Chapter IV
Contesting Identities: The Representation of British South Asians in Meera Syal’s Anita and Me and Life Isn’t All Ha Ha Hee Hee,

Writers from the Indian subcontinent settled in Britain usually face the task of expressing their new cultural reality—balancing the demands of the society in which they live and the controls of their Indian heritage. Many of the texts that result from the “in-between” world perspective highlight the negotiation of race and culture in a new setting. The writing of diaspora experience becomes a valuable tool for the acceptance of the new South Asian British subject. This writing also forms part of a process of invalidation of the Orientalist stereotypes that prevail in the Western consciousness. British Black and Asian writers develop new perspectives on Britain based on their roles as insider-outsider. Their readings of the culturally inflected experiences enable them to create new versions of the self along with multiple versions of Britain. These narratives also provide a commentary on the ongoing identity negotiation in diaspora space. The issues of diaspora space raised in British-Asian fiction closely reflect the actual experience of living in a diaspora space. The construction of a national British identity is built on a notion of a racial belonging, on a hegemonic white ethnicity that never speaks its presence. It is said that in Britain you can be either one or the other, black or British, but not both.

Britain, like Australia and the US has traditionally been a country of immigration. In fact, the population of Britain has always been composed of different peoples. The Celts, Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Vikings all came to Britain as the result of various invasions, making the British the most ethnically composite of all European peoples. But in pre-capitalist societies the number of people who moved across different territories— or even significant distances within one geographical area—remained very small, and this usually involved only traders and merchants. Large scale movements of people in search of work are unique to modern capitalism. Immigration as understood today really began in the nineteenth century with the consolidation of unified nation states with recognizable borders. Immigration went hand in hand with the development of the capitalist system and the capitalist state. Based on the British Empire's reaches, the British migrated to all parts of the world, favouring the US, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. Many people settling in Britain, experience racism and discrimination based on difference of colour as well as culture.

Black Women's writing in Britain negotiates a rich and difficult passage through “in-between” identities, histories and forms of expression. In the works of Meera Syal, Zadie Smith, Moniza Alvi, Monica Ali, Ravinder Randhawa, Ruksana Ahmed, Grace Nichols and Jean 'Binta' Breeze, one can find both the tensions and the richness of diaspora existence. Meera Syal's debut semi-autobiographical novel Anita and Me dwells on the life of a Punjabi Indian family in a mining village in the British Midlands. Syal is a second generation Indian migrant and is one of