans-caste and trans-regional identities. Social and cultural integration and preservation spaces were found to be important social and cultural settings, such as social gatherings, religious groups, and cultural societies.

The term "Jahaji identity" can also show how a community is created in the case of the Girmitiya. The journey was more likely to create life-long links when migrants travelled together, due to the experience of leaving one's own country and settling in a new country. They did so and established social institutions which helped to fill the void of kinship institutions affected by the migration. These relationships are usually represented in literature as providing emotional support and solidarity to each other.

Cultural survival for the Girmitiya did not imply any preservation of the culture in its original form, nor any reproduction in its original cultural form. It encompassed the adapting, negotiating, and transformative cultural processes. The communities embraced the culture but took to the environment and retained the link to the culture. The result was a creation of new diaspora culture that consisted of both traditional aspects and innovations. The cultural traditions that were carried on in Fiji, Mauritius, Trinidad, Guyana and other former

indenture colonies were an example of that creative mixing of influences.

The cultural adaptations as mentioned in the Girmitiya literature and the impact on the formation of the diasporic identity are discussed. The analysis of the process of cultural survival showed that it is performed through literary representation: by means of memory and interaction with culture, when the collective and continuous work of adapting culture and keeping it was performed.

Additionally, cultural survival is a rejection of assimilation into the colonizing culture and a resistance to the "oblivion to history. Oral traditions, rituals, celebrations and the holding of the languages was an act of cultural agency of the Girmitiya communities in the system of exploitation and marginalisation. In these ways they challenged the notion of cultural superiority of the colonists.

Literature as Counter Archive

The other significant role played by Girmitiya literature is that it can be considered a counter-archive, that challenges and counter-argues colonial archives, which voices marginal groups. Most colonial archives had very little material relating to private individuals as far as the colonists were concerned, except for administrative material, labours contracts, census records, plantation registers and correspondence regarding indentured labourers. Although the above forms contain very useful historical information about indentured labourers, their depiction of these people is limited to being anonymous and important only due to their productivity and economic usefulness. The above archives have not included information on the emotional experiences, cultural practices, hardships and hopes of these laborers. Hence, there has been a gap in the history of indenture as presented by the colonial archives.

On the other hand, Girmitiya literature turns out to be an alternate archive of historical

information which compensates for the missing parts in colonial archives. Many writers in memoirs, autobiographies, novels, poetry and other literary texts manage to depict different aspects of migrants' lives that have been neglected in colonial archival documents.

The genre of the autobiographies of former indentured labourers is important for the counter-archives. Autobiographies provide information on recruitment, migration, plantation life and community building, for one. They also reflect emotions of which there is no record in the official archives such as fear, loneliness, hope, resistance, and cultural attachments. This is because the autobiographical writings can provide an opportunity to challenge a colonialistic point of view and provide alternative perspectives.

Furthermore, literature offers information about types of knowledge which cannot be conveyed with conventional means of historical documentation. The music of people, traditions, families and communities. All of these are good sources of cultural memory and are good indicators of migrants experience of the journey. As such, these kinds of cultural expression help to transmit the memory from one generation to the next, and to help maintain cultural identity.

The idea of the counter-archive can be compared with the Subaltern Studies that seeks to bring back to the fore the voices of the subalterns. Girmitiya literature is a counter archive as it tells the story of ordinary labourers, of women and of the marginalised people. These works do not tell the stories from the point of view of colonial administrators and politicians, but give attention to the lives of people that suffered due to their displacement and exploitation. Furthermore, literary narratives break up the veracity of the official history of the colony and demonstrate that the colonial record is often incomplete and unreliable as it contains information on salaries and punishment, but not

on the emotions and psyche of those who migrated.

Girmitiya literature is also a counter-archive and aids in efforts to reconstruct and understand the history of indenture. Children of indentured servants rely on written sources to find out about history. Through literature they can discover their stories, remember their past and re-echo their voices. The literature documents, therefore, are used to discover and preserve history and culture.

Diasporic Identities

The theme of identity formation is an important one in the literature on the experience of the indentureship. Migration in the time of indentureship was a process that involved a disruption and re-negotiation of identity. The migrants were deprived of their original social context and had to create new social contexts, colonial plantation societies, social networks and a feeling of belonging with their own culture. Identity in a diaspora, therefore, was an adaptation and cultural reconstruction process.

Prior to migration, the indentured workers were part of a number of identities, both in terms of region, language, religion and castes. However, the trans-migration of people from one area to another in Kala Pani and the plantation society contributed to the erosion of these traditional values. Indeed, through the common experience of alienation and oppression they came to make new identities.

Some continuity and change regarding the development of diasporic identity was needed. Firstly, immigrants needed to keep some aspects of the traditional culture such as language, religion, traditions and memories. In the interim, immigrants encountered new conditions, and were affected by a variety of cultures. So these identities were not Indian, but 'part' Indian, and not 'full' assimilated.

It is not unusual for literary texts to depict identity as fluid and evolving rather than fixed and ongoing. Characters have to find a

way to combine memories of the homeland with reality of the diaspora. The symbolic point is Homeland which turns into an object which is perceived from memory, through the narratives and cultural practices. In case of children born abroad, identity is formed based on inherited memories.

To them, the term “hybridity” is helpful in describing how identities are constructed within the Girmitiya communities. Plantation societies help to develop hybrid identities that are affected by various interactions of cultures. Due to changed conditions, languages were changed, religious views were modified and social customs were renewed. In some cases, however, it meant innovative ways to deal with the new realities that could also be used to deal with the past.

Research on the literature of Girmitiyas shows a direct connection between identity formation and memory and cultural remembrance. Authors introduce the concept of identity in the context of historical disruption using the plot of the people's displacement, adaptation to a new life and formation of a new community.

Lastly, diasporic identity is found to be multifaceted and polyvalent in the text of Girmitiya. It shows the transformative power of potential migrants to make migration a process of being moved to being integrated, and to make culture a diversity of cultures into a collective strength.

Resistance through Memory

Memory is also of significance in Girmitiya literary products, not only as a way of remembering the past; but also because it is a powerful weapon of resistance. Remembrance was a cultural and political practice for communities who had been systematically marginalized, misrepresented and denied a place in the official history.

In the colonial system, it was easier to consider indentured laborers as economic units

rather than human beings, as a thing in a culture and with its own history, ideas, and dreams. In this context, memory came to play a key role as a weapon in migrants' struggle against dehumanisation. Migrants were able to preserve their dignity and identity by recalling their histories, their culture and their migratory journeys and their ancestral practices.

Literature is used in literature as a tool of empowerment as the stories of migration, survival and resilience are passed down through generations, carrying forward the memory of past experiences and continuing through the collective consciousness. These memory stories are a counterpoint to the marginalisation of voices in the story of the colonies with alternative readings, literature.

Resistance is also achieved and maintained through the mechanisms of memory, with regard to cultural traditions. Festivals, religion, folk music, folk stories and language practices are living archives which link people to their past. Thus, the Girmitiya community managed to defy the pressure towards cultural assimilation and accentuated the importance of their identity. Therefore, it is important to take into account that memory can also be performed and in communal activity, as well as remembering. Last but not least, it's also important to note that subaltern histories can be recovered as a part of the remembering project when they are offered a stake in the resistance. In this case, it is the task of literary works to record the experiences of exploitation, racism, marginalization, and cultural change from the point of view of migrants. Thus, memory challenges the colonial and Euro-centric views of history and brings to light other histories.

In terms of future generations, memory is empowering and cultural identity. Heirloom of indentured labourers want to know about their ancestry and heritage from stories of their past. In literature, museums, commemoration and education of modern-day diasporic communities, the memory of indenture is

carried over. It is through memory that the connection between past and present is made.

The other are the places through which memory brings forth, that of resilience. Though Girmitya literature recognizes the struggles of migration and life on the plantations, they tend to recognize more often than not, the resilience and adaptability of migrants. By remembering the suffering, it enables people to appreciate the ability to survive through it and the sacrifices of the past generation.

CONCLUSION

The interrelatedness of the themes memory, migration and cultural survival have been examined in the context of Girmitya literature and how these themes are important in the process of creating a diaspora identity and collective consciousness. The reality of Indian migration in the context of indenture has given rise to a significant body of literature and culture known as Girmitya literature that carries the memory of the stories of displacement, exploitation, adaptation and struggle in this literary and cultural canon.

From the analysis conducted it is evident that memory is a crucial instrument that is utilized by the displaced people in order to stay in touch with their homeland. The memories of home, language, religion and culture enable migrants and their children to feel at home, even when far from home.

Migration under the system of indenture was a traumatic as well as a transforming experience for the migrants. They had to experience the disorientation of a physical, psychological and social type on their way, but they had to learn to build solidarity and identity as well. Formation of diasporic communities shows how the process of negotiating between continuity and discontinuity occurred within the displaced population.

Clearly one of the strengths of Girmitya community is its culture's survival. Through

such elements as religion, language, orality, festive occasions, and institutions, migrants succeeded in maintaining important parts of their culture. For this example, cultural survival is shown to be more about adaptation and renewal, rather than about retaining tradition.

One of the major conclusions is that Girmitya literature can be viewed as counter-archive which undermines restrictions of colonial historiography. Literary discourse emphasises the views of the indentured persons, revealing other hidden histories and saving those experiences that were not officially recorded.

Collectively, the importance of Girmitya literature in the field of postcolonial and diaspora studies is that it brings to light the intersections between memory, migration, identity and cultural survivability. Migrants' efforts in this essay demonstrate the endurance of memory and culture even when colonized, drive forces that maintained their cultural tradition after their displacement from their homeland. The concerns of migration, cultural identity and belonging are relevant in the current socio-cultural context and the relevance of Girmitya literature has increased more than ever in this context.

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