

FROM HYBRIDITY TO MIMICRY: A POSTCOLONIAL JOURNEY IN HANIF KUREISHI'S *BUDDHA OF SUBURBIA*

¹Mumtaz Ahmad, ²Ghulam Murtaza, ³Asghar Malik

Abstract

One of the major problems that a postcolonial subject faces in a white society is the location and stating of his place and identity in a society of which he is not a natural part and in which he is not treated in a natural manner. Painfully aware of his different cultural, ethnic and in most of the cases linguistic origin, he acutely feels the need of developing such characteristics in him as would help him to be and seem like them (whites) for which he both consciously and unconsciously resorts to different methods and strategies which help him assimilate into postcolonial white society. In view of this complex nature of the place of a postcolonial subject in a white society, it is not easy for him or her to state identity. But since the issue of identity is central to human existence, postcolonial subjects also have a very strong desire to make their existence felt and get known by the others in a society or a community in which they are living. Hybridity of these postcolonial subjects as it has been narrativized by Hanif Kureishi in *The Buddha of Suburbia* through the characters of Karim, Haroon and Margaret, stems from their 'transcendental narcissism' (i.e. actions taken by the character to transform form their identity).

Keywords: Postcolonialism, hybridity, mimicry, identity, diaspora Pakistani fiction

Introduction

The representatives of ethnic minority groups adopt various techniques to ensure their successful survival and assimilation in majority community, one of such techniques frequently resorted to being mimicry. Far from being liked or taken as harmless phenomenon, it is, nevertheless, considered as potential threat to white society, for the similar is never the same but usually distorted and often dangerous. Gautam Malkani (2006) uses the phrases "Coconuts, Bounty bars, Oreo biscuits" (p.23) those who are perceived as others or hybrids. Corollary of such a perception is an uneasy awareness of inferiority and a powerful lust for revenge and hatred. When in alien white societies with different and antagonistic cultural and ethnic environment, the postcolonial (their postcoloniality being the result of their immigration to or birth in white

¹ Ph.D. Scholar, NUML, Islamabad, Assistant Professor of English & Head, Department of English, Govt. Guru Nanak Postgraduate College, Nankana Sahab, **Faisalabad**, Pakistan

² Ph.D. Literature Scholar, NUML, Islamabad, Lecturer in English, Government College University, Faisalabad, Pakistan

³ M.Phil. Linguistics, Assistant Professor of English, Govt. Degree College, Samanabad, Faisalabad, Pakistan

society), unable to give free expression to their ideas, feelings or identity as these are subject to repugnance or derision by the dominant white people, desperately need to resort to several techniques of avoidance or assimilation to locate their place in the society.

Theoretical Framework

The term 'mimicry' owes to Frantz Fanon's depiction of the similar people in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Although Frantz Fanon's perspective seems to be quite distant from our debate of post colonial issues rooted in Britain, the context in which we want to exploit his views is quite relevant, thus it will be rewarding and befitting to utilize his ideas in the present debate. Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Mask* (1952) exposed the enduring impact of colonialism on directly or indirectly once colonized people. Fanon, himself a psychologist, and a victim of *thingification*, "brought together the concept of alienation and psychological marginalization" (Bill Ashcroft et al. 1991, p.123). Major points of Fanon's discussion like prejudice of white society, racialism, the feelings of exclusion and psychological nakedness directly correspond to the postcolonial studies. Homi K. Bhaba says that the mimic men become "almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha 1994, p.89). He is inclined to use his famous terms "mockery" and "colonial imitation" akin to "mimicry" (Ibid, p.88). in Ania Loomba's observations "the process of replication is never complete or perfect and what it produces is not simply a perfect image of the original but something changed because of the context in which it is being reproduced" (1998, p.89).

Cashmore (1996) is of the view that hybrid subjects seem decently settled "within the contact zone produced by colonization" (p. 118). Their concurrent belonging to two cultures makes them hybrid and they retain "links with the territories of their forbears but [come] to terms with a culture they inhabit" (ibid, p.165). They evade permanent sticking to any culture, and stay in between, getting better of the two cultures and resisting assimilation with any of them. In view of Kaleta "not only do they cross but are also crossed by two cultures", (1998, p.7) which makes them sensitive to both of them but at the same time leaves them at the crossroads, unaccepted. Katarzyna Nowak (2007) notes about the nature of misinterpretation of the travelling subjects: "The migrant is neither here nor there, speaks neither the language she [he] was born into nor the

language of an adopted new homeland and belongs neither to the past nor the future. She [he] is neither whole nor fragmented” (p. 14). Hence the problems of the hybrid subjects regarding their acceptance into new culture are numerous, and overcoming all the obstacles placed in their way is not only well nigh impossible for the hybrid protagonists but also a vicious circle because even their perfection in one or all the components of a new culture is no guarantee of their acceptance.

Motives of Mimicry

Elleke Boehmer (1995), historically analyzing the situation, claims that Indian elites were always "mentally colonized" and "European cultural centrality was axiomatic" (pp.169-170). It is difficult to agree with Ania Loomba that imitation is "an act of straightforward homage" (1998, p.89) in view of *The Buddha of Suburbia's* postcolonial subjects, for instance, Karim and Haroon, who hardly ever endeavor for perfection in coping or imitating an ex- colonizer , instead they look for their own mixed English Asian way of existence.

Frantz Fanon's concept of the "Prospero complex" finds a very satisfactory illustration of the unfettered desire on the part of the hybrid characters to become a social climber. Elleke Boehmer (1995) claims that in the contemporary postcolonial hybrid cultures, mimicry surfaces "where other channels of self-expression were closed" (p.171). Hence a mimic man is not necessarily the product of mainstream culture rather more of a side effect. Jacques Lacan's assertion that mimicry serves the purpose of merging into the background for the achievement of a particular aim adds a new and invigorating perspective to the discussion of mimicry: "The effect of mimicry is camouflage.... It is not a question of harmonizing with background, but against a mottled background, of becoming mottled – exactly like the technique of camouflage practiced in human warfare" (1981, pp. 47-48). To Lacan, mimicry is a voluntary and deliberate choice serving some particular purpose: carrying on along with newly emerging identity (as a consequence of interaction with white people at many levels) erstwhile identity not disavowing his/her heritage and roots. Imitation, on the other hand, is used to dilate upon the sentimental attachment with one's fatherland.

Janus-Like Existence of the Subjects in The Buddha of Suburbia

In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the 1950's generation (whether they have settled down after immigration to white society or are born there)

make sustained efforts to please their longing for India and simultaneously sinking into new reality of their belonging to white Western culture. A good part of the novel records the feverish endeavors on the part of the mixed characters to settle down and carve out a respectable career for them if they were to permanently live there and keep themselves from the ever-present danger of being isolated. Not contented with a humble job of a "civil service clerk" (p.7) of the British Government which made him travel in the train every day, Haroon, the protagonist of the novel, after his stay for over twenty years in the middle and lower-middle classes of the British culture, finally learned to hide and stifle his emotions, needs and ambition and on not being offered the opportunity of favorable reception by the other people "to keep his mind blank in constant effortless meditation" (p.8).

But at the same time never even for a single moment did he remain oblivious of the huge advancement he could make only if he would conform to the norms of the white society. Therefore, to impress the white people with his knowledge and conversion, he carried a "tiny blue dictionary" (p. 28) on his way to work and learned a new sophisticated word on daily basis, telling Karim the philosophy behind it: "[Y]ou never know when you might need a heavyweight word to impress an Englishman" (p.28). Karim's longing and ambitions about his son are also obviously coloured and influenced by the demands and requirement of the outside world as he is desirous to see Karim becoming a successful doctor and go on dating with white girls only.

Man-Woman Relationships and Identity

As the Sub-Continental culture considered it honor for men to have amorous relations with girls only not with the same sex- homosexuality being deemed highly disgracing and abominable practice – Karim, influenced by indigenous cultural ideas of adulthood, wants his son to stay away from homosexual proclivities and develop fascination for the white girls only, for to have a white girl friend in Sub-continent was a mark of prestige and fortune. His Indo-Pak or better say Orient-inspired male-chauvinistic ideas experience huge setback when he discovers his son in Charlie's attic where the step-brothers had just had a thrilling sexual fling. When many years of Haroon's unsuccessful living in English elapsed and disillusionment followed, he had the bitter realization that "he was going nowhere" (p. 26), he took a strong turn

when he “turned to Lieh tzu and Lao tzu and Chang tzu” and got too deeply involved in them “as if they’d been writing exclusively for him” (p. 28). Realization dawned upon him that his existence in the cosmopolitan consumerist society has been fruitless, devoid of any purpose and direction. The new enterprise will help him get his moorings, so he desperately needs to discuss “the Ying and Yang, cosmic consciousness, Chinese philosophy, and the following of the path” (p. 27).

Resistance and Assimilation

It is true to some extent what Susie Thomas (2005) claims that “Haroon starts off as the mimic Englishman and, when this fails, he becomes a mimic Indian” (p.66). In both the roles of a mimic Englishman and a mimic Indian, it is necessary for him to hide the part of his real identity, for such concealment would fortify him against the discriminating attitude of the white, on one hand, and make him a person of exotic charm on the other. The first to be surprised at this unusual change in Haroon is his son Karim who discovers his father's endeavors to speak in strong Indian accent during his séances, congregations of the spiritually dead white people seeking peace of mind. Karim is wonderstruck to see his father who “had spent years trying to be more of an Englishman to be less risibly conspicuous” (p.21). Although, Haroon triumphantly tricked his white listeners into believing that he was a great spiritualist, a Buddha with mystic powers to impart spiritual bliss and composure of mind, Karim was conscious of the deeper reasons behind this strong behavior of his father: “beneath all the Chinese bluster was Dad’s loneliness and desire for internal advancement. He needed to talk about the Chinese thing he was learning...” (p.28). Haroon seems to be in a fix when his soul strives and yearns for mimicry but the other part of his personality, his oriental body, resists any efforts for complete assimilation. Contrary to Thomas's statement referred to above, Haroon cannot be isolated from his deep rooted emotionality and profoundly sincere love for Eastern traditions of which he had been a part and custodian for long and which can be clearly seen from his "dietary preferences, love of yoga, and propensity to mock the British (Gilbert 2001, p.132). India and Indians may have temporarily been softened in Haroon's mind but they never vanished from his thought rather remained green, particularly because he had his boyhood friend Anwar to share his

feelings with and refresh the Indian memories, thus his flexible and impressionable identity emanates from his sense of loss rather than conformity to English values.

Exclusion through Inclusion

This study aimed to explore what Fanon had said during his early writing about a man of color that "he has two dimensions: one with his fellows, the other with the white man" can be profitably applied many years later to explicate biracial characters' emotions. In Kureishi's postcolonial world inhabited by characters whose defining feature is their hybridity, duality of perception is evoked frequently by voluntary mimicry which resultantly creates an unbridgeable gulf between traditional, heritage-oriented upbringing and opposing surrounding that demand unlearning the traditional elements. It is quite within the ambit of possibility that Kureishi's characters make use of the elements of imitation deliberately because it is "a strategy of exclusion through inclusion" (Childs 2005, p.129).

Haroon, Karim Amir, Shahid (*The Black Album*) and similar biracial characters breathe in white culture, immerse and assimilate themselves there, experience it into their bones, partially because they cannot avoid it. They like and accept what they deem might help them to exist in that society, for they are the self-help survivalists knowing their success will entirely depend upon their own efforts and that the hostile society will put all the obstacles in their way efforts of achieving their success by realizing desired identity. By means of previous inclusion or assimilation into white society, they are now able to exclude some elements of 'whiteness', the elements which they have found during their interaction with white people unavailing. It needs to be pointed out here that the imposition of mimic identity comes from a unified society and the English society is in all reports a unified society. Haroon's selfhood, his Indian identity was at stake when Jean, his wife's sister and her husband Ted permanently start calling him by the English version of his original name. He is transformed from Haroon to "Harry", for the English version of his name seemed more pertinent as "it was bad enough his being an Indian, in the first place, without having an awkward name too" (p.33).

Karim's Dilemma of Identity

As the white people would want the Asians/immigrants to conform to their standards and norms of living, both the protagonists of *The*

Buddha of Suburbia feel compelled to adopt simplified versions of their names ("Harry and Karim"). Karim apparently seems to be chameleonic figure, having a fickle and volatile identity, vulnerable to all kinds of mimicry and, therefore, eluding any definite, stable identity. Karim's susceptibility to assimilate almost all kind of mimicry inhibits the discovery of his identity. Standing on the threshold of teens, an age which stands as a bridge between innocence and maturity, Karim finds himself bewildered by the bifurcation of innocence and maturity, dependence and freedom, innocence and corruption. His choices, dilemmas, confusions and accomplishments in the xenophobic white society confirm that "the immigrant is the everyman of the twentieth century" (Rushdie 1992, p.181). Despite exacting appropriate changes to come up to the white standards of behavior however, it appeared difficult for Karim to avoid stereotypical roles even while working in a theatre. His first appearance as an actor in the role of Mowgli, from Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, costs him a lot of humiliation which he has to bear with for the sake of initiating a career. To play the role with fidelity to art, to give it a touch of realism and authenticity, he had to have his body covered "from toe to head in the brown muck" (p.146).

But even more aggravating was the problem of accent as his director, Shadwell conditioned him to speak with strong Indian accent and when Karim tried to negotiate the change, to tell of his British origin and capability of speaking with genuine English accent, Shadwell silenced him exclaiming: "you have been cast for authenticity not for experience, try it until you feel comfortable as a Bengali" (p.47). Bengali Karim never had been, but refusing to comply with director would simply mean ousting from the cast, thus he (Shadwell) re-enacts the scene of colonization by in postcolonial British by forcing Karim, a hybrid, to perform according to the Englishman's whims, otherwise he would be denied the opportunity of social climbing, and quest for identity. Whereas Karim's later performances of an immigrant might seem exaggerating the process of stereotypical idea of reduced and crippled identity. Bradley Buchanan, nevertheless, speaks in favor of Karim's mimicry and regards it a useful practice as "in pursuing or representing an inauthentic self, one discovers a more pleasurable, profitable or useful way of being" (2007, p.44). His flexible and fluid identity easily keeps becoming new in the face of new influences.

Karim is not unaware of this mutability process taking place, in fact quite early in his life does he realize its importance and starts practicing first by changing his wardrobe as if he was trying on new roles or identities just like different dresses which suit different occasions, then sharing with childhood friend Jamila the practice of being someone else as they were not allowed to be English, and even when they tried to be so they were not accepted: “sometimes we were French, Jammie and a I and other times we went block Americans. The thing was we were supposed to be English, but to the English we were always *wogs* and *nigs* and *pakis* and the rest of it” (p.53).

This changing of roles and putting on new identities seem to be the necessary condition of being for Karim, Haroon and any Pakistani immigrant, Shahid’s uncle, Asif in *(The Black Album)* dwells on the same dilemma faced by the Pakistanis. They have to fulfill many roles; they are supposed to do whatever they are told to do. It is taken for granted that they don’t have will or choice, so they have to “do everything , win the sports, present the news and run the shops and business , as well as fuck the women”(p.6). The white man has taken off this burden and now it is, in Asif’s opinion, “the brown man’s burden” (p.6) and the role imposed upon Pakistanis by the white society is enormous but thankless as despite discharging so many roles successfully and helping the white society work smoothly, the Pakistani are discriminated, humiliated and refused to be considered at par with the white.

Role of English in the New Identity

If the Asians hope to equal the white man on his own land, they have to achieve the same communicative excellence as the whites have. Appropriating language is appropriating identity for, identity itself is not something fixed or given, it is what it is expressed to be. Haroon is a remarkable example in this context of striving to be more resourceful in English than the English themselves. His obsession with learning new vocabulary for the sake of impressing the native speakers seemingly makes him “more English than the English” (Ashcroft et al 1991, p.4), and further intensifies the process of his disillusionment. When reaching London he tries to discuss Byron with the local people thinking that the English must be knowing more about their own poet, he discovers to his utter astonishment that “not every Englishman could read or they didn’t

necessarily want tutoring by an Indian on the poetry of pervert and a madman “(p.24).

Fuzziness of Sex as a Metaphor of Blurred Identity

Karim Amir's fascination for Charlie hero is motivated by his flaming desire of transforming his identity on the model and pattern embodied by Eva's beautiful son: “I admired him more than anyone but I didn't wish him well. It was that I preferred him to me and wanted to be him. I coveted his talents, face style. I wanted to wake up with them all transferred to me” (p.15). Consequently Karim's inordinate desire for Karim leads him to abandon accuracy of his sexual preferences which inevitably affects relations with parents. Inspired by Charlie, he brings radical changes in his dressing too, and becomes enamored of particular sort of music and books. Charlie becomes style statement of the whole era for Karim. Charlie's silvers hair excites his imagination and sets him thinking whether London was “entering a new hair era that he had completely failed to notice” (p.37). What follows from this is that sexual mimicry becomes inevitable part of his life. But on the other hand, Kaleta has some entirely different point to make that “to say this is homosexual love affair is a simplification” where the need is not for simplification but for clarification as “the boys are in love not with each other's maleness but their own” (Kaleta 1998, p.179).

Karim's fixed sexual identity in postcolonial culture is under threat. Ashcraft (et al.) is of the opinion that mimicry is not without potential threat: “threat inherent in mimicry comes not from an overt resistance but from the way in which it continually suggests an identity not quite like the colonizer. This identity of the colonial subject means that the colonial culture is always potentially and strategically insurgent” (Ashcroft et al. 2000, p.141). Hence Karim's sexual mimicry is “at once resemblance and menace” (Bhabha 1994, p.86).

Violence in Negative Mimicry

The postcolonial subjects are subject to a negative mimicry as well. Burning with revengeful motives, they recourse to the violent imitation of “the white oppressors”. Kureishi's protagonists frequently express this negative, violent, threatening side of mimicry. Shahid, the protagonist of *The Black Album* for example frankly admitted that he “wanted to be a racist” (p.10) as a result of racist discrimination he had to bear with everyday. One cannot always commit violence upon others without the

risk of being adversely affected by it. Shahid then started to pay the society in the same coin to prove that evil is contagious: “I argued ... why can’t I be a racist like everyone else? Why do I have to miss on that privilege? Why is it only me who has to be good? Why can’t I swagger around pissing on others for being inferior? I began to turn into one of them. I was becoming a monster” (p. 11). Anwar (*The Buddha of Suburbia*) just like Shahid turns violent when he is mocked by the white boys for being a Pakistan – a term of racial inferiority. He was badly upset because of his daughter Jamila's refusal to marry the person of his choice, when a racist attack on his shop aggravates his mental deterioration, making him go round the streets madly, wanting to strike the white boys heavily on head. Racial decimation meted out to him drives him a psychological patient. This concept of negative copying is not confined to the biracial subjects alone, the postcolonial conditioning of reality engenders it in the white ones also. John (*My Beautiful Launderette*) can’t help himself slipping towards becoming “a fascist with a quarter inch of hair” (p. 26).

From Illusion to Disillusionment

Karim experiences personality crisis inner dissatisfaction, strained relations with his parents, and incapability to set the time right that has gone wrong in terms of his mother's divorce and love affair with Haroon, an oriental. Realization of England being “the kingdom of prejudice” (p.245) dawns upon him quite early revealing that this swampy country provides no real purpose of life and opportunities to find which he flies to America where bored with sexual adventures, he plays with his accent much in the same way as Karim had been made to play with his Indian accent in England. To be successful and 'find' himself on the American soil, he mimics cockney, although, paradoxically when he was at school in England he was “mocked by the stinking gypsy kids for talking so posh” (p.247). Karim, in America with his favorite hero, takes no time to perceive that one time's hotly pursued punk star in England was “selling Englishness and getting a lot of money for it” (p. 247). For Karim this new identity of his idol is simply unacceptable and despicable, for he had not ever thought of him behaving so cheaply. He despises him for almost the same reason for which he was despised by Tracey: for turning his identity and class into commodity. Understandably enough Karim gets disillusioned with his idol in America for the latter's deliberate

abandoning of what Karim had been whole-heartedly striving for: stable and authentic self- the things that Charlie compromises on to acquire economic prosperity and win the attention of the American audience. Thus Charlie is in America what Karim was in England: bored and unnoticed. Both kill their boredom and get noticed even become notable by giving different orientation to their identities.

Insight of Lived Experience

Kureishi is often admired as well as criticized for being “the hyphenated Anglo-Asian author” and for his unique but controversial “insider / outsider point of view” (Kaleta 1998, p. 7). His own biracial / hybrid identity allows him to better comprehend the fact of being lost in the multicultural world and belonging nowhere, thus his own experiences held him in creating such hybrid protagonists who come face to face with the issues of belonging to two cultures, two ethnic groups and consequently two identities. But at the same time, Kureishi sees something good in hybrid character, provisionality and positionality of identity as when you are in the middle, between the cultures “you can see the end and the beginning” (Thomas 2005, p.163). Cognizant of their otherness, postcolonial protagonists carry the burden of representation and stereotyping. Karim Amir states his hybrid identity in the opening lines of the *Buddha of Suburbia*: “My name is Karim Amir and I am an Englishman born and bred, *almost*. I am *often* considered to be a *funny kind of Englishman a new breed as it were having emerged from two old histories*. But I don’t care – Englishman I am (*though not proud of it*), from the south London suburbs and *going somewhere*” (emphasis added, p.3). The word ‘almost’ differentiates him from the others and excludes him from a homogenous English society. His unhappy or mixed experiences within the homogenous white society have made him painfully conscious of “the new breed” he represents a breed of hybrids, and he knows absolutely clearly that he is denied “Englishness”. He locates his identity between “two old histories”, between two antagonistic social systems, and even two continents. Karim has mixed blood and seems to be enslaved in “Cinderella Complex” (Fanon 1967, p.77). he is treated on discriminatory grounds, refused to be recognized as the natural part of the society, which makes these hybrid characters dream about what Frantz fanon called “Lactification”, miraculous whitening (ibid, p. 47).

In *The Buddha of Suburbia* the focus is perceived through a seventeen years old boy Karim Amir, a mixed child of an immigrant from Bombay and a lower-middle class English woman, Haroon and Margaret, driven by hormones and lured by the sense of danger in seeking release from the status quo. Kurieshi himself a product of inter-racial marriage, identifies the character of Karim as being a "new breed" as the second generation of immigrants living in England –a direct product of transmigration and interracial marriage creating an almost chaotic jumble and confusion of feelings within him, and a non-linear-contrary to tradition-set of beliefs that present an inherent restlessness and the need for change and resistance. Kurieshi incessantly flips between the lives of the characters and the perception of life as experienced by Karim who is placed in the midst of a polarized society where radicalism is contradicted by convention and to be different is to be cool: two ideas embodied through Margaret (the traditionalist) and Mrs. Eva kay (a new-age spiritualist and a radical); in the family mainly induced by his father's renewed and reinvigorated interest in spiritual practice in collaboration with Eva.

Karim's hybridity surfaces in his behavior and preferences also: he is fond of tea and cycling and listens to "King crimson, soft machine, captain Beefheart, Frank Zappa and Wildman Fisher" (p. 62). Against the judgment of most of the Whiteman, he knows absolutely well how and where to satisfy his tastes. As a typical Englishman, he knows the good places where to buy the blends of tea he likes most and where the best music shops in the high street are. He feels spirited in the city. His soul luxuriates in supreme happiness there but his immoderate love for the city is not reciprocated, it remains unresponded and dejected. It was when he tried to date Helen, a white girl, her father reminds him of his place in that society: "she doesn't go out with boys. Or with wogs (...) we don't want you blackies coming to the house" (p.40). To Hellen's father, there is clear difference between the "boys" and "wogs" discriminately called "blackies". Hellen's father is obviously constructing a lower position for Karim, an uncomfortable "master-slave relationship" (Gandhi 1998, pp.16-17). White man still considers himself colonial master who knows the brown man more than the latter does himself.

Hybridities of the First and Second Generation

The first generation immigrants like Haroon and Anwar, despite their best efforts to completely take to western ways, fail primarily because of their stronger ties with the Indo-Pak culture and they retain a strong oriental ideology and outlook in their ways of life – whether it be dressing or eating food, sexual relations or marriages, choice of profession or allowing freedom to their new generation. Haroon, Karim's father, being the member of first generation Anglophile, finds himself surrounded by race-ridden cultural snobs who treat him like a wog. Elleke Boehmer (1995) claims about such people that they may be physically uprooted from India but emotionally they are still there: “[e]x-colonial by birth, “Third world” in cultural interest, cosmopolitan in almost every other way, he or she works within the precincts of the Western metropolis while at the same time retaining thematic and / or political connections with a national background” (Boehmer 1995, p.233).

They find it very difficult to unlearn their Asian culture, its beauty and ugliness which they seem to have taken into their soul. Haroon, for instance had lived almost a princely life in India before he decided to come to England. Forgetting it with all its concomitant values and conventions is beyond the limits of probability. Allured by economic prosperity, the 1950's generation rushed to Britain with soaring hopes and expectations. This is a period after the flux of immigrants to Britain from the 1950's and 60's from the new commonwealth countries: west Indies, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh who come tempted by the hope of finding better employment opportunities in a thriving economy. Haroon's parents had sent him to England with great hopes that he would return from there as a successful man: “Dad was sent to England by his family to be educated....like Gandhi and Jinnah before him, dad would return to India a qualified and polished English gentleman lawyer and an accomplished ballroom dancer” (p. 94).

Chili is the eldest son of the ostentatious father who has adopted with encourage ment from his father the extravagant city life style: "In Chili's hand were his car keys, ray-bans and Marlboros....Chili drank only black-coffee and neat Jack Daniel's; his suite were Boss, his underwear Calvin Klein, his actor Pacino. His barbar shook his hand; his accountant took him to dinner, his drug-dealer would come to him in all

hours....now Chili claimed that the family business had to expand-to London” (p. 30).

Chili strikes great resemblance in his following of contemporary British style with another young protagonist, Karim as both are the lovers of glittering city life. In the life style as well describing the physical appearance of the character, Kureishi also affixes a life-style to him which reflects the second generation immigrant’s conformity to and acceptance of the western materialistic society that dominates around them, repudiating their own traditions of home and family. As the hybridity of the second generation immigrants is predominantly a matter of promiscuity, Chili is reluctant to live with his wife Zulma, and prefers the company of more promiscuous women.

Haroon, the first-generation immigrant, truly represents the masses of the Third World countries that easily fall victim to white society’s charm, colour and culture. Through his characters, Kureishi has explicitly demonstrated the impact on Asian immigrants of the clash of Western and Eastern culture. Haroon, Anwar and the people like them had migrated to Britain in the hope of resplendent future unaware of the fact that they might have to face a large number of problems: identity crisis, cultural clash, religious antagonism, racial attacks, alienation etc. Haroon lost himself in the charm and glamour of the West and got too deeply implicated in the Western civilization, turning back upon Islamic code and conduct of living. In order to move up the ladder of social mobility, he did not even stop short of abandoning his legal wife and two sons and took refuge in the warm love of Eva for sexual gratification. Haroon did achieve some success in terms of getting popularity as a Buddha but lost his religion, faith and identity. The second generation immigrants, the hybrid descendants who are the result of cross-cultural marriage inherit the traits of two cultures and face the dilemma of belonging and not belonging more than their parents did.

In both *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*, Kureishi alludes to the racial unrest, enhancing the cause through religious beliefs and political stances. In *The Black Album* Shahid, Riaz, Hat, Chad and other boys and girls from the college go to guard a Bengali family from the deep racial harassment they faced from the twelve and thirteen years olds: "the husband had been smashed over the head with a bottle and taken to hospital. The wife had been punched. Lighted matches had been

pushed through the letter-box. At all hours the bell had been rung and the culprits said they would slaughter the children” (p.90). Similar racial prejudice is seen in *The Buddha of Suburbia* when Karim is restricted from seeing his friend, Helen and threatened sinuously in case he persisted to meet her. Her father tries to intimidate him: “...‘we don’t like it’ Hairy Back said. ‘However many niggers there are, we don’t like it. We’re with Enoch. If you put one of your black ‘ands near my daughter I’ll smash it with ‘ammer! with ‘ammer’” (p.40). Kureishi moves on to question whether violence can be attributed to ‘living in ugliness.’ In the estate where Bengali family is being guarded, there is a high level of racism; could this be due to unemployment, powerlessness, lack of food and under-education? Dr. Brownlow, Deedee Osgood’s ex-husband and the students’ lecture defends this as the problem. He is contended against by Riaz, the fundamentalist and the leader of the student revolutionaries who argues how privileged they are living in Britain, to be able to vote, have housing electricity, heating, T.V fridges hospitals nearby while “...our brothers in the Third World, as you like to call most people other than you, have a fraction of this...” yet they are neither “...racist skinheads, car thieves rapists ... No they are humble, good, hardworking people who love Allah !” (p. 95).

Kureishi develops the idea of religion as an integral part of politics and as a requirement for liberation, equality and racial unity. He highlights the significance of faith in the second generation immigrant as a ‘tag’ that makes them human and demonstrates how for it goes to unite ‘brothers and sisters’ together in harmonized reverence and trust towards Allah and a sense of belonging: “the religious enthusiasm of a younger generation, and its links to strong political feelings, had surprised him” (p. 91). The second generation’s faith in *The Black Album* is much stronger than that of the first. This is obvious as neither Shahid nor Chili had been taught about religion by their parents. Karim Amir and his brother Allie are no exception since their parents had never felt inclined to impart religious teachings in their minds. Despite being the sons of an Indian Muslim, they had never been taught the importance of learning religious beliefs.

Karim is absorbed by his father’s spirituality, affectionately addressing him ‘God’ for his successful conducting of yoga sessions with Eva and a hoard of other converts whose spiritual barrenness induced by

materialistic modern society makes them seek inner happiness promised by Haroon – the Buddha of Suburbia. But characteristically, Kureishi distances Karim from the core of faith by putting doubt in his mind. Karim's alienation from and indifference to Islam is primarily because of his father's perverted involvement in and obsession with Buddhism, that leave the children of the second generation find themselves in a divided world, in a state of limbo between cultures and traditions.

They were in a great fix as they were seen as unwelcome visitors by the white majority and castigated and shunned by their own families back in their own countries for having become too western. They were labeled with discriminatory and derogatory tags as 'coconuts' and 'Pakis' (as Karim is frequently called 'paki basher' by the white) for their color and repudiated for their hybridized cultures. Karim expresses his restlessness "...perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood' of here and there' of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored... I was looking for trouble, any kind of movement' action and sexual interest I could find" (p.3).

Furthermore what aggravated their problems regarding finding a better place to live in their new home was the fact that despite their high level of education and experience, they had to face the unexpected prospects of unemployment or being employed as low-salaried unprivileged workers. In some cases like that of Haroon accepting such low jobs was a degradation because he had left behind in Bombay an aristocratic life never expecting he will have to take up such petty jobs. Finding themselves placed in such awkward situation, they feel themselves unable to mediate between the conflicting set of values of East and West. To resolve their identity crisis, they strive to practice their Muslim male superiority over their wives and children (as in case of Haroon wh tries to exert his Muslim male-chauvinism upon his wife Margaret, and son- Karim) but ultimately they desperately fail to do so because of their lack of understanding that they are applying the eastern values in a different western culture which augments their feeling of in-betweens and compels them to rethink their notion of identity.

On the other hand the matter of confusion of cultural identity and hybridity has a different orientation for the descendants of the first-generation immigrants as they have to grapple with these issues from the very first days of their lives. Frequently what these hybrid children see at

their homes and what they observe and experience outdoors is in direct contrast with each other; they are constantly made to realize that they are racially inferior to the white dwellers of the society; are unable to come up to the expectations of the two conflicting cultures and are unwanted outsiders, the 'others' who are destined to be treated more as animals and brutes than civilized human being. Unlike their parents who find it difficult to assimilate, to accept being British Asian due to their deep-rooted love for their mother country, the second-generation immigrants have less strong emotional affiliation with the mother country, and seem reluctant to be labeled as British Asian because they on account of being born and brought up in England, deem themselves simply British. Apparently for the second generation immigrants the 'in-betweenness' of their parents is a weaker phenomenon, less conspicuous as if the 'in-betweenness' state *was already 'post' condition and now they were more in tune with the conventions* and life style of the British culture. However, their cultural confusion stems from other sources than their parents and they have their own different ways to cope up with it. There are two categories of second generation immigrants in this regard : the conformists who prefer assimilation to avoid any cultural confrontation, such as Allie of *The Buddha of Suburbia*; and the 'traditionalists'- who do not break with their roots in terms of religion and political stance like Millat of White Teeth and Karim of Brick Lane. Karim's younger brother, Allie (a westernized version of the Islamic name Ali) appears to be the prototype of completely assimilated perfectly westernized second generation British Asian who deliberately dissociated himself from his origin, from anything oriental.

Similarly Magid absorbs English identity and English manners instinctively, despite being sent back to Bangladesh to receive traditional upbringing and to mix up with native tradition. On the contrary, Millat and Karim stand for a new young militant generation characterized by involvement in crime violence and drug abuse, cultural conflict and finally religious fundamentalists as the means to come to terms with identity confusion. In addition to these two categories of hybrid descendants belonging to the second generation immigrants, there is a third category as well : the one represented by hybrid character of Karim Amir whose unstable and fluid identity embodies a 'new way of being British' (*My Beautiful Laundrette*, p. 18). He explicitly considers himself

to be English (though not proud of being so) but simultaneously demonstrated a sense of cultural responsibility towards his origin, his roots and learns after a series of cultural encounters with the Britishers the facts about his identity confusion and unavoidable state of hybridity.

Like his ethnic hybridity, Karim's sexual identification is also complicated. Without any preference or priority, he is quite ready to sleep with anyone, male or female, though his first really significant and thrilling sexual fling is with Charlie and he sleeps indiscriminately with male or female of any ethnic origin, for instance, Jamila-an Asian and Eleanor- a British. His indeterminate sexuality embedded in overriding confusion places him in liminal role as the fixed labels of homosexual, heterosexual, Indian or British are not exclusively applicable to him, nor does he claim to have the intentions to be identified thus. Avoiding the exclusivity of being pinned down as anything 'fixed' in terms of national cultural or sexual identity, he constantly vacillates between the boundaries of binaries, though he has an Indian Muslim's (later a propagator of Buddhist Philosophy) blood in his veins, and he also retains shreds of respectable Indian traditions, but none of the stuff of Indian heritage is strong enough to restrain him from indulging in immoral sexual relationships with Jamila, his childhood friend, and Charlie, his step-brother. Later on as he grows up, and the novel records his experiences in Bildungsroman tradition, he traverses the road of upward social mobility. He makes connections with upper middle class people attached with Arts community, and participating in theatrical performances exclusively designed for him to highlight his confusing cultural identity, he beings a breath - taking, intensely emotional, though equally complicated sexual relationship with a perfect upper middle class theatrical beauty –Eleanor under the false impression (appropriated by theatre Director Pyke by persuading Eleanor to enter into sexual adventure with Karim out of sympathy, if not out of love because she had never been able to forget her erstwhile love with Eugene) that Eleanor loves him heart and soul, but only to discover later on with shattering disillusionment that her love was only a mercy, nothing more than courtesy while Karim had "never had such a strong emotional and physical feelings before "(p.187).

As a matter of fact most powerful reason of large-scale immigration as Kureishi's claim was that it seemed quite obvious and hopeful for the

immigrant communities that sooner or later they will be extended the right of citizenship and brought at par with the white society: "belonging', which means, in a sense, not having to notice where you are, and, more importantly, not being seen as different would happen eventually. The West was a dream that didn't come true. But one cannot go home again. One is stuck" (Kureishi 2002, p.21). Going home again was increasingly made difficult by the expectations the parents and society back home had attached with the first generation immigrants that they would return home filled with economic and intellectual wealth but instead, they had, better say, got trapped into the West from where returning was as much different as staying. Tragically, when they seem to live in two countries, in reality, they live in neither of them which makes them hybrid and alienates them from others, even to themselves.

The two childhood Indian friends – Haroon and Anwar (*The Buddha of Suburbia*) who migrated to England together are perfectly aware of living between cultures, of their in-betweenness and subsequent inability to completely assimilate into British culture, rooting out from their feelings love and nostalgia for the home country. Young and energetic as they were at their stepping into England, they spared no efforts to adopt the culture of the white and dived deep into the ways and norms of the white people even one of them, Haroon married a lower middle –class English woman, Margaret. But their efforts and expectation to be treated as welcome guests in England remained unrealized chiefly because they were something more than individuals and their mode of thinking and living was emblematic of the whole nation. Quite pertinent is the observation of Edward Said (1994): ".....cultures come to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates "us" from "them," almost always with some degree of xenophobia (p.13). This leads one to assume that this is a natural process of transformation towards hybrid identity for the one who lives in an acquired culture. Lois Tyson (1999) almost shares and confirms Edward Said's idea of gradual progressiveness towards hybrid identity as she claims that the postcolonial identity rather than being a fixed entity is "necessarily a dynamic, constantly evolving hybrid of native and colonial cultures" (Tyson 1999, p.369). What follows it is the division of the society in to two categorically different sections which

actually are the effect of universalistic tendencies followed by the colonized and the colonizers.

Both communities - the colonized and the colonizer- walk towards opposite directions chalked out by their sentimental attachment to their roots and heritage and almost extremist tendency towards giving their respective culture an almost divine superiority. There is thus yet present on both sides a will to preserve the purity of culture, though this will and the concomitant effort to materialize this despite is fated to fail in a postcolonial hybrid culture where the purity of culture is a myth and the hybridity is a living reality. Karim is really surprised to observe his Dad's and Anwar's morbid attachment with "home" as not long ago they had seemed decently settled in Britain showing no signs of nostalgia for India: "[f]or years they were happy to live like Englishman. (...) Now, as they aged and seemed settled here, Anwar and Dad appeared to be returning internally to India or at least to be resisting the English here. It was puzzling: neither of them expressed any desire actually to see their origins again. "India is rotten place", Anwar grumbled. "Why I should want to go there again. It's filthy and hot and it's big pain- in- the- arse to get anything done" "(p.64). Both men came to England convinced that England was their dreamland and lived very close to the heart of London in order to satiate their immoderate thirst for English pleasures which were forbidden and disgusted in India. However, when they tried to forget their "otherness", the white were there to remind them they were "others". An interesting chat takes place between Haroon and Helen, Karim's white girlfriend when the former complains that the old Indians "come to like this England less and less and(...)return to an imagined India" (p.74), the latter tries to hearten Haroon with balmy words : "we like your being here. Your benefit our country with your traditions" (p.74).

Conclusion: Answering Back to Mimicry

In Kureishi's works mimicry has been dealt with as the most commonly adopted technique by the hybrid subjects to look for their identity, to try to play different social and ethnic roles, and finally get that status in the society from where they can state their identity. What makes Kureishi's characters appear authentic is the fact that the feeling they display and the conditions they undergo are the direct consequence of their displacement and immigration. Kureishi's works seem to be

written to answer a very crucial question of the postcolonial era: whether there is only Englishness to Identify with? And emphatically suggest that England is no more the country of the white or the British nor there is only one version of Englishness to follow or identify with. Instead “there must be a new definition of today’s national identities just like Kureishi’s attitude towards his characters and telling their stories is new” (Kaleta 1998, p. 232). Susie Thomas (2005) observes that “[n]ational identities are inevitably presented as a matter of cultural performances” (p.69). Karim ends up with sheer frustration, discovering painfully that despite moving heaven and earth to become the same with the white through mimicry, he is bound to be unsuccessful because mimicry “relies on resemblance, on the colonized becoming like colonizer but always remaining different” (Childs and Williams 1997, p.130).

Kureishi suggests that these are not the Asians or the semi-Asians alone who, while living in postcolonial hybrid cultures of today recourse to mimicry rather the white also are not far behind in this practice. Though it looks a bit surprising, it is an undeniable functional reality that both the groups imitate each other in the search of similar if not the same features. The protagonists find themselves trapped in mimicry in their enthusiasm to imitate the subject of idolization often unaware of the imperfection of the subject imitated, and thus in doing so stand deprived of nobility of feelings and sincere emotionality. Robert Young in *Colonial Desire* (2003) interestingly retorts hybridity that “hybridity is itself a hybrid concept” (p.194). Hybridity is inalienably allied with mimicry and both function simultaneously. It is indeed a complicated term deriving directly from “an act of mimicry that is at the bottom insurrectionary” (Castle 2001, p.505). Just like mimicry, it is considered a potential menace to colonial discipline and order, because in Homi Bhabha’s observation it is “neither the one thing nor the other”, (Bhabha 1994, p.33) and such crossings possibly lack the clarity and purity of the original. Hybridity has dealt a heavy blow to the monologic discourses and its permeation into art, literature or culture may “signify a freeing of voices, a technique for dismantling authority, a liberating polyphony that shakes off the authoritarian yoke” (Boehmer, 1995, p. 238-39).

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