Chapter II
On Artistic Self

[A] poet is a light and winged thing, and holy, and never able to compose until he has
become inspired, and is beside himself, and reason is no longer in him.

Plato, *Ion*

Weave a circle around him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Kubla Khan’

Writers are often asked if their work is autobiographical. ... where else could the work
come from, except from the self?

Hanif Kureishi, ‘Something Given’

Artists have always been considered a mysterious self with magical creative power. Plato’s
description of a poet as ‘light and winged thing, and holy’ and Coleridge’s description of a
poet as one who has fed ‘on honey-dew’ and ‘drunk the milk of Paradise’ seem to
celebrate the poet as a heavenly being. However, this celebration is followed by
banishment and exclusion because ‘reason is no longer in him’ when he composes and he
behaves like a drunken and enchanted person to be dreaded. So, an artist is a self who is
simultaneously celebrated and ostracised. The artistic self is an alienated self living a
lonely life.
In this chapter I will study Kureishi’s concerns with art and the artistic self. 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. By foregrounding the dilemmas of the artists Kureishi foregrounds the dilemmas of the creative writers and makes his own writings self-reflexive.

2.1 Theories of Artistic Self

Artists are creative people and creativity demands certain personality attributes. Jane Piirto (2009) talks about many studies that have emphasised the fact that creative people in all domains have certain personality attributes in common. She lists the following personality attributes of creative people from well documented studies: androgyny, creativity, imagination, insight, intuition, introversion, naiveté or openness to experience, over excitabilities, motivation or passion for work in a domain, perceptiveness, persistence, preference for complexities, resilience, risk-taking, self-discipline, tolerance for ambiguity, and volition or will. Piirto (2009) also lists some personality attributes of creative writers that may or may not be present in creative people practising their creativity in other fields. These are namely, (1) ambition/envy, (2) concern with philosophical matters, (3) frankness often expressed in political or social activism, (4) psychopathology, (5) depression, (6) empathy and (7) a sense of humour.

C. G. Jung in his book *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (1933) argues that what is key to artistic creation is ‘collective unconscious’ by which he means ‘a certain psychic
disposition shaped by the forces of heredity’ (Jung 165). According to Jung every epoch has its own ‘bias’, ‘particular prejudice’ and its ‘psychic ailment’ which requires ‘compensatory adjustment’. This is done by ‘collective unconscious’ in a poet [artist], a seer, or a leader. Guided by the ‘unexpressed desire’ of his times he shows the way ‘to the attainment of that which everyone blindly craves or expects’ (Jung 165). Jung thinks that art acts like some innate drive and seizes a human being as its instrument. ‘The artist is not a person endowed with free will who seeks his own ends, but one who allows art to realise its purpose through him’ (Jung 169). An artist generally lives a life full of conflict between ‘the common human longing for happiness, satisfaction and security in life’ on the one hand and ‘a ruthless passion for creation’ on the other. The lives of artists are generally highly unsatisfactory ‘because of their inferiority on the human and personal side’ (Jung 169). Every one of us is gifted with ‘a certain capital of energy’ or human impulse at birth. The creative force in an artist drains that capital energy to such an extent that the personal ego develops all sorts of negative qualities: ‘ruthlessness, selfishness and vanity (so called “auto-erotism”’ (Jung 170). Auto-erotism of artists resembles that of neglected child who develop bad qualities to protect themselves from destructive influences of people who do not love them. Later in life they maintain ‘an invincible egocentricism by remaining all their lives infantile and helpless or by actively offending against the moral code or law’ (Jung 170). This is the price one has to pay to be an artist, ‘a man who from his very birth has been called to a greater task than the ordinary mortal’ (Jung 170).

From the above discussion what comes out is that artists are endowed with certain innate quality or creative force. Piirto’s enumeration of the personality attributes are based on empirical studies and essentialist in nature. These attributes are essentialist because they seem to be stable or innate and permanently present traits in the personality of the artists. Jung’s concept of artistic creativity is also like some innate drive that seizes upon the
person. This drive he calls ‘collective unconscious’. This is also essentialist in nature because Jung thinks that the task of being an artist is imposed upon the individual from the time of birth.

Since artists are also subjects and they also grapple with the question of identity it will be improper not to talk about the theories of subjectivity and identity. Subjectivity, as Chris Barker (2003) defines it, is ‘the condition of being a person and the processes by which we become a person; that is, how we are constituted as subjects (biologically and culturally) and how we experience ourselves’ (Barker 219).

Contemporary theories of subjectivity and identity are anti-essentialist which means that these are changeable in relation to definite socio-cultural conjunctures. ‘Identities are discursive constructions that change their meanings according to time, place and usage’ (Barker 221). According to Gidden, as Chris Barker refers to, ‘the individual attempts to construct a coherent identity narrative by which “the self forms a trajectory of development from the past to an anticipated future”’. ‘Thus’, Barker quotes Gidden(1991), “Self-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual. It is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography” (Barker 221). So, identity or self is not some entity we have but it is a mode of thinking about ourselves. It changes with circumstances in time and space. It is a process. Barker (2003) states that identity project is built on ‘what we think we are now in the light of our past and present circumstances’ and ‘what we think we would like to be, the trajectory of our hoped-for future’ (Barker 222).

Stuart Hall (1992b) identifies three different ways of conceptualising identity, namely: the enlightenment subject, the sociological subject and the postmodern subject.
Enlightenment subject is based on the notion that human individual is a unique unified thinking being having the ‘capacities of reason, consciousness and action’. This notion of the subject actually goes back to seventeenth century French philosopher Rene Descartes’ concept of the certainty of self-consciousness and modern soul, and his famous declaration, ‘cogito ergo sum’ (I think therefore I am). This capacity of rational thinking allows us to experience the world and make sense of it according to its actual property. This concept of certainty of self-consciousness has wide ranging cultural implications as it holds individuals as unified and capable of organising themselves and taking responsibility of their actions.

Hall thinks that subjectivity or identity is not autonomous or internal to the self rather it is constituted through the process of acculturation, i.e. cultural interaction with ‘significant others’ especially family members in a social context. Hall calls this the sociological subject.

Barker states that the journey from the enlightenment subject to the sociological subject represents a shift from self-sufficient unified whole to considering the subject as socially constructed. Neither the sociological subject is the source of itself nor is it a whole because individuals take up ‘a variety of social positions’. Thus, the postmodern subject involves the self which is decentred, fragmented and of multiple identities. As Hall (1992) states:

The subject assumes different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent ‘self’. Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continually being shifted about. If we feel that we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or ‘narrative of the self’ about ourselves. (Hall 277)
According to Hall five major ‘ruptures in the discourses of modern knowledge’ have contributed to our understanding of the subject as decentred. These are: Marxism, psychoanalysis, feminism, the centrality of language and the work of Foucault.

Marxist theory destabilises the notion of essential universal personhood and postulates that the production of subjectivity is contingent upon historically specific mode of production and social relations. Hall bases his notion of historical subject on the Althusserian reading of Marxism. In Althusserian reading ‘ideology’ takes the central place in the constitution of subjects. Chris Barker defines ideology in a simplified manner. According to him ‘by the concept of ideology is meant structures of signification or “world view” that constitute social relations and legitimate the interests of the powerful’ (Barker 225). Althusser (1968) says that ‘ideology interpellates individuals as subject’. Althusser suggests,

... all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects... ideology “acts” or “functions” in such a way that it “recruits” subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or “transforms” the individual into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: “Hey, you there!”(Althusser 301)

Every social institution has its own seemingly autonomous ideology. John Fiske states that ‘ideology is not a static set of ideas through which we view the world but a dynamic social practice, constantly in process, constantly reproducing itself ...’(Fiske 307). According to Fiske, Althusser believed that:

‘we are all constituted as subjects-in-ideology by the ISAs [Ideological State Apparatuses], that the ideological norms naturalised in their practices constitute not only the sense of the world for us, but also our sense of ourselves, our sense of
identity, and our sense of our relations to other people and to society in general.

The subject, therefore, is a social construction, not a natural one’ (Fiske 308).

That is to say, the Althusserian subject is not the unified Cartesian subject; it is rather a
decentred and fragmented one. Thus, a biological female can have a masculine subjectivity
and a black person can have a white subjectivity.

According to Hall, the next cause of decentring of subjectivity was the discovery of the
unconscious by Freud through psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis for Hall is significant, as
referred by Chris Barker, because it shed light on how identifications of the ‘inside’ are
linked to the regulatory power of the discursive ‘outside’. Freud divides the self into an
ego, or conscious rational mind, a superego, or social conscience, and the unconscious, the
source and repository of the symbolic workings of the mind functioning with a distinct
logic of its own. This view of the self fractures the unified Cartesian subject further
because it suggests that our actions and thoughts are not the products of rational mind but
the workings of the unconscious. The self is fractured into ego, superego, and unconscious.
Barker says:

‘...the unified narrative of the self is something we acquire over time through entry
into the symbolic order of language and culture. That is, through processes of
identification with others and with social discourse we create an identity that
embodies an illusion of wholeness’ (Barker 226).

Feminist theories also caused fracturing or decentring of the self. Feminism has
interrogated how sex is an organising principle of social life and bound up with power
relations subordinating women to men. Hall considers feminism to constitute a further
decentring influence on the concept of subjectivity. Feminism has raised the question of
how an individual is formed as sexed subject in the context of gendered families.
Poststructuralist feminists argue that sex and gender are social and cultural constructions and not reducible to biology. In her influential book *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir writes “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman...it is civilisation as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine” (293). This is an anti-essentialist stance in which femininity and masculinity are not essential universal categories, rather these are considered to be discursive constructions. So, what is to be a person cannot be universal or united because identity is marked by sexual difference.

Contemporary theories of language argue that language does not reflect but construct reality for us. Language generates meaning through relations of difference. Since self is articulated and experienced only through language, it is language that constructs our self rather than reflects one that is pre-existent, fixed and eternal. According to Barker, “it cannot now be said that language directly represents a pre-existent ‘I’. Rather, language and thinking constitute the ‘I’, they bring it into being through the processes of signification” (228-29). There cannot be any concept of ‘I’ outside of language and similarly no ‘identity’ beyond the process of signification. Descartes’ famous assertion, ‘I think, therefore I am’ loses ground because it implies that thinking is separate from ‘being’ and it represents the pre-existent being, ‘I’. Hence, it can be argued that there is no ‘I’ outside of language and thinking is ‘being’.

Stuart Hall considers Michel Foucault’s works to be another influence on the concept of postmodern self. Michel Foucault has produced a ‘genealogy of the modern subject’. According to Foucault subject is the product of history and subjectivity. It “is a discursive production” (Barker 229). For Foucault, power structure depends upon structures of knowledge. Those who posses power in society produce knowledge about those who lack power. Such a system of knowledge is called “discourse”. The arts, religion, science and
the law are discourses that produce particular subjects (Nayar 55). Discourse provides speaking persons with positions from which to make sense of the world and come into existence at the same time subjecting the persons to discourse. “To speak is to take up a pre-existent subject position and to be subjected to the regulatory power of that discourse” (Barker 229).

What follows from Stuart Hall’s concept of the postmodernist self is that the cumulative effect of Marxist theory, psychoanalysis, feminist theory, contemporary theories of language and Foucauldian discourse theory deconstructs the essentialist notion of unified self and suggests the existence of the decentred self, constituted of anti-essentialist, multiple and changeable identities. According to Hall, the cultural identity is also anti-essential in that it may be organised around points of similarity as well as points of difference. Some of the points of difference around which cultural identities could be organised are identifications of class, gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, nationality, political stand, morality, religion, etc., however, each of these are discursive constructions and subject to change (Barker 231).

According to Foucauldian discourse theory, ‘self’ is the product of discourse rather than producer of identity. This strand of thought does not leave any role for the human agency which is needed for social change. Hall critiques Foucault on the ground that he does not help to understand how and why particular discourses are taken up by some subjects and not by others. He also does not explain how a subject constituted through disciplinary discursive practices can resist power (Barker 234).

However, Foucault’s later work focused on “technologies of the self” talks about agency (Ranibow 223). According to Foucault humans develop knowledge about themselves, such as ‘economics, biology, psychiatry, medicine and penology’ in different ways. Human
beings use specific techniques or ‘truth games’ to understand themselves. Foucault identifies four types of technologies: ‘technologies of production’, ‘technologies of sign system’, ‘technologies of power’ and ‘technologies of the self’. According to him technologies of the self ‘permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality’ (Ranibow 225). At this phase Foucault (1987) explores, as quoted by Barker, “how subjects are led to focus attention on themselves, to decipher, recognize and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire” (Barker 234). This leads to the discursive practice of self-production through self-recognition and reflection which Foucault calls the ethics of “care of the self”. According to Foucault, as quoted by Barker, “ethics are concerned with practical advice as to how one should concern oneself with oneself in everyday life: for example what it means to be a ‘good’ person, a self-disciplined person, a creative person, and so forth”. Ethics centre on the “government of others and the government of oneself” (qtd. in Barker 234). Ethical discourses enable the subjects to take positions of agency. However, the position of agency does not mean a metaphysical position of free will or freedom because ethical discourses are also regulatory in nature and produced socially.

Subjectivity and identity are socially contingent and discursively determined. This, however, does not mean that the individual is not original. According to Chris Barker “while identity is a social and cultural accomplishment, our individuality can be understood in terms of the specific ways in which the social resources of the self are arranged” (238). Each individual arranges the discursive resources in her/his unique way. The unconscious workings of the individual mind can also be considered as a unique source of creativity.
Barker says that the question of innovative acts or creativity “can be understood as the practical outcomes of unique combinations of social structures, discourse and psychic arrangements”. Innovation is possible because of the contradictory nature of the discourses that constitute our society and because of the unique arrangements of the discursive resources at the disposal of an individual. It is possible to re-create and re-articulate ourselves in unique new ways. Barker refers to Rorty’s (1991a) view that “we produce new metaphors to describe ourselves with and expand our repertoire of alternative descriptions” (238).

2.2 The Concept of Artistic Self in Hanif Kureishi

In the light of the above discussion of artistic creativity, self and subjectivity we can study Hanif Kureishi’s idea of the artistic self as it appears in his novels. Hanif Kureishi being a contemporary writer is very much aware of the contemporary discourse of subjectivity and identity. As far as Kureishi’s own identity and his becoming a writer is concerned, the question of self and subjectivity becomes a pertinent question. Most of his novels having autobiographical overtones actually testify to this fact. The artists in the novels of Kureishi are from different domains of art and they have some similarity. All of them seem to undergo certain crisis in their lives before they embark upon the world of art and artistic creativity, be it acting, writing or painting. All the artists in Kureishi’s novels are in the process of growing up and by becoming artists they try to come to terms with themselves and resolve the crisis in their personal and familial life.

Kureishi’s first novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) engages with the growing up of artist and the artistic self and is written in the *bildungsroman* genre. 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’ (Abrams193).

The protagonist of the novel Karim Amir is an aspirant actor and his half brother, Charlie is a pop star in becoming. Karim and Charlie both became successful and attained celebrity status in their lives as actor and pop star respectively. To reinforce this idea Kureishi brings them back again and again in his following novels.

The questions that become pertinent here are what is it that makes Karim the kind of actor he becomes and what is it that makes Charlie the kind of pop star he makes himself. Karim is the son of an Indian immigrant father and an English mother from the working class background. Karim introduces himself in the opening lines of the novel as the following:

My name is Karim Amir, and I am 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), from the South London suburbs and going somewhere. 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. Or perhaps it was being brought up in the suburbs that did it. (Buddha of Suburbia 3)

In these lines Karim enlists almost all the socio-ethno-cultural factors that decide his given identity as mixed-race, immigrant and suburbanite young man. Karim’s ethno-cultural background and his mixed-race identity become a source of strength and resource for his acting career. But this background alone does not help; he has to go through many trials and tribulations to discover the artist in him.
Karim was not much happy with his life. Situation in his family was rather gloomy, he got bored easily and he was planning to get out of it. One turning point in his life was his meeting with Eva Kay, who marries his father later. It was Eva who first appreciates Karim’s ethnic look: “Karim Amir, you are so exotic, so original! It’s such a contribution! It’s so you!” (Buddha of Suburbia 9) After his interaction with Eva and having been familiar with the way she and her son Charlie live Karim feels that he has ‘an extraordinary revelation’: “I could see my life clearly for the first time: the future and what I wanted to do. ... The door to the future had opened: I could see which way to go” (Buddha of Suburbia 15). Karim is charmed by the personality of Eva, the woman who has stolen the heart of his father. She is very open to express her feelings. She is always ecstatic and never bored. ‘She didn’t let the world bore her. She gave him good books to read. She was a good conversationist. She provided Karim with all sorts of solid facts which he would write down. She played the role of mentor, teacher and friend for him: “Eva was unfolding the world for me. It was through her that I became interested in life” (Buddha of Suburbia 87).

Karim’s father wanted him to be a doctor. But his prospect at school was very bleak. Later he was admitted to a college which was more a place of distraction rather than education. He lied to his father saying that he was preparing to become a lawyer. He split up with education thinking, “it wasn’t the right time of my life for concentration” (Buddha of Suburbia 94). He was for ‘general drift and idleness’ without bothering about money which was the spirit of the age. Karim was developing a taste for an unconventional and rebellious living. However, he was not disinterested to life: “there was plenty to observe – oh yes, I was interested in life. I was an eager witness to Eva and Dad’s love, and even more fascinated by Changez and Jamila ...” (Buddha of Suburbia 95).
Karim was becoming a keen observer of people around him. Being with Eva he could think about “the difference between the interesting people and the nice people: ‘The interesting people you wanted to be with – their minds were unusual, you saw things freshly with them and all was not deadness and repetition’ (Buddha of Suburbia 93). He thought that Eva was an interesting person. She made him see things in a certain way. “She came at things from an angle; she made connections”. He also knew:

... there were the nice people who weren’t interesting, and you didn’t want to know what they thought of anything. Like Mum, they were good and meek and deserved more love. But it was the interesting ones, like Eva with her hard, taking edge, who ended up with everything, and in bed with my father. (Buddha of Suburbia 93)

Karim observes his friend Jamila who is a strong character. She knows what to do in life. She is not lazy. She reads all sorts of books. “She knew what she wanted to learn and she knew where it was...” (Buddha of Suburbia 95). Observing Jamila, Karim understands that the world is made up of three kinds of people: “those who knew what they wanted to do; those (the unhappiest) who never knew what their purpose in life was; and those who found out later on” (Buddha of Suburbia 95). Karim knew that he was in the last category, though he wished to be in the first.

Karim once told Eva that he wanted to become a photographer or an actor or a journalist. Eva plans to land him in theatre and for that she asks him to read aloud to her from books. She appreciates his voice. After moving from the suburbs to London Eva arranges for a party “as her launch into London” and invites people from the film and theatre world. Here, she introduces Karim to her theatre-director friend Shadwell. Shadwell is happy with his trial and says, “I’m looking for an actor just like you”. Karim is selected to play Mowgli from The Jungle Book by Rudyard Kipling: “You’re just right for him ... In fact,
you are Mowgli. You’re dark-skinned, you’re small and wiry, and you’ll be sweet but wholesome in the costume. Not too pornographic ... Certain critics will go for you” (Buddha of Suburbia 142-43). Shadwell chooses Karim to bring authenticity in his play. Karim is expected to speak the Indian accent. Brown make-up is applied on him to make him look more Indian. Karim’s self-esteem is hurt by all these. He feels like running away from Shadwell. However, he plays the role of Mowgli because he “relished being the pivot of the production” and gives a remarkable performance. After that he gets a chance to be introduced to another established theatre director, Matthew Pyke when he comes to watch The Jungle Book. Pyke offers Karim a chance to work in his next production. When Karim asks about his role and the subject of his play Pyke says that the only subject there is in England’ is ‘Class’. Next, Pyke asks each of his actors to tell the story of their lives to the rest. He also gives a hint: “concentrate on the way you think your position in society has been fixed” (Buddha of Suburbia 169). Later, Pyke asks all his actors to improvise characters “from different rungs of social ladder”. Karim plans to choose Charlie as his character but Pyke discourages him: “We need someone from your own background,’ he said. “Someone black’” (Buddha of Suburbia 170).

What is to be noted here is that Shadwell as well as Pyke, both of them want to exploit the ethnicity of Karim Amir. They give him opportunity to be a part of their theatre production because of his Indian connection through his father. They think that Karim has the authentic knowledge of the Indian languages and culture and he would impart authenticity to their productions. Karim is not free to choose the role he would play or the costume he would wear. He becomes an actor but the roles will always be dictated by the directors who are in the positions of power.

Foucault’s concept of discourse comes in mind here. The contemporary culture industry is enamoured of the discourse of multiculturalism and the leaders of the culture industry
celebrate it by introducing tokens of diverse cultures in their works only to exploit the commercial value of the token. In the process they stereotype the token which may be a character or a ritual or a costume or a particular accent. Thus, an artist from a particular ethnic background is expected to represent his/her ethnic culture in his/her artwork. This in turn restricts the possibility of variety in the works.

Karim has to invent his own character for the play to be staged under Pyke’s direction. This makes Karim enter into his creative life. First, he improvises the character of his uncle, Anwar and his hunger strike however, his co-actor Tracey finds it politically incorrect as it was showing the fanaticism of an Indian, a black. Next, he works on the character of Changez, the funniest character in the novel who comes to England to marry Jamila. In search of his character he recognises that part of his own identity which he has neglected until then. He acknowledges his Indian connection through his father. However, he knows that he is an Englishman also, a British citizen. Finally, he makes his career by acting the role of a ‘rebellious student son of an Indian shopkeeper’ in a TV soap opera. 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.

The kind of artist Karim finally becomes is decided by his being a second generation immigrant. By looking at Karim, Shadwell once pronounced: “The immigrant is the Everyman of the twentieth century” (Buddha of Suburbia 141). There is truth in Shadwell’s observation. The issue of immigration and the immigrants are central to any socio-political discussion in the contemporary world. The so called ‘first world’ and the metropolitan centres of the erstwhile colonies are generally the host to the immigrants. The immigrants get specific opportunities and face specific challenges and problems in their adopted countries and the host countries also have to make new provisions and changes in
their policies to accommodate the new immigrant citizens. The culture and show business industries cannot ignore this phenomenon. Theatres, soap operas and films are engaging with these issues. Karim as a budding actor with immigrant background should be a part of it is very natural. Karim is seized by what Jung calls ‘the collective unconscious’ of the second generation immigrants. Through his acting he gives voice to their concerns. Following Foucault’s concept of discourse, we can argue that Karim is ‘subject to the discourse’ of racism, immigration and multiculturalism. However, being an artist he can engage with these discourses, bring out their contradictions and rearticulate those in his art. Charlie as a pop star becomes successful and famous by constantly changing his persona. While Karim addresses the issue of authenticity, Charlie does that of artifice in the novel. Charlie first assumes the persona of a hippy and starts his own rock ‘n’ roll band ‘Mustn’t Grumble’. Karim observes that “the band didn’t have an original sound” (Buddha of Suburbia 118). Charlie was capitalising on his girlish physical features, “exquisite cheekbones and girl’s eyelashes” to create an image of a pop star who is neither male nor female. He developed “an enraging affectation, worthy of an Oxford undergraduate” to carry a book of poetry in his pocket and taking it out occasionally in the middle of conversation to imbibe “a beakerful of the warm South” (Buddha of Suburbia 118). Karim knew that “to go somewhere you gotta be talented” and Charlie was not talented. He considers Charlie “a back door man”. When Charlie understood that the time of the post hippy rock was over and it was moving into another phase, he finds in punk the next possibility. One night in London by looking at a group of punk boys he observes: “The sixties have been given notice tonight. Those kids we saw have assassinated all hope. They’re the fucking future” (Buddha of Suburbia 131). Karim objects to Charlie’s following the punks: “‘It would be artificial,’ I said. ‘We’re not like them. We don’t hate the way they do. We’ve got no reason to. We’re not from the estates. We haven’t been
through what they have’” (Buddha of Suburbia 132). What Karim means is that punk is a class style and people like Charlie and he who come from privileged suburban background do not belong to that class (the working class) hence, it would be artificial for them to imitate punk style. Here emerges the point of difference between the two budding artists. One is for authentic experience and the other is for artifice and mere temporary success. Charlie renames his band as ‘Charlie Hero and The Condemned’ and emerges as a punk band.

Later, Karim finds Charlie in New York while on a tour with Pyke’s cast. He finds that Charlie is a popular and famous pop star in America though, Karim doesn’t consider him one: “It didn’t seem of his essence, but a temporary, borrowed persona” (Buddha of Suburbia 246). But, Charlie was living the life of a real star, all the time giving interviews to journalists from all over the world, being photographed; discussing politics, literature and dance with smart serious women, publishers, film critics, professors and Sufis. His borrowed persona helped him become famous and earn money. He recounts his love for money to Karim: “There was a day when I fell in love for the first time. I knew this was the big one. ... It was then I knew I loved money. Money and everything it could buy. I never wanted to be without money again because it could buy me a life like this every day” (Buddha of Suburbia 248). Karim warns him against his love for money:

Time and money are the best, Charlie. But if you’re not careful they’ll fertilize weirdness, indulgence, greed. Money can cut the cord between you and ordinary living. There you’re, looking down on the world, thinking you understand it, that you are just like them, when you’ve got no idea, none at all. Because at the centre of people’s lives are worries about money and how to deal with work. (Buddha of Suburbia 248-49)
This is another point of difference between Karim and Charlie as artists. Karim as an actor wants to address the real problems and issues of people in life-like presentation that is in theatre and finally soap opera on TV which is watched by the masses, whereas, Charlie only wants to make money and become famous by selling his borrowed persona. Nick Bentley observes:

Charlie becomes a success as a punk artist due to his ability to exploit the latest trend, which makes up for his lack of talent. His real ability is to recognize the potential embedded within new sub-cultural trends and to adapt, chameleon-like to its main terms of signification. Charlie thus represents the process by which original and potentially subversive sub-cultural movements are quickly absorbed into consumer society and become part of the very establishment that the originators of the movement set themselves against. (Bentley 170)

Karim describes two incidences in America that finally separated him from Charlie. Once, Charlie and Karim were coming from recording studio when one wretched English journalist begged to fix an interview with him. The man was desperate but Charlie cruelly punched him on his head, kicked in the chest and finally, stamped on his hands. This cruelty on Charlie’s part was too much for Karim. Karim was selfish and he knew that. He let down his mother and betrayed his friend Changez on two occasions but, he cannot be this much cruel like Charlie. The other incident was sexual. Charlie goes for ‘the ultimate experience’ in sexuality to attain ‘self-knowledge’. Karim is witness to the inhuman and cruel sexual acts that Charlie indulges in. At this point Karim dissociates himself from Charlie: “I didn’t care either for or about him. 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).
What Nick Bentley observes about David Bowie, a former pupil at Karim’s school holds true of Charlie as well:

‘In the context of the novel, the figure of Bowie promises not a new world order based on the collective and socialistic principles of hippiedom, but an individualist hedonism carrying with it the excitement of sexual excess’ (Bentley 169).

In his novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia* Kureishi presents two growing artists of two distinct persuasions. One believes in social realism with the commitment that an artist should engage with socio-cultural issues and connect with the masses, while the other believes in exploiting the consumerist appeal of social movements by assuming a borrowed persona only to advance individualist interest. Kureishi subtly raises the question of responsibility of the artist towards society and also the question of authentic experience. This is a pertinent question for Kureishi himself also as a writer with the baggage of his racially hybrid identity like Karim, the protagonist of *The Buddha of Suburbia*. An artist like Karim plays the role of cultural translator as Kureishi himself as a screen playwright and novelist has done.

Kureishi’s next novel *The Black Album* (1995) is also written in the *bildungsroman* mould. The protagonist of the novel Shahid Hassan, a second generation immigrant of Pakistani descent also passes through a crisis in his life. He joins a derelict college in London to get over this crisis. After watching Salman Rushdie, the author of *Midnight’s Children* on television “attacking racism” and “informing people how it all arose” Shahid becomes aware of racism and how he has been a victim of it. Shahid escapes from his family member’s materialistic and consumerist values that clash 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. Now, the question is
what kind of writer he wants to become and what makes him decide that he has to become a writer.

The first piece that Shahid wrote and sent for publication in a literary magazine called *Stand* was entitled, ‘Paki Wog Fuck off Home’ featuring six boys of his school who chanted at him ‘Paki, Paki, Paki, Out, Out, Out’ in the absence of the teacher. Typing this piece of writing on sheets of paper was a therapy for him: ‘He banged the scene into his machine as he relived it, recording the dismal fear and fury in a jagged, cunt-fuck-kill prose that expressed him, like a soul singer screaming into a microphone’ (*Black Album* 72). This shows how intensely Shahid was affected by this kind of racist verbal attack. Incidentally, his mother happened to read this piece of writing and she was outraged with the hate it contained: ‘People don’t want this hate in their lives. ... Goodbye to filth, goodbye to filth – and don’t you spread it!’ (*Black Album* 73). The mother hated any talk related to race or racism. With her upper class aristocratic upbringing in Karachi she could not conceive that anybody might treat her or her children with disrespect. Shahid was a regular victim of racial abuse in school coming back everyday with ‘cuts, bruises and his bag slashed with knives’. He vomited and defecated with fear before going to school. However, the mother did not take him seriously, she turned away from him. In this kind of situation the sense of helplessness, lack of power and lack of emotional support only makes the subject egocentric which may lead to what Jung (1933) calls ‘auto-erotism’ referred to earlier in this chapter.

The attitude of Shahid’s mother towards his writing shocked him. But, ‘writing had been a compulsion for a couple of years’ (*Black Album* 74) for him. As Jung says, ‘art is a kind of innate drive that seizes a human being and makes him its instrument’ (Jung 169), writing seizes Shahid and makes him its instrument. His concern was how to be ‘subtle and profound’. One incident worked like epiphany for him. He along with his mother watched
a play called, *The House of Barnarda Alba* written by Lorca and both the mother and the son were left spellbound by the effect of the claustrophobic and tragic passions the actors evoked. Now onwards, ‘he was discovering new emotions and new possibilities’. He wanted to ‘achieve such an effect with a piece of writing’. The play ‘in its gentle greatness inspired him to think that, in his own way, he would have experience, imagination and dedication’ (*Black Album* 74). But, his parents did not want him to be an artist. His father questioned him why did he write that kind of ‘damn bloody things’ advised him to concentrate on studies and become, like some of his nephews, a lawyer, banker or doctor because the ‘artist types are always poor’.

At this point it dawned on Shahid that, ‘there were a multitude of true things that could not be said because they led to uneasy thoughts. Disruption of life, even, could follow; the truth could have serious consequences. Clearly the unsaid was where it all happened’ (*Black Album* 75). What comes out from this epiphany is the nature of art, specially writing, that Shahid is contemplating upon. He comes to know that art originates from the ‘unsaid’. Some of the truths cannot be said and are never said because they are unpleasant. They may lead to social disruption. So, they are never said explicitly. These thoughts or truths find expression in art. What is needed is a proper medium and form as Lorca found them in his play. Probably, Shahid also thinks about self-censorship of art by the artist. The suppressed anger and vengeance that he poured on the piece of his writing was too vulgar which outraged his parents. He could have done the same in some subtle way without being vulgar. The question of self-censorship becomes all the more relevant in the context of Rushdie’s controversial novel and its aftermath which is at the backdrop of *The Black Album*. Shahid distances himself from writing anything that would lead to social disruption of the Rushdie Affair kind.
Shahid ultimately wanted to leave home after the death of his father. He was a victim of taunting and bullying by his sister-in-law, Zulma who was like his brother Chili an ‘arch-Thatcherite’. The Thatcher government championed private entrepreneurship that helped the business class flourish. Shahid’s family was having a flourishing travel business but Shahid did not have any interest in business. Zulma used to taunt him for talking about ‘fairness or equality or opportunity, or the need to reduce unemployment’ (Black Album 87) and call him ‘hypocrite’ for behaving like a communist while living off a business family. Zulma believed like the Thatcherites that the world could not think about all the things Shahid said, rather what the world needed was ‘enterprising people – who weren’t afraid to crush others to get what they wanted’ (Black Album 87). Shahid argued that however intelligent and upper-class Zulma might consider herself, for the Thatcherites she would always be a Paki. Zulma would appreciate the truth calling this fact ‘colonial residue’. This idea of ‘colonial residue’ finds expression in racism which is a concern for Shahid. His humanist concern for fairness, equality, opportunity and unemployment seem to be rooted in his feeling of being a victim of racism. This is what he probably wants to express in his art for which he has to leave home.

After joining the college in London, Shahid finds himself entangled in two diametrically opposed worlds. On the one hand he involves himself with the activities of a small group of Islamists who preach him to lead life in accordance with strict Islamic laws; on the other hand he becomes sexually involved with his cultural studies teacher, Deedee Osgood for whom ‘all limitations are prisons’ (Black Album 25). At the instance of his Islamist friends Shahid visits a mosque to offer prayer. He is impressed by the ‘uncompetitive, ‘peaceful’, and ‘meditative’ atmosphere of the mosque. But, when he comes out of the mosque and sees the ‘bustling diversity of the city’ he is not able to reconcile the two worlds. What Kureishi implies by this seems that Shahid as an artist in becoming cannot limit himself to
the circumscribed world of Islamic rituals. An artist has to respond to a larger world with human lives in all its variety. He has to be a keen observer of everything and interpret life in all its diversity.

His Islamist friends would tell him religious stories ‘about the origin of everything, about how God wanted them to live, about what would happen when they died, and why, while alive, they were persecuted’ (Black Album 133). From religious point of view these stories are definite and absolute truth. But, Shahid was not convinced with these stories because ‘they could be easily mocked and undermined by more demonstrable tales’ and ‘he found the world to be more subtle and inexplicable’. Shahid’s idea of stories is that, ‘stories were made up by men and women; 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”’ (Black Album 133). But, his friends would not admit any role of imagination in their religious stories because that would make these stories fallible. As a would-be writer Shahid believes in the creative power of imagination. According to Shahid the creation of imagination cannot be judged by the category of true or false. Imagination works upon the subtle and inexplicable areas of human life and creates art out of that which can be interpreted in different ways and multiple meanings may come out. Art cannot exist in the line of one definite absolute truth. Here, Shahid makes his stand clear that being an artist he cannot share the belief of his friends. Finally, Shahid severs his contacts with his radical friends after the book burning incident. This seems to show that the way of an artist cannot coincide with that of orthodox religious radical.

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 he wants to come to terms with himself by reading literature and becoming a writer himself.

He reflects on what Deedee was teaching him in cultural studies and compares this with classic literature. According to Deedee the present generation do not connect with serious literature. She herself finds reading *Little Dorrit* and *Sentimental Education* very challenging. ‘Some exceptional students would read hard books; most wouldn’t, and they weren’t fools (Black Album 134). She would rather enter into ‘the music her students liked, how they danced, their clothes and language, it was theirs, a living way’, ‘extend it, ask questions’ (Black Album 134). For her reading classics to the students is like informing them about ‘white elite culture’ and telling them of ‘their inferiority’. Deedee is also fond of reading self-help books that tell people ‘why they weren’t happier, and why their expectations hadn’t been fulfilled’. ‘She was interested in thinking what neEd such books supplied rather than attempting to disturb people with literature, which only academics imagined central to anything, and real people only read on holiday’ (Black Album 135). Shahid couldn’t go for that kind of books neither could he ‘always appreciate being played Madonna or George Clinton in class, or offered a lecture on the history of funk...’(Black Album 135). He appreciated reading serious literature because:

... literature was better in every way, the difference hit you instantly, look at the first few pages of *Tom Sawyer*. That was why it was called literature. He intended to embark on the migraine reads. Turgenev, Proust, Barthes, Kundera: what did they have to say? Why were they respected? (Black Album 135)

It seems that Shahid finds the methods of cultural studies and the subject chosen for that kind of study frivolous and without any purpose. On the other hand, a good piece of
literature has some greater purpose, something profound to offer, some greater cause to address. Shahid as a would-be writer is actually getting experience and collecting material to write something profound and address some serious cause. While patrolling an estate block along with Riaz’s group to protect a Bengali family from racist attack Shahid reflects on the nature of life of the inhabitants. He feels like ‘striding around the estate like a Britisher in India’ which he doesn’t like. He makes ‘word sketches of the block’s inhabitants’ in his notebook. He comes to know that these people are regular victims of robbery. The children do all mean jobs, sell drugs or do burglary. These people were not starving however, ‘in this place there was no God, political belief or spiritual sustenance. What government or party believed that these people mattered’ (Black Album 136)? The young woman who gave him an account of her house having been robbed told him that ‘their condition might improve only if they drew attention to themselves’ (Black Album 136). But, the question is ‘how could you do that’? It seems that Shahid has an answer. He can do this by writing and not by ‘burning the fuckin’ place down’. As a writer he can write about the lives of these people and draw the attention of the Government to them. He is not in favour of any kind of violence. Later also he abstains himself from the violent incident of book burning by his radical friends. The area Shahid was patrolling is inhabited by both the White working class people as well as immigrants. Shahid is not only moved by the worst living condition of the immigrants but also of the White working class people. As a writer Shahid’s concern is for a larger humanity rather than for a particular community.

Writing involves discipline, strong determination and hard work. It does not come easily. It demands solitude also. In moments of confusion and mental chaos Shahid feels to escape and seek someone to talk to. He feels that even Chilli, his brother who generally lets him down would have been better than nothing. ‘Shahid, during this time, had made up his
mind to be a disciplined person and not waste his life’ (Black Album 147). He knew that he wasn’t a ‘naturally brilliant’ person but he could follow the example of his parents and work hard. He decides to continue working ‘even if a bomb exploded outside, which wasn’t entirely unlikely, he would burst with his arse adhered to the chair’ (Black Album 147). After sometime he starts liking his work and ‘inconceivable ideas entered his head, exciting him. He went over the same piece again and again, until the original idea had been extended, even transformed, into something he’d never thought before (Black Album 148).

Hanif Kureishi seems to reflect on the process of writing by making Shahid perform and experience it. Writing involves concentration and hard work. Ideas may come as flash of light and the writer may have a glimpse of what he wants to write. However, the actual writing is working and reworking on the original idea again and again which involves extension, even transformation of the original idea into something which was never thought before. Kureishi also does not think that the writer has a unique story to tell: ‘everyone had their story; and what went on in his mind occurred in others’ too, the current of life flowing through all’ (Black Album 148). He compares writing with dreaming. The only difference between dreams and writing is that ‘the dreams spread in concentric circles, one colouring another’ while writing could be linear. Kureishi here dissociates himself from Rushdie’s way of writing. In the of The Black Album Shahid once refers to Rushdie’s novel, Midnight’s Children: ‘It’s rhythms aren’t Western. It dashes all over the place’ (Black Album 9). Rushdie’s next controversial book which is at the backdrop of Kureishi’s present novel is also written in dream sequence and employs the technique of magic realism. Kureishi dissociates himself from Rushdie at both the fronts, the content as well as the technique of his writing. Theme-wise he does not make Shahid write something that may lead to social disruption which I have already referred to and technique-wise also he does not make Shahid appreciate and write something that ‘dashes all over the place’
though he likes Rushdie as a writer. His concern is rather here and now for which he
prefers linear realism rather than magic realism.

The burning of Rushdie’s controversial novel by the Islamic radical friends of Shahid is a
turning point in his development into a creative writer. He reluctantly joined them in the
demonstration but neither did he support the fatwa issued by the Iranian leader, Khumeini
to kill the writer of the blasphemous book nor was he in favour of burning the book. He
thinks that a book only throws light on one of the many ways of being in the world. The
moment the book was put to flames his alliance with his friends was broken. After this
incident he also rejects the Islamic certainty of believing and following the words of the
scripture which is considered to be absolute: ‘... there must be more to living than
swallowing one old book? What men and women do, and the things they make, must be
more interesting than anything that God is supposed to do?’(Black Album 272).

Shahid’s passionate love relationship with Deedee also plays some role in his becoming a
writer. Though he does not believe in everything what Deedee says but she taught him
how to follow pleasure and one’s feelings. He learns about the mysteries sexual pleasure
and how one can pursue its optimum level. It is in the company of Deedee that he learns to
exist in an uncertain and provisional state of being instead of being certain about
everything. Finally, he decides to understand his recent experiences 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 protagonist of The Black Album finally becomes a writer with an uncertain and provisional self abjuring his religious identity. Shahid actually develops what is called a postmodernist self which claims to have no attachment or commitment to any ideology. But, is it really true that he is uncertain and provisional and without any commitment to any ideology? In postmodernist thought all meta-narratives are deconstructed and made provisional, but what reigns supreme even in post-modernism is the ideology of liberal secularism. By declaring himself uncertain and provisional Shahid enters into the discourse of postmodernism and hence, into the discourse of liberal secularism. It seems that Shahid commits to liberal secularism because it guarantees the right of the individual to liberty of thought and expression. However, the ending of the novel, specially his running away from his own people, does not seem convincing. Considering the fact of Shahid’s initial commitment to the cause of the immigrant community and his opposition to racism it seems to be selfish on Shahid’s part. But Shahid is not only an individual, he is an artist also. From this perspective what Moore-Gilbert says seems convincing:

The Black Album clearly endorses the right of the individual, especially the artist, to liberty of thought and expression. ... If Shahid finally disavows Riaz’s conviction of a given community’s right to determine the social function of ‘its’ art and the work of the individual artist who supposedly belongs to that community, his reconciliation with Deedee at the end of the text may represent no more than a partial, temporary and ‘strategic’ alignment with her. (Moore-Gilbert 147)

Kureishi’s another novel that engages with the lives and growing up of artists is Gabriel’s Gift (2001). The protagonist of this novel Gabriel Bunch is the fifteen year old son of a
former bass guitarist, Rex Bunch and costume designer, Christina Bunch. Gabriel has the talent of making painting, generally copying from original and he aspires to be a film maker. However, Gabriel is different from Kureishi’s other protagonists. Karim of The Buddha of Suburbia and Shahid of The Black Album are born into conventional families with conservative middle class values emphasising the importance of money and stability in life. It is only later that they develop unconventional provisional selves. Gabriel, on the other hand is born into an unconventional family. His parents were not married. Both of his parents were previously associated with pop show business. Presently, they were in oppositional realm of the discourse rebellion. While Gabriel’s father was living on dole and ‘considered the world through the bottom of a beer glass’; the mother subscribed to the entrepreneurial spirit of the time advocated by Thatcher:

A few years ago, when the country decided it should become entrepreneurial and began dizzily to bolt about like someone who’d just awoken from an overlong sleep, she had tried to expand the business by renting a small warehouse and employing the unemployed. (Gabriel’s Gift 5)

Gabriel had watched his parents quarrelling. His mother wanted his father ‘to wake up one day as a different sort of person, the type who earned money, didn’t mind cleaning, sometimes kissed her, and was less melancholic than her’ (Gabriel’s Gift 6). Gabriel was a perceptive child. He knew what was to be ‘from a broken home’ by listening to people saying of other children. He could think ‘how it felt to miss people and the relief of their return’. Looking at his parents and also the parents of his friends he noticed that:

... there were different styles of madness for men and women, fathers and mothers. The women became obsessive, excessively nervous, afraid and self-hating, fluttering and blinking with damaged inner electricity. The men blunted themselves with
alcohol and cursed, blamed and hit out, disappearing into the pub and then into jail.

(Gabriel’s Gift 6)

As a promising artist Gabriel has some similarity with Karim, like him Gabriel also doesn’t find any interest in school. When asked how the school was, he replies, ‘learning makes me feel ignorant’ (Gabriel’s Gift 1). His father also thought: ‘... school was the last place where anyone could get an education. But outside, if your eyes were open, there were teachers everywhere’ (Gabriel’s Gift 2). Karim also thought that, though apparently he was not doing anything the experiences that he was gathering would be of great help to him later. Gabriel thought:

...he was too old for school, or the school itself was somehow backward, or too old-fashioned for him. It didn’t give him enough to think about. As soon as he began to concentrate on a piece of school work, he became aware that more exciting things were going on somewhere else. (Gabriel’s Gift 73)

Like Kureishi’s other artist protagonists Gabriel also undergoes a turbulent phase of his life when his father leaves home, mother goes to work and he is looked after by an East European refugee nanny called Hannah. He is more disturbed by the presence of his mother’s new boyfriend, George. Moreover, Gabriel is torn between his allegiances to both his parents. Occasionally he is allowed to visit his father. In one of such visits Gabriel is taken by his father to the famous pop artist Lester Jones with whom he used to perform. Talking about Lester, Rex explains to Gabriel that Lester is a highly successful person and what made him achieve that success:

... Lester had the one thing that everyone wanted, something rarer than rubies or even the ability to make money, the force at the centre of the world which made precious
and important things to happen. This was his imagination or talent. This was his gift.

(Gabriel’s Gift 44-45)

This visit becomes a turning point in the lives of all the three Bunches. Conversation with Lester Jones reassures Gabriel of his creativity and the power of his imagination. Jones reflects on the nature of artistic creativity which proves to be enlightening for Gabriel. Gabriel shows Lester his sketchbook and tells him how things go on his mind and he put them in pictures. Lester tells him that he writes songs in the same way with the help of imagination which, according to him, sees what isn’t there. Lester appreciates him and tells him, ‘you’re talented, ... I’m telling you — and now you know for ever. Hear my voice and carry these words wherever you go’ (Gabriel’s Gift 50). He also adds that talent needs cultivation also: ‘Talent might be a gift but it still has to be cultivated. The imagination is like a fire or furnace; it has to be stoked, fed and attended to. One thing sets another ablaze’ (Gabriel’s Gift 50). Gabriel tells Lester that he copies other artist and asks if it is wrong. Lester says, ‘it's what you make of the stolen objects that’s important. If you take something and use it, then it’s worthwhile. If you just copy it and it stays the same, then nothing’s been done’ (Gabriel’s Gift 50). Also, Lester elaborates upon his own process of artistic creation. He compares his creative moments with dreams and he says that all great works of art seem to be supernatural and dreamlike. It takes place in the unconscious mind as in dreams. The artist loses his personality while creating an art:

When I’m doing this I disappear. There’s no me there. I don’t know who I am. I draw and sing to get lost. If I’m not lost how can I do anything? This is how I live twice. I live in the world, and then in memory and imagination. If you listen to the greatest music... or read the greatest books, like Hamlet, you’ll see how weird, almost supernatural and dreamlike they are. (Gabriel’s Gift 51)
Lester is impressed by Gabriel and he gives him one of his old paintings with his signature. This picture plays an important role in Gabriel's life and also in his family. His father, Rex wanted to sell the picture and earn some money, his mother wanted to preserve it as a prised possession as it was signed by an adorable pop singer Lester and Gabriel himself wanted to keep the picture. He stealthily makes two copies of the picture, one for his father and one for his mother and keeps the original for himself. He forges the signature of Lester, though he feels guilty of doing so. His father is not able to understand that he is given a copy; however, he observes that the picture was looking better than before. Gabriel gets appreciation indirectly and he is flattered. It seems that Kureishi obliquely refers to postmodern situation in which the distinction between the original and the copy is blurred and it becomes almost impossible to distinguish the two.

Gabriel as an artist also shares the technique of magic realism which is one prominent postmodern technique. He paints a pair of work boots from a picture and he notices that the boots take real shape with the smell of 'dung, mud, the countryside and grass' (*Gabriel's Gift* 18); but this miracle did not last for a long time, when he comes back again to the sketchbook he finds a 'boot-shaped hole' in the centre of the page: 'As he turned the page, the boots were sucked back onto it, and everything returned to normal' (*Gabriel's Gift* 18). A similar thing happens when he copies a chair:

...he began to feel he was bringing it into existence. ... When he had finished drawing and colouring in, he closed his eyes and looked up.

There it was.

He ran his hand over its ridges and curves. Gingerly, wondering whether it might collapse, he sat down. It was secure and comfortable. Gabriel stood on it, and danced
a bit. It took his weight; this was a chair you could put your arse on and wiggle about.

When he returned to his sketchbook and turned the page, the real chair disappeared, but his copy remained. (Gabriel’s Gift 22)

It is notable that the magical quality of Gabriel’s work is ephemeral. Bradley Buchanan (2007) thinks that it ‘is perhaps a warning about the temporary nature of such postmodern creativity’ (Buchanan 106).

Another magic realist technique in this novel is the introduction of Archie, the dead twin brother of Gabriel who is a confidante and also a guiding spirit for him. Whenever Gabriel has a problem he talks to his brother and he offers him the right solution. This twin brother died at the age of two and a half but is always present with him: ‘the dead brother, alive inside the living half, had become a magic, and wiser, boy — Gabriel’s daemon and personal spirit’ (Gabriel’s Gift 19). Gabriel’s talking to the dead brother is like Lester’s getting lost in dreamlike state. It is like delving deep into the unconscious or the world of imagination. It is like existing in two spheres, one the real world and the other the world of imagination and artistic creativity. Susie Thomas (2005) thinks that Gabriel’s messing with magic ‘turns out to be a way of talking about artistic gift, while his double self becomes a metaphor for his emerging identity’ (Thomas 152). Gabriel as an artist seems to have a split personality. At one level he exists in the real world and at another level he exists in the magical world which is a metaphor for his artistic creativity, the world of imagination. Gabriel uses both his personalities to achieve two different things. He wants to help his dreamy incompetent father to start working for a living and bring his parents together, on the one hand; on the other hand he wants to become a filmmaker for which he has to accumulate resources. He becomes successful in both. His father takes up teaching
music to the son of a famous film-maker named Jake. Jake, in turn, promises to help Gabriel to become a film-maker and gives him one old 16mm camera. He suggests his father to take his mother to a party at Jake’s place which makes his parents come together again. The story ends with the marriage of Gabriel’s parents.

The novel *Gabriel’s Gift* ends with a positive note. The broken family of Gabriel comes together and he starts making film as wished to do. Once he told his benefactor Jake, ‘I want my work and my life to be the same thing’ (*Gabriel’s Gift* 162) and he chooses film making as his vocation. But he is apprehensive also about his future:

... he wondered if he might fail at what he wanted, as his father ultimately had. A lot of people wanted to be someone, but who had the tenacity, the commitment, the steely determination? For how many people was it a necessity, a matter of life as opposed to death? He was too young to be careful. He was full of hope and the ambition of uncontrollable wishes. He was ready, too, to work. (*Gabriel’s Gift* 154)

After taking up teaching music as his vocation Rex becomes self critical for having ‘mythologized pop and pop stars’. He admires Gabriel’s enthusiasm and appreciates him. He says ‘you rebelled but at least you took part’ and ‘you joined in ...’ (*Gabriel’s Gift* 141). What he means by this is joining the bourgeois middle class and taking part in the middle class value of working for a living. He drops all his idealism. He laments his self destructive period:

I wanted to rip everything down. It was a sixties idea to piss on things, the “straight” world, mainly. It was considered rebellious. But it meant I had a cynical soul and I wish I didn’t. I haven’t liked things enough. I haven’t opened the windows of my soul. (*Gabriel’s Gift* 141)
Kureishi seems to critique the idealism and nonconformity associated with artistic creativity. He also hints at the risk of failure in any idealistic artistic endeavour. Very few people actually become successful artist. The fear of failure is always there. Kureishi also addresses other challenges that artists face. Rex’s friend Lester being a successful pop artist, an equivalent of David Bowie shares the challenges of an artist to Gabriel. He says one of the challenges of the artist is ‘keeping alive self-belief when there was no one to confirm it. This was the hardest time for any artist’ (*Gabriel’s Gift* 51). Another challenge Lester talks about is ‘envy’, ‘one of the strongest human forces: the jealousy and hatred of others, and their desire to contain or undermine you’ (*Gabriel’s Gift* 57).

Another character in the novel called Speedy, the owner of a pop art museum plays an important role in the development of Gabriel into an artist as well as in finding employment for his parents. His museum is visited by many famous artists, actors and musicians and he has a deep understanding of the nature of life lived by the artists. He introduces Gabriel to Karim Amir of *The Buddha of Suburbia* who has become a famous actor. He also, enlightens Gabriel about the nature of life of the artists. He tells Gabriel that talent cannot be inherited, it is something innate: ‘You can inherit an old tie but not a gift, that’s one thing I know’ (*Gabriel’s Gift* 123). He believes that: ‘For some people, imagining is the most natural thing in the world. They don’t have to sweat blood over it. You just hit the groove and see stuff!’ (*Gabriel’s Gift* 124). Speedy knows that many people want to write film scripts but very few of them can actually do it to save their lives and those who can do it is ‘the top man’. But it comes with a price that one has to pay. Speedy warns Gabriel at that: ‘But I know those guys, the creative artists. They’re selfish and self-obsessed; the desire for success isn’t pretty. It’s a hunger that never goes away or can be satisfied. That’s what makes people into stars’ (*Gabriel’s Gift* 124).
Something to Tell You (2008), the latest of Kureishi’s novels also engages with art, artists and creativity. Some of the major characters in this novel are artists. The protagonist of this novel Jamal Khan is a psychoanalyst whose best friend Henry Richardson is a theatre and film director. Bushy, the chauffer of Jamal’s sister, Miriam is a guitarist. Mustaq, the brother of Jamal’s erstwhile girlfriend, Ajita becomes rock musician by reinventing himself as George Cage.

Henry as an artist doesn’t like cheap popularity and easy success. As a theatre director he loves to take challenges. He wants struggle and ‘risk of annihilation’ in his work. As a director he likes to work with ordinary actors and he appreciates ‘naive acting’ which according to him ‘had its own beauty’. He would say, ‘bring me only the worst actors. What could be more depressing than talent?’ (Something to Tell You 111) Henry as an artist is different from Henry as a man. He is different when at work. Jamal is ‘impressed by his assurance and intense concentration, by his concern for the actors and his interest in their ideas, as well as his firmness when he wanted something’ (Something to Tell You 111). The artistic self of Henry was ‘alert and vibrant’ and it was separated and very different from his anxious daily self.

Kureishi addresses the price an artist has to pay for being famous and a celebrity figure. Once an artist becomes a celebrity figure she cannot afford to enjoy the freedom of being anonymous or go unnoticed in any public place without being mobbed. In Gabriel’s Gift when Rex goes to see Lester taking Gabriel with him they find the desperate mob waiting outside Lester’s place to have a glimpse of him. In The Buddha of Suburbia Charlie is followed by a desperate journalist for an interview. To reinforce the extent to which the private life of an artist becomes the subject of media gossip Kureishi reintroduces Karim Amir and Charlie Hero in Gabriel’s Gift. Speedy in his museum of pop art memorabilia tells Gabriel about the scandalous relationship of Karim’s father and Charlie’s mother. In
Something to Tell You Mustaq turned George experiences the same problem. Mustaq ‘when young he’d wanted to be recognised and praised as a star, whereas having become older he yearned for his original anonymity, having realised that fame – a handful of snow – didn’t bring you understanding from others but somehow rendered you abstract, even to yourself (Something to Tell You 475).

Hanif Kureishi has chosen artists from different domains of creativity as the characters of his novels. Each of these artists is creative in different ways and they face different types of challenges and draw inspiration from different sources. The challenges faced by these artists are sometimes similar to those faced by a creative writer. In a way Kureishi’s engagement with artists and their creative life makes his own writing self-reflexive. Kureishi has shown in his writing that the kind of artist a person becomes may be decided by his position in society, that is to say art may be auto-biographical as is the case with Karim of The Buddha of Suburbia. However, it is possible to transcend one’s background and reinvent oneself as Charlie of The Buddha of Suburbia and Mustaq of Something to Tell You did. With the advent of award culture writers also have gained celebrity status but the celebrity status comes with a price. Charlie, Lester and Mustaq all these characters demonstrate the challenges a celebrity has to face.

One of the recurring themes of Kureishi’s novels is the blurring distinction between high art and low art. Theatre is one of the art forms generally considered to be high art. But, in The Buddha of Suburbia the difference between theatre and pop art has been blurred. The bohemian life style of theatre director like Matthew Pyke is far from the seriousness theatre generally evokes in one’s mind. In The Black Album the dialectic between elite culture and pop culture is a contested one. Deedee teaches Cultural Studies. She is of the opinion that the present generation do not connect with serious literature and teaching them classic literature is like informing them about ‘white elite culture’ and telling them of
‘their inferiority’. She would rather teach ‘the music her students liked, how they danced, their clothes and language, it was theirs, a living way’, ‘extend it, ask questions’ (Black Album 134). But Shahid, the prospective writer finds the methods of Cultural Studies and the subject chosen for that kind of study frivolous and without any purpose. On the other hand, a good piece of literature has some greater purpose, something profound to offer, some greater cause to address. Henry in Something to Tell You believes in high art and high culture and he is rather upset that both of his children hate high culture. He holds a very high opinion of high culture. He thinks that ‘against death and authoritarianism there is only one thing’ which is culture. According to him, it is far more important than love. He observes: ‘Any clown can fall in love or have sex. But to write a play, paint a Rothko or discover the unconscious— aren’t these extraordinary feats of imagination, the only negation of the human desire to murder?’ (Something to Tell You 77) Henry believes in the power of classic art, such as, poetry of Shakespeare, books of Dostoevsky and music of ‘Mahler and Bach’ to provide him some anchor at a time when ‘the world of bloodied, shredded bodies under Bush-Blair had been making’ him ‘angry and sick’. He observes, ‘Isn’t art the still point – a spot of sense in a thrashing world?’ (Something to Tell You 460)

However, Henry doesn’t look down upon the decadent world of pop culture. Pop culture and pop art is all about revolting against bourgeois values of respectability and some bourgeois institutions, such as, marriage and family that help to regulate sexuality. In company with Miriam, Henry reinvents his sexuality though he was in his middle age and had a family. With Miriam and her driver Bushy, Henry visits all sorts of places which are generally the reign of pop culture. He doesn’t behave like a cultural snob. Jamal admits that he had ‘been something of a snob before’, but being in relationship with Karen he ‘learned to make no distinction between high and low art’ (Something to Tell You 271). Today in the world of literature also no distinction is made between what was once
considered to be classic literature and pulp literature. As far as Kureishi’s own writing is concerned he does not hesitate to use taboo words and his description of some sex scenes (especially in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*) border on pornography. Some of the scenes of orgies actually turn out to be pornography.

One more thing that Kureishi seems to foreground is the role of show business in the late-capitalist economy. In a city like London a large number of people are engaged in show business – making films, soap operas, music videos, documentaries, talk shows, not to mention live stage performance. Similarly, a large number of people make their living by writing. The world of these people is different from other ordinary citizens. These people are connected to each other in their own close knit world. Sometimes they claim to be representing the causes of the masses, but they are actually cut off from them. This is also true of literary writers and more so of the immigrant writers who claim to represent the people and their culture that the writers themselves are not always familiar with.
Works Cited


