

From Village Tales to Urban Realities: Oral Traditions and Identity in Meera Syal's *Anita and Me*

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Abstract- This study examines *Anita and Me* by Meera Syal through the lens of cultural hybridity and postcolonial theory, focusing on oral traditions, cultural memory, and identity formation in diasporic contexts. Set in the fictional British town of Tollington, the novel follows Meena Kumar, a first-generation Indian immigrant navigating dual identities in 1970s Britain. Syal employs oral storytelling—folktales, family narratives, and communal rituals—as a means of bridging generational and cultural gaps between immigrant parents and their children. These oral traditions preserve cultural heritage while enabling hybrid identity negotiation in shifting diasporic landscapes. The study argues that oral storytelling in *Anita and Me* functions as both a resistance to cultural erasure and a tool for adaptation. By contextualizing Syal's novel within broader migration, memory, and identity discourses, the paper highlights storytelling as a site of cultural negotiation. The novel intertwines rural Indian narratives with urban diasporic realities, emphasizing the persistence of oral traditions in shaping transnational identities. Ultimately, this research underscores the significance of storytelling in maintaining cultural continuity and fostering belonging in a globalized world.

Keywords: Oral traditions, Cultural memory, Identity formation, Migration and memory Transnational identities, Generational divides

INTRODUCTION

Oral traditions have long played a central role in the cultivation of identity and belonging, particularly in communities that have undergone displacement, migration, and cultural transformation. In the context of globalization, where landscapes are fluid and ever-changing, oral traditions function as living archives of cultural memory, preserving histories, beliefs, and worldviews that might otherwise fade away due to industrialization, urbanization, and migration. More than a repository of past knowledge, oral traditions provide a dynamic

framework for shaping individual and collective identities, fostering resilience, and creating a space for marginalized voices to assert their agency.

By engaging with oral storytelling, proverbs, songs, and rituals, communities forge connections between their ancestral past and the realities of their contemporary existence. This act of cultural transmission serves as a bridge between generations, reinforcing familial and communal ties while also equipping individuals with the emotional resilience necessary to navigate the challenges of cultural displacement. Oral traditions ensure that diverse perspectives remain present within a collective memory, preventing the homogenization of experiences often imposed by dominant narratives. Through this process, cultures not only maintain their distinctiveness but also evolve in response to new social and cultural conditions. The adaptability of oral traditions allows them to integrate new experiences while still preserving fundamental values, making them indispensable tools in identity formation and negotiation.

In a rapidly globalizing world, where borders are increasingly porous and cultural interactions more frequent, the significance of oral traditions becomes even more pronounced. The transmission of knowledge and values through oral means fosters a sense of community cohesion, ensuring that members retain a sense of rootedness even when faced with external influences that threaten cultural dilution. For diasporic communities in particular, oral traditions act as lifelines that tether individuals to their heritage, providing an emotional and intellectual link to their origins. Stories, myths, and legends function as cultural blueprints, guiding individuals in understanding their identity and the values that define their community. This is

especially vital for second- and third-generation immigrants, who may feel a disconnect from their ancestral roots due to the pressures of assimilation.

Oral traditions also facilitate the negotiation of hybrid identities, allowing individuals to navigate the complexities of cultural duality. For instance, a child of immigrant parents raised in a Western nation might struggle with reconciling the traditions of their heritage with the expectations of their host society. Oral storytelling provides a means through which this negotiation can occur, enabling individuals to interpret and reinterpret cultural meanings in ways that resonate with their lived experiences. Through stories passed down by elders, individuals learn the histories and struggles of their ancestors, internalizing lessons that help them navigate their own identities in contemporary contexts. In this way, oral traditions do not merely serve as nostalgic recollections of the past but as evolving mechanisms for identity formation that are continually redefined with each retelling.

Additionally, oral traditions function as a counterforce to cultural erasure, particularly for communities that have faced colonization, forced migration, or systemic marginalization. Historically, dominant cultures have attempted to overwrite indigenous and diasporic narratives by privileging written documentation over oral transmission. This has led to the perception that written history is more legitimate, while oral histories are often dismissed as unreliable or anecdotal. However, scholars such as Walter Ong, in *Orality and Literacy* (1982), argue that oral traditions offer a dynamic and interactive form of knowledge transmission that is no less valid than written texts. Unlike static written records, oral traditions are adaptable, capable of incorporating new information while preserving core cultural values. This fluidity ensures their survival across generations, even in the face of efforts to suppress them.

Moreover, oral traditions serve as a means of resisting hegemonic narratives that seek to homogenize diverse cultural expressions. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) highlights how colonial powers have historically constructed distorted representations of non-Western cultures to justify their domination. In response, oral storytelling emerges as a powerful tool for reclaiming agency, allowing communities to tell their own stories on

their own terms. By centering indigenous and diasporic perspectives, oral traditions challenge the erasure imposed by colonial histories and affirm the richness of cultural diversity.

In literary contexts, many postcolonial authors have integrated oral storytelling techniques into their written works as a means of preserving indigenous knowledge systems and resisting cultural erasure. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, in *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986), underscores the importance of language and oral traditions in the decolonization process. By incorporating oral narratives into literature, writers construct hybrid storytelling forms that disrupt Western literary conventions and validate indigenous epistemologies. This blending of oral and written traditions demonstrates the enduring significance of oral storytelling as both a cultural and political act.

The role of oral traditions in shaping identity is particularly evident in Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (1996), which explores the experiences of Meena Kumar, a first-generation British Indian girl growing up in the 1970s. Throughout the novel, oral traditions function as a means of cultural transmission, helping Meena navigate the complexities of cultural hybridity and assimilation. The stories told by her mother and grandmother provide her with a sense of continuity, connecting her to her Indian heritage while also helping her make sense of her British upbringing. These narratives serve not only as cultural anchors but also as tools for negotiating identity in a multicultural society.

In *Anita and Me*, oral traditions also act as instruments of resistance against cultural erasure. Meena's struggles with racial and cultural identity are reflected in her attempts to reconcile the oral narratives of her heritage with the lived experiences of growing up in Britain. The novel illustrates how oral traditions not only preserve cultural memory but also serve as mechanisms for negotiating power dynamics and asserting agency. By engaging with oral storytelling, Meena is able to carve out a hybrid identity that encompasses both her Indian and British influences, rather than being forced to choose between them.

The adaptability of oral traditions is a key factor in their resilience. Unlike written texts, which are fixed

once recorded, oral narratives are fluid and responsive to contemporary realities. This flexibility ensures their continued relevance, allowing them to incorporate new experiences and perspectives while maintaining core cultural values. In the digital age, oral traditions have found new platforms for expression, from spoken word performances to podcasts and social media storytelling. These modern adaptations demonstrate that oral traditions are not relics of the past but living, evolving forms of cultural expression that remain essential in shaping identity. Oral traditions play a fundamental role in identity formation, cultural preservation, and resistance against dominant narratives. They provide a means of transmitting knowledge, reinforcing communal bonds, and challenging hegemonic discourses that seek to marginalize non-Western perspectives. As globalization continues to reshape cultural landscapes, oral storytelling remains a vital tool for ensuring that diverse voices and histories are not only preserved but actively engaged with and adapted for future generations. The endurance of oral traditions speaks to their power as both cultural anchors and instruments of resilience, offering individuals and communities a means of asserting their identities in an ever-changing world.

ORAL TRADITIONS AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY

The role of oral traditions in preserving cultural memory is particularly significant for diasporic communities, whose histories are often marked by colonialism, migration, and displacement. These communities frequently experience cultural fragmentation and identity struggles as they navigate between their ancestral heritage and the socio-cultural realities of their host countries. Oral traditions serve as a vital link in maintaining continuity, fostering a shared sense of belonging, and ensuring that historical narratives are not lost in the process of assimilation. As Walter Ong (1982) suggests in his seminal work *Orality and Literacy*, oral traditions represent a mode of knowledge transmission that is communal, interactive, and deeply embedded in social practice. Unlike written texts, which are static and fixed, oral traditions evolve through performance and reinterpretation, allowing them to remain relevant across generations. The performative nature of oral traditions—whether through storytelling, poetry, songs, or rituals—

ensures that knowledge is not only preserved but also adapted to new social realities. This continuous evolution allows diasporic individuals to renegotiate their identities in ways that integrate both historical consciousness and contemporary lived experiences.

Oral traditions also act as counter-narratives to dominant historical discourses. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) posits that colonial powers have historically used textual representations to construct a monolithic, often reductive image of colonized people. Such representations, embedded in colonial archives, often stripped indigenous and diasporic communities of their agency, portraying them as passive subjects rather than active participants in history. In response, oral storytelling becomes an act of resistance, enabling marginalized groups to reclaim their histories and assert their perspectives. Through oral traditions, communities can challenge hegemonic narratives that seek to erase or misrepresent their experiences. By preserving stories that have been overlooked or deliberately suppressed, oral traditions serve as powerful tools of cultural survival. The narratives passed down through generations provide alternative histories that counteract colonial narratives, highlighting resilience, adaptation, and agency. Moreover, oral traditions empower communities by offering an inclusive, participatory space where multiple voices can coexist, rather than being confined to rigid, monolithic interpretations of history. The very act of storytelling and cultural transmission ensures that marginalized voices retain a stake in shaping their collective memory, resisting both cultural homogenization and historical amnesia.

This is particularly evident in the postcolonial literary landscape, where authors integrate oral storytelling techniques into written narratives as a means of preserving indigenous knowledge systems and resisting cultural erasure. Many postcolonial writers recognize that written literature alone cannot fully encapsulate the depth and dynamism of oral traditions. Consequently, they incorporate elements such as folktales, myths, and spoken rhythms into their narratives to bridge the gap between oral and literate cultures. The oral-literate continuum explored by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) in *Decolonizing the Mind* underscores the importance of language and oral traditions in the process of decolonization. Ngũgĩ argues that colonialism not only subjugated people through political and

economic domination but also through linguistic imperialism, erasing indigenous languages and their associated oral traditions. He advocates for the revitalization of indigenous languages in literature, emphasizing the necessity of reclaiming oral storytelling as a means of cultural and intellectual resistance. By embedding oral traditions in literature, writers construct hybrid forms of storytelling that challenge the primacy of Western literary norms and assert the legitimacy of indigenous epistemologies. These hybrid forms not only preserve traditional narratives but also adapt them to contemporary contexts, ensuring that they remain relevant for future generations. The intersection of oral and written traditions creates a literary space where cultural memory is both conserved and reinterpreted, allowing for a more fluid and inclusive understanding of identity. Oral traditions are far more than just a means of cultural preservation; they are dynamic, adaptive, and integral to the negotiation of identity in diasporic and postcolonial contexts. They challenge dominant historical narratives, foster community resilience, and serve as tools for cultural and intellectual decolonization. Through oral storytelling, communities assert their agency, sustain their heritage, and ensure that their voices remain part of the global discourse on history and identity.

MEERA SYAL'S *ANITA AND ME*: A CASE STUDY IN ORAL TRADITIONS AND IDENTITY NEGOTIATION

Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (1996) offers a compelling exploration of the role of oral traditions in shaping identity, particularly within diasporic communities. The novel follows Meena Kumar, a first-generation British Indian girl growing up in the 1970s, as she grapples with the complexities of cultural hybridity, assimilation, and belonging. Oral traditions play a crucial role in Meena's navigation of identity, providing both a link to her Indian heritage and a means of understanding her place in British society. Through folktales, familial storytelling, and communal rituals, Meena connects with her cultural roots while simultaneously negotiating the pressures of assimilation. These oral narratives do not merely function as passive relics of the past; rather, they are active, evolving tools that help Meena make sense of her lived reality. By listening to and engaging with oral traditions, she develops a dual perspective that enables her to

navigate the cultural binaries imposed upon her. One of the most significant ways in which oral traditions shape Meena's experience is through the stories told by her mother and grandmother. These stories function as repositories of cultural knowledge, offering moral lessons, historical insights, and emotional guidance. For Meena, these narratives serve as an alternative epistemology that counters the dominant cultural narratives she encounters in school and mainstream British society. As Walter Ong (1982) suggests in *Orality and Literacy*, oral traditions represent a form of knowledge transmission that is communal, interactive, and deeply embedded in social practice. Unlike written texts, which are static and fixed, oral traditions evolve through performance and reinterpretation, allowing them to remain relevant across generations. Through this dynamic process, Meena internalizes cultural values and develops a sense of belonging that transcends geographical and generational gaps.

Furthermore, oral traditions in *Anita and Me* act as instruments of resistance against cultural erasure. Meena's struggles with racial and cultural identity are mirrored in her attempts to reconcile the oral narratives of her heritage with the lived experiences of growing up in Britain. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) posits that colonial powers have historically used textual representations to construct a monolithic, often reductive image of colonized people. In response, oral storytelling becomes an act of resistance, enabling marginalized groups to reclaim their histories and assert their perspectives. In *Anita and Me*, the storytelling practices of Meena's family counteract the dominant narratives imposed by colonial histories and mainstream British culture, offering alternative versions of history and identity that empower diasporic individuals. The novel also illustrates how oral traditions serve as a means of negotiating power dynamics and asserting agency. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) in *Decolonizing the Mind* underscores the importance of language and oral traditions in the process of decolonization. By embedding oral traditions in literature, writers construct hybrid forms of storytelling that challenge the primacy of Western literary norms and assert the legitimacy of indigenous epistemologies. Similarly, in *Anita and Me*, Meena's engagement with oral traditions allows her to contest the dominant British narratives that seek to assimilate and homogenize ethnic minorities. Her negotiation of identity through storytelling

reflects a broader struggle within diasporic communities to preserve cultural distinctiveness while adapting to new socio-political environments.

Moreover, oral traditions in *Anita and Me* function as an intergenerational bridge, fostering connections between Meena and the older members of her family. Her interactions with her grandmother, in particular, highlight the transmission of cultural values through storytelling. This oral exchange not only strengthens familial bonds but also provides Meena with a sense of historical continuity, allowing her to understand her present struggles within the broader context of migration and colonial history. As Stuart Hall (1990) discusses in *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, identity is not fixed but rather fluid, shaped by historical and cultural contexts. Meena's engagement with oral traditions exemplifies this fluidity, as she constructs an identity that accommodates both her Indian heritage and her British upbringing.

In addition to familial storytelling, communal oral traditions also play a vital role in *Anita and Me*. Festivals, religious ceremonies, and social gatherings serve as spaces where oral narratives are shared and reinforced. These communal rituals help sustain cultural memory and create a sense of belonging among diasporic individuals. By participating in these traditions, Meena gains insight into the collective experiences of her community, which, in turn, informs her understanding of identity and resilience. The performative aspect of oral traditions—songs, prayers, and folktales—ensures that cultural narratives remain vibrant and adaptable, capable of addressing contemporary challenges faced by diasporic communities. Additionally, oral traditions in the novel serve as a counterbalance to the alienation that Meena experiences in British society. As she struggles with racial discrimination and cultural marginalization, the oral narratives of her heritage offer her an alternative framework for understanding herself and her place in the world. Homi Bhabha's concept of the 'third space' (1994) is particularly relevant here, as it highlights the liminal space occupied by diasporic individuals who navigate between cultures. Meena's engagement with oral traditions allows her to inhabit this 'third space,' where cultural hybridity becomes a source of strength rather than conflict. Through storytelling, she constructs a nuanced identity that resists binary categorizations and embraces multiplicity.

Moreover, *Anita and Me* demonstrates how oral traditions evolve in diasporic contexts, adapting to new environments while retaining core cultural values. The narratives Meena inherits from her family are not static; they are reshaped through her lived experiences and reinterpretations. This dynamic process reflects the adaptability of oral traditions, which continue to thrive even in the face of displacement and cultural change. The novel, therefore, highlights the resilience of diasporic communities in maintaining their cultural heritage through storytelling. Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* exemplifies the profound impact of oral traditions on identity negotiation within diasporic communities. Through familial storytelling, communal rituals, and performative oral traditions, Meena Kumar navigates the complexities of cultural hybridity, assimilation, and belonging. These oral narratives not only preserve cultural memory but also serve as instruments of resistance, agency, and intergenerational connection. By embedding oral traditions within her novel, Syal underscores their enduring significance in shaping diasporic identities and challenging hegemonic narratives. In doing so, *Anita and Me* contributes to the broader discourse on the politics of memory, cultural resilience, and the decolonization of identity in postcolonial literature.

ORAL TRADITIONS AS A FORM OF RESISTANCE

The use of oral storytelling as a form of resistance aligns with Said's concept of counter-narratives. In *Orientalism*, Said argues that the West has historically imposed its own narratives onto colonized subjects, often distorting or erasing indigenous perspectives. Oral traditions disrupt this erasure by centering the voices and experiences of marginalized communities. In *Anita and Me*, Meena's embrace of oral traditions allows her to resist the pressures of assimilation and assert a hybrid identity. The folktales and family stories she inherits become tools for making sense of her cultural position, challenging dominant narratives that seek to define her in singular terms. This act of storytelling is not merely a nostalgic longing for the past but a dynamic means of constructing a future in which multiple identities can coexist. Moreover, oral traditions foster intergenerational solidarity. The act of storytelling creates a sense of continuity between past and present, reinforcing familial bonds and communal ties. This is particularly significant

for diasporic communities, where the transmission of cultural knowledge is often disrupted by migration and assimilation pressures. By preserving and adapting oral traditions, communities maintain a sense of belonging and resist cultural fragmentation. Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* (1996) offers a compelling exploration of the role of oral traditions in shaping identity, particularly within diasporic communities. The novel follows Meena Kumar, a first-generation British Indian girl growing up in the 1970s, as she grapples with the complexities of cultural hybridity, assimilation, and belonging.

Oral traditions play a crucial role in Meena's navigation of identity, providing both a link to her Indian heritage and a means of understanding her place in British society. Through folktales, familial storytelling, and communal rituals, Meena connects with her cultural roots while simultaneously negotiating the pressures of assimilation. These oral narratives do not merely function as passive relics of the past; rather, they are active, evolving tools that help Meena make sense of her lived reality. By engaging with oral traditions, she develops a dual perspective that enables her to navigate the cultural binaries imposed upon her. One of the most significant ways in which oral traditions shape Meena's experience is through the stories told by her mother and grandmother. These stories function as repositories of cultural knowledge, offering moral lessons, historical insights, and emotional guidance. For Meena, these narratives serve as an alternative epistemology that counters the dominant cultural narratives she encounters in school and mainstream British society. As Walter Ong (1982) suggests in *Orality and Literacy*, oral traditions represent a form of knowledge transmission that is communal, interactive, and deeply embedded in social practice. Unlike written texts, which are static and fixed, oral traditions evolve through performance and reinterpretation, allowing them to remain relevant across generations. Through this dynamic process, Meena internalizes cultural values and develops a sense of belonging that transcends geographical and generational gaps. Furthermore, oral traditions in *Anita and Me* act as instruments of resistance against cultural erasure. Meena's struggles with racial and cultural identity are mirrored in her attempts to reconcile the oral narratives of her heritage with the lived experiences of growing up in Britain. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) posits that colonial

powers have historically used textual representations to construct a monolithic, often reductive image of colonized people. In response, oral storytelling becomes an act of resistance, enabling marginalized groups to reclaim their histories and assert their perspectives. In *Anita and Me*, the storytelling practices of Meena's family counteract the dominant narratives imposed by colonial histories and mainstream British culture, offering alternative versions of history and identity that empower diasporic individuals. The novel also illustrates how oral traditions serve as a means of negotiating power dynamics and asserting agency. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) in *Decolonizing the Mind* underscores the importance of language and oral traditions in the process of decolonization. By embedding oral traditions in literature, writers construct hybrid forms of storytelling that challenge the primacy of Western literary norms and assert the legitimacy of indigenous epistemologies. Similarly, in *Anita and Me*, Meena's engagement with oral traditions allows her to contest the dominant British narratives that seek to assimilate and homogenize ethnic minorities. Her negotiation of identity through storytelling reflects a broader struggle within diasporic communities to preserve cultural distinctiveness while adapting to new socio-political environments. Moreover, oral traditions in *Anita and Me* function as an intergenerational bridge, fostering connections between Meena and the older members of her family. Her interactions with her grandmother, in particular, highlight the transmission of cultural values through storytelling. This oral exchange not only strengthens familial bonds but also provides Meena with a sense of historical continuity, allowing her to understand her present struggles within the broader context of migration and colonial history. As Stuart Hall (1990) discusses in *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, identity is not fixed but rather fluid, shaped by historical and cultural contexts. Meena's engagement with oral traditions exemplifies this fluidity, as she constructs an identity that accommodates both her Indian heritage and her British upbringing. In addition to familial storytelling, communal oral traditions also play a vital role in *Anita and Me*. Festivals, religious ceremonies, and social gatherings serve as spaces where oral narratives are shared and reinforced. These communal rituals help sustain cultural memory and create a sense of belonging among diasporic individuals. By participating in these

traditions, Meena gains insight into the collective experiences of her community, which, in turn, informs her understanding of identity and resilience. The performative aspect of oral traditions—songs, prayers, and folktales—ensures that cultural narratives remain vibrant and adaptable, capable of addressing contemporary challenges faced by diasporic communities. Additionally, oral traditions in the novel serve as a counterbalance to the alienation that Meena experiences in British society. As she struggles with racial discrimination and cultural marginalization, the oral narratives of her heritage offer her an alternative framework for understanding herself and her place in the world. Homi Bhabha's concept of the 'third space' (1994) is particularly relevant here, as it highlights the liminal space occupied by diasporic individuals who navigate between cultures. Meena's engagement with oral traditions allows her to inhabit this 'third space,' where cultural hybridity becomes a source of strength rather than conflict. Through storytelling, she constructs a nuanced identity that resists binary categorizations and embraces multiplicity. Moreover, Anita and Me demonstrates how oral traditions evolve in diasporic contexts, adapting to new environments while retaining core cultural values. The narratives Meena inherits from her family are not static; they are reshaped through her lived experiences and reinterpretations. This dynamic process reflects the adaptability of oral traditions, which continue to thrive even in the face of displacement and cultural change. The novel, therefore, highlights the resilience of diasporic communities in maintaining their cultural heritage through storytelling. Meera Syal's *Anita and Me* exemplifies the profound impact of oral traditions on identity negotiation within diasporic communities. These oral narratives not only preserve cultural memory but also serve as instruments of resistance, agency, and intergenerational connection. By embedding oral traditions within her novel, Syal underscores their enduring significance in shaping diasporic identities and challenging hegemonic narratives, contributing to the broader discourse on the politics of memory, cultural resilience, and the decolonization of identity in postcolonial literature.

THE FLUIDITY AND ADAPTABILITY OF ORAL TRADITIONS

One of the most remarkable aspects of oral traditions is their ability to adapt to changing circumstances.

Unlike written texts, which are fixed and unalterable once published, oral narratives are fluid and responsive to contemporary realities. This adaptability ensures their continued relevance, allowing them to incorporate new experiences and perspectives while maintaining core cultural values. The ability of oral traditions to evolve is crucial in preserving cultural identity, particularly in diasporic contexts where individuals navigate multiple cultural influences simultaneously.

In the context of globalization, oral traditions are not static relics of the past but living, evolving entities that interact with new cultural influences. The fusion of oral traditions with contemporary storytelling methods—such as digital media, spoken word poetry, and theatrical performances—demonstrates their resilience and capacity for reinvention. Through these modern adaptations, oral traditions continue to function as a means of cultural transmission, reinforcing communal identity and resisting cultural homogenization. Digital platforms, in particular, have played a significant role in revitalizing oral storytelling, enabling diasporic communities to maintain connections with their heritage despite physical displacement. For example, in *Anita and Me*, Syal weaves elements of traditional Indian storytelling into a narrative that is distinctly British in its setting and themes. This hybridity reflects the lived reality of diasporic communities, where cultural identities are constantly being negotiated and redefined. The novel's protagonist, Meena, grows up hearing stories from her mother and grandmother—narratives that serve as a bridge between her Indian heritage and her British upbringing. By integrating oral traditions into her novel, Syal highlights their enduring significance in shaping identity and fostering cultural continuity.

Furthermore, oral traditions act as a form of resistance against cultural erasure. Within diasporic communities, dominant cultural narratives often attempt to assimilate or marginalize minority voices. Oral traditions provide a counter-narrative, offering an alternative history that resists hegemonic discourse. By retelling folktales, myths, and personal stories, diasporic individuals assert their cultural presence and reaffirm their heritage. This act of storytelling is not merely about preserving the past but about reclaiming agency in the present and shaping future narratives. Additionally, oral

traditions foster intergenerational dialogue, ensuring that cultural knowledge is passed down and remains relevant across generations. In *Anita and Me*, Meena's relationship with her elders is strengthened through storytelling, which becomes a tool for understanding her identity and navigating the challenges of growing up in a predominantly white British society. These stories provide her with alternative ways of seeing the world, challenging the limited representations of South Asian identity she encounters in mainstream British culture.

The intersection of oral traditions with contemporary media further reinforces their importance. The rise of South Asian spoken word poets, digital storytelling platforms, and community-led storytelling projects has revitalized oral traditions in the diaspora. These modern adaptations maintain the core function of oral narratives—providing cultural affirmation, fostering solidarity, and resisting assimilation—while making them accessible to new audiences. For example, online platforms such as YouTube and podcasts have enabled diasporic voices to reach wider audiences, ensuring that their stories are heard and validated. Moreover, oral traditions contribute to collective memory, shaping how communities remember and interpret their histories. In diasporic literature, memory plays a crucial role in defining identity. The retelling of ancestral stories allows individuals to establish a sense of belonging and continuity despite geographical and temporal distances. This connection to the past, mediated through oral traditions, reinforces cultural pride and counters feelings of alienation in foreign cultural settings. Oral traditions are dynamic, evolving, and deeply embedded in the politics of identity and memory. In diasporic narratives like *Anita and Me*, they function as tools for cultural preservation, resistance, and self-definition. Through storytelling, individuals negotiate their hybrid identities, challenge dominant cultural discourses, and forge connections with their heritage. As globalization continues to reshape cultural landscapes, the adaptability of oral traditions ensures their ongoing relevance in shaping identities and resisting cultural erasure.

CONCLUSION

Oral traditions remain a vital force in preserving cultural heritage, shaping identities, and resisting hegemonic narratives. As demonstrated in *Anita and*

Me, storytelling functions not only as a bridge between generations but also as a mechanism for negotiating cultural hybridity. By engaging with the folktales and familial narratives passed down to her, Meena Kumar reclaims a sense of belonging, illustrating how oral traditions empower individuals to assert their identities within diasporic spaces. In the face of globalization, oral storytelling is not a static remnant of the past but a dynamic and evolving practice that continues to adapt to contemporary realities. Its fluidity allows communities to incorporate new perspectives while safeguarding core cultural values, ensuring continuity in an ever-changing world. Furthermore, oral traditions act as instruments of resistance against cultural erasure. By countering dominant narratives that marginalize or misrepresent minority voices, they provide a platform for self-representation and agency. Through storytelling, communities reinforce solidarity, sustain intergenerational connections, and challenge imposed identities.

As cultures become increasingly interconnected, the importance of oral traditions grows even stronger. They serve as both a repository of collective memory and a catalyst for cultural transformation, fostering resilience and adaptability. By embracing and sustaining these traditions, individuals and communities affirm their histories, reclaim their narratives, and ensure that their voices continue to resonate across time and space.

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