

## South Asian Visions of Africa and African/Diasporic Literatures

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### A Postcolonial Native in Colonial Africa: An Exploration of the Travelogue Kappirikalude Nattil

Shabab K R  
The English and Foreign Languages University  
(India)

**Abstract:**

I would like to understand the Indian Migrants' experiences of African colonialism in the context of Kappirikalude Nattil (In the land of Kappiris); a Malayalam travelogue written by SK Pottekkatt in the 1950s. I also try to bring a comparative perspective of colonial experiences in the African and Indian contexts. Kappirikalude Nattil is a travelogue about Africa written from the perspective of an Indian writer in the post-independence period. The perception of concepts such as 'state' and 'nationalism' considerably vary for an Indian citizen who migrated to Africa which was still under British rule. Due to his Indian identity, his social position in Africa, and his approach to colonization are different from the Native Africans. Similarly, the tools of oppression used by the imperialist powers for colonization in Africa subtly differ from the hegemonic apparatuses they employed in India. Awareness of linguistic dominance, racial dominance, and racial discrimination plays a pivotal role in imperial oppression. Also, the colonial modes of power employed over the Indian immigrants are different from those employed over the Africans. The main reason for this is the significant class differences among immigrant Indians and differences in the capacity for political transactions and economic inequality. The difference can be

seen in the general life scenarios of Malayalees, Tamils, and Gujaratis in Africa. According to Homi K. Bhaba's mimicry theory, the attitude of Indian immigrants towards African natives confuses British imperialism and results in a hybrid culture. This reading will give you a better idea of the defenses adopted by the British government against Indian immigrants to strengthen their colonial power.

**Keywords:** Hybridity, Mimicry, Colonialism and Hegemony

Travel has been indispensable to modern man since the beginning of mankind. Humans continue to require travel for daily needs, survival, and entertainment. Travelogues are also very popular in literature because they relate to life. Here we will discuss the famous Malayalam writer S K Potekatt's travelogue titled *Kapirikal Nattil*. This work describes the experiences of an author visiting Africa within a few years after India was freed from British colonial rule.

Sankaran Kutty Kunjiraman Pottekkatt (14 March 1913 – 6 August 1982) was an Indian writer of Malayalam literature and a politician from Kerala, India. He was also a great traveler among the Keralites and wrote many travelogues for the people who have been unacquainted to the outside world. He was the awardee of the Jnanpith Award in 1980.

The author's journey to Africa in the 1950s is depicted in nine chapters such as "On the African Soil", "Beira", "In South Rhodesia", "The Victorian Falls", "The Indians of East Africa", "From Blantyre to Dodoma", "Looking Back at Nyasaland", "Swahili", and "The Indian Bwana." The travelogue is originally written in Malayalam and

translated into English by Radhika Menon with the title 'In the Land of Kappiris'. The most distinctive thing that makes this work different is that the author traveled to another British colony immediately after his country became independent from the British occupation. For this reason, it will be interesting to understand how the observation and attitudes made by the writer and other citizens of a post-colonial country will be about people suppressed by colonialism.

By exploring the travelogue, we can have a comparison of the experiences of colonization in Indians within both India and Africa. Based on these colonial backgrounds we have to address some important questions. As citizens of an independent country, what kind of attitude did both the state and citizens of India have towards the African colony and the people of the same? And what is the marked difference between the colonial experiences of Indians in colonized India and the colonial experiences of Africans in colonized Africa?

In fact, Indians living in African colonies were socially and economically superior to African natives. Although racism on a large scale existed in Africa, compared to Africans, the condition of Indians was essentially better. Because of that, even if they were not imperialists, the Indians had psychological dominance over the Africans. But how did people who experienced the tragic results of colonization get this type of hegemonic attitude instead of the sympathy they should have when they see the inhabitants of another colony?

For this study, we can refer to the theories of hybridity and mimicry by Homi K Bhabha to understand the colonial Experience of Indian natives.

According to Homi K Bhabha's Mimicry Theory, Mimicry is an evolutionary effect of colonization. Whatever strategies the imperial powers employ to exploit the colonies, the colonies will eventually follow suit. It is to be understood that the attitude shown by the whites towards the Indians in colonial India was naturally imitated by the Indians and this influenced the attitude towards

their people in Africa. Indians are driven by the feeling that they are occupying power in Africa or even that they have hegemony over Africans. But Indians have not been able to behave completely like whites, instead, a hybrid of the colonists and the colonized can be seen in Indians. Homi K Bhabha's theory of hybridity predicts such a change. In the article *The Limits of cultural Hybridity: on Ritual Monsters, Poetic License, and contested Postcolonial purifications*, Pnina Werber argues that "the harmony of the ceremony was necessarily an ambivalent one, given the pervasive inequalities and separations between white and black. This ambivalence, the unstable meanings, the hybridity of the bridge ceremony, did not simply derive from the fusing of disparate cultural elements, each bearing its own fixed cultural meaning." (Werber 2001, p.136 *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*). Guido Pezzarossi's discovery citing Homi K Bhabha's theory of mimicry is noteworthy here. Bhabha's (1985) concept of hybridity operates from a theoretical footing that forwards a fluid, contingent, in-process conception of culture and identity that emerges from the continually hybridizing processes of the "Third Space." Moreover, Bhabha's concept of colonial "mimicry" is especially salient to the interpretations of the enabling and constraining of Indigenous or other subaltern populations' consumer strategies. Mimicry is defined as: "The desire for a reformed recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say that the discourse of mimicry is constructed through an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (Bhabha 1984, p. 126, emphasis in original)

The culture of hybridity among Africans can be seen mainly in costumes. In describing the town of Bulawayo, the author makes special reference to men and women dressed in European style. But it has to be said that such hybridity is generally less visible in intellectual fields than in such peripheral changes. At the same time, intellectually, such a change can be seen among the Indians of Africa. One of the main reasons for such a difference between Africans and Indians is the basic education that Indians received.

It is relevant that the British had to rely on educated Indians to keep the administration active. In this way, it has to be said that the Indian officials are also indirectly involved in the African obsession.

Now, let us check what the attitude of the Indians towards the Africans maintained. The author observes; Apart from the south Indian laborers, most of the migrants to Africa were traders from northern India and Gujarat and a few clerks from Kerala. The economic superiority of Indians, including the mercantile Gujaratis, in Africa has largely helped to improve their social status as well. It has to be said that the economic exploitation of the African natives by the Gujarati traders was largely modeled on the British Empire. One of the most interesting things is that Gujaratis had a great impact even on the dominance of language. In the course of the travelogue, the author indicates; There was even a situation where any Indian in Africa had to know Gujarati to get a job in a private school. Another thing similar to the British imposition of English is the role played by Gujaratis in making Gujarati, a language spoken in only one state in India, the language of all Indians in Africa. Here too we see signs of indirect imitation of the British occupation. Here we can see Gujaratis who are reaping huge financial profits by supplying daily necessities to the locals in their shops. Gujarati traders have been able to exploit the African locals as much as the British or even more with their trading strategies. But the author quotes the Indian Prime Minister Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru as saying what should be the attitude of the Indian immigrants towards the African natives: "What the Indians living in Africa should remember always is that they are the guests of Africa and therefore should not indulge in anything that is likely to be an obstacle in the Africans' progressive path towards freedom (29)". This one statement of Nehru's attitude towards the colonization of independent India is clear here. The state's position was that an Indian should be guided by sympathy for the natives and the desire for their independence, without supporting the occupying power. But the author observes that the Indian traders did nothing for the good of the Africans.

After the independence of India, it is necessary to examine what was the attitude of the whites towards the Indians in Africa. The author believes that to understand the white man's anger towards independent India, one can understand the entry process of Indians to places like Southern Rhodesia. He opined that an Indian traveler could face a prison sentence unless he had a large amount of money in hand or a recommendation from higher authorities. It can also be understood that its press media tried to create an anti-India public sentiment among the whites due to grievances about Indian influence in Africa. The author points out that the article "Indian invasion is Africa's big problem" by Noel Monks in the British-controlled Mombasa Times and another article written by J.W Patten in 'Outspan Daily' was discussed with significant importance at that time. The British were able to rule comfortably in colonial India by creating communal divisions among the Indians themselves. But the British also practiced the same politics of communal division in Africa. While in India it was mainly a division between religions, in Africa the whites tried to create communal divisions between the Indians and the African natives.

The author curiously recalls an occasion when India, freed from British rule, bravely faced Britain. When Britain asked the Indian government to send laborers to Africa to do clerical work as a matter of necessity, India took advantage of that opportunity very boldly: "A minimum salary of 30 Pawan, second-class ticket, first-class accommodation and equal status with the whites. If there is a willingness to allow all this, we will think about it" (Pottekattu, P.123, In the land of Kappiris).

What we have done so far is look at the interrelationship between the Indian people of Africa, the British, and the African natives through the eyes of the author. But now let us try to understand the author's attitude towards the African natives. The book's title, In the Land of Kappirees, must be criticized here. We have learned that the English translation of a book written in Malayalam titled Kappirikalude Nattil was published under the title In the Land of Kappirees. The same word used in the titles of both these lan-

guages is Kappiri. Actually, in Malayalam, the word Kappiri is used as a synonym for the word caprice. Kappiri is a derogatory term addressed to blacks, generally in contexts of color or in the consciousness of purity. Here, even the author, who has experienced and seen racial discrimination, addresses the African natives with the word 'Kappiri'. It is a serious thing that the author's inner consciousness or discriminatory interest is hidden in the title of this book itself.

Indians who lived in an African colony did not feel the sympathy they should have felt for a British colony. Instead, Indians had a sort of superiority complex over Africans. According to Homi K Bhabha's Mimicry Theory, Indians were to some extent imitating the English. But without complete imitation, a hybrid culture was formed among Indians. Anti-colonial interests of the Africans were not supported by the Indian settlers in any way, as most of the Indians were not interested in governance issues or freedom struggle but were concerned only with trade and other people were clerks of the British government. But in this matter, the government of independent India had an official stance of supporting the indigenous Africans. Indians generally had a less harsh sense of discrimination against Africans than did the British. On the other hand, the influence that Indians were gaining socially and economically in the African colony created a headache for the British and it is possible to see the British's stance against it. Britain was unable to fully succeed with those small positions as it needed Indian staff for official affairs.

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