

## MISSISSIPPI MASALA: A DEMONSTRATION OF MULTIPLE DEFENTION OF DIASPORA IN A MULTICULTURAL WORLD BY MEERA NAIR

CHRISTY SIMON

**Abstract:** Diasporian community is an unsettled nationality that constitutes disputed citizens with a long and complex history of migration. Its experiences are constrained and inherent of ambiguity. It can also be defined as a third space where the minds of its inhabitants are conditioned by the cross cultural contacts, which no longer can acquire the cultural authenticity or return to past. Being in an amalgamated context the identities of these people are in a state of flux. They are owned with multifarious identities which is always in struggle with the self and the other. Meera Nair's Mississippi Masala depicts such identities who struggles to overcome their hybrid existence and homelessness through various ways. Their existence is a lubricant in the conjunction of cultures.

**Introduction:** By colour Jai is an Indian whose skin is lighter than Okelo. His religion and cultural beliefs enhance his Indianess. But when he was forcibly expelled from the country of Uganda he says with an Ugandan accent "Why should I go Okelo this is my home". He later says "I have always been to Uganda first, India second, Uganda is my home". These words capture the complexities of Jai's identity. Nowhere in the movie we see Jai mentioning about returning to India. He always wants to be back to Uganda where he finds his roots.

The dilemma continues to Mina, the main character in the film who describes herself as a masala, a confluence of multiethnic character. She was born in Uganda and was moved to England, yet she defines herself as an Indian. But ironically this label solely resembles the colour of her skin and the occasional traditional clothes she wears. She speaks in American accent and behaves like a girl born and brought up in a foreign country. An alternative reading of Okela's character and the darker complexion of her skin in comparison with other Indian girls extends the complexities of her identity.

Again when she goes to Demetrius family the grandfather remarks her as a girl from Indiana while Demetrius friend and business partner assumes that her origin is Mexican. Here unconsciously Meera tries to acknowledge her identity to correct all misrepresentations. Mina's attraction and love towards Demetrius can be seen as a recollection towards her roots or her affiliation towards Okela.

At the same time Indians preserve their culture and reproduce their social institutions. Patriarchy, class, structure and ethnic conflicts are reconstructed and reinforced in the film. Jai's disapproval of Mina-Demetrius relationship is attempt to reproduce his ethnic boundaries in an environment where spatial boundaries are impossible. Jai's attitude towards their relationship is a subjective sense of stability and security. Moreover his perceptions are racist. From that perspective the movie depicts the internal social and cultural conflicts between Indian and non-Indian

value and norms. The male centric and patriarchal Indian society is well portrayed by the Meera Nair in the movie. Jai being the head of the family overlooks the interests of the family members and under the pretext of being the head of the family, being more powerful than others, he takes decisions in the important aspects of Meera's life and career such as education, marriage, property, etc. Meena asks the permission of Jai before she leaves to meet Demetrius and after they were arrested from the hotel Meera is forced by her parents to stay within the home. This reiterates the characteristics of a typical Indian middle class family. Thus this multifarious identities lead to a complex race-class relationship making the third space into a hybrid location of antagonism, perpetual tension and cultural solitude.

The multifarious identities also leads to an inversion of class-race relationship. Jai has suffered a lot of social and racial discrimination in Uganda and he was downgraded from being a white collar professional to an unemployed man. It is his cultural status than his social status that helped him to get some place in America to live. Therefore he still confronts racism with the whites for whom he is socially inferior and economically non-viable. In order to survive Jai and most of the Indian characters in the movie try to marginalize other minorities that is African-American community because they are both racially and economically inferior to both whites and Indians. For instance Indians own motels and the black characters work in their motels.

Another instances is that when the accident happens Demetrius is being convinced of the motel owner who is an Indian and discouraged by him from asking an insurance compensation simply because Demetrius works for the motel owner. At the same time to separate Demetrius from Mina he is defamed and he loses the patronage of his Indian client and the trust of the white banker who has extended him, a loan for his carpet-cleaning business. This indicate how Demetrius and the entire community of Black have been alienated by the racial prejudice, economic

control and political stronghold of communities surrounding them. Here third space becomes a space for reconfiguring self and other where both intimacy and resistance are reshaped and promoted.

Id Amin cited that the Ugandan community and its economy have been exploited by the Indian community who refused to integrate with black African. At the wedding reception one of Jai's friend remarks to the other "In Uganda he was the champion of defender of Blacks". Jai's wish to go back to Uganda has to be reanalysed in this context. Thus the inherent capitalist and idiosyncratic identity of Indians is also being ridiculed in the movie. The Indians in the United state become another cross section of Indian historical reality that practises a different kind of apartheid that disregards black as disorganised, immoral and lazy. There are also instances in the movie where special emphasis is given on the physical appearances that inspires a widespread contempt for the "ugliness" of the black. Thus the movie becomes an interrogation of Indianess from different perspectives of identity.

In the movie Meera gives the in-between subject positions the potential to transverse, negotiate and balance commonalities and difference through exchange and inclusion. That potential enables Jai to realise when he revisits Uganda, that "home is where the heart is". As Bhabha suggest intermediate spaces can go beyond the realms of binary thinking and initiate a new sign of identity and sites of collaboration and condensation. Mina and Demetrius also achieve this dialogic space towards the climax through unbinding the monolithic realities. Meena breaks way from the heritage of her family by eloping with Demetrius. Even before that we can see how Meena interprets her social status in America when she says her father that there is nothing bad in cleaning toilets. Mina finally comes to a heightened awareness of race, gender and class issues and explore the liminality of exile. When her parents who are anxious for her to marry a wealthy light skinned Asian refuse her relation with Demetrius she says "Face to me- you gotta darkie daughter".

Demetrius again who is shown against the backdrop of his culture stands out because he is hardworking person who takes his life seriously rather than his friends who simply waste their life roaming around the streets. Stuart Hall says "By definition, black popular culture is a contradictory space. It is a sight

of strategic contestation". In this context for both Mina and Demetrius the space of diaspora becomes an interruptive, interrogative and enunciative space of new forms of cultural meaning and production erasing the limitations of existing boundaries and calling into question the established categorization of culture and identity. They try to look beyond their cultural identities to define themselves.

The title itself recounts the encounter of two different geographical area Mississippi and Masala which represents the Indian motto "Unity In Diversity". Rather on the contradiction between the two Meera has worked more on their commonalities and on the complexities that arise from the in-between subject position that rejects fixity but which favours dynamism and nomadism. The title suggest that a diasporic space does not constitute a mode of thinking and knowing that exist in monolithic discourses, dualistic binaries or dichotomized mode of interaction. The dialogic relationship that the director is bringing between Mississippi and Masala cannot be reduced to the speakers intention or to the response of the addressee but can only be derived from the link between the two. The significance determined by past is no more stable than the significance that may be given in the future. Hence the movie presents multiple dimensions of a diaspora: of conflicts, transculturation and negotiation. Therefore the movie deliberately and incisively debunks myth and rose above the limits of racist issues.

The film Mississippi Masala by Mira Nair deserves great appreciation for considering the inherent complexities of racism and for making the viewers think about the effects of racism on and between two different different communities in a space of diaspora. Meera Nair's characters are multidimensional with a talent for social mobility. And the film breaks the stereotypes of Hollywood film formulas by bringing characters who are ignored and marginalised by the mainstream society in a diasporic world. Mina Nair in her film does not confine within the monolithic construction of race, class and gender but the identity emphasized for each of her characters transcends beyond the racial and cultural categorization. Therefore Mississippi Masala by Mira Nair strongly presents the multiple facets of diaspora and stands in contrast to other films that deals with the surface meanings of interracial relationship.

#### References:

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Christy Simon /Student, Christ University, Bangalore-68, Karnataka.