

Cultural Hybridity: Effect of Adolescents and Racism in Meera Syal's *Anita and Me*

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Abstract

Culture predominantly confers the origin of people. Nowadays people are migrated to embrace a better life economically and socially. Which destroy their origin, ethnicity and culture. In the novel *Anita and Me*, Meera Syal depicts the cultural indifference through a pre-adolescent Meena, a half white and half Asian. Her self-indulgence evokes humour and a sense of awareness to modern parents about how the modern children are evolving sensibly. Meena's friendship with Anita lead her to experience thrill and the spirit of adolescence, which formulate Meena to be familiar with the terms virginity and chastity at the age of 11. The life of non-white is quite dangerous in an adopted country. The mining village employs the immigrants just for their political and economical stability. Racism and cultural indifference are noticed by the reader through the friendship between the title characters and various incidents happened at shop, bank and park etc. Syal fetches out various dimension of the postcolonial era through the world of innocent Meena. The aim of this paper is to bring out how the immigrants are victimized in a diasporic land through racial discrimination and cultural indifference.

Key words: racism, cultural indifference, spirit of adolescence, friendship, immigrants

The term cultural hybridity is closely associated with Homi K Bhabha. According to him after the colonization, the third world has created followed by the people that follows two cultures such as the culture of the colonizers and the culture of the descendants. Some collaboration arises in the culture and ethnicity which named as third space in the commonwealth countries. According to Bhabha the third space between the stereotypical differences of colonial discourse is:

It is significant that the productive capacities of the Third space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory...may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity. (38)

Thus Cultural hybridity is widely employed in the postcolonial theory. Postcolonialism refers to the effects of colonialism on cultures and society. In the novel *Anita and Me*, Meera Syal portrays the cultural conflict and the mixture of two races (i.e white and non-white). The novel is structured by the past dynamics of British colonization and its impact in the present world. Syal symbolizes the cultural differences through the friendship of the title characters Anita and Meena. Both are quite different in economically, socially and culturally.

In the beginning of the novel, Meena is a nine year old girl. Her native white friend Anita Rutter is in her eleven. As pre-adolescents befriend with each other and bloom their friendship. Even though they do not have the same age, Meena takes pleasure in the company of Anita. Meena worships Anita and says, "I was happy to follow her a respectable few paces behind, knowing that I was privileged to be in her company." (52) As a second generation girl, Anita dwells her life with the josh of western culture. She has enjoyed her teenage with her cool eyes. She is round up with sexuality. Even she expends her night with her boyfriends, it generates puzzle in Meena's mind. With this confusion, one day Meena asks her parents innocently about Anita whether she is a virgin. It is not Meena's initial naïve lurch into lasciviousness, but it is the prompt for her parents to question their daughter's relationship with young Anita Rutter.

The cultural difference is intervened through the family of Anita and Meena, Meena's family is a Punjabi immigrant blends with two cultures. They are neither Hindu nor Christian. They bring together their conviction as one.

Meena's parents are nominally Hindu, but do not practice their religion with much conviction. As Meena bemoans, they do not have a shrine in the house. Instead, they practice an interesting mix of eastern and western theism, fusing Hinduism with Christianity...I now understood why my parents made an effort to mark Jesus's birthday. (192)

They accept both culture and ready to live in the adopted land. Her parents are aware about their Indian heritage and they experienced, but Meena hears her Indian culture through stories told by her parents and her Nanima. She does not receive the first hand knowledge of her native land. Through this characterization Syal portrays Meena to be an excellent example of a young girl who discards one culture for the other. According to Schoene-Harwood, "Meena yearns to blend in with the cultural predictability of her drab Tollington background." (49) As she assumes, Diwali is celebrated like Christmas in India by the Indian people. She visualizes India in her London streets with few cows. While analyzing with the concept of cultural hybridity, Meena's family is not just an ethnic minority rather a cultural minority. Her family has a wider network filled with relatives, bicultural, healthy and happy atmosphere. They have the necessary ingredients for survival. Even though they live in an adopted country, they followed their own culture along

with foreign culture. It is exemplified through Meena's mother Daljit's preparation of food. She cooks boiled rice with sauce for dinner.

Anita's family is distorted with western culture. Her mother runs off with a young man, leaving her two daughters. They exist in a parent-less household. Because of this situation Anita lives on her own way and enjoys the spirit of adolescence. Meena's mother welcomes Anita to her home and attempts give two things: discipline and nutritious meal that she has clearly lacked. This shows the difference between two cultures. Moreover it evokes the awareness to the parents how to take care their adolescent children. Psychologists claim that, adolescence is an age of storm and stress. In this stage, the children require more affection and care from their parents. If it lacks, the children life will turn in a negative way.

Meena becomes familiar with the history of India through the anecdotes told by her parents and relatives. Meena's father Kumar recites the partition of India-Pakistan to Meena. Which brings back to the memory of partition, many places haunted by terrorists, political turmoil and the suffering of people through many violations. It is also shared by the memory of Meena's relatives. Kumar narrates the train journey to Meena which culminates some horrible effects:

There was a Muslim in our carriage. He began praying. A sikh next to us began cutting off his hair quickly. He offered to shave the Musselman's moustache but he refused. "Allah will save me," he said. The Hindu *goondas* entered the carriage...' Papa paused a moment. 'They looked at us, my father quoted the Gita [Hindu scripture] at them,...They tore the trousers off the Musselman, saw he was circumcised, and cut off his head...'.(75)

After hearing this various stories, Meena is keyed up to learn more about the history of her ancestors. Her ancestral home country is always a dream to Meena. In the adopted country the immigrants are longing with nostalgic thoughts about their home land. Even though they live comfortably but somehow they lack in the real happiness and freedom. It is exemplified through various incidents in *Anita and Me*. As Meena depicts, one day Meena's mother Daljit has an interaction with a shopkeeper named Mr. Omerod who contemptuously damages Africa and Asia. He asserts that the African and Asian require to enlarge themselves culturally and socially. Moreover he said, the civilization and cuture are not in the 'fans...radios and cookers' as the non-whites have in their home like the western people. He said that the non-whites are less advanced than the British.

In the beginning of the novel, Meena's childhood begins with curiosity and sense of excitement to learn new things. She desires to ease from the mundane activities and tries to find something new every day. Her friendship with Anita brings colourful feelings towards her pre-adolescence. At the end, she turns out be matured after the hospital incident and get relieved from the dreamy world and strive to realize the reality. She sometimes feels odd about her parents' heritage and rejects it for her new culture. Even though she is

born and brought up in the British culture, the roots of her parents homeland makes her think about the Asians and how the Panjabi culture mould her parents. She feels amazed by her parents and relatives and wondered about their histories. While hearing the stories happened that during the partition, she assumes how cruel the Indians are.

As a second generation girl, Meena feels something awful to be an immigrant in the foreign land. She lacks her mother tongue Panjabi and is well-versed in English and used to communicate with her parents in English. She considers herself to be a British, but the native people see the non-whites as alien. Even she is treated as an alien by her friends. Her mother works as a teacher in the mining village of Tollington, her job economically satisfies her needs. But her traditional sarees and dressings show her culture as different. On the whole, the reason of moving the immigrants from the native land is to upgrade their status economically and socially in a better way. The foreign land acknowledges the Indian people's knowledge for their political and economical welfare only. But the immigrants are like others to the eyes of natives in the diasporic land.

Through the novel *Anita and Me*, Syal raises the quest for identity with Meena's family. As a semi-autobiographical novel, presents the intensive feeling of the immigrants through the life of innocent Meena. Through the first person narration, Syal picturizes the life of adolescents and their growth through the image of Anita and Meena and their friend's gang in Tollington. After reading the novel, the modern parents obtain how the younger generations are grooming. The generation gap and lack of culture is shown through the roguish Anita and witty Meena. Thus the novel is a meticulous replica of the cultural differences in an adopted land in the postcolonial era.

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