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RACIAL BIAS IN THE FICTION OF MEERA SYAL: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Racial bias in Black British and British Asian Literature offers the first extended exploration of the cultural impact of the politics of race and antiracism in Britain through focusing on a selection of recent novels by black British and British Asian writers. Meera Syal is carefully read to explore the impacts of antiracism in her fiction. This article focuses on the racial politics in the select fiction of Meera Syal. All the main characters in both the well-known novels *Anita and Me* (1996) and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999) are mainly concerned with racial bias. Meera Syal has brought out the Diasporic aspects such as culture shock, alienation, assimilation, common history, and myth. The novel *Anita and Me* (1996) is believed to be a semi-autobiographical one. Meena is an Indian descendent. She has brought forth the Diasporic consciousness which she faces due to her Indian parents. Her second novel *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999) is a sharply amusing novel about three second-generation friends in London who support each other through struggles of marriage and career until an unexpected betrayal throws their lives into disarray. The work under review presents the difference between experiences of generation migrants. They are subjected to discrimination by the natives of the land they have migrated to. This paper aims to bring out how the immigrants are victimized in a Diasporic land through racial discrimination and cultural indifference.

**Keywords:** Racial, Cultural impact, Diasporic, generation migrants

Racial politics has been deeply rooted within side the institutional fabric of society. The humans of various racial, non-secular, and nationality backgrounds stay collectively within side the equal countrywide society. To devalue and humiliate a man or woman primarily based totally on his/her race, religion, network, and the countrywide foundation is a moot point. This is the motive for sour and unharmonious family members among humans. It is a vital difficulty this is the primary issue of the whole world. This difficulty treated our normal life. Many theories of racism had been offered via way of means of the writers to explain for the foundation and increase of racism in current society. Some famous critics of racism like Gunner Myrdal, W.E.B. Dubois, E. Franklin Frazier, and Robert E. Park have explained the racial relations. Oliver C. Cox developed a theory on racial relations and their relation with the rise of capitalism. Oliver C. Cox argues that

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Racial exploitation and race prejudice developed among Europeans with the rise of capitalism and nationalism, and because of the worldwide ramifications of capitalism, all racial antagonisms can be traced to the policies and attitudes of the leading capitalist people, the white people of Europe and North America (Klarlund: 85)

The racial relationships are based on three stages, social intolerance, racism, and ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is attached to the norms and values of one's culture. We use this tendency to judge and measure all other cultures. Cox believed that social prejudice is most likely as old as a social organization. Cox defines race as "any group of people believed to be and accepted as a race in any given area of ethnic competition" (Klarlund: 86).

The question of the impact that racism has on social relations has preoccupied many sociologists working within a variety of theoretical paradigms. Meera Syal's novels *Anita and Me* and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* are mainly concerned with a globalized and homogeneous London. Interracial connections are inherent in the background of both novels. The main themes of cross-culture incongruities, betrayal, marriage, and marginal patriarchy are common in Syal's novels. The women writers of the Indian Diaspora are the product of two cultures, they are unsure of their status related to mainstream and also concerning their minority group. Culture and its impact on Indian thinking are at odds with Western life and thinking. Meera Syal, a second-generation immigrant born and raised in the United Kingdom, has a natural nationality and talks about the specific asylum and hostile treatment experienced by her first-generation contemporaries. One such Indian literary Diaspora writer. Ultimately, Syal's novel moves towards affirming the value of "traditional" culture for her protagonist but carefully recognizing the limits of its acceptance.

*Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* everything explores aspects of South Asian ideology that can be criticized, especially concerning gender relations, and seeks ways to renegotiate relations with tradition to avoid this oppression. But by the end of her novel, heroines achieve personal and social stability by leveraging traditions and identifying the "Asian" aspects of their diverse heritage. Syal's cultural conservatism is at least as important as her criticism of repression in the field of ethnic division. While the warehouse embodies the changes in social and cultural relationships shaped by the story of immigrants, other sections of the novel show that London's space has changed rapidly from a unified past to recent times. The opening paragraphs offer a metaphor for the transformation of British culture under the influence of foreign immigration. The snow falling on Leyton alters the landscape, but rather than whitening the vista serves instead to darken everything on which it falls. The narration then takes the perspective of an old man, who is surprised when Deepak's wedding procession travels down this street. He is the first of several old white characters who are given a brief outlook on events in *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*. While Enoch Powell's notorious 'Rivers of Blood' speech made much capital of the image of an old white woman tormented by 'wide-grinning piccaninnies'. Syal's old people react differently to the presence of the Asian migrants. The old man who watches the wedding procession invokes Thatcher's famous swamping comments, only to reject them as inappropriate. He says: "It isn't like that, wet and soggy like Hackney Marshes. It's silent and gentle, so gradual that you hardly notice it at all until you look up and see that everything's different. 'Like snow', he said, out loud" (*Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*: 11)

The Asian communities are seen to have provided a new and positive way for the white British to regard the world. This idea that immigration might revitalize and ameliorate British culture is also present in the novel when Tania sees how the communal life practiced by Somalian immigrants in their front gardens has led "their boldness had also encouraged a few white OAPs to venture into the once hallowed space of the front lawn" (*Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*: 272). The impression is of Britons liberated from the stuffiness of their culture and free to explore new and exciting spaces. Cultural diversity is seen here as inherently beneficial to the nation.

Meera Syal's first narrative text *Anita and Me* (1996) in which Meena seems to fit in quite well with the other children and the family are certainly accepted, admired even, by the community. This all begins to fall apart though as ignorance and racism clash as Meena encounters firsthand how hurtful racism and ignorance can be and she struggles to understand the relationships between people and their ideas. This fragile balance breaks when the Punjabi girl examines her tie with the English friend, who has also a racist behavior and finds

her doubts pointed on the face of the other: "In fact, sometimes, when I looked into her eyes, all I could see and cling to was my questioning reflection" (*Anita and Me*: 150)

The analysis of the body in which the skin works is like a crossroads between the self and the other. Being between the inside and the outside, it can be seen as a barrier. The skin shows not only a person's physical condition, but also emotions, feelings, and thoughts. This is because a person can blush, turn pale, or braid his eyebrows. Mina feels the humiliation of the insulting "niger", a very offensive word. She finds it very difficult to tackle the body-to-body-ethnic interrelationships. She says:

I always got told off, but I was beginning not to care. I knew I was a Freak of some kind, too mouthy, clumsy, and scabby to be a real Indian girl, too Indian to be a real tollington Wench, but living in the grey area between all categories felt increasingly like home (*Anita and Me*:149- 150).

Meera Syal's second novel *Life Isn't All Ha ha Hee Hee* (1996), in which all three women characters Tania, Chila, and Sunita have to compromise their Indian background with modern English lifestyle. The hybridity of these characters is revealed in the conflict they have in their family atmosphere, more than in the society they live in. Syal's protagonist, Tania, who can look back on a successful career, shows how important it is to focus on cross-cultural and interracial hybrids. Tired of patriarchal fathers, Tania is shaping her global change and English hypocrisy. Syal's fiction shows racism in the case of Tania, Deepak, and Chila. Her complex personality shows a multicultural self dilemma. Syal's characters are affected by migration, sojourn, settlement, displacement, relocation, alienation and belongingness, cultural crisis, rootlessness, polylingual attitude, and social ostracization. Her works are replete with the images of loss and longing. *Anita and Me* is a semi-autobiographical account of a young girl, growing up in the Midlands in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The protagonist Meena navigates a course between the Punjabi culture of her migrant parents and the white working-class community in which she lives. The Anita of the title is an older girl whom Meena admires as both friend and role model. Anita's increasingly racist attitudes, which mirror the growing tensions in the town as a whole, eventually necessitate a break for Meena and lead to her development of a more productive sense of self: "The place in which I belonged was wherever I stood and there was stopping me simply moving forward and claiming each resting place as home" (Gunning 112).

Roger Bromley describes the novel *Anita and Me* as detailing Meena's "becoming British Asian", suggesting that this is an identity that needs to be constructed" (Bromley: 147), Berthold Schoene-Harwood argues that "the novel traces how Meena can reach a position where the possibly restrictive elements of cultural hybridity are negotiated into a fruitful and liberated identity" (Harwood: 159). Similar issues about the formation of identity are raised in another novel *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, in this later novel they are explored through several different characters. The diffusion of narrative focus from one to many characters might allow for a more complex account of British Asian identities.

The heroines of *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* (1999) belong to the same generation as Meena but, as the novel is set in the late 1990s, are in their mid-thirties. This novel shows a year in the lives of three friends, Chila, Sunita, and Tania. The story begins on the day of Chila's wedding with the successful businessman Deepak, and the first part of the novel is primarily about recording the beginning of their marriage. The relationship between Tania and her white boyfriend Martin is as explored as her first attempt to direct full-length television production. Encouraged by her boss, Tania oversees a documentary about love and marriage among British Asians, and her two friends agree to participate. At the opening party, Tania's film turned out to be a laughingstock about Chila's naivety and Sunita's unsuccessful marriage. When she witnessed a clinch with Deepak, her betrayal is complete. The climax of the novel happens when the shameful Deepak tries to rob Chila's newborn baby, but Tania can't escape the country because she stole and destroyed her passport. The baby is returned, the friends reconcile, and the novel ends with Tania's father's funeral. Sunita and Akash are working to rebuild their marriage, Chila is about to take her baby to India, and Tania is increasingly involved in media projects that attempt to aid Asian people in Britain, rather than just using them for raw material. The setting of this novel is very different from *Anita and Me*.

In the novel, Tania's previews for her film take place in an East End bar that was formally a Victorian workhouse. Syal traces the building's occupants throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century from three generations of Jewish owners into the hands of a Muslim named Imran Wahaab, and then on to: "A young Bengali man who did not look like the entrepreneur he claimed to be-too much gel in the hair, too flashy a car to be decent, but who paid, like all the building's previous owners, in crisp, fresh notes" (Gunning: 113)

With this passage, Syal is a place where the East End changes from part of the 19th century English landscape to the influence of Jewish and Asian migration, and ultimately a self-conscious English dwelling. You can draw how it changes to the Asian community that was born. This embedded story also allows Syal to focus on the lines of continuity that run through the area. The building represents the epitome of a city that has always prospered with change, relying on updates from the next generation of newcomers. In *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*, Syal offers a clear sense of how one might understand the persistence of cultural tradition as playing a vital role in the construction of her heroines' selfhood, but also as providing a necessary ballast for them as they seek to flourish within multicultural Britain. Ethnic identities cannot be simply abandoned or used solely for the acquisition of cultural capital but must be recognized and considered by the individuals and society as a whole within them. Still, Syal's novels ultimately provide a confused version of the ethnic community. The protagonist's generation often shows a hybrid that must retreat to the old sense of belonging, where this fixation begins, or how future generations will show their ethnic self to a seemingly new and fluid identity. Little is thought about what to understand, the predecessor just before that. At the same time, the novel wants to insist on the potential for change and the equality of the basic synchronicity of ethnic culture. Novels written by black British and British Asian writers show how anti-racism shaped the form and content of both British political debate and individual minority identities. .. Multiculturalism, although increasingly challenged in recent years, remains the dominant form of anti-racism in the United Kingdom. Multiculturalism itself is a problematic term with multiple and often contradictory meanings, but it probably remains the only available ideology that takes diversity seriously. The Asian community seems to have provided white British people with a new and positive way to see the world. This idea that immigration might revitalize and ameliorate British culture is also present in the novel when Tania sees how the communal life practiced by Somalian immigrants in their front gardens has led "a few white OAPs to venture into the once hallowed space of the front lawn" (*Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee*: 272). The impression is of Britons liberated from the stuffiness of their culture and free to explore new and exciting spaces. Cultural diversity is seen here as inherently beneficial to the nation.

The central theme of this article is racial issues and aims to show the extent and extent of racially comprehensive justice available in a particular society. South Asian writers show how anti-racism shaped the form and content of both British political debate and individual minority identities. Anti-racism refers to a variety of individual activities, actions, and attitudes that challenge discriminatory practices based on racial or religious differences. Many of these facets have a long history and exist in their present form only because of the decades of struggle that made them possible. Multiculturalism, although increasingly challenged in recent years, remains the dominant form of anti-racism in the United Kingdom. Multiculturalism itself is a tricky term with multiple and often contradictory meanings, but it probably remains the only available ideology that takes diversity seriously. It is valid to question whether this respect for diversity can on its challenge the many material bases and forms of racial discrimination, but few antiracists accept that its ideals could profitably be abandoned altogether. The legacy of anti-racism has influenced British political discourse, and more than that, the types of self-assertion that can now be clearly expressed cannot be ignored. The novel *Anita and Me* and *Life Isn't All Ha Ha Hee Hee* by Meera Syal carries the incidents of racial remarks and violence that a migrant faces in the host land. Immigrants seek to incorporate the culture of the host country to be accepted there. When faced with such an incident, all their efforts will not end. In this way, the novel is a meticulous reproduction of the cultural differences of the adopted nations of the postcolonial era.

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