Chapter-6

Identity Crisis

Meera Syal’s works deal with the theme of displacement, alienation and quest for identity. In her novels characters feel entrapped in a dilemma of tensions between Indian culture and the society of British culture. In Syal’s novels *Anita and Me* (1996) and *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999) in which the protagonists of Indian origin are uprooted from their moorings and are expatriated to alien countries. Meena, the narrator of *Anita and Me*, her conflicted and contested belonging involves a process of conceptualising her parents’ place of origin in both a temporal and spatial sense, and of translating, rerouting, that ‘origin’ into ‘vernacular’ of her own split location as a British born Asian. As she comes under pressure from what slowly unfolds as a racist community, the more she needs to learn of the history, politics and languages of her parents’ Indian, not as a place to retreat to, but as a cultural space to start out from in order to contest the fixed, racialised identity inscribed in her localised experience in the rural West Midlands. Initially distanced from her parents and their extended family, Meena longs to identify with the local, white working class community embodied in the figure of the precocious role mode, Anita on or around her tenth birthday, Meena experience her deepest sense of alienation and separation from her home culture, expressed graphically in the following way, she says:

I want to shed my body like a snake slithering out of its skin and emerge reborn, pink and unrecognisable. I began avoiding mirrors, I refused to put on the Indian suits my mother laid out for me ... I hid in the house when Auntie Sheila bade fond farewells in Punjabi to my parents from the front garden I took to walking several paces behind or in front of my parents when we went on a shopping trip, checking my
reflection in shop windows, bitterly disappointed it was still there” (AM146).

The worlds of ‘India’ and ‘Tollington’, both epic and banal, are part of a cultural continuum. Meena feels alone between the two cultures. The theme of Identity and belonging and a search for roots have received insightful, critical treatment in Meera Syal's novels like *Anita and Me* (1996) and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999) and hybridity as a 'third space', which offers the possibility of moving beyond those binary oppositions that constitute differences in hierarchial ways. This chapter looks at how identity and belonging are textually constructed in representation both of the South Asian and white communities in UK. South Asian women's writing in Britain is marked by the legacies of colonialism and the overtly racist attitudes of dominant forms of White British culture. It is also a body of writing mainly concerned with the largely generational problems of difference and conflict between South Asian culture and religions and the society and culture of contemporary Britain. Identity is an important issue in contemporary Britain, there are ongoing struggles to redefine both "Britishness" and the nature of a desirable, culturally diverse society. Writing together with other forms of black cultural production such as film, and performance, is an important site for the articulation of old and new forms of black identity and for exploring the place of black people in Britain. The desire to be from somewhere, to have a sense of roots and a feeling of belonging are main features of the quest for positive identity in postmodern, post-colonial societies.

The need to connect with a pre-colonial past has become an important and widespread feature of contemporary multi-ethnic societies. The desire to be from somewhere where one would unambiguously belong and the search for roots in contemporary western societies, a product of the ethnocentrism and racism
experienced in the societies in which diasporic peoples now live. The writer’s individual talent should be rooted in the tradition of a particular society and culture, the real strength of the modern literary imagination lies in its evocation of the individual’s predicament in terms of alienation, immigration, expatriation, exile, and his quest for identity. Culturally and even linguistically estranged as the individual feels about himself, the whole question of his social emotional, ethnic or cultural identity assumes mythic proportions and thus becomes an unattainable ideal. The contemporary literary who deals with emotional problems clearly reflects the pathetic condition of the modern man. Getting uprooted from the native cultural traditions and values, the loss of indigenous language, man’s position as a mere outcast or an unaccommodated alien, together with multiple injuries and lacerations of the psyche is the main themes in diasporic writings. Caught between two worlds, the expatriate negotiates a new space, caught between two cultures and often languages; the expatriate writer negotiates a new literary space.

The search for identity, roots and belonging is not always positive or benign in its objectives and effects. Multiplicity, ambivalence, inauthenticity are some of the marked characteristics of South Asian immigrant women writers whose attempt at self-definition is to be validated by their geographical-cultural racial-political contexts. The expatriate writer whose mode of operation is subject to the memory of the past, confrontation with the present and receptivity towards the future is continuously drawn towards the need for an integrative world which does not denote hegemony, racial class solidarity but an organic connection between the subjective self and the objectivised narrations that complement one another in the newly traversed paths.
Recent Asian women's writing raises questions of culture and identity in the context of immigration, racism and the bi-culturalism of second generation South Asian Britons. The exploration of the experience of emigration and of living and growing up in Britain's South Asian communities has not been restricted to writing by women and men of South Asian descent. The cinema and television have begun to explore these areas with rise of a new generation of British South Asian scriptwriters and film and programme makers. We live in a historical juncture when talk about identity in the diaspora has captured the imagination of many literary and cultural specialists. The close association between the ideas of 'home' and 'identity' is not new nor is it unique. Migrancy and dispossession indelibly mark configurations of belonging, home and place in the postcolonizing nation-state. According to Stuart Hall:

Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think. Instead, of identity as a 'Production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. This new problematises the very authority and authenticity to which the term, 'cultural identity' lays claim (Weedon 5).

Post-colonial literature is mainly based on the question of place and displacement and how these "parameters of place and its separateness". As Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin and Gareth Griffiths put it:

It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place ... A valid and active
sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation, resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation, or "voluntary" removal for indentured labour ... Beyond their historical and cultural differences, place, displacement, and a pervasive concern with the myths of identity and authenticity are a feature common to all post-colonial literatures in English (Krakovsky 51-52).

Postcolonial writers frequently show how in the past colonized peoples attempt to construct a life in a new space, concurrently tackled the past represented by the country of their beginning. Our culture shapes and determines our identity and belonging. To convey our sense of self, we must first generate a positive understanding of the long cultural tradition. Identity is the very important part of one's own personality. "Identity talk" and "identity politics" are genuine and significant phenomena. Conflicts of culture and identity arising from the experience of immigration are shown to affect not only first generation immigrants but their British-born children. Generational differences are intensified for second generation South Asian women by the experience of growing up in British society where gender norms and expectations are not only different, but also in conflict with parental values. Now we look at the conflicts inherent in the Indian-British immigrant experience-more specifically, at the way in which the Indian female protagonists negotiate the demands of the two cultures which go into their cultural make-up. Meera Syal's novel *Anita* and *Me* is a Black British Bildungsroman, which trace the developments of the protagonist while exploring in varying degrees of complexity the issue of taking freedom on one's own terms and not giving into the condescension of the dominant culture.
Syal's narrative explores a particular year in her protagonist's life where she hovers on the brink of adolescence. The protagonist, Meena, narrates her childhood experiences of growing up in the only Indian family in a typical working-class mining village in the heart of the Black Country in the early 1970s. It becomes quite apparent that the young girl's struggle for independence while growing up in augmented by her increasing awareness of her difference from the mainstream of English life, which she yearns to be a part of. Meena is fascinated by Anita Rutter, the bad girl of Tollington village, and yearns to be accepted by her as her best friend, for Anita is everything Meena is not, beautiful, popular, irreverent, and grown-up for her age and, of course, white. Moreover, being Anita's best friend brings the added bonus of not being different and of being accepted. This blends in with Meena's growing awareness of her brown skin in a white society, a marker of her difference, her otherness.

Meena is secretly in love with Sam Low Bridge, the leader of the village skinhead gang. He instigates attacks on foreigners, notably Indians, and openly articulates his racist sentiments at a public festival, jolting Meena into a realization of the palpable undercurrent of racist feeling among many of the villagers, whom we had largely considered her friends. But these attacks are not levelled consciously at Meena and her family, she suddenly aware of her difference and realizes that, despite all her efforts to be assimilated, she now lives with her otherness. At the end of the novel, when Meena finally comes to terms with her double heritage, she sees Sam for what he really is and does not idolize him. When Meena finally confronts him about his brutish behaviour at the village festival, he claims to have always considered her as different from the others- the other foreigners of the community as well as other Tollington girls:
Those things you said at the spring fete, what were you trying to do? Sam Shrugged [...] "I wanted to make listen" be said finally. "You wanted to hurt people you mean"! I yelled at him. "How could you say it, in front of me? My dad? To anyone? "How can you believe that shit"? Sam grabbed me by the wrists. [...] "When I said them", he rasped, "I never meant yow, Meena! It was all the others, not yow! "I am the others, Sam. you did mean me (AM 313).

Meena sees through Sam's tempting offer to free her from the racist stereotypes, it is as if he is accepting her as an 'honorary member' of white Tallington society. She vehemently turns down his attempt to treat her differently, taking her stand as one of the others, refusing to deny that other half of her multicultural heritage just to belong to the mainstream. Sam realizes that Meena has taken freedom on her own terms, to stand up for herself and others like her, she is not going to deny herself, to please the likes of Sam Lowbridge by accepting the definition he has been pleased to confer on her. Sam is powerless against Meena's newfound confidence and her ability to defend herself: She says:

Sam gripped my wrists tighter for support."You've always been the best wench in Tollington. Anywhere. Dead funny! [...] but you were never gonna look at me, you won't be staying will ya? You can move on. How come? How come I can't?" And then he kissed me [...] and I let him, feeling mighty and huge, knowing I had won and that every time is say another Meena on the street comer he would remember this and feel totally powerless (AM 314).

On one level, Sam is right; Meena is not really the 'others'. She is a hybrid-born of Indian immigrant parents, in Britain. Unlike her English friends and her
Indian parents, Meena does not have the role-models she needs that could help her to come to terms with her hybrid status. She does finally find potential surrogate parents, who lead hybrid lives like hers-Harinder Singh and his French wife Mireille, the mysterious couple who live in the Big House and, Meena says:"lived, you know, through all of you, so fascinating [...] we felt proud like parents. There are not many places left like this now [...] and in here we only needed each other 'Oo else would have understood us, strange creatures like us"? (AM 319).

Meena understood them and was fascinated by them in turn and disappointed by the fact that they:

\[\text{Had kept them hidden for all these years, wasting their gifts and zest for life instead of sharing them with people whom they could have inspired and entertained, for whom they could have been living proof that the exotic and the different can add to and enrich even the sleepiest backwater (AM 319).}\]

They show her that it is possible to reconcile the differences between her two cultures and to form a composite identity for herself. Meena is conscious of who she is-an Indian British girl who has found her own space and is able to move between both her worlds without wanting to discard either one. Meena has the freedom to 'move on' to new and better things because she has an increasing number of options, thanks to the love, support and acceptance of her parents as well as her own diligence at school and her personal ambition to make something more of her life. Sam, Anita and many others of Meena's contemporaries lack these mainstays. Indeed, Meena has managed to establish a firm basis for her fledgling identity, by finally recognizing her superiority over Sam, she turns Sam's stereotypical racial prejudices against himself, since he does not seem to have any scope for development, and he is forced to see
himself as the 'other'. Meena has won a significant victory over Sam and herself she says:"I [...] hated Anita for speaking to me all those years ago [...] hated Sam for not being cruel to me so that I could have dismissed him long ago, and mainly hated myself for having forgotten all about it [...] all that potential, all that hope all gone because I made friends once with Anita Rutter" (AM 321-22]. This hate and anger enables her to free herself finally in a twofold sense-both from the stereotypical framework set up for people like her by Sam and those of his kind and from the yearning to be like and be accepted by Anita and Sam. The end of the novel evokes the promise of more to come; Meena's journey into young adulthood has just begun. The encounter with Sam Lowbridge and the final split from Anita are just beginning of a long list of successes and failures on her way to herself.

Meera Syal's novel *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999), deals with the lives of three very different women from the South Asian community of East London, Tania, Sunita and Chila. The novel develops a number of themes, most of which can be seen as the product of a community, well established and self-confident enough to turn its attention to its own internal dynamics rather than focus predominantly on the problems caused by white Britain. A woman-centred novel, the text follows the lives of three childhood friends who live their South Asianness in very different way. Tania is a programme maker for television who negotiates two worlds with increasing difficulty as she begins to address South Asian issues in her work. Tania's dissatisfaction with the view of Asian Britain offered by the middle-aged white men is precisely a discomfort triggered by the anxieties of misrecognition. The reality of her identity as formed by the interactions within the community in which she is raised is distorted and reduced by the demands made by external representations that insist on characterizing Asian cultures in a single, fixed way. She reminds her unhappiness in
relation with her white lover Martin; at one point, "she breaks into tears but feels unable to tell him that she needs him to call her 'jaan" (LAH 72). Tania achieves a form of recognition from the fashionable white society she inhabits. Her desire for television work is lauded and she is considered a person to watch. Tania has a strong desire for a different recognition; the aspects of her being that have been moulded by the structures of the Asian community. Martin's attempts to show this recognition by buying "fireworks for Diwali' and 'tickets' for a Dussehra festival are insufficient" (LAH 109). She requires an appropriate and knowing sign of recognition formed within the Asian community, as the sound of the Punjabi endearment.

The cultural critic Susanne Reichl suggest that "the novel imagines an essential Asian self from which the women are alienated at the beginning of the novel but to which they draw closer" (Gunning 116). It is not necessarily essentialism that drives Syal to plot these women as only beginning to find the strategies for survival in contemporary societies when they turn to the codes of their parents. The second female character Sunita is a former student radical who, after meeting her future husband at university, becomes pregnant, has an abortion and fails her law exams. She marries only to become a downtrodden house wife and mother who, in the course of the narrative, once more emancipate herself. Sunita cannot perhaps be compared with vivacious Tania and displays a mild degree of emancipation, though she is obviously not allowed to revolutionise her life, constantly safeguard by her close community. Her two children, Sunil and Nikita, reflect the controversial interruption of prestige and liminality that is usually grafted onto the notion of maternity in Indian culture. The story of Sunita transmitted as an intricate gaze into the past betrays a silent tension which violates a fixed formality. She receives this burdensome condition from
her own family context because her mother has to endure this troublesome subaltern condition of the Zenana that regulates her life and limited her identity. She says:

My Mum has always had this weird habit, she has never called my father by his real name (infact, for years I though his full name was Darling sharma), preferring endearments such as jaan and ji and sometimes, when she was feeling fruity, husband-sahib. During my rebellious phase, when I was monitoring how many times my dad and brothers left my mother alone in the kitchen while they started at the TV, I challenged her about this (Gunning 234).

The way Sunita shows her background does not constitute solely a reaction against the inviolability of traditions; her significance has to be confronted with the personal experience of both Tania and chila.

The third character, Chila is a woman widely perceived as having neither beauty nor academic accomplishments. She eventually marries a man considered a good match by her family and she dedicates herself to domesticity. Despite her constant efforts to please her husband, she finds that he rekindles a former love affair with Tania, while Chila is pregnant with his child. She leaves the relationship determined to raise her son as a single parent. Tania comments on the destiny of her friend and shows a typical pattern of postcolonial literature by female writers:

Chila didn't have much choice. Coming from the most traditional family and obviously not college material, they were lining up boys for her before she left school. Ironic, really, that the girl who most wanted to do the Right Thing was considered defective material. Her parents assaulted the marriage markets on all fronts: the matrimonial bureaux where they find a perfect match by matching up your heights and
income brackets, the notice boards in the temples and community centres where your personal details are displayed along with the times for yoga classes and the winner of the under sevens trampolining competition, and, of course, the gossip grapevine. [...] I don't know how Chila kept her dignity, I hated her fucking family for what they were offering her, hated the other bastards for what they thought she was worth. And the amazing thing was, under all that pressure, Chila always said no. She would wait, she said. I don't know for what, we all thought (Gunning 148-49).

Through the depiction of the lives of these three women in *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* raises questions of cultural difference, identity, family expectations and traditional cultural practices, illustrating how they are negotiated in different ways by second generation British South Asian. South Asian women's writing suggests, difference as depicted in short stories and novels is very far from postmodern notions of free choice, celebration and play. Difference is shown to be socially constituted by both the dominant and minority cultures within which the writers' work is located. Dominant forms of British culture construct Asian people as 'other', in ways that fail to do justice to the reality of their lives.

Recent fiction by British women of south Asian descent suggests that Britain is not only multi-cultural but is reshaping notions of culture and identity, producing hybrid forms that draw on both so-called 'ethnic' and white British identities, cultural forms and practices. This work shows the hegemonic racist and ethnocentric white British ideas of otherness are being made explicit and challenged. In the works the history of Britain is being rewritten to foreground the history of people of colour in Britain and the importance of empire to the making of British society and culture. It is
here that ideas of Britishness as white, and of traditional so-called 'ethnic' culture as static and unchanging are being subverted. The production of new, hybrid forms of culture and identity are explored, together with the problems and experience of living in a racist Britain that is in the process of shifting towards an acceptance of cultural diversity. Syal's work exhibits the radical discrepancy between official discourse on multi-cultural, culturally diverse Britain is explored and ideas produced about how this gap might be narrowed.

In the 1990s South Asian film and television began to move from ethnic minority slots, often broadcast in a mixture of English and South Asian languages, into the mainstream. Recent films have raised questions of gender, cultural difference, hybridity, generational conflicts, identity and racism. A significant landmark in this shift was the film *Bhaji on the Beach (1993)*, written by Meera Syal and Gurinder Chadha, which was shown on television and in 'arthouse' cinemas and released. *Bhaji on the Beach* is centrally concerned with questions of culture and identity. From the older women who cling to traditional values, brought with them from the Indian subcontinent, to the teenaged girls anxious to experience 'a bit of the other'- in this case white boys-ethnic and gender politics are played out against a racist white society. Subjectivities and identities are portrayed as both fractured and complex and no attempt is made to create homogeneous positive images.

Indeed the only character who is completely at home with herself in the film is the middle-class, westernized visitor from Bombay, who chides the older women over their outmoded notions of tradition. In an age of virtual reality, cyberspace, and migration of global proportions, the very possibility of home is being vigorously contested, whether it is identified as Africa, England, India or more subversively, the "black Atlantic", home is neither a stationary place nor a self-evident trope. All
historical utterances, it is both fictional and contingent, inflected by the particular social contexts out of which it is fashioned and, of equal significance, defying the very materiality and permanence it appears to embody. Because it is one of the organizing fictions of national literatures and ideologies, the project of remembering home has produced elaborate interiors and imaginative architectures that are vivid and, as Meera Syal illustrates, ultimately approximate as well. These dwelling-places of the mind seduce but do not finally satisfy, precisely, because they can only ever "almost look something like home" (Burton 32).

Meera Syal's film *Bhaji on the Beach* (1994) as, in a way precursor of the types of film that is characterizes yet another realignment of the ethnic identities comprising the British. Meera Syal wants her audience to revaluate what is means to be Indian in England at that point in history, particularly in light of the ways in which her original culture has been used to exclude them from full citizenship. Bravely using comedy to treat the issue of violence against women, Syal shows her audience the complexity of Asian Women's lives in England, the conflict between modern ways and tradition, the price some women refuse to pay for the so-called comforts of home, and the tensions that arise in recognizing the state as both oppressor and protector. In campaigns against domestic violence like Asian women have made demands for their right to leave oppressive family environments and for the state to criminalize domestic violence, dismantling the notion of the family as a sacred and private place. British South Asian women have also needed to demand that the state recognize the right to family unity in immigration cases where racist laws and policies separate and even criminalize some members of minority families.

To keep silent about domestic violence for the sake of preserving the mythical notion of a united Asian community means to support and collude in their own
oppression as women. There are many women like the fictional Ginder in Chadha's film and we see in Syal's *Bhaji on the Beach* accomplishing without loud speakers and big demonstrations is the reconceptualization of community for Asian women living in Britain today. According to Chadha, what has changed since the release of *Bhaji on the Beach* is "the British audience's appetite for films about Britain" (Arana, Ramey 56). She claims "People don't see film in terms of race and culture clash" (Arana, Ramey 56), managing instead to "identify with characters regardless of their background" (Arana, Ramey 56).

The reemergence of Irish, Welsh, Scottish and Indeed English nationalism, which have been so noticeable in recent decades, can be seen not just as the natural outcome of cultural diversity, but as a response to a broader loss of national, in the sense of British, identity. According to the critic Stuart Hall:

Black British culture is today confident beyond its own measure in its own identity... We are fully confident in our own difference, no longer caught in the trap of aspiration which was sprung on so many of us who are older, as part of the colonial legacy described in Fanon's famous phrase as Black skins, white mask. Black identity today is autonomous and not tradable (Arana, Ramey 57).

Britain is a nation of hybridity, since many other "classic" British writers were not born in Britain either, but in the colonies, whether as colonizers or the colonized. The discovery of a true black identity involves decolonizing the self and recovering an identity no longer distorted by the colonial experience and by racism. Hall offers an alternative approach to the question of black identity. He says that:

There is, however, a second related but different view of cultural identity. This second position recognizes that, as well as the many
points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant differences, which constitute "What we really are", or rather—since history has intervened—"What we have become". ... Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being". It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything, which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous "play" of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere "recovery" of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, well secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narrative of the past (Arana, Ramey 75).

This understanding of identity as a process through cultural productions that is major concerns in this chapter. Meera Syal describes how her semi-autobiographical character Anita came to this realisation that she had no home that she had ever visited:

Papa's singing always unleashed these emotions which were unfamiliar and instinctive at the same time, in a language I could not recognise but felt I could speak in my sleep, in my dreams, evocative of a country. I had never visited but which sounded like the only home. I had ever known. The songs made me realise that there was a corner of me that would be forever not England (Norguay, Smyth 58).
Another example of her alienation from a national identity, Syal's Anita talks of her separation from cultural roots.

I always came bottom in history; I did not want to be taught what a mess my relatives had made of India since the British left them (their fault of course, nothing to do with me), and longed to ask them why, after so many years of hating the 'goras', had they packed up their cases and followed them back here (Arana, Ramey 58).

The need for a realignment of identity from an axis of belonging and alienation to a continuum of translocated migrancy is evident in the discourse of essentialised national identities. Syal is one of the Britain's best known Asians she is often perceived by the white mainstream as a kind of official spokesperson for all things British Asian. In Goodness Gracious Me, the sketches focus on a range of issues. These include many aspects of the experience of living as a South Asian British person in contemporary Britain. In addition to everyday life and the family, themes include the legacies of colonialism, stereotyping, acculturation and the overtly racist attitudes of dominant forms of white British culture. The issues dealt with are the generational problems of difference and conflict between South Asian culture and religious and the society and culture of contemporary Britain. These differences and conflicts have profound effects on the identity, aspirations and lifestyles of British-born Asian people. The sketches span the generations from teenagers to their grandparents. The characters range from exaggerated portraits of an Indian nationalist to a family who want to be totally assimilated as English, and from teenaged rappers to traditional parents.

Meera Syal's dark screenplay My Sister-Wife (1993) contends with the irreconcilable forces of individuality and communality as they clash within the
domestic spaces of Pakistani Muslim household in South London. Syal with great wit, sketches the tortuous and circumlocutory ways through which immigrants in Britain negotiate between the customary traditions of former homelands and the less evident, more contemporary orthodoxies of the secular culture within which they must live as British subjects. The plot is framed by two poles of immigrant British Muslim women's subjectivity. Farah is the modern urban professional woman, born in Pakistan, raised in Britain by cultured, upper-class Pakistani business people. Maryam is a traditional Pakistani bourgeois woman in an arranged marriage to Asif Shah, a wealthy binational businessman who travels between Pakistan and Britain. Syal portrays the stage for a psychic struggle between individual rights and customary practice. Syal's work shreds the illusion that education and modernization can buy middle-class women enough consciousness to put out of the patriarchal circuits of exchange and subjection. Syal skillfully lays out the intangible but more compelling psychic economics of cultural insularity immigrant self-perception, and isolation through which Asif's and Maryam's cultural ambivalence takes root and finally overwhelms Farah's British sense of self and individuality. Syal paints a contemporary picture of interlocking interests of desire and patriarchy, both Muslim and Western through which this particular British Muslim household must determine its fate. Maryam and Farah eventually do, by killing the source of their discontent, Asif.

Meera Syal poses difficult questions about immigrants and cultural assimilation within British secularism, presenting modern Muslim identities-as embodied by Farah and her parents-in tension with the feudal Muslim identities of conservative immigrants like Asif and his first wife Maryam. Maryam stands at the crossroads of these conflicting identities, a victim who is determined to survive the circumstances. There is no middle ground for Syal, as neither Maryam nor Farah
emerges successfully from the trauma. Syal recognizes the regimes of tradition that work to the detriment of women, and both argue for a move away from tradition toward more emancipatory forms of identification through a decolonization of the self. Neither Ahmad nor Syal suggests what that self might be. But the negativity of their critique implies that they see modern secular individualism as the way out. The playwright, becoming British means coming to terms with specific histories of oppression while struggling to find new, emancipatory strategies for creating viable British Asian identities. Syal's screenplay *My Sister-Wife* (1993) presents the cultural transactions across ideologies of belonging. Transnational identifications inform the dialogues in this text, dismantling older notions of Englishness, nationness, and left politics. This screenplay presents the contradictory and pleasurable sites of transnational affiliations, struggling to maintain coherence within the rapidly shifting political and psychic tends of everyday existence.

In post-colonial writings the concept of diaspora lays the image of a remembered home that stands at a distance both temporally and spatially. This 'place of origin' may be the focus of a sustained 'ideology of return', it can still figure as a home in the present or be seen as belonging entirely to the past memories of home are no factual reproduction of a fixed past. Rather they are fluid reconstructions set against the backdrop of the remembering subject's current positioning and conceptualizations of home. Memories, both personal and collective, form the frame of reference we all use to meaningfully interpret our past and present experiences and orient ourselves towards the future. Later generations have not experienced migration and have no memories of the time before it. They are heirs to diasporic memories that are told and retold, reappropriated and reinterpreted in light of the here and now. Throughout their lives they construct their own diasporic narratives of home and
belonging out of these memories, together with their own experience, their migration routes and migrant roots.

The female authors whose writings are based on diaspora very often engage with the mixed notion of hybridity. In recent writings, hybridity appears as a convenient category at 'the edge' or contact point of diaspora, describing cultural mixture where the diasporized meets the host in the scene of migration. The cultural critic Stuart Hall argues that diaspora is to be thought of 'metaphorically as well as literally', as capturing the complex cultural imaginings, experiences and positionings of post-colonial migrants and settlers in ways that transcend and contest simplistic and essentialized narratives of displacement, arrival and identity. He writes:

Diaspora does not refer to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return [...] The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by a recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference" (Knott, McLoughlin 115).

But Hall argues that, the productive tension of diaspora resides in a process of translation of histories, cultures and representations, where 'cultural identity is a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being" (Knott, McLoughlin 115) and where old identities take new formations:"Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything else which is historical, they undergo constant transformation [...] Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves a new, through transformation and difference" (Knott, McLoughlin 115).
Diaspora emphasizes the place of arrival rather than the place of origin-a shift from the idealization of homeland to the multiple and fractured process of homing. Sometimes a particular symbolic object-such as the key to the house from which refugee has been expelled- is taken on the exile's journey and comes to function as a synecdoche for the unreachable lost home, and to act as a focus for memories of the exile's past life. In her autobiographical novel, describing growing up in the UK of Indian parents, Meera Syal gives a compelling account of the symbolic significance of the large suitcases which had sat on the top of her mother's bedroom wardrobe for as long as she could remember. She explains:

As a child she had always assumed this was some kind of ancient punjabi custom, this need to display several dusty, bulging cases, overflowing with old Indian suits, photographs and yellowing official papers, as all my uncles' and Aunts' Wardrobes were similarly crowned with this impressive array of luggage (Morley 45).

Syal's mother tried to brush off her questions about the significance of the suitcases with the practical point of view that they are just a good place to keep all the things that do not fit into these small English Wardrobes. Syal never considers these matters so simple she says:

Already noticed that everything in those cases had something to do with India-the clothes, the albums, the letters from various cousins and wondered why they were kept apart from the rest of the household jumble, allotted their own place and prominence, the nearest thing in our house that we had to a shrine" (Morley 45).

Nor is this simply an account of how life used to be among Indian immigrants living in the UK in the 1960s. In recent edition of the BBC2 television comedy show
Goodness Gracious Me, one of the most effective events is that in which an Indian estate agent offered to his Indian client's houses with "built-in" suitcases on top of the wardrobes, as a way of signifying to his would-be customers that he is familiar with their most private domestic habits. Home is not always symbolised by any physical container—whether suitcase, building or Coffin. Language and culture themselves provide the migrant with the ultimate mobile home.

Identity is important to occupying the position of 'knowing subject' and it is as knowing subject that we speak and act most effectively in the world. Identities are not just enabling, in defining their own sense of identity, individuals and groups tend to fix the identity of others, often working within long established binary modes of thinking that help sustain inequalities, exclusions and oppression. To move beyond identities as divisive, we would need to move beyond material power relations that privilege some groups over others. The people who find themselves excluded from the space of the simply 'human', and are defined as 'other' in discourses of race, gender, sexuality or ethnicity, it is clear that having a voice, representation and respect are crucial. Critic Stuart Hall in his essay Caribbean cinema, argues that:

Putting the issue of cultural identity in question. Who is this emergent, new subject of the cinema? From where does he/she speak? Practices of representation always implicate the position from which we speak or write the position of enunciation. What recent theories of enunciation suggests is that, though we speak, so to say, 'in our own name', of ourselves and from our own experience, nevertheless who speaks, and the subject who is spoken of, are never identical, never exactly in the same place (Weedon 155).
Like most societies, Britain has never had a singular and homogenous culture or national identity. It has always had different white ethnic groups with their own senses of history and identity. The last fifty years have seen a massive expansion in cultural identity in Britain, as a wide variety of migrants have settled in the UK, diversity that is often strongly grounded in religious differences. Now the cultural critics have begun to look at the hegemony of whiteness as an apparently unmarked subject position and identity that is thought to be equivalent to being human. The cultural narratives of minorities-historical and fictional-are one place to begin to acquire the knowledge needed to dislodge both hegemonic narratives and the oppressive binaries that they perpetuate. This is crucial to the development of plural societies that are accepting of difference, and that even celebrate it. The new generations of black writers in Britain cannot write about some far away home from a position of remembrance, they write about Britain from their own British viewpoints and put their own British spins on the world as seen from their very own perspectives.

What characterized an earlier black British literature, the migrant's otherness, emanated from their coming to England and searching for a particular kind of perceived britishness that did not necessarily exist? Black writers born in England have none of these illusions. They are developing within the British landscapes and social groups that they have been born into, writing about their own impressions of Britain from a new British perspective.

The younger generation writers who have no firsthand experience of any homeland other than Britain. The black British cultural critic Mike Phillips argues that:

First, there is a critical concern with identity and its relationship with a network of arguments about nationality and citizenship. this is
accompanied by a focus on how the urban landscape shapes individual choices and outcomes, a consistent in excavating or describing the effects of migration on British society and a dominant interest in describing the language or motivation of black characters whose experience of growing up and living in Britain determines their identity (Arana, Ramey 117).

The diasporic person has no fixed identity. She has to move on, and on, because she has always to be passing through the period of transition. She has to learn to adjust, to survive. Meera Syal becomes aware of the closeness of the two societies which have shaped her identity and at the same time, of the distance between them. Meera Syal discusses the conflicts and contradictions, identity, belonging, alienation experienced by people born in Britain but whose families originated from Indian subcontinent. Meera Syal writings are mainly concerned with the differences between first-generation immigrants' and their children's values and beliefs. Rather than focus on conflicts between cultures, she portrays discord between generations and within communities. The focus on generational differences forms the basis of her appeal to a new generation of readers, for whom these differences may be part of her own experience. In Syal's film, the character fantasies in the inflated style of Bollywood movies fracture notions of an unmediated reality and foreground the illusion of an authentic transcendental voice. Meera Syal works critically reflects the majority and minority communities. Syal's portrayal of neglected, white, working-class Anita acts as a foil to Meena's protected upbringing in Anita and Me. Syal's narratives presents the reflection of popular culture, evident particularly in the style of humour and sitcom aesthetic of her novels and films. The cultural notion of identity and belonging presented by Syal is very different from other diasporic writers. Syal's writing is all
encompassing in defining the options which is available for British Asian women in relation to their cultures of origin and destination. She attempts to blend aspects of both cultures together in a different way. The popularity of Syal novels is part of the explosion of novels by women for increasingly lucrative female readerships over the last decade. The cultural work of Black British women demonstrates, women are everywhere present but relegated to the background in nationalist and postcolonial struggles for citizenship. Syal's works are replete with the images of loss and longing. Her characters show the confusion between two diverse cultures and they have accepted both cultures. Diasporic second generation writers has raised the question of culture and identity most sharply and racism documented in its full brutality. These writers mobilize recent history in support of the postcolonial project of decolonizing Black identities, producing new forms of Black British identity and reshaping ideas of British culture and nation. They use fiction to articulate silenced voices, to explore inter-cultural and cross-generational conflicts, and to produce new hybrid identities and cultural forms. They challenge those forms of white subjectivity and ideas of history and nation that allow racism and ethnocentrism to flourish and refuse to acknowledge white complicity in and responsibility for the position in which black people find themselves in today.