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Title: "To us the Asiatic is generally a dirty, disease creating being with filthy habits": "Afghan" Cameleers and Ghan Towns in the Outback

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Abstract:

My proposed paper traces mobilities between India and Australia. It maps the transoceanic experiences, related socio-cultural contexts, and tells the story of "Afghan cameleers" who remain neglected in Australian histories. Specifically, how and why camels were brought to Australia, who were the people who came along and how they were perceived in the Australian society? This paper explores how cameleers played a key role in exploring the territory, maintaining supply lines, and building communication networks but remained on the fringes of the society as outsiders. They built mosques and established towns. The origins and identities of these cameleers were diverse. They came from multiple geographies. The multiplicity of their origins never translated to their identities as cameleers. They were collectively known as "Afghans" or "Ghans" and their dwellings as "Ghan" towns. In their decades of service their relationship with the state and society was complex: their expertise was crucial but their self a detestable site. They proved to be indispensable for inland expeditions until the motorised vehicles replaced them. They were crucial for the colony but at the same time they were unwanted bodies. They were perceived as a threat, "growing evil" or "nuisance." In 1891 the government of Victoria wrote to officials in Lahore to stop the immigration of "Afghans and other Asiatics."

Author's Bio:

Syed Kazim Ali Kazmi is a scholar and researcher, specializing in Anglophone Pakistani novel. He has recently finalised his PhD from The University of Duisburg-Essen. His research focuses on the exploration of postcolonial narratives and their socio-political implications.

Currently he is working on his postdoctoral research, where he focuses on trans-oceanic mobilities. He is dedicated to exploring the intriguing history and cultural significance of Australian cameleers.