



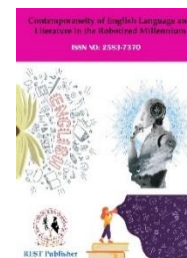
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Negotiating Identity and Hybridity in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*

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ABSTRACT: *This paper offers a fresh reading of Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), focusing on how the novel portrays the shaping of diasporic identity, the experience of cultural in-betweenness, and the racialized structures of 1970s Britain. Through the protagonist Karim Amir—a British Asian teenager of mixed parentage—the novel dramatizes the negotiations undertaken by second-generation immigrants as they navigate conflicting cultural demands within a society that professes multiculturalism yet remains deeply stratified. Drawing on insights from Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall, this study examines the ways in which Karim moves between inherited traditions and contemporary British life, encounters stereotypes and discrimination, and uses performance, sexuality, and self-fashioning as avenues to reclaim agency. Ultimately, the novel imagines diaspora not as a fixed position but as a dynamic process marked by continual transformation. The discussion emphasises the enduring value of Kureishi's text for understanding the shifting debates surrounding identity, diversity, and belonging in modern Britain.*

Keywords: *English Language Evolution, Global Communication, WSM Analysis, Linguistic Scenarios, Language Policy, Cross-cultural Exchange.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) stands as a landmark work in British Asian writing and a significant contribution to contemporary diaspora studies. Set against the cultural and political atmosphere of 1970s London, the narrative follows Karim Amir, the son of an Indian migrant father and a white English mother, as he attempts to make sense of his place in a society where cultural boundaries remain rigid despite the rhetoric of multiculturalism. Through Karim's evolving self-awareness, Kureishi engages with themes such as racial discrimination, migration, sexual expression, cultural adaptation, and mixed-heritage identity. Semi-autobiographical in tone, the novel captures the everyday negotiations faced by postcolonial communities and their children, who must reconcile the pressures of inherited cultural values with the realities of British social life. This paper examines how the novel conceptualizes hybrid identity, racialized power structures, and the strategies individuals adopt to reinvent themselves within a divided society.

Diasporic Identity and Cultural Conflict: Karim's biracial background places him in a space of cultural uncertainty; he is frequently unsure whether he belongs within his father's South Asian heritage or the English environment in which he was raised. His self-description as "an Englishman born and bred, almost" reveals a lingering ambivalence regarding belonging. Kureishi uses this uncertainty to illustrate the fragmented identity formation typical of second-generation migrants, whose attachments are neither wholly rooted in ancestral homelands nor seamlessly integrated into Britain's national culture. The novel's treatment of hybridity aligns with Homi Bhabha's argument that identity emerges in the "in-between" or "third space" produced through cultural interaction. Karim's continual movement between different social contexts—suburban life, urban theatre circles, South Asian family spaces—demonstrates how identity is shaped relationally and situationally. Haroon's reinvention as a spiritual guide—a role that blends Eastern symbolism with Western consumerism—further exemplifies how cultural practices are reimagined within diasporic settings. Karim's experiences in the theatre provide another lens through which Kureishi critiques the expectations

placed upon racial minorities. He is repeatedly cast in roles that rely on caricatured representations of “Indianness,” revealing how even progressive cultural spaces perpetuate racialized stereotypes. Yet these same performances compel Karim to confront his own assumptions, prompting him to carve out a sense of self that resists fixed labels. Through this process, hybridity becomes not simply a site of conflict but also a condition that enables new forms of expression and agency. The broader social backdrop of the novel underscores the persistence of racism in 1970s Britain. From verbal harassment to structural exclusion, Kureishi depicts a society where racial prejudice shapes everyday interactions. The arts world mirrors these hierarchies, revealing the limits of Britain’s proclaimed commitment to multiculturalism. Through Karim’s encounters, Kureishi demonstrates that diasporic identity is shaped as much by social constraints as by personal exploration.

Sexuality and Self-Construction: A notable feature of the novel is its open engagement with sexuality. Karim’s bisexual experimentation serves not only as a personal journey but also as a means of challenging cultural rules—both within South Asian family networks and within mainstream British society. Sexuality becomes an arena for questioning inherited norms and exploring alternative forms of belonging. This aspect of the narrative reinforces the novel’s central argument that identity is never static; instead, it evolves through choices, experiences, and ongoing self-fashioning.

2. CONCLUSION

The Buddha of Suburbia portrays diasporic life as a fluid and constantly shifting space where identities are shaped through interactions among cultures, institutions, and personal aspirations. Karim’s journey reveals the tensions and possibilities that accompany life in a multicultural yet racially stratified society. Kureishi shows that hybrid identity is not a fixed *state*, but a process influenced by social pressures, cultural encounters, and individual acts of reinvention. More than three decades after its publication, the novel continues to offer valuable insights into contemporary debates on migration, multiculturalism, and politics of belonging.

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