Chapter IV

Celebrating Multiculturalism

In the post-colonial and post-industrial societies the basis of political mobilisation has shifted from the class interest to the group interest and the notions of identity, cultural difference and cultural domination. Earlier the political goal of the disadvantaged section of the society was the redistribution of wealth. Now it is focused on the demands for recognition, acceptance and rather celebration of difference of culture, ethnicity and sexuality.

4.1 Theoretical Aspects of Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism as state policy or as a way of thinking got currency at this juncture as a response to the demands of the culturally disadvantaged groups for recognition. The idea of multiculturalism is usually invoked in two contexts. One, in the field of education it is claimed what is taught as ‘culture’ (including history, literature, philosophy and so on) has only included the culture of ‘white-western-heterosexual-male’ to the exclusion of women, gays, lesbians, ethnic and religious minorities and the indigenous people. In this context it is appealed that these omissions should be rectified by including in the canon works produced by these excluded groups and also including their point views in the interpretation of works produced by others, specially by white males. Two, the wider social, economic and political context in which the culturally distinct minority groups claim that their cultures are not sufficiently protected by the individual rights provided to them by liberal democracy. Therefore, they need special group rights in order to protect their distinct cultures, meaning ‘ways of life’ against the onslaught of majority culture.
The multicultural debate or the question of multiculturalism arises in the context of
the existence of cultural diversity in a given society. In the post-colonial, post-
industrial and globalised world cultural diversity is a regular feature in almost all
national societies because of mass migration, faster mode of communication and
identifies three most common forms of cultural diversity: ‘subcultural diversity’,
‘perspectival diversity’ and ‘communal diversity’. According to Parekh gays,
lesbians, people following unconventional family structure, people with particular
occupations can be included in the category of ‘subcultural diversity’. ‘Subcultural
diversity’ emerges from the same shared culture and it does not represent an
alternative culture in the broad sense. It can be accommodated within the majority
culture by invoking such values as personal autonomy and individual choice.
‘Perspectival diversity’ constitutes of the members of the society who are highly
critical of some of the central principles and practices of the prevailing dominant
culture and seek to restructure it in a different way. Feminists are critical of its
patriarchal bias, religious people are critical of the secular orientation of liberal
culture, and the environmentalists are critical of the anthropocentric and technocratic
bias of the modern industrial society. Perspectival diversity provides intellectual
perspective on how the dominant culture should be reconstituted. This diversity also
cannot be conceptualised as an alternative culture in the sense of ‘way of life’. The
third kind of diversity Parekh calls ‘communal diversity’ that refers to the “self-
conscious and more or less well-organized communities entertaining and living by
their own different systems of beliefs and practices” (3). This includes new or old
immigrants, various religious communities and territorially concentrated indigenous
people. The members who represent ‘communal diversity’ have their own long
history and a way of life which they wish to preserve and transmit. Communal diversity is also unique in a historical sense, because it first appeared in countries which found themselves faced with distinct cultural groups mostly in the post-colonial era.

So, multiculturalism as state policy specifically relates to the accommodation of the communal diversity with their distinct cultures. The presence of communal diversity makes a country multicultural but not multiculturalist. When a country adopts multiculturalism as a policy it is called multiculturalist.

Countries, such as, the United States, Australia, Canada, Britain, France and also Germany received a sizeable number of immigrants with their own diverse cultures from the former colonies. The presence of these diverse cultural communities posed new and unfamiliar challenges to these societies. All these above societies are multicultural in the sense they include two or more cultural communities. However, they may be or may not be multiculturalist depending on the way they respond to their cultural diversity. Either they might welcome and cherish the diversity and consider it central to their self-understanding by giving respect to the cultural demands of the constituent communities, or they might seek to assimilate these communities into their supposed national mainstream culture completely or substantially. If the first is the case, the society is considered multiculturalist and in the case of the second it is considered monoculturalist in orientation and ethos. Hence, Parekh says, “the term ‘multicultural’ refers to the fact of cultural diversity, the term ‘multiculturalism’ to a normative response to that fact” (6).

Another possible way of looking at the dichotomy between the two terms ‘multicultural’ and ‘multiculturalism’, according to C.W. Watson (2002), is to mark
how ‘multicultural’ can be linked to a perspective where individual is at its centre; whereas ‘multiculturalism’ make us think in terms of social and collective dimensions of diversity. These connotations of these two words are all the more relevant for discussion when they are circulated in Western liberal democracies where governance emanates from the proposition that the aim of the state must be to limit the restrictions on individual as little as possible, “since the ultimate goal of human development must be the maximization of the potential of the individual” (Watson 107). It is clear from this view that the structures, legislations and institutions of the state should be designed in such a way which solely enhances the possibility of individual freedom. In this sense what the term ‘multicultural’ suggests is welcome because it offers additional dimensions or options of individual choice. Following Ostendorf (1998), Watson suggests that from other perspectives the emphasis may be less on individual freedom and more on collective well-being and harmonious coexistence of humans in society.

Multicultural societies in the contemporary world are not historically unique. Many pre-modern societies also included several cultural communities. However, the characteristics of the modern version of multicultural societies are different from that of the pre-modern times. Bhiku Parekh (2006) identifies four distinguishing facts. First, minority community in the past generally accepted their subordinate status and remained confined to the social and geographical spaces assigned to them by the dominant community. In the contemporary multicultural societies the cultural and political climate is quite different. No community can live isolated lives in the modern economic system. They are caught up in a complex pattern of interaction with each other. Moreover, because of the spread of liberal and democratic ideas they refuse to accept inferior political status and demand equal political rights.
Second, the dark history of colonialism, slavery, the Holocaust, and the suffering caused by the communist tyranny have made us realise better than before that “moral dogmatism and the concomitant spirit of aggressive self-righteousness not only lead to egregious violence but also blind us to its enormity and blunt our moral sensibility” (Parekh 7-8). Now we understand and accept the fact that as groups of people can be oppressed and humiliated economically and politically, they also can be done so culturally. We also recognise different sources of subtle forms of violence. Development in the new field of studies, such as, psychoanalysis and cultural psychology has made us aware of how deeply culture matters to people and how their self-respect depends on others’ recognition and respect of it. This has led to a greater acceptance of cultural difference and made culture a politically relevant category. Respect for an individual’s culture has become an integral part of the principle of equal citizenship.

Third, because of economic globalisation in the contemporary world goods and services travel freely across the globe and these are not culturally neutral. Functioning of multinationals requires necessary cultural precondition from the receiving societies of those goods and services. It seeks some level of moral homogeneity, sometimes embodied in various statements on human rights. With all these, travelling of people as tourists and job seekers leave no society immune to external influences often in subtle ways. At this juncture, the idea of national culture, the project of cultural unification for national cohesion and stability, has become meaningless. Thus, cultural diversity has become a shared universal predicament in the contemporary world.

Fourth, in pre-modern societies cultural communities were considered as the bearers of collective rights and left free to pursue their customs and practices. On the other
hand, in modern societies only the individuals are considered as the bearer of rights for whom the modern state designed homogeneous and uniform political units subject to the same body of laws and institutions. The modern state requires cultural and social homogenisation as its necessary basis. It has worked in that direction for centuries by dismantling long established communities and uniting the “emancipated” individuals on the basis of a centralised structure of authority. Because of this, Parekh argues, “we have become so accustomed to equating unity with homogeneity, and equality with uniformity, that unlike many of our pre-modern counterparts we feel morally and emotionally disoriented by, and do not quite know how to accommodate, the political demands of a deep and defiant diversity” (9).

It is clear from Parekh’s argument that the multicultural societies in the contemporary world, though not unique, are distinct from their pre-modern counterparts on the basis of historical context and patterns of interaction between the constitutive communities.

In this situation, if a modern state wants to survive, according to C.W. Watson, it can do one of the two things. It can pursue a policy of monoculturalism by singling out one dominant culture as the norm and suppress or root out all other diversity and finally destroy the multicultural dimension of the society. At the extreme this may take the form of violence and genocide as the Holocaust. A benign strategy of the monoculturalist policy may be what is labelled as “coercive assimilation” implemented through the institutions of the state, such as, schools, the legal system and qualification for citizenship. These institutions work in such a way that other cultures are either suppressed or made to wither away, so that the dominant culture finally becomes the only normative culture. This has been, somehow, the strategy
adopted by many of the apparently liberal democratic states including the United Kingdom up to the 1960s.

Alternative to the above may be celebrating the diversity and encouraging multiculturalism to welcome people as citizens who may be protective of their cultures and also apprehensive of state interference. This strategy is frequently referred to as ‘integration’ as distinct from ‘assimilation’. However, there is confusion surrounding these two terms, since these are sometimes used as synonymous by some. To distinguish ‘assimilation’ from ‘integration’ Watson (2002) uses the analogy of ‘the melting-pot’ originally coined by Anglo-Jewish writer Israel Zangwill to refer to the process of cultural assimilation of the immigrants in America by gradually abandoning their culture of origin adopting American common culture. However, from the late 1960s it was found that neither the different cultural groups were simply abandoning their culture of origin nor it was found desirable. Thus, ‘the melting pot’ analogy lost its descriptive power and a new analogy of ‘salad-bowl’ was invoked where the constituents retain their distinctive flavour but the salad as a whole has its distinctive character because of unique blending. This analogy was used to distinguish ‘integration’ from ‘assimilation’. Watson being apprehensive of this culinary metaphor being taken too far observes, “... there is a potentially disturbing dimension to the thought of social groups being tossed around like salad ingredients by governments simply concerned with flavours” (Watson 4). Notwithstanding, this analogy of integration appreciates the positive advantages of celebrating cultural diversity rather than suppressing it.

The shift towards an endorsement of multiculturalism was not uniform throughout the world. France strongly affirms the policy of assimilation. Germany does not offer citizenship to its guest workers.
In America and Britain the shift towards multiculturalism was noted in the mid-1960s, though for different reasons in each case. In the case of America it was a result of the civil rights movements and the black power campaigns. In Britain it was the result of arrival of a large number of immigrants from her former colonies who, though committed to the law of the land were not ready to abandon their culture and tradition. This led to the endorsement of integration as a more ethnically viable option than assimilation. After a brief acceptance of the policy of assimilation in education in 1964, the United Kingdom government accepted the notion of ‘integration’. The then Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins in 1966 defined this as “not a flattening process of uniformity but cultural diversity, coupled with equal opportunity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance” (Rex and Singh 2003). Jenkins’ argument encapsulates both growing popular sentiment and liberal intellectual views both of which, though from different perspectives, were derived from a sense of ‘difference’. From the policy of integration Britain moved to a model of multiculturalism whereby the immigrants retain a sense of their original cultures at the same time adapt to the cultural make-up of Britain. This was conceived as a celebration of difference.

The debates that followed about freedom of religious expression, multilingual education and the nature of entrenched racism in British social and political institutions are all attempts to reconcile a principle of difference with one of equality. It may be helpful, according to C.W. Watson (2002), to employ here a distinction frequently made between ‘soft multiculturalism’ and ‘critical multiculturalism’. Soft multiculturalism in education policy acknowledges that the school curriculum need to be revised to incorporate the cultural practices, from religion to cuisine of the pupils from minority culture which, it is believed, will make the learning
environment positive and responsive for them. It is also believed that this will educate the majority about the minority culture and dispel the ingrained ignorance and prejudice which are responsible for discrimination and injustice inside and outside the school. No doubt this kind of initiative has raised awareness about the presence of the ethnic minorities in Britain, but the critics of these initiatives have doubts in its effectiveness to address the institutionalised disadvantages faced by the minorities. This approach solidifies cultural differences and makes people from other cultures appear more exotic and distinct than they really are. The approach of ‘soft multiculturalism’ instead of being a cultural liberator becomes a cultural straightjacket and perpetuates stereotyping of difference and, ipso facto, inferiority. According to Anne Phillips this approach forces “those described as members of a minority cultural groups into a regime of authenticity, denying them the chance to cross cultural borders, borrow cultural influences, define and redefine themselves” (14).

However, there are theorists who advocate a stronger approach to multiculturalism than the mere tokenism which ‘soft multiculturalism’ suggests. They argue that there are sound moral and intellectual grounds for adopting an approach which they refer to as ‘critical multiculturalism’. As quoted by C. W. Watson, Terence Turner defines the purpose of ‘critical multiculturalism’ as “to use cultural diversity as a basis for challenging, revising and relativizing basic notions and principles common to dominant and minority cultures alike, so as to construct a more vital, open, and democratic common culture” (Watson 54). Critical multiculturalism can easily be differentiated from what Turner calls “difference multiculturalism”, Watson calls “soft multiculturalism” and some other critics call “corporate multiculturalism” which the Chicago Cultural Studies Group (1994) describes as employing what they
call ‘Benetton effect’ i.e., exploitation of ethnic difference for commercial benefits. According to C.W. Watson:

The principal drawback of difference multiculturalism lies in its essentializing of difference to the point where that alone is celebrated and becomes a political goal in its own right rather than, as in the case of critical multiculturalism, leading to an ongoing critical engagement with both dominant and minority cultural experience. (54)

Critical multiculturalism is similar to what Bhikhu Parekh calls ‘multicultural perspective’. Multicultural perspective, according to Parekh, is composed of the creative interplay of three “complementary insights, namely the cultural embeddedness of human beings, the inescapability and desirability of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, and the internal plurality of each culture” (338). In a society where more than one cultures coexist, it cannot be managed or understood from within one of them. One requires a multicultural perspective to reflect critically on such a society. By setting up intercultural dialogue one can illuminate one’s cultural insight and expose the limitations of one’s own culture as well as that of others, and create for oneself “a vital in-between space, a kind of immanent transcendentalism, from which to arrive at a less culture-bound vision of human life and a radically critical perspective on one’s society” (Parekh 339). Homi Bhabha’s concept of “hybridity” and “third space” also refers to an in-between space. By hybridity Bhabha (1990) means the ways in which two or more cultures interact and combine in a metropolitan space without privileging any one of the constituent parts but incorporating elements from the both. Hybridity can also occur at the level of racial identity whereby the children of mixed-race marriages could be described as hybrid but it is more importantly used in cultural sense. Hybridity in
cultural sense refers to a ‘third space’ as the location of cultural interaction and mutual intervention in metropolitan urban spaces as it relates to migrant communities in interaction with one another. The third space rejects the binary opposition of cultures and also rejects the belief that the origin of culture is race and ethnicity. The ‘third space’ is a new hybrid containing the dual heritage of both the cultures that went into its formation. In a way Turner’s “critical multiculturalism”, Parekh’s “multicultural perspective” and Bhaba’s hybridity and “third space” all conceptualise a cultural uncertainty as opposed to cultural polarity. They all refer to some or other kind of engagement in intercultural dialogue.

Since serious literature responds imaginatively to its intellectual climate, the debates related to cultural identity, formation of multicultural perspective, hybridity, race relations and the possibility of intercultural dialogue in a multicultural and multi-racial society all find expression in contemporary fictional writings. Hanif Kureishi being a contemporary novelist touches upon these issues in many of his novels, especially in The Buddha of Suburbia (1990) and The Black Album (1995).

4.2 Idea of Multiculturalism in Hanif Kureishi:

Karim Amir, the narrator and protagonist of The Buddha of Suburbia introduces himself as “an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But I don’t care --- Englishman I am (though not proud of it)...”(Buddha of Suburbia 3). Karim is born in suburban London of an English mother and an Indian father who immigrated to Britain in the 1950s. He is an Englishman by any standard other than those of racial extremists. His Englishness, as he acknowledges, is a given identity, not a matter of choice. He considers himself a new breed of Englishman
because of being a descent of immigrant. Karim is a member of that new generation of Englishman in the post-colonial Britain which Stuart Hall (1989) calls “new ethnicities”. He is a funny kind of Englishman because, though born in England and bred like an Englishman he is racially hybrid. The fact that he emerged from ‘two old histories’ that of Indian and British provides him a hybrid in-between position which makes him bored and restless very easily: “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” (Buddha of Suburbia 3).

*The Buddha of Suburbia* is a novel of growing up and formation of identity. Karim has lived his entire life in England more like an Englishman and less like an Indian Muslim, the background his father comes from. He has been given the upbringing of an Englishman by his father who has never shown any interest to go back to India or oriented his son to the culture of his origin. So, the cultural orientation of Karim is not hybrid. The consciousness of his being in a hybrid in-between position that he refers to in his frank confession in the beginning of the novel is racial rather than cultural. What makes him conscious of his difference from the majority is the colour of his skin. His cultural orientation is English but he has to face racist taunting and also physical torture even in the hands of his teachers as well as fellow students because of the colour of his skin. Once he observes “...we were supposed to be English, but to the English we were always wogs and nigs and Pakis and the rest of it” (Buddha of Suburbia 53). He responds to these racist insults in a very submissive and defenceless manner: “If people spat at me I practically thanked them for not making me chew the moss between the paving stones” (Buddha of Suburbia 53). Every day, he considers himself “lucky to get home from school without serious
injury”. This is the problem with the policy of wholesale assimilation because it is, according to Bhikhu Parekh:

…unable to redeem its promise of full and unqualified acceptance. Even when one assimilates into the dominant culture after a strenuous effort, there is always the danger that one’s slightest difference or past background might be made the basis of discrimination by the whole or a section of the wider society. The demand for total assimilation springs from intolerance of differences, and for the intolerant even the smallest differences are sources of deep unease. (198)

When Karim’s father decides to live with his mistress Eva Kay, Karim chooses to go with them leaving behind his mother and younger brother. Karim chooses to go with Eva to get proximity of her son, Charlie because of his homosexual infatuation with him and also for a life of excitement and indulgence that he foresees at Kay’s. Charlie was into pop music. After moving to the city with Eva and his father, Karim is introduced to Shadwell, the theatre director who chooses him for the role of Mowgli for the production of *The Jungle Book*. Here, conversation with Shadwell makes Karim aware of the expectations of the majority community from a person of immigrant background. Shadwell speaks some words in Punjabi or Urdu as if to “get into a big conversation about Ray or Tagore or something”. To his surprise Karim does not understand anything. Shadwell exclaims, “your own language”. He further asks him if he has been to India and “had that dust in your nostrils”. Again he gets the answer in the negative. Now, Shadwell observes:

What a breed of people two hundred years of imperialism has given birth to. If the pioneers from the East India Company could see you. What puzzlement
there’d be. Everyone looks at you, I’m sure, and thinks: an Indian boy, how exotic, how interesting, what stories of aunties and elephants we’Il hear now from him. And you’re from Orpington. ... Oh God, what a strange world. The immigrant is the Everyman of the twentieth century. (*Buddha of Suburbia* 141)

Shadwell wants to introduce variety and authenticity to his play by giving the role of Mowgli to Karim who is a descent of immigrant. But, this kind of idea of authenticity only amounts to cultural stereotyping. This whole situation can be seen as a metaphor for a second generation immigrant and how such a person is pushed into, what Anne Phillips calls, “a regime of authenticity” and denies him “the chance to cross cultural borders, borrow cultural influences, define and redefine” himself (Phillips 14). This is a challenge to the development of a multicultural identity and the subject in question has to struggle and resist these tendencies of the “regime of authenticity” to forge an in-between, hybrid identity.

Shadwell even comes to pronounce Karim’s identity of being “a half-caste in England” which, he thinks, is his destiny and must be complicated for Karim to accept “belonging nowhere, wanted nowhere”. As he started his role of Mowgli, he was covered with shit-brown cream all over his body as his costume. Then he was asked to work upon his accent which should be an authentic Indian accent. Karim has been ‘cast for authenticity and not for experience’. He was asked to try it until he feels ‘comfortable as a Bengali’. Karim protested at this and said it was a political matter for him. But, nobody from the cast, even his Trotskyite friend, Terry who encouraged him to speak of the prejudice and abuse he had to face being the son of an Indian, did intervene. Karim felt alienated from the whole group.
After the debut production of *The Jungle Book* the reactions of Karim’s father and his friend, Jamila show how politically charged the affair was:

‘Bloody half-cocked business,’ he said. ‘That bloody... Mr. Kipling pretending to whity he knew something about India! And an awful performance by my boy looking like a Black and White Minstrel’...

‘You looked wonderful,’ she [Jamila] said, ... ‘... But no doubt about it, the play is completely neo-fascist—’

‘And it was disgusting, the accent and the shit you had smeared over you. You were just pandering to prejudices—’ *(Buddha of Suburbia 157)*

Karim’s experience with Shadwell is an example of what Paul Gilroy has identified as “cultural racism”— a form of prejudice that does not focus on biology but re-establishes a power relationship based on the perceived cultural practises engaged in by a particular ethnic group. *(Bentley 164)* Hanif Kureishi seems to challenge this sort of cultural racism in his narrative to make room for multicultural perspective.

Though Karim is able to bring the authentic accent of his character, he resists the authenticity by changing the accent and relapsing into cockney at odd times to make the audience laugh.

When Karim is introduced to another theatre director, Pyke and he wants to know what kind of role he may get with him Pyke says the only subject in England is ‘class’ around which it may revolve. In the rehearsal Pyke instructs his group members to ‘concentrate on the way you think your position in society has been fixed’ *(Buddha of Suburbia 169)* to improvise characters. Karim decides to choose Charlie as his character but Pyke discouraged him and said, ‘we need someone from your own background. Someone black.’ ... ‘What about your family?’ Pyke said.
'Uncles and aunts. They’ll give the play a little variety. I bet they’re fascinating.' *(Buddha of Suburbia 170)*

When Karim dramatises Anwar’s character Tracey, the working class girl warns him not to show Anwar’s hunger-strike because it shows ‘black people’, ‘Indian people’, ‘Black and Asian people—’ ‘One old Indian man—’ ‘as being irrational, ridiculous, as being hysterical. And as being fanatical.’ Tracey continues:

> Your picture is what white people already think of us. That we’re funny, with strange habits and weird customs. To the white man we’re already people without humanity, and then you go and have Anwar madly waving his stick at the white boys. I can’t believe that anything like this could happen. You show us as unorganized aggressors. Why do you hate yourself and all black people so much, Karim? *(Buddha of Suburbia 180)*

The interest of theatre directors like Shadwell and Pyke in Karim lies in his ethnic background. They want to reap the commercial benefits by exploiting his ethnic background which, they feel, would introduce multicultural diversity and authenticity in their plays. Karim for them is not an individual but a type. This kind of celebration of diversity and difference is what Turner calls ‘soft multiculturalism’ referred to before. Hanif Kureishi by introducing the element of theatre in his narrative technique in the novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia* challenges this kind of apolitical, superficial and exploitative celebration of multiculturalism for commercial gain. The kind of characters and images Karim is made to represent in theatre perpetuates the negative stereotyping of the ethnic minority as exotic other which in turn perpetuates racism. The novel challenges the ways in which the contemporary race relations in Britain are perpetuated through cultural representation of different
sorts and attempts a subversion of the same. Stuart Hall’s (1989) concept of “new ethnicities” may help us to understand how Hanif Kureishi subverts the simplified negative representation of the ‘essential black’ or essential Indian by ending the innocent notion of the essential black subject and introducing multiplicity of subjectivities.

After the initial confusions and restlessness in suburban London Karim, however, gets ample opportunities to learn and enrich himself with experiences about the lives of people in cosmopolitan London being in company with the people of theatre. An important reflection occurs here when Karim develops a relationship with Eleanor. Feeling himself inferior, he decides to lose his accent and imitate Eleanor’s, even though he understands that for him it ‘could only be a second language, consciously acquired’. In this relationship with Eleanor, Karim finds himself in a situation where Eleanor’s stories have primacies over his. It is ‘her stories that connects to an entire established world’. Karim has his own stories to tell. One of them may be about the time, he ‘got fucked by Hairy Back’s Great Dane’ --- the episode in which Helen’s racist father(Hairy Back) tries to see Karim off his premises. Here, it may be significant that the most arresting episode of Eleanor’s life is the story of her black boyfriend Gene, driven to suicide by the prejudice that spoilt his acting career and his life. But this is not ‘her’ story to tell. Whenever Karim shows interest to know what happened to Gene, Eleanor avoids the matter. It serves the purpose of locating the extreme effect of an ingrained racism that is directly challenged by the novel:

Sweet Gene, her black lover, London’s best mime, who emptied bed-pans in hospital soaps, killed himself because every day, by a look, a remark, an attitude, the English told him they hated him; they never let him forget they thought him a nigger, a slave, a lower being. And we pursued English roses as
we pursued England; by possessing these prizes, this kindness and beauty, we stared defiantly into the eye of the Empire and all its self-regard ... We became part of England and yet proudly stood outside it. But to be truly free we had to free ourselves of all bitterness and resentment, too. How was this possible when bitterness and resentment were generated afresh every day? (Buddha of Suburbia 227)

The story of Gene intersects partly with Karim’s own story in the Hairy Back episode and also elsewhere in the novel. Karim is betrayed by Eleanor and Pyke. Eleanor became friendly with Karim because he was asked to do so by Pyke. It seems that Eleanor’s involvements, first, with Gene and later, with Karim were not relationships of mutual love but her interest in the exotic as both of them were considered to be black. For the same reason he was invited for group sex by Pyke and his wife Marlene. It is in the company of Eleanor that Karim feels the strength of love and variety of sex. In the company of Matthew Pyke and Marlene Karim comes to know how the rich and successful people live, how they pursue their fantasies and how sexually promiscuous and naive they are. Karim’s involvement with these people is not liked by Jamila. She says:

You’re moving away from the real world. ... the world of ordinary people and the shit they have to deal with—unemployment, bad housing, boredom. Soon you won’t understand anything about the essential stuff. (Buddha of Suburbia 195)

In the company of Eleanor, Karim gets the chance to observe the lives of the rich people in London as he frequents parties with her almost regularly. But he is not
comfortable with the crowd after a couple of hours with them. He feels ‘heavy and listless’. He feels pity for these people:

Life had offered these people its lips, but as they dragged from party to party, seeing the same faces and saying the same things night after night, I saw it was the kiss of death; I saw how much was enervated and useless in them. What passion or desire or hunger did they have as they lounged in their London living rooms? I told my political advisor... that the ruling class weren’t worth hating. (Buddha of Suburbia 225)

One more thing he learns from these self serving theatre people and artists is that these people make productions based on problems of ‘class’ and ‘race’. They pass themselves off as ‘liberal left’ and patronise the working class people such as Heater who is given free ticket for the opening day of any play followed by dinner. The members of Pyke’s group consider Heater to be a representative of the working class who can teach them working class culture. All these gestures may appear to be sympathetic towards the cause of the working class. However, when Karim asks Eleanor to join others in confronting the fascists ‘her attitude was strange considering what had happened to Gene’. She makes excuses and avoids joining the march.

All these experiences alienate Karim further and he starts realising the cause of his disorientation. In the funeral of Anwar he feels ashamed for spurning his Indian acquaintances and realises that his heritage is not something to be ashamed of because it is despised by fanatical racists. Now he comes to realise that Indians are his own people. This acknowledgement on Karim’s part makes him realise that the cause of his decentring is not his racial hybridity and the colour of his skin but his
inability to fuse the two cultural traditions of the people he is racially connected to. In the funeral of Anwar, Karim regrets having denied this fact of his life:

...looking at these strange creatures now—the Indians—that in some way these were my people, and that I’d spent my life denying or avoiding that fact. I felt ashamed and incomplete at the same time, as if half of me were missing, and as if I’d been colluding with my enemies, those whites who wanted Indians to be like them. (*Buddha of Suburbia* 212)

After his initial success in theatre first with Shadwell and later with Pyke’s group, Karim moves to America with Pyke’s group. In America he stays for some time with Charlie who has established himself here as a rock-star. Charlie has lost his real self, picked up cockney English and slangs to become successful as a rock-star. He has made himself Americanised and he is very optimistic about America. Initially, Karim enjoys his time with Charlie. He has always wanted to become like Charlie, popular and successful. However, after staying for some time with Charlie he goes into depression and then realises that he should go back to England where he still has chances to do well. Karim does not like Charlie’s idea of becoming successful by constantly changing his persona: “I couldn’t consider Charlie a rock-star. It didn’t seem of his essence, but a temporary, borrowed persona” (*Buddha of Suburbia* 246). With success Charlie became cruel and he continued experimenting with sex in inhuman ways. These things have become foolish for Karim now: “He didn’t interest me at all. I’d moved beyond him, discovering myself through what I rejected. He seemed merely foolish to me” (*Buddha of Suburbia* 255). Karim has already referred to what he rejected. Half of his self realisation happened at the funeral of uncle Anwar when he realised that ‘half of me’ was missing, i.e. his being half Indian by descent which he rejected until then. And now, after rejecting Charlie’s idea of
success in America by employing ‘borrowed persona’ and acquired cockney accent he asserts his Englishness and comes back to England where he belongs. Now, it seems that Karim has come to terms with his real hybrid self of being Indian and English at the same time. The recognition of multiple allegiances makes Karim more centred than ever before. In this way the migrant can feel more centred by recognising the possibility of having the multiple allegiances which Bhikhu Parekh calls multicultural perspective referred to before in this chapter.

Finally, Karim signs up for a role in a soap opera in which he plays the role of a “rebellious student son of an Indian shopkeeper”. He is said that the soap opera “would tangle with the latest contemporary issues: they meant abortions and racist attacks, the stuff that people lived through but that never got on TV” (Buddha of Suburbia 259). The new role seems to be in tuning with his hybrid self and he earns name and fame in it.

Karim’s brother, Allie seems to be more apt to grasp and deal with his multiple allegiance and hyphenated identity. Allie believes in critical engagement with his identity and culture which involves attachment and detachment at the same time. He argues that all black around the world do not share the same experience:

At least the blacks have a history of slavery. The Indians were kicked out of Uganda. There were reasons for bitterness. But no one put people like you and me in camps, and no one will. We can’t be lumped in with them, thank God. We should be just as grateful we haven’t got white skin either.... Let me say that we come from privilege. We can’t pretend we’re some kind of shitted-on oppressed people. Let’s just make the best of ourselves. (Buddha of Suburbia 267-68)
Allie’s argument is that having a hyphenated identity does not automatically qualify one to have claims on past that they have not personally experienced. He believes that the blacks in Britain should stop pitying on themselves, and starts thinking how to project themselves as British citizen without denying their difference. Allie as an individual seems to have developed a multicultural perspective by which he denies the essential idea of cultural identity and argues for the formation of cultural identity in a critical manner which can be called critical multiculturalism.

Different characters in the novel have different levels of decentring in their lives and they try to negotiate that in different ways. Karim’s father, Haroon and the Buddha of the title of the novel has chosen Britain over India to live here, so far as he could, ‘like Englishman’. He has married an English woman, keeps an English mistress and is bringing up his children making them inculcate Englishness despite the hostility of their racist neighbours. At the same time, he trades on his Indian origin by establishing himself as a guru (Buddha) expounding Eastern religion and philosophy to the inhabitants of South London suburbs. His desire to be English is inseparable from his ambivalence about being English. To address the English crowd as an Eastern guru he reads self-help books on Eastern philosophy and rehearses which baffles Karim:

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 spadeloads. Why? (Buddha of Suburbia 21)
Haroon came to England for education from an aristocratic family of Bombay. His perception of the English people and England was formed from the experiences he had in colonial India seeing them as the ruling class and reading narratives of England. Coming to England he saw the English in poverty and doing menial jobs. After failing to complete his education he ended up working as a clerk in the Civil Service. He feels that he has been a victim of racism when it comes to promotion:

The whites will never promote us,’ Dad said. ‘Not an Indian while there is a white man left on the earth. You don’t have to deal with them—they still think they have an Empire when they don’t have two pennies to rub together.

(Buddha of Suburbia 27)

It seems that all his initial efforts to assimilate into Englishness have gone in vain and in the middle of his life he has reached to a crisis of decentring. The cause of Haroon’s decentring seems to be the wide gulf between the England of his dream and what the contemporary England has to offer him. After all these whatever he does ‘a renegade Muslim masquerading as a Buddhist’ seems to be a form of resistance to assimilation. He internally migrates to a zone that he may claim to be his own to end his cultural alienation. Since he cannot go back to India which he has left behind, he recreates it for himself by inventing him as a Buddhist guru.

This seems to be one way of inscribing and articulating cultural hybridity. Hybridisation, according to Bhabha (1994), is intrinsic to all forms of “racial transformation” and “traditional renewal”. But Haroon’s case is not of ‘traditional renewal’ because he comes from Muslim background not Buddhist.

Perhaps, Haroon’s new-found love of Eastern philosophy is simply a strategy of reaction against his disappointment with Western secularism and all pervasive
materialism and also a strategy to curve out a space for himself in the so-called multicultural city of London which has otherwise denied him any:

We live in an age of doubt and uncertainty. The old religion under which people lived for ninety-nine point nine per cent of human history have decayed or are irrelevant. Our problem is secularism. We have replaced our spiritual values and wisdom with materialism (*Buddha of Suburbia* 76).

His love for Eva and subsequently leaving his family for her and going to live a bohemian life shows his revolt against the middle-class idea of marriage and family life. He talks about the need of spiritualism, however, minus the Eastern values of self-discipline, renunciation, charity, and compassion. An important strand of Eastern philosophy is mastering one's feelings and desires. However, Haroon believes “happiness is only possible if you follow your feeling, your intuition, your real desires. Only unhappiness is gained by acting in accordance with duty, or obligation, or guilt, or the desire to please others” (*Buddha of Suburbia* 76). Haroon's Eastern philosophy, it seems, is a post-Freudian hedonism. While talking to Ted, his brother-in-law Haroon, in an effort to release him from his “hard work, very hard, from morning till night”, asks him to stop working and advises, ‘Follow your feelings. Follow the course of least resistance. Do what pleases you – whatever it is. Let the house fall down. Drift’ (*Buddha of Suburbia* 49).

He further advises him not to ‘make an effort’ to do anything. It seems that Haroon loathes the life of hard work. The life of an immigrant is also a life of hard work. They come here in search of fortune and good life which they can only earn by doing hard work. Anwar and Jeeta and Jamila have to work in their dusty, disorderly and crammed shop ‘Paradise Stores’ from eight in the morning to ten at night, even on
Sundays. Haroon’s apathy to ‘work’ and ‘making effort’ seems to be a rebellion not only against the gripping and pervasive Western materialism but also against the life of an immigrant.

However, the irony of the situation is that the person he goes with in search of happiness to revolt against Western materialism is herself materialism personified. Haroon’s new-found love Eva Kay is a scheming businesswoman. She is always in search of things and ideas that have market value. She uses her contacts with people as launching pads to earn money. Eva is interested in Haroon because of his interest in the eastern philosophy which can be of interest to the people of the suburban-London. Once she has been successful in establishing Haroon as a mystic guru she insists that people pay to attend his sessions. She also insists that Haroon should improve his service to keep alive the interest of the people by consulting esoteric library books. She uses her contact with the press for the publicity of Haroon’s persona of a mystic guru by publishing his interview and photograph in a local newspaper.

Haroon’s leaving his family is not without his feeling of guilt. As Karim observes “Regret and guilt and pain just overwhelmed him. How badly he’d treated Mum, he told us. How much she’d given him, cared for him, loved him, and now he was sitting in Eva’s house all cosy and radiant and looking forward to bed” (Buddha of Suburbia 116).

Haroon says:

‘I could have done more, made more effort to care. She didn’t deserve to be hurt so. I don’t believe in people leaving people.’

‘This guilt and regret will ruin us!’
'It is part of me-

Please, please, clear it out of my mind.'

*(Buddha of Suburbia 116)*

Eva decides to sell off her suburban house that she has decorated with the help of Ted and Karim and go for a flat in London where she can take Haroon thinking that a change of location would make him stop thinking about his wife, Margaret.

Karim’s response to his father’s behaviour is ironic. He ridicules the whole enterprise of his father making him almost a caricature for his fake, two-dimensional multiculturalism. Ironically he starts calling his father ‘god’. When Haroon objects to Karim’s homosexual behaviour with Charlie, Karim sarcastically alludes to his father having sex with Eva in her garden: “Relax Dad. Relax your whole body from your fingers to your toes and send your mind to a quiet garden where...” *(Buddha of Suburbia 18)*. The recognition that Haroon gets from the people of London as an Eastern spiritual guru is the celebration of multiculturalism which C.W. Watson calls ‘soft multiculturalism’ and the Chicago Cultural Studies Group refers to as ‘corporate multiculturalism’ *(Watson 55)*.

Haroon’s friend Anwar also internally migrates to the values of his homeland because of cultural decentring. He decides to marry off his daughter, Jamila to a boy from India chosen by his brother. But Jamila has grown up in an unconventional way, with the idea of individual freedom and women’s liberation. She cannot accept this kind of arranged marriage. Anwar ‘goes on a major Gandhi diet’ (fast unto death) to force his daughter into arranged marriage. This is an attempt by Anwar to sustain the values of patriarchal rights that he has left behind in India and without which he ceases to exist as an Indian. This principle of absolute patriarchal authority
puzzles Karim. Karim finds similarities between what was happening to his dad, with his discovery of Eastern philosophy and Anwar’s stand on Jamila’s marriage:

Perhaps it was the immigrant condition living itself out through them. For years they were both happy to live like Englishmen. ... Now, as they aged and seemed settled here, Anwar and Dad appeared to be returning internally to India, or at least to be resisting the English here. It was puzzling: neither of them expressed any desire actually to see their origins again. ‘India’s a rotten place’, Anwar grumbled, ‘why would I want to go there again? It’s filthy and hot and it’s a big pain-in-the-arse to get anything done. If I went anywhere it would be to Florida and Las Vegas for gambling. (Buddha of Suburbia 64)

Once Jamila got married Anwar wants her to become pregnant immediately, so that he has grandchildren whom he could give ‘cultural upbringing and take them to school and mosque’. It is obvious that Anwar’s ‘cultural upbringing’ refers to Indian Muslim culture. His initial anglophilia seems to be over now. Anwar is not able to negotiate the two cultures, one of his origin and the other that he adopts as his host. He withdraws himself into his monocultural past.

Haroon seems to be happy by establishing himself as a ‘Buddha’ going away to live with his mistress Eva but at the cost of ruining his family. This shows the impact of extreme individualism in the British society. On the other hand, Anwar’s absolute patriarchal authority in the marriage of his daughter, Jamila also ruins his family. In fact, the omniscient narrator and protagonist of the novel appears to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of both the Indian-Muslim and British cultural ethos.

Many of the incidents in the novel, The Buddha of Suburbia paint the picture of all pervasive racism and racist violence in contemporary England. One such incident
happens in the novel when Karim goes to see his school friend, Helen at her place. He finds her father (Hairy Back) standing at the door. He ‘let go of the dog he was holding, a Great...Dane’ towards Karim and said:

‘You can’t see my daughter again, said Hairy Back. ... ‘We don’t want you blackies coming to the house.’... ‘We don’t like it,’ Hairy Back said. ‘However many niggers there are, we don’t like it. We’re with Enoch. If you put one of your black ‘ands near my daughter I’ll smash it with a ‘ammer! With a ‘ammer!’ (Buddha of Suburbia 40)

Hairy Back refers to the Conservative Member of Parliament, Enoch Powell who made his famous anti-immigrant speech “Rivers of Blood” in 1968 depicting Britain as swamped with uncontrollable waves of immigrants which were throwing the country into impending doom (Bentley 17).

The narrator of the novel, Karim depicts the sordid and boring kind of life led by immigrants such as, Uncle Anwar, Aunt Jeeta and their daughter Jamila. They run a grocery shop, ‘Paradise Stores’. The shop is dusty, disorderly and crammed with tins and cartons. “Paradise opened at eight in the morning and closed at ten at night. They didn’t even have Sundays off now, though every year at Christmas Anwar and Jeeta took a week off. Every year, after the New Year, I dreaded hearing Anwar say, ‘Only three hundred and fifty-seven days until we can rest freely again’” (Buddha of Suburbia 51). They never bothered to spend money for their comfort and enjoyment. “They behaved as if they had unlimited lives: this life was of no consequence, it was merely the first of many hundrEd to come in which they could relish existence” (Buddha of Suburbia 51). They knew nothing of the outside world. They didn’t know who was the Foreign Secretary or the Chancellor of the Exchequer of Great
Britain. All these show that these people never bothered to integrate with the mainstream British way of life.

However, this is only the one side of the story. The other side is that the area in which Anwars are living is the poorest of the poor in London. It was full of neo-fascist groups who roamed the street at night beating Asians and shoving shit and burning rags through their letter boxes. ‘The lives of Anwar and Jeeta and Jamila were pervaded by fear of violence’. The narrator says, “I’m sure it was something they thought about every day. Jeeta kept buckets of water around her bed in case the shop was fire-bombed in the night” (*Buddha of Suburbia* 56).

Jamila’s attitude to life, to some extent, was conditioned by the experience of racist violence. Under the influence of Angela Davis she became rebellious. Jamila used to resist the racist in a militant way by taking them head on. ‘She had a Ph.D. in physical retribution.’ Once, how she threw a greaser off his bike by tugging out some of his hair for racist abuse is an example of physical retribution. She started learning karate and judo and doing physical exercise. “She was preparing for the guerrilla war she knew would be necessary when the whites finally turned on the blacks and the Asians and tried to force us into gas chambers or push us into leaky boats” (*Buddha of Suburbia* 56). However, later, in the novel Jamila develops different strategies to defy racism. She becomes a political activist, joins a commune to live a life of experiment, gives birth to a racially hybrid baby and becomes a lesbian.

The novel seems to challenge the ingrained racism in the contemporary Britain and gives the message that the policy of multiculturalism adopted by the state which attempts to celebrate cultural difference will not produce results unless the majority
as well as the minority citizens develop multicultural perspective and engage themselves in the dialogic process of critical multiculturalism.

It cannot be said for certain that the policy of multiculturalism proved successful, but it can be certainly said that Britain has become a multicultural society and Hanif Kureishi as a writer does not lose sight of this fact. Kureishi’s second novel, *The Black Album* (1995) engages with the issues of assimilation, integration and multiculturalism which will be discussed in the following chapter. However, here I intend to explore how Kureishi has represented Britain as a multicultural society in his novels.

Though the majority of the characters in Kureishi’s novels are either English or the immigrants from the Indian Subcontinent, he introduces some eastern European refugees and Indians who fled from the West Africa as minor characters in his later novels. The very presence of these characters tell a lot about the recent history of West Africa and the collapse of Communism in eastern Europe and its impact on Britain: the influx of new immigrants and refugees. In *Something to Tell You* (2008) the protagonist Jamal had two friends, Valentin and Wolfgang. Valentin is from Bulgaria and Wolfgang is German. Jamal’s first love Ajita and her family, though Indian, emigrate from Uganda. In *Gabriel’s Gift* (2001) the maid servant at Gabriel’s home called Hannah is a refugee from a former Communist country. Gabriel describes the present demography of London as the following:

"The city was no longer home to immigrants only from the former colonies, plus a few others: every race was present, living side by side without, most of the time, killing one another. It held together, this new international city called..."
London – just about – without being unnecessarily anarchic or corrupt. There was, however, little chance of being understood in any shop. (*Gabriel’s Gift* 8)

London has not only become an international city in terms of its demography but also in terms of the goods and services these new population have brought with them. New restaurants have come up with exotic dishes difficult to pronounce. The street corners and road sides are full of ethnic goods and memorabilia. One can also find an acupuncturist there.

The most prominent and recurring aspect of multiculturalism is the inter-racial marriages and the racially hybrid children born out of these marriages. Whatever may be the political relations between the races at the social or national level the inter-racial marriages bring individuals from different races and cultural backgrounds closer to each other. The children born out of these marriages are racially hybrid. They are the ambassadors of multiculturalism, the ‘everyman’ of the postcolonial globalised world as Karim Amir of *The Buddha of Suburbia* is called. Like Karim’s mother Margaret, Haroon’s second wife Eva is also an English woman. In *Intimacy* (1998) Jay’s marriage with Susan is also inter-racial and they have two children. In *Something to Tell You* Jamal and Miriam are the children of Pakistani father and English mother. Jamal is married to Josephine, an English woman and they have a son. Miriam has five children with different men and she is having a ravishing affair with Jamal’s middle-aged English friend Henry. Hanif Kureishi has made the inter-racial marriage a commonplace phenomenon in his fictional world.

Another aspect of contemporary British society is the prominent presence of the immigrants in the cultural life. People from the ex-colonies are no more only factory workers, shopkeepers and labourers. They are now actors, writers, film makers,
musicians, fashion designers and also psychoanalyst. Some of them are also members of the House of Lords and the House of Commons of the British Parliament. Hanif Kureishi does not lose sight of this reality. Karim Amir is an actor. Shahid of *The Black Album* is a writer. Jay of *Intimacy* is a screenplay writer. In *Something to Tell You* Jamal Khan and Tahir Husain both are psychoanalyst. Mustaq is a musician. Ajita is a fashion designer. Kureishi has depicted them in all walks of life which help to break the stereotype of the ex-colonised as inferior race.

As far as the sexual identity of the immigrant, Black or Muslim whatever they are called is not also monolithic. The Muslim immigrant can also be homosexual. Kureishi has shown this in his novels. Karim is a bisexual. Jamila becomes lesbian. Mustaq is gay. The gay character, Omar Ali from Kureishi’s screenplay *My Beautiful Laundrette* reappears in *Something to Tell You* as Lord Ali. He has sold away his business of laundry and dry-cleaning and has entered into the media business. He is described as:

...a stalwart of the ant-racist industry, Omar Ali made television for, by and about minorities. The ‘Pakis’ had always been considered socially awkward, badly dressed, weirdly religious and repressed. But being gay, Omar Ali was smart enough to know how hip and fashionable minorities – or any outsiders – could become, with the right marketing, as they made their way up the social hierarchy. (*Something to Tell You* 243)

To conclude it can be said that as a creative writer Hanif Kureishi is a multiculturalist. He is out to break all sort of stereotyping about the Asian immigrants in Britain, especially the Pakistani Muslims. But he does not idealise the community either. He is able to bring out the follies and the eccentricities of the
community for genial laughter. Kureishi is also not silent on racism. He criticises racism severely and is against any aggressive, xenophobic and race-oriented national identity. Kureishi seems to be against the idea of any fixed identity. He rather advocates the idea that identity is an evolving process. This way he advocates his case for multiculturalism which only can appreciate this notion of identity and create a tolerant and peacefully coexistent society.
Works Cited


