Chapter-1

Introduction

The general objective of the project is to study the representation of migrants in multicultural society and is to establish the role of diaspora in colonial and post-colonial societies. This cross-cultural study is concerned with the experience of diaspora in dissimilar cultures. The present study focuses on the agonizing struggle of growing up in the crushing clash of cultures. The present work is a study of the selected novels of contemporary British writer Meera Syal. It also seeks to increase the awareness about diasporic culture. It is interesting to study Meera Syal as migrant and her experience of growing up with a dual cultural heritage. The aim is to address a larger body of cultural work which engages with South Asian Culture and traditional Indian Culture minority groups.

Diasporic women writers in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Indian Ocean, as well as within France, where they or their families immigrate for various personal or economic reasons, have given us unique insights into what Renato Rosaldo has called the "border zones" of culture. The periphery of those areas is based on metropolitan cultural discourse, Rosaldo explains, that an incessant and playful heteroglossia, a bilingual speech that is place for dominant conceptual paradigms. Academic presumption about cultural, linguistic, or stylistic norms are frequently being put into practices that may able to seen and set out the development of a adaptation, appropriation, and contestation that preside over the structure of identity in colonial and post-colonial contexts. The creative processes are essentially significant in understanding the contemporary global culture, as postcolonial writers define everyday realities and subjective perceptions of a majority whose cultural contributions are measured to be the products of minority voices. Writers like Meera
Syal are part of shrewd interpretation of the postcolonial conditions where work published in London has been redefining UK history and literature. They create new fiction that represents, through innovative literary techniques; both linguistic and geographic exiles, displacement in metropolitan centre, and cross culture or inter culture exchange.

In order to understand literary output of these writers the study is a brief invasion into the field of cultural anthropology, and understands the process of adaptation and acculturation. The terms like "assimilation" and "acculturation" now used in postcolonial writings and achieved a negative connotation because they highlight the relation of conquest between colonized culture and the hegemonic system. Rosaldo argues that "metropolitan typifications suppress, exclude, and even repress border zones", like:

The model for cross-cultural understanding that produces immigration as a site of cultural stripping away is the academic version of the melting pot: theories of acculturation and assimilation. In this view, immigrants, or at any rate their children and grand children are absorbed into the national culture. Above all, the process involves the loss of one's past-autobiography, history, heritage, language, and all the rest of the so-called cultural baggage.... The theory of assimilation appears to have the inevitability of a law of history. If it doesn't catch up with you this generation, it will in the next (Lionnet 103).

Cross or transcultural exchange always is like "an absolute fact" of life everywhere, Edouard Glissant pointed out that, "the human imagination in western tradition, has always wished to deny or disguise" it. "The melting Pot" is not merely a social reality but a myth and works like a metaphor in American national identity. The
concept of transculturation proves very useful in the context of traversing existing cultural territories. The concept of culture is quite controversial among anthropologists. Rosaldo states that:

Anthropologists hold contradictory notions of culture. The discipline's official view holds that all human conduct is culturally mediated. In other words, people act in relation, not to brute reality, but to culture specific modes of perceiving and organizing the world ... No domain of culture is more or less culturally mediated than any other.... [But] if official [anthropological] view holds that all cultures are equal, an informal filing system, more often found in corridor talk than in published writings, classifies cultures in quantitative terms, from a lot to a little, from thick to thin, from elaborate to simple ... culture in this view is defined by difference. Difference... makes culture visible to observers (Lionnet 105).

Difference from both sides’ makes a binary system mainly reasons are responsible like exoticizing, "othering", groups share in cultural purity. Writers are involved in a particular redefinition of decolonization. The process of assimilation, and parallel assumptions about "authenticity" in either dominant or native cultures. As Rosaldo points out;

The view of authentic cultures as an autonomous internally coherent universe no longer seems tenable in a postcolonial world. Neither "We" not "they" are as self-contained and homogenous as we/they once appeared. All of us inhabit an interdependent late 20th century world, which is at once marked by borrowing and lending across
Women writers show-"from all points on the compass"- the dialectical problems between local and world wide cultures and between diversity and resemblance, between relativism and universalism. The proportions of postcolonial theory, pedagogy, cultural, and canon formation show the contact of imperialism and libertarian humanism with non-traditional literatures. Postcolonial shows the different geographical regions and cultures, colonized or the political economy of imperialism and neo-imperialism.

Cross-culturalism in literary and cultural studies is a useful rubric for works, writers and artists that do not fit within a single cultural tradition. The cross-cultural can also be said to incorporate the colonial and the post-colonial, since colonialism is by definition a form of cross-culturalism. Globalization has produced new patterns of migration and provoked divergent responses worldwide. The Question of diaspora arises with particular tensions, between internationalism and nationalism. The relationship between place and the ways of culture and literature interact to create new reality. New articulations of diaspora necessarily overlapping with familiar ways of conceptualizing it, have found their way into literary writings. The Indian Diaspora is a basic term to describe the people who migrated from territories that are currently within the borders of the Republic. The Diaspora covers practically every part of the world. A large number of people has migrated from the countries of their origin in search of better economic conditions to various foreign lands forced exiles or self-imposed exiles. Some of them have made a mark in the field of writing. These immigrant writers reflect, on the one hand, their attachment to the motherland and on the other, their feeling of alienation and rootlessness. As such there is a need to study...
the fundamentals of culture, cross-culture, inter-culture and multi-culture of various countries in order to arrive at the right judgement of the problems of immigrants and diaspora in the works of Meera Syal.

Meera Syal is to be placed and examined in coming chapters. The choice of this writer is intentional because she addresses the notion of home and homeliness in her fiction and Syal, as a diasporic writer, deals with a multicultural society both from ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, seeking to find her native identity in the adopted country. In her cross-cultural experience, she is not able to forget her cultural past and negotiate it with her British present. In her works, the diaspora situations make her characters think about the past and brood over the feeling of loss. Meera Syal is the living incarnation of the cross-cultural, inter-cultural and multi-cultural paradigm in its true application as against the theoretical concepts, being herself a migrant from India to United Kingdom.

Meera Syal is undoubtedly a South Asian actress, a strong feminist critique, a cultural critique vociferous about in between identity that an emigree enjoys but sometime a person born in a foreign country is treated as a migrant because of the family background in the so called developed countries. She is a multi-faceted personality, a director, a film writer, a script writer and actor and best known for her acting on radio and television. Her two novels, *Anita and Me* (1996), set in Northern England and imbued with her memories of infancy in Wolverhampton, and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999), with its urban setting and perplexed stories of Asian ‘sisterhood’, may be considered as example of the literary curve of second generation writers, within the Indian diasporic context. They both reflect on a chain of themes and the social transformations that happened in the United Kingdom over the post-war decades.
The native Indian authors remind the diasporic writers of the paradox of the postcoloniality, which is the condition of double identity, fragmented and united by the registers of when in 2000 Meera Syal was appointed 'Media personality of the year' by the commission for Racial Equality as part of the 'Race in Media Awards', they recognized her involvement in a multitude of creative projects. In her productive career, a significant point that introduced her to the large British audience probably resides in *Goodness Gracious Me*, originally conceived as a radio show and then adjusted for BBC2 in 1998. Structured through short colorful sketches, the series dismantles British preconceptions of Asian communities and mocks expectations of both Indian migrants, who desperately try to discharge their burdensome heritage and acquire an Anglicized identity, and the British neighbourhood, blindly unable to understand different cultures. Interestingly it is the style of comedy that permits a critical gaze on the stereotypes created by both factions; undoubtedly drama represents a very popular form of television entertainment in the United Kingdom. The core topic of diaspora are displayed through the modes of parody and pungently exploited in a project of appropriation and abrogation of Englishness and Indianness.

Meera Syal, in an interview given to the BBC, admitted that the novel *Anita and me* (1996), incorporates some echoes of her childhood. The present research aims to study some of the neo-romantic elements in her oeuvre. The diaspora writers like Syal, obviously dwell deep in socio-cultural mores used by their family and the struggle they have to face in the society of a foreign land. This combination of narrative fiction and memories works because she feels, "the emotional landscape is very much how I felt growing up, being the only Asian family in such a tiny mining environment" (Adami 163). As a female writer she states whether food and the other cultural procedures such as those viewed previously are dividing structures that in the
narrative construct a polarised dichotomy representing India and England. The central themes with which she deals are man-woman relationship, contemporary Indian life and the urban milieu, alienation, cross-cultural encounters, and a quest for identity. Diasporic writers like Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi and Meera Syal have experienced the stressful readjusting of their own literary works into scripts instead of handling them onto professional writers. This adaption witnesses the intricate link between the artist-creator and the moulded word, between the page and the stage, between the 'inky' character and the 'ocular' movement. Diasporic or postcolonial authors writing or adapting for cinema or television express a throbbing anxiety by exposing the novelty of intercultural forces at work in British society to the western showbiz.

Indian women writers, who stay away from their homeland and also write about Indian culture, have a stamped place in Indian English literature. Women have to their credit a whole series of literary achievement over the last decade. There exists a group of women writers of the global Indian diaspora who have emerged as significant voices. In our contemporary world, we come across a lot of Indian diasporic writers such as Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerji Divakaruni, kiran Desai, Iqbal Ramoowalia, and Jhumpa Lahiri who represent images of diaspora.

Diaspora is not a mere scattering or a dispersion which can refer back to botanical frameworks or biblical narratives. Critic like Avtar Brah has observed, "the diasporic experience is determined by who is it who travels, where and how and under what circumstance" (Pal 76). The diasporic experience is a composite one made up of collectivities, multiple journeys, still points and border crossings. Experiences are shaped by economic positions, personal skills and political relationships between country of origin and of adoption, from a colonial, previous colonial or from a
sovereign, culturally 'white' country to one of the prosperous and developed
country. The host country's immigration laws, legal system and cultural openness or
otherwise is all equally important. It is not necessary that developed societies like
Britain, Australia, Canada or USA are more open than the developing ones like Fiji,
Malaysia or Mauritius. Salman Rushdie says that racism manifested a crisis of culture
in the country of adoption. He writes, "British thought, British society, has never been
cleansed of the filth of imperialism even British-born blacks and Asians are thought
of as people whose real home is elsewhere"(Pal 76).

The poetics of expatriate elaborates itself without centers in the writings of
Homi Bhabha. Bhabha defines centre or nation in terms of "double inscription" (Jain
25). Bhabha projects culture as hybrid from the side of migrant and subaltern.
Diaspora, according to him, produces "incompatible systems of signification" (Jain
26). Within the Diaspora community, the concepts of "home" continue to intensify
inter-generational frictions that exist everywhere. Inter-generationality has several
grouping other than the usual one depending on age we have disparate "cultures"
within the Diaspora. Work on women of South Asian origin in diasporic communities
is a essential and growing area of research for the important challenge it poses to both
feminist scholarship and Diaspora studies. South Asian diasporic feminisms open up
questions for several fields, including area studies, cultural studies, critical
ethnography and work on production and utilization.

The theme of consumption and comodification of South Asian culture and
representations of South Asian women is a restricted point in the thesis chapters, and
also highlighting the importance of questions of consumption and production to
studies of South Asian diasporic culture. Perhaps one of the question that could have
been explored more explicitly in the work is the comparative national contexts of
multiculturalism, feminist politics, racialization, and class models in the US and UK. The term diaspora exists in relation to an originary nation-state and is often used within an area studies framework that posits diasporic subjects as where they are not, or where they have left from, rather than where they live. Clearly, no collection can encompass all questions, and the strength of this thesis is that it raises some fascinating and timely questions. The Dictionary meaning of migrant is a person who moves regularly in order to find work. That means he carries with him the culture and tradition along in the foreign land. The experience of alienation, nostalgia, guilt or day dreaming can be said to be just one dimension of the migrant sensibility.

Indians travel more frequently now than before. Television has made foreign lands accessible at home. Many Indians are inevitably influenced by global culture. Inevitably the perspective on home culture is relativised. For the immigrant, ‘home’ is a contradictory site of nurture and also dark, de-compositional elements. The new world offers professional opportunity and financial betterment but also insists on assimilation and acculturation, a rejection of old habits, traditions and conditioning, and a merging with the culture of the new context. In Post-colonial Theory Leela Gandhi tells us: “While ‘diaspora’ is sometimes used interchangeably with migration it is generally involved as a theoretical device for the interrogation of ethnic identity and cultural nationalism” (Joshi 84). In this chapter diaspora includes immigrants, the act of migration and the psychological-cultural issues which are linked to immigrant experience.

Difficulties in modification, homesickness for home, inability to ‘connect’ on return visits to India, schizophrenic sense of double Indian and western identities or a sense of belonging nowhere, neither here nor there, remain the overriding feelings of the Indian immigrant. It is this psycho-cultural space that is especially explored in
Indian fiction in English. In a study of depression of Hispanic immigrants in the US, Belisa Lozano-Vonrich states:

Some studies have shown that language barriers, disconnection from family and friends, and exposure to new and different customs and traditions can lead to difficulties in adapting to a new country. Difficulties acculturating can, in turn, lead to low self-esteem and increased self-doubt, with additional psychological stress (Joshi 85).

Lozano-Vonrich uses the terms, ‘migration stress’ and ‘acculturation stress.’ Lozano-Vonrich’s observations define the alienation, stress and depression of Indian immigrants as well. Indian films in Hinglish – a parallel development to the diasporic Indian Novel in English – have touched upon the immigrant experience in different ways, though the black comedy in their depictions is missing in Indian fiction in English which tends to have a humorous but elegiac note. Among these films, American Desi is about Indian students in New York; Sam and Me and The Guru show deluded youngsters arriving in the US dreaming of big money and ending up working in desultory and menial jobs. East is East and Bend it Like Beckham show the clash between traditional patriarchal Indian values and the more emancipated needs of the younger generation influenced by western views. The clash of opinions between older and younger generations of immigrants is a familiar theme in Indian fiction as well.

Indeed, the presentation of diasporic experience in Indian fiction in English has ranged from identity crises, to relationship failures, to immigrant dreams and fantasies to a philosophical dimension, the alienation, the immigrant represents to a vision of the kind of spiritual-cultural forces which can cause healing. We can coin some new words to describe the immigrant condition, foregrounding the word
‘nation’ in some appropriate words by capitalising the letter ‘N’ – thus ‘alieNation’ would refer to the immigrant’s alienation from the Old and New nations, and ‘destiNations’ would refer to the act of migration to and attempting to embrace a new nation. The aspiration to ‘destiNations’ has resulted not in hope but in ‘alieNations’ mainly, indicating that immigration has not been an organic activity but a malfunctional, artificial attempt at transplantation - the loss of dignity and failure in the rebirthing of the Indian immigrant have been forcefully portrayed Indian fiction in English.

Meera Syal, as a post-colonial writer, who shares the experience of growing up and living in an environment with a dominant English language and culture which were not hers, seems comfortable and confident with her dual identity. In the context of Syal’s *Anita and Me*, Meena, the central character, is becoming a hybridized girl, by abrogation and misappropriation of elements of the dominant English culture, notably the English language and culture and through particular attitudes which relegate her from marginal or subordinate positions to those reached from cross-fertilization.

Of Indian roots and culture, Syal portrays the struggle of second generation Indians to maintain the culture of their parents while carving their own identities from the English cultural landscape, the desire to be visible, to be recognized as a person rather than an ethnic stereotype. The immigrant narrative is a literary form that has been used by contemporary writers to better understand the lives of immigrants as they challenge the static images of immigration associated with previous historical eras. These immigrant narratives are vehicles for describing the immigrant experience in Great Britain through their fictional constructs.
Immigrant identity is often based on how the protagonist, Meena, develops her sense of self in relation to the host country. She has to decide to what degree she will assimilate into the host culture and to what degree she will retain her respective language and culture. As Meena tries to put up herself to the host culture by learning the new language and culture, yet still maintain her original language and culture, she will have a degree of academic and social success since she is attempting to balance and endure both the social worlds with their respective identities. To what degree can such an identity adapt to a variety of shapes and forms through a process of mutual variation? If socially constructed, to what extent does the protagonist face British culture? Is hybridization the means to construct her new identity? The liminal space is a hybrid space that witnesses the production rather than the reflection of cultural meaning.

The negotiation of cultural identity involves the exchange of cultural performance. Syal’s novel *Anita and Me* refers to the pleasures and frustrations of childhood without becoming sentimental or nostalgic, but as Meena is growing older, her dependencies and loyalties become increasingly ambivalent and conflicted. Her increasing consciousness of it compels her to renegotiate her identity and friendship. To what degree do English education and the succeeding values and norms bring alien references to the Indian family that is beginning to be affected? To what extent is the separation of the realities of the Indian family and the school milieu evident? Probably, the Indian parental hope for the well-being and financial security of Meena, as well as her adherence to English cultural customs depends on Meena’s successful performance in English schooling and behaviour.

Inside Syal’s narrative, the post memory of partition belongs to neither the public nor the personal sphere but to an alternative community space that is
somewhere in between: a reconstituted punjabiness that exists behind closed inhabited doors. To understand the relationship between postmemory and narrative arising out of trauma, we have to develop conceptual networks more complex than Hirsch’s differences between cultural and public, on the one hand, and individual and personal, on the other. The diasporic position that obligates Syal to operate, at least initially, from the margins of British public culture, and the tensions and complications between memory and narrative that we have noted, including the compulsions to silence, are not dissimilar to those that shape partition novels written by women. To understand better those compulsions, we must revisit connections between trauma, memory, and narrative that are now taken almost as axiomatic within Western scholarship. Cultural appropriations invoking constructs of “Asia” and East and West encounters is musical and hardly there is a long tradition of simplifying, modifying, and Broadway-ifying stories placed in Asia to make them danceable, singable, and reachable to New York theatergoers.

The current invasion into South Asia, in the Broadway theater productions of *Bombay Dreams*, the musical produced by Andrew Lloyd Webber, maintains certain Bollywood song and dance principles with innovations of American style music and cultural situations. *Bombay Dreams*, in which over thirty South Asian performers were able to find profitable employment in a place where brown skin and Hindi film songs are the showpiece, not a strange interruption. For those who oppose such employment on an anti-cultural imperialist platform, *Bombay Dreams* is a perfect location for such transformation because many people who rarely attend the theatre will see it. It does not pretend to make a sophisticated commentary on society, the individual, or much of anything. It simply does what Broadway usually tries to do—entertain. And if brownness and brown people happen to be “in” right now, more power to the
performers who are initiating and just possibly transforming what entertainment-and real inclusiveness-on Broadway and America could one day mean.

Meera Syal’s *Anita and Me* is a tale of childhood friendships and a picture of a small but multifarious society. The storyteller is a nine-year old Indian girl in the 1960s that lives in a monotonous ex-mining town near Birmingham among a white, downwardly drifting British working class where only the women are still employed. Meena rebels against the courteous ways of her educated parents; although she lies and steals money, she is more adventuresome than bad. Not wanting the confined world of the Indian immigrants who frequently visit one another, she imitates and tries to become the best friend of Anita, a hard-boiled, nihilistic product of a broken British working-class family with its brutality, scarcity, and antipathy. The story takes us into Meena’s eleventh year, by which she learns more about her own family’s history including the dreadfulness of the partition, and understands that they have come to England for the future of their children. The humid, binding ways of her family and their friends are contrasted to those of Anita’s mother, who is racially prejudiced and immoral and who abandons her children.

The treatment of English speech is witty and specific, the story full of actions, twists, and characters; the work is more like farce than the moralizing tale which is too obviously becomes toward the conclusion. Syal is a television actress as well as the screenwriter of *Bhaji on the Beach*. Television film conventions are interestingly integrated with those of the novel. The organization and movement is by distinct scenes, each of which builds to a major action. Instead of psychology or social exploration there is recognition and strong sense of location. Cultural nuances are visualized. The characters, even when bland, are forcefully present stereotypes. Even
the excellent details of British class and regional speech works well because treated as a given. Shaved hair means skinhead, violent, racist, hopeless, and futureless. Although just a child, Meena perceives that life inside the home and life outside it are divided into two separate worlds. Syal shows that even a child as young as Meena, although indentifying with her parents’ culture to some extent, already understands that she is different. She notes that although her parents are respected and approved of by the general society they live amongst, they do not completely respect or approve of their neighbours. They choose not to belong and set themselves apart from the English community, Meena, in comparison is contented thinking of herself not only as English, but as belonging to Tollington. As a female writer she states “

I had won them over with my cheeky charm….. and my deliberately exaggerated Tollington accent, thus proving I was very much one of them, they did not need to shout to make themselves understood or think they could get away with muttered swearing and I would not understand, that I belonged (Lau 249).

She enjoys her easy inclusion in the Tollington community and it is not until she is a little older that she would realize the underlying racial tensions and realize too, that she does not, in fact, belong. Clifford points out those diasporic women are “caught between patriarchies, ambiguous pasts, and futures.

They connect and disconnect, forget and remember, in complex, strategic ways. The lived experiences of diasporic women thus involve painful difficulty in mediating discrepant Worlds” (Lau 253). These diasporic South Asian Women are also inclined to form their identities in reaction to the culture they have brought from South Asia, either in conformity with it or in rebellion against it. From the contemporary writings of the diasporic South Asian women, it appears that South
Asian women of the diaspora feel the tug of loyalties and confusion of identities until they learn to balance dual-identities or double consciousness, and combine those into certain equilibrium. The study of the novel focuses on the excruciating struggle of growing up in the devastating clash of cultures. It is about the cultural displacement felt by nine year old British-born, Meena, the central character in Syal’s *Anita and Me* (1996) and her desire to be assimilated in the host culture. The seeming cordiality turns into hostility soon, making her realize that an outsider on the periphery cannot occupy the centre stage. This forces her to reinterpret her associations both with host as well as the native culture. Active interaction with the history and culture too is hazardous for the one who has become an outsider to one’s own culture as well.

Meena’s homing desire’ is the desire of all those who have no idea of home or homeland. Far removed from their place of origin, they do not even have the broken images of home. It makes them strangers to their culture to which they fail to belong. In desperation they turn to the host culture for solace but to find hostility and unacceptability ultimately. A stranger ‘there’ remains a stranger ‘here’ as well. The idea gets endorsed making them ‘double strangers’. Anyhow the yearning for a ‘total’ rather than partial belonging remains. How do they give their incomplete selves a sense of completeness by plotting new routes and developing new relationships between past, present and future? Meena’s dilemma is the dilemma of British-born Asians whose divided identities make it difficult for them to locate and place themselves. They do not know when, where and how to relate and belong. There is nothing ‘fixed’ or ‘pre-given’ in identity. As Brah says: “It is constituted within the crucible of the materiality of everyday life; in the everyday stories we tell ourselves individually and collectively” (Brah 183). The ‘stable core’ of the self is no more stable today.
Meena too stands on such a vantage though perilous pedestal from where she can view and compare the two different worlds. She is naive enough not to understand that she cannot adopt and be adopted by the other culture and be a part of it the way an insider like Anita can be. The differences remain submerged in the beginning, drowned for sometime in the climactic period and re-emerging forcefully in the end. In the initial stage the dominant culture is so enticing that the differences can be easily overlooked. The yearning is to follow the other blindly, identify completely, to be like them, to be one of them. All these feelings manifest in Meena’s behaviour in the beginning of the book when the revolt is directed against the way of life that her parents have chosen. Kumar family is the only Indian family settled in an ex-mining village Tollington, which is a constant source of embarrassment to Meena. The living style, food habits, sense of dressing is some of the visible glaring disparities that keep troubling her.

At one level she seems very clear but at another this clarity turns into ambiguity when she gets momentary glimpses of indifference. It is evident on Diwali day. She poignantly notes, “…no one else in the world seemed to care that today was our Christmas” (AM 91). Another incident closely related to it which shocks Meena is her visit to Gurudwara during her early ‘crisis of faith’ when their car starts skidding and she goes out to plead the others to retreat back. She purposely uses “…exaggerated Tollington accent, thus proving” that she “was very much one of them” (AM 97). Despite her best efforts, she fails. The casual remark of an elderly woman, “Bloody Stupid Wog. Stupid Woggy Wog. Stupid” (AM 97), makes the ground slip beneath her feet. It wrenches the frame of her mind. Her whole being is shaken. She remains quiet about it but it weighs very heavily on her mind. She wonders how her parents might have been absorbing such insults without
complaining. She ponders, “...what had happened to me must have happened to papa countless times… I felt ...hurt, angry, confused and horribly powerless because this kind of hatred could not be explained” (AM 98).

Such revelations are shocking for Meena but she still cannot foresee that the cracks formed by such differences and hatred are likely to take the shape of a wider breach in state of crisis. Her innocence doesn’t let her doubt that the world of Anita and her gang of Tollington wenches is but a microcosm of the dominant culture whose power is dependent on the exclusion of the ‘other’. So Meena at this stage as Lopa Patel writes in a review, “...wants nothing more than to be the best friend of local lewd beauty Anita Rutter”. The disapproval warnings of the parents do not stop her from idolizing “the most rambunctious, roughest and the brassiest girl in the neighbourhood” (Singh 165).

The cherished dream of being intimate with Anita comes true as the circumstances favour them. She herself reflects later, “Anita was a bad influence that was official. And I was temporarily motherless and a proven liar and thief. It was decided then a marriage made in heaven” (AM 133). Sam, for whom Meena secretly harbours love, shocks her when he says, “This is our patch. Not some wogs’ handout” (AM 193). Meena feels completely bewildered in this land of strangers. The issue of identity which she thought she had resolved re-emerges. As Kobena Mercer remarks, “Identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty” (Singh 166).

Meena is in such a situation when the dream shatters. But with the shattering comes a painful awareness for Meena that this is not her world, she owes her allegiance to another world. The encounter with the host culture though tragic leads to
a new awakening. The recognition of the limitations and boundaries paradoxically takes her to a higher level of awareness about self, identity and the host culture. The critics like Morely and Robins says, “dynamic view of identity, focusing on the ability… to recompose and redefine… boundaries” (Singh 166), is relevant in the context. It is this realization and recognition that endows Meena which literally means Meen-a fish that has the power and strength to swim to the surface from the whirling motion in which Tollignton, the dying village and its residents are trapped. She is the one who is able to move away from the rut that consumes others. As Bromley says, “Meena successfully navigates the two worlds and is not caught ‘in between cultures, because both are fluid and subject to change, but instead creates a new culture, a third space” (Singh 167). She learns the art of circumventing the indifferent and the unpleasant, like the migratory birds and discover new lands and shores.

The term ‘British Asian’ may fail to recognize individual artistic voices, such as those of British-Asian filmmakers who do not make Asian-themed films. The majority of British-Asian film does for the most part, have Asian themes and share a number of features, including relatively low budgets. Academics and critics often pack films by British-Asian filmmakers into a variety of ‘cultural boxes’. They are defined as part of a distinctive ‘Black’ British cinema, with which they share many cultural references and common beginnings or they are sometimes identified with social-realist British cinema, while writers such as Hanif Kureishi and Ayub Khan Din are generally identified as distinctive British ‘auteurs’.

In the U.K., the term ‘Asian’ commonly describes the ethnicity of peoples originating from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. The term British Asian is controversial, given Britain’s colonial past and the fact than many Asians see themselves as occupying multiple-and changing-cultural identities. The gradual
emergence of British Asian films into the mainstream reflects not only the growing experience and talent of their practitioners, who are concurrently British and Asian but also a gradual reconciliation of British society, which is slowly forgetting its colonial past. Since the end of World War II, major waves of immigration from the Asian subcontinent, the Caribbean, and East and West Africa have taken place, creating, and a considerable racist backlash. Two distinct communities-Asians and African Caribbeans-were melded together through their common experience as racial minorities with in the UK, often living under the threat of poverty and social exclusion.

The diasporic author constantly draws upon two temporalities and two spaces. Exchanging one traditional for another, one culture for another, and one home for another, the writer creates and inscribes ‘alternative worlds’, which vibrant and demanding resist the scene of obliteration. A diasporic writer has no other worlds to live in but the one she creates. She writes with the memories of the imported, a blend of the old and the new, of the real and the ideal. What shapes this fiction, then is the silent dialogue that goes on between the inner voices that keeps on whispering at the writer’s elbow and the imaginary audience—one familiar, yet not quite known. In Bakhtin terms, such a writer’s fictions is shaped mainly by a special kind of dialogic imagination where the writer’s voice is the imported one and the reader’s is the one with those accents and tones the writer is not altogether at home. Fiction then becomes not only a dialogue between the writer and the reader of the same community, but the conversation between representatives of two groups, two places, two beliefs, two histories, and two cultures. It is this kind of relationship that can explain the presence of other languages, and non-English idioms, maxims, and fresh
metaphors. That, accounts for the polyphonic, the alien, the refreshing nature of diasporic fiction.

Recent Indian history is witness to at least four major movements involving Indian migrants: (i) the indentured labour that built for the Empire in South Asia and the West Indies; (ii) the seekers who went mainly to the West in search of security, freedom or identity; (iii) the aspirants who went again to the West in search of opportunities; and (iv) the re-migrants who, for survival had to move from where they had arrived in the first place from India to another ‘haven’ such as UK for Ugandans and USA and Australia for Fijians. The first and the fourth migrations are two connected but historically disjoined Indian Diasporas.

Meera Syal was born in 1963 near Wolverhampton in the West Midlands and was educated at Manchester University where she read English and drama. She co-wrote the script for 'My Sister Wife', a three part BBC television Series, and wrote the film 'Bhaji on the Beach' for channel 4. She co-writes and is a cast member of the popular BBC Television comedy Series 'Goodness Gracious Me' and 'The Kumars at 42'. She also works as a journalist and is a regular contributor to 'The Guardian'. Meera Syal was awarded an MBE in 1997 and won the 'Media personality of the year' award at the commission for Racial Equality's annual 'Race in the Media' awards (2000), as well as the EMMA (BT Ethnic and Multicultural Media Award) for Media Personality of the year in 2001.

Meera's parents both originate from the farmlands of the Punjab, in north-west India. Her father, Surendra Syal, hails from a small village called Lasara. In India it is difficult to trace his ancestry through documents like birth certificates, in the way that one can in the United Kingdom, but instead Indian family records are kept at shrines in the country's many holy cities. It is in the ancient city of Haridwar, on the
riverbanks of the Ganges, that a Hindu priest is responsible for preserving the
genealogy of the Syals, in a book called a Bah. It was in this book that Meera found
that the Syals have been living in Lasara for the past 250 years.

Although the Syals originally came from Lasara, Surendra grew up in 1930s
Lahore, where his father, Tek Chand Syal, had gone in search of better prospects. As
a student at the DAV College in Lahore, Tek Chand became involved in the student
demonstrations against the British. Some of these were peaceful protest but others
were not, and he was forced to disappear temporarily from Lahore in the early 1930s.
In 1936, however, he returned from hiding to begin his career as journalist at Milap,
an Urdu newspaper at the Vanguard of the Indian independence movement.

The struggle for independence from the British was won in 1947, although the
partition of India was a severe price to pay for it. Punjab was carved in two, with one
part of it in the separate State of Pakistan, and the other part in India, and so bore the
brunt of the division. The Syals, like millions of other partition refugees, were forced
to free from their home. Tek Chand decided that Lahore, in Pakistan, was not a safe
place for his Hindu family, and he moved them to Delhi while he stayed behind. For
the next few months, Tek Chand was trapped in Pakistan and could not find anyone
willing to take him across the border. Over in Delhi his family feared he was dead, yet
another victim of partition. Eventually a Muslim horse and cart driver agreed to make
the perilous journey, and Tek Chand made it to India and rejoined his family.
Unfortunately, the driver did not make it back to Pakistan. He was found dead, a
victim of Hindu youths seeking revenge for the murder of one their own.

Meera's mother side of the family displayed rebel roots too. Her grandfather,
Phuman Singh, marched with hundreds of other Sikhs during a struggle against the
British in the village of Jaito in the Punjab. Phuman Singh participated in the 11th
Jatha, which set off from Amritsar in July 1924 and arrived in Jaito in early September, 1924. Up to 20,000 Sikhs were arrested during these marches including Phuman Singh, who spent more than a year in prison. In 1972 he was awarded a freedom fighters pension for his part in the Jaito Morcha. Meera's parents met while studying at college in Delhi in 1950s. They were from different religious backgrounds-Surendra was Hindu, Surinder was a Sikh—but nevertheless, they fell in love. Then for seven years they continued to meet, sometimes at the famous landmarks of Delhi, including India Gate and Lodhi Gardens. When her parents suggested to their daughter that it was time to search for a suitable husband, Surinder confessed she had already found the man she wished to spend the rest of her life with. At first Phuman Singh objected to Surinder's choice of husband, on the basis of his religion, but in time he embraced his son-in-law. Very much in love, Surendra and Surinder married in Delhi in 1958. In 1960, Surendra left India for England to pursue his education in London. His journey to England involved a seventeen day boat trip from Bombay to Europe, followed by a train journey across Italy, Switzerland and France and then a Ferry to Dover. Like other Asian immigrants at the time, he arrived at London's Victoria station with only a minimum amount of money in his pocket. Little did he know that he would make a permanent home in the United Kingdom, and that some forty years later his daughter would be researching his family's history for a television programme?

Meera Syal has been constantly preoccupied with the imaginative portrayal of the intercultural relationship of which she herself is a living example. Her mixed allegiance enables her to view with serenity the challenge of contrasting cultures. She has depicted with discernment the impact that the West has had on the Indian mind during the British regime. She can compare and contrast both the cultures, with
dispassionate objectivity. Her major theme has been the delineation of the cultural clash of the two modes of life, the western and the oriental, and the consequent actuation of the painful process of modernization. The British contact was conductive to the growth of a new angle of vision but sharp political disagreement and cultural pride kept the two apart. The theme of East-West interaction in Syal’s fiction has interpersonal, familial, social, cultural and spiritual dimensions. The beginning of Meera Syal’s second novel, *Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999), one of the three protagonists, Tania, is making a film about the British Asian experience. Her producer Jonathan critiques her with the following: “Well, its victim mentality TV isn’t it? Let’s look at these strange brown people and admire their spunk or pity their struggles. What about the happy stories? What about the Asians who like who they are, who just get on and do it and … live? Yeah?” (LAH 63-64).

In the wake of the rise ‘Asian cool’, the desire to meet the image of a confident, self assured British Asian identity is overwhelming. As the most ‘funny’ British Asian Voice, best known for her roles in the BBC comedy series *Goodness Gracious Me* and *The Kumars at Number 42*, Meera Syal might be seen to play into this demand. Syal’s comedy, rather than a mark of new-found confidence, is instead a device used to challenge the prevailing mood of optimism with a stark warning of the continued difficulties of being not only British Asian, but a British Asian woman especially. History does not repeat itself, but it does sometimes come full circle. The Victorian missionaries tried to take Christianity to the heathen Indians, and the neo-victorian Asians have brought their spirituality back to their old colonial masters. The “Asian values” that the author attempts to wrest from what, to me, seem rather recalcitrant texts are, of course, entirely spurious: ‘Asian’, quite matter-of-factly, is reconfigured as ‘Indian’ (thus smothering a variety of important historical, social,
cultural and political distinctions under a sort of neo-ethnic blanket term), and the texts in question undergo a kind of ‘ethnic cleansing’ that pushes their questioning, ironizing or even satirical engagement with ethnicity our of critical sight. By contrast, practitioners in the field of ‘Asian British literature and culture’ such as Meera Syal have developed rather more critical perspectives on their alleged ‘Asianness’:

Yet the very word ‘Asian’ is profoundly misleading. Meera Syal comes from a Hindu-Punjabi family and her relatives live in Delhi. She has as much in common, religiously, culturally and nationally with a Bangladeshi Muslim as a Devon farmer would have with a Bosnian peasant: in both cases, the only common denominator would be a rough similarity of skin-tone.


As a female writer, Meera Syal has explored this trickiness in manifold ways, and re-negotiations of ethnically shaped identities also form an important feature of Meera Syal’s Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee (1999). The three female protagonists obviously play a major role in the narrative. Marketing of both Syal’s first novel, Anita and Me (1996), and its follow-up, Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee, identifies her with the ‘funny’ public image developed through her television work. The choice of reviews used on the paperback editions of both novels emphasise humour: the original cover to the paperback of Anita promises ‘lorry loads of laughs; the independent review, quoted on the cover of the paperback Ha Ha Hee Hee, says it is ‘funny and sharp’. Such selections obscure a broader concern in these reviews with the serious
issues that Syal’s novel deal with. They are nevertheless representative in the sense that they do capture the prevailing tone of reviews, if not their entireties. Positive emphasis is often made inspite of the acknowledged content of the texts. The best example in terms of Anita is the *Times online review*, which describes a ‘drab’ village setting and protagonist ‘learning to lie, steal and swear’. And yet the reviews open nevertheless with the phrase ‘Syal Jolly coming of-age-story. A parallel is offered in terms of *Ha Ha Hee Hee* by Jennifer Reese’s *The New York Times reviews*, which notes the dilemmas facing the three central characters and yet concludes that the novel is ‘gossipy, funny and thoroughly entertaining’. In such reviews, there is a need to see Syal as funny despite the overwhelming content of her novels.

Gurinder Chadha’s *Bhaji on the Beach* (1993) has reached a wider audience than any other film dealing with British Asian experience. *Bhaji on the Beach* is based almost entirely upon the differences within a small section of an Asian community based in Birmingham, rather than on the difference between the community and the dominant white society. The film is more an exploration of gender issues than those of race, but these are articulated with in a number of set-pieces related to a range of codes shaped by a specific ethnicity and cultural practices. Sex, pleasure, food and family are all subject to transcoding within the film which transfers its cast of characters from a recognisably ‘Asian’ enclave in Birmingham to Blackpool, the quintessentially white, working class English seaside resort, which becomes a metaphorical site for exploring the transformations of ‘Asianness’ brought about by the pressures of migration and inter-generational gender conflicts. All the events take place in the course of a single day which is used to focus, synoptically, on a wide number of ongoing problems which are magnified by this time-space compression. The potential changes brought about by the day and the mode of resolution make the
film a comedy, but the dilemmas posed suggest levels of conflict and tension beyond the comic.

The film establishes a number of symptomatic, if not necessarily representative, themes which are a source of conflict brought about, as initially presented, by female behaviour unlike a number of cultural fictions which treat only the situation of second generation non white immigrants, the film open with a prefigurative scene in which Asha, first generation, ‘hallucinates’ on image of a Hindu Goddess and of herself as a ‘model’ Indian wife serving an ‘ideal’ son, husband and daughter. *Bhaji on the Beach* – a fiction film – raises questions of the politics if representation and was criticized by some British South Asians for not restricting itself to positive images of South Asians. It is explicitly feminist in its approach to its subject matter, offering a series of insights into the lives of a group of South Asian women from the Midlands, who range in age from teenaged girls to elderly ladies. They come together for a day trip to Blackpool organized by the local Asian women’s centre. The film raises issues of white racism and ethnic stereotyping, problems within the South Asian community, including cross – generational conflict and domestic violence as a response to the changing role of women. It also looks at the community’s reaction to interracial relations, in this case a young South Asian woman and a Black man.

*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 sub-continent, to the teenage 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 that 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. A major theme in the film is the changing role of South Asian women who are no longer ready to conform to subordinate roles within the family. While older women are shown to exercise power, it is very much in the form of power behind the throne. The younger generations are no longer willing to settle for this and their challenges to oppressive patriarchal practices produce family tensions and even domestic violence. Yet because these issues are rooted in storylines and characters with which white viewers can empathize, they do not become issues peculiar to South Asians. The social realism of the film is interrupted by the visions of one of the characters, Asha, which vividly express the clash of cultures and her unhappiness at her traditional role and her critical attitude towards those younger women who do not conform to parental and community values.

After considering the subject matter in the major works of Meera Syal in the concept of diasporic identities in which a diasporic person finds herself. This in between situation constitutes the content of forthcoming chapters. Her novels can be read as a journey of self-discovery-an exercise in postcolonial cultural criticism. Through expanding research methologies to recognize cultural variance in behaviour, language and meaning.Cross-cultural psychology seeks to extend, develop, and transform psychology and how it's viewed in a global society. Cross-cultural research not only tests where are people are similar or different, it also highlights limitations in our knowledge as it relates to universal and culture specific theories. Different people with different experiences often see the world in quite divergent viewpoints. This work is endowed with a cross-cultural experience directly and indirectly challenging the reader to understand his or her biases, and pursue and appropriate path to help
others. The literature of Diasporas which is emerging rapidly is the need of the time as it helps to develop cross-cultural understanding.