

Paradigm Shift in Culture in Meera Syal's *Anita and Me*

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to explore the paradigm shift in culture which is revealed through the characters' psyche in Meera Syal's *Anita and Me*. Basically culture is the set of customs, tradition, values and of knowledge. Culture plays a vital role to mold and shape the lives and views of people. Culture is an essential source of basic education in society. A paradigm is a mental setting from which they think, feel and live. Their paradigm determines what they hold onto, mentally and emotionally. A paradigm shift holds on outdated thought and feelings which is also entirely transformed. This paper talks about the changing psyche of Meena, the protagonist, who hates her native language and later she is impressed and learnt that Punjabi language through other characters. It is a revolutionary change from one way of thinking to another.

Key words: Paradigm Shift, Culture, psyche, language

The term 'paradigm shift' has represented the concept of a major change in thought pattern that is an essential change in personal beliefs, complex systems, replacing the former way of thinking. M. L. Handa develops the concept of a paradigm and identifies the basic component of social paradigm. He addresses the issue of changing paradigms, this process is popularly known as 'paradigm shift'.

Literature represents aspects of the culture. It can be used as a rich resource to develop the ability to communicate properly in alien cultural settings. The relationship between culture, language and literature cannot be exaggerated. The

relationship between culture and language have two main aspects they are; firstly, language is one aspect of culture. Secondly, language and culture are inseparable.

A language is uprooted from its native soil to an alien soil. It is a twice-born language. That language is born again in the sense to carry the weight of new cultural experiences. English is a twice-born language in many countries whereas it is used as a second or third language.

This paper is entitled as "Paradigm Shift in Culture in Meera Syal's *Anita and Me*" and it talks about the paradigm shift in the psyche of the protagonist Meena. She has caught between two cultures that is western and Indian cultures.

Meera Syal is a British novelist who has written three novels. She sets the stage for a psychic struggle in her novels. Her first novel is *Anita and Me* (1996). It is a semi-autobiographical novel. *Anita and Me* is mainly concerned with Meena, daughter of Indian immigrants. The protagonist Meena, a nine years old girl, grows up in England. Her parents are from India. Meena's identity is divided into two halves between English social setting and the Indian family milieu.

This novel portrays the life of a young Indian immigrant girl growing up in the English Midlands. The new environment has appeared strange to the immigrants. Meena's parents have moved to Britain because of the sudden attack in the "dusty Indian village" (9), India-Pakistan partition, 1947.

In Britain, their eyes are filled with tears of comfort as "the sign they had been waiting for, dreaming of, the sign planted in tarmac and emblazoned in triumphant hues of red, blue, and white, the sign that said simply, WELCOME TO BRITAIN" (9).

Meena's parents has come from Punjab to England. Meena's mother Daljit as she has seen Tollington and feels "fields and trees, light and space, and a horizon that welcomed the sky which, on a warm night and through squinted eyes, could almost look something like home" (35). A critic Dayashankar Mishra rightly says, "Diaspora is a movement of people from one or more nation states to another. They migrate to a foreign country and became part of the country for a better life of comfort and happiness" (171). Kumar's family has settled down in Tollington and undergoes the diasporic experience.

However, Daljit suffers much because of the difference in cultures. She is “a simple Punjabi girl suffering from cultural shock, marooned and misplaced in Wolverhampton” (9). Anyway she tries to manage with the new atmosphere. Meena’s parents begins to live their new life in Tollington. Daljit carries her culture to Tollington besides tolerant and accepting herself to the new culture.

Cultural conflicts arise in that migrated country. The garden in front of Meena’s house is different when compared to other gardens. Meena observes that their garden is considered to be an “odd one out in the village” (15) because her mother grew mint, thunia, coriander and lemon verbena etc to garnish their Indian meals. Daljit makes Meena to understand the importance of those those plants “this one thunia... coriander I mean... this lemon verbena, you can make tea from this...” (16). Meena dislikes these herbal plants in her garden. She longs to grow roses and sunflowers like Mr.Topsy.

Meena’s mind is compared to a garden where the seeds of thought can be grown or uprooted like a garden. Some mental paradigms take time to bloom and other mental paradigms are hard to uproot so deep in the ground. Instead of uprooting that mental paradigm, she has reframe it. Her inner thoughts are the medium through which the author explores the other characters. It records the problems and the dilemmas of the characters, their feelings and emotions. The subconscious mind of the characters contribute an experience of depression.

Meena’s father, Kumar works in Tollington with the English people. Daljit works as an infants’ teacher in the adjoining school. She wears sari and without changing her traditional dressings and food habits she lives in the migrant land peacefully. Meena does not know why her parents are different from others. But she gradually gets an answer.

Meena’s Aunties perceive that the English people treat their own children as inhuman. They send their children out of the house at the age of sixteen. If not they must pay the rent to their parents. “They treat their dogs like children, no, better than their children...” ‘They expect their kids to leave home at sixteen, and if they don’t, they ask for rent! Rent from your kids!’ (34) These Aunties has made a

journey from the civilized side of Wolverhampton. They complain to Meena that the immigrant land is not good when it is compared to India.

Anita Rutter's mom Deirdre runs away with a butcher. She has left a note. She does not care about her children. Anita is dead upset and cried. Their interjection makes her mama to look after Anita and Tracey. English culture is exactly different from Indian culture. The English does not care about their children. They can easily leave their children without having any affection. But Indians are not like that.

Meena has not visited India. She said "I knew that my parents had not been back there since before I was born..." (263). Her parents and relatives talk Punjabi when they have a get together at every weekend. It is their secret language. She hates that language because she can't understand that language. But her papa's songs have made her to feel "I could speak in my sleep, in my dreams, evocative of a country I had never known. The songs made me realise that there was a corner of me that would be forever not England" (112). She tries to shift her mind set from negative to positive.

After that she has sung a song about a sultry moon lit night. It was a romantic song. Shaila has appreciated her song thus: "va! She sings Punjabi with a Birmingham accent! Damn cute, really!" (114). Emigrated people from India like Daljit, Kumar, Shaila, and Nanima often speak Punjabi. Meena can't understand the language. This language is an indoor language to them. Meena tries to pick up that language gradually.

And later she has changed her character, influenced by the words of Robert, a new friend in the hospital, he who says "Mind the road!"(293). That simple advice becomes the guiding words to her. Then, she has asked Daljit to bring all her school books to prepare for the eleven - plus, she is also ready to grow her hair long. She writes letter to India and introduces herself as anonymous army of blood relatives. And especially, she is ready to speak the truth. She has suddenly become "the good Indian daughter" (302)

Meena writes a letter to Anita: "Dear Anita, we're moving on Saturday. I'm going to the grammar school..." (328). Meena's says "my parents' hopes for my future, the justification for their departure from India, our possible move out of

Tollington (306). She has changed her concept from English culture to Indian culture. Thus Indian Culture is better than English culture. Cultural different makes Meena to identify and analyses the best Indian culture and language through her findings

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Paradigm shift.

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