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Identity, Multiculturalism and the Postcolonial Experience in Hanif Kureishi's Works

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ABSTRACT: Kureishi elegantly presented in his work the Anglo-Asian lifestyle with its tradition, elements of culture and technique of assimilation. Noting this leading role of Bart Moore Gilbert's Hanif Kureishi (2001) observes that Kureishi "has acted as a pathfinder for [the] explosion of British – Asian cultural expression in a number of domains" (p. 190). Sukhdev Sandhu (2003) argues that the inaccessibility of the Pakistan culture and community in Britains: "before Kureishi made his way into the writers club through the postcolonial narratives Pakis were unknown material, off the cultural radar" and "young Asian had no cultural ambassadors or role models" (p. 1). Susie Thomas (2005) relates that Kureishi's birth, upbringing and education in the British Society – not to talk momentarily of the racial prejudice that the colored people are subject to in race and class-ridden British Society – is the vital factor that differentiates him from his generic (postcolonial) predecessors like notoriously famous Salman Rushdie or V.S Naipaul, a significant first-generation immigrant writer, and help us understand why he is not unlike them "a displaced postcolonial writing back to the centre [rather] writing from the centre"

KEYWORDS: Hanif Kureishi, identity, multiculturalism, postcolonial, experience, works

I. INTRODUCTION

For more than a quarter of a century Hanif Kureishi has been one of the most prominent and most important literary commentators on contemporary London. Indeed, Kureishi's work has focused almost exclusively on the contemporary moment — to date all of his writing has been set in the late twentieth or early twenty-first century — and almost exclusively on London; the 2013 film *Le Week-End*, set in Paris, and 2014 novel *The Last Word*, set in rural Somerset, are Kureishi's first major works not to be set primarily in London. Moreover, Kureishi's writing has frequently sought to address the multicultural and multiethnic character of the city, and has done so with a great deal of insight; accordingly, Kureishi has rightly been identified as a key voice in debates about multiculturalism. However, critics have often attempted to emphasise his importance for such debates by endowing his work with representational status, and this has led to a failure to recognise the multiplicity of his writing [1,2,3] and to engage fully with its complexities. Moreover, while it is fair to say that until very recently Kureishi's work was obsessed with London, and while Kureishi has often written about the city's multicultural character, one cannot say that Kureishi's work is obsessed with multiculturalism; much of his writing has very little indeed to do with questions about ethnic and cultural diversity.

Kureishi's literature can be totally categorized as a postcolonial tracing of the kinds of social and cultural conflicts that can be recognized between the cultures and peoples of the east and the west as often called "we and the others". However, the present study aims at investigating the prospects of identity loss and the conflicts involved in the line to achieve self-confirmation as depicted in Hanif Kureishi's literature who is seen as an influential postcolonial writer. Kureishi has dedicated himself fully to exposing the elements of the conflict that immigrants in Thatcherian Britain have been obliged to encounter due to the notion of being the "others" in Britain. Moreover, those others have been considered as the unwelcomed beings in the Britain society. Therefore, it is the state of being rejected on the new land is what results in a severe search for confirming the self and proving the identity. As for this study, a postcolonial approach drawing on the lens of Homi Bhabha is adopted to highlight the gap in investigating Kureishi's efforts to expose the dilemma of being in a different society which offers nothing than prejudice to the new comers. Consequently, Kureishi's three ever celebrated novels, *The Buddha of the Suburbia*, *The Black Album* and *Something to Tell You* which carry the elements of postcolonial literature are purposefully chosen to collect data qualitatively

Hanif Kureishi is one of the postmodern novelists who examine the notion of identity in their literary works. Kureishi is the son of Rafiushan Kureishi, who belongs to Muslim community in Madras when India was undivided through era [4,5,6] of the colonial Raj. After India partition in 1947, he went to Britain to complete his Law studies where he had a job and decided to settle. It was in Britain that Rafiushan met and married Audrey Buss, a white girl who belonged to the working-class from Bromley. Kureishi's early years of childhood were spent in a pleasant and caring environment in Bromley. When he entered school, he suffered culture shock as being a foreigner in the society which he did not



originally belong to. The exclusivist behavior against him that the teachers and schoolmates made him reshape a passive impression about his presence on this certain area of land. Therefore, his feelings of isolation started to increase day by day. When he grew up, he recognized the cultural duality that had grown in him. Therefore, the elements of multicultural domains were the features that controlled his mentality later stages. Similar to his contemporaries who do not belong to the western culture, Kureishi's works deliver an array of topics that reflect so many problems such as identity loss and their consequent burdens on people's lives. However, Kureishi's novels like *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album* try to examine the lives during the clash of cultures and varied perspectives, hybridity and the in-between situations that draw on both immigrant generations' lives. Furthermore, the novel investigates many issues of fundamentalism, racism and sexuality. Among the interesting prospects of his writings is Kureishi's unique style of the treatment of his own home as depicted through his characters. In his *Something to Tell You*, one can notice a break with the popular style of home as being a secure and comfortable place; rather than that it is depicted as a space of troubles where the trying to break with the control of the authority is recurrent and unstoppable. Alongside, Kureishi's writings investigate the people's lives in a system which is assimilative hetero-patriarchal one. During the 1970s and mid-1990s, Kureishi dedicates himself to the problems of class differences, racism, and adjustments towards the new culture. The works from the mid of 1990s till the beginning of 2000 fundamentally deal with the religious fanaticism and Islamophobia as depicted by the western world. By the 2000s, Kureishi changes his interest to the problems like identity loss in relationships formed through one position. Issues such as aging, failed marriages, loss [7,8,9] of libido, sexual infidelity and causing separation form his middle age writings. While dealing with the issues of hybridity, being in-between, identity and racial abuse, Kureishi often depicts with characters with sarcasm and humor. His characters in total are human who have follies regardless the race, colour and age. Clinging to a specific place is what Hashmi (1993) suggests. He states "the plot and setting of his works are set at the dreary suburb flats and at the cheap residential complexes or council houses in London" (Hashmi,1993, p.32).

II. DISCUSSION

Hanif Kureishi belongs to biracial parents i.e. Asian father and British mother. He was born in Britain and had a rare chance of visiting Pakistan. His writing signifies him as a British from cultural as well as psychological viewpoint and at the same time celebrates his Pakistani origin. Kureishi's literary contribution questions the hybrid sense of colonial discourses that decolonize the immigrants. The field of Social Sciences has paved the way for intellectual post-colonial hybrid writers such as Hanif Kureishi to win many awards and distinctions. The study tends to argue that the individuals born to the Asian parents, settled in the Britain colony, are educated in the distinguished institutions of Europe. Such intellectuals who are exposed more to the Western style of life, culture, media and rituals produce hybrid Orientals. Edward Said's work of *Orientalism* in the year of 1978 provokes the criticism of Western representation of Orientals and how the Asian immigrants are represented in literary writings. The position of the hybrid individuals in Britain society was always considered with the dogmas of difference Differences in the skin color, language, culture and identity made the identity of post-colonial subjects delicate. The multicultural society of Britain made the transformation of identity an essential requisite to adjust in the colony. Bhabha(2003) claimed in an interview with Rutherford that "identification is a progression of identifying with and through another entity, an entity of otherness. Hybridity levitate to something new, something different, which may be [10,11,12]unrecognizable" (p.211). Hybrid intellectuals are in a constant flux of identification. They struggle to leave their parental culture and attempt to assimilate and get transformed to be acceptable in Britain society. Young (1995) claims that "hybridity in itself is a hybrid idea" (p.195). It's a complex term that is derived from the act of mimicry. Bhabha (1994) asserts, "Mimicry is similar to camouflage which is not synchronization or oppression of difference. It is a form of semblance that differs/preserves its manifestation by displaying it in parts, metonymically" (131). Post-colonial writers such as Kureishi tend to portray hybrid characters in their writing. Ashcroft (2000) opines in *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*: Hybrid individuals tend to settle themselves in the zones generated by colonization. Subjects try to refrain associations along the terrains of forbearers. However, they only come to terms with a culture they inhibit (p.117). Post-colonial subjects are destined to remain in between their culture and the culture of Britain. Bhabha (1994) asserts: The second generation of migrants or the post-colonial subjects does not need to assimilate into the culture of Britain or to completely remain outside it. Translation as a tool allows the position to be "in-between" both the cultures. This in-betweenness allows the rejection of binarism of margin/center, self/other, colonizer/colonized.

Kureishi is appreciated as well as criticized for producing the biracial characters and sanctioning them the sense of loss in the world they are much acquainted with. Moreover, Rushdie (1992) opines that the hybrids do not surrender completely to the host's culture. They will not hold the customs and traditions of parental native land completely. Hybridity is a link between diverse nations that gives birth to an entirely new personality (p.196). Moreover, Berry (2001) states, "in hybridity, individuals or groups belong simultaneously to more than one culture" (p.199). Kureishi



portrays the life of South Asian communities residing in White dominating Britain society. He analyses the life of all those individuals who make an unending effort to transform and assimilate with the British ideals [13,14,15]. Thomas (2005) asserts that Kureishi as an artist highlights the problems of Asians and tries to assert that minority subjects are having equal importance as the White Britains (p. 05).

Post-colonial subjects are aware of their biracial identities. Karim's sense of hybridity is eminent in the opening of the novel when he asserts that "My name is Karim Amir. I am an Englishman born and bred, almost" (p.01). The word "almost" shows protagonists' sense of awareness about hybridity. Kureishi himself was descendant of a rich brown Indian father and a white mother. His identity was a blend of two different cultures. But he himself refuses the label of being a hybrid. He thought himself to be an Englishman in his Essays. But people use of mock at his affirmation saying that "how comes a brown-faced person with Muslim name having well-known family roots in Pakistan could claim as Englishman" (p.12). Gilbert (2001) asserts that hybridity emerges "when possibly two or more monoliths interact with each other" (p.107). The Rainbow Sign, compares the life of people living in Britain with Pakistani society. He narrates his experience in his father's homeland. His Pakistani relatives gave him a warm welcome. In Pakistan, he was at times, called with the disparaging term of being a "paki". In Pakistan, Kureishi used to wear jeans instead of Shalwar Kameez and was mocked for his western fashion. For the short span of time, he feels at home in Pakistan but later he began to miss England. Being born and bred there he feels England as his first home. In Bradford, the whole city presents the condition of post-colonial Britain. The city of Bradford becomes the microcosm of Asians living in Britain. Kureishi manages to have talked with an Asian Mayor named M. Ajeeb. He was often attacked on racial and hybrid grounds. Both of them discussed the hybridity of the British-Asian community and the political condition of residents. Bradford also discusses the issue and problems of separatism. In Britain, it was due to politics among British government and Islamic schools by Asians. Britain's government never liked the origin of Islamic schools in their community. Tariq articulates that if anyone attends Islamic school, he will definitely have a problem in finding a good living opportunity in Britain. It's a better option to attend schools of mixed race or single sexed. (p.15) Kureishi narrates the story of Ray Honeyford in this essay. He was headmaster of the school where ninetyfive percent of students were from Asian families. Later, Honeyford publishes two articles showing how racist explorations and hybrid identity hinders the learning procedure of Asian students. Honeyford was finally exempted from his job after the publication of the second article. New Right Party favors the stance of Honeyford. Right Party holds that 'Asian's are only acceptable if they are hybrids. They might have to leave if they won't behave like whites" (p.55). They wished to reduce the threats of anti-racism in the educational system by arousing the sense of national sentiment amongst all residents of Britain [16,17,18].

III. RESULTS

Kureishi questions not only traditional views of gender, identity, religion, tradition and singularity of meaning. He also effectively employs the elements of British history dovetailing with Indian past and present and makes the readers aware of the indissolubility of colonial times with contemporary condition of a postcolonial man. He poses a note of interrogation about the impact of the past on particular protagonists. Their unique position of "in-betweeners" allows the author to employ the concept of ambivalence in relation to cross-cultural and cross-historical experiences of the characters. In such a way, although Kureishi used the term defined by Homi Bhabha and deriving from psychoanalysis, he depicted its application in modern multicultural society. Mimicry, as one of the stages between love and hate approach to western values is utilized and, not incidentally, juxtaposed to complete debasement of the prevalent and popular features. Similarly, Kureishi's dominant thematic preoccupation with Edward Said's ideas of oriental structures, subaltern positioning and "the other" helps the author to redefine and redraw the proclaimed but hackneyed and old-fashioned issues of hetero-sex relationships, purity of culture and nationality and, already subjugated, heteronormative values. Interrogating traditional gender roles demands a fresh disposition of father – son relations in a reliable settlement, and a new view on a position of a masculine protagonist. Much space is devoted to the Freudian idea of Oedipus complex but, what Kureishi focuses on, is not the relation of sons and their mothers but sons and fathers. Kureishi in his plays and fiction concentrates on the insecure and blurred placement of a postcolonial man, and he proclaims and anticipates "a death of masculinity" which is itself often a subject of critique. Interestingly, the author does not identify himself with either of the genders as his concurrent negligence and debasement of female characters in his fiction exclude him from supporting the feminist or lesbian criticism as well. The strategies of abrogation and appropriation introduced by Kureishi follow Bill Ashcroft's (et al.) discussion traced in *The Empire Writes Back*, which again takes the readers back to ambivalent attitude to metropolitan culture. Hanif Kureishi's oeuvre has already provoked the attention of numerous academics and theoreticians. Consequently, there have been published six monographs on the writer. The first critical biography was Kenneth C. Kaleta's *Hanif Kureishi. Postcolonial Storyteller* (1998). Kaleta treats Kureishi both as a novelist and an essayist, but also as a screenwriter. The author, himself a professor of Radio-TV-Film at Rowan University in Glassboro, New Jersey, is deeply interested and involved in



Kureishi's adaptations of his novels and scripts. On the other hand, as the first biographer, Kaleta interviewed Kureishi frequently and read his works in their first original unpublished copies. In spite of few critical remarks, Kaleta's work is a profound and versatile analysis of Kureishi's works beginning with *My Beautiful Laundrette* and finishing on *Love in a Blue Time*. The second publication is Bart Moore-Gilbert's *Hanif Kureishi (2001)*, a volume adding to the series of Manchester University Press: *Contemporary World Writers*. The book discusses Kureishi's literary output in the following groups: the plays, the films, the novels and recent work up to *Sleep With Me*. Moore-Gilbert's critical overview is an objective and accessible source. What is important, the author does not refrain from criticism and negative evaluation of some of the works by Kureishi, supporting his views with critical material from academic journals, newspaper articles [17,18,19], reviews or even Kureishi's explanations. Another work is a reader's guide, an introductory study of Kureishi's first and most acclaimed novel. Nahem Yousaf's *Hanif Kureishi's "The Buddha of Suburbia" (2002)* represents the series entitled *Continuum Contemporaries*. After a short biographical introduction probably the most interesting part of the guide follows, that is an interview with Hanif Kureishi. Then Yousaf continues with a full-length interpretation of the novel and summary of the novel's reception. The author pays attention to the adaptation of the novel, finishing his work with useful questions for discussion and a list for further reading. Although Yousaf's work is rather an inspiration for students' discussions, it contributes to general comprehension of Kureishi's humour, his idea of postcolonialism or his attitude towards the issues of remembering and memory.

More critical and feminist view is presented by Ruvani Ranasinha in her study entitled *Hanif Kureishi (2002)*. She discusses Kureishi's works in particular thematic groups like political commitment, identity, muslimophobia or mid-life crisis. There is, however, a strong connection and common feminist idea for all the discussed works which makes Ranasinha's study exigent and demanding. She frequently draws attention to Kureishi's negligence, and even failure to create reliable and honestly depicted female characters. She is equally critical of the picture of Islam, as in her opinion, "Kureishi never explores any forms of Islam that are not 'fundamentalist'"¹⁵, which, on the other hand, results from his lack of first-hand experience. Ranasinha's severe remarks represent, in fact, extremely useful and interesting female views providing the reader with new look and fresh ideas. What is important, as the first critic, she discusses Gabriel's *Gift* published in 2001. The next monograph on Kureishi is Susie Thomas's *Hanif Kureishi (2005)*. The edition gives the reader an opportunity to explore Kureishi's unknown statements and opinions. Thomas explores the critical material which Kureishi's work has received and equips the reader with a wide range of critical perspectives. The monograph includes nine essays, each devoted to one of the works, and a conclusion pointing to Kureishi's future projects. Bradley Buchanan's *Hanif Kureishi (2007)* provides an approachable introduction to Kureishi's writing placing his fiction and plays in cross-cultural and historical contexts. It also offers a recent interview with the author and supplies the reader with an extended discussion of Kureishi's most popular works. As far as Polish publications are concerned, there has been only one PhD written at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań by Dagmara Drewniak entitled 'Imaginary Homelands' *Lost and Found in the Selected Texts of the Postcolonial Literature Written in English (2002)*. Dagmara Drewniak discussed three postcolonial writers: Salman Rushdie, Philip Michael Ondaatje and Hanif Kureishi. No theoretical work has been written or translated yet. My dissertation consists of an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion. All the mentioned issues overlap and are analyzed from the point of view of postcoloniality. The first chapter: "Heritage – From Routes to Roots" discusses the attitude of two generations of Asians towards tradition brought from once colonized countries to metropolia. It deploys Edward Said's theory of "the Orient" and assumed but overrated sex involvement of the east to discuss the issues of geographical conditioning of sexual discipline and propensity to such an activity. The chapter also applies the term of *Hindutva* or root fascination utilized by Dilip Hiro to present one of the feasible approaches to oriental culture. Homi Bhabha's views of ambivalent nature of postcolonial subjects are employed to discuss the cultural elements present in life of the characters. The code of dressing, food fascination, search for authenticity, purity of culture, arranged marriages, misinterpretation of patriarchy in new cultural context – all the themes are subject to Bhabha's theory of acceptance and rejection. Gayatri Spivak's theory of "the burden of English" overlaps with Bill Ashcroft's (et al.) discussion of abrogation and appropriation of the language. This section of the first chapter discusses, to a large extent, a mental and sentimental journey of Kureishi's protagonists to India and Pakistan. The complex issue of Islam evoking confusion, fear and fanaticism is another subject of deliberation. It is depicted not only from the perspective of ethnically mixed protagonists but also their white friends. Salman Rushdie's voice is introduced to the discussion to supply objectivizations of the religious issues opposed by Ruvani Ranasinha's accusations.

IV. CONCLUSION

Hanif Kureishi's novels have explored the space of multiethnicity in post-diaspora Britain's immigrant literature. By attempting to read the sense of hybridisation that a post-diasporic immigrant undergoes, Kureishi has consistently denied the relatively easier amalgam of the 'postcolonial' nomenclature. His debut novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*



(1990) almost singlehandedly led to the advent of the contemporary generic strain of immigrant multiethnic literature that consists of such authors as Zadie Smith and Monica Ali. The present paper attempts to read into the biographical roots of Kureishi's novel as well as the thematic endorsements that he brings into his sense of Postcoloniality, hybridisation of cultures and multiethnicity in a postcolonial world. By introducing theoretical angularities from Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Gayatri Spivak and others, the paper is an attempt to read the text contextually as well as with its historicity

In this context of re-placing the diasporic identity in a renewed order, the broad orientation of Kureishi's work seems to be increasingly geared towards occupying the liberal mainstream in British culture, arguing for a different medium of expression and integration. Indeed, in some of the later texts such as *Intimacy* (1998) and the collection *Midnight All Day* (1999), even issues of ethnicity are deeply submerged amongst other concerns, such as class identity, sexuality and desire, micro-politics and the local sphere. In the struggle against diasporawriting, the strategy of Kureishi's writing "cannot be totalised in terms of the old opposition of separatism versus integration" (Morrison 190). To quote Jago Morrison, as a recapitulation of Kureishi's creative acumen, "his work can be thought of as a play for the imaginative centre ground" (Morrison 190), especially in the context of diaspora and its allied literary activities to which Kureishi lends a necessary hint of imagination, reacquiring the order of substantiative identity.[20]

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