

**Polyphonic Identities: A Study of Select Novels of
Hanif Kureishi**

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by

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Certificate

This dissertation titled "Polyphonic Identities: A Study of Select Novels of Hanif Kureishi" submitted by Samana Madhuri, Centre for English Studies, School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree, diploma of any university or institution.

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TO AMMA & NANNAGARU

What this seems to be, what this seems to be, is real
All of my life is changing
You're the enemy, you're the enemy, I fear
All of my life is changing, always some rearranging
So much is lost, so much disharmony
So much is lost, no voice of sympathy
My identity, my identity, is not real
All of my life is changing
All of my lies you're facing
So much is lost, so much disharmony
So much is lost, no voice of sympathy
What this seems to be, what this seems to be, is real
All of my life seems wasted, all of my life seems wasted
So much is lost, so much disharmony
So much is lost, no voice of sympathy
So much is lost, so much disharmony
So much is lost, no voice of sympathy

-So Much is Lost by Paradise Lost

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Introducing Hanif Kureishi

Most writers would say, quite rightly, that their subjects choose them; that they are interested in whatever they are interested in for reasons they cannot explain, and that writing is an experiment which takes you where it has to. The vocation of each writer is to describe the world as he or she sees it; anything more than that is advertising.

-Hanif Kureishi in *The World and the Bomb*

Kureishi's words "The vocation of each writer is to describe the world as he or she sees it" echoes Michel Foucault's summation of the term discourse wherein power and knowledge are combined to form the reality in which an individual is cocooned. Kureishi in his novels describes the world which he sees from his perspective. Partially, he perceives it from perspective of a second generation Pakistani immigrant in Britain and partially from the eyes of a Londoner. Karim, the protagonist of his first novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) who is also a second generation immigrant like Kureishi introduces himself to the reader as

...I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of English, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But I do not care-Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the South London suburbs and going somewhere. 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. (Kureishi 1990 1)

Similarly, more often than not, Kureishi has denied his Pakistani self; he rather likes himself to be called as a British writer. But his idea of being British is being and belonging to a multicultural Britain that is polyphonic, hybrid, and mosaic. This understanding of heterogeneity existing in Britain could be one of the reasons why Kureishi's subjects have shown a remarkable diversity since his earlier days of inception as a writer.

Hanif Kureishi (1954-), an eminent British screenwriter, playwright, novelist deals with the question of "identity" and deals with it in a manner that is very different in its treatment from his

contemporaries. Unlike most of his contemporary writers Kureishi explores the multiple ways of “belonging”: This category of belonging in the Kureishian narratives at times is not directly implicated by the dominant discourse of categorizations like race, class etc., but is about people who do not really associate their belonging to a smaller group but are connected emotionally rather than on the basis of cultural parameters. Kureishi’s tactful re-constitution of a diverse heterogeneous set of people under an umbrella of music, fashion and style provides a hint to the new ways of living and belonging in a postmodern society where parameters like colour, sex, religion etc cannot be the defining markers of an individual. If we re-contextualize the characters of Kureishi in an Indian setting, then perhaps the reference to pop icons like Tamla Motown, Prince, Sex Pistols, Beatles would be replaced by the Bollywood bandwagon, remixes, other *desi* artists and at times also western pop artists. In both cases, the popular culture of music, movies, fashion and youth culture perform a cohesive act wherein people start the process of identification with each other on the basis of “popular imagination”. Kureishi’s attempt is to explore this category of “emotionally bonded tribes” and their sense of belonging in today’s consumer oriented culture.

His first novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) came almost a decade after his tryst with writing. The characters are present in *The Buddha of Suburbia* can also be seen as the mature and much rounded versions of characters of his earlier plays like *Borderline* (1981), *Tomorrow-Today* (1981), *Birds of Passage* (1983), *My Beautiful Launderette* (1985). Kureishi’s first novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* is located in London and revolves around Karim, “a funny kind of Englishman” who desperately wants to move out of the suburbs into London. Karim is an actor and he chose not to pursue education after school. Karim’s growing years revolve around his father Haroon who is an employee of the British Government. Haroon works as a Civil Service clerk and also acts as the mystic spiritual guru of the East on Eva’s request. Haroon’s romantic interest in Eva is instrumental in his separation from his family. After Haroon’s and Margret’s (his wife) separation Karim starts living with his father and Eva whereas his brother Allie (Amar) goes to live with his mother. Karim is not really affected by his parents separation because he not only likes Eva but is also romantically interested in her son Charlie. Haroon’s separation with Margret and Eva’s movement up in the social ladder (and away from London suburbs) changes the course of Karim’s life. These incidents displace Karim from the London

suburbs to the centre of all opportunities i.e., to London. Karim is introduced to the world of theatre actors, directors and other artists by Eva who has now moved up in the London social scene.

At the same time there is a parallel story of Haroon's friend Anwar and his family. Haroon's friend Anwar and his wife Princess Jeeta have a shop (*Paradise Stores*) in the London suburbs and are often visited by Haroon and Karim. Kureishi etches Anwar as a complete contrast to Haroon's character right from their student days. Haroon and Karim are from Bombay and they were friends since the age of five. Both Anwar as well as Haroon who arrived in England to study aeronautical engineering and law respectively end up in entirely different directions. Haroon marries Margret soon after his allowance is cut by his family as a retort to his drinking "several pints of rough stout and brown ale wearing a silk bow-tie and a green waistcoat." (Kureishi 1990 26) On the other hand, Anwar was already married to Jeeta and after she joins him in England Anwar accidentally wins a lottery and they invest this money in a toy shop in South London only to convert it into a grocery shop on the advice of Princess Jeeta. If Haroon is style conscious and spends his money frivolously then Anwar had always been relatively tight fisted as well as a tireless owner of the *Paradise stores*.

Anwar and Jeeta have a daughter called Jamila who is not only aggressive and rebellious but is also well read. Karim and Jamila are in a physical relationship but they emotionally invested in each other as friends. Karim becomes actively engaged in Jamila's life when he attempts to save her from Anwar who plans to marry Jamila off to an Indian groom. Though the fearless and intelligent Jamila refuses to marry her imported groom initially but she is emotionally blackmailed into giving in because of Anwar's antics like hunger strike etc. Jamila's marriage from the beginning is a disaster because the imported groom/Changez is never accepted emotionally by Jamila.

Karim's professional career takes off after Jamila's marriage takes place. With the help of Eva Karim meets Shadwell and gets his first theatrical break as Mowgli of Jungle book. Karim on the insistence of Shadwell (his director) has to make certain compromises with himself in order to be in his first "professional production". Soon after his first production Karim starts working with Matthew Pyke who had his own company. Karim describes Pyke as "...the star of the flourishing

alternative theatre scene... one of the most original directors around” (Kureishi 1990 159-160). But even when Karim is working with Pyke he is forced to mimic an authentic Indian identity. In Pyke’s production Karim meets Eleanor with whom he soon falls in love. But Karim’s love life with Eleanor soon comes to an end because Eleanor is attracted to Pyke (who is intelligent and successful). Eleanor’s and Pyke’s physical relationship leads to the separation of Eleanor and Karim. But Karim stops seeing Eleanor only after he has group sex with Matthew, Eleanor and Matthew’s wife Marlene. The success of Karim’s second play (directed by Pyke) compels Karim to stay in New York for more than a month. In New York Karim meets Charlie who is now very successful after changing his style from glam to punk. But this eventual meeting of Karim with Charlie only helps him in realizing that he is no more in love with Charlie. Karim returns to London even after Charlie offers him the post of his manager and asks him to stay back.

The Buddha of Suburbia was soon followed by Kureishi’s publication of *The Black Album* and *The Faber Book of Pop* with John Savage in 1995. Frederick Holmes in his paper “Postcolonial subject divided between East and West: Kureishi’s *The Black Album* as an intertext of Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*” points out

The Black Album is set in the late 80s at the time of the fatwa, and Kureishi’s characters argue about Rushdie’s book, which, in one of the narrative’s climaxes, is publicly burnt by a group of fundamentalist Muslim students at a nondescript college in the slums of northwest London... Like Rushdie, Kureishi is concerned with the plight of the migrant denied a unitary identity because he is shunted back and forth between two cultures(each of which is itself internally divided and subdivided) and invited to adopt a variety of sometimes contradictory subject positions. Such a dilemma is painful, even potentially tragic, but Kureishi shows that it also contains possibilities for growth and creativity.(Holmes 2)

The Black Album is Kureishi’s first engagement with issues that are of concern and are also the topics of popular debates in the west like fundamentalism, liberalism, Muslim identity etc. Kureishi locates his subject, the second generation immigrant Shahid in a similar familial scene like that of Omar in *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1995). Like Omar’s relatives, Shahid’s family is well an affluent and unlike Omar, Shahid does not want to earn money. The theme of rebellion against parents once again comes into play in Kureishian narrative after the production of his play *Borderline* (1981).

The Black Album was released almost six years after the ban on Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses* in 1989. This novel grapples with the lives of some students in an unknown college of London where Rushdie's book was burned by a handful of students (most of them were South Asian). The story is centered around Shahid, a South Asian second generation immigrant with a Pakistani father in travel business. Shahid leaves his home in order to understand about his identity as well as to learn about the world around him. He wants to deny his South Asian identity. Shahid's leaving of his house, in a way shows his rejection of his father as well as of his Pakistani culture that is given to him. This act can also be read as Shahid's attempt to understand himself in a new light, in new surroundings.

Shahid arrives in London with the intent of starting life afresh. It was a pretext to get away from his dead father's business, Pakistani mother, girlfriend (who recently went through an abortion) and, from his brother Chili and his daily squabbles with Zulma (Chili's wife). Unlike his brother Chili, Shahid does not enter into his father's business but leaves Kent and comes to North London. Both Chili and Shahid are complete contrasts to each other.

In London Shahid studies in a college and is taught by Deedee Osgood. Shahid's entry to London leads him to a crossroads where he has to choose between the two extreme ways of dealing with life: fundamentalism and liberalism. Shahid meets his neighbor Riaz who is a student leader and leads the Islamic group of students who help fellow Muslims. They protect local Muslim families from racist attacks and threats. Shahid soon becomes a part of the group that takes up the cause of night vigils. Shahid lives alone in a squalid apartment in London. His befriending Riaz leads him to his friends like Chad, Hat, Sadiq, Tahira, Nina, etc. As the story proceeds further, Shahid is given a book of verses, 'The Martyr's Imagination', written by Riaz to be typed and converted into print. Riaz also asks Shahid to help him to get it published. Shahid's interprets his friendship with Riaz, Chad and others as his attempt to belong somewhere. Shahid says,

These days everyone was insisting on their own identity, coming out as a man, woman, gay, black, Jew-brandishing whichever features they could claim, as if without a tag they wouldn't be human. Shahid too wanted to belong to his people. But he had to know them, their past and what they hoped for (Kureishi 1995 92)

If Shahid is introduced to the world of fundamentalism by his friends then Deedee leads him into the underground party scene, ecstasy, drugs and sexual freedom. It is for the first time Shahid witnesses some five hundred people in a room, drugged and completely immersed in limitless pleasure.

Shahid is soon caught between the two opposite worlds. The world of duty, religion, abstinence and faith preached by his neighbor/friend Riaz is challenged by Deedee's bricolage of an alternative possibility that is rooted in hedonism, pleasure and freedom.

The novel ends with Shahid's rejection of fundamentalism that is, for Shahid inherently opposed to basic human values like freedom, imagination, liberty etc. Shahid's friendship with his friends is ruptured when Riaz sees Shahid's rewritten form of his verses seeped in erotic content. In the closing section of the book Kureishi problematizes the Rushdie incident and the burning of copies of *The Satanic Verses*. The book ends with an incident of some people throwing a petrol bomb on a book-shop with one of the culprits being burnt whereas Deedee and Shahid are together "Until it stops being fun". (Kureishi 1995 276)

Two years after the publication of *The Black Album* where Kureishi for the first time tries to directly address Muslimophobia his collection of short stories *Love in a Blue Time* and his screenplay *My Son the Fanatic* were released. Some critics point out that *Love in a Blue Time* inaugurates the theme of mid-life crisis in Kureishi's writings that is a dominant theme in his later work. Kureishi's *My Son the Fanatic* (1997) published after *The Black Album* is believed to be an extension of Riaz (the young fundamentalist of *The Black Album*) and his differences with his father. The character etched on that of Riaz in *My Son the Fanatic* is called Farid and is a fundamentalist. Deedee Osgood in *The Black Album* tells Shahid about Riaz, I quote

Riaz was kicked out of his parent's house for denouncing his father for drinking alcohol. He also reprimanded him for praying on his armchair and not on his knees. He told his friends that if one's parents did wrong they should be thrown into raging fire of hell. (Kureishi 1995 109)

In 1998 the adaptation of *My Son the Fanatic* into a film was released as well as Kureishi's controversial novel *Intimacy*. *Intimacy*, is a collection of confessions of the narrator begins just the night before Jay is about to leave his wife Susan and his two children. The novel is in the form of a confession diary that has the narrator's present, his short relationship with Nina. The reader is acquainted with the narrator's frame of mind not with his past. The information about Jay is limited, he is just placed in a situation which is soon going to change. The use of confessional mode of writing by Kureishi provides the subject Jay a new mode of asserting his own subjectivity. The discursive act of writing is nothing but his performance of his self. Jay writes to reason out his abrupt leaving and at the same time he also writes to the unknown reader, the invisible 'other'. His 'world' is falling apart yet he is unrelenting to change his decision.

Kureishi's play *Sleep with Me* was performed in Royal National Theatre in 1999. This year his second collection of short stories *Midnight all Day* was published which was soon followed by his fourth novel (if we consider *intimacy* as a novel) *Gabriel's Gift* in 2001.

Gabriel's Gift (2001) deals with the life of a fifteen year old boy who is very talented and aspires to be a filmmaker. This novel revolves around the relationship of Gabriel with his father Rex Bunch who in 1970's was a musician in pop icon Lester Jones band and is still living in the glory of past and refuses to work for a living. Gabriel's mother: Christine on the other hand is a waitress in a bar and is the sole bread earner of the family. This novel is deeply submerged in the rock and roll era of the 70's but at the same is a very touching presentation of family relationships.

Kureishi's other novella *The Body* (2003) opens up an alternative possibility to Jay's (the protagonist of *Intimacy*) dilemma. "I was a stranger on the earth, a nobody with nothing, belonging nowhere, a body alone, condemned to begin again, in the nightmare of eternal life"(Kureishi 2003 126), cries Adam in *The Body*. *The Body* engages with a new technological Utopia/Distopia where a man has the liberty to leave the 'oldbody' and enter a 'newbody' etc. Adam, who is on a body holiday for a period of six months is chased and threatened by Matte. The good and desirable condition of his 'newbody' is the source of all troubles. The body as a tool for the performance of everyday activity is described by Kureishi. He explains

I became a kind of a performer. Many of my friends have been actors, singers or dancers, men and women who used their bodies in the service of art, or as art itself; people who were looked at for a living. Those of us who cannot perform, who imagine from the audience only an examination of our faults, can have little relationship between a player and a voyeur. (Kureishi 2003 78)

Kureishi's body is the site of performance for different activities. Gender, colour, occupation etc set assorted roles for this body to be a part of social action. The 'mind' and 'matter' debate that had been the central debate of western philosophy is addressed by Kureishi in this novella. For, the postmodern writer Kureishi, the bridge between mentality and materiality is not 'imagination' but a technologically sound future that would enable new advancements. Kureishi decodes the possibility of a world where mind is specific and bodies are readily available to everyone, a completely contrasting position to the functioning of the present world where the mind is free-flowing and the body is governed by constant sameness. Kureishi structures his protagonist's debacle and dilemma in such a way that the reader gets to explore various facets and functions of a normal, human body.

Kureishi's latest novel *Something to Tell You* (2008) moves back and forth in time to narrate the past and present of its protagonist Jamal. Jamal is a middle aged psychoanalyst who is doing well on his professional front. He is separated from his wife Josephine but visits her place often to take their son Rafi out. Henry, Jamal's friend is his frequent visitor and in the course of the narrative falls in love with Jamal's sister Miriam. Henry and Miriam are complete contrasts to each other. Henry is a theatre director, he is married and has two children whereas Miriam is a single mother of five children (from different men) and lives in a council flat. Bushy Jenkins is Miriam's minicab driver and right hand man (who sleeps in Miriam's house and at times in the car) is a part of Miriam's household.

Something to tell You unlike Kureishi's other novels does not have a linear narrative and is divided into four parts. The first part moves back and forth time from Jamal's current state of live as a psychoanalyst, a separated husband ad as a father to his college life when he first met Ajita (his first love) in the mid 70's. Jamal with his friends Wolf and Valentin crafts a plan to scare Ajita's father when he discovers that Ajita's father is venting out his frustration (financial

losses) by raping Ajita secretly. The plan goes awry and Ajita's father is killed. Jamal in order to make the incident look like a theft steals Ajita's father's watch and some money. It is at the end of part one that Mushtaq sees the watch on Jamal's wrist and recognizes it.

In *Something to Tell You* for the first time Kureishi brings the protagonists from his different works together in a party thrown by George Cage/Mushtaq (Ajita's brother). George Cage/Mushtaq invites Jamal to his house in Soho for a drinks party. Both Henry and Jamal go to Cage's party and meet Alan (George Cage's future wife whom Cage wants to marry after civil partnerships become legal). The other invitees to Cage's party were Omar Ali (the protagonist of *My Beautiful Laundrette*), a well known businessman. He owned laundrettes and dry cleaners and sold them to get into the media business in 90's. Omar Ali is the typical enterprising entrepreneur of the Thatcherite era. Omar Ali who is now the, "Asian gay millionaire with an interest in a football club" and was being considered as the "perfect leadership material" was "disliked by Muslims for his support of the government's fondness for bombing Muslims, and hated by the Left and Right for good reasons...But he was protected by political fringe" (Kureishi 2008 159). This Omar Ali is none but one of Kureishi's characters from his earlier play *My Beautiful Laundrette*. The young Omar of *My Beautiful Laundrette*

The present character of Omar Ali is loosely etched on British, Muslim, gay millionaire Waheed Alli (1964-) also known as Baron Alli. Though Waheed Alli is Caribbean by birth he is considered Asian in Britain. He was not only the co-founder and director of some production companies but also was a supporter of the labour government as well as the chairman of ASOS and Chorion Ltd.

Similarly, George Cage appears in the party scene as the new age *avatar* of Freddie Mercury who has carefully camouflaged his South Asian identity with a pop name and fair skin. Jamal's talk to George Cage/ Mushtaq steers in the direction of Mushtaq's father's death. Mushtaq wants to talk about his father's death to Jamal. He still has the desire to look out for his father's murderer.

Jamal's days as a student are set in the controversy ridden phase of British political system. Sections of the narrative deal with left wing politics in Britain and incidents of political unrest,

strikes and antipathy that loomed at large against the entrepreneurial class of people as well as against the prospering immigrants. Jamal's past holds the key to the biggest secret (Ajita's father's murder) and like Jay the protagonist of *Intimacy* Jamal writes his past down in his diary (a mode of confession) in order to come to terms with it. Jamal has also confessed his crime to his analyst Tahir. Tahir was Jamal's first analyst. Tahir performs the role of Jamal's absent father who does not prove to be much of an aid when Jamal and Miriam visit Pakistan soon after Jamal's break up with Ajita and Miriam's first hand encounter with the Brixton riots. It is Tahir who motivates Jamal to pursue philosophy and psychology and to become a psychoanalyst.

The second part of the novel deals with Jamal's present. Jamal in the course of the narrative has to face his past when the characters from his yester years come back to interrupt the tranquility of his safely guarded familial present. Karen, Jamal's ex-girlfriend's appearance starts the chain of people that revisit Jamal's life in the second part of the book. In fact the second part starts with the appearance of Karen who was Jamal's girlfriend after Ajita left to India. Jamal spent a lot of his time with Karen in a commune after his break-up with Ajita. Karen used to encourage Jamal to do something professionally. Writing pornography was taken up by Jamal after he had extended debates with Karen and thought about the practical necessities for making pornography films only to be abandoned later on. Jamal actually started writing pornography after he started thinking about the verbal content and plot of pornographic films.

Part three of the novel begins with Bushy telling Jamal of his suspicion that someone is following him. He asks Bushy to find out who the person is. Jamal finds out that his stalker is none but his friend from his college and partner in crime, Wolf. Wolf in his meeting with Jamal tells him that life has not been kind after he left London.

Part four begins with the news of the explosion of four bombs in central London (7/7 London bombings of 2005). This event does not disrupt the narrative. Jamal meets Mushtaq before he later leaves for America where Alan was being treated for Hepatitis C and had been already refused for a liver transplant. Mushtaq wants to pay full attention to Alan though he is disturbed by the presence of new man in Ajita's life, her changing behavior and demands and is concerned about her well being. Jamal promises to take care of Ajita when Mushtaq is not around.

Jamal's and Ajita's next meeting harks back to similar epistemological questions of racism, faith, belief as opposed to personal freedom. Like Shahid of *The Black Album*, Ajita, by embracing religion wants to seek some consolation and to find direction to steer her life. The novel ends with Jamal deciding that he will not write about Ajita anymore. Jamal, Karen, Henry, Miriam all in the end are celebrating the "official opening" Jamal's mother's and Billie's garden studio. Kureishi ends his novel with an epilogue where Jamal is old and Rafi is soon going to be an adult and Jamal is contemplating of a holiday with Josephine and Rafi.

Ruvani Ranasinha in her criticism has pointed out that Kureishi himself (in the earlier phase of his life) was a part of projects both in theatre as well as television when there was a requirement for 'cultural translators' in British media. I quote Ranasinha from the essay "The Politics of Representation: Political Commitment and Ironic Distance"

My Beautiful Laundrette and Sammy and Rosie Get Laid were literally products of the Thatcherite 1980's. Both were funded by Channel 4, a TV channel created in 1982, under Mrs Thatcher, with a brief to cater minority representation (Ranasinha 2002 38).

Asha Sen in her essay "Rewriting History: Hanif Kureishi and the Politics of Black Britain" points out, "Kureishi's screenplays have all been produced for Channel Four television; in 1994 his novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* was also made into a film for this station". Channel Four in 1985 broadcasted a documentary on Parnes, the man who was responsible for the invention of British 'pop', called "Parnes, Shillings and Pence". It was Parnes who first used the word 'pop' instead of popular music. It is this element of 'pop' which closely binds myriad elements of Kureishi's narrative together and acts as a background to his novels. Channel Four intended to act as a medium of cultural communication between the majority and minority cultures in Britain. The idea was to propagate a collage like image of Britain which inhabits different ethnic groups and the primary objective was to bridge gaps between ethnic groups that were separated sociologically, politically and economically. But Kureishi does not readily accept the tag of a 'cultural translator'. He has stated that he did not intend to take up this role but he wrote because he was "paid to write" stories about "unmapped and emergent areas".

Kureishi's central idea of celebrating "multiculturalism" let it be his plays, novels or films had always caught my attention. The typical characteristic ease with which he depicts characters and

identities that cannot be effortlessly bracketed under one strict category have always lent a curious edge to Kureishi's writing, over the typical diasporic as well as mainstream British literature. But unlike most diasporic writers Kureishi's fictional writing is not smeared with the nostalgia of "home"/ Pakistan/ Indian Subcontinent. His mixed parentage of a Pakistani father and an English mother stands in his way of asserting one identity with more vigour or forcefulness. Perhaps, this is the reason why his South-Asian characters comprise of a multiplicity of voices as he himself is one of the voices.

R. Radhakrishnan in his essay *Ethnicity in the Age of Diaspora* presents one such case of "fractured identity" and explains how the 'understandings of ethnicity are always context-specific, so that for instance, being Indian-American, in a hyphenated sense, is completely different from being an Indian'. If being an Indian lays claims on one root (which may or may not be defined by partaking to one set of traits in the cosmos of pluralistic Indian culture) then when one positions oneself as an Indian-American then further plurality enters the discourse.

In case of the later of course there is a claim on the "ethnic-Indian" self along with being an American citizen. Immigration that plays a very important role in this context and this cannot be separated from the history of colonialism and the rise of mercantile society, industries etc which are the basic proponents of modernity. The new or the much hyped about hyphenated identities are a result of this continuous movement across the globe, where one is displaced from the place of their origin and are in the process of either re-rooting themselves or want to define themselves in new possible ways. These hyphenated identities that are a product of the post-modern present also put forth some tantalizing questions as R. Radhakrishnan points out

How could *someone* be both *one* and something *other*? How could the unity of identity have more than one face or name? If my son is both Indian and American, which *one* is he really? Which is the real self which is the other? How do these two selves coexist and how do they weld into one identity? How is ethnic identity related to national identity? Is this relationship hierarchally structured, such that the "national" is supposed to subsume and transcend ethnic identity, or does this relationship produce a hyphenated identity, such as African-American, Asian-American and so forth, where the hyphen marks a dialogic and non-hierarchic conjuncture? What if identity is exclusively ethnic and not national at all? (Mannur etal 120-121)

These hyphenated identities tagged with new problematizations put forth by Radhakrishnan are the inquiries that are being asked in the diaspora that constitutes the central essence of “difference”. The interrogations revolve around the basic yet primordial inquisitions like: Who am I? Where do I belong? The sense of belonging is never singular for the person who is leading a hyphenated existence. They are never just British or American but they are actually British-Asian or Asian-American or at times more objectively Pakistani-American, Indian-American. The problem with these linguistic constructions is this that, they rather constrict the “object” defined in one particular bracket of hyphenated existence rather than making it a part of the holistic American/British existence. Commenting on hybrid identities, Jhumpa Lahiri once stated her position to further problematize this phenomenon. She says

The question of identity is always a difficult one, but especially so for those who are culturally displaced, as immigrants are, or those who grow up in two worlds simultaneously, as is the case for their children. The older I get, the more I am aware that I have somehow inherited a sense of exile from my parents, even though in many ways I am much more American than they are...I think that for immigrants, the challenges of exile, the loneliness, the constant sense of alienation, the knowledge of and longing for a lost world, are more explicit and distressing than for their children...For example, I have never known how to answer the question “Where are you from?” If I say I am from Rhode Island, people are seldom satisfied. They want to know more, based on things such as my name, my appearance, etc. Alternatively, if I say I’m from India, a place where I was not born and have never lived, this also is inaccurate...there was no single place to which I fully belonged.¹

The celebration of polyphony and multiculturalism has attracted me to his writing since the day I picked up *The Buddha of Suburbia* from a second hand book shop in College Street five years back. I found a reflection of my personal dilemma of “belonging” in Kureishi’s characters let it be the ‘hybrid’ Karim and Jamila of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Jamal and Miriam of *Something To Tell You*, Shahid and Chad of *The Black Album* or the socially displaced characters like Charlie and Eva (*The Buddha of Suburbia*), Ajita and Mushtaq (*Something to Tell You*) etc. This thesis would try and explore how Kureishi explores and constructs his characters by placing

¹ http://hinduism.about.com/library/weekly/extra/bl_jhumpainterview.htm as accessed on 17th March 08.

them against the backdrop of British popular culture i.e., the contemporary music and fashion scene. Initially it was difficult for me to choose my primary texts from Kureishi's vast range of writing which includes plays, screenplays, novels, short stories and non-fiction; but after initial hesitation I decided to work on selected novels of Kureishi keeping in mind that his plays and screenplays have been already worked on by a number of academicians. For my convenience, I selected three novels that were written by Kureishi at three different junctures of his literary career and address different issues like identity, muslimophobia and mid-life crisis in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, *The Black Album* and *Something to Tell You* respectively. *Gabriel's Gift* could have been considered instead of *Something to Tell You* but since the later text is rather untouched by academia I preferred it to the former.

The central idea in undertaking this project is to provide an elaborate "understanding the identity of the second generation immigrant" in the novels of Hanif Kureishi. There has been an attempt to provide for an elaborate understanding by addressing different themes like fashion, style and popular culture, men and masculinities and women in diaspora in the course of the work.

The first chapter is concentrated around the themes of fashion style and popular culture. This chapter deconstructs the construction of different identities (esp., of the second generation immigrant) vis a vis British popular culture and also discusses how the "subject" asserts its identities by taking recourse to marginal discourses of subculture. The 'subject' in this case becomes a part of dominant discourse not through its associations to it but through an alternative process of subversion and opposition.

The second chapter deals with the process of change and gradual transformations in the production and circulation of masculinities in the last century. The central idea of "transforming masculinities" is addressed in Kureishi's works by sketching the differences in the masculinities portrayed by the first generation immigrant and the second generation immigrant.

The third chapter is about the portrayal of women character's in Kureishi's novels. This chapter tries to understand and underline the various processes of cultural communications and negotiations that women have to be a part. This particular chapter deals not only with the South

Asian women characters (both first and second generation) but also with the white women characters in Kureishi's novels.

Ways of Living: Popular Culture, Fashion and Style in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, *The Black Album* & *Something to Tell You*

Kureishi explores the polyphony embedded in the much stereotyped category of the “South Asian” immigrant in Britain. By projecting his characters through the lens of diversity, Kureishi saves the archetypal immigrant from being drowned “an anonymous collectivity” (Loomba 137). He explores the multiple possibilities of being an Indian or a Pakistani in Britain and produces a counter narrative to; counter the homogenization of the category by representing characters that are divided on the basis of race, class, gender, generation and sexuality. But all interrelated by their being “British” at a certain historical, sociological and political juncture.

Kureishi himself tries to escape of the category of being a “cultural translator” by writing texts that have all white characters like *Gabriels Gift* and *London Kills Me*. For Kureishi’s characters, culture is not given, but it is something in which they are located, and like them it is continuously, rapidly changing and evolving, along with the society in which they are.

Kureishi’s representation of contemporary British culture in his novels is very much akin to Raymond Williams’s definition, where he defines it as ‘a whole way of life, material, intellectual, and spiritual’ (Williams 27). To elaborate on this definition further the term culture can also be understood as a

...historically created system of meanings and significance or...a system of beliefs and practices in terms of which a group of human beings understand, regulate and structure their collective lives. It is a way of both understanding and organizing human life. (Parekh 143)

Kureishi tries to unravel the contemporary “culture” or “ways of living” of the Pakistani immigrants in Britain and other marginal communities as opposed to the rich and affluent people, who live in London and its suburbs. Kureishi deals with the specific case of the South Asian immigrants, and in their rendering there is an attempt made by the author to break away from the characteristic mould that governs their representation. In Kureishi’s novels, they are not always characterized as the typical immigrant characters: the archetypal ‘others’ who are different and of whom there is an urgent demand for integration into the British culture. But they are a curious mixture of different identities that are at loggerheads with any one strict

definition or polarization. This perspective put forward by Kureishi is the call of his times, an era which promoted national integration and multiculturalism as opposed to the racially unrest, turbulent 60's. In the essay The Rainbow Sign, Kureishi gives a small glimpse of the racially intolerant ideologues of the times when he was growing up:

In 1965, Enoch Powell said: 'We should not lose sight of the desirability of achieving steady flow of voluntary repatriation for the elements which are providing unsuccessful or unassailable'.

In 1967, Duncan Sanndys said: 'The breeding of millions of half-caste children would merely produce a generation of misfits and create national tensions.'

...Also in 1967, Enoch Powell-who once said he would love to have been viceroy of India-quoted a constituent of his as saying that because of the Pakistanis 'this country will not be worth living in for our children'.

And Powell said, more famously: 'As I look ahead I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, "I seem to see the River Tiber foaming with much blood".' (Kureishi 2002 27-28)

Kureishi in his novels tries to address this growing sense of intolerance that has seeped into the latter half of 20th century British society. The notion of the 'alien' or the 'other' crafted by the politicians, media etc, that pose a threat to the dominant discourse of a homogenized imagination of the white British population is challenged by Kureishian characters that are built in a real world where it is a necessity for them to embrace the politics of cosmopolitanism.

With the help of his novels Kureishi tries to address the possibilities of a convivial culture, an idea which is strictly opposed to the politics of marginalization that was embraced by the conservatives like Powell. The so called "multicultural" author tries to do away with the stereotype of a Pakistani/immigrant whose real intentions were always suspect. Instead he presents the reader with an alternative world view by positing the dilemmas of a second generation immigrant who does not consider himself /herself to be the suspicious 'other' but as a part of the dominant culture. The construction of this image of a second generation immigrant who does not consider his 'father's' home (from which he is both temporally and spatially dislocated) to be his own but rather associates his loyalties with the place where he is



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born/brought up has been subjected to a lot of debates in new media, films as well as literature. The “second generation” immigrant debate has emerged as the latest challenge to both the colonial as well as post-colonial debates. The question of locating this hybrid subject has always been open to contestations.

There has been a remarkable shift in the content of British, Hollywood as well as Bollywood films since the release of films on “migrant” as the main subject like *Towers of Silence* (1975) by Jamil Dehlavi, *Private Enterprise* (1975) by Dilip Hiro and *Majdhar* by Ahmed Jamal (1984). Jigna Desai points out that these films dealt with “the difficulties of displacement (e.g., the isolation and lack of support due to migration and social alienation) and the institutional impacts of racism (e.g., lack of financial opportunities and access to education) on the lives of migrants” (Desai 42) This process of asserting ones anxieties and dilemmas in a public space were further encouraged in prime years of multiculturalism (eighties and nineties). English movies in these years saw the release of Kureishi’s films like *The Beautiful Laundrette* (1986) and *Sammy and Rosie get Laid* (1988) which tried to break the image of isolation and alienness that is generally associated with the immigrant. What the reader witnesses in the cinematic as well as the written works of Kureishi is his play with the “dialogic principle”. Kobena Mercer in his essay “Diaspora Culture and Dialogic Imagination” talks about how “The liberation of imagination is a precondition of revolution” and this is what we witness with the breaking away of the cultural stereotype in Kureishi’s novel. Mercer in his essay points out

Carnival is *not* “the revolution”, but in the carnivalesque aesthetic emerging here we may discern the mobility of what Bakhtin called “the dialogic principle in which the possibility of social change is prefigured in collective consciousness by the multiplication of critical dialogues” ()What is at issue can be characterized as the critical difference between a *monologic* tendency in black film which tends to homogenize and totalize the black experience in Britain, and a *dialogic* tendency which is responsive to the diverse and complex qualities of our black Britishness and British blackness-our differentiated specificity as diaspora people (Mercer 254)

These questions of anxiety, loss and fear have been gradually replaced by subjects that bring forth the friction between the first generation and the second generation immigrant, the conflicts in their ideologies, their separate notions of belonging as well as with the second generation

immigrant's relationship with the world around him. It is not only the diasporic film makers and writers who have tried to deal with this dilemma of "belonging" but of late mainstream Bollywood films have also tried to etch the character of this hybrid subject – e.g, Vivek Oberoi (Riyaaz) in *Kurbaan*, Yuvaan Makaar (Sameer) in *My Name is Khan* etc — films for which a large part of target audience is from the overseas market.

Like the shifting "national imagination" of what it is to be British since the call for immigrant labour in the 1940's and 50's; from the disembarkment of "Four hundred and ninety-two West Indian emigrants" (Proctor 13) on June 22nd 1948 from the *SS Empire Windrush* docked at Tilbury, and the subsequent employment of many South Asians and blacks in the manufacturing industries in Britain, there has also been an analogous change in the migrant ethnicities that have become an integral part of the British population since then. And across time these so called "immigrants" who had once upon a time landed with the intention of rendering labour have become a part of the British cultural scene. They have lent a lot of cultural signifiers and at the same time have also absorbed a lot of ingredients of the "white British" culture. This constant interaction and interchange has transformed the context of what is it to be British in the 21st century Britain.

There has been a significant change in the character of these cultural communities that were not initially a part of the "white" British populace but were, at the turn of the century and are now: the essential partners of the "multicultural" banner under which Britain has reconstituted its citizens. This change could be ascribed to the evolutionary character of "culture" which has the capacity to re-emerge with new parameters to define itself in a changing context. As Bhiku Parekh points out

...every culture is a culture of particular group of people, its creator and historical bearer...An ethnic community might lose its traditional culture, as when it migrates or abandons that culture in favour of another. And a culture might lose its ethnic rootedness, as when it is freely adopted by or imposed on outsiders...When a community's culture changes or is abandoned in favour of another, it remains the same community, now united in terms of another shared culture (Parekh 154-155)

Kureishi tries to represent the changing culture of South Asian immigrants in Britain along with a parallel narrative of cultural interchange under the banner of 'popular culture'. This changing culture of "white" Britain was influenced by the cultural movements of the 1960's, 70's and these times were also the legacy of Thatcherite era in Britain. If Powell based his politics on the on the culture of mistrust, hatred and opposition in covenant with the immigrants then Thatcher's regime encouraged people who were ready to work and make money. Characters like Haroon and his Father of *Borderline*, Naseer, Salim and Omar of *The Beautiful Laundrette*, Eva of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Chili and his parents of *The Black Album* and, Mushtaq in *Something to Tell You* are all examples of people who were doing well in Thatcher's era— they were hardworking entrepreneurs who could make it "big" if they worked towards it. But their being rich and successful does not grant them an entry into the dominant British culture. They have to take recourse to other means to an entry into the British cultural sphere.

Kureishi deals with South Asian (especially Pakistani) characters and other participants that are either marginalized in the mainstream 'British'/ 'white' culture or participate in a willful embracement of a culture that subversively appropriates the codes of the dominant culture. Kureishi takes recourse to the 'subculture' music, fashion and styles to produce an alternative discourse of British-ness. Kureishi's characters do not dance to Punjabi pop music or are draped in Indian sarees like the characters of Mira Sayal in *Life isn't all ha ha hee hee* or Chanu and his family of Monica Ali's *BrickLane*, but his characters are located in the mainstream British popular culture/subculture both in terms of music as well as fashion.

If culture is about a 'way of life' then subculture is about the subversive appropriation of the "given way of life"; it is about practices partaken by communities, which are not "conventional". What we see in this relation between culture and subculture is; the formation of "new codes and signals" within the existing system of codes in isolation. The subculture movements rest their existence on their resistance against the given signifiers of the dominant culture. In this manner, they construct themselves in opposition to the latter by bestowing new meanings to the objects or to the exiting codes. Dick Hebdige points out

...subcultural styles are created, adapted and eventually superseded. Indeed, the succession of post-war youth styles can be represented on the formal level as a series of transformations of an initial set

of items (clothes, dance, music, argot) unfolding through an internal set of polarities (mod v. rocker, skinhead v. greaser, skinhead v. hippie, ted v. punk, skinhead v. punk) and defined against a parallel series of 'straight' transformations ('high'/mainstream fashion). Each subculture moves through a cycle of resistance and defusion...this cycle is situated within the larger cultural and commercial matrices. (Hebdige 129-130)

Kureishi attempts to redefine the fixed idea of being British beyond the safely guarded familial sphere in the modern world where inflexible, conventionally revered structures are breaking down to give way to "neo-tribes". These new forms of community formation and identification are more fluid as compared to the older models of separation that were founded on the basis of class or race. These emerging "pseudo tribal identities" are about asserting individuality that is a part of the group yet is about "the self annihilating individual".

The characters of Kureishi's novels, whether be the second generation immigrants, gays or boys and girls of the younger generation, make an attempt to rupture the construction of social identities in order to redefine them with more flexibility. For, it is they who face crisis, as they do not belong to the old order but at the same time are not readily embraced by the new world order around them. This is a classic case where: 'Identity emerges as a dynamic process without primordial fixity' (Bahri et al 32). Kureishi projects these changes, by taking the reader to a detour of "outward signs...in the ever increasing speed of fashion cycles. New styles of clothing, furniture, decoration, music and art replace one another more and more quickly...History has never before witnessed such an incredible turnover in styles and tastes. The result, of course is a major loss of the pseudo-tribal identity provided by the old, rigid social class system" (Morris 33). It is the contemporary youth culture that acts as the basis of this new culture that seeks

...to devise new matrices between objects and ideas that will answer to their real nature, to once again line up and join together those things that had been falsely disunified and distanced from one another – as well as to disunite those things that had been falsely brought into proximity.... All these... are aimed primarily at destroying the established hierarchy of values, at bringing down the high and raising up the low, at destroying every nook and cranny of the habitual picture of the world... (Bakhtin 167)

The location which he zeroes down to depict this "way of life" in Britain is London: the metropolis of the century. The portrayal of London is a microscopic illustration of an assortment

of fast changing youth styles in modern urban spaces. In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the swiftly altering fashion of the city is very crisply pointed out by the author. Karim observes

...London had moved on in ten months. No hippies or punks: instead, everyone was smartly dressed, and the men had short hair, white shirts and baggy trousers held up by braces (Kureishi 1990 270)

It is this location which is central to Kureishi's writings, i.e., London and its surrounding brick lanes and borderlines; that contain and define this postmodern metropolis: a miniature model of the bigger canvas called Great Britain. Judith Watt in *The Penguin Book of Twentieth-century Fashion Writing* summarises the revolutionizing fashion scenario of Britain in the second half of the twentieth century. I quote

The themes of class and rebellion run through British dress...The 1950s' working class youths were inventing themselves as the fashion leaders for the first time: Teds in bootlace ties and mods in Italian bum-freezer jackets, and, as Nancy Mitford observes, even Etonians turned Ted. The 'British look' of the 1960's was an amalgam of youth from different backgrounds challenging almost every traditional sartorial rule, following the lead of pop groups, all made accessible by television, and purchasable at men's boutique's...Another kind of 'Britishness' was that of Mick Jagger and Nicky Haslam, who flouted convention in lace, black leather and Anello and David boots... (Watt 117)

Since lifestyle, fashion and music capture a very significant part of Kureishi's ethnoscape, the reader is time and again taken to the very heart of these binding ingredients that act as a superstructure of the holistic narrative of the novels. Jamal, the protagonist of the novel *Something to Tell You*, as a teenager continuously strives to be 'hip' by studying about pop-stars and movies in a classroom of twelve students that was defined by its very character of variety in terms of style. This very desire to turn "hip" has its own subversive connotations both structurally as well as linguistically

Clarence Major, in his study *Juba to live: A Dictionary of African American Slang*, traces the origins of hip to the Wolof Verb *hepi* ("to see") or *hipi* ("to open one's eyes"), and dates its

usage in America to the 1700s. So from the linguistic start, *hip* is a term of *enlightenment*, cultivated by slaves from the West African nations of Senegal and coastal Gambia...*Hip begins, then, as a subversive intelligence that outsiders developed under the eye of insiders...*

The meaning of the word hip acquired new connotations with the changing social scenario

The 1910s and 1920s brought the second hip convergence, as populations moved from country to city. Blacks migrated north, Jews emigrated from Europe, writers split for Paris, and the radio and fledgling record industry brought rhythm to the masses. Hip perlocated through a radical, gynocentric bohemia in Greenwich village, the Harlem Renaissance uptown and the Lost Generation in exile. The third hip convergence, after World War II, saw the parallel emergence of bebop and the Beat Generation, two intellectual movements that rejected the mainstream in search of grace and beatitude. This was hip's golden age, and the template for the counterculture of the following decade. (Leland 53)

These whole series of change in fads and fashions have molded and transformed the entire phenomenon of "celebrating the otherness" across time, and has time and again re-defined the integral position and their power of producing subversive discourses in the society. The aping of fashions straight out from the margins and cultivating the colloquial English of the ghettos was the result of the close communication among the non-white and the white working class population at spheres of work etc. It is in these groups that new communities are formed which could transcend the hierarchised binarification based on race, class, gender etc. In these surroundings bonds were forged on the basis of social conditions, likes, identification and also at times, purely on the basis of style.

The class of Jamal flaunted the myriad styles that were characteristic of that age: "hippies, down-at-heel, hard working academic types...a Goth, and a couple of punks wearing safety pins and bondage trousers. The hip kids were turning punk" (Kureishi 2008 31). Kureishi give a picture of contemporary Britain in which these new cultures were appearing under the mainstream 'white' British culture. Leon E. Wynter in his *American Skin: Popculture, Big Business and The End of White America* draws the readers' attention towards the socio-economic aspects of this new identity formation which could be in other words termed as cultural miscegenation that the

working class whites. The upper class whites considered these cross-cultural communications as corruption of existing codes and values. These interactions were considered crude, a culture of the masses and as a result were legitimized under the banner of “popular culture”.

Jamal’s sister Miriam who is “...wrapped in layers of flashing semi-psychedelic clothing along with a black, Goth, spider-web top...her wild hair... freshly streaked with red and blue, her face-studs sparkling” (Kureishi 2008 50) has suffered the sense of non-belonging, like most characters of Kureishi’s novels. She was not accepted by her father and other paternal relatives in Pakistan, a possibility that she tried to explore after facing the anti-police riots in Brixton. Both Jamal and Miriam are called “Paki” in England because they are not white whereas they are called “Paki” in Pakistan because they are not, and cannot be Pakistani enough to be ever addressed as Pakistani in a respectable manner. Jamal in the course of the narrative points out Miriam’s attempts at her being “authentic”:

Long before we got to Pakistan, like a lot of other ‘ethnics’ she’d been getting into the roots thing...She was a Pakistani, a minority in Britain, but there was this other place where she had a deep connection, which was spiritual, even Sufi. To prepare for the trip, she’d joined a group of whirling dervishes in Notting Hill. (Kureishi 2008 127)

Miriam’s turning to ‘pop’ has its own history of disenchantment accompanied by a strange sense of betrayal that she felt because of her father and repeated rejections that she faced from other men in her life. Miriam in a fit of anger tells Henry about her sordid past: “I’ve had five children and more abortions than you’ve had orgies! While you were in nancying around in theatres I was in a psychiatric hospital.”(Kureishi 2008 282) It is Miriam’s desire to “belong” somewhere leads her to the ‘pop’ lifestyle where she finds a friend/keeper like Bushy Jenkins. This is Miriam’s last resort after she tried belonging everywhere including her frail attempts to get intoxicated by Sufi music (to turn ethnic) in order to bond with her Pakistani roots. Her means of escape from real life is marijuana and other psychedelic drugs.

Henry (a middle-aged successful director), Jamal’s friend, on the other hand, who is fed up of his mundane life, starts his tryst with ‘pop’ after his acquaintance with Miriam. Both of them, together, visit the underground parties and explore new terrains of sensuality by participating in masked orgies at a place called the Kama Sutra club. For titillating Henry’s intellectual senses

Jamal philosophizes on the act of an orgy, “This orgy idea...Isn’t it a dream of merging? Of there being no differences between people? No one is left out. Sexually, it’s a totalitarian idea. Isn’t the orgy where people lose their individuality rather than find it” (Kureishi 2008 272). Inside the club, everyone is familiar, yet unfamiliar, the people are masked and they are in pursuit of uninhibited physical pleasure. Here, the existent social hierarchies of the real world crumble, in this space allocated to limitless pleasure and sexual possibilities, and an alternative order of possibilities is established where everyone is happily engrossed in the ‘other’. But to be a part of this congregation Jamal has to fit in by wearing appropriate clothes. He pays for garments that cover him up well in “rubber and some sort of plastic” and the Goddess gifts him a “half-mask with gold eye sockets, made of turquoise, blue and purple feathers, with silver blue stars sewn into it”(271). Jamal becomes a part of this carnivalesque and soon discovers Josephine (his wife) as a part this congregation.

For Kureishi, ‘style’ is a political issue as well as pastiche, or blank parody. For characters like Miriam it is a way of asserting who she is but at the same time the relevance of such popular forms of asserting resistance suffer from a loss of their original sense of meaning when this starts being marketed and commodified. Jameson describes pastiche as

...parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody’s ulterior motive, without satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something *normal* compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic. Pastiche is a blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humor. (Jameson 188-189)

On, one hand, being a punk, a Goth, or a hippie was a movement against victimization or marginalization and a movement towards belonging to a marginal (all these are subcultural modes of performing one’s identity) group by annihilating differences that are bodily (race or gender). This sense of new belonging empowered the subject with a new position, where he/she belonged to a “tribe” which was pitting against the society that was divided on the basis of various cultural and economic markers. But at the same time Kureishi shows how these very political ‘subcultures’ lost their touch with their origins and their respective authenticities when they were interpreted in the commercial culture of music and fashion.

Deedee Osgood, Shahid's teacher who was once a part of the hippie movement is nostalgic about the high idealism of the times that she was once so closely associated with. Her liberal way of thinking and teaching is often questioned by fundamentalists like Riaz and Chad. It is Deedee's punctual provocations and reminders of the necessity to seek one's true calling that enables Shahid to escape the clutches of his fundamentalist friends. Deedee's support and her towering influence permits to understand the world around him without succumbing to prejudices, and empowers him with the ability to question his mates and the encasing circumstances. The background of this novel is set against the music of Prince and Marvin Gaye. Chartbusters like "Sexual Healing" often played by Shahid juxtaposes Shahid's attempts at belonging to a group where both men and women are advised to strictly cover their bodies as opposed to the fundamental conception of Gaye about sex and body. I quote

Gaye prized sex as holy, as a sacrament that could mediate the temporal and the eternal, uniting lovers not just with each other but, if only fleetingly, with God (Friskics 51)

Shahid in the course of the novel is depicted to be torn between two cultures. He is effortlessly drawn towards the sensual excesses but at the same time he has to sacrifice it on the altar of religion, solidarity and brotherhood. *The Black Album* is often criticized for its crude representation of characters that are always pitted in opposition to each other. The possibilities of a dialogue between the sensualist and the fundamentalist from the start are closed. Shahid can only belong to either one of the two worlds.

In *The Black Album* Kureishi juxtaposes two cultural stereotypes: the hippie vs the fundamentalist. Shahid is Deedee's student/lover and he is also the brother/friend of Chad/Trevor Buss, whose 'soul was lost in translation' (Kureishi 1995 108). Chad was adopted by a white couple and was always jealous of people around him who would "effortlessly fit in" the picturesque Orwellian image of England, whereas he on the other hand was always looked at with suspicious eyes. Chad in his redeemed *avtaar* is a Muslim fundamentalist and the protector of the local Muslim leader Riaz.

Clothes and fashion re-appear in this novel of Kureishi as a means of associating with each other in a group as well as to echo the fashion of the 1980's. Chili's "pure cotton ruby socks, a green Fred Perry shirt, Paul Smith and some white Italian T-shirts" remind the reader of the yippie

style which was all about well tailored smart dressing style predominantly crafted by the fashion houses of that era. This was the essence of the eighties, seethed in hard work and individual responsibility and there was no place for the youth who were in the 1960's and 70's the icons of any fashion movement. Youth were replaced by the older generation who were earning and were backed with their personal spending capacity. It was around this time that a lot of Italian brands emerged as prominent players in the market like Giorgio Armani as well as American brands like Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klein. Vicky Carney in his book *Fashions of a Decade: The 1980's* points out

The rise in the popularity of the yuppie look pointed male fashion in a new direction...On the surface, this looked like a return to the familiar twentieth-century male tradition-but a new spirit was afoot...Men were increasingly concerned about their appearance and looking good...Success was not just reflected in salary but in a whole lifestyle, encompassing car, house, clothing and body. (Carney 13)

This culture of designer wear and western clothing is contrasted with the strict dress codes that are to be followed by a practicing Muslim. Tahira who wears a burqa points out to the men in her group that they should also be “appropriately dressed”, I quote

‘Chad, could you close your legs, please?’ Chad frowned but brought his knees together, shrugging at Hat.

She went on, ‘Chad, I’ve noticed that you like wearing tight trousers.’

‘I do, yes.’

‘But we women go to a lot of trouble to conceal our allures. Surely you’ve heard how hard it is to wear a hijab? We are constantly mocked and reviled, as we are the dirty ones...’

‘You brothers urge us to cover ourselves but become strangely evasive when it comes to your own clothes. Can’t you wear something looser?’...

Tahira said, ‘That will be progress. But aren’t you thinking of growing a beard?... Even Shahid has got something bushy on the way.’(Kureishi 1995 105)

This episode is soon followed by Chad gifting a *salwaar kamiz* to Shahid. This gesture serves as Shahid’s initiation into the brotherhood. He symbolically becomes a part of the brotherhood that

is not restricted to a particular country or a culture but becomes a part of a tribe that is bind together by rituals, customs and beliefs. In the mosque Shahid sees the congregation accumulated for the evening prayer and muses

The black kids stuck with each other, the Pakistanis went to one another's houses, the bengali's knew each other from way back, and the whites too. Even if there was no hostility between groups...but wasn't the world breaking up into political and religious tribes...More pressingly, if everyone was so hastingly adhering to their own group, *where did he belong?* (Kureishi 1995 134) (italicization mine)

The reader gets a taste of the London undergrounds, ecstasy and drug peddlers in *The Black Album*. Shahid, who has decided to acquire education in London, enrolls as a student under Deedee Osgood. Deedee introduces him to fringes of the 'other' world which is open to any kind of experimentation. Shahid unlike his brother Chili, who takes charge of his father's travel business after his death, has this urge to gain an understanding about himself and also to identify "what he lacked". Unlike Chili, Shahid is not rich. He cannot afford to have a lifestyle like Chili until and unless he decides to be a part of his travel business. Shahid is a rebel, he distances himself from his family, their business and at the same time he could not convince himself to be a part of Riaz and his group. He is constantly in friction with the worlds that are given to him and his primary desire is to understand his position in them. For him the question of 'belonging' re-surfaces at all junctures of his life and it is in this quest that he has moved from his home to London. The dilemma of belonging has been an integral part of Kureishi's narrative since the time he made his literary foray.

In *The Buddha of Suburbia* we witness the changing fashion and music scenario from the eyes of Karim: the fading away of the hippies to the emergence of the new wave. Karim who once got the solicitous advice on fashion from Charlie as a school kid to wear "Levis...with an open necked shirt, maybe in pink or purple, and a thick brown belt"(Kureishi 1990 16), i.e., in short to "wear less" witnesses Charlie's conversion to the group of "anti-star" who loathingly swears "Fuck off, all you smelly old hippies! You fucking slags! You ugly fart-breaths! Fuck off to hell!" and embraces their fashion mantra where the boys dressed themselves in

...ripped black clothes. And the clothes were full of safety-pins. Their hair was uniformly black, and cut short, seriously short, or if long it was spiky and rigid, sticking up and out and sideways, like a handful of needles, rather than hanging down. A hurricane would not have dislodged those styles. The girls were in rubber and leather and wore skin-tight skirts and holed black stockings, with white face-slap and bright-red lipstick. (Kureishi 1990 129)

It is Karim who witnesses the rise and fall of Charlie Hero and his subsequent tactful adaptation to the new styles of popular culture which in turn, would aid him to become a star. Charlie embraces the much touted style of “confrontation dressing” (Hebdige 107) in which all those elements are used as accessories of fashion which are actually absent in fashion vocabulary. What we witness in the case of Charlie and Jamal is how there is a circulation

of youth styles from the subcultures to the fashion market, then, is not simply a ‘cultural process’, but a real network or infrastructure of new kinds of commercial and economic institutions. The diffusion of youth styles from the subcultures to the fashion market, then, is not simply a ‘cultural process’, but a real network or infrastructure of new kinds of commercial and economic institutions. (Hall et al 187)

Similarly, Karim also continuously reinvents himself as an actor and in terms of his performance to retain his salability. Both Charlie and Karim have to dislocate themselves from their respective homes in South London suburbs to London and then to America to attain success. Karim has to mimic his authenticity of being Indian by wearing a ‘loin-cloth and brown make-up’ and by speaking in an ‘authentic’ Indian accent for his debut as an actor whereas Karim observes that in America

Charlie had acquired this cockney accent when my first memory of him at school was that he’d cried after being mocked by the gypsy kids for talking-so-posh. ..Now he was going in for cockney rhyming slang too...He was selling Englishness, and was getting a lot of money for it. (Kureishi 1990 247)

Nick Bentley in his essay “Narratives of Cultural Space”² points out how Haroon exploits the cultural stereotype of being an Indian for his own benefit. He parades in “a large pair of pyjamas...On top...a long silk shirt embroidered around his neck with dragons...under this...baggy trousers and sandals” (Kureishi 1990 29) to Eva’s house for disseminating knowledge about life and yoga that he himself had hurriedly demystified from the pages of *The Secret of the Golden Flower*. He employs himself as the ‘spiritual guru’ to escape his mundane life in the suburbs and also to pursue physical pleasures with Eva.

The success stories of Charlie and Karim, the small but noticeable walk of Haroon to his five minutes of fame as the “mystic guru”, their respective indulgences and the tropes used by them on their road to fame and money are a reminder of the very essence of ‘pop’. Charlie Kay by the simple act of changing his name, a fad in the era of ‘pop’, transforms into a youth icon: Charlie Hero, the rebellious pop-star. Charlie Hero achieves success, fame and stardom in America but he does not have his friends or peers who would behold his success. His sense of achievement is incomplete as long as there is an absence of an envious or an admiration filled gaze. He embarks on a journey of constant self improvement but it is only the ‘gaze of the other’ which could complete him. But Karim does not want to be with Charlie (his first love), in America, instead he returns home, to London, back to his own life, of being an actor. Kureishi uses fiction as a medium to present the “alternative history” of “post-war culture” and “introduces us to the fringes of the respectable world, to marijuana, generational conflict, clubs, parties, and to a certain kind of guiltless, casual sex that had never been written before” (Kureishi 1995(b) xix)

Kureishi was writing about an era that traces the after effects of the popular on the British society after the Beatles summer tour of 1966 which was interrupted by a huge Christian rally, planned by Christian fundamentalists as a protest against John Lennon’s remark that the Beatles were ‘more popular than Jesus’. (Kureishi 1995(b) 278) What served as a strong aide memoire in the history of pop and youth culture was the astonishing number of twenty thousand who heard the Beatles as opposed to the eight thousand (in which four thousand were adults) who were

² Bentley, Nick. *Contemporary British Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2008.

rallying against them. What came after were: protests against the war in Vietnam, the Hippies in 'Hashbury' (Haight-Ashbury district in San Francisco), marijuana, LSD, and free rock concerts in Golden Park for those who could not afford it otherwise.

It is in or around the fictionalized narratives of pop-stars like Charlie Hero in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Lester Jones in *Gabriel's Gift* and George Cage in *Something to Tell You* that the central characters are located. Though *The Black Album* is an exception in terms of the lack of an Kureishian pop-star character but it nevertheless plays tribute to Prince (also known as Prince Rogers Nelson) as it is named after the much hyped and banned music album *The Black Album* by the American pop-star that was scheduled to be released on 7th of December 1987. Perhaps it is this close proximity with the 'popular' that influences the characters, their choices and the rejection of the conventional parameters set by the world around them. The characters strongly echo the words of Matthew Bannister in the introductory chapter of *White Boys, White Noise: Masculinities and 1980's Indie Guitar Rock*

My idea of masculinity was shaped mostly by my mediated identification with popular culture heroes (representations), but also by the sense that education and popular culture were systems in the public arena where I could 'belong', a kind of imagined community, on the one hand, but also a public space where I could potentially gain power, by 'being someone'.

Identity in modernity is no longer something we necessarily get from family, community and tradition, because our experience of them is now fragmented and disjointed. (Bannister xix)

This trait, of charting the road of the central characters towards self-realization or growth by kneading in contemporary styles and music, can also be interpreted as the re-localization of the 'hybrid' into his mother culture to which he/she is not an alien but is an integral part unlike the 'father' figure in Kureishi's novels. In *The Buddha of Suburbia* as well as *Something to Tell You*, the character of the mother of Jamal and Shahid is etched as a woman who is basically 'white' and hails from middle class. Though *The Black Album* stands as an exception to the standard formula of character construction what is to be noticed in this case is that unlike the fathers of *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *Something to Tell You* who came in the pursuit of education in England, Shahid's father was a businessman whose sole motto was to expand his family

business. There is perhaps a very subtle hint of the mother being a 'cultural carrier' and it from her, that there is a direct transference of culture and also from father's like Haroon, who were "elegant and handsome, with delicate hands and manners; beside him most Englishmen looked like clumsy giraffes" (Kureishi 1990 4). These hybrid families of Kureishi's fictional work are examples of family units that show

..immense strains on marriages in general and on women in particular, as marriages become the meeting points of historical patterns of socialization and new ideas of proper behavior. Generations easily divide, as ideas about property, propriety and collective obligation wither under the siege of distance and time. Most important of all, the work of cultural reproduction in new settings is profoundly complicated by the politics of representing family as "normal" (particularly for the young. (Mannur etal 43)

Men and Masculinities in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, *The Black Album* & *Something to Tell You*

Kureishi investigates different possible constructions of the 'self' in his novels. Kureishi in his writings have always tried to address diverse subjectivities by crafting myriad characters of different social and economic backgrounds. Kureishi has etched some of the most remarkable South Asian characters in his novels like Karim of *The Buddha of Suburbia* or Omar of *My Beautiful Laundrette*. At the same time he has also introduced his readers to the world that exists in the peripheries of British Society like that of the homeless people, immigrants, gays, blacks, drug addicts etc. Kureishi sets his eyes on deconstructing the lives of his characters and analyzing them with respect to the context in which they are placed. Very often his characters open up to the readers through the typical Kureishian narrative wherein the character is in the process of discovering and defining himself. The character evolves through his/her understanding of the outside world. Kureishi's characters are introduced to the reader through the typical first person narratives. The characters develop through their engagement with different situations that they encounter and deal with in day to day life or in the choices that they make. The familiar faces of South Asians appear in a new light in the Kureishian narrative as the writer continuously imagines and reconstitutes various elements in positioning of the "subject"³ vis a vis the dominant discourses of sex, race and class. It is in this process of reconstitution that Kureishi etches new black/brown subjectivities that were earlier absent or rarely acknowledged in the British media. Critics have at times pointed out that Kureishi's writings are a typical example of literature in a world where there is a continuous attempt to bridge this gap between

³ In any discourse the "subject" is the most crucial constituent in defining one's identity, for the 'self' is constructed when the 'subject' itself becomes a function of power. It entails that the 'subject' is 'subject' only when it has proved its supremacy against the 'object'; which in turn means that one's subjectivity can only exist in its relationship with the 'other'. The relation between the 'self' and the 'other' or in other words the orientation of subjectivity in relation to the 'other' is known as identity. In the maze of ever evolving "identity" the notion of "difference" acts as an essential ingredient in determining one's position vis-a- vis the 'other/Other'.

‘self’ and ‘other’, with the help different official policies like multiculturalism⁴, concepts like convivial culture, cosmopolitanism, Secular Humanism etc.

There has been a conscious attempt in the past decade to empower the voices of minorities in many countries. The first step towards fostering solidarity between different ethnic groups existing in any society was to bridge the gap (let it be economical, social, political or cultural) that existed among them. Kureishi’s literary career flowered at a time when Britain was on the lookout for “cultural translators” in its heterogeneous population. Kureishi became a familiar name after his association with Channel Four (Channel 4 was created by the British media in the 1980’s with the intent of promoting the voices of minorities in the British population).

Nahem Yousaf in his essay “Hanif Kureishi and ‘the brown man’s burden’”⁵ highlights Kobena Mercer’s argument of ‘the burden of representation’, where the black artist is expected to tell a certain kind of narrative. Yousaf points out that “the black artist is straitjacketed into a formulaic series of expectations...the artist is monitored and regulated as to his or her access to modes of cultural production and to visibility as a cultural producer. The containment of black artists leads to what Mercer terms the ‘sense of urgency’ to tell everything at once but it may also lead to a desire to tell stories other than the ones expected of a black cultural producer” (Mercer 76).

Kureishi, in order to escape such a predicament in Britain extends his writings not only to the peripheries of a metropolis like London where most South Asians live but also to other marginalized sections of British society. In his latest works Kureishi had also dealt with subjects like mid-life crisis in his novels like *Intimacy*, *Gabriel’s Gift* and *Something to Tell You*. Moreover, in order to escape being stereotyped as a South Asian novelist and to bring diversity to his works Kureishi had published novels like *Gabriel’s Gift* that has all white characters and *The Body*, a novella that could be labeled as science fiction.

The appearance of Kureishi’s gay, South Asian businessman Omar in *My Beautiful Laundrette* had sparked many controversies about Kureishi’s writings. Kureishi was accused of tampering

⁴ Multiculturalism has been adopted by different countries and promoted by each state with individual way of defining it like British multiculturalism. Australian mosaic culture and the American melting pot.

⁵ Yousaf, Nahem, “Hanif Kureishi and ‘the brown man’s burden’”. *Critical Survey*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1996.

with the image of South Asians in the media by portraying characters of South Asian origin in an entirely different light.

My Beautiful Laundrette caused much hype in the British media because of the presence of characters like Omar Ali. The portrayal of Omar's sexuality (i.e., as a homosexual) was outrightly rejected by many South Asians. Criticisms were hurled at Kureishi for representing South Asian characters in a negative light (characters like Salim in the narrative are greedy and unscrupulous).

Commenting on this aspect of Kureishian narrative Ruvani Ranasinha in "The Politics of Representation: Political commitment and Ironic Distance" points out, "Kureishi appears to have accurately anticipated the hostility he would face with *Laundrette*...Kureishi justifiably refuses to take on the role of representing 'the Asian community'. (Ranasinha 49)

His portrayal of a gay, South Asian entrepreneur is one of many controversial identities that Kureishi has portrayed in his works. Ruvani Ranasinha in "Introduction: Situating Hanif Kureishi" sees the character of Omar as the beginning of Kureishi's "exploration of *the question of race through sexuality and constructions of masculinity*." (Ranasinha 19) In his later novels like *The Buddha of Suburbia*, *The Black Album* and *Something to tell You* Kureishi engages further with the "question of race" and deals with the changing character of masculinity vis a vis their ethnicity in the changing social context. This chapter will focus on Kureishi's constructions of South Asian masculinities in his novels. There will also be an attempt to contrast the hegemonic masculinity of the first generation immigrant with the fluid and dialogic masculinities of the second generation immigrant.

Before moving into a detailed analysis of Kureishi's representation of different masculinities in the key texts it is necessary to understand the term "masculinities". This particular term has been the topic of many debates and discussion in the past era. John Beynon in "What is Masculinity?" (Beynon 1-25) explains the term "masculinities" along with a brief overview about how this term became a part of contemporary culture and theoretical postulations. Beynon explains that, "Masculinity is always interpolated by cultural, historical and geographical location" and in the last century movements like feminism and gay movement have been instrumental in interpreting

masculinity as well as sexuality in a new light. Masculinity is interpreted in this context as “cultural” phenomenon as opposed to “maleness” which is biological. Masculinity therefore, can only be interpreted by taking factors like “class, subculture, age and ethnicity” etc. Benyon and other critics on “masculinities” have always emphasized the plurality that exists within the discourses of masculinities that are loosely homogenized under the categories of race, sex, class etc. Benyon, therefore points out that

...any easy generalizations like ‘working class’, ‘middle class’, ‘gay’ or ‘**black**’ masculinities are greatly misleading because within each of these broad categories there is considerable variation in both experience and presentation...men globally have never shared the conception of masculinity...it is interpreted, enacted and experienced in culturally specific ways (Benyon 3)

Benyon’s theoretical postulations can be interpreted in a better fashion by taking Morgan’s explanations of masculinity into account. Morgan defines masculinity as a “cultural space” as something that defines the characteristic traits of men or simply as “what men do”. This definition is further elaborated by theorists like Kirsten and Butler who have described “masculinity” as ‘situational accomplishment’ and as a “performative act” respectively. But it is only with the help of the body as well as its relationship with the world around forms one’s identity.

Benyon argues that this new way of looking at “masculinity” as a “cultural” phenomenon is the result of a series of changes in economy, technology, politics and the socioscape in the twentieth century. The Suffragette movement⁶ had influenced the lives of many women in countries like United Kingdom, Ireland, USA, Australia, and New Zealand. Women had been empowered for the first time in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Women in many countries were given voting rights. The years of Suffragette movement were temporally parallel to the years that had already brought a considerable change in the living conditions of people living in various developing countries after the World wars. The Great Depression era when millions of men were unemployed was catalytic in changing the ideal image of the man as the “breadwinner” or the provider of his family needs. The emergence of technology in the post depression era further

⁶ This movement started in the 1860’s but it was popularized and well know from 1098 to 1928.

worsened the situation for men. The closing of many heavy industries like shipping, mining etc further reduced the requirement for men in the industrial section. The changing scenario not only led to the new situation where men were under privileged but also the women were catapulted to a scenario where they could find employment with ease in the automobile industry. This transformation situated men in a completely new matrix of both consumption as well as production.

The advent of Feminism in the 1960's further carried on the legacy of women's empowerment. But this was the same time when consumerism was the catch phrase. Benyon points out the major reasons by which this new trend of consumption soon became a question of lifestyle. Celebrity culture, the growing popularity of "image industry" and its successive growth as well as the increase in goods of luxury like cars were some of the many characteristic traits of consumer culture. Critics like Benyon have often pointed out that consumerism promoted a culture wherein desires become more important than needs. This culture points out Benyon has also led "masculinities" to a juncture where "masculinities" can also be commodified according to ones resources.

Nick Bentley in *Contemporary British Fiction* talks about Haroon's performance as The Buddha. Bentley points out

Karim's father, Haroon, is the suburban Buddha alluded to in the title and shows an ability to exploit cultural stereotypes to his own advantage. He takes on the image of the exotic mystic to get money out of the gullible, suburban, white middle class, and is, therefore, aware of the way in which cultural identities can be used to turn the exploitation back on the colonial centre. His position as a 'lapsed Muslim masquerading as a Buddhist', whilst at the same time continuing his day job as a suited civil servant, shows this fluidity of cultural identity and how it can be used for personal gain. (Bentley 165)

Haroon in the course of the novel is described by Kureishi as someone who is impeccable in his manners. He adds "Like many Indians... (he) was small, but...was also elegant and handsome, with delicate hands and manners, beside him many Englishmen would look like clumsy giraffes. He was broad and strong too: when young had been a boxer and fanatical chest expander." (Kureishi 1990 4) Haroon is an employee of the British Government. He works as a Civil

service clerk and also acts as the mystic spiritual guru of the East on Eva's request. Haroon is actually an imposter posing as the *guru*. Haroon explores his connection with the East to its fullest. He not only becomes a small local star in himself who is mainly driven the exotic element of eastern spirituality but also manages to win Eva as his girlfriend.

Kureishi's characters like Omar, the rich gay entrepreneur of *My Beautiful Laundrette*, Karim, the ambitious bisexual actor of *The Buddha of Suburbia* and Mushtaq/John Cage, the talented gay singer, songwriter and musician; draw their identities from their difference (their choice of sexuality) with others (both with the characters in his text as well as with the characters of his plays or screenplays). Kureishi situates homosexuality as well as bisexuality in the post modern context. If we try and look at how homosexuality is interpreted in the modern context, it can be defined in its relationship with the discourses of heteronormative sexualities. In this case, Manalansan points out that

- Homosexual relations have been able to escape the structure of the dominant heterosexual kinship system.
- Exclusive homosexuality, now possible for both partners, has become alternative path to conventional family forms.
- Same-sex bonds have developed new forms without being structured around particular age or gender categories.
- People have come to discover each other and form large-scale social networks not only because of existing social relationships but also because of their homosexual interests.
- Homosexuality has come to be a social formation unto itself, characterized by self-awareness and group identity. (Mannur et al 210)

Therefore, the non-heteronormative sexuality of Kureishian protagonists is located through their 'perverse' subject position- i.e., of being a part of "queer South Asian diasporic subjectivity" (Gopinath 2003 264) and their non-belonging to the "heterosexual diasporic subjectivity".

As Iris Marion Young points out, I quote "Any move to define an identity, a closed totality, always depends on excluding some elements, separating the pure from the impure." (Young 315)

The sexuality of characters like Omar and Mushtaq can be accommodated in the construction of 'the new man' by refuting their Muslim identity but it is the bisexuality of characters like Karim that poses a bigger threat to the world (Western) that defines itself on the basis of difference. Eve Sedgwick in *Epistemology of the closet* points out that

Current struggles over the "authenticity" of bisexuality illustrate the effect: if the world is divided into "same" and "different", "homo" and "hetero", then bisexuality is something which cannot exist, and individuals claiming a bisexual identity are confused or are in a state of transition. (Sedgwick 1990 28)

Perhaps, it is Karim's sexuality that challenges his feelings of belonging to one place or the other. In a world etched on differences Karim finds it difficult to understand the basic facets of his identity, namely ethnicity and sexuality. Karim wants to construct his identity in opposition to the 'other' and this is his biggest limitation because he is both British and Asian as well as both a heterosexual and a homosexual. Karim is from the suburbs but he is also a Londoner. All these characteristic traits of Karim which makes him the inhabitant of oppositional worlds challenges him into different situations where he belongs as well as not unlike his father who is straight and has the memories of the world that he once belonged. Kureishi very skillfully captures the dilemma of Karim from the opening lines of *The Buddha of Suburbia* "I am an Englishman born and bred, almost" (Kureishi 1990 1) till the end of the novel. The heterogeneity of Karim's character indicates how identity "should not be equated with labels for fixed or national groups, or indeed with labels of any kind. They are about 'choosing' and 'using' as well as 'being'. (Hussain & Miller 2006 11)

In *The Buddha of Suburbia* Haroon's contempt for homosexuality manifests itself when he witnesses Karim and Charlie making love in the course of his spiritual sessions in Eva's house. Haroon exclaims

'I saw you, Karim. My God, you're a bloody pure shitter! A bum banger! My own son-how did it transpire?' ... 'I'll send you to a fucking doctor to have your balls examined!' (Kureishi 1990 18)

Haroon is clearly troubled by Karim's act but both of them refrain from talking about this episode. Haroon's immediate reaction of contempt against same sex relationships is manifested clearly in the narrative when he sees Karim with Charlie together. Like most South Asian Muslim fathers of Kureishian narrative, for Haroon it is doubly impossible to accept Karim's sexuality both as a man as well as a Muslim. It is only when Karim starts seeing Eleanor that he muses

Dad had already heard that I set my sights on Eleanor. This was relief to my father, I knew, who was terrified that I might turn out to be gay and 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 perverse and self-destructive, as well as everything else. (Kureishi 1990 174)

Judith Butler in her work on sexuality and gender points out how the differences created by sex and gender are instrumental in constructing 'heterosexuality' as the rule or the normal choice whereas other sexualities are condemned for being unnatural. Therefore this normative discourse of heterosexuality reasserts its fundamental postulations by recreating the circumstances that favour it through constant proliferation into new generations and by propagating its validity to them. This leads to the formation of 'subjects' who follow heterosexuality and the 'other' or the 'non-subject'. Kureishi's narrative gives a platform to these 'non-subjects' and their modes of resistance against the dominant culture.

This outright condemnation of homosexuality also resurfaces in Kureishi's latter novel *The Black Album*. Riaz, the Muslim student leader, and Hat criticize homosexuality in Shahid's presence:

Hat had stated that homosexuals should be beheaded, though first they should be offered the option of marriage. Riaz had become interested and said that God would burn homosexuals forever in hell, scorching their flesh in a furnace before replacing their skin as new, and repeating this throughout eternity (Kureishi 1989 119).

In *The Black Album* Kureishi does not etch any gay or bisexual character but the narrative is always accompanied by the image of the bisexual, pop star Prince who is described by Deedee as, "...half black and half white, half man half woman, half size, feminine but macho too" (Kureishi 1995 25) Kureishi had named his second novel after Prince's *The Black Album*.

In *The Black Album*, for Shahid, like Omar and Karim, religion does not hold redemption but it rather poses a threat to them in performing their identities. Riaz on the other hand is an embodiment of agonistic masculinity⁷. Riaz like Shahid transgresses the codes of masculinity by refusing the law and order of normal existence whereas Shahid who is in love with his teacher Deedee does not denounce his life of sexual adventure, drugs and music for leading the life of a chaste Muslim with his friends.

Shahid in the course of the narrative recounts how his father and his brother Chili bullied Shahid by calling him effeminate. Shahid recalls how his father got infuriated when he came to know that the former was reading poetry to his girlfriend on a date. I quote

‘Did you touch her?’ Papa stabbed at his own wheezing chest.

‘Or further down’, he continued, slapping his legs, as thin as medieval Christ’s. Chili was smirking in the doorway.

‘No’.

‘What have you been doing?’

‘Reading poetry.’

‘Speak up, you bloody eunuch fool!’

‘Reading Keats and Shelly to her.’

‘To the girl?’

‘Did she laugh at you?’

‘I don’t think so.’

Of course she did!’ (Kureishi 1995 52)

⁷ The masculinity of the terrorist is often interpreted as the case of transgressive masculinity. The cult of violence among men (let it be the suicide bombers or the *Jihadis*) are seen as figures who transgress the normal law and order and therefore their masculinity cannot be interpreted as that of a normal citizen. The masculinity of the terrorist, therefore can only exist outside the ideology of state and its rules and regulations.

Shahid's character is completely in contrast with his father's who flew RAF bombers from East Anglia and was also awarded with an MBE and with his brother Chili, for whom both money and girls came easily in the 1980's. Shahid in order to understand himself leaves his house for college in London after his father's death. Shahid refuses to be a part of the patriarchal set up that had considered him effeminate. If Shahid's brother and father are from the old masculine era then Shahid is brought up in the culture of the new masculine wherein men have to play multiple roles like father, brother, lover, partner, worker etc. *The Black Album* concludes with Shahid breaking all ties with his friends. Shahid and Deedee are together and they choose to sever all ties with the world outside.

The self confessed 'racist' Shahid who is often haunted by "killing nigger fantasies" in end takes the route of hedonism with Deedee. Shahid's performance of his masculinity in the end is completely opposed to how Shahid introduces himself to Riaz and the audience in the beginning of *The Black Album*. Both Riaz and Shahid can only be defined by their position of opposition against the dominant discourses. Their masculinities have to be in the process of continuous friction with the discourses woven around them (like religion or law respectively).

In *Something to Tell You*, Kureishi's latest novel, the writer has made an attempt to address homosexuality by creating characters like Mushtaq/John Cage. Mushtaq or John Cage's image is contrasted with his father right from the start. Jamila's and Mushtaq's father was a very powerful man. He owned a factory in London but due to workers strike and other problems his business is almost destroyed. As a child Mushtaq loved reading *Young Americans*, loved *Rolling Stones* and watching T.V. Jamal describes young Mushtaq as "girlish" (81) as he is unaware of "football". The incest committed by Ajita's father re-asserts his hegemonic masculinity as opposed to Mushtaq's choice of sexuality after his father's death. Mushtaq even confesses to Jamal that "If he were alive today he would disapprove of everything about me. I have to be glad he's dead-which is difficult" (Kureishi 2008 192)

Like Mushtaq, Jamal's father is also absent for most part of the narrative as he is separated from Jamal's mother and is settled in Pakistan. Jamal's visit to Pakistan helps him in gauging the distance that has crept between them over the course of years. The absence of Jamal's father figure is replaced by his analyst Tahir. Tahir not only helps Jamal in fighting with the guilt of

killing Ajita's father but also in choosing his career. Unlike Jamal (a south Asian Muslim, without a father figure), Mushtaq's homosexuality displaces him from his original place of belonging. Mushtaq's real identity is always camouflaged under the alias of John Cage, a very well known face in the popular culture circle. Mushtaq himself confesses how his colour and his upbringing were always instrumental in concealing his real identity as a South Asian.

Mushtaq is very connected and Jamal meets Omar Ali, Karim and Charlie in a party that Mushtaq hosts in his country house. In *Something to Tell You* Kureishi very craftily brings together some of his very powerful characters that were present in his former works. This particular party is a stage set by Kureishi wherein he brings together some of his characters and juxtaposes their opinions. Omar Ali who is now very rich and well connected despises the leftist stand and ideologies in his country. Omar is a successful entrepreneur in the TV business and is an ardent Tory supporter. Karim, who once used to be very famous, is running through a rough patch career wise and Charlie on the other hand is still basking in his glory of yester years. But all these characters including Mushtaq are removed from their past and they had made a mark in the present through their persistence, hard work coupled with a fair share of manipulation.

In "Exploring notions of masculinity and fatherhood: When gay sons 'come out' to heterosexual fathers" Tracey Skelton and Gill Valentine point out how "homophobia as part of masculinity and part of fatherhood provides an important context for the father—son relations" (Hoven etal 192) and how their set of familial relations, "acting at individual, social and cultural levels, in which masculinities are at play and potentially in great tension with each other". The politics that govern this familial relationship are "alliance, dominance and subordination" as Young points out in his critique of hegemonic masculinities. The homosexual masculinities of the sons can be repressed by their fathers. Tracey Skelton and Gill Valentine point out

men have been, and continue to be, exposed to, and interact with, hegemonic masculinity but through a discovery of their homosexual sexual identities they have transformed the way in which they engage with such a hegemony. The men are both marginalized from, and subordinated by, the dominant masculinity. Nevertheless some of them resist the negative practices and reject the 'patriarchal dividend' because they constitute a masculinity which contradicts the heterosexual masculine hegemony. (Hoven etal 193)

Kureishi's characters underplay their Muslim identity as it is unable to accommodate one of the defining markers of one's identity, i.e., sexuality. Since, one can either be a Muslim or a homosexual. Kureishi's protagonists in the process of re-defining themselves turn towards an identity which is more secular i.e., their being British and situate themselves in opposition to the dominant discourses by locating themselves in the margins or in the popular culture scene their search for identity.

These new ways of asserting one's subjectivity separates the first generation immigrant character of Kureishian narrative form the second generation South Asian immigrant. Kureishi in his novels has always tried to address the marginal sexual identities of his characters. There had also been many attempts by the author to address this issue from the perspective of both the first generation and second generation characters. Kureishi's texts deal with these marginal sexualities and their respective conflicts with their families as well as with the society around them. Almost all of Kureishi's South Asian second generation characters are born into a middle class, immigrant, Muslim families. It is this Muslim identity that refuses to accommodate any kind of sexual diversions in the formation of the characters identity. Both Islamic masculinities as well as the 'social construction of masculinity in Western culture' (Stephen etal 61) have rejected femininity and homosexuality as threats to traditional notions of masculinity. Asifa Siraj in her essay "On being homosexual and Muslim: conflicts and challenges" (Ouzgane 202-216) writes about the responses of various interviewees (most of them who were Muslim, male and were either straight or gay) and how being gay and Muslim at the same time might evoke some fundamental problems. She re-iterates what Ellison has pointed out in this context: 'many gay men and lesbians repudiate organised religion or at least maintain a healthy distance in order to survive in a hostile context' (Ouzgane 208). Asifa Siraj points out that in some cases the Muslim and the homosexual identity could be integrated on the grounds that homosexuality in most cases was a natural condition to some people and therefore "God given" but this connection could not be forged for all respondents.

In an attempt to move away from the writings typically associated with diasporic writers Kureishi plays with the idea of a dystopic reality where in bodies could be purchased, worn and discarded by human beings. In his novella *The Body*, Kureishi's body is the site of performance

for different activities. Gender, colour, occupation etc set assorted roles for this body to be a part of social action. The 'mind' and 'matter' debate that had been the central debate of western philosophy is addressed by Kureishi. For, the postmodern writer Kureishi, the bridge between mentality and materiality is not 'imagination' but a technologically sound future that would enable new advancements. Kureishi decodes the possibility of a world where mind is specific and bodies are readily available to everyone, a completely contrasting position to the functioning of the present world where the mind is free-flowing and the body is governed by constant sameness. Kureishi structures his protagonist's debacle and dilemma in such a way that the reader gets to explore various facets and functions of a normal, human body.

Kureishi's body has traits of the 'body' that has been identified by Maurice Merleau Ponty. As he mentions: "It is only through body that I understand other people, just as it is through my body that I perceive things."⁸

Adam's act of exchanging body results in new permutations and combinations. Being in a new/different body he for the first time explores the possibilities of youth and beauty. As Mark, he enters his own house and talks to his wife. He works in a Centre for women in Greece as an "Oddjob". His relationship with Patricia, Alicia or his new present is at constant friction with his past because he is being chased by Matte's men (Matte wants Adam's new body for his ailing brother). Adam becomes a subject who cannot be self-regulated anymore by the social order because of his multiple identities: Adam/Adam in Mark's body.

The Body, of Kureishi transports us to a situation where the body becomes 'cultural plastic'. The author takes us to a point in history where even the body is commodified as a garment that can be worn, used and in the end sold to get a better one when it is old from wear and tear. The body in Kureishi's story breaks the dichotomies of gender and race that are the crucial elements in positing the 'self'. This small piece of sci-fiction takes us to a futuristic plane where

⁸ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *Phenomenology of Perception* (trans. Colin Smith), London: Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1962.

The body is no longer simply a dysfunctional object requiring medical intervention, but a commodity...which can be continuously upgraded and modified in accordance with new interests and greater resources. (Joanne 56)

The body in Kureishi is thereby reduced to a 'pastiche'- a blank parody in Jamesonian terminology⁹. Adam's new body does not have any memories just like the replicants in Ridley Scott's *The Blade Runner* (1982).

The extreme dystopic possibilities of our highly technologised culture are presented by Kureishi in his novella. The crisis faced by individual even in the highest state of technological accomplishment and the other side of cosmetic surgery, sex change operations etc is the main subject of Kureishi's enquiry. Kureishi's first work of science fiction can be read as his attempt to move away from the "differential history" of mankind. Homi Bhabha explains this concept further in his essay "'Race', Time and the Revision of Modernity" (Moore etal 167-214) where he discusses the "differential and relational nature of postcolonial identity" (Moore etal 166) and the subversive nature of postcolonial politics. For Bhabha modernity is still an incomplete project undertaken by the West and it is only under the banner of postmodernism that it has made a new attempt in demystifying the non-West. He elaborates on his ideas by referring to Fanon's "phenomenological performance of what it means to be *not only a nigger* but a member of the marginalized, the displaced, the diasporic...whose very presence is both 'overlooked'- in the double sense of social surveillance and physical disavowal. And at the same time...made stereotypical and symptomatic"(Moore etal 167). Kureishi in *The Body*, manipulates the reader into believing a future wherein the discourses woven around human body can be done away with. There is an attempt made by the author to forgo the oppositions created by modernity which denies the black man the ontological understanding of his identity since their identity has to be read with relation to "the white world". Kureishi like Fanon "...uses the fact of blackness, of belatedness, to destroy the binary structure of power and identity...Fanon writes from the temporal cesura, the time-lag of cultural difference, in a space between the symbolization of the social and the 'sign' of its representation of subjects and agencies". (Moore etal 168-169) Kureishi unlike Fanon refers to the future where the world has moved beyond the discourses

⁹ Jameson, Fredrick, "Postmodernism and Consumer society" in John Belton ed. *Movies and Mass Culture*, Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, New Jersey . 1996. pp-188-189.

perpetuated by modernity. The body does not hold the key to one's identity in Kureishi's dystopic future.

Kureishi in his novel *Gabriel's Gift* as well as in *The Body* do not have any South Asian characters. The identity of the characters in both the works of fiction is challenged by typical traits of postmodernism like schizophrenia and pastiche. Adam's sense of personal identity falls in crisis when he meets Mark's friends from New York accidentally on the road. He does not know how to handle the situation. Adam has hired Mark's body only for six months, to live, feel and enjoy the life that he has missed because of aging. The old Adam inside the body of Mark remains the person. Similarly Gabriel continuously communicates and seeks advice from his dead brother Archie. Both of these characters demonstrate symptoms of schizophrenia. Jameson describes schizophrenia as

the breakdown of relationships between signifiers...The schizophrenic, however, is not only "no one" in the sense of having personal identity; he or she does nothing...The schizophrenic is thus given over to an undifferentiated vision of the world in present...the temporal continuities break down, the experience of the present becomes powerfully, overwhelmingly vivid and "material": the world comes before the schizophrenic with heightened intensity, bearing a mysterious oppressive change of affect, glowing with hallucinatory energy".¹⁰

This intensity can be traced back to Adam's primary reactions on his entering a new body. Adam describes his sensory perception post-operation, he muses in an amazed state of mind, "For the first time in years, my body felt sensual and full of intense yearning: I was inhabited by a warm, inner fire, which nonetheless reached out to others".

The painting by Lester Jones in *Gabriel's Gift* and the body of Adam in *The Body* both have a consumption value and to possess either of them one needs capital or one can exchange capital for the possession of either of the two. Like the painting, the body also has a resale/exchange value and there are bidders like Matte who can go to any extent in order to possess it.

¹⁰ Jameson, Fredrick, *Ibid.* pg-195-196.

Lester Jones's gift to Gabriel, a drawing that is autographed by Lester points is circulated in copies by the innocent Gabriel. The circulation of drawing not only points out how the drawing or the work of art is drained of its significance but also at the rapid circulation of copies in the post-modern era. Gabriel's act of copying, circulating and later reaping the benefits from is a reference to the fast pace of production in the mechanical era where consumption holds the key for fulfillment of all desires.

Kureishi weaves in the narrative of changing identities in his novels and since most of his protagonists are men the changing essence the question of "what is it to be a man"/masculinities reemerges within new contexts and situations in his texts.

Gabriel's father, Rex Bunch is a typical example of the new boy/man who does not want to take any responsibilities. In fact Rex is the complete opposite of the masculinities demonstrated in the working class where men grow up with the presupposition that if they want to play the role of a good husband then they should always be in a position to provide for their family. It is only when Christine throws him out of her house that he starts earning for a living. Rex is the example of the 'new man' who has not taken up the role of the "breadwinner" of his family. Kureishi's representation of the South Asian families and relationships is much more nuanced.

**Voices of Dissent and Progress: The Portrayal of Women in Select Works of Hanif
Kureishi**

Any good woman

In her senses

With her choices

Would say the

Same

In Asia

Europe

Anywhere

For

Here under the sun,

Being a woman

Has not

Is not

Cannot

Never be a child's game

(Ama Ata Aidoo , *Our Sister Killjoy*)

As one can clearly see in the earlier chapters Kureishi's major preoccupations with identity revolve around his male protagonists but at the same time he has also constructed different feminine subjectivities in his novels that challenge the stereotypical image of both South Asian as well as white women. The Asian woman of Kureishi's novels who can be clearly labeled under the category of "passive" performer in the processes and aftereffects of migration is not homogenized under the overarching banner of the 'subaltern woman' whose voice is 'unheard'. But, at the same time, Kureishi's construction of the category of white women is not built in opposition to the South Asian women. In both the contexts women and their bodies are interpreted strictly with their relationship to "home". Gayatri Gopinath in her essay "Nostalgia, Desire, Diaspora: South Asian Sexualities in Motion" points out how

...the nation is constructed in terms of familial and domestic metaphors, where "the woman" is enshrined as both the symbolic centre and the boundary marker of the nation as "home" and family". Deniz Kandiyoti following Benedict Anderson, further explicates this conflation of "woman", "home", "family" and "nation" by pointing out that "nationalism describes its object using either the vocabulary of kinship (motherland, *patria*) or home (*heimat*) in order to denote something to which one is 'naturally' tied...The nation (as many critics may have asserted) is a nostalgic construction, one that evokes an archaic past and authentic communal identity to assert and legitimize its project of modernization. Women's bodies, then, become crucial to nationalistic discourse in that they serve not only as the site of biological reproduction of national collectivities, but is the very embodiment of this nostalgically evoked communal past and tradition. (Mannur et al 262-263)

Kureishi in his works elaborates on these constructions of feminine identity both with respect to the East as well as the West. The image of the Western woman is not necessarily used by Kureishi to juxtapose it with that of the South Asian women but on the contrary he uses these two identities of women rooted in different contexts to complement each other's characters and social conditions. Ruvani Ranasinha points out one such instance in one of Kureishi's earlier works, *Borderline*.

In “Kureishi’s Discovery of his Subjects in his Early Plays”, Ranasinha points out the case of Susan, the English journalist, who wanted to fight for the cause of South Asians. Kureishi takes Susan’s case as an instance to demonstrate the discourse of “womanhood” in English society that is as fixed and as conventional as that of the South Asian women in East. Susan who appears as a strong and an independent woman in the role of a journalist, has an entirely contrasting narrative about her real life. Susan in the course of her interaction tells Amjad that her parents ‘do mind’ about her career as a journalist and that they ‘think it’s time [she] married an architect and had kids.” (Ranasinha 27) According to Ranasinha, Susan’s case is an archetypal example of the fixity in gender roles in western society. Ranasinha points out that these “gender constraints and patriarchal expectations in white British culture and prevents a simplistic contrast between the progressive white Britain and its ‘backward’ minorities”. (Ranasinha 27) Susan’s character of an assertive, self-sustaining woman has been instrumental in assisting Kureishi to sketch the characters of other empowered white women in the Kureishian narrative like Karen¹¹ in *Something to Tell You*.

Kureishi portrays the lives of white woman both as empowered subjects like Karen and Eva¹² but at the same time characters like Margret (Karim’s mother) of *The Buddha of Suburbia* and Jamal’s mother of *Something to tell You* are typical examples of middle class white women who are the disempowered housewives of immigrant men. Karim describes his mother as a

...plump and unphysical woman with pale round face and kind brown eyes...she considered her body to be an inconvenient object surrounding her, as if she was stranded on an unexplored desert island...she was a timid and compliant person, but when exasperated she could get nervily aggressive... (Kureishi 1990 4)

Both Margret as well as Jamal’s mother had to restart their lives after their respective husbands’ desertion. Jamal’s mother’s situation is not elaborately described in *Something to Tell You* but the reader is informed that she had a tough time when her kids (Jamal and Miriam) were growing up. She never really dated anyone after her husband and had a difficult time in managing her

¹¹ Jamal’s ex-girlfriend in *Something to Tell You* who has made her mark as television journalist and becomes a TV producer. She is often referred to as “the TV bitch”

¹²The upwardly mobile and ambitious girlfriend of Haroon of *The Buddha of Suburbia*.

family in a council flat. It is only when she is old that she informs her children that she with her lover Billie (her girlfriend) would like to settle down.

Margret's condition is more deplorable than Jamal's mother's condition. She is so shaken up by her separation with her husband Haroon in *The Buddha of Suburbia* that she has to spend days recuperating her sister Jean's house. Margret's redemption lies only in her re-union with her husband. Until the end of the narrative where she re-unites with her husband Margret is never really shown at peace with herself.

In *Gabriel's Gift* Kureishi has also crafted the character of Christine (Gabriel's mother) who is independent enough to ask her husband Rex to move out of their household as he is not interested in taking up the role of breadwinner in the family. It is for the first time Kureishi in his literary career constructs the character of a woman who is able to take care of her family without any help from her partner right from the inception of the novel. Kureishi in his works tries to show how the lives of women (both South Asian as well as white) have undergone a remarkable change in the second half of twentieth century.

Kureishi's novels try to address how women are free to take up different roles in the post modern set up. From the emergence of "The Suffragette movement" to the advent and popularization of feminism in the west in 1960's, the role of women both in the public and private sphere had gone through a remarkable change. Factors like globalization and increase in "transnational movement of women" has further heightened the possibilities of change in their lives. Women who generally are a part of, or are, directly affected by such socio-political movements have to be located in and around cities or in major metropolitan centers. These changing parameters have been instrumental in not only imagining the "woman" in a new light but also in understanding how the experiences of women differ with respect to their positioning and locations.

The role of the woman (immigrant women) is crafted not only through different levels of cultural negotiations but is also largely determined by the state "both in the context of departure and settlement and as a result renders them vulnerable...the state, through its well defined immigration and citizenship policies, regulates and appropriates the needs and aspirations of migrant women to serve their own end" (Thapan 26). Therefore, the singular category of 'being a

woman' is diffused by Kureishi under the lens of class, race, ethnicity and other social markers as well in new contexts like displacement, relocation etc.

In the Kureishian narrative like most diasporic literature (whose major preoccupations are generally centered in and around the man's world) women do not play role of only "cultural carriers" instead at times they play the role of a cultural negotiator who challenges existing customs and hierarchies of their homelands. Kureishi tries to portray the different identities asserted by South Asian women in Britain. Kureishi's portrayal of South Asian women can be referred to his early days of theatrical engagement when he shaped the character of Amina in *Borderline*. Amina is one of the most vocal and assertive female characters of Kureishi's earlier work. Kureishi's play *Borderline* deals with the issues of oppressive structures and discursive constructions of racial superiority created by the western world as well as with the idea of "womanhood" in a multicultural atmosphere. Amina's father Amjad, is a conservative Muslim who has immigrated to Britain for material advancements. Unlike Amina, he does not want to lose his Pakistani identity in the process of assimilation with the British population. Amjad is dominant enough to control his daughter's rebellious nature. His reservations restrict his wife Banoo to the closely guarded familial sphere. Banoo and Amina are repressed by the patriarch in the household and when they venture into the outside world they are abused as "Paki" and are constantly threatened by racists.

Kureishi in his works, for the first time portrays the difference that exists in his women characters of different generations by exploring the characters of Amina and Banoo. Though both live in the same household there is a huge difference in the modes of resistance deployed by them in countering Amjad's patriarchy. The characters of mother and daughter act as a foil to each other. A woman like Banoo who has been ripped off from one world and flung into another, all she could try and do is to keep everything together, the tradition, the habitual ideas, customs and most importantly her family together. Her life is held in a strange suspension, as if the act of moving has provided too much disturbance in it. She states her position as "I clean the house, I cook for my husband. Then I work. I sew. He says, don't think. Don't think about anything" (Kureishi 1981 126).

Like Naazneen, the female protagonist of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, Banoo has no direct contact with the world outside her. Both Banoo as well as Naazneen earn money through their skill to stitch clothes. But financial income is not enough for women like them to make them independent. They have been conditioned into believing that they belong to the world that exists within the boundaries of their home and that their duty is to serve their husbands. Characters like Banoo and Naazneen are too timid to assert their subjectivity. In Banoo's case, she voluntarily sacrifices her wishes and desires for her family's well being and material advancement. She gives into her husband's whims and stays back in England and performs her duties as a housewife instead of forcing Amjad to return to India as long as he is alive. Banoo reveals her case of double repression¹³ to Susan in the course of their meetings.

She describes her bitter experiences of racism to Susan "Some weeks ago, when I go out, in the street here, the men there expose themselves to me...I am an old woman, it is the insult... For them we are not human Susan." (Kureishi 1981 124) It is only after Amjad's death she goes back to Pakistan, a place where she feels she really belongs.

Banoo's plight is in fact shared by many first generation immigrant women who are displaced from their homeland. Jhumpa Lahiri in her novel *The Namesake* summarises the dilemma and the condition of the immigrant women (especially the first generation):

For being a foreigner, Ashima is beginning to realize, is a sort of lifelong pregnancy- a *perpetual wait, constant burden, a continuous feeling out of sorts*. It is an *ongoing responsibility, a parenthesis in what had once been ordinary life, only to discover that that previous life has vanished, replaced by something more complicated and demanding*. Like pregnancy, being a foreigner, Ashima believes, is something that elicits the same curiosity from strangers... (Lahiri 71)

This perpetual waiting of the "immigrant woman" can only end if she either goes back to her homeland or if she is able to negotiate with her present condition. The character of Banoo had possibly inspired Kureishi in his attempts to re-create the characters of the first generation immigrant woman in his latter novels.

¹³ Banoo is repressed by Amjad's patriarchy in her house whereas when she steps outside she is constantly threatened by the racists.

Princess Jeeta, the wife of Anwar in Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* has a similar role like that of Banoo in the novel. But unlike Banoo, Princess Jeeta participates in the family business by helping Anwar out to manage Paradise Stores. But at the same time Princess Jeeta has to obey Anwar's orders. Anwar doesn't even ask for Princess Jeeta's opinion when he is all set to marry their daughter (Jamila) off to an imported groom from India. For first generation immigrants (let it be men or women) it is always difficult to assimilate in their respective displaced contexts. For them the new world that they have come to inhabit is not only a temporary but also an alien space. The condition of the immigrant (especially the first generation) is described by Meenakshi Thapan as someone who, "simultaneously straddles two worlds, the past and the present, through the attachment and commitment to two or more nations at the same time". (Thapan 24). They are caught in a situation where they are: in transit for the rest of their lives since the act of migration was committed. Anwar's whim of marrying off his daughter to a groom from India is a demonstration of his inability to understand his straddling condition. Anwar does not want to return to India because he can envision prosperity and material advancement only in Britain. But he also does not want to let go off his culture, tradition and values that he has inherited from his forefathers in a country where he is rejected as a "Paki". Anwar's solution to this paradoxical situation is as complex as the situation itself. Jamila's marriage to Changez is not only Anwar's means of quelling Jamila's rebellious nature but also a method to secure Jamila and her offsprings to his "home" culture.

Unlike Anwar, Jamila does not relate herself to the Indian subcontinent, she calls herself "English" like Karim (the protagonist of *The Buddha of Suburbia*). For the second generation immigrants (Jamila, Amina, Miriam and others) these cultural negotiations of belonging to one and being in another place cannot be applied, because their birth as well as their cultural conditioning provides them with new "points of identification" with respect to a new/different history and culture unlike their parents. What we witness in the case of the second generation immigrant subjects is the gradual shift in their roles. Their subjectivity is asserted in ways that are completely different from that of their father's generation. Nilufer Ahmed addresses this

particular changing scenario with reference to the research that focussed on the lives of Bangladeshi women. Thapan points out that according to Ahmed's study,

Migration offers the immigrants the opportunity to re-define roles and re-evaluate their perceptions of self, devoid of familial constraints and hierarchy...in an unfamiliar society...it has also led to isolation and stagnation of values. While it has allowed them greater freedom and opportunities in terms of work and education, it has also burdened the woman with extra chores which lie outside their culturally defined roles and many of them feel uncomfortable engaging in these male spheres as it compromises their identity. (Thapan 31)

These new opportunities provided by the act of displacement at times cannot be completely explored by women like Banoo, Jeeta and others of their generation because they are conditioned since childhood to not enter into the male arena. These kinds of cultural and emotional restrictions are often questioned by the second generation immigrant for whom the same conditions of social interaction cannot be exactly recreated. The identity of the second generation immigrant is therefore constructed in the "continuum" that exists between the two worlds, the old and the new. Unlike the first generation women their children have no memories of their homelands. Culturally, spatially as well as temporally they are separated from their homelands. Therefore, for them it is difficult to "recreate traditional roles" as wives and homemakers as they have never been a part of it in the first place.

Kureishi represents these dilemmas inherent in the characters of the second generation immigrant by representing Amina, Jamila, Miriam and others.

Anwar and Jeeta have a daughter called Jamila. Jamila is assertive, aggressive and is also well read. She had been guided by Miss Cutmore in reading literature as well as philosophers and theorists. Jamila and Karim (the protagonist of *The Buddha of Suburbia*) are not only good friends but also sexual partners. Jamila's and Karim's parents are unaware of their relationship. Anwar who had always been a conservative wants Jamila to marry a groom from India so that his son-in-law would not only stay with him but would also take care of his business along with Jamila. After days of long distance calls to Bombay Anwar fixes Jamila a match with a "boy eager to come and live in London as Jamila's husband. Except that this boy wasn't a boy. He was thirty. As dowry, the ageing boy had demanded: a warm overcoat from Moss Bros., a colour

television and, mysteriously an edition of the complete works of Conan Doyle” (Kureishi 1990 57). Anwar chooses Changez because he thinks that Changez would play the role of the absent son in Anwar’s household and he would also take over his business in future.

Though the fearless and intelligent Jamila refuses to marry her imported groom initially, she is emotionally blackmailed into giving in by Anwar’s antics like hunger strike etc. Jamila’s marriage from the beginning is a disaster because the groom, Changez, is never accepted by Jamila. It is only after the marriage Anwar and his wife discover that their new son-in-law is of no help to them when Anwar tries to initiate Changez into the grocery business. It is in a matter of weeks that Changez becomes the son-in-law whom Anwar will regret for his lifetime.

Anwar who had to live with the burden of a an incompetent son-in-law soon loses his interest in his grocery business and it is then that Princess Jeeta starts actively taking interest in the business. Like Banoo’s life Princess Jeeta’s also undergoes a big change after her father’s death. She too, like Banoo goes back to Pakistan after Anwar’s death.

Both Princess Jeeta as well as Banoo’s characterisations by Kureishi are the most typical portrayals of South Asian (first generation immigrant) Muslim women. In traditional Islam women’s status is elevated because they are seen as the guardians of the “human potential” but Kureishi shows through characters like Banoo how these guardians of “human potential” suffer partly because of their position of being a woman in the family (the dependent member) and partly under the strong dominance patriarch remain voiceless. But again she is the one who understands that Amina’s upbringing would not let her match to her parents expectations. She tells Amjad “We never realized how English she would become...she understands life here more than us.”(Kureishi 1986 126)

These docile, submissive and tamed women like Banoo and Jeeta who live perpetually under the shackles of patriarchy are often contrasted with the aggressive and assertive women of the second generation or with the next generation South Asian wives.

Zulma (Shahid’s sister-in-law and Chilli’s wife) of *The Black Album* is yet again one more portrayal of the empowered South Asian women. Unlike Banoo and Princess Jeeta who cannot convince their husbands to return to India with them, Zulma leaves her reckless husband Chilli in England not only to return back to Pakistan with their daughter Sapphire but also to start a

business with her friends in Pakistan. She is strong enough to assert her own wish of going back when Chilli is completely disinterested in taking care of his family business and is always high on drugs. Zulma's empowerment stems from the fact that she is rich and educated unlike the other South Asian wives of Kureishi's narrative.

Amina (Amjad's and Banoo's daughter), Jamila (Anwar's and Princess Jeeta's daughter), as well as Miriam (Jamal's sister in *Something to Tell You*) are typical examples of women whose characteristic trait of rebellion against the dominant discourse of patriarchy and their natural tendency to question the given reality separates them from their mother's generation. Amina's character is introduced to the audience in a scene where she is talking to her boyfriend. There is a marked contrast between the way which she speaks and in her dressing. She is wearing a *salwaar kameez*, a very traditional Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi attire that is supposed to reflect femininity and modesty. The dress acts as a mode of reference to the image of the typical Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi woman who is docile, submissive, caring and tamed women. But all that Amina talks to Haroon in their meeting, ignoring her father's repetitive calling, is about "making-out". Her feelings are in continuous oscillation in the course of her meeting with Haroon. Amina is caught between the duality of desire and morality. Amina asks Haroon "I am evil aren't I" because she is conditioned into thinking that all sexual demands are perverse but at the same time she wants to explore her sexual life. In *My Beautiful Laundrette*, Kureishi recreates the sexual tension¹⁴ present in Amina's encounter with Haroon. This encounter takes place in first scene of *Borderline* where Amina is repeatedly requesting Haroon to be physically intimate with her ignoring her father's repeated calling. The presence of the father's overarching presence is challenged by Amina in her refusal to pay attention to him and in her attempts to do something (making out) that he would have had out rightly rejected on the grounds of morality. Both Amina as well as Tania are in fact very similar in their assertion of their identity. Ranasinha points out that in the

...characterization of Tania as fearless, outspoken and sexually free, Kureishi contests the trope of the submissive Asian daughter and undermine stereotypes of Asian women as

¹⁴ The scene that is being referred to is the scene in *My Beautiful Laundrette* where Tania bares her breasts through the window to one of her father's colleagues when he sitting in a room filled with men including her father.

passive and desexualized. However, the episode where Tania bares her breasts through the window has troubling implications from a feminist perspective. From the point of view of the narrative, this act is positioned as a deliberate, transgressive act against patriarchal norms and expectations of women. (Ranasinha 48)

Amina's repressed sexuality is vented out through her relationship with her boyfriend. Her rebellion which initially starts at her dissent to the patriarchal set up wherein the woman is supposed to be virgin before marriage and should not even talk to any man outside the immediate family comes to an end only after her father's death.

Yasmin, Amina's friend who is a social worker and fights for the rights of South Asians acts as a major helpmeet to Amina after her break-up with Haroon. Yasmin is Kureishi's non-conformist character, 'the New Woman' who is not only powerful enough to take her own stand but also helps others. Amina is constantly emotionally aided and educated politically by Yasmin and in the end emerges as the "the New Woman", made bitter by experience. The ignorant and innocent Amina after her moving away from Haroon learns about the real world without the protective men around her who always tried to dissuade her from learning about the outside world. She is strong enough to assert "I belong here. There is work to be done. To make England habitable." (Kureishi 1981 148) The bitter experiences that Amina undergoes (Haroon's desertion, her father's death and the constant humiliation that she has to undergo as a "Paki") instead of making her weaker helps her to evolve into a stronger woman.

Similarly, the death of Anwar changes the familial life of Jamila. Jamila who is forcefully married to Changez refuses to accept him as her husband right from the start. After her father's death Jamila moves into a commune and Changez follows her. Jamila not only has a child from one of the men in the commune but also has a lesbian girlfriend with whom she spends most of her time while Changez is taking care of the baby. Jamila's practicing of lesbianism and her refusal to accept Changez as her husband is her sexual choice as well as her political engagement with the discourses of sexuality. Jamila's lesbianism can be read as her attempt to place herself outside the boundaries of "home" "(as household, community, and nation of origin) whereas the "woman" can only exist within it)" Gayatri Gopinath points out that in this case the

lesbian is seen as a “foreign,” as a product of “being too long in the West,” and she is therefore annexed to the “host” nation where she may be further elided...as a non-white immigrant within both the mainstream (white) lesbian and gay movement and the larger body of the nation state. (Mannur et al 265)

Like Amina, Jamila and Yasmin, Miriam¹⁵ places herself outside the discourses of “home”. Miriam is a single mother with five children (from different men) and lives in a council flat. But unlike Amina and others Miriam was never brought up by her father. Miriam lived with her mother¹⁶ and brother Jamal in a council flat. Miriam and Jamal’s father was always busy with his political aspirations. He was actively involved in Pakistani politics and rarely had time to meet his wife and children in England. Miriam’s and her father’s relationship was limited to the small trip that she and Jamal had undertaken to Pakistan in order to invigorate their familial bonds after the Brixton riots. . Miriam’s understanding of Pakistani culture is as limited as her visits to the Sufi trance sessions that she had attended before visiting Pakistan. Both Miriam and Jamal are addressed as “Paki” even in Pakistan because of their inability to be a part of Pakistani culture. Miriam and Jamal are a little too English in their ways for their kith and kin in Pakistan. They are both too assertive and promiscuous to be accommodated in the conservative Pakistani culture.

The brother and sister duo returns to England and replace the figure of the ‘father’ in their respective lives in different ways. Jamal’s analyst Tahir takes place of the guardian figure in his life whereas Miriam continues her affairs with various men until she falls in love with Jamal’s friend Henry. Jamal’s story is majorly revolves around the life of his sister Miriam and Ajita, his girlfriend of college days.

Ajita is also a South Asian second generation immigrant in Britain. Ajita’s father owned a factory and some sweet shops in North London and her mother left for India soon after they arrived in England. Ajita, her brother Mushtaq and her father lived together. Ajita’s father’s business was suffering losses because of the workers strike in his factory. Ajita’s father’s financial instability starts affecting their family life which was otherwise very normal and happy.

¹⁵ Jamal’s sister in *Something to Tell You*.

¹⁶ Jamal’s mother like Karim’s mother is English.

Jamal with his friends crafts a plan to scare Ajita's father when he discovers that Ajita's father is venting out his frustration (financial losses) by raping Ajita secretly.

Ajita's father in this case not only asserts his control as her "father" but also commits incest and claims her body. If characters like Amina, Jamila and Yasmin attempt to subvert the "figure of the woman in the nationalistic discourse" where woman acts as the "primary marker of an essential, inviolable communal identity or tradition" then Ajita's father act of molestation symbolically resists this process of subversion.

The heterogeneity present in the stories and voices of the South Asian women is also there in Kureishi's portrayal of white women in his works as it is discussed to a large extent in the earlier sections of the essay. But definitely these characters are much more in number when they are compared with the South Asian women who are generally portrayed as the wives, daughters or some other member of the family.

Afterword

A reading on the constructions of polyphonic identities in the novels of Hanif Kureishi was the central area of focus of this dissertation. In order to make the study comprehensive the ‘question of identity’ in the novels of Hanif Kureishi has been discussed by looking at it through the lens of fashion, style and popular culture, masculinities and the presentation of women and myriad femininities.

The “question of identity” had always been a topic of contestations and negotiations. It had reemerged with such vigour and forcefulness in the twentieth century¹⁷ that the debates woven around it, since then, have always generated considerable amount of interest in academia. The lessening of distances has always been a welcome change for mankind, but it has also brought up new challenges along with dawning of newer possibilities. Possibilities like accessibility to newer horizons, migrancy, hybridity and challenges like colonialism, racism, riots etc. As a result, the post-modern subject vis a vis the subject of the enlightenment era is much more difficult to understand because of its decentralized character. This new subject does not own one identity but has multiple layers of identities, which (again), may or may not be complementary, but are definitely fractured in nature. Therefore, the identity of the “second generation” immigrant or the “new subject” is central to the understanding of the polyphony that exists in the globalized world. The “second generation” subject who does not belong to one place therefore problematises the very questions of ‘being’ and ‘belonging’. Moreover, it is also necessary to consider in analyzing such identities is this that the basic facets acting as the binding factors in defining the term “identity” are not fixed, but are exclusively dependent on the temporal and cultural factors of any given culture. Since, both time and culture are not stagnant factors, these changing parameters further problematise and interrupt the possibility of attaining simple answers to repeated interrogations regarding identity. What needs to be understood in the changing scenario is this that the question of “identity” itself rests on changing parameters of: culture, ethnicity, religion, beliefs and most importantly: new ways of positioning oneself.

¹⁷ In the twentieth century these discussions are being looked at in a new light, keeping in mind the temporal and spatial changes that have taken place in the 21st century. Not only there have been attempts to understand the process of ‘identity formation’ in the changing scenario of globalization etc, but also academicians have tried to counter the essentialist formulations of identity constructions.

These challenges that underline the definition of identity till date have played a major role in retaining a considerable part of curiosity among the identity theorists, who are: continuously trying to define the fluctuating subjectivities that are emerging with time at different historical and sociological junctures. Changes in the socio-political and economic scenario accompanied with the passage of time were instrumental in reproducing new identities.

If Derrida harks back to the mythic “fall of the tower of Babel”, as a reference to the linguistic discord in mankind then perhaps the history of invasions, conquests, crusades was the rightful heir of the pandemonium that was once invoked by the Gods. If long sea voyages, distant travels etc separated mankind both temporally and geographically and limited interactions (after the cacophonous event of Babel) between different cultures then in the present age new technologies has been instrumental in aiding mankind with faster, effective and more efficient means of communication. This process of cultural negotiations has set in motion a constant inflow of information, ideas and their resultant: re-contextualizations. Therefore, what needs to be addressed in case of the identities created in this era is that they are not products of one or two cultures but are polyphonic in the truest sense of the term. The emergence of this new, pluralistic identity again is attributed to the era of late capitalism that is always in the process of erasing borders and creating new bridges (virtual as well as real) between worlds, that have been earlier separated by time and geographical space.

Kureishi’s works provide ample scope to their reader to read to these cultural and temporal changes that are taking place in the world because of their contexts that are rooted in the present realities. Though there are some other aspects of Kureishian works (like plays and screenplays) that have remained untouched in this work, I sincerely desire to work on the unexplored themes sometime in future. The changing possibilities of the world in which we are located diversifies the manner in which this fundamental proposition can be looked at and addressed across time and space and provides further exploratory scope for the work in future.

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