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CONSTRUCTION OF HYBRID IDENTITY: A CRITICAL STUDY OF HANIF KUREISHI'S *THE BUDHA OF SUBURBIA*

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ABSTRACT
This research article analyses the authorial perspective and self-reflection in Hanif Kureishi's first novel, The Buddha of Suburbia. The dominant discourses of ethnicity, race, class, and gender are examined in terms of their effects on the categories of subjectivity and identity. The analysis focuses on the novel's protagonist, Karim Amir, tracing his life journey and showing how his self-perception is shaped by forces beyond his control but is malleable thanks to his extraordinary skill of mimicry. Karim mimics white English mainstream society consciously as a way to find his place in society and unconsciously as a political gesture against the forces of colonialism, neocolonialism, and capitalism. Drawing on the work of theorists like Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart, Fanon and others, we see that Karim and his relatives are complex hybrids who question the assumptions underlying Cartesian concepts of identity and subjectivity.
Keywords: subjectivity, identity, hybridity, mimicry, colonialism, neocolonialism, capitalism

INTRODUCTION

The novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* is structured around various subplots that chronicle the protagonist Karim Amir's journey of self-discovery from his early years through his transition into maturity. The novel explores themes of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class within the context of postcolonial discourse. It centers on a protagonist who has an Indian father and an English mother from a suburban background. The narrative challenges the concept of fixed notions such as nationhood and identity through its satirical approach. Within the confines of this specific social environment, the existence of any established category is negated, hence rendering the perception of a stable identity unattainable. The novel is set in a period marked by the political activity of Thatcher, a conservative Member of Parliament who advocates for the preservation of British racial purity and eventually assumes the role of Prime Minister. However, Kureishi effectively illustrates the futility of Thatcher's efforts to marginalise immigrants and exclude them from the construct of British identity. This study centres on the experiences of Haroon and Anwar, who are first-generation immigrants. Alongside the challenges of adjusting to a new environment, they encounter other obstacles stemming from racial discrimination. Due to the presence of discriminatory attitudes, individuals in this scenario have a lack of connection to their cultural heritage and encounter challenges in assimilating into British society. Therefore, in order to ensure their survival, individuals construct their own physical and metaphorical environments, resulting in a state of liminality as conceptualized by Homi Bhabha.

Objectives of the Study

To explore hybrid identities constructed and depicted in the novel, *The Budha of Suburbia*.
Analyze the ways in which characters navigate between their ancestral cultural heritage and the culture of their suburban environment.

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REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Hybrid identity is a complex concept that has been explored and theorized by various scholars from different academic disciplines. There are some notable theorists who have contributed to the understanding of hybrid identity**.** A prominent postcolonial theorist is Homi K. Bhabha, who has written extensively on the concept of "hybridity" in postcolonial cultures (Mambrol, 2016). Bhabha argues that the encounter between colonizers and the colonized has resulted in the creation of new cultural forms that are neither purely Western nor purely indigenous. He contends that these hybrid cultures challenge the binary opposition between the West and the non-West, and that they hold the potential for creating new forms of cultural and political agency.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is another important theorist. Her most famous work is "*Can the Subaltern Speak*?" which examines the relationship between knowledge and power in colonial societies (Spivak, 1988). Spivak argues that the subaltern, or the oppressed and marginalized groups in colonial societies, are not able to speak or be heard in the dominant discourse. This lack of representation, she contends, is a result of the power dynamics of colonialism, which silence and marginalize the voices of the colonized.

Frantz Fanon, a psychiatrist and philosopher from Martinique, wrote extensively on the psychological effects of colonialism on the colonized individuals (Fanon, 1968). He wrote about the internalization of the colonizer's negative stereotypes, the alienation and disorientation caused by the loss of cultural identity and the importance of national liberation struggle.

Stuart Hall, a cultural studies scholar, has made significant contributions to the study of cultural identity and hybridity. His work explores how identities are constructed through cultural processes and discourses, particularly in diasporic contexts. He emphasizes the idea of "cultural identity in the diaspora" and how it involves negotiation and adaptation (Hall, 1995).

Although primarily known for his work on orientalism, Said's writings also touch upon issues of hybrid identity. He examined how colonial encounters shaped hybrid identities in postcolonial contexts, highlighting the complexities of identity formation in the wake of colonialism (Said, 1978).

Gloria Anzaldúa, a Chicana feminist writer and theorist, introduced the concept of the "borderlands" to explore the hybrid identities of individuals living at the intersection of multiple cultures, languages, and identities. Her work, such as *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* is seminal in the study of border identities (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Paul Gilroy, a cultural theorist, introduced the concept of the "Black Atlantic" to examine the hybrid identities of Black people in the diaspora (Gilroy,1993). His work explores how African diasporic cultures have evolved and intersected in the Atlantic world, resulting in hybrid identities and cultural forms.

Kimberlé Crenshaw is primarily known for her work on intersectionality, her framework is relevant to discussions of hybrid identity. Intersectionality theory emphasizes how various social categories (e.g., race, gender, class) intersect and interact to shape individuals' experiences and identities, including hybrid identities (Crenshaw,2019).

Néstor García Canclini is known for his work on cultural hybridity and globalization. His writings, such as *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity*, examine how globalized societies foster the mixing and blending of cultures, resulting in hybrid identities (Garcia,1995).

Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" has been used to understand how nations and national identities are constructed (Anderson, 1983). His work is relevant to discussions of hybrid national identities in multicultural and transnational contexts. Arjun Appadurai: Appadurai's concept of "scapes" (e.g., ethnoscapes, technoscapes) in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, helps explain how hybrid identities are influenced by the movement of people, ideas, and technologies across borders (Appadurai, 1996).

These theorists have contributed diverse perspectives and frameworks to the study of hybrid identity, enriching our understanding of how individuals navigate and negotiate their complex and evolving identities in multicultural and globalized societies.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Residing within liminal areas does not necessarily imply that the settlers are marginalized individuals; rather, they actively shape their own hybrid identities. Liminality plays a significant role in the colonial discourse by embodying the concept of being in a state of transition or being "in-between." It may be described as an intermediate phase that exists between established identifications. This transitional phase paves the way for the creation of hybridity, which embraces and celebrates diversity without imposing a hierarchical structure (Altbach, 1971, p.131). The concept of liminality plays a vital role in elucidating the significance of the "in-between" space in facilitating cultural development. The concept being discussed is the transcultural space, which serves as a platform for the development of strategies pertaining to individual or collective self-identity. This space is characterized by a constant process of mobility and exchange between various states. The colonised individual may find themselves residing within the transitional realm that exists between colonial discourse and the adoption of a fresh, non-colonial sense of self. However, the process of identification is not a straightforward transition from one identity to another; rather, it is a continuous endeavour including active participation, conflict, and assimilation (Altbach, 1971).

Bhabha's articulation of the concept of liminality effectively challenges the conventional binary dichotomies that exist between the coloniser and the colonised. The concept of the "third space" or "third space of enunciation" was proposed by Bhabha in his scholarly contributions. This concept encompasses the notion of liminality and serves as a means to question and challenge binary categorizations (Bhabha, 1994).

In order to examine the arbitrary nature of British nationalism, it is necessary to recall the insights of Benedict Anderson, who conceptualized the nation as a construct that exists in the collective imagination of individuals (Anderson, 2006, p.7). In accordance with the work of Gellner (1964), Anderson emphasizes the notion that nationalism has the capacity to fabricate the existence of nations in situations where they are not inherently present (Anderson, 2006, p.6). Given that the concept of "nationalism" is a construct, it suggests that the idea of a nation is perpetually subject to reinterpretation and reimagining. According to Perloff (1999), Homi Bhabha conceptualizes "nations and cultures" as narrative constructs that emerge from the complex interplay of competing national and cultural elements. (p.109) the novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* illustrates the manner in which postcolonial agency influences the reconfiguration of Britishness by the inhabitants of Britain, including both migrants and the English, in opposition to the Thatcherite conception of national identity.

Haroon, as an individual belonging to the first-generation immigrant group, encounters challenges in attaining acceptance into the English society. However, it is via this arduous journey that he significantly contributes to the process of redefining the concept of Britishness. Due to his aristocratic lineage in India, he refrains from succumbing to feelings of inferiority in the presence of the coloniser. According to Kureishi, Margaret, Haroon's spouse, asserts that their family holds a greater social status compared to the Churchills (1990, p.24). Karim holds his father in high regard, specifically appreciating his father's perspective. In Kureishi's (1990) narrative, Karim describes his father as beautiful and attractive, possessing refined hands and manners. Karim further emphasises that his father's presence surpasses that of other Englishmen, who appear awkward and ungainly in comparison. (p. 4) Haroon's firsthand encounters with the colonial era in India have shaped his perception, leading him to hold the belief that the English represent a superior and esteemed racial group. Upon being dispatched to England for the purpose of receiving an education, he has a sense of disillusionment upon encountering the British populace, who appear to him as unremarkable individuals.

The father experiences a sense of astonishment and encouragement at witnessing the presence of the British population in England. He has not encountered instances of English individuals experiencing poverty, such as those working as road sweepers, dustmen, merchants, and barmen. The individual in question has not encountered instances where an English individual consumes bread with their fingers, nor has anyone informed them about the English population's purported lack of regular hygiene practises due to the perceived coldness of the water, assuming it is available at all. In Hanif Kureishi's work, it is observed that the protagonist's father encounters a lack of awareness among individuals in local pubs regarding

the ability to read English literature. Moreover, there is a reluctance among some Englishmen to receive instruction on the poetry of Lord Byron from an individual of Indian descent, due to the poet's controversial reputation as both a pervert and a crazy (Kureishi, 1990, pp. 24-25).

The aforementioned information serves to dismantle Haroon's perception of the revered British. These individuals of average status are juxtaposed with the privileged members of their society. According to Yousaf (2002), Kureishi's intention is not to establish a homogenous collective identity that aligns strictly with either British or Asian categorizations. In his work, Kureishi provides illustrations of different manifestations of community membership (Kureishi, 1990, p.51). Haroon's case presents a significant challenge to the prevailing Thatcherite conception of Britishness, which staunchly asserts that British identity is exclusively reserved for individuals of British descent. The individual in question embodies a hybrid identity, referring to himself as "the brown skinned Englishman." This identity is shaped by his occupation as a civil servant, which entails commuting from the suburbs into London. Furthermore, his identity is influenced by the typical expectations associated with the English middle class. One aspect to consider is his affinity for kebabs, which serves as an indication of his adherence to Indian culinary customs. Additionally, he expresses a fondness for the bustling atmosphere created by the presence of others, reminiscent of the lively ambiance typically found in Bombay (Kureishi, 1990, p.47). Conversely, adopting a perspective that disregards his own Asian heritage, Haroon offers guidance to his son, cautioning him against pursuing relationships with Asian girls due to the challenges they may bring. Engaging in a customary occupation in England, the individual in question commences his day by perusing the Daily Mirror prior to embarking on his commute alongside fellow travellers en route to the urban centre. Haroon's cultural identity leans more towards Englishness rather than Indianness, as evidenced by his worldview. However, despite this inclination, his culinary preferences, interest in yoga, and tendency to criticise the British indicate that he never completely disassociates himself from his Indian heritage (Moore-Gilbert, 2001, p.132). The individual's daily regimen appears to involve engaging in mimicking as a means of mitigating their racial visibility.

With Eva's help, Haroon begins to pretend to be a Buddhist, and he eventually becomes a "Muslim commodifying himself for white suburbanites searching for the 'inner room' as an Oriental-Hindu 'Buddhist' guru" (Yousaf, 2002, p.40). He is a Muslim by birth and takes no interest in Buddhism throughout his time in India, thus he is no more able to relate to the religion than the average Brit. He studies Buddhism from English-language texts and, in an effort to pass as a Buddha, alters his speech pattern to sound more like that of native English speakers in India. Here, one can not help but recall his earlier dogged attempts at natural English speech. After spending time imitating the colonisers, Haroon decides to adopt an Indian persona. Karim, his son, is taken aback by his father's sudden shift in lifestyle preferences:

> [T]he thing that made me realize that ‘God’, as I now called Dad, was seriously scheming, was the queer sound I heard coming from his room as I was going up to bed. I put my ear against the white paintwork of the door. Yes, God was talking to himself, but not intimately. He was speaking slowly, in a deeper voice than usual, as if he were addressing a crowd. He was hissing his s’s and exaggerating his Indian accent. He’d spent years trying to be more of an Englishman, to be less risibly conspicuous, and now he was putting it back in spade loads. Why? (Kureishi, 1990, p. 21)

When considering the purpose of imitation, imitating either the British or the Indian yields similar implications. Bhabha (2006) discusses the concept of imitation and its role as a mechanism of renunciation in his seminal work, *The Location of Culture*:

> [M]imicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an imminent threat to both ‘normalized’ knowledges and disciplinary powers (Bhabha, 2012, pp. 122-3).

The phenomenon of mimicry has a significant and unsettling impact on colonial discourse, as articulated by Bhabha who states that mimicry possesses a dual perspective that not only reveals the conflicting nature of colonial discourse but also undermines its authoritative status (Bhabha, 2012, p. 126). Through his adoption of either Asian or British cultural practices, Haroon challenges the prevailing conception of identity. Due to his exceptional performance, he assumes various personas. Buhanan (2007) states:

> [Karim] facetiously calls Haroon 'God', but beneath the smirk there is a serious point: Haroon has shown Karim the Godlike power to reinvent oneself in another's image. Thus, Karim finds it merely peculiar, and by no means objectionable, that Haroon has suddenly embraced Buddhism and is 'exaggerating his Indian accent' in order to appear more genuinely guru-like (Buhanan, 2007).

The Buddha of Suburbia explores the existential turmoil experienced by the protagonist, Karim Amir, amidst the disintegration of his parental unit. The individual experiences personal growth as their performing profession flourishes and they relocate to the United States. Moreover, they embrace their Indian ancestry to a greater extent, recognising its positive impact on their acting abilities and social interactions. Moreover, the individual comes to the realisation that those whom he venerates are not exempt from the intricacies, emotions, and challenges inherent to being human. One individual who fits this description is Haroon, his father. Haroon, a middle-aged individual of Indian descent, migrated to London from a family of apparent high social standing and exhibits a sense of satisfaction in regard to his abundant chest hair. The perspective of Karim towards his father undergoes a transformation throughout the narrative, as Haroon transitions from being a source of frustration for Karim, to attaining a revered status in Karim's perception, to being perceived as a morally reprehensible individual whose happiness was achieved at the expense of Mum's anguish, and ultimately to Karim recognising Haroon as a multifaceted individual rather than solely a paternal figure.

Wohlsein (2008) discusses the concept of Haroon adopting the identity of the 'Buddha of Suburbia'. This identity is described as being "invented" and "highly hybrid," meaning it's a unique and complex blend of different elements. By taking on this identity, Haroon manages to accomplish two important objectives simultaneously. Firstly, he discovers a profession that he feels a strong passion for and is genuinely intrigued by. Secondly, he utilizes this fabricated identity as a means to gain approval and integration within the white English community. In essence, this allows him to achieve both personal fulfillment and social acceptance at the same time.

Furthermore, through engaging in Buddhist practices, Haroon lays the foundation for the British to reconstruct their own identities. Despite the fact that the practice of yoga does not fundamentally transform Eva's identity, she endeavours to adopt an Eastern aesthetic by donning a full-length, vibrant kaftan and eschewing footwear (Kureishi, 1990, p.8). Eva's adoption of the Asian style of attire, albeit in a pretentious manner, does not necessarily indicate a genuine appreciation for spirituality. Rather, her mimicry serves as a means of embodying a novel mode of existence. Another example of the subversion of social categories can be observed during the intimate encounter between Eva and Haroon. Haroon expressed his distress by exclaiming "Oh God, oh my God" (Kureishi, 1990, p.16). Karim expresses his shock in a lighthearted manner. The protagonist expresses his discomfort upon encountering the utterance of "Christian curses from the mouth of a renegade Muslim masquerading as a Buddhist" (Kureishi, 1990, p.6). In their particular circumstance, identity might be understood as a manifestation of performance.

Anwar follows in the footsteps of his close friend Haroon by studying in England. To get by in racist Thatcher-era Britain, he, too, constructs his own liminal zone. Anwar and Haroon used to spend their time in India playing cricket on the weekends and tennis in the evenings. Typically, they played the British in cricket matches (Kureishi, 1990, p.23). The fact that it is originally a western style of sport demonstrates their early exposure to the culture of the colonisers, long before they arrived in England. After living well in India, Haroon and Anwar faced difficult circumstances in England. However, they adjusted to the difficult circumstances by embracing the independence that Western culture provided. When Haroon was summoned nightly to the pub, Anwar "loved the prostitutes who hung around Hyde Park"

(Kureishi, 1990, p.25). Anwar was married to the Indian princess Jeeta, but he was also seeing one of Margaret's acquaintances when he was seeing Haroon (Kureishi, 1990). Without regard for their families' beliefs, Anwar and Haroon take advantage of England's potential and establish new centres of power in their own communities. Anwar, an international student studying aeronautical engineering in England, wins a bet and promptly purchases a home. His wife Jeeta suggested they start a business, so together they did, calling it Paradise Stores. The fact that Anwar is willing to consume "pork pies," which are forbidden in Islam, "as long as Jeeta wasn't looking," shows that he is in touch with English practices despite the fact that he works fourteen hours a day (Kureishi, 1990, p.64). His daughter Jamila's independence prompts him to take a stand against the western way of life. This marks the beginning of his cultural shift away from England and back towards India. Disregarding Anwar's previous experiences in England, during which he embraced a western lifestyle, and overlooking Jamila's active opposition to racism, Anwar's sole concern lies in Jamila's perceived detachment from her Muslim way of life. The author expresses concern on the complete eradication of his indigenous culture (Kureishi, 1990, p.38). Anwar's appropriation of Islam might be understood as a means of reconnecting with his indigenous cultural roots. Nevertheless, the author fails to acknowledge the absence of original or untainted cultures. The presence of both eastern and western parts in his identity serves as evidence supporting the notion that discussing civilizations in isolation, without any connection with others, is inherently impossible. In an effort to instill Islamic principles in his daughter, the individual undertakes a hunger strike as a means to persuade Jamila to enter into matrimony with Changez, an imported groom hailing from India. Jamila ultimately acquiesces to this matrimonial union, a decision that does not necessarily signify her submissiveness, but rather can be interpreted as the initial catalyst for her act of defiance. This union reinforces the notion that expectations pertaining to the concept of nationhood are ultimately worthless. Contrary to Anwar's aspirations, Changez does not exhibit a complete and unwavering commitment to Islam or his Indian heritage. The individual in question exhibits a greater inclination in exploring the ambiguities inherent in England, as opposed to prioritizing the establishment of a familial unit to meet Anwar's desires. Furthermore, Jamila, who has been coerced into this matrimonial union, steadfastly refrains from engaging in any physical intimacy with Changez, so prompting him to recognize the unconventional nature of their marital relationship. Changez, an individual who displays a lack of willingness to contribute at Paradise Stores and is unable to fulfil Anwar's desire for grandkids, ultimately proves to be a significant source of disappointment.

Jamila's situation serves as a prime example of the shortcomings of religion in establishing and enforcing personal limits. Anwar seeks to establish his dominance over his daughter, Jamila, by the imposition of a marital union with a Muslim individual of Indian descent. The individual holds the belief that his daughter would retain her cultural heritage and establish an Indian family. However, he fails to acknowledge the significant influence of her upbringing in England and exposure to British customs, despite being born into an Indian household. Her everyday routine differs from that of the Indian population. The extent to which she distances herself from Islam as a religious belief or Indian practices does not necessarily indicate that she is acting in opposition to her cultural heritage. In contrast, she actively manifests her racial identity and opposes any instances of discrimination, albeit without employing religious means. The attainment of her distinctiveness is facilitated through the utilization of the knowledge and ideas derived from the books she has engaged with and assimilated.

Ultimately, Anwar comes to a poignant realization that Changez's Indian heritage does not necessarily equate to his devoutness as a Muslim or his suitability as an ideal spouse who remains deeply connected to his cultural origins. The individual acknowledges the lack of merit in attributing immorality and corruption solely to the English. The protagonist's dire circumstances are further exacerbated when he experiences a sense of forsakenness by Allah, despite his consistent engagement in prayer and steadfast commitment to abstain from engaging in promiscuous behaviour (Kureishi, 1990, p.172). Motivated by this sentiment, he aspires to return to India, a prospect that seems unattainable. Despite his claim of being deeply connected to his Indian roots, the most of his life has been spent residing in England, leading to a

significant alteration in his sense of self due to the interplay between the colonising and colonised cultures.

In light of the realization that embracing a Muslim identity does not offer a resolution to his challenges, Anwar violates religious principles by consuming beverages that are not in accordance with Islamic teachings. The portrayal of both Haroon and Anwar's characters illustrates the notion that identity is not an inherent quality but rather a fluid and mutable concept. In short, the integration process of Haroon and Anwar exemplifies the ongoing interplay between the "rooted" and "routed" cultures, ultimately reshaping the notion of Britishness (Gilroy, 1996). The individual's pursuit of self-identification is intricately entwined with a fluctuation between the construction of a British identity and a return to their ancestral origins. Regardless of their efforts, it is imperative to acknowledge that individuals do not possess an inherent, predetermined identity. On the other hand, individuals construct their authentic identities through the process of experimenting. Initially, both individuals adopt British cultural practices and assume a British-like persona. Subsequently, they revert to embracing eastern mysticism, with Anwar aligning with Islam and Haroon with Buddhism. However, it is important to note that neither Haroon nor Anwar fully identifies with any particular spiritual tradition. Nevertheless, they feign affiliation with these religious institutions solely through the imitation of their customs and rituals. Consequently, their endeavours bear resemblance to creative expressions.

CONCLUSION

The current study examines the novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* by Hanif Kureishi, specifically focusing on the fluctuation between identities as a central theme. The identities of several individuals, such as Karim and his father Haroon, exhibit a significant degree of change. The individual's lifestyle underwent continual transformations upon establishing new relationships with diverse individuals. Karim, the central character in the work, assumes the role of the protagonist as he narrates and explores the narrative of his own growth amongst many societal and political transformations. The individual also endeavoured to establish his own identity and gain insight into his upbringing, surroundings, and personal development. Based on the findings of the research, it is evident that first-generation immigrants are consistently motivated by the desire to attain economic wealth, while concurrently seeking to preserve their cultural identity within the host community. This document presents an examination of the phenomenon of identity fluctuation among migrants, aiming to address the relevant subject at hand. *The Buddha of Suburbia* also explores themes of ambivalent identities and liminality through the lens of its protagonist, Karim Amir, a young British-Indian man growing up in the suburbs of London in the 1970s. Kureishi's portrayal of Karim's journey offers insights into the challenges, conflicts, and search for belonging faced by those who live in the intersection of different cultures and social spheres.

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