

Q. Elucidate the diasporic experiences of Indian migrants as portrayed in the novel "Anita and Me".

Ans: Meera Syal can be considered as one of the wonderful woman writers of diaspora. An Indian descendant and a prolific writer, Meera Syal, was born in 1963 near Wolverhampton in the West Midlands to Punjabi parents. This novel "Anita and Me" depicts the experience of the protagonist Meena Kumar, a nine year old girl, through whom the author tries to decipher the perplexity of existence of an Indian Punjabi family in the white society.

Meena's family lives in the midst of the white community. They are the lone Indian Punjabi family in the mining village Tollington. When the novel opens, the narrator and protagonist Meena describes the village. Sandy, a divorcee, who lives on the same street where Meena's family is settled, is found to be accepting them as a whole. After Meena's mother Daljit helps Sandy by lending butter or giving her lift down when she misses her bus, Sandy admits,

"You're so lovely. You know, I never think you as, you know, foreign. You're just like one of us." The comment gives the hint that the Indian family is gradually assimilating into the host society. It also reveals one more aspect that when the host society is benefited by the migrants, there is a chance of getting mingled with them. Divya Girishkumar figures out:

"Her [Syal] works problematize the notion of 'Englishness', positioning diasporic identities as dynamic and fluid." (26). Syal's characters belong to the new generation who are able to view the English world through the English eye even though they are of Indian origin.

Meena's assimilation into the host society becomes easy as she is brought up in there, that is, the mining village Tollington. But the assimilation of Indian elders of Meena or the first generation migrants is not like that of Meena or of the second generation. The way of observing the host land and its culture differs from generation to generation. While Meena likes to prepare pastry with Mrs. Worrall, her mother insists on her learning to cook sabzi or roll out a chapatti.

Meena craves for her identity as a pure British. So, she selects Anita Rutter as her guide and mentor in the host land. She finds Anita to be a disruptive girl in her village. She admires Anita for being so and feels proud to be in her gang. She expects Anita to spend more time with her than she does with the other girls. She adores and is compassionate towards Anita's little sister Tracy for her innocence and affection she has for Anita. But, Meena's intuition alerts her when Anita indulges in vicious practices and, at last, she decides to give up her friendship with Anita. It proves that in spite of her yearning to be a complete British girl, she could not go beyond the ambit of her mother culture. The alarm that rings in her mind is because of her parents' inculcating a sense of ethnicity in her.

As a second generation character, Meena's way of observing the homeland is not as much intimate as that of others. She describes her relatives who are shown by her father through photos. She expresses the word 'litany' and the phrase 'forced to memorise' which illustrate how Meena visualizes her relatives and reveals her feeling of boredom of memorizing them because of her father's compulsion. She has this kind of attitude because she has not met them in person. She realizes their importance and the role that they play in their life through her parents. She hates their relatives because of their intervention in her upbringing. It is also clear that the Indian relatives do not like Meena with her foreign life style or behaviour.

Meena's aunts also comment on her behaviour. It exposes the typical Indian tradition: whether it is extended or nuclear family, relatives play a vital role in the upbringing of an Indian child in a foreign land and it points to the existence of a well-structured society in India.

Syal's description of flashback scenes happening in India brings the country of origin to alive to the mind of Meena who has been ignorant about them. Meena's mother also has nostalgia for her home, a village near Chandigarh, India. The description of the ancestral home presents the ardor of Daljit for her homeland: milking goat, cobra beneath the grasses, Muslim neighbours who offered her family sweetmeats during festivals "to emphasise how the land they shared was more important than the religious difference that would soon tear

the Punjab in two." The reminiscence of her homeland brings out her happiness something which she is not enjoying in the adopted land.

The novel "Anita and Me" presents the facts of the first and second generation migrants in the foreign land. Aspects like the culture shock, alienation, assimilation, common history and myth, formation of ethnic group, longing for home ambience and longing to visit the imagined

ancestral home, maintaining religious beliefs, divide the first and the second generation migrants. The whole novel is narrated through the first person point of view of the protagonist Meena. This narrative technique helps a lot in bringing out the psyche of Meena, who has never visited her home of origin, who imagines her land through the information she has gathered from her elders and longs to visit it and also makes out her notions of India and Indians in Tollington.

So, the novel is compacted with diasporic experiences of Indian migrants and also provides many evidences for proving the continual affiliation with their homeland and its culture of the elders.