1. Delineate the diasporic experience in Meera Syal’s “Anita and Me”.

Ans: Meera Syal’s novel Anita and Me is set in the fictional English village of Tollington in the 1970s. It tells the story of nine-year-old Meena Kumar, the daughter of Indian immigrants. Meena attempts to define her personal identity, marked by her Indian background and the small-town, English society in which she grows up. The diasporic experiences of Indian migrants in the novel Anita and Me are well witnessed. Syal is a British English writer who was born to Punjabi parents. She uses her personal experiences as an Indian descendant in the novel.

The novel depicts the experience of the protagonist Meena through whom the author tries to interpret the perplexity of existence of an Indian Punjabi family in the white society. As she is born and brought up in the foreign land by the Indian family, she is blended with both the ways of life of the host land and the conventions of the homeland. Throughout the novel she remains a young girl characterized with the same innocence that any girl of her age possesses.

Meena‘s family lives in the middle 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. After Meena’s mother Daljit helps her neighbor 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.” It points out 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.

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. 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.

Meena’s mother also has nostalgia for her home, a village near Chandigarh, India. The description of the ancestral home presents the love of Daljit for her homeland. The reminiscences of 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 narrator compares the home land and the host land to picturise the transition of the other Indian female characters to modern or to western as well as the longings of Indian lady Daljit for the home land ambience in host land.

In concluding, it can be said that, Syal has brought out the diasporic aspects such as 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 and so on. Acculturation and assimilation play a vital role while depicting the diasporic experiences. It is brought out through the attires of Indian characters; their food habits also enfold them in their ethnic community.

1. Discuss the themes of the novel, “Anita and me”?

 Ans:

[Quick revise](https://revisionworld.com/quick-revise/9429)

The key themes of the novels are discussed below:

**Friendship**

Different versions of friendship are shown throughout the novel mainly though exploring Meena’s relationships with Anita and Later Robert.

When Meena first gets to know Anita Rutter she believes that they share similar rebellious traits but overtime she sees that Anita will never treats her as an equal and that Anita’s friendships involve domination and exclusion.  Anita’s relationships with her other friends Sherrie and Fat Sally highlight this as she often plays of one friend against the other. Meena comes to terms with the fact that she actually pities Anita as she is a victim of circumstances herself because her mother Deirdre is untrustworthy and ultimately abandons her.

After breaking her leg Meena meets a boy called Robert in hospital who is so ill he stays in his own isolation room. This relationship allows Meena to recognise for the first time what genuine friendship between two peers actually looks like. Meena and Robert become so attuned with each other that they can communicate wordlessly through a window. When Robert dies Meena’s sadness helps her accept that she would never have such strong emotions for Anita.

**Family**

The contrast between Meena’s family the Kumars and Anita’s family the Rutters could not be more different. Meena grows up in a tight-knit, loving family. Anita and her sister are eventually abandoned by their mother.

Meena is often resentful of expectations that she behave like a typical Indian girl and enjoys spending time with Anita because the older girl’s family seemingly allows her more freedom. Over time, Meena becomes aware that her own family’s rules and discipline are an expression of love, providing her with the support she needs to become a successful adult, whereas Anita’s lack of family guidance leaves her on her own and with few prospects. By emphasising the two girls’ divergent paths, Meera Syal highlights the importance that family can have in a person’s future prospects.

**Racism and immigration**

Racism is a key theme in Anita and Me. We see this throughout the novel through the eyes of Meena and her family. Meena becomes aware that some villagers harbour resentment for their working-class lives. Frustrated by a system that keeps them from thriving economically, these people seek scapegoats—which they find in non-white people, including recent immigrants like Meena’s family. She discovers that some residents of Tollington including Sam Lowbridge don’t seem to be aware of the impact that their prejudice can have. The novel stresses that racism is often the result of frustration and ignorance as much as hatred and that such prejudice is no less harmful.

Through talking with her family, Meena discovers that the root causes for immigration lie in the actions of the British Empire. The British colonization of India caused India to experience a variety of social, economic, and political problems, which led people like Meena’s parents to leave India and search of better opportunities in Britain. Some British people’s ignorance of this aspect of history keeps them from understanding that their own nation is at least partially responsible for the immigration of non-whites to Britain. The character of Mr Topsy (Mr Turvey) served in the British army and speaks Punjabi, he calls British rule there “ugly” and “criminal” and is used by Meera Syal to show that an in-depth understanding of history has the potential to play an important role in fighting resentment and racism.

**Culture and belonging**

Although Meena grew up in Tollington in the west midlands she doesn’t feel fully English due to her Indian heritage. The introduction of Meena’s grandmother Nanima greatly influences her desire to know more about her Indian culture and history. Meera Syal’s exploration of the Character of Meena’s background and feeling of hybrid cultures between English and Indian are a key theme in the novel.  The sense of belonging and identity is highlighted as the novel concludes by letting the reader understand a person’s identity is wherever they choose to call home.

*“I now knew I was not a bad girl, a mixed-up girl, a girl with no name or no place. The place in which I belonged was wherever I stood and there was nothing stopping me simply moving forward and claiming each resting place as home.”*