

## Religious Hybridity of Asian Diaspora: A Postcolonial Criticism on *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *Anita and Me*

### Hibriditas Agama Diaspora Asia: Kritik Poskolonial Terhadap Novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* dan *Anita and Me*

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#### Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji negosiasi agama Islam dan Hindu yang dipraktikkan oleh diaspora Asia di Inggris yang mengakibatkan hibriditas agama sebagaimana direpresentasikan dalam novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* karya Hanif Kureishi dan *Anita and Me* karya Meera Syal. Berbagai kajian tentang kedua novel tersebut sebelumnya tidak terfokus pada kajian hibriditas agama, sehingga artikel ini menawarkan kajian yang berbeda, yaitu pada bagaimana para tokoh diaspora menegosiasikan identitas agama mereka. Penelitian ini tergolong deskriptif kualitatif yang pengumpulan datanya dilakukan melalui studi dokumen dari novel dan kemudian dianalisis melalui teknik content analysis dengan teori hibriditas budaya. Hasil temuan menunjukkan bahwa diaspora Asia di Inggris memiliki praktik beragama yang ambigu. Di satu sisi mereka masih berusaha mempraktikkan agama Islam dan juga Hindu, namun di sisi lain mereka juga berusaha untuk menegosiasikan keyakinannya dengan agama, kondisi sosial, budaya masyarakat Inggris.

Keywords: fiksi diaspora Asia Inggris, hibriditas budaya, Hindu, Islam

#### Abstract

This article investigated the negotiation of Islamic and Hindu beliefs held by South Asian immigrants in British society, which resulted in religious hybridity as depicted in two diasporic fictions, *The Buddha of Suburbia* by Hanif Kureishi and *Anita and Me* by Meera Syal. This was a qualitative study. Data was collected through document studies of the two novels. The data were then analyzed using content analysis techniques in conjunction with cultural hybridity theory. The findings indicated that the religious practices of the British Asian diaspora were ambiguous. On the one hand, they continued to practice Islam and Hinduism, while on the other, they attempted to reconcile their religious beliefs with the religious, social, and cultural aspects of British society.

Kata kunci: Asian British fiction, cultural hybridity, Hindu, Islam

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### 1. Introduction

This essay examines the negotiation of Islamic and Hindu beliefs held by South Asian immigrants in British society which brings about hybridity as represented in two diasporic fictions, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) by Hanif Kureishi and *Anita and Me* (1997) by Meera Syal. Both authors are well-known contemporary British Asian writers who are familiar with the Islamic and Hindu religions. Kureishi's father is Pakistani who follows

Islamic values and Syal's parents have Hindu religious background. They represent the members of South Asian diasporic communities in Britain and translate Western culture into South Asian communities in Britain and Eastern countries. According to Rananshiha, Kureishi and Syal aim to discuss colonialism's legacy and how it affects immigrants and their descendants in modern-day Britain (2007: 221). White Britons and members of the Asian diaspora, who have different religious backgrounds, bring about religious negotiation in British society.

The issues of migration, diaspora, cultural hybridity and identity, which are interrelated, have become the prominent concerns of Hanif Kureishi and Meera Syal, both well-known contemporary British Asian writers. In their novels, the mutual as well as conflicting relationships between the white Britons and Indian diaspora in postcolonial British society are accentuated. Ranasinha (2007: 221) asserts that both Kureishi and Syal intend to address the legacy of colonialism, and its effects on immigrants and their descendants in contemporary Britain. One obvious impact of the British Empire, for instance, is reflected in the migration of South Asians and their subsequent lives in post-imperial Britain. Familiar with Indian diasporic communities in Britain, Kureishi and Syal profoundly depict the negotiation of British and Indian cultures as well as identities in great detail. Gilbert (2001: 190) argues that the portrayal of British Asian life in British Asian fiction contributes to cultural production in the United Kingdom. This contribution, of course, compels a redefinition of identity in which the notions of purity and racial hierarchy are called into question.

South Asian Anglophone literary works in Britain have been influential and widely recognized. Their contributions to the development of British contemporary and postcolonial literatures are very significant. There are a lot of famous authors of postcolonial fiction who are South Asian decent, such as V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi, and Meera Syal, to name a few. These well-known authors render the empowerment of ethnic minorities in Britain through their works and activities. The historical experiences of colonization and decolonization, as well as of migration, have strongly inspired those authors. According to Boehmer (2005: 227) British Asian writers work within the precincts of the Western metropolis while at the same time retaining thematic and/or political connections with a national, ethnic, or regional background. This claim is completely plausible since those writers depict how Eastern and Western cultures negotiate each other within diasporic and postcolonial communities. Moreover, the portrayal of the amalgamation of cultural values

grounded both in the Western metropolis and periphery clearly becomes the herald of cultural hybridity.

In postcolonial, literary, and cultural studies, the concept of hybridity has been extensively debated. It was initially used to describe the combination of two species. Later, the term would also refer to the mixture of individuals of various races (Young, 1995). As the postcolonial concept of hybridity became intertwined with the negotiation and amalgamation of distinct cultures with multifaceted identities, postcolonial studies scholars began to use the term "cultural hybridity." Because, as Weedon (2004: 73) asserts, "our culture shapes and determines our identities," it is impossible to separate the notions of cultural hybridity from identity issues. This perspective is plausible because individuals frequently consider their cultural roots when constructing their identities. If cultures are combined, identities will be hybrid and more malleable.

Edward Said embraces the theory of cultural hybridity and asserts that cultural forms are hybrid, mixed, and impure (1994: 14). Indeed, Said's theory is plausible because, in a globalized world, Western and Eastern cultures, immigrants and indigenous people, as well as the formerly colonized and colonizers, will coexist. Similarly, Homi Bhabha argues that the inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures is untenable before historical examples demonstrating their hybridity are presented (1995: 55). Thus, both Said and Bhabha concur that the concept of an authentic culture must have been utopian, as cultures have the potential to assimilate with one another and become hybrid. In this regard, it is essential to define culture in general in order to provide a foundation for the discussion of cultural hybridity. According to Storey, culture is a specific way of life that manifests itself through a variety of practices, such as Christmas celebrations and youth subcultures (2008: 2). On the basis of this definition, it can be stated that culture primarily reflects the intellectual and artistic abilities of people. As they are from distinct racial groups, their cultures are naturally distinct.

Culture and identity are redefined and reconstructed by cultural hybridity. According to Bhabha, hybridity is a reevaluation of the colonial identity assumption [...]. It demonstrates the required deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and dominance (1995: 36). This concept appears to emphasize Bhabha's emphasis on the redefinition of identity within colonial space, where negotiation occurs between those who have dominated and those who have been discriminated against. Both colonizers and colonized can be uprooted from their origins and 'position,' resulting in a "renewed" and "ambiguous" sense of self. Young asserts with certainty that hybridity renders cultural

identity's essentialism impossible (1995: 25). Consequently, hybridity tends to deconstruct stereotypes and images. In a hybrid society, both identity and culture are unstable, so there is no absolute boundary or separation between the colonized and the colonizer. Furthermore, Bhabha emphasizes that hybridity affects the productivity of colonial shifting forces and fixities and generates ambivalence and ambiguity (1995: 34–36). (emphasis added). Thus, it is evident that hybridity promotes the mutation of something stable, which carries ambiguity and uncertainty. As a result, a person may have difficulty identifying the ethnic classification to which he or she belongs.

Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism are the religions followed by most South Asian immigrants in Britain. Images of these religions have been represented not only in postcolonial British fiction but also films. British society has been characterized by Christian traditions for decades. In the 1970s, according to Knott (2000: 92), temples were opened in British cities such as Leeds, Coventry, Birmingham, and west London; they were registered with local authorities and largely sponsored by local government funds. This indicates that the British government accepts the religious activities of Indian immigrants. Moreover, these places of worship provide Hindus with the opportunity to practice their religious rites. In the 1980s, many mosques were also constructed to meet the religious needs of South Asian Muslims living in Britain. Nielsen (2000) adds that Islamic religious activities reinforced the existence of the British Muslim community after the construction of these mosques. Because British society has been shaped by Christian traditions, these actions could result in negotiation and cultural hybridity. Islamic traditions should consider Western viewpoints. Accordingly, religious diversity has become the feature of postcolonial Britain. Brown (2006: 94) claims that it is impossible to understand British society without some knowledge of British Muslims, Hindus or Sikhs (2006: 94). It is important to note, however, that what Brown means by British society in this case is the one pervaded by diasporic communities. Therefore, religious life in British society is diverse. Cornelle (2021) asserts that in a world of religious diversity and choice, many people have created their own personal faith by combining elements from various religions, which is called “religious hybridity”. The religious practices of the South Asian Diaspora who have a background in Islam and Hinduism are influenced by Christianity, which is embraced by the majority of Britons, as well as British lifestyle and culture. In order to be accepted by Indigenous British people they must in some way practice the culture and religious values espoused by Britons. Religious hybridity, which is a component of cultural hybridity, can be found in the novels *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *Anita and Me*.

There have been studies on *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *Anita and Me*. Selkli & Supit, (2021) unpacks the dilemmas pertaining to national identity, sexuality, and family encountered by first generation of Asian British Diaspora in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. Meanwhile, Messaoudi & Al-Khawaldeh (2022) scrutinizes the role of the father in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, who cannot function properly in taking care of the family. Mahto (2016) illustrates Anita's struggle to fit into British society's culture and way of life while still being unable to let go of her upbringing in *Anita and Me*. Furthermore, Attar (2017) focuses on the female friendship and family relationship in *Anita and Me*. All of these studies do not focus on religious hybrid identity. The practices of Islam and Hinduism by the characters in the two novels do not become the attention of these studies. So, this article will fill the gap and focus on the depiction of how Asian British Diaspora negotiate their religious identity with Christian values and western lifestyles. By focusing on religious hybridity, this study makes a significant contribution to the study of the representation of religious issues in Asian British diaspora literature, which has been extensively researched from the perspective of ethnic, racial, and cultural identity.

## **2. Method**

This study is qualitative in nature. In qualitative research, according to Creswell (2015), researchers examine documents, observe behavior, and interview participants or informants, and then analyze the data from documents, observations, and interviews to provide meaning and organize it into a number of categories or themes. I scrutinize two documents in the form of novels, *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *Anita and Me*. I chose these two books because they both represent the existence of the South Asian Diaspora in England by focusing on their relationships with Britons. I collected data by reading the novels and then categorized it using coding. I annotated data about the religious practices that the South Asian Diaspora characters in the novels, including those with Hindu and Muslim religious roots, engaged in. The information I coded from *The Buddha of Suburbia* focuses on the fusion of British culture with Islam. The results of coding information from *Anita and Me*, meanwhile, are related to the blending of Hindu and Christian religious traditions with British culture. In validating data, I use triangulation, which involves corroborating evidence from a variety of different sources to explain a theme or perspective (Creswell, 2015). In this process, I relate the data that I have gathered about religious hybridity in the two novels to the opinions of scholars and research data that are relevant to the data that I have gathered. I then analyzed it using content analysis techniques and cultural hybridity theory.

### 3. Result and Discussion

#### 3.1 Negotiation of Islamic Values with Western Culture in *Buddha of Suburbia*

The South Asian immigrants who are depicted in *The Buddha of Suburbia* are saturated by ambiguous Islamic religious identities because of the influence of British tradition. On the one hand, Indian immigrants follow some Islamic rules. On the other hand, they practice traditions and customs which are prohibited by Islam. Anwar, Haroon's close Indian friend, blends Indian and British cultures in his daily life, and transgresses Islamic values. Anwar is depicted as a devout Muslim who is characterized by Islamic religious activities, such as going to the mosque, a holy place for Muslims to pray. "For a few weeks he'd been visiting the mosque regularly, and now I occasionally went with him (Anwar)" (Kureishi, 1990: 171). The fact that Anwar routinely goes to the mosque indicates that he is an obedient follower of Islam, a religion that is believed by a lot of people in the Indian subcontinent, where Anwar originally comes from. By so doing, Anwar, of course, conforms to Islamic religious norms. Yet, he ironically violates Islamic rules by drinking beverages and eating foods that are prohibited in Islam.

Uncle Anwar doesn't sleep at all now. At night he sat on the edge of his chair, smoking and drinking un-Islamic drinks and thinking portentous thoughts, dreaming of other countries, lost houses, mothers, and beaches. Anwar did no work in the shop, not even rewarding work like watching for shoplifters and shirtlifters. Jamila often found him drunk on the floor, rancid with unhappiness, when she went by to see her mother in the morning before work (Kureishi, 1990).

The focal point of this quote pertains to un-Islamic drinks and the condition of being drunk, which imply the paradox of Anwar's Islamic belief. According to Qaradawi (1997: 71) alcohol is an un-Islamic beverage that Muslims are not allowed to consume. Anwar drinks a large amount of alcohol so that he gets drunk. Beverages are regarded as a product which represents a particular culture and civilization. Alcoholic drinks are, of course, widely available in England, where many people used to consume them. As one of the consumers, Anwar therefore ascribes himself to British customs which have been practiced simultaneously by a lot of white Britons. Anwar, in addition to drinking non-Islamic beverages, secretly consumes pork. "Anwar even scoffed pork pies as long as Jeeta wasn't looking" (Kureishi, 1990: 64). Here, Anwar, again, disobeys the values of Islam, the religion he still believes in. Pork is also available in England because many people consume it. However, in Islam, pigs are forbidden to eat. In this respect, Kureishi strikingly accentuates the negotiation between Islamic values and Western tradition through the representation of food. What happens to Anwar is therefore the signal of cultural hybridity for his essential

Islamic identity, which is destabilized. By drinking un-Islamic drinks and eating pork, Anwar breaks down the rigid Islamic rules and crosses the cultural boundary. As a result, his identity becomes ambiguous and hybrid. Due to this phenomenon, Bhabha (1995: 34–36) claims that hybridity produces ambivalence and uncertainty. Due to the juxtaposition of religious and cultural practices Anwar exhibits, it is difficult to exactly identify the cultural and religious principles Anwar intends to practice and preserve. On the one hand, he still goes routinely to the mosque to pray. On the other hand, he drinks alcohol and eats pork.

Hanif Kureishi also emphasizes the conflict between Islamic religious values and sexuality issues. In this section, rather than focusing on sexuality, I examine how Islamic principles interact with sexuality. Englishman Charlie is in an intimate relationship with Karim. Haroon's homosexuality is considered contrary to Islam, his religion. According to Qibtiyah (2015), homosexuality is contrary to the natural law (*sunnatullah*) and destroys family life. Karim is aware that homosexuality, like being a gay, is a forbidden choice and activity in Islam.

This was a relief to my father, I knew, who was so terrified that I might turn out to be gay that he could never bring himself to mention the matter. In his Muslim mind it was bad enough being a woman; being a man and denying your male sex was preserve and self destructive (Kureishi, 1990: 174).

Karim relates his intimacy with Charlie to Haroon's Islamic beliefs. He actually realizes that such intimacy is not approved by Haroon. In this case, it can be assumed that Karim basically encounters a conflicting situation in which, on the one hand, he insists on having a special relationship with Charlie but, on the other hand, he cannot completely ignore Islamic norms that are followed by his father. However, it is somehow obvious that in the above excerpt, Karim implicitly challenges Haroon's conservative Islamic beliefs. It is profound that Haroon's response to Karim's intimacy with Charlie is completely negative. In contrast, Eva, who seems permissive and liberal, seems more tolerable in Karim and Charlie's relationship. These responses obviously show different ways of thinking between Muslim South Asian immigrants (Haroon) and Britons in responding to something that is against religious values.

Moreover, even though his father suggests that Karim obey Islamic norms, Karim tends to ignore them. In spite of appreciating and following Islamic rules, Karim subverts them by declaring that all religions are "childish" and "inexplicable."

There was a minor row when one of the Indians pulled out a handy compass and announced that the hole hadn't been dug facing in the right direction, towards Mecca. The five Indians

shifted the coffin a little and murmured verses from the Koran. All this reminded me of the time I was thrown out of a class at school for asking what people would be wearing in heaven. I thought I was one of the people in history to find all religions childish and inexplicable (Kureishi, 1990: 212).

Therefore, Karim has diverse perspectives and interpretations of religion, including Islam. By mentioning Mecca, the holiest city of Islam located in Saudi Arabia, which is a material symbol of Islam, and talking about the Indian who talks about "verses from the Koran," an Islamic holy book, Karim intends to present some important features of Islam, his father's religion. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Karim is expelled from class because he inquires about the attire worn in heaven. Karim's question irritates his Muslim teacher. Such a question is fundamentally crucial and essential. Nevertheless, according to his teacher, it is subversive. His teacher, who specializes in Islamic subjects, is unable to explain empirically what people wear in heaven because, according to Islam, heaven is only accessible after death. It is true that Eastern culture is frequently illogical. For instance, Muslims believe in heaven but they are not able to prove it scientifically. Karim's refusal to follow Islamic principles is related to a study conducted by Modood et al., (1994) which found that the second generation of South Asian immigrants in Britain value religion less than the first generation. The second-generation Indian immigrants consider religion as the entity which restricts their freedom and lifestyle. This claim and assumption, however, cannot be used to generalize the religious perspectives of second-generation Indian immigrants. There are still a lot of second-generation Indian immigrants in Britain who are concerned with Islamic values.

The transgression of Islamic rules and the juxtaposition of religious practices are positive in terms of preventing South Asian Muslims like Anwar and Haroon from becoming fundamentalists. Terrorist attacks, such as the 2005 London bombing, are frequently carried out by people with radical religious beliefs who reject other people's cultures and religions. Such violence, which is triggered by religious fundamentalism, is of course counterproductive to the vision of a multicultural society, which should be saturated by tolerance and equality. Therefore, once the Muslims are more tolerant of the British traditions, the conflict triggered by religion and race discrimination can be prevented. In addition, the acceptance of white Britons toward oriental cultures will develop a multicultural Britain and decrease race discrimination. The establishment of mosques in Britain, such as the one to which Anwar is accustomed, results in religious pluralism, which is expected to lead to future peace. Brown (2006:138) presents the fact that in the mid-twentieth century, South Asians took their religious traditions to the secular societies of



Western world and were able to create a sacred space. This evidence, of course, not only shows religious activities carried out by South Asian immigrants like Haroon and Anwar, but also signals the acceptance of Western society—despite the resistance of Western people who refuse the establishment of worship place of worship for Muslims. Above all, the portrayal of South Asian Muslim Immigrants who transgress the conservative Islamic rules is grounded by the fact that in a multicultural society in which different cultures and religions exist, essentialism and purity will be deconstructed.

### 3.2 Negotiation of Hindu Religious Celebration and Christmas in *Anita and Me*

The intermingling relationship between Hindu religious values and British cultures is clearly reflected in the form of religious celebration. The religious background of Meena's family is Hindu. They still celebrate a Hindu festival called "Diwali" (Syal, 1997:91) each year in England. This celebration signals the insistence of Indian immigrants to preserve Indian ancestral tradition, although it is regarded as strange in England or in other Western societies, where, as claimed by Brown (2006:145), "the prevailing culture has been Christian." As one of the Indian religious traditions, 'Diwali' is completely different from an English Christmas. While the English Christmas is celebrated on the 25th of December, the date of the Hindu festival changes every year because it depends on the rotation of the moon. Moreover, one of the traditions of English Christmas is giving presents. In contrast, giving gifts is not allowed during the Hindu religious celebration. Of course, the British are perplexed by this Indian tradition. Anita, for instance, surmises that there is a birthday party in Anita's house when the Hindu festival is celebrated by Meena's parents.

She said, "Is it someone's birthday today?"

"No," I replied. "It's like our Christmas today. Dead boring."

"You have two Christmases, do ya? Lucky cow." (Syal, 1997: 99).

Anita supposes that there is a birthday party because on the day she has a conversation with Meena above, Christmas has not yet been celebrated. It is furthermore important to notice that Meena calls the Hindu celebration "our Christmas." This profoundly undermines the originality of the name "Diwali" and, at the same time, challenges the original tradition of the English Christmas. However, the change of the name "Diwali" into "Indian Christmas" indicates the intermingling relations between Indian and English cultures encountered by Meena's Indian diasporic family. In this case, some elements of Indian and English traditions are merged. Furthermore, it can be assumed that the Hindu religious

celebration is situated in the context of British society. The term "Christmas" entails a direct and clear perception about the celebration, which is usually conducted by those who follow the Christian tradition. As a consequence, the term "Indian Christmas" is confusing and ambiguous, since India is a country that has been pervaded by oriental traditions, whereas Christmas has been developed and is rooted in the West. In the dialogue above, Anita seems more familiar with the term "Christmas" than "Diwali." That is why she then claims that Meena has two Christmases –English and Indian Christmases. Nevertheless, Meena shows her disinterest in the Indian Christmas by claiming that it is tiresome. Meena is more interested in the English Christmas, so she resists "Indian Christmas." Her intention to celebrate English Christmas and reformulate "Diwali" is influenced by British traditions, which she cannot ignore.

Meena celebrates Hindu festivals, but her main goal is to receive a gift. This wish, of course, is engulfed by the tradition of the English Christmas, in which children usually receive presents. Meena still celebrates the Hindu festival because of her parents. Nevertheless, she wants to adopt the tradition of the English Christmas.

Mama had been cooking and cleaning for weeks it seemed because today was Diwali "Our Christmas, Mrs Worrall," mama had told her, not wanting to go into huge detail about the Hindu festival of Light and why the date changed each year, being a lunar festival, and how we did not give presents but put on all the lights in the house and gambled instead to welcome goddess Lakshmi into our lives, hoping she would bring luck and wealth with her. Christmas was not the best comparison to use in front of me because I naturally expected a carload of presents and the generally festive, communal atmosphere that overtook the village somewhere around late November and continued into January (Syal, 1997: 91).

Meena's mother also calls the Hindu festival "our Christmas," even though there are obvious differences between the Hindu festival and English Christmas. Thus, South Asian immigrants in England prefer to call the Hindu festival "Indian Christmas" rather than "Diwali." This name change can be interpreted as an attempt to redefine their origins and persuade the English to accept their cultures. However, the possessive pronoun "our" in "our Christmas" obviously suggests the position of the Indian diaspora as "the outsiders" within the white majority population. In this context, "our Christmas" is opposed to "their Christmas." The opposition between "our" and "their" clearly signals the process of "othering." Based on the excerpt above, it can be assumed that the different perspectives of the first and second generations of Indian diaspora on the Hindu festival are reflected in the way they celebrate it. Meena's parents seem reluctant to give presents, which can break the

principles of Hindu celebration. In contrast, Meena seems to challenge this tradition in Hindu festivals by expecting gifts.

Meena's parents plan to celebrate an Indian religious festival because they learned about and believe in Hinduism while living in India. They also want to teach Meena some Hindu principles. "She (Meena's mother) may have intended to talk me through every aspect of the worship, explaining the rituals, [...] teaching me one of the hymns (in Hindu tradition)" (Syal, 1997: 98). Meena's parents continue to practice Hindu tradition in the city because it is important to them in terms of preserving their past identities. However, it is worth noticing that their past identities as well as the values of Indian religious tradition are intermingled with their present identities and British cultures. As part of the Asian Diasporas in Britain, Meena's parents cannot preserve the purity of Hindu festivals. Meena wants a sort of a 'new' Hindu celebration in which some elements of the English Christmas are included. Moreover, the Britons cannot comprehend the essence and features of Hindu festival because of its strangeness. In addition, they do not consider it part of British culture, although it is celebrated by South Asian diaspora in England. Due to this phenomenon, Hall (1995: 24) claims that diaspora "is defined not by essence or purity, but by recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity, by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference, by hybridity. Therefore, Hybridity takes an important role in constructing the identity of Indian Diasporas.

As discussed previously, the negotiation between the English Christmas and the values of the Hindu festival can be seen clearly from how "Diwali" in England is called "Indian Christmas" and how it is saturated by the tradition of giving presents. However, it is worth noticing that the basic values of Hinduism are still preserved. This brings about disavowal from the second generation, like Meena. "This (Hindu Festival) was perfect for them (Meena's parents) but a major disappointment for me (Meena) and all my other cousins who wanted presents" (Syal, 1997: 99). Meena tends to be more liberal in terms of religiosity, as she has been influenced by British culture. She challenges the conservative religious point of view and intends to adopt the English Christmas tradition. This "subversive" attitude is understandable given Meena's birth in England and her extensive relationships with people of British descent who primarily celebrate Christmas. The negotiation between "Diwali" and the English Christmas subsequently results in the decision of Meena's parents to give Meena a gift at the English Christmas—even though it is forbidden in Hindu. Her parents always "mark Jesus' birthday" (Syal, 1997: 62) in order to remind themselves about the gift they should give to Meena in that day. In this case, Meena's

parents attempt to reconcile their Hindu beliefs with the English Christmas. Although they do not celebrate the English Christmas, they give Meena a Christmas gift.

However, although Meena and her parents have adopted the tradition of the English Christmas by calling the Hindu festival "Indian Christmas" and giving presents, they cannot avoid exclusion. It is impossible for the English to completely receive the Hindu festival and consider it a part of mainstream culture. People in England have holidays during the celebration of the English Christmas because it has been regarded as a special event for decades. The Indian government also has a policy of giving holidays to Indians who celebrate Hindu festivals in India. However, the British government does not include the Hindu festival in the British holiday calendar, even though there are many Indian immigrants in England who celebrate it. Thus, the exclusion of Indian culture has been manifested through government policy. "But no one else in the world seemed to care that today was our (Indian) Christmas. There was no holiday, except it happened to be the weekend so mama and I were off school and papa only working a half day" (Syal, 1997: 92). It is clear here that Meena and her parents adapt to British culture on the one hand, while preserving Indian culture on the other.

#### 4. Conclusion

The South Asian diaspora in England negotiates their identities through their religious rituals which brings about hybrid religious identity, as seen in the novels *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *Anita and Me*. Hanif Kureishi discusses how the South Asian diaspora's practice of Islam is complicated by the culture and religion that the British locals have embraced in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. They practice British culture, which is essentially in opposition to Islamic principles, while adhering to Islamic doctrines on the one hand. In this novel, the second generation tends to challenge Islamic principles. On the other hand, the first generation of people of Islamic descent in the Indian Subcontinent are religiously ambivalent. For instance, Haroon is a member of the first generation of South Asians to immigrate to England from their home country. He still prays at the mosque, but he breaks Islamic law by drinking alcohol and eating pork, which are both forbidden in Islam. Karim is part of the second generation of Asian immigrants. He is aware that homosexuality is forbidden and undesirable in Islam, yet he continues to practice it.

The South Asian diaspora's practice of Hinduism, however, becomes hybrid in *Anita and Me*. Christmas and Hindu religious celebrations are combined. Meena, a girl of Indian descent, continues to practice Diwali, a Hindu religious festival, but she also celebrates

Christmas with her best friend Anita, a girl of British descent who is a Christian. Meena celebrates Christmas in order to be welcomed by their British acquaintances and obtain Christmas gifts. Meena attempts to negotiate her religious practice by referring to Hindu holy festivities as "our Christmas." By referring to the Hindu religious celebration as "our Christmas," Meena incorporates the term "Christmas" into Hinduism. As a result, the Hindu celebration becomes a hybrid, encompassing Christian religious terminology.

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