Abstract

In this thesis I have studied five novels of Hanif Kureishi exploring the three major themes of art and artists, gender and sexualities, and multiculturalism. Chapter I surveys the socio-cultural and political milieu of post-war Britain that created the necessary background for the emergence of a writer like Hanif Kureishi and the fictional world that he has created.

After 1945 (World War II) Britain started losing her colonies. In 1947 India became independent with partition that created one more independent country, Pakistan. The loss of ‘the jewel in the crown’ of the British Empire represented a key moment in the history of Britain. It signalled the beginning of the gradual dismantling of most of the Empire over the next fifty years or so. Colonialism ended with the political independence of the colonies. However, the legacy of colonialism was here to stay and have a far reaching influence not only on the former colonies but also on Britain itself, both in terms of its global position in the new world order and also the changing nature of its population. Britain has continued to maintain contacts with many of the former colonies with the establishment of the Commonwealth, an association of a group of countries formerly ruled by Britain. This continued association along with a favourable immigration policy in the initial years has affected the pattern of migration from the former colonies. From the 1950s onwards, a large number of people moved from parts of the Caribbean, South East Asia, Africa and other parts of the world and settled in Britain’s urban areas. This influx of immigrants has changed the face of British society and culture in profound ways. The newly emergent black and Asian population occupied certain labour market positions, lived in particular areas and faced particular forms of racism. There has always been resistance in some quarters to the development
of these new communities from other parts of the world. To make it worse, the successive governments have played the so-called ‘race card’ rhetoric designed to create unnecessary phobia amongst established British population with images of being invaded and swamped.

To manage these culturally diverse immigrant communities and to maintain harmonious co-existence with the established British communities Britain has experimented different policies from wholesale ‘assimilation’ to ‘integration’ and ‘multiculturalism’. After a brief acceptance of the policy of assimilation in education in 1964, the United Kingdom government accepted the notion of ‘integration’. From the policy of integration Britain moved to a model of multiculturalism whereby it was assumed that the immigrants would retain a sense of their original cultures at the same time adapt to the cultural make-up of Britain. But in reality this did not happen. The formation of the cultural identity of immigrant people has been complex phenomenon in the face of deep rooted racism in the British society. The policy of multiculturalism has been questioned and debated in the context of global terrorism and the role of the home grown terrorists.

The post war Britain was also marked by rapid cultural changes. The concepts of gender and sexuality underwent a radical change. The success achieved by feminist movement in the 70s and 80s in changing cultural perception of the roles for men and women were more visible in the 1990s when the cultural theorist started talking about a post-feminist situation. It was felt that the main aims of the second wave feminism of the 1970s and 80s had already been achieved and the critique of patriarchy has become an anachronism. One of the impacts of the success of feminism was the changing notions of masculinity. From the original tenets of feminism it follows that masculinity
is also a cultural construct and men are equally conditioned by the prevailing gender codes as women.

The later part of the 1960s also saw a change in attitudes towards homosexuality. Gay Liberation Movement of America and Western Europe coincided in interest and agenda with the Women’s Liberation Movement in the late 1960s. In Britain homosexuality was decriminalised in 1967 by the Sexual Offences Act but the everyday prejudice and acts of violence against homosexuals continued. Because of this the Gay and Lesbian rights movements continued in the 1970s and 1980s. The riot at the Stonewall Inn, a lesbian and gay club in New York City in May 1969 served to bring to public attention the injustices done to the lesbian and gay community, which in effect strengthened the resistance against this kind of prejudice in Britain as well as America. Since then many laws have been enacted to redress some of the inequalities meted out to the homosexuals. Britain has granted the rights and responsibilities of a civil marriage to the same-sex couples by enacting the Civil Partnership Act of 2004.

Hanif Kureishi is a contemporary novelist, playwright and film maker of contemporary multicultural Britain. His works mirror the condition of Britain of the last three-four decades which is marked by rapid and radical socio-cultural changes. Kureishi was born of a mixed parentage in the post war period, grew up in the welfare state of Britain, lived through Thatcherite England and is writing through the time of Tony Blair to the present day. Kureishi is a product of the lost empire, a second generation immigrant Englishman born of an English mother and Pakistani-Muslim father. His very multicultural background is indeed a fertile ground of creativity. He has produced a considerable number of screenplays, a few collections of short stories, some novels and a few books of non-fiction.
This thesis has been limited to the study of his novels only because inclusion of other genre of his writings would have made it very lengthy. As a literary genre the canvas of novel is the largest and it allows its writer the scope and autonomy needed to explore his vision.

In many of his books the main characters are artists, such as, actors, writers, painters and musicians. In *The Buddha of Suburbia* the protagonist, Karim Amir is an actor and his half-brother, Charlie is a pop-musician. Shahid, the protagonist of *The Black Album* is a budding writer. In *Gabriel’s Gift*, Gabriel is a promising painter and his father Rex is a musician. The lives of the artists are complex. Stiff competition, uncertainty, innovation, fact or fiction, responsibility and morality are some of the dilemmas of the artists. Chapter II of this thesis entitled ‘The Artistic Self’ has dealt with the theme of art and artists. The first part of this Chapter makes an investigation into the theoretical aspect of the concepts of self and identity. The second part is focused on the study of Kureishi’s concept of ‘the artistic self’.

Kureishi’s writings suggest that nobody is a born artist. Artists are rather products of circumstances. Kureishi values imagination very highly. However, he reinforces that imagination alone cannot make one a successful artist. He seems to be of the opinion that one has to have commitment and put in hard work to be successful as an artist. Kureishi seems to be critical of the idealism and nonconformity associated with artistic creativity. In his writings Kureishi does not distinguish between high art and low art. By foregrounding the dilemmas of the artists Kureishi foregrounds the dilemmas of the creative writers and makes his own writings self-reflexive.

Gender and sexuality is one of the recurrent themes in the novels of Kureishi. Kureishi deals with the themes of development of sexual orientation, fluidity of sexuality, sexual
relationship, relationship between ethnicity and sexuality, and the pursuit of sexual
pleasure in a very uninhibited and unconventional manner. Chapter III of this thesis
entitled ‘Redefining the Sexual’ has dealt with the theme of gender and sexuality. The
first part of the Chapter III explores the development of the theoretical concepts and the
discourse of gender and sexuality. The second part is devoted to the study of the novels
to investigate Kureishi’s vision of gender and sexuality. Kureishi destabilises the
hegemony of normative heterosexuality in his novels. Kureishi shows in his novels that
the sexual relations between the races is fraught with the historical baggage of
colonialism and the desire for the mysterious Other. However, Kureishi seems to be in
favour of racial intermingling which would lead to hybridity instead of separatism.

The period from the 1960s to the present day is historically and politically marked by
Britain’s dilemma to deal with large number of immigrant population from her previous
colonies and the rise of racist politics. Initially, Britain adopted the policy of
assimilation, followed by first, the policy of integration and second, multiculturalism.
Kureishi, himself being the son of an immigrant father and a British mother has
observed these developments very closely. In his novels we find the snapshots of many
multicultural interactions and the problems of developing a multicultural identity.
Chapter IV of the thesis entitled ‘Celebrating Multiculturalism’ makes an investigation
into Kureishi’s take on the policy of multiculturalism and the development of
multicultural self. The failure of multiculturalism as a policy to counter racism and
social exclusion of the immigrants, specially Muslims first came to light in 1989, the
year following the publication of Salman Rushdie’s controversial book _The Satanic
Verses_ resulting in world-wide protest, book burning in Bradford, England and
Ayatollah Khomeini’s _Fatwa_ against Rushdie. This event raised questions related to the
limits of the freedom of expression guaranteed by liberal democracy; level of tolerance
of a particular religious or cultural community to criticism, stereotyping or deconstruction of their sacredly held beliefs, customs and texts. This event also raised questions to the efficacy of the policy of multiculturalism to help the minority safeguard their religion and culture from the onslaught of the majority liberals and also to maintain social and racial cohesion. The situation changed furthermore in the post-9/11 world. Some of Kureishi’s novels address these issues and debates. Chapter V of this thesis entitled ‘Multiculturalism in Crisis’ makes an attempt to explore Kureishi’s engagement with these issues. Chapter VI is the conclusion. The conclusion summarises the findings of the research.