Chapter V

Multiculturalism in Crisis

In the previous chapter I have explored the development of multicultural perspective or in-between culturally hybrid consciousness in the protagonist of the novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim Amir. Perhaps for Karim embracing the cultural in-between position is a bit easier by virtue of his being racially hybrid. Though, Karim has been a victim of racism he does not take part in active political resistance. He resists racism in his own private ways. Jamila on the other hand takes part in leftist political activism and joins demonstration against racism. Many Asians like Jamila were drawn towards leftist politics to fight racism. Kenan Malik recounts his own experience of joining leftist politics in his book *From Fatwa to Jihad* (2009). Leftist politics could assemble all racially and otherwise marginalized people irrespective of religion and culture to fight against racism. Culture and religion was not in the category of politics. As Malik puts it, "I came to learn that there was more to social justice than the injustices done to me (a non-white), and that a person's skin colour, ethnicity or culture was no guide to the validity of his or her political belief" (xix).

However, with the advent of multiculturalism as a state policy culture and religion was politicized. Even the left lost faith in universal liberal values and started talking about multiculturalism and group rights. According to Kenan Malik:

They became disenchanted with Enlightenment ideas of rationalism and humanism, and many began to decry the Enlightenment as a 'Eurocentric' project. Where once the left had argued that everyone should be treated equally, despite their racial,
ethnic, religious or cultural differences, now it pushed the idea that different people should be treated differently \textit{because} of such differences. (xix)

Now, the dilemma of a liberal democracy adopting the policy of multiculturalism is that it fosters the existence of two cultural or institutional domains. One is the public sphere or the domain of public/national political culture centered on the idea of welfare state and the other is the private communal sphere or the domain of separate cultures of the different ethnic communities. The private communal sphere involves the members of ethnic communities speaking their own language among themselves, practicing their own religion and family practices. The separate private communal cultures are allowed to exist in a multicultural society for three reasons. First, it is believed that the communal cultures may have value in themselves and allowing them to exist is a gesture of mutual tolerance. Second, the private communal culture provides moral and emotional security to the members of the community. And the third reason of allowing these communal groups with their private cultures is that they may protect the political interest of the groups by collective actions. (Rex and Singh 7)

However, the question is how to ensure political integration and social cohesion in such a society where two domains, that of public and private exist simultaneously. The advocates of multiculturalism believe that simultaneous existence of public and private domain in a liberal democracy is possible and also desirable in the present globalised world in which migration is a very common phenomenon.

British Indian political philosopher Bhikhu Parekh, for example, believes that the sense of belonging among the citizens of a multicultural society cannot be based on ethnicity or shared culture because a multicultural society is too diverse for that but it can be based on a shared commitment to the political community. Commitment to a political community
does not mean sharing a common view of history or a particular economic or social system but commitment to its continuing existence and wellbeing. The members may differ in many regards and "might criticize the prevailing forms of government, institutions, policies, values, ethos and dominant self understanding in the strongest possible terms, but these should not arouse or provoke charges of disloyalty so long as their basic commitment to dialogue is not in doubt" (Parekh 342).

Commitment to a political community is reciprocal in nature. Citizens cannot belong to a political community unless it accepts them as belonging to it. To develop a sense of belonging among the diverse cultural groups the political community has to value and cherish their diversity which should reflect in its structure, policies, conduct of public affairs, self-understanding and self-definition. Parekh says, "Citizenship is about status and rights, belonging is about being accepted and feeling welcome" (342). Some individuals and groups might enjoy the same rights as the rest but feel that they do not quite belong to the community. This may cause serious damage to their citizenship and their commitment to political community. According to Parekh:

It is caused by, among other things, the narrow and exclusive manner in which wider society defines the common good, the demeaning way in which it talks about some of its members, and the dismissive or patronizing ways in which it behaves towards them. Although such individuals are free in principle to participate in its collective life, they often stay away or ghettoize themselves for fear of rejection and ridicule or out of deep sense of alienation. (342)

The provision of group rights can be contested in the dialectic between the ideas of ‘cultural liberty’ and that of ‘valuing cultural conservation’. "Cultural liberty" according to Amartya Sen, "focuses on our freedom either to preserve or to change our priorities (on the
basis of greater knowledge or further reflection, or, for that matter, on the basis of our assessment of changing customs and fashions)” and “valuing cultural conservation” for Sen is “providing support for the continuation of traditional lifestyles by new immigrants in the West” which is a big issue in the rhetoric of multiculturalism (113). Theoretically, then, multiculturalism in the sense of ‘valuing cultural conservation’ is associated with identity politics based on essentialism and authenticity, i.e. ‘cultures’ are fixed static realities and the ethnic groups are the proprietors of their ‘culture’. Critics of this form of multiculturalism find fault in it because it allegedly depoliticises or aestheticises differences by emphasising the cosmetic celebration of cultural diversity, rather than the socially transformative struggle against racism or white supremacy. They consider it to be a strategy of containment of resistance and revolt rather than for a true desire for the elimination of racial /ethnic oppression.

The policy of multiculturalism and the provision of two parallel domains of public and private affairs in Britain came under severe criticism after a section of the Muslim population of Britain vehemently protested against Salman Rushdie’s alleged blasphemous postmodernist novel *The Satanic Verses* in 1989 and burnt copies of the book in Bradford. Later, after the terrorist attack in America on September 11, 2001 and the London bombings of July 07, 2005 politicians and policy makers again have started questioning and scrutinizing the policy of multiculturalism. Kenan Malik in his book *From Fatwa to Jihad* (2009) comments on multiculturalism:

The celebration of difference, respect for pluralism, avowal of identity politics – these have come to be regarded as the hallmarks of a progressive, anti-racist outlook and as the foundation stones of modern liberal democracies. Yet there is a much darker side to multiculturalism, as the Rushdie affair demonstrated. Multiculturalism has helped foster a more tribal nation and, within Muslim communities, has
undermined progressive trends while strengthening the hand of conservative religious leaders. While it did not create militant Islam, it helped ... create for it a space within British Muslim communities that had not existed before. (xx)

The critics of multiculturalism seem to be more concerned about the emergence of political Islam as they find it a threat to the existence of multicultural societies. American political scientist Samuel P. Huntington (1996) made this probable threat famous in his "clash of civilizations" theory, in which he foresaw a clash primarily between the Christian West and the Islamic East. According to Huntington, as Kenan Malik puts it:

On one side of the fault line stood the West, with its liberal democratic traditions, a scientific worldview and a secular, rationalist culture drawn from the Enlightenment; on the other was Islam, rooted in a pre-medieval theology, with its seeming disrespect for democracy, disdain for scientific rationalism and deeply illiberal attitudes on everything from crime to women’s rights. (x)

It is imperative here to probe the growth of political Islam in Britain. The Muslim Diaspora of Britain is largely the result of an influx of immigrants which began after 1947 when India and Pakistan got Independence after partition. This was largely economic migration and these immigrants initially intended to be sojourners but eventually became settlers, creating a new life for them in a different socio-cultural context. Since their settlement, they have raised new generations whose perception of themselves and their lives have been conditioned by circumstances very different from those of their parents. The lives and self-images of the first generation of immigrants to Britain were shaped partly by imperialist domination and partly by resistance to it. The newly emergent immigrants occupied certain labour market positions, lived in particular areas and faced particular forms of racism. People from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Caribbean were some of
the most oppressed and exploited sections of the working class. They had the worst working and housing conditions. In general terms, they remained there and been at the sharpest edge of racial tensions.

The first generation of immigrants came to Britain to make a good life for them. They wanted to live their lives as best as they could like the Englishmen. It was a matter of pride for them to be like the Englishmen. They had largely accepted racism as a fact of life and kept their heads down to get on with the job of survival. But their children (second generation immigrants who were born in Britain) refused to do so. They considered themselves British citizens and challenged racism head-on (Malik 40). The British-born descendants of the first generation immigrants have participated in the process of evolution of creating a new self-image and identity. This new conception of self is shaped by the fact of being minority culturally, linguistically and racially which made them experience social, economical and racial oppression.

Initially, these immigrants did not identify themselves with their religious identity. The first generation immigrants continued with their village traditions. They tended to recreate the village and kin networks or what they called biradari system. However, with higher literacy and education, intensified communication and media consumption and expanded interaction with Western and other cultures the second and third generation immigrants refused to follow the village traditions and biradari system. Practices such as arranged marriages to other members of the biradari still living in their country of origin, an unwritten honour code that makes the preservation of collective face more important than individual rights, and the frequently contemptuous treatment of women and reluctance to see them grasp opportunities in education, employment or public life all became major source of friction between the first generation and the second and third generation immigrants. This created a void between the first generation and the later generations
leading to the development of a sense of alienation and identity crisis. Islamic revival was there to fill in this vacuum as Huntington puts it:

Islamic revival as a source of identity, meaning, stability, legitimacy, development, power, and hope epitomized in the slogan “Islam is the solution” had a wide purchase among the Muslim youth. Islamist symbols, commitments, and beliefs meet these psychological need, and Islamist welfare organisations, the social, cultural, and economic need of Muslims caught in the process of modernization. (116)

Contrary to the popular belief that Islamic revival is a reawakening of the medieval theological faith, it is rather a socio-cultural movement and very much a product of the Western society:

... a reaction to new political and social changes: the loss of a sense of belonging in a fragmented society, the blurring of traditional moral lines, the increasing disenchantment with politics and politicians, the growing erosion of the distinction between our private lives and our public lives. Radical Islamists have responded to the political crisis created by these changes returning to the Qur’an and taking literally its strictures. (Malik 25)

The growth of contemporary radical Islam is not a return to traditional religion but a break with it. Contemporary radical Islam, according to Turkish academic Nilufer Gole, as Kenan Malik puts it, is a “religious experience of a new kind; it is not directly handed over by community, religious or state institutions”. Rather, it presents “an affirmative reconstruction of identity” (27).

Hanif Kureishi’s novel *The Black Album* (1995) imaginatively engages with the rise of radical Islam with multiculturalism at its backdrop and the politically charged debates that
surround the Rushdie affair by situating the novel in 1989, the year the latter happened. The debates include the role of literature in society, freedom of expression, representation, censorship and the failure of dialogue between the liberals and the fundamentalists. Kureishi recreates the ‘book burning incident’ in a small scale in the college attended by the protagonist of the novel, Shahid Hasan. After joining the college Shahid Hasan finds himself torn between liberalism and fundamentalism. He is in love with his Cultural Studies teacher, Deedee Osgood for whom “all limitations are like prisons” and develops friendship with a fundamentalist group headed by Riaz Al-Hussain who teaches Shahid how to purify oneself.

Shahid Hasan joined this “derelict college” in London when he was passing through a crisis in his personal life. After watching Salman Rushdie, the author of *Midnight’s Children* on television “attacking racism” and “informing people how it all arose” Shahid became aware of racism and how he was a victim of it, as well as his own complicity in it.

Shahid started feeling like becoming a racist himself and joining the racists “going around abusing Pakis, niggers, Chinks, Irish, any foreign scum’. Because of this feeling of desperation and uneasy situation at home Shahid joins the college for ‘a new start with new people in a new place thinking that ‘the city would feel like his; he wouldn’t be excluded; there had to be ways in which he could belong” (*Black Album* 16).

Shahid’s choice of the course on ‘colonialism and literature’ in the college and his previous reading list, Malcolm X, Maya Angelou, *Souls of Black Folk* and accounts of Mutiny, Partition and Mountbatten followed by Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* all show his commitment to some cause, the search for ‘ways in which he could belong’, i.e., the search for a postcolonial identity. Shahid holds a liberal view of art and literature, and through literature he wants to come to terms with himself. But he is challenged by the
fundamentalist group whose one member, Chad considers literature to be a mere entertainment and he thinks by reading literature “intellectual people elevate themselves above ordinary ones”. This is only the beginning of the clash between the binary of Western liberal discourse and the discourse of Islamic fundamentalism. Apparently the text seems to pander to the popular belief of the Westerners in the discourse of liberalism with its professed tolerance and fair play against the rigidity of the fundamentalist discourse. However, one can read the ambivalence of the text and find critiques of both the discourses by resisting the apparent oppositional mode present in the novel.

Hanif Kureishi seems to build a defense of literature through his protagonist, Shahid and he differentiates his novel from Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children: “its rhythms aren’t Western. It dashes all over the place”. In contrast with Rushdie’s postmodernist technique Kureishi’s choice is linear social realism, ‘picture of life’. As in his first novel, The Buddha of Suburbia Kureishi chooses the genre of bildungsroman for The Black Album too to record the process of the subject’s coming to terms with the society as an integrated member. The subject of bildungsroman, according to M. H. Abrams, “is the development of the protagonist’s mind and character in the passage from childhood through varied experiences – and often through a spiritual crisis – into maturity, which usually involves recognition of one’s identity and role in the world” (Abrams 193).

Thus, The Black Album is an account of Shahid’s escape from his Thatcherite family members who’s materialistic and consumerist values clashes with his own artistic sensibility. His artistic sensibility clubbed with his consciousness of racism urged him to study “colonialism and literature”. Ultimately, he wants to become a writer and address the issues of racism and belongingness in his writings. On this pretext Kureishi brings together three sets of characters in the novel: the Thatcherite materialist and consumerist family members of Shahid, secular liberals such as Deedee Osgood and her estranged husband Dr.
Andrew Brownlow; and the Islamic fundamentalists, Riaz and his group. This provides Kureishi the opportunity to problematize the question of belonging and also to engage all these different point of views in dialogue.

One such dialogue takes place between Riaz and Brownlow in the presence of Shahid when Shahid accompanied Riaz’s group to give protection to a Bengali Muslim family from racist attack and surprisingly Brownlow joined them. Brownlow starts the dialogue by saying that he often wished in his adult life that he could be religious until he read Bertrand Russell. He asks in a condescending way whether Riaz and Shahid knew Russell and quotes him: “The whole conception of God is a conception derived from the ancient Oriental despotisms”. He continues:

Since then [i.e., after reading Russell] often – me – felt abandoned in the universe. Atheism can be a terrible trouble, you should know. Having to invest the world with meaning. Would be marvelous to believe that soon after death by cancer one will slip – I mean, sip – grapes, melon and virgins in paradise. Paradise being like Venice. Without the smells or early closing. Heaven, surely, as someone said, was man’s easiest invention. (Black Album 96-97)

Brownlow goes on criticizing the idea of religious faith as becoming “the slave of superstition” and “existing in an imaginary realm ruled by imaginary beings” and living life according to rules, from “how to eat” to “how to wipe your bottom”, delivered from high. Here, he obliquely refers to Rushdie’s book The Satanic Verses and equates Islamic faith with “magic realist tales from distant centuries” which, according to Brownlow, is a “bondage”. He refers to the believers as “weaklings” who prefer the bondage of faith to “free will” which is like “infantile dependence”. He says, “the act of believing” is “as opposed to thinking”. Brownlow feels that for an intelligent man like Riaz believing in
something that cannot be proven is to be “dishonest” and he says “people must decide
good and evil for themselves”. Riaz replies to this by saying, “man is the last person I
would trust to such a task” (Black Album 98).

The problem is that Brownlow is too arrogant in professing his liberal views and attaches
the conception of God to “Oriental despotism”. He creates a binary between the Western
liberalism and Eastern spiritualism in which he places the Western liberalism on a
privileged position. He fails to understand that many of the self-righteous values of
liberalism are actually derived from Christianity. He also ignores the historical role of
liberalism in colonialism, slavery and the Holocaust. His aggressive anti-religious stand
and his inability to tolerate other’s point of view is actually a danger to the health of a
multicultural society. Kureishi seems to be conscious of this. And here the ambivalence of
the text comes alive when the apparent victory of liberal values over religious
fundamentalism at the end of the novel and Kureishi’s apparent defense of the former
comes under tension with Riaz’s counterblast:

But you are a little arrogant. … Your liberal beliefs belong to a minority who live in
northern Europe. Yet you think moral superiority over the rest of mankind is a fact.
You want to dominate others with your particular morality, which has – as you also
well know – gone hand-in-hand with fascist imperialism. … This is why we have to
guard against the hypocritical and smug intellectual atmosphere of Western
civilization. (Black Album 98-99)

Later, when Shahid shares their anti-racist activities with Deedee, she expresses her
displeasure and denounces both Riaz and Chad for their past. Then she offers him a drink
saying, ‘Alcohol is one of the great pleasures’. Shahid rebuffs her by saying, ‘Is life just
for pleasure? ...What about making the world better place?’. She expresses her disgust for
people like Riaz and Chad because 'they're devoid of doubt', 'people with anger and passionate belief'. A staunch liberal like Deedee cannot tolerate people who are very sure of everything. She considers these people dangerous even for Shahid. However, she is not able to convince Shahid. He feels his friend Riaz is actually doing a noble job by protecting others even placing his own life at stake. He becomes angry with Deedee and accuses her of cynicism and inaction. The ambivalent position of Shahid becomes clear in his outburst though he is not able to resist the pleasures introduced to him by Deedee:

The thing is, Deedee, clever white people like you are too cynical. You see through everything and rip everything to shreds but you never take any action. Why would you want to change anything when you already have everything your way? (Black Album 110)

Though, Shahid cannot resist the allures of pleasures introduced to him by Deedee and fantasizes on “the secrets of desire” and “sexual tension” present everywhere he does not continue to bathe very long in the memory of “love they’d made and the pleasure she’d introduced him to, which they could delectably repeat and extend into the future”. He rather senses a bitter, disillusioned feeling:

How he’d been drowning his senses in the past hours! What illusions he’d been subject to! What torrents of drug-inspired debris he had allowed to stream through his head! What banal fantasies he believed were visions! (Black Album 130)

The pursuit of pleasure and self-absorption which is attached to Western way of life comes under attack once again from Chad. Chad effaces his ethnic identity of being a ‘Paki’ and asserts his identity of being a ‘Muslim’. He says:
We are people who say one important thing — that pleasure and self-absorption isn’t everything! ...One pleasure — unless there are strong limits — can only lead to another. And the greater the physical pleasure, the less respect for the other person and for oneself. Until we become beasts. *(Black Album 128)*

By rejecting the pursuit of pleasure and self-absorption Chad rejects extreme individualism prevalent in Western culture, specially in pop culture and postmodern culture. According to Maria Dagabriele, “Kureishi represents this Islamic rejection of pop culture and postmodernity as something that is founded on a rejection of Western imperialism” (Dagabriele 12).

But, the problem with Shahid is that he cannot stick to one idea for a very long time. After his disillusioned feeling with sexual fantasy he goes to a mosque and decides to break up with Deedee and concentrate on his works with Riaz. He finds the atmosphere of the mosque “uncompetitive, peaceful, meditative”, a place of unity in diversity. Once he comes out of the mosque he is not able to reconcile the “bustling diversity of the city” with the unity of the mosque. He recalls the religious stories told by his friend “about how God wanted them to live, about what would happen when they died, and why, while alive, they were persecuted”. Shahid knows that these stories could be easily mocked and undermined, however they compelled him. But, when he had left them he knew that stories were made up by human being:

…they could not be true or false, for they were exercises in that most magnificent but unreliable capacity, the imagination, which William Blake called “the divine body in every man”. Yet his friends would admit no splinter of imagination into their body of belief, for that would poison all, rendering their conviction human, aesthetic, fallible. *(Black Album 133)*
Shahid knows that “all this believing wasn’t so much a matter of truth or falsity, of what could be shown and what not, but of joining”, joining the Muslims together to forge an affirmative identity. This kind of joining, he knows, is breaking the world up “into political and religious tribes” and such divisions would lead to different kind of civil war. Kureishi seems to comment on the impact of the policy of multiculturalism which matches with Kenan Malik’s observation on the same. According to Kenan Malik:

As a means of bridging racial divisions and differences, however, it was far less successful. Multiculturalism helped create new divisions and more intractable conflicts which made for a less openly racist but a more insidiously tribal Britain.

(63)

The setting of *The Black Album* also coincides with the collapse of the Berlin Wall and with it the collapse of the vision of global socialism. The novel comments on the role of communism in anti-racist politics. Dr. Brownlow seems to be a caricature of communism and its recent history of failure in Eastern Europe. Riaz and his group appreciate Brownlow’s role in anti-racist politics. As Chad says, “he come[s] to this college to help us, the underprivileged niggers and wogs an’ margin people. ... He [is] always strong on anti-racism. He hate[s] imperialist fascism and white domination ...”. Riaz also says, “Andrew Brownlow has some personal integrity” (*Black Album* 32). But, later Brownlow got disillusioned with his ideology and the socio-political condition of England. He is also disturbed with the rise of religious fundamentalism. After the book burning incident his faith in rationalism is completely shattered and wants to leave England. He admits that religions and forms of worship and prayers “all have their purposes” but nobody in the Western world could imagine that they would “survive rationalism”: “... when you thought God was dead and buried, you realize he was merely awaiting resurrection” (*Black Album* 243). The fundamentalists appreciate the egalitarian ideals of communism.
However, it is not compatible with them because of its being an atheistic and materialist ideology. They believe that without the faith in God to who all are answerable there cannot be any morality left which, in turn, bred “extremity and ingratitude and hard-heartedness, like beneath this Thatcherism” (Black Album 33).

Until the collapse of the communist regime of the Eastern Europe in 1989 communism was a guiding force to fight against racism and social justice, as noted earlier with reference to Kenan Malik’s book. Religion and ethnicity was not a barrier to forge an alliance with communism to create a political identity in the fight against racism. My intension here is not to suggest that communism was the only ideal option but to suggest that an alliance of that kind is possible where religion, culture and ethnicity should not be allowed to overrule everything but to be mutually tolerated by the members of the alliance. Instead of digging out differences in everything one should look for similarities and common ground. Here, Amartya Sen’s (2006) idea of “multiple identities” comes in mind. The fundamentalists fail to explore their multiple identities. Though, Brownlow joins them in their resistance to racism they are dismissive of him and make fun of his political identity. This failure on the part of the fundamentalists poses a threat to the social cohesion of a multicultural society. Kureishi hints at that danger by criticizing the idea of one absolute identity based on religion and ethnicity. Shahid is also critical of one dimensional identity of his friend Riaz:

Shahid watched the man he had wanted as his friend and who like him but with less reason, seemed strangely out of place here. Riaz loved ‘his people’, but, unless offering assistance, he appeared uncomfortable with them. Riaz had little: no wife or children, career, hobby, house or possessions. The meaning of his life was his creed and the idea that he knew the truth about how people should live. It was this single-
mindedness that made him powerful and, to Shahid now rather pitiful. (Black Album 173-74)

However, the way Riaz’s character has been presented in the novel with his intelligence (which Brownlow appreciates), the ability to engage people in religious talks correlating the topics of his talks with the contemporary socio-cultural atmosphere, e.g., “Rave to the Grave?” (against drug addiction), “Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve” (against homosexuality), the single-mindedness of his purpose, his resolution to fight against racism, the devotion to the cause he has chosen to serve, the purity of his character all show the sympathy the author has for him and we as readers also cannot but sympathize with him. Shahid feels Riaz “must have tasted the atmosphere of his time without drinking it in”. Shahid knows that the whole of his generation is given to pop culture i.e. admiration for rebels, body piercing, hating respectability and excessive use of drugs. “But it cost little to rebel”. The third person narrator of the novel reflects:

Riaz, however, in an era of self-serving ambition and careers, had taken on a cause and maintained his unpopular individuality. In the end he was more of a nonconformist – and one without affectation – than anyone Shahid had met. Where everyone else had zigged, Riaz had zagged. (Black Album 109)

As far as Shahid’s own search for identity is concerned, he has the capability of forging multiple identities. He has sympathy for Riaz and his group because he shares his ethnicity with them. It is in their company that he learns his own religion. Shahid’s love of literature and art brings him close to Deedee who introduces to him the world of pleasures. However, Shahid is able to engage all of them in dialogue and point out the shortcomings in their point of views.
Kureishi has used the aubergine episode as an incident to bring together different point of views on the status of religious miracle in a liberal multicultural society. The fundamentalists believe that the aubergine with God’s name inscribed in it is a sign from God and they make special arrangements to display it in a private house so that the God fearing people may come and pay their homage to the sacred symbol. Mr. Brownlow joins them to show his solidarity with and respect to the minority people’s right to assert their faith. Brownlow has also roped in the Labour Party leader and local councilor, Mr. Rugman Rudder who has helped to get permission to use the private house as a public one. When Riaz presses for a place in the Town Hall for the display of the aubergine Rudder assures him reluctantly that he would try and says, “… our party supports ethnic minorities …”. Riaz hails him as “a true friend of Asia”. Kureishi seems to comment on ‘Britain’s multicultural bargain’ through this kind of political patronage in matters of faith which can be referred to as ‘ethnic card’ in politics. Politicians often concede to the demands made by the ethnic minorities in faith related matters to gain their support. But, this may prove dangerous if the minorities lose their sense of proportion and their demands cross the limit leading to strengthening the hands of the religious fanatics. Finally, even the national politicians are also clueless about how to deal with them.

However, Deedee being a staunch liberal is very critical of the aubergine incident and Shahid’s involvement in it. For her, it is superstition. She cannot accept that an educated person like him could believe in such a thing. She is also critical of the political support they have managed to gain from Mr. Rudder to place the ‘holy aubergine’ in the Town Hall. Shahid defends this by saying that Mr. Rudder wants “a closer association with our community” and he respects “our” culture. But, Deedee cannot accept that believing in an aubergine is “culture at all”. At this Shahid becomes angry and shouts:
We’re third-class citizens, even lower than the white working class. Racist violence is getting worse! Papa thought it would stop, that we’d be accepted here as English. We haven’t been! We’re not equal! It’s gonna be like America. However far we go, we’ll always be underneath! *(Black Album 209)*

Shahid’s outburst is understandable. For him the faith in the miracle is not so important, what is important is the assertion of their faith and getting acceptance of the Whites. Deedee is not able to understand this. She is very arrogant about her self-righteous liberal belief and is not able to understand other alternative point of views.

Now, we move to the central debate of the novel that takes place around Rushdie’s novel *The Satanic Verses*, though never explicitly named. The uncanny presence of the book is in Kurishi’s novel is perceptible from the very beginning. In the very first chapter in his first meeting with Riaz, Shahid tells him about his having read *Midnight’s Children* and asked Riaz if he has read the book. In reply Riaz says, “I found it accurate about Bombay. But this time he has gone too far” *(Black Album 9)*. Chad says, “that book been around too long without action. He insulted us all – the prophet, the prophet’s wives, his whole family. It’s sacrilege and blasphemy. Punishment is death”. He rejoices after learning that the Iranian spiritual leader, Ayatollah Khomeini has issued a fatwa against the writer demanding death punishment for him. But, Shahid cannot support this. He says, “if he’s insulted us, can’t we just forget about it? If some fool calls you a bastard in the pub, it’s best to not think about it” *(Black Album 169)*. Shahid felt sick about the violent idea of killing a person. He asks Riaz, “would you kill a man for writing a book?” Riaz justifies violence by saying that when evil has been done, there must be order in society. He rather accuses Shahid of anarchy for not supporting him and says:
Are you not with your people? Look at them, they are from villages, half-literate and not wanted here. All day they suffer poverty and abuse. Don't we, in this land of so-called free expression, have to give them a voice? … We cannot just forsake our people and live for ourselves. … If we did, wouldn't that mean we had totally absorbed Western morals, which are totally individualistic? (Black Album 173)

The debate continues in the meeting convened to decide on the proper action against ‘the book’ and discuss what cannot be and what must not be said, what is taboo and forbidden and why, what is censored and how censorship benefits ‘us’ in exile. Riaz’s point of view is that some people in the name of storytelling “expose a corrupt nature”. They pretend to reveal the truth to the masses and represent their own people in the negative light to get acceptance of the white elite so that they can be considered “great authors”. Riaz says, “… as one would deprecate a disrespectful nature in another person, it is impossible to see how such a spectacle could be valued as literature. ... After all, for what higher purposes can such literature possibly exist?” Shahid holds a liberal view of literature. According to Shahid literature tells us about ourselves and reflects on our nature. A free imagination, according to Shahid, “ranges over many natures. A free imagination, looking into itself, illuminates others”. Riaz at this point says, “we are discussing here the free and unbridled imagination of men who live apart from the people”. For Riaz “the profound and satisfying comfort of religion is preferable to the indulgence of an unbridled imagination: ‘to me these truths about the importance of faith and concern for others are deeper than the ravings of one individual imagination” (Black Album 184). When Shahid says that the individual voice is also important, Riaz rebuffs: “up to a point. And then no further. Is there one society in which any individual can be allocated unlimited freedom?” (Black Album 184)
What comes out from the above dialogue is that the central issue of the Rushdie debate was not that the radical Islamists are incompatible with art, literature, individual freedom, representation and imagination but whether there should be some limit to the individual freedom and imagination; and whether the artist should respect the sentiment of some people and should know what cannot and should not be represented. In almost every culture there are some of the things which are considered to be taboo and are forbidden. In every religion there are things considered to be sacred, be it the idea of god, deity, prophet, scripture, or the rituals. Some religions, specially the polytheistic ones, permit anthropomorphic representation of gods and goddesses and accept localised retelling of narratives and new figures of deities. Christianity and Islam both are monotheistic religions and both have reservations on the representations of the sacred. Majority of the Christian societies in the European countries, however, have undergone the process of secularisation of the civil society since the middle of the eighteenth century. This process often has been commented upon by social scientists and theologians as ‘disenchantment’ (Max Weber) and ‘demythologising’ (Bultamann). This historical trend is also called the Enlightenment project the goal of which has been to restrict the role of religion in public life as much as possible. The Enlightenment project also encouraged a movement in art and literature to problematize the issues of morality in religion and demystify religious symbols and personalities. Iconoclasm became the cult of rational thinking. Ridiculing Christian figures and mocking saints and priests became accepted phenomena of the contemporary European cultural heritage. All Christians may not like it but they have learnt to live with it (Watson 58-59). As far as the Muslim societies are concerned the representation of the Prophet and God in any physical form is prohibited and considered sacrilege. Ridiculing the Prophet and the Scripture is considered blasphemy. Even today many Muslims the world over are ready to be martyr to protect the sanctity and sacredness
of the Prophet and the Scripture. This is something on which the whole Muslim world is united. The Rushdie affair was one such event that united the Muslims. Once they felt themselves united they wanted to assert their right to protest against all injustice done to them locally as well as globally. This was what happened at Bradford in 1989.

Kureishi has recreated the Bradford episode in a miniature way in *The Black Album*. Riaz, Chad, and other members of their group make arrangement for a demonstration against the book and to burn it in public in the college premise. Shahid reluctantly assists them. Mr. Brownlow also joins the demonstration. Before burning the book Riaz was about to make a speech when Deedee comes to interrupts. Riaz says, "... is the free speech of an Asian to be muzzled by the authorities?" She tries to pacify them by saying that they should read the book first. Riaz says that this was democracy and they should be left to protest: "Are the white supremacists going to lecture us on democracy this afternoon? Or will they permit us, for once, to practice it?" (*Black Album* 224)

It seems clear from the above debate that, though Riaz and Chad are in favour of violent action against the author for blasphemy they have another motive i.e. to give voice to their people. It is an occasion for them to unite their people, assert their identity and express their resistance against individualistic Western morals and white supremacy. According to Kenan Malik, "In the West, it was not theological distress about blasphemy but political despair about belongingness and identity that stoked up anti-Rushdie sentiment" (Malik 95).

Shahid’s involvement in the demonstration and his reactions at different points of it demand discussion. His behaviour is ambivalent. When the book was put to flames by Chad and all their group members were rejoicing triumphantly Shahid could not share their fervour:
Shahid looked away immediately, with a guilty expression, as if he weren’t enjoying it as much as he should. He wanted to appear neutral but knew that wasn’t possible. It wasn’t as if he felt nothing, like many of the people looking on. If anything, he felt ashamed. He was someone who couldn’t join in, couldn’t let himself go. ... The stupidity of the demonstration appalled him. How narrow they were, how unintelligent, how ... embarrassing it all was! (*Black Album* 225)

However, when the college guards approached them to stop the demonstration in college premise Shahid did not “want the event to be interrupted. He rather ‘wanted to witness every page in flames’. Later, he is confused to understand his own position. He considers himself better than others because he lacked their fervour. Again he considers himself worse because of being tepid. Finally he thinks, “he was not simple enough”:

> He wanted to crawl back to his room, slam the door and sit down with a pen; that was how he would reclaim himself. This destruction of a book – a book which was a question – had embodied an attitude to life which he had to consider. (*Black Album* 227)

Shahid thinks that his alliance with his friends terminated the moment Hat soaked the book in petrol: “He had been taught much about what he didn’t like; now he would embrace uncertainty. May be wisdom would come from what one didn’t know, rather than from confidence. That’s what he hoped” (*Black Album* 227).

Shahid’s rejection of the discourse of absolute certainty of a fundamentalist and embracing the discourse of uncertainty of liberal humanist which is provisional is a crucial point in the novel. Shahid finally aligns himself with Deedee and flees from his friends. Progressive liberal individualism triumphs over one’s ethnic and cultural commitments.
But, Shahid is aware of his vulnerability. Observing Deedee’s husband, Brownlow leaving her place permanently Shahid becomes critical of the extreme individualism and lack of long term commitment in relationship prevalent in western society. He is reminded of what Riaz once told him about love. He said that love could not flourish “without a fixed morality” and framework “given by God and established in society” (*Black Album* 240). In the absence of a proper framework people would only rent one another for some time “to obtain pleasure and distraction” turning love into a commodity. In this kind of faithless transaction people “hoped to discover something which would complete them. And if they didn’t soon receive it, they threw the person over and moved on. And on” (*Black Album* 240). Shahid is convinced that such circumstances cannot lead to any permanence or mutual understanding in love relationship. His relationship with Deedee is only limited to passionate physicality without mutual knowledge of each other. He becomes apprehensive that Deedee may leave him any time and he may have to follow the footstep of Brownlow leaving her, separating their possessions.

Kureishi’s novel, *The Black Album* is critical of the arrogance of the White liberals as well as some values of western liberal culture. It is more critical of the fanaticism of the fundamentalists, though crediting racism for its rise. But Kureishi does not attempt to reconcile the two warring point of views, he rather disposes off the fundamentalists. The fundamentalists are disposed off in a semi-comic scene in the house of Deedee where they come to take revenge on Shahid and Deedee for calling in the police at the book burning site. They, however, are counter-attacked by Shahid’s brother Chili in a filmy style. Riaz is humiliated. He is made to take off the shirt he was wearing which originally belonged to Chili. The aura Riaz had among his mates as their ideologue is broken. He is assaulted and humiliated in front of all by a drunken person like Chili. It seems that Kureishi fails to engage the two groups in dialogue and arrive at some amicable resolution.
The book seems to suggest attainment of self knowledge at the individual level only. One member of Riaz’s group, Hat dissociates himself from the group and condemns the violence meted out to Shahid. He abjures violence:

Because Allah is forgiving and merciful, I will only show love and consideration for others ... it not my place to condemn another person. Only God can do that. I was wrong to put myself in that position, as if I never done wrong things. *(Black Album 271)*

Though he turns away from the “brothers”, he does not turn away from God. He advises Shahid also not to turn away from God. As for Shahid, he is “sick of being bossed around, whether by Riaz or Chad or God himself. I can’t be limited when there is everything to learn and read and discover”. Shahid, decides to come to terms with himself by writing:

...he found a fountain pen with a decent nib, and began to write with concentrated excitement. He had to find some sense in his recent experiences; he wanted to know and understand. How could anyone confine themselves to one system or creed? Why should they feel they had to? There was no fixed self; surely our several selves melted and mutated daily? There had to be innumerable ways of being in the world. He would spread himself out, in his work and in love, following his curiosity. *(Black Album 274)*

The examples of individual immigrants leading the lives of peace loving citizens may be classified in two types. One type of immigrants may be called *integrated* and the other type may be called *assimilated*. Hat decides to dissociate himself from the ‘brothers’ and continue his study to be an accountant, though he does not turn away from God. His movement is towards *integration*. Shahid, on the other hand, rejects his ethnic and religious commitments in favour of progressive liberal humanism. Shahid’s movement is
towards assimilation. Majority of the immigrant population come under these two categories of the mainstream citizens. The rest are the delinquents and drug addicts like Chili or the religious fanatics like Riaz and Chad. Both of these categories are on the fringes of society. Kureishi does not say anything explicitly about the future of these people but he suggests the potential of the latter at two different places in the novel. One is the book burning scene and the other, aftermath of a terrorist attack at Victoria Station where Shahid finds himself incidentally on his way to meet Deedee. Thousands of commuters were stranded. The narrator reflects on what did they feel:

Confusion and anger, because somewhere outside lurked armies of resentment. But which faction was it? Which underground group? Which war, cause or grievance was being demonstrated? The world was full of seething causes which required vengeance – that at least was known. While inside the city, gorging on plenty without looking up, were the complacent. And today ‘the lucky ones’, those with mortgages and jobs, wondering the streets in search of a working phone, were meant to know they could be stalked, picked off, besieged. For they were guilty. They would have to pay and pay. (Black Album 103)

This incident obviously show that the possibility of a terrorist attack at public places looms large at any time but common people have no idea of what cause or grievance was being demonstrated through it.

The grievance, it seems Kureishi suggests, is the lack of belongingness of some citizens who feel not being accepted and welcome as equal citizens. I have already referred to what Bhikhu Parekh has to say in this regard. “Citizenship is about status and rights, belonging is about being accepted and feeling welcome” (342). Some individuals and groups might enjoy the same rights as the rest but feel that they do not quite belong to the larger political
community. Same is the case with Riaz. Riaz considers Shahid his “fellow countryman” i.e. Pakistani, on the basis of his racial and ethnic features, although Shahid protests at this. Shahid does not say that Britain is his home but he says, “It suits me. There’s nowhere else I will feel more comfortable” (Black Album 175). He accepts a provisional state. On the other hand Riaz says Britain will never be his home. For Riaz ethnicity is nationality. He is not able to consider himself and others like him to be a member of a political community i.e. British. His nationality will always be Pakistani. Britain as a multicultural signifier has no meaning for him.

Chad is another example who tries in vain to negotiate his belongingness. He is also of Pakistani origin adopted by an English couple and given the name Trevor Buss. He becomes a huge fan of Prince and fond of stylish clothes and drugs. But he could not belong to England:

Chad would hear church bells. He’d see English country cottages and ordinary English people who were secure, who effortlessly belonged. ... When he got to be a teenager he saw he had no roots, no connections with Pakistan, couldn’t even speak the language. ... In England white people looked at him as if he were going to steal their car or their handbag, particularly as he dressed like a ragamuffin. But in Pakistan they looked at him even more strangely. (Black Album 106-07)

Chad has been “saved” by his “people” and he becomes the action man of Riaz’s fundamentalist group. Chad rejects national or political belongingness and forges one identity of being Muslim: “No more Paki. Me a Muslim” (Black Album 128). Finally he burns himself while throwing petrol bombs to destroy a bookshop in protest against the unnamed blasphemous book.
If we analyse the cultural orientation of some of the major characters in the novel such as Shahid, Chili and Chad we find that all of them are assimilated. All three of them are fond of pop music, stylish clothes and drugs. Chad turns to Islam out of desperation and a sense of rootlessness. Shahid and Chili, however, are in opposition to Islam and the fundamentalists. Strapper considers that both the brothers are too westernized and they want to become like the whites which is a wrong turning. But the irony is that they are also considered “Muhammadans” and “terrorist” by Zulma’s friend Charles Jump. Jump is one minor character in the novel who epitomises the deep rooted Islamophobia in western society. He accuses Shahid of having joined “militant Mohammadans” and observes:

... we know they are entering France through Marseilles and Italy through the south. Soon they will be seeping through the weakened Communist regions, into the heart of civilized Europe, often posing as jewellery salesmen while accusing us of prejudice and bigotry. ... You can’t walk ten steps without coming across a mosque. That is where the disorder is fomented. ... You will slit the throats of us infidels as we sleep. Or convert us. Soon books and ...and ... bacon will be banned. Isn’t that you people want? (Black Album 190-1)

Chili, the person who was ready to take “the brown man’s burden” (Black Album 6) and do everything in England has finally become disillusioned. He doesn’t want to work any longer. He observes that the new generation will not accept the treatment meted out to their parents and working in dirty shops will not be enough for them:

You see them, our people, the Pakis, in their dirty shops, surly, humourless, their fat sons and ugly daughters watching you, taking the money. The prices are extortionate, because they open all hours. The new Jews, everyone hates them. In a few years the kids will kick their parents in the teeth. (Black Album 201)
The father of Shahid is another example who could not carry on with his initial crush with England. In Karachi he lived like an English Lord attended by uniformed servants. Autographed photographs of Cowdrey and May, and a print of George V broadcasting to the empire hung on the walls and The Times was open on an oak stand. But he was fed up with the everyday problems in Pakistan:

... the religion shoved down everyone’s throat; the bandits, corruption, censorship, laziness, fatuity of the press; the holes in the roads, the absence of roads, the roads on fire. Nothing was ever right for Papa there. He liked to say, when he was at his most depressed, that the British shouldn’t have left. ‘1945 – a new country, a fresh start!’ he’d cry. ‘How many people have such an opportunity! Why can’t we run things without torturing and murdering one another, without the corruption and exploitation? What’s wrong with us (Black Album 107)?’

However, the same papa despite having achieved huge material success seems to be disillusioned with England. He observes that ‘pubs were the only glory of England now and the single reason for existing in such a God-forsaken country’. Instead of English cricketers he would celebrate the exploits of Pakistani, Indian, West Indian or even the Australian cricketers against England – “they were colonials, after all” (Black Album 156).

The predicament of all these apparently westernised people discussed above reveals that, though they seem to have assimilated with the British culture the question of their cultural identity and national affiliation remains indeterminate, complex and vulnerable. This is so because of the inhospitable nature of the White majority community who are unsympathetic to the goals of multicultural living.

It seems that Hanif Kureishi is more concerned with the apparently westernised and assimilated immigrant population. In presenting the ambivalence of their cultural identity
and national affiliation he makes them caricatures to laugh at. This is true about Haroon and Anwar of *The Buddha of Suburbia* as well as the father of Shahid Hasan of *The Black Album*. All these characters bear Muslim names but, they are not practising Muslims. Anwar turns out to be a fanatic of tradition and an irrational person. Haroon, a lapsed Muslim masquerading as an eastern religious (Buddhist) guru makes himself funny. Shahid’s father hates religion. Karim Amir, the protagonist of *The Buddha of Suburbia* integrates himself with the place of his birth i.e., England by acknowledging his mixed race identity with Indian connection through his father. Neither does he have nor does he develop a religious identity. Shahid Hasan of *The Black Album* opts for progressive liberalism along with the pursuit of pleasure and individualism that it offers. He also neither does choose nor develop a religious identity. The only people who assert their religious identity are the radical Islamists, Riaz and his friends, Chad, Hat, Sadiq and Tahira. These people are shown to be religious fanatic and devoid of reason. They are also shown to be aggressive and violent in nature. This kind of characterisation in Kureishi’s novels gives an impression that only violent and irrational people can become Muslim. This way the novel, *The Black Album* gives a monolithic, circumscribed and narrow view of Islam and its believers. In this context Ruvani Ranasinha (2007) comments that, “Kureishi rehearses stereotypes of Muslims as intrinsically violent” (241). In *The Black Album* Chad is characterized as “crazy”, all “bulk and suppressed violence” with “the ferocity of a wild pig” (*Black Album* 78, 237). Though Kureishi seems to be sympathetic to Riaz and hints at the origin of such Radical people to be racism, he doesn’t give Riaz a chance to negotiate his identity in such a way so as to retain his Islamic faith and be a mainstream citizen. It seems that other than liberal individualism there is no other way to be in the mainstream and be a responsible citizen. Kureishi creates a binary between
radical Islam and liberal individualism placing the latter on a privileged position and leaving no way in between. Ranasina observes:

In his characterisation, Kureishi invents a polarity between radical orthodox Islam and detached liberal individualism with no recognition of the spectrum of attitudes in between. His Muslim characters tend to either scorn religion like Shahid’s ‘secular’ father, brother Chilli, and his patrician wife Zulma in Black Album, and Parvez in My Son the Fanatic, or they are represented as extreme ‘fundamentalists’—already a highly charged term in Britain. Kureishi’s polarity ignores the wide range of different forms of Islam that are not extreme or aggressive. This implicitly positions Islamic beliefs as problematic in themselves and illustrates one of the ways in which practising Muslims are, as Tariq Modood argues, demonised and Islam perceived as a ‘divisive’ identity. (Ranasinha 241-42)

This is truer of that migrant population whose religion does not approve many of the commonplace aspects of the British way of life. This actually thwarts the goals of a vibrant multiculturalism. Dominic Head (2000) sums up this point very appropriately:

The migrant identities that are fictionalised in post-war writing are often embattled and vulnerable. This is sometimes due to the transitional nature of twentieth-century postcolonial expression, where postcolonial identity is conceived as process than arrival; but the evocation of vulnerability has just as frequently to do with the inhospitable nature of the British, and especially English society, often portrayed as unsympathetic to the goals of a living, interactive multiculturalism.(156)

Kureishi addresses one more dilemma faced by the policy of multiculturalism that is posed by feminism. Multiculturalism allows certain autonomy to the different traditional cultural
groups in matters deemed to be private. However, for feminism private is public. It is argued by the feminists that most of the traditional cultures are by nature patriarchal which places the women in disadvantaged or oppressed position and the defence of group rights of such traditional cultural group will only perpetuate the disadvantaged position of women. The elders of a cultural group or religious community generally defend some of the cultural practices related to marriage, divorce, inheritance etc. as ‘personal law’. In this context, Susan Moller Okin (1998) observes that a mere suggestion by a First World feminist that “women and girls in cultures other than our own are disadvantaged or oppressed by elements of their own cultures is regarded as offensive cultural imperialism” (665). Kureishi knows this fact and he incorporates this in his novels. In *The Black Album* Deedee is accused of cultural imperialism for providing shelter to a girl who ran away from home. Sadiq, one member of Riaz’s group says that Deedee forced her to say that, her “religion treats women as second-class citizens” (*Black Album* 229). In *The Buddha of Suburbia* Jamila does not run away from home when her father forces her to marry Changez because she knows that if she does so her White friends would brand her community as oppressive for women. Jamila herself is a feminist but she does not want her community to earn a bad name for her own action, otherwise she does not care for her religion or culture of origin.

Kureishi’s latest novel *Something to Tell You* primarily engages with the mysterious and unsatisfying urge of sexual pleasure and the middle age crisis of the protagonist Jamal Khan and his friend Henry. However, the novel obliquely comments on the politics of multiculturalism by connecting it with the 7/7 terrorist attack in London’s underground train and also in city bus. The girlfriend of Henry’s son Sam who is called ‘Mule Woman’ in the novel is killed with many others. Henry gets upset about the deaths, but he gets more upset with the attitude of Lisa towards the attack. “She is almost triumphalist over the
bombing. Not only does she claim to have predicted it, not only does she see it as just retribution, but she seems to think Bush-Blair will learn his lesson at last” (Something to Tell You 472). She asks a rhetorical question: “Why would a young articulate kid, from a decent family, well-educated and intelligent, with everything in front of him, become a zealot destroying thousands of lives?” (Something to Tell You 472)

Henry is “disillusioned and confused” he recalls how he and his generation grew up with the ‘radical’ movements in the Third World, from Africa and South America. Twenty years ago the word “radical”, according to Kenan Malik, meant “someone who was militantly secular, self-consciously Western and avowedly left-wing” and resisted racism. But, today the word “radical” is used in an Islamic context and it refers to “religious fundamentalist” (Malik XII). That is why Henry feels betrayed that those same “oppressed” rebels “are killing us from the far religious right!” Henry is shocked by this kind of violence perpetrated by the religious right. However, this violence reminds him “the diabolical killing of civilians in Baghdad – severed head, blood underfoot, children eviscerated, limbs blown into trees”. Henry seems to hate both of the acts of violence. Henry feels that London attack is a revenge on Blair’s indiscriminate act of violence in Iraq and that is why he is angered when Blair refuses to accept that his own “massive acts of violence” was responsible for the attack. Henry called it “moral childishness”.

It seems that Kureishi in a way suggests that the problem of Islamic terrorism is more political than religious. The home-grown radicals seem to seek public attention to convey the message that the armed interference and the mindless violence perpetrated by the Bush-Blair combine in the foreign lands was not justified. The problem does not lie on the question of integration. The people involved in the bombing were “from decent families, well educated and intelligent”. It is not that they were not integrated. They were integrated but they felt connected by their common faith with the victims of state violence elsewhere
and they are out to take revenge. People such as Henry and his daughter Lisa try to find the reason of the 7/7 London attack in the policy of the Blair government. Out of desperation Henry resigns from the Labour Party. Henry says that, “there had been insufficient debate over Iraq” *(Something to Tell You* 439). Lisa is not satisfied with her father’s gesture of only resigning from the Party. She says: “Why doesn’t he actually support the insurgents in Iraq, and the bombers and resisters around the world? Why doesn’t he accept the idea of the struggle moving to Britain?” *(Something to Tell You* 440-41) To justify her stand she refers to one politician, Robin Cook who said “we’d have been better advised bringing peace to Palestine than war to Iraq”.

The London attack of 7/7 was a blow to the policy of multiculturalism in Britain. *Something to Tell You* captures the gradual change in race relations in Britain which worsened after the 7/7 attack as Jamal summarises:

> Most whites considered Asians to be ‘inferior’, less intelligent, less everything good. Not that we were called Asian then. Officially, as it were, we were called immigrants, I think. Later, for political reasons, we were ‘blacks’. But we always considered ourselves to be Indians. In Britain we are still called Asians, ... It was a long time before we became known as Muslims, a new imprimatur, and then for political reasons. *(Something to Tell You* 55)

The religious identity of being Muslim has become the public and political identity and other identities such as those based on race and place of origin have become irrelevant. Miriam reports that after the 7/7 attack, the area in which she lived has become more racist and the victims are the Muslims. “Mussie”, “ham-head” and “allahAllah-bomb” were the new insult words replacing the older ones, such as, “Paki”, “wog”, “curry-face”; “religion had not been part of it” *(Something to Tell You* 482).
The one person who undergoes a tremendous change after the incident of 7/7 is Ajita. In her desperation to forge an identity for herself she empathises with the Muslims, especially the Muslim women who have to face newer kind of persecution and insult. She starts wearing the veil and also starts learning the Koran. Ajita feels that she was not given a cultural upbringing by her family. Her father was a secular person, a non-practising Muslim. When in Africa he ignored the culture of Africa and in England he ignored Western culture. Apparently, Ajita and her brother seem to be cosmopolitan. Being a pop musician and a gay, Mustaq seems to have acquired a culture for him, but Ajita was without any culture of her own. She wants to acquire a culture for herself and she chooses Islamic culture, the culture of her origin. This is a new phenomenon in which apparently cosmopolitan people turn to their culture of origin. This happens because of the feeling of rootlessness aggravated by racial persecution when the sense of suspicion and hostility is at its height.

Kureishi has captured the mood of a generation. Being persecuted at home they identify with the lot persecuted elsewhere. The same happens with Ajita. She learns the Koran from an Algerian woman. This woman tells her about the oppression of Muslims abroad: “She talks of her life, politics, the condition of our people, my brothers and sisters, the oppressed of Afghanistan, of Iraq, of Chechnya”. Ajita confirms, “I wouldn’t blow up anyone myself, but this is a war” (Something to Tell You 484). For Ajita wearing the veil is a form of resistance. She wants to assert her Islamic identity in public, but she categorically rejects any violence.

In the conclusion one can say that Kureishi as a creative writer has observed and recorded the contemporary socio-political scenario and the changing race relations from a very close quarter. This is so because Kureishi himself is a product of mixed race marriage like many of the characters in his novels. It seems that Kureishi is very much concerned about the
future of race relation in Britain. As far as the policy of multiculturalism is concerned Kureishi seems to suggest that it is a two-way traffic. To make it work all members of the society have to contribute. Government policies may play a proactive role to maintain a cohesive society, but the common citizens of both the majority and the minority community (immigrants), have to be sympathetic to each other’s concern for a peaceful coexistence in the multicultural context.
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