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**DISCERNING THE DIASPORIC DIMENSIONS OF MEERA SAYAL'S
FICTIONAL NARRATIVES**

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Abstract:

The Indian diaspora is critical in shaping its concept of Indianness. Unlike other diasporas such as Pakistani or Bangladeshi, where Islam defines the group identity, the Indian diaspora is home to various faiths, including at least four main religious groupings. Unlike the Sri Lankan diaspora, which is defined only by the languages Sinhala and Tamil, or the Pakistani and Bangladeshi diasporas, which Urdu and Bangla define, respectively, The Indian diaspora has expanded worldwide via its diverse faiths and languages yet has remained unbroken. The present paper attempts to comprehend the South - Asiandiasporic dimensions in general and Meera Sayal's fictional Narratives in specific.

Keywords: *Immigration, Globalization, Multiculturalism, Colonial Neurosis, Identity Formation, Nationalism, etc.*

The term 'diaspora' connotes forced displacement due to expulsion, slavery, racism, refugees, or war, particularly nationalist warfare. The diaspora has constantly harped on immigration, globalization, multiculturalism, colonial neurosis, identity formation, nationalism, border, and transculturalism. The word diaspora has recently been a source of contention in folklore, anthropology, English, and cultural studies. In general, the term 'diaspora' refers to groups of people who have been driven from their ancestral homelands as a result of immigration, colonial expansion, migration, or exile. In this regard, diaspora implies a worldwide or international sense of belonging. According to Bikhu Parekh, the Indian diaspora is one of the most diversified in the world, comprising: "half a dozen religions... seven different regions of India... nearly a dozen castes" (Parekh, 105).

Diaspora is not synonymous with transnationalism. In a nutshell, diaspora is the migration of people between one or more nation-states. They move to a distant nation and become citizens to live a full, comfortable, and happy life. They do not want to be constrained by the boundaries of a country state; they wish to transcend them to advance and grow personally.

The Indian diaspora has been influenced by changes in the external environment and the spirit of England and English sensibility. Most importantly, they have tapped into the vein of Englishness and English values through their interpretation of the English language, even prior to their move-in India. As a result of this engagement with the English language during colonial history and beyond, the Indian diaspora is replete with English literary activity and influences English culture.

Meera Syal's (1961-) first book, *Anita and Me* (1996), is set in the fictitious Midlands mining town of Tollington in the 1970s and is autobiographical in tone. Meena, a teenager of Asian-British ancestry, yearns for a pure British identity and becomes friends with Anita, a white British girl of working-class descent who represents mainstream British culture. Meena believes that aligning herself with the white community and Anita would cure her inferior position and uplift her soul. While Meena



seeks to strengthen the bonds of friendship to escape the strait of in-betweenness, her parents bring her back to Punjabi culture. However, Meena progressively evolves into an indigenous culture when she faces bigotry in English society and discovers her own culture via Nanima, her grandmother who had immigrated from India. She is weaned from her attachment with the alien society via a series of excursions and disasters.

Syal's primary focus as a second-generation South Asian diasporic writer based in the United Kingdom is on the sentiments and ambitions of young teenage girls and young adults or middle-aged women. Her writing demonstrates the conflict over how women are portrayed in the face of dual devotion to homeland and host country. As a South Asian, she confronts the paradox of South Asian British women who have made Britain their home while yearning for another home on the Indian subcontinent that is more mythical than real for second-generation individuals like the author and her heroines. Syal makes a concerted effort to provide an authentic portrait of these ladies down to the smallest detail. The appearance, clothing, anxieties, trauma, love, and dissatisfactions are all shown, but not without reference to the politics that taint her image. Syal stayed active as a member of various social activist organizations campaigning for the rights of black Asian women in the United Kingdom. Her affiliation with socialist organizations such as 'Southall Black Sisters,' 'Women Against Fundamentalism,' 'Refugee Council,' and 'Newham Asian Women's Project' impacts her work and portrayal of female characters.

Southall Black Sisters is a not-for-profit group founded in 1979 to oppose violence against Black Asian and African Caribbean women. The group is committed to advancing justice, equality, liberty, and women's empowerment. 'Women Against Fundamentalism' is an all-female group created in 1989 to combat the global rise of fundamentalism. Apart from solely religious global situations, women from many origins establish cohesiveness to combat fundamentalism at the household and state levels. The 'Refugee Council' is the biggest organization in the United Kingdom dedicated to assisting refugees and asylum seekers. It provides employment possibilities, protection, and other assistance to victims. The 'Newham Asian Women's Project' was founded in 1987 to prevent family violence and assist Asian women and children escaping family abuse with rehabilitation. It ensures the provision of, and knowledge of, greater chances, health, rights, and positions for Asian women victims and their mental stability. Syal's ladies fight both the white sexist male gaze. These girls are presented as commodities and the Third World homeland beliefs into which they fall as Third World citizens attempting to maintain their identity in the First World. Meera Syal's characters, whether Meena in Anita and Me or Chila, Tania, and Sunita in Life Is not Always Ha HaHeeHee, all return to their homeland, not out of nostalgia or desire, but to provide them with a platform from which to declare and claim an identity.

Syal's characters experience prejudice as Asian women striving to fit in while being born and bred in the United Kingdom. In her literature, the heroes begin by complying with the standards of the British world. However, in the face of constant internal and external conflict, they submit to traditional conventions of culture and heritage. The female characters become more stereotyped as they get older, and although first rejecting stereotypical identities, ultimately adopt them. The political portrayal comes to the fore in the comedic projection, which highlights the prejudice in the characterization, endowing these women with a lower position. Life depicts three distinct eras in a woman's life, each with its own set of concerns: spouse, kid, and job. Chila, Sunita, and Tania represent these three periods, and the fiction depicts the tragedy of their life, unhappiness, and failure in each instance. Even still, it is only through the united sisterhood that they find fulfilment in their lives. However, in the instance of Meena, who does not intend to masquerade as one of her community's young teenage girls, she is undeniably estranged, first from Anita and the whole British culture, and subsequently from the Asian community. Though she returns to the latter in a belligerent mood, her second-generation



identification and desire to identify with the British surely pose obstacles. In Syal's paintings, Asian community politics are disclosed. The depiction of the Punjabi- Hindu community in Britain comes to life in flesh and blood, in contrast to Sunetra Gupta's etiolated and secondhand portrayal of indigenous people culture, that of the villages, and so on.

In their quest for a fantasy country, Syal's heroes cast doubt. They are British, but as Chila feels in *Life*, she will take her kid to India. In this request for restitution of land, there is a longing for a second home that is never expressed in the works of writers such as Monica Ali or Kureishi. However, the characters created by these writers generate new gendered roles that are not traditionally associated with South Asians. During the father's burial, Tania is in charge of the visitors and the brother, but the customs duty is for the male to control the weaker sex.

Meera Syal's tales are essentially confrontational against the usual diasporic narrative of loss. Though the characters disclose the duality of their identities and racism in British culture, the writings also demonstrate an aspect of pandering to British acceptability. Her fiction and the fictitious portrayal of the South Asian population in films are more accepted and liked by the South Asian community than their British counterparts. The fictional depiction of South Asian character-types and stereotypes serves the dual purpose of testing the acceptability of the native British and improving their (the British's) understanding of the South Asian community's problems and concerns, and curing the peculiarities and affectation of the community that impedes acculturation. The political attitude, that these authors adopt results in a subtle politicizing of the story. The authors usually use comedic stereotypes or stock characters that fit the typical British perception of South Asians— fat, bizarrely clothed, crying, blowing nose, noisy, stinky, billowy, illiterate South Asians protecting their chastity and their daughters' virginity as coffers. In *Life*, Syal emerges as a spokesman for South Asian diasporic awareness. She follows the struggles of three women in their thirties as they establish their differences while opposing this assigned Asian concept of femininity.

On the other hand, these female protagonists confront a predicament while representing their society. They often reject their position as community commentators, even though portrayed. Furthermore, Syal's characters show a dual involvement with the host country and their native culture. Consequently, they are compelled to choose between open deception and a public display of deception. The various diasporic communities seek security in-group identification. They try to connect with Westerners, return to their communities, or get support from family and friends. The informal get-togethers outside closed doors rekindle many pleasant memories of a long-forgotten nation and long-lost people. In addition, they have formed a political organization. Despite the prevalence of all of these characteristics of Asian identity, the characters in Syal's books begin with sufficient reservations about their Asianness, having been born and raised in the United Kingdom. However, by the novel's conclusion, all of the characters had embraced Third World Feminism.

In Syal's works, the yearning for sexuality in women throughout their adolescence and early youth is realized as a force. The desire is explained in a variety of ways: as frustration (Meena), as an attempt to realize the virulence of the self (Tania), as a gesture of defiance against tradition (Meena) or the concept of home and family (Tania), as a mode of clinging to tradition (Chila), as the initiation into motherhood (Sunita), as a simple adolescent phase (Meena), or as a mid - (Chila, Tania and Sunita). The first yearning that destroyed them was for this new place and a suicidal desire to escape the conventions and traditions of their homeland. The loudest of the three women in *Life*, Tania had vehemently opposed any attempt to maintain the home's purity. At first, she has no concept of family and qualms about physically connecting with Deepak, her friend Chila's husband. Tania was a deliberate destroyer; the utopian aspirations of home encountered a resounding reply in her destructive attitude.



Syal shows Asians' aversion to the West via Meena's mother's refusal to let her daughter socialize with Westerners, the Bakwas look. While remarking on Anita's mother's lusty attachment to her daughter's lover, Meena expresses profound joy that Asian women have never had partners. Meena's family relocated from their former neighbourhood to avoid external influence and establish a house in a new neighbourhood where half of the neighbours are Hindu. Meena's parents exhale contentment at the prospect of freely hanging the Hindu emblem 'Om' in front of their houses. Girls, too, increasingly adopt stereotypes and assume the roles of mothers and aunts.

Syal portrays the Westerners' good and negative reactions in *Life* through the perspective of Mrs and Mr Keegan, a white couple. Mrs Keegan finds it repulsive that a burial ground and a cremation coexist. What irritated her was the frying of the corpses and hurling them into the air, leaving nothing of the dearly gone to remind you of them. The differences between Hindu and Sikh funeral rituals and Christian burial concepts made her feel quite foreign among Asians. However, Mr Keegan's tone bridges this chasm. Mrs Keegan, who was resentful of the full set of rituals, from the shrieking and wailing to the shiny silk that seemed to be out for a wedding, Mr Keegan 'had never dared to speak, but he looked forward to these foreign cremations'. The pure silk looked much more inviting than the rigid black coats that evoked the image of "scavenging birds." The suffocating screams that the return to the graves of the deceased had proven less consoling than the gathering of friends and family during the cremation. While his wife rushed to the vehicle in order to avoid encountering foreign customs; Mr Keegan's slowed down a bit'. This slowing down, this halting and tarrying, this try to look at the other from a sympathetic corner of the heart, this attempt to look at the so-called 'others' benevolently, is unquestionably a reunification of East and West.

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