Chapter Four

From Immigration to Acculturation: The Pakistani Diaspora from Kureishi to Aslam

After having studied the diasporic elements in the writings of Meera Syal and Sunetra Gupta of Indian origin, this chapter focuses on the conditions and circumstances which characterize the fictional endeavour of writers like Hanif Kureishi and Nadeem Aslam of Pakistani origin. Their fiction have been dealt with in detail, but as in the previous chapter, certain texts have been analyzed in greater details while the rest have been referred to in passing or in instances where their citing is relevant. Sections which reveal diasporic engagement; have been obviously emphasized, though an attempt has been made to capture the essence of the whole as well. Like the earlier chapter, this is also divided into three sections. While the first makes a comparative analysis of both the authors on an introductory basis, the second and third focusses on Kureishi and Aslam separately.

I. The Writers of the Pakistani Diaspora

A host of Pakistani writers have now settled in and around England. Bradford, the place specifically known for Pakistani immigrants, has gained the name of England’s Pakistan. As the Wikipedia gives, there are more than seven million Pakistanis overseas, spread across more than twenty different countries like Saudi Arabia, UK, UAE, US, Canada, Onam and several others. According to Pnina Werbner, “the Pakistani diasporic community, the earliest and by far the largest and most prominent internationally, which emerged in the 1900s (is) a major player in global diaspora religious politics” (Werbner 476). The Pakistanis migrated
mostly from the Barani areas of Jhelum, Gujarat, and Gujranwala and from the Mirpur districts. The first migrants were mainly of “impoverished background” (Werbner 476) and most of them worked in the wool and the cotton industries of Lancashire and Yorkshire. Later on they shifted to the cities of Birmingham, Oldham, Bradford, Manchester, Newcastle-on-Tyne, where they established small businesses and engaged in textile industry.

The Pakistanis emerge from the historical phase of Partition, whereby Pakistanis who had travelled before 1947 still rest upon the Indian identity and name themselves Indians. Similarly several of the many Pakistanis having migrated before 1972, find their relatives back home naming themselves Bangladeshis and mostly do not wish to get back to Pakistani identity. Under such a condition the Pakistanis are in a crisis which surpasses the crisis of every other diasporic group (this feeling is however extended to an extent to the Bangladeshi diaspora). As the protagonist Jamal Khan, a second generation diasporic in Kureishi’s fiction *Something to Tell You* (2008) reminiscences of his Dad’s anxiety,

> While Dad was studying in London, his eight brothers removed the rest of the family from India to Pakistan, imagining the new country—brutally sliced from the old one like an afterthought, as the British vandal fled, taking a swipe—would be a new beginning. During this time, although Dad was living in the London suburbs with the family he had made, he began to feel he had no home, as well as no vocation (43).

There is not even going back to their homeland, for though their contribution to their homeland Pakistan’s exchequer had given them an elevated ground, they only receive a second hand status in case they permanently return to their homeland. Ali Eteraz, the writer and freelance journalist comments on the Pakistani diaspora, that it is supposedly the only diaspora which subdues identity to religion. Almost every diasporic group looks back to a nation and national history and claims back an identity which is attached to the state. On the contrary, the Pakistani diaspora is satisfied with their attachment to their religion and at times
with the false interpretation of the same by the religious lords, the Maulavis, maintaining international connection. The Pakistanis’ condition, he writes is worse than the stateless Palestinians who do not rest their identity solely on their religion. Eteraz deduces a remedy:

Instead of becoming a censor-state, Pakistan should promote freedom of expression. Engagement with Pakistan’s culture will give adrift Pakistanis around the world a sense of belonging. Effort has to be made to connect Pakistani expats to Pakistan, not via their families, but via the idea of Pakistan itself – via Pakistaniat. It is this sense of confidence that will make Pakistanis want to invest in Pakistan perhaps even return and engage in nation-building…Most people think ‘diaspora’ only when they run into a Pakistani on foreign soil and want to ask about the nearest place to find chicken tikka. Diaspora is, actually, the barometer by which one can judge the health of a nation. The feeble state of the Pakistani diaspora speaks volumes (Eteraz).

In order to get back to this notion of homeland, merely an aligning with the homeland nation is not enough. Rather a getting back to literature, arts and culture, is what proves effective.

The land is reinvoked in the novels, thereby stirring the sense of solidarity of the Pakistanis. A host of Pakistani writers, whether located in the homeland or diaspora, contribute to the increasing sensibility of the unified concept of home. The authors include Kamila Shamsie, Mohsin Hamid, Tariq Ali, Sara Suleri, apart from Hanif Kureishi and Nadeem Aslam, the two writers on whom this study focusses. Kamila Shamsie was born and brought up in Karachi and presently lives in London. Mohsin Hamid, the successful writer of Moth Smoke (2000) and The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2007) was born in US, but later shifted to Lahore, Pakistan. Tariq Ali is a British Pakistani historian, novelist, filmmaker, political campaigner, and commentator. He is the author of several books, including Can Pakistan Survive? The Death of a State (1991), Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity (2002), Bush in Babylon (2003), Conversations with Edward Said (2005), Pirates Of The Caribbean: Axis Of Hope (2006), and A Banker for All Seasons (2007) and the recently published The Duel (2008). Sara Suleri’s popular books include Meatless Days (1989) and Boys Will Be Boys: A Daughter's Elegy (2003). Moreover Bapsi Sidwa’s Pakistani Bride (1983), Saira
Shah’s Storyteller’s Daughter (2004), Tahir Shah’s The Caliph’s House (2006), Mohsin Hamid’s The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2007), Mohammed Hanif’s A Case of Exploding Mangoes (2008), Tariq Ali’s The Duel (2008), James Caan’s The Real Deal (2008), Yasmin Hai’s The Making of Mr Hai’s Daughter: Becoming British (2008), Ziauddin Sardar’s Balti Britain (2008), Nadeem Aslam’s The Wasted Vigil (2008), Hanif Kureishi’s Something To Tell You (2008) and Amir Khan’s Boy from Bolton: My Story (2009) are the most recent novels written by authors of Pakistani origin. It shows how these new emerging voices make us aware of the separate sub-genre called Pakistani English writing.

Playwright, screenwriter, novelist and film-maker Hanif Kureishi was born in Bromley, Kent in 1954 and read philosophy at King’s College, London. Kureishi is one of the most important and popular writers born in Britain of “New Commonwealth” origins. His father Rafiushan was from a wealthy Madras family, most of whose members moved to Pakistan after the Partition of India in 1947 where at present his family members hold significant place in the country’s functioning. Rafiushan came to Britain to study law though he soon abandoned his studies. After marrying Kureishi’s mother Audrey, he settled in Bromley. As a child of mixed parentage Kureishi’s screenplays and his novels starting with The Buddha of Suburbia (1990), over and again reiterate the crisis of diasporic life. As a popular British writer, his extensive research on the life and commitments of expatriates, the like of split consciousness and divided identities, has brought out several writings on various genres. Kureishi’s concentration doesn’t stay on one field, as he shifts from his career as a novelist to that of a screenplay writer, the writer of short stories, plays, non-fiction, and so on. His long list of works apart from the above mentioned, include novels like The Black Album (1995), Intimacy (1998), Gabriel’s Gift (2001), The Body (2003), and Something to Tell You (2008). His popular list of screenplays includes Sammy and Rosie Get Laid (1988), London Kills Me
Kureishi’s broad range of work focuses mainly on angst in the modern world and his characters are more or less diasporic. His work looks mainly at the Muslim diasporic community in the West but delves into their aspirations from different angles. His fictional characters are trapped in their situations and life, trying to work out an escape by maneuvering their identity as suits their purpose. They range from separated couples, love hungry maidens, youths fascinated with hip culture, homosexuals, frantic, sex maniacs and so on, but in one way or the other they are affected by this diasporic sensibility. Diasporic angst plays a curious role in their lives, baring their lives to disturbance caused due to the shift. The protagonists are all in a plight and in their tensed state they often bend upon the neurotic. Kureishi’s work can be summed up in Rushdie’s words—‘it “celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure’” (“In Good Faith” 394).

The second writer in this study is Nadeem Aslam. Born in Pakistan in 1966, he moved to the U.K. as a teenager. His family settled in Huddersfield, and presently lives in London. He began his writing career with *Season of the Rainbirds* (1993), followed by *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004), which took him eleven years to complete. *Season*, unlike diasporic themes
The novels of both Kureishi and Aslam are steeped in a deep sense of pain. While Kureishi gives outlet to the frustration in the shameless extravagance of lusty living and grim sexuality, liquor and women, Aslam’s narrative is steeped in deep longing. Longing recurs in the novels of Aslam in his portrayal of homeland, in the depiction of his people or in the projection of women who defy every attempt at assimilation. Hanif Kureishi in his “The Rainbow Sign” speaks elaborately of the broad ways in which diasporic existence might prove problematic. The confusion is made critical by the condition of those who have one or the other parent of
British origin. Hanif Kureishi and Monica Ali, of Bangladeshi origin belong to the lot. Both have South Asian fathers and British mothers. The sense of nationality is equal for both the places and the child associates with England and the English for it is also the land of stay. This indeed seems the shortest route. However it is very difficult for people with a South Asian complexion to escape racism. The injury caused by racist attacks brings home diverse complications. On the other hand the attacks unite the South Asian people together and evoke a diasporic sentiment. They smart under the taunts, try to escape but all in vain. When they ultimately return to their place of origin, whether for a short time or permanently, they fail to locate their roots. Kureishi makes a trip to Pakistan to find that he is ahead of time and this makes him critical of Pakistan and its theocracy. Aslam’s approach to the host country is but totally different, he being a first generation immigrant.

Indeed the discrimination of Kureishi and Aslam as writers is mainly in their stages of diasporic existence, that is the number of generations through which they have stayed in the foreign land. Their generation is what gives effect to their stance and their way of looking at such concepts as home and exile. While Kureishi is baffled as he is told, “we are Pakistanis, but you, you will always be a Paki— emphasizing the slang derogatory name the English used against Pakistanis, and therefore the fact that I couldn't rightfully lay claim to either place” (“The Rainbow Sign” 12-13), Aslam is hardly waivered in his positioning for he confirms, “It was a shock to come and learn that I was a Paki, that I was something to look down on. But it didn’t do me as much damage as it would have done had I grown up here because, by 15, I was confident enough to go ahead and do what the hell I liked” (qtd Rees).
II. Hanif Kureishi and the Urge to Assimilate

*The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), hailed as Hanif Kureishi’s (1954—) masterpiece, and probably his most stirring novel dealing in diasporic sensibility, visualizes the Pakistani diasporic life in the suburbs of Britain through the life of Karim Amir, a second generation diasporic individual. Often considered a replica of the author himself, Karim, like the author (as Kureishi himself mentions on various occasions) is trapped in a society which treats him as an “odd mixture of continents and blood” (Kureishi, *Buddha* 3). While the mixture of continents is the result of his father Haroon’s shift from undivided India to Britain, his mixture of blood had resulted from his father marrying his mother, an English woman. In such a curious state Karim faces the worst crisis of his life for though he stirs to get out of the boredom, he has hardly enough space for movement. The confines of the society put him at unrest and make his life static at the same time. The breaking apart of the family confirms the *difference* while Eva, Haroon’s girl friend further complicates the situation. The novel is a bildungsroman tracing the growth of Karim. As Karim tries his hand in acting, he realizes that the only role he is found suitable in is the role of Mowgli, the jungle-boy, and that his father can rise in prospects in Britain only by selling the oriental image of the Buddha. Anwar, Haroon’s capricious friend who would never attempt at assimilation; his daughter Jamila, his polar opposite, rollicking in the prospects of freedom beyond Islam’s grasp; the mother Jeeta, working at a reconciliation between the father and daughter and Changez, Jamila’s husband whom she defies to the last possible extent, frequent the pages of *Buddha*. 
The Black Album (1995), Kureishi’s second novel, is set in the late 80s at the time of the fatwa on Salman Rushdie, and concerns a group of fundamentalist Muslim students at a college in the slums of northwest London. This novel purely deals with the encounter of the Asian-British with Islam. The novel sees the different outlooks, the different parts that Islam plays in the lives of the Muslim diaspora in Britain in the light of growing fundamentalism. The protagonist Shahid and his friends address Islam as at once the disease and the salve; that which absolves from sin and that which induces corruption. Shahid though refutes the strict codes of Islam as conjured up by Riaz AlHussain, the leader of the Muslim students in Shahid’s college, and the fundamentalist group of the same college, Shahid nonetheless finds a release from the crisis of identity when he is in the mosque. His religion gives him a fixed identity without any inbetweenness or rift. At peace with himself, he would “regain his purity” (Kureishi, The Black 147) in the mosque. Though Shahid finds peace in the mosque, he purposefully flouts the Islamic notion of sinfulness in his indulgence in sex with the white woman Deedee Osgood, and his craving for liberty required for creative imagination. Moreover Shahid gives his acts a religious justification— “he celebrated to himself the substantiality of the world, the fact of existence, the inexplicable phenomenon of life, art, humour and love itself— in murmured language, itself another sacred miracle” (Kureishi, The Black 92).

As against Shahid or Riaz, Chad’s stance is a curious one. An orphan of Pakistani background adopted by English parents, Chad, out of a “sense of exclusion” from British society courts Islamic identity, changing from Trevor Buss to Muhammad Shahabuddin Ali-Shah (shortened as Chad by his friends). The exclusivist position in Britain had “practically drove him mad” (117). On the other hand Uncle Asif takes a resistive attitude in believing that it was only the subcontinentials who spoke the best English. The novel recounts the different strains of
Pakistani identity as conceived by the different characters. In the explicit connection with Prince’s recording *The Black Album*, Kureishi probably attempts to capture the throb of life against Islam’s all encompassing thrall. Kureishi even clips together different glimpses of Islam coming as slide show one after the other. “The novel,” says Kureishi of *The Black Album*, “is concerned with stories, isn’t it? Just as Riaz, as it were, invents Islam to suit him... Shahid is doing the same when he rewrites Riaz’s poems ....The point is that life is reinterpreted all the time as we live it” (qtd. Kaleta 139).

*Intimacy* (1998), notorious for its strong biographical underlining, deals with a family story in which a father leaves his twin sons and wife in search of identity. The husband Jay finds himself tied down by a meaningless relationship whereby saving the relationship is ensured only at the cost of marring one’s self and identity. As Jay remarks of some couples, “loyal and faithful to one another,” they cannot help being “disloyal and unfaithful to themselves” (Kureishi, *Intimacy* 58). The utopian notion of home is attacked from all quarters and the dominant voice is the biased voice of the male. A partial novel, it however bears the imprint of Kureishi in its hacking at the roots of hypocrisy and tabooed beliefs— “The dream, or nightmare, of the happy family, haunts us all; it is one of the few Utopian ideas we have, these days” (Kureishi, *Intimacy* 101).

*The Body* (2002) is a similar attempt at looking at oneself, one’s aspirations in life from different angles, but this time the engagement that Kureishi makes is with the human body. Based on a much handled science fiction of an old body getting back to its young vital state, the novella, *Body* is the title piece and the first of the eight short stories comprising Kureishi’s book. The narrator, ironically named Adam looks at the body and marks the changes and alongwith it comes his encounter with a world which alters itself around an altering body.
*Love in a Blue Time* (1997) compiles different works of Kureishi bringing in one volume, Kureishi’s diverse experimentation in sexuality, ethnicity, identity, sex and gender. Among the different works in this collection, the novella titled *In a Blue Time* tracks the same crisis of economic stagnancy in London, and the world of delusion comes to the fore in the two characters, Roy, the film-maker and the irresponsible Jimmy. As their friendship is explored, Kureishi delves into the confusion of Thatcherite Britain, the hip culture in consumption of cocaine and outrageous liaison with women, without any emotional bonding.

While *The Gabriel’s Gift* (2001) is an all new exploration of a fifteen year old adolescent, Gabriel, who has the gift of bringing to life any inanimate object that he paints, the novel is all hail to the power of imagination. Kureishi’s usual portrayal of life’s gloom and disruption is not far off as it comes in the parents’ broken dreams and ruined relationship. The creator however cooks up a world of his own and designs a release in his surrealism, unlike most of Kureishi’s protagonists who merely give in to bohemianism. Kureishi in this novel names the parents Rex and Christine; and names the diseased twin of Gabriel, Archie, who is long dead and with whom he finds a connection of soul, beyond the parameters of the real world. Archie is also Gabriel’s angel. Here too Kureishi finds a rue to play with identity as he describes how Gabriel dresses up, not just in front of that mirror but pretending to be someone else, probably a woman with mother’s rings, necklaces and shoes on.

*Something to Tell You* (2008) concentrates on the life of an Asian British psychoanalyst Jamal Khan, of Pakistani origin. The novel focuses on the psychiatric failures of human life as a crash emitted from clash of identity and tracks the psychosis in the mind of Jamal himself. The novel delves deep into the neurosis of the diasporic psyche and feels deep into the pangs of the crisis lent out by racism. Jamal’s sister Miriam yells, “I’m a Muslim single-mother Paki
mad cunt!” (15). Growing around Jamal and his family, the storyline runs through the life of Ajita his girlfriend of South Asian origin and her father, “a hard working man expelled from Africa, trying to make everything all right for his family” (203) who ends up molesting his own daughter and finally being murdered by Jamal. The story looks into the conspiracy of it and Jamal’s association with other women. The activities all take place in the city of London which proves an effective diasporic setting. Jamal claims, “London I liked was the city of exiles, refugees and immigrants, those for whom the metropolis was extraterrestrial and the English codes unbreakable, people who didn’t have a place and didn’t know who they were. The city from the point of view of my father” (40).

This realization of one’s identity gives a new angle to the personality. South Asia gains a new perspective in the eyes of the diasporic people who are insiders and outsiders at one stroke. Though, a half British, when it comes to naming a home and loyalty towards homeland, Kureishi gets back to South Asia. He writes, “I would rather walk naked down the street than stand up for (British) National Anthem” (Kureishi, “The Rainbow 53). Kureishi’s fiction project how for a child born of mixed parentage belonging to the First and Third world, it becomes very difficult to harbour difference, or the colonized and colonizing other in the same personality, the same body, appearance and the same self. Karim, the protagonist of the *Buddha*, a child born of such lineage is a curious case study.

The predominant aspects of his characters as rebellious irresponsibility, blatant carnality, indulgence are consciously brought in by Kureishi to make ashamed and let tremours run through the foundation of both cultures and countries. Hysteria like sexual engagement encompasses frenzy not of outlandish passion but of revenge against the monstrosity of lovelessness and centrelessness of modern society. Love and care, the pre-requisite of a
human existence being rarified, Kureishi’s characters continue under the aegis of animal existence. His indulgent characters are self-deluded. Their exuberance in selves is to ward off the outer disturbances and waive the breakage of life. Materialism rules supreme and the faith in human company or the urge for human benevolence no longer persists. Machines take the place of human warmth and love, so much so that in “Nightlight,” Kureishi’s absurdist theatre, an anonymous person leaves his wife of ten years and picks up his television on his way out because he must take something and his computer is attached to too many wires.

To add to this come mid-life crisis, racial hatred, the sting of such abuses as “Paki,” and the bitter realities of Paki-bashing. Unlike several diasporic authors, who merely touch upon certain tender issues as racism, Kureishi makes his characters speak elaborately on this issue. Chad, an orphan of Pakistani background in The Black Album mentions the racist stance, as something like, “I wouldn’t touch brown flesh, except with branding iron” (Kureishi, Black 11). Kureishi shows the hatred for the blacks and Asians as percolated deep in the minds of the natives. Kureishi further writes of himself in his “The Rainbow Sign”:

From the start I tried to deny my Pakistani self. I was ashamed. It was a curse and I wanted to be rid of it. I wanted to be like everyone else. I read with understanding a story in a newspaper about a black boy who, when he noticed that burnt skin turned white, jumped into a bath of boiling water (25-6).

Hanif Kureishi however maintains a highly balanced stance in his novels, as he blames both the natives and the people of the South Asian community. He writes in “The Rainbow Sign” of how the politicians in Britain brewed tension and created a neo-Nazi environment all around, inciting and stirring the crisis. He writes of Enoch Powell and Duncan Sandys:

In 1965, Enoch Powell said: ‘We should not lose sight of the desirability of achieving a steady flow of voluntary repatriation for the elements which are proving unsuccessful or unassimilable.’
In 1967, Duncan Sandys said: ‘The breeding of millions of half-caste children would merely produce a generation of misfits and create national tensions’ (Kureishi, “The Rainbow 27).

However when the characters speak of racism, they are seen to speak of both, the attacks by the South Asians on the hostland, and the injustice of the British Government on the South Asians. Racism can be counted in the opinions of Jamal Khan—“there’d be an IRA bomb: among other things, they liked blowing up pubs, as well as Hammersmith Bridge, which was attacked twice. The wrong people were soon beaten, forced to confess, and locked up. We were used to it” (Kureishi, Something 78). ‘The hatred is equal on both ends. In The Black Album Uncle Asif, a representative of the first generation diasporic subject makes known—“they gave us language but it is only we who know how to use it” (Kureishi, The Black Album 6). To him “the brown man’s burden” (ibid) of the Pakistani men in England was to “win the sports, present the news and run the shops and businesses, as well as having to fuck the women…” (ibid).

Kureishi in Buddha tactfully analyses both the attitudes of the native British and the new British in a way to clearly state the bias which both the groups affect for one another, while all the time himself staying out of the blame. He further speaks of the prejudice of the South Asian people against the host country as Karim speaks of Jamila’s bias against her tutor Miss Cutmore: “She drove me mad by saying Miss Cutmore had colonized her, but Jamila was the strongest-willed person I’d met: no one could turn her into a colony. Anyway, I hated ungrateful people. Without Miss Cutmore, Jamila wouldn’t have even heard the word ‘colony’” (Kureishi, The Buddha 53).

In his creative writings, the novels, the screenplays and every other work (though this study concentrates only on some of the selected novels), Kureishi demonstrates how racism
permeates through the fabric of British social life. Politicians as Powell and Sandys played an
effective role in badging the black immigrants as villains and the branded enemies of the
British race. The visual and print media have made the notion of “blacks” as outsider, “Other”
and poachers, seep into the veins of British social life. Karim’s father’s friend Anwar vents
his disgust at such disparity in the social front as he comments, “the whites will never
promote us…Not an Indian…they still think they have an empire” (Kureishi, *The Buddha 27*).
Apart from making life hellish, this makes a terrible impact at the psychic level. The native
British constantly protest that the South Asians negate every attempt at assimilation.
Assimilation remains incomplete as they do not wish to lose their identity or their heritage and
culture and present themselves like the British. The constant appeal on the part of the native
British to the *outsiders* to assimilate make the *blacks* and specifically South Asians retaliate
all the more for they consider this the worst design of negating their culture and identity.
Though the French, German and several others are accepted and continue to exist without
causing much disturbance to the British society, the Asians and Blacks are considered
‘Outsiders’, the ‘Other’ and hence anathema to the British sensibility.

Racial prejudice plays a great part in the lives of the diasporic people. However this is over-
emphasized at times by the diasporic groups. This undoubtedly creates a great problem
regarding the administration and smooth functioning of government policies. The charitable
organizations raise hue and cry at trifles and create a deadlock in the name of upholding rights
of the blacks, Asians and other minority groups. Karim narrates an incident when it took his
father six attempts to pass the driving test. Convinced that he had failed only because of racial
prejudice he had complained to the Race Relations board and passed the next time. However
Karim also comically observes that his father had crashed with all of them in his car!
Kureishi shows the awkward notions with which the South Asians arrive in England. In The Buddha of Suburbia, Karim reminiscences how the sight of Englishmen lying on streets, performing menial jobs and stuffing food into their mouths with their fingers was a pleasant shock to his father and father’s friend. Residing in England, every now and then, they have a revelation of the groundlessness of their notion of homogeneity of British life. Karim comes to terms with two theatre companies and in the process gets to know new people from completely different backgrounds like the working class Welshman Terry who is an active Trotskyite, or Karim’s lover Eleanor who is upper middle class but pretends to be working class. Karim perceives in the different accents, the different types of English. In the Buddha, Kureishi also demonstrates the bankruptcy of Britain’s traditional images. He shows how the ex-colonialist British become coveted and hated at once for the South Asians. They (the South Asians) are intimidated in the presence of the British but try to prove superior at other occasions. As Karim observes, “Dad had always felt superior to the British: this was the legacy of his Indian childhood — political anger turning into scorn and contempt. For him in India the British were ridiculous, stiff, unconfident, rule bound…They were exhausted now; their Empire was gone and it was our turn” (Kureishi, The Buddha 250).

Hanif Kureishi’s works pose a blatant disposition of gross materialism and sexuality. He describes sex and boisterous life at stretch. This is a conscious expression of frustration and boredom of the second generation protagonists of his novels; they prove inadept adapters to life and fail to face reality. Hence by shirking off their responsibility they get back to their fictitious world. As Karim says, “I was looking for trouble, any kind of movement, action and sexual interest I could find, because things were so gloomy, so slow and heavy…” (Kureishi, The Buddha 3). As P. A. S. Ghuman, the anthropologist observes,
Some young people, through loss of (or a lack of) a sense of coherent identity might choose a negative identity, and engage in anti-social activities such as gang fights, mugging, petty thieving and burglaries. Another important point in Erikson’s theory is that the processes of formation of personal and social identities are complementary—that being ‘at home’ in one’s body, in one’s physical home and in one’s social world all together are the keys to personal and social wellbeing (Ghuman 2).

Like several young people, especially second generation citizens, Kureishi’s protagonists enjoy being free and boundless. The rootlessness for people as Karim, Jamal, and Kureishi himself, is mostly enjoyable and laudable. They pose to love this feeling of being without a home, stability, and security. Fluidity and change form the core of diasporic existence which they enjoy to the fullest extent. However this image is contrasted in Kureishi’s opinion that the sense of progress for the diasporic people has a certain sense of retrogression. As Kureishi mentions, “having been ripped from one world and flung into another, what they also require, to keep everything together, is tradition, habitual ideas, statis. Life in the country you have left may move on, but life in the diaspora is often held in a strange suspension, as if the act of moving has provided too much disturbance as it is” (Kureishi, “Something Given 3).

Another important feature that comes to the fore in Kureishi’s fiction is the different responses of the diasporic people to the different locales in Britain. Britain is not all one colour. The South-Asians migrating to Britain mainly land up in the suburbs and ghettos. Life often proves stifling and the sense of alienation is stronger in the narrow restrictiveness of the places. However when taken to London, the city is much different in tempo and vigour from the suburbs. The diasporic people look towards London as a release from their state of deadlock. This deadlock is created by the confined environment of the suburbs and the ghetto where the key ingredients of a person sought for are nationality, heritage, etc. Kureishi gives to understand that, “…the suburbs are a place where time runs into a dead end in more senses...
than one, while London is a place which permits almost anything to begin and to flower” (Allen 225). The metropolitan is real multicultural. Here several currents and crosscurrents of diverse cultures meet and ‘thousands of blacks’ (Kureishi The Buddha 33) euphorically celebrate their existence. John Clement Ball parallels this shift to the post-colonial migration from the prior colony to the ex-empire:

[The] move from the suburbs to ‘London proper’ becomes a local, miniaturized version of postcolonial migrancy and culture shock—the move from ex-colony to metropolis. This London not only includes ‘the world’ in the sense of peoples, it also replicates within its borders the world’s spatial patterning (Ball, “The Semi-Detached 21).

Hanif Kureishi for this case prefers to name himself a Londoner than a Brit. However this is not a universal phenomenon, as characters differ in their attitude towards London. Shahid, the protagonist of The Black Album encountered mundane poverty and confusion all around in London. Trapped amidst diverse noise and smells of Indian, Chinese, Italian, Greek, every type of food, his senses hardly could stand on a single thing or perceive clearly for a while.

While introducing a London restaurant Riaz, a University student in Britain had announced to Shahid, “[y]ou will really feel at home” (Kureishi, The Black 4). While he is initially baffled at such a remark from Riaz, he comes to understand the suggestion the moment he finds a brass plate on the wall with Koranic verses inscribed on it. This is London with its thousands of cafes, each representing a specific community or national group. However the night clubs, the erotic ambience and the corruption all make him appear intimidated. Jamal too has a similar experience and states: “However much you dislike the country, you drive back into the city on a Sunday night after a weekend away and your heart sinks: the dirt, the roughness, the closeness of everyone and everything, so much so that you can almost believe you like leaving London” (Kureishi Something 210). Clement Ball’s observation reiterates this idea—“postcolonial novels of London all show an awareness of the city’s potential (however
frustratingly unrealized it may be) for productive disorder and intermixture, and for stimulating the imagination to roam in both familiar and ‘previously unthought’ directions” (Ball, *Imagining* 25).

Generational conflict is another recurrent theme in Kureishi’s work. He discriminates between the first generation and the second as he portrays in Haroon Amir, the father of Karim, the megalomaniac Indian, “the legacy of his Indian childhood— political anger turning into scorn and contempt” (Kureishi, *The Buddha* 250). The position of the second generation immigrants however is not addressed by any sense of power or superiority. They may resort to fundamentalism or wage open confrontation with the government, but in that case they are in a much disturbed state deprived of any sense of pride and alignment with any land. Karim feels dispossessed and ashamed for not having that stiffness of personality or courage. The second generation feels inferior to the first generation, for the first generation at least has the promise of the native land at their disposal. Karim laments his pitiable state— “I didn’t want Dad to see me like this, because he wouldn’t be able to understand why I had made such a mess of thing when the conditions had been good, the time so opportune, for advancement” (Kureishi, *The Buddha* 250).

Another point of focus that must necessarily be considered is Kureishi’s stance which seems to a great extent self-elusive. He portrays the characters and speaks of their rootlessness, but there is never any search for roots not even by the first generation characters of his fiction. Kureishi had written in his “The Rainbow Sign” that his father had always been an alien even in his homeland. In his fiction there is neither mythicizing the land nor any longing for home or culture. Kureishi and his protagonists are rooted in British culture but feel themselves denied and their identity negated when they had tried to confirm their identities as necessarily
British. Thus his position is one of a defeated messiah who because he cannot save the world wishes to destroy it instead. On the other hand, though he vents his frustration and pretends to be a sex-maniac, hardly ever is the nature of loss or alienation pronounced. Kureishi’s stance is often interpreted as anti-British but when the gaps in the language are read, what comes out is that he has much to complain of his homeland identity and his frustration is much more of non-acceptance in the host country rather than a longing for the homeland. Though this is a typical phenomenon for most second-generation diasporic subjects, Kureishi’s position is further complicated by his association with his mother, who is British and white. He is at once a diasporic (an outsider) and a British by origin (hence an insider), apart from it being the place of his growing up.

In an Interview in the *New York Times*, Kureishi writes, “I was brought up really as an English child...my father was very Westernized— he wasn’t a practicing Muslim...I wasn’t influenced by Asian culture at all”...and had claimed his father’s family as “anglophile” and “alien even in India” (qtd. Ranasingha 6). He cherishes both the identities even though aligning with one or the other at different times. While diasporic writers like Rushdie and others do not doubt their origin as Asian and never disclaim their indigenous identities, the groups of Kureishi’s kind are not confirmed in their land of origin. Kureishi at times feels a disregard for the hatred of the whites, the separatist mentality of the ethnic communities from the Third World. He writes in the introduction to his *My Beautiful Laundrette*, “‘All whites are devils’ view, was... unacceptable. I had to live in England, in the suburbs of London, with whites. My mother was white. I wasn’t ready for separate development’ (Kureishi, *My Beautiful* 78). But at the very next moment he says, “It is the British, the white British, who have to learn that being British isn’t what it was. Now it is more complex thing involving new elements”
(Kureishi, *My Beautiful* 101-2). Again he remarks with bitter frustration, “who wants to be British anyway?” (Kureishi, *My Beautiful* 100).

Such ideological orientation of the diasporic writers as present in Kureishi makes their writings narratives of contestation. They seek the dual purpose—to cater to the majority communities’ taste that looks for the caricatured images of South Asians on the one hand, and the minority group who wish to know how the rest of the community feels or is sensing their life in this new land. This is of much curiosity to both the residents of the foreign land and to those settled back home, people who have never moved from their place of origin. Susheila Nasta observes, ‘Hanif Kureishi has tended most often to be incorporated by a Western readership as “eroticized” representatives of “otherness” and readily assimilated into the mainstream’ (Nasta 6).

The notion of homeland and hostland is also complicated in Kureishi’s fiction. Haroon in *The Buddha of Suburbia* had grown up in his native India, mocking the British. Now this same Britain that had formed a part of his boyhood and adolescent joke is a serious issue, his homeland and yet not homeland. The joke has turned on him and he now has a British name he had jeered at. He is a joke for the people of his homeland Pakistan or the entire subcontinent for being such a curious British. A British in passport and franchise rights and not the same in sentiments makes him a strange anomaly in nature. Moreover, as Anthony Ilona writes that due to colonial experience, “Haroon’s identification with India is doubly tethered to the sign of India’s perceived Other, the ‘British’. His migration to Britain somehow cannot deny the interactive influence of Britain in the constitution of Indian national identity” (Ilona 99). Amidst these constant shifts, identity faces the greatest crisis in a diasporic life. Identity can be termed as that which gives the being its state and its position in
the world; it is that which defines the self. However this constant changing of the parameters of the identity markers leads to something close to existential crisis. Devoid of stability, attachment to a particular land and a particular national status, existence itself sounds fictitious and life fabricated. To follow suit comes depression, trauma and identity crisis. However the positive aspect of it is not left unexplored. By the end of the novel *The Black Album*, Shahid accepts the fluid, multiple nature of personal identity, opining that 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” (285).

A common characteristic of diasporic writing is angst, rootlessness and a search for meaning. In several of his works Kureishi shows how the migrants at times fail to derive any meaning out of their lives. Their lives appear to be rootless and directionless. Their entire life is given to seeking and this search motif forms an important part of their experience. Karim the protagonist of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, says “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…it’s not enough to say that I was looking for trouble, any kind of movement, action and sexual interest I could find” (Kureishi, *The Buddha 3*). Similar is the case with Shahid in *The Black Album*. As a young British Asian, who had moved to London from Kent for further education, he too looks for a release from this trapped condition and seeks an outlet in sexuality, jingoism and homosexuality. In *Intimacy*, controversial for its resemblance with the author’s life, the protagonist Jay seeks a release from the deadlock that he perceives conjugal bonding has taken him into. He assures his wife as he leaves, “I am not leaving this unhappy Eden only because I dislike it, but because I want to be someone else” (Kureishi *Intimacy* 101). In the novella *Body*, the protagonist rediscovers himself in his body transformed from youth to
old age. In *Something to Tell You*, Jamal Khan, the psychoanalyst, not only tries to get out of his disturbances in interpreting the psychic ailments of his patients but attempts a desperate attack at life in his murder of his beloved Ajita’s father. As Kevin Rabalais quotes Kureishi in his review of Kureishi’s *Something to Tell You*, “Psychoanalysts and writers – or creative writers, as Freud calls writers – are interested in the same things: childhood, sexuality, authority, religion and the everyday. Most serious art of the 20th century has been obsessed with the ideas of Freud. And therapy, in a way, is our culture. If you think of culture itself as being therapeutic, then you get a picture of these two practices, creative writing and psychoanalysis, and see that they run parallel” (Rabalais).

In their search for their true home and identity many characters like their authors choose writing as a kind of therapy or profession. They feel that it is only through their writings that they can bridge the gap caused by this migration. Creative writing is a powerful attempt at altering reality, thereby making reality more powerful than the original state of diasporic life. Though haunted by pangs of the actual reality, the fictitious reality thwarts it to give the diasporics release from this mental prison. Moreover, for Kureishi, “Writing was the future. You can avenge yourself on the world by re-arranging it in a way that suits you” (Hanif Kureishi). He even writes of his father’s inclination towards writing, “Writing provided him with something to look forward to. It gave him meaning and ‘direction,’ as he liked to put it. It gave him direction home too, since he wrote often about India, the country he left in his early twenties and to which he never returned” (Kureishi, “Something Given 1).

However in this context it must be mentioned that the Asians in Britain never considered the profession of a writer good enough for one to pursue after all the hazards of migration and migrant living, ill-paid as it was. The majority of diasporic people had landed up in a foreign
land to make money, acquire huge amount of wealth which was unthought-of living in Asia. Art is considered a frivolous substitute and according to Islam, an inferior mission in life.

When Shahid wishes to take up writing as profession, his parents and friends alike restrict his unprofessional act. “‘These artist types are always poor— how will you look your relatives in the face?’” (Kureishi, *The Black 85*) asks Shahid’s father, upon discovering that his son has been writing fiction. Again, after Shahid tells Chad that he has always loved stories, his friend asks sarcastically, “‘How old are you— eight? Aren’t there millions of serious things to be done?’”(29). This conflict reaches its peak in Shahid’s debate with Riaz over *The Satanic Verses* when, in response to Riaz’s charge that “all fiction is, by its very nature, a form of lying” (193), Shahid zealously claims: “‘Surely literature helps us reflect on our nature. A free imagination... ranges over many natures. A free imagination, looking into itself, illuminates others’” (194). Through different opinions, Kureishi thus confirms creative writing’s role in unravelling the complexities of identity.

In *The Buddha*, Matthew Pyke, the play-actor, elaborates how the creative writer actually brings about one’s encounter with the true self. One is introduced to one’s real self only through his association with the mask, that is his not-self. “To make your not-self real you have to steal from your authentic self... The closer you play yourself the better. Paradox of paradoxes: to be someone else successfully you must be yourself” (Kureishi, *The Buddha* 238). Here is a semblance with the migrant in search of his identity in a diasporic land. In order to know one’s true identity one has to go back to his past culture and heritage. They try to guess the traditional South-Asian concept of home, homeland, nation, nationhood, religion, etc. The diasporic existence makes the migrants much conscious of their identity than considered important by the people living in a fixed place. The diasporic people formulate and reformulate this notion of identity and get obsessed with identity which is fleeting. Karim
observes his Dad bartering his identity—from that of a blasphemer to an Islamic and finally with that of a Buddhist mystic teaching yogic postures. Karim comically observes regarding Haroon, “Christian curses from the mouth of a renegade Muslim masquerading as a Buddhist” (Kureishi, *The Buddha* 16). Diasporic people’s concern with identity and their attempt at grasping this unattainable notion is very similar to a post-structuralist’s obsession with the slippery meaning of words; here the meaning sought for is that of the self. The similarity in both the experience is that of unattainability.

In his novels Kureishi reiterates this identity crisis and how it is further stirred as the process of assimilation takes shape. Assimilation as envisaged in his novels is not only becoming one with the ideals and cultural stigmas of the British life, but a process of negation of one’s cultural marks which one follows as a part of family tradition. Hence in *The Buddha Amar*, the protagonist Karim’s younger brother, becomes Allie, and his friend Jamila turns Jammie forsaking every hint of sub-continental identity. The character is left to calculate how far he can move in negating and omitting his self. Sometimes identification with South Asian identity is forced and not always generated willingly, as in the case of Shahid in *The Black Album* who is constantly coaxed by his friends to take up an Islamic identity, and Jamila, Karim’s friend in *Buddha* who is forced to marry a Pakistani. Anwar forces his daughter by taking to fasting unless she gave in to his wishes of getting wedded off to a Pakistani. Jamila in her turn takes her revenge by denying her Pakistani husband and reducing him to the status of a servant while she kept enjoying with the white men. This assimilation however is mostly an act of feigning. Karim observed in the “dreary suburb of London” that “it was said that when people drowned they saw not their lives but their double-glazing flashing before them” (Kureishi, *The Buddha* 23). One actually craves for a public acceptance through this
assimilation. Despite this, several remain unassimilated and they adopt through their mysticism, that is, by appealing to the popular craze for the same. Kureishi rightly observes,

...identity in London becomes a dynamic, flexible and interactive concept. Playing ‘not me’ is also playing another version of what I am, an easy shifting of the boundaries of identity, playing with the vacillating signs of positive approval and negative stereotype as the route to an elevated sense of self-knowledge and worth (Kureishi, The Buddha 238).

On the other hand, as a common trait among most first generation diasporic individuals, there are also many characters in Kureishi’s fiction who cherish a strong desire for their homeland identity. Karim’s father, Haroon claims, “I have lived in the West for most of my life, and I will die here, yet I remain to all intents and purposes an Indian man. I will never be anything but an Indian” (Kureishi The Buddha 263). Many of these characters feel the need to uphold the sanctity of culture not only for themselves, but for their children as well. There are even several occasions when culture is upheld for the purpose of saving a community identity.

However in an attempt at being a representative, the migrant loses his sanctity as an individual. Kureishi revolts against this standing up for the community as he protests, “But then I don’t pretend to be a spokesman for the Asian community, and they shouldn’t expect me to do PR for them, any more than you’d expect Neil Jordan to do PR for the Irish community” (Root 333).

However diasporic writers usually assert their group identity, exposing their self, culture, heritage. Though Kureishi emphasizes his individual stance and shows himself not willing to stand in solidarity with the community, and he is not an exception. However he never blatantly exposes them, for he speaks mainly of the second generation diasporic group who are to an extent assimilated, and the settings in most of his novels are all West. His characters (even when they are first generation) can rarely be seen following Pakistani cultural totems,
performing namaz, celebrating Eid or clinging to strictly Pakistani identity. Characters like Anwar in *The Buddha* are but few exceptions – Karim mentions, “It was certainly bizarre, Uncle Anwar behaving like a Muslim” (Kureishi, *The Buddha* 64). Still he (Karim) curiously observes how these people refused to return to their homelands:

> Now, as they aged and seemed settled here, Anwar and Dad appeared to be returning internally to India, or at least to be resisting the English here. It was puzzling: neither of them expressed any desire actually to see their origins again. ‘India’s a rotten place,’ Anwar grumbled. ‘Why would I want to go there again? It’s filthy and hot and it’s a big pain-in-the-arse to get anything done. If I went anywhere it would be to Florida and Las Vegas for gambling (Kureishi, *The Buddha* 64).

The assertion in the face of outside pressures sniffs of reactionary movement by the post-colonials against the imperialists. In the diasporic writers asserting through their art/performance they are the “empire” but an empire not at war, not grim in its hatred but one longing to be accepted, waiting amidst dual response of love and hate. While in the post-colonial phase the writer strikes back, in the diasporic phase they reveal an urge to create a space for themselves in the empire. This is akin to Bhabha’s third space of enunciation. However these two phases merge and overlap at times.

Kureishi’s characters embody the painful experience of denying their identity which becomes necessary in the diasporic context. He also speaks of his own experience, “From the start I tried to deny my Pakistani self. I was ashamed. It was a curse and I wanted to be like everyone else […]. I reckoned that at least once everyday since I was five years old I had been racially abused” (Kureishi, “The Rainbow” 73, 76). Likewise Kureishi reveals in his novels that in a dire attempt at being one with the world the diasporic people play hide and seek with their self. This juggling with the self creates a lot of anxiety and a sense of self-betrayal. The subjects feel deprived of the freedom to possess their own identity for they feel that their sub-
continental heritage proves the greatest barrier in their progress. For instance, Karim writes of his experience, “enjoying the fighting at Millwall Football Ground, where I forced Changez to wear a bobble-hat over his face in case the lads saw he was a Paki and imagined I was one too” (Kureishi, *The Buddha* 98). Next to it come divided identities, rifts, double selves and above all failure to reach an identity. Anthony Ilona emphasizes on this dual identity when he states, “Set against this comparative motivation in the discourses of nationhood, found both in England and in Pakistan, is Kureishi’s realization that neither Britain nor Pakistan is a satisfactory locus of identification, ‘I couldn’t rightfully lay claim to either place’” (Ilona 98).

Unlike Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi hardly ever turns back to his homeland in terms of memory. He is no outright exception for in most cases the second generation writers hardly ever go back to reminiscences. This of course is because they hardly possess any memory to share. The case is similar with Meera Syal. Just as in her novel *Anita and Me* people from the homeland like Nanima encompassing India in her Hindi, her fables and adoration, sprout from nowhere bringing a gush of India, similarly in Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* the arrival of the ineffectual Changez, Jamila’s so-called husband, imported from Pakistan comes as a totem of Pakistan-ness or Indianness. But while grandma soothes and comforts Meena’s psyche, Changez proves irresistible to Jamila. However in both the cases the unseen and never seen land comes alive in the life of the characters. They ultimately fail to evade the homeland, whether they long for or deny the same. Characters as Nanima and Changez are portrayed as consistent, loyal and upholding their duties of caring for the betterment of the people. Changez is nonetheless deviated, but never deters from his mission of caring for his wife. On the contrary, Jamila is what the West has done to Pakistan.
Though Kureishi’s protagonists are male, they do not stand erect in their supremacy. The clumsy stature, fatty and comical caricature of Dad is the only kind of Asian who is gladly accepted into a British society, i.e. as an outsider. Kureishi has no other alternative to project any other Asian British in his work. Haroon or Anwar, Changez or Karim, somehow lack the strength of character and personality. Individuality is hardly stressed and the same projected is not always for the physical shift or mental rift, but come in as Kureishi’s obsession with partially British characters. While Haroon takes to Eva to escape the thrall of his wife; Eva, turns him to a mystic. The misogynistic portrayal of Susan in *Intimacy* gives Jay, the husband the heightened position of a superior in society. However, here both race and gender are politicized in Kureishi’s representation. It can also be said that Kureishi willingly misrepresents the Asians by not looking back to the country of origin. Almost none of his characters show perfect assimilation. This dichotomy in Kureishi is what makes a diasporic writer’s standing enigmatic to the readers.

It seems that for the white European, Kureishi has to offer trouble-seeking characters as sex-crazy, Asians; as erotic youth of uneven mental make-up as a projection of the Asian British psyche. The ethnic community group feels satisfied at the delineation of Karim as angstridden and suffering, and as one whose central concern is his family. Kureishi here contrasts the varying stances taken up by the Brit-Asian, thereby questioning their real identity. This attitude is similar to what R. Radhakrishnan asks in terms of Americanization,

> When someone speaks as Asian-American, who is exactly speaking? If we dwell in the hyphen who represents the hyphen: the Asian or the American, or can the hyphen speak for itself without creating an imbalance between the Asian and American components ... which has the power and the potential to read and interpret the other on its own terms? If the Asian is to be Americanized, will the American submit to Asianization? (Radhakrishnan 31).
As has already been mentioned before, as a second-generation diasporic writer Kureishi’s portrayal of the homeland is hardly substantial. The characters ensonce a critical attitude towards the homeland. Kureishi is however too detached and acts like an outsider. While speaking of India, before the days of partition, Karim speaks of his Dad’s experiences — the stance is just critical. “There were constant riots and demonstrations and Hindu-Muslim fighting. You’d find your Hindu friends and neighbours chanting obscenities outside your house” (Kureishi, The Buddha 23). The question regarding Kureishi’s representation that often comes to the readers is proposed by one of Karim’s friends and co-actors, Eleanor, who elucidates—

Your picture is what white people already think of us. That we’re funny, with strange habits and weird customs. To the white man we’re already people without humanity, and then you go and have Anwar madly waving his stick at the white boys... You show us as unorganized aggressors. Why do you hate yourself and all black people so much, Karim?’ (Kureishi, The Buddha 180).

Similarly Shahid in The Black realizes that though he had turned up in Britain from “Lahore. Originally” (Kureishi, The Black 6), the “originally” was the biggest thing for he had been here only when he was fourteen years old and “his accent was certainly a compound of both places, which explained why he sounded like a cross between J. B. Priestley and Zia Al Haq” (6). Shahid thus comes as a subdued new British. Thus Kureishi confirms that his characters are not of the type of those longing for the homeland. On the contrary, as Amina in the Outskirts, says, “I belong here. There’s work to be done. To make England habitable” (Kureishi, Outskirts 158), the characters of the fiction too feel for the host country. He further writes in the “Rainbow Sign,” “Strangely, anti-British remarks made me feel patriotic when I was away from England...But I couldn’t allow myself to feel too Pakistani.” (Kureishi, “The Rainbow 33-34). Then suddenly he takes a U-turn as Jamal in Something to Tell You feels:

Being with Dad in Pakistan, catastrophic and depressing as it had been in many ways, had instilled something like a public-school ethos in me. The sense of
Kureishi’s depiction of Uncle Asif too taunts the British, ‘Your country’s gone to the wogs!’
(Kureishi, The Black 6).

Though Kureishi sprouts rampant conflicts, he however sums up every dichotomy between the groups as he brings in comments from Ajita’s Dad or that of Zulma in Something to Tell You. Mustaq, Ajita’s brother claims of their father that “he wasn’t religious and never prayed. He’d have despised those mad mullahs and extreme Islam fascist wallahs” (190) but he “hated the whites” (190) and “One day, according to Father, we’d be free of anxiety, because we’d be rich. Before then he had no time for anything else, for sport, culture, nature— love, even” (191-2). The upper class woman, Zulma, to an extent resolves the conflict as she realizes, “She might imagine she was an intelligent, upper class woman, but to them she’d always be a Paki and liable to be patronized. She appreciated the truth of this, but it was a colonial residue— the new money knew no colour” (Kureishi, The Black 87).

Thus Hanif Kureishi’s stance vis-à-vis the diasporic predicament remains one of the most complex for though he appears to be a spokesperson for the Asian community in Britain, his stance has often been interpreted as a politicized stance for he is both an insider and an outsider in both the communities and is critical of both, alternately. Moreover he poses as the marginalized subject and privileged member of the First World country at the same time. For his unique positioning and representative tone he is taken as the brand name among diasporic writers. Having elaborately dealt with Kureishi’s works, the next section would make a detailed analysis of Nadeem Aslam’s works and his views.
III. Nadeem Aslam and His Novels of Nostalgia

This section will now examine the Pakistani-British predicament as manifested in the writings of a much younger diasporic writer than Kureishi. As a first generation writer, born of Pakistani parents, Nadeem Aslam (1966—) longs back for the days he was in Pakistan. His works show a remarkable difference from that of Hanif Kureishi. Unlike Kureishi, who is a second generation diasporic and much more confirmed in his British identity by dint of his mother’s nationality, Aslam is a first generation writer who had come to England at the age of fourteen. Aslam had migrated with his family, and had settled in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire in England; when his father, a Communist, fled Zia’s regime. He currently lives in north London. Like most first generation immigrants, Aslam’s works reveal nostalgia and a deep sense of longing for the homeland he’s left behind. His debut novel *Season of the Rainbirds* (1993) speaks of the Pakistani community in the homeland. On the contrary, his next novel *Maps for Lost Lovers* (2004) focuses entirely on the Pakistani community in Britain and on their turmoils and upheavals of life. His next novel *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) also focuses on similar issues of angst, and a sense of waste coming in, though it doesn’t concern the Pakistani diasporic group. Thus throughout his brief oeuvre, nostalgia creeps in corrupting the lives already tainted by diasporic rifts and disruptions.

Aslam’s first novel *Season of the Rainbirds* (1993), is a simple story of a confined Pakistani community with earthen characters as Mujeeb Ali, the local landowner; Nabila Ali, Mujeeb Ali’s wife and the “mother of his five daughters” (Aslam, *Season* viii); Arshad Ali, Mujeeb
Ali’s youngest brother; Yusuf Rao, lawyer and former political activist, et al, all of whom are steeped in true local colour. The sisters of the locality, one a widow Kalsum, receiving pension from Mujeeb Ali for the death of her son in a political rally, and the other Suraya, on visit from Canada seeking divorce from her husband Burkat, link up the story at home and bring in news of the outer world. Narratives come together from every quarter bringing different perspectives of looking into life. The slave girl’s narrative coalesce with the anonymous narrator creating an intricate maze of incidents made livid by such characters as Mr Kasmi, the retired schoolmaster; Benjamin Massih, the roadsweeper and father of Elizabeth Massih, Azhar’s Christian mistress; Zafri, the butcher; Zebun, the ex-courtesan; Alice, her Christian servant girl; Gul-kalam the night-watchman, and so on. Season speaks mainly of homeland society and the reason is quite obvious. For all debut novels the diasporic writer is usually autobiographical or writes about a region that he is already thoroughly conversant with. It takes years of experience in the host culture to write about it, and hence most first generation diasporic writers stick to the homeland setting. Seasons, steeped in deep gloom and silence of Aslam’s native homeland, is also reminiscent of his fascination for the dark silent life devoid of thrill— “I always think of the silence and the darkness of a root that enables the flower to grow” (Brace). Contrastingly, Maps is fraught with diasporic enigma.

Maps for Lost Lovers (2004) is about a Pakistani community in Britain, most of the members of which belong to the working class though the protagonist Shamas is an intellectual. Written in the trend of the Asian assimilation novel, it plumbs into the complex quarters of the human heart and the further complicated nexus of assimilation-acculturation, etc. and acceptance into the land. It is seen through the eyes of a middle aged conservative woman, Kaukab who came to England with her husband. The novel tracks the mental plight of a lady who senses filth all around in the stale smell of beer and finds that degeneration had taken its toll on all the male
members of her family; and her daughter, her lone female companion is not far from corruption. Trapped in a subtle nexus of sin both inward and outward, she is racked between the agonies of her life in being unknowingly married to a man who had a Hindu father; and her sons’ as well as her brother-in-law’s liaison with white women. Coming from a conservative background where the popular curse goes ‘may your son marry a white woman,’ Kaukab is tormented beyond belief. These traumas, interspersed with the ailments of menopause and mid-life crisis leave her alienated; the alienation which she unconsciously connects with her new life in the West. The storyline is set around the disappearance of an unmarried couple Jugnu, Kaukab’s brother-in-law and Chanda who are assumed to be living in sin. The brothers are suspected of honour killing and taken in custody. The popular sentiments of the community come to the fore in the graffiti scrawled on Jugnu’s house—

“They lived the life of sin and died the death of sinners and They have been burning in the Fire now for over six months but remember that Eternity minus six months is still Eternity” (Aslam, Maps 102).

Aslam’s most recent, The Wasted Vigil (2008) deals with complex issues concerning Afghanistan, but unlike his previous novels doesn’t focus on South Asian British diasporic community, nor does it have a Pakistani character. The novel is set in the Soviet Union, America and Afghanistan and explores the CIA’s involvement in third-world affairs. The story is set in recent times though it begins from over twenty years before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Marcus, an English doctor who had married a forward thinking Afghan woman, is trapped inside his once-happy home by the memories of his family. Although there is nothing really left in his home except gloom, Marcus won’t leave without any information of his daughter Zameen’s long lost son. Marcus takes in several emotional refugees into his home, including the Soviet born Lara, who searches for her soldier brother, disappeared; and
Zameen’s American lover, David. In time the little family embraces Casa, a jihadist who hides out with them out of fear that his own organization wants to kill him. David hides from Marcus and Lara the truth about Zameen, her death, and her connection with Lara’s missing brother. The story shows the atrocities of the Taliban regime and the extreme effects of fundamentalism.

As mentioned earlier, Nadeem Aslam’s novels are strikingly different from those of Kureishi and reveal a difference in outlook. Pakistan had not only been his land of origin, but the land of his childhood fancies, and at present the land of his desire and nostalgia. Kureishi had never set his novels in Pakistan. On the other hand, the three novels of Aslam are set in three different locales. The first Season of the Rainbirds has nothing conspicuous about diaspora or diasporic sensibility. It becomes apparent that for a first generation diasporic writer, the first pattern that comes out is that of the homeland. Of the eight writers that have been chosen for this study, the five first generation writers are Ambalavaner Sivanandan, Romesh Gunesekera, Sunetra Gupta, Nadeem Aslam, and Monica Ali. Among them, the first three writers composed their debut novels in a homeland setting, and in Ali’s debut novel, the homeland comes in phases. The second generation writers generally tend to set their novels in their present land of stay. The characters are mostly hybrid and they talk of their land of origin in stray comments, in letters and through such gestures. The only exception is Tahmima Anam’s A Golden Age. Though its writer is a second generation diasporic individual, the novel is rooted in the history of the freedom struggle of Bangladesh.

Aslam’s works focus on several issues at random. He masterfully creates an aura of Pakistani norms and culture all around, with a view of projecting the community. Unlike Kureishi, whose stance is highly politicized, Aslam is intent on establishing the community and
studying its moves. The characters in his fiction are brought in with conscious effort and each is a mouthpiece for some or the other virtue, vice or some feeling or emotion. While Azhar in *Season* stands for exploitation, the clerics represent the different versions of Islam as observed by the people of the homeland. The sisters Kalsum and Suraya are living portraits of the plight of Islamic women whether in the homeland or elsewhere in the diaspora; for Kalsum had lost her son in the political feud in Pakistan, whereas Suraya had been divorced by her husband who was staying in Canada.

This focus on women characters and their plight is also found in *Maps*. In this novel Kaukab stands for orthodox religion and confirmed faith in Islam in spite of every odd that comes her way. She is totally against assimilation. Mah-Jabin, the daughter ruined by an unequal marriage at the age of sixteen with her cousin, explodes the strict codes of Islam and the rigidities put up for her by her mother. The men too are not far from their kind of plight. Shamas, the male protagonist, goes against the religious orthodoxies, and though he suffers inwardly as his past love for his wife fails to provide succor in this new ambience, he at least has the consolation of a higher position in the community. Jugnu and Chanda are killed, but their spectres lurk. As Jugnu’s hands had glowed, the glow continues in Chanda’s protruding belly. They refuse to go with their death. Kiran, another character, waits throughout her life for the consummation, which she gets only at the cost of the ruin of the lovers. Though she is bodily united with Kaukab’s brother, her past lover, their liaison had flared up Chotta, Chanda’s younger brother (and her present lover), who in turn had unleashed his rage on Chanda and Jugnu.

In Kureishi’s fiction the protagonists are all male and the women hardly share enough space with them. In the all male world the woman is either Mum (anonymous) in *Buddha* shouting...
at the South Asian husband’s inefficacy; Susan, in *Intimacy* curbing the free spirit of her husband Jay; or Deedee, the white teacher and sexual partner of Shahid in *The Black Album*, without any significant voice. Contrastingly, Aslam’s world is fraught with women and their lives are steeped in pain. Their reactions have been observed from various quarters and most importantly the focus is on the women’s psyche. The women characters projected in Aslam’s novels chart failure at more than one level. Their sufferings, despair and disturbances are not their own but tinged by the experiences of their families. Their defeats are layered by the defeats of their husbands and children, which persist under any circumstance. In *Season*, while Kalsum laments the death of the son; Suraya is defeated by the plight of her husband in Canada. On the other hand, in *Maps* Kaukab’s torments, apart from being her religious qualms, are nonetheless tinged by the divorce of her elder son, the frustration of the younger, the angst of loveless life of her husband and the disappearance of her brother-in-law. However apart from the *Season*, where portions of narration are given to the slave girl, the women do not narrate their own story, but is interpreted by the omniscient narrator. Typical feminine experiences like menstruation reiterate in his novels and Aslam seems preoccupied with the women’s subtle feelings.

An interesting point to note in this regard is that neither Nadeem Aslam nor Hanif Kureishi, however gets over the traditional portraiture of Asian women. Kaukab in *Maps* is outrightly projected as a stereotype, a South Asian Muslim woman who defies the slightest attempt at assimilation into the British culture. The portraiture of Asian femalehood is politicized, for though the diasporic writers in most cases appear to write back, they at times write for the British, satisfying British tastes in a way which at times goes against the community or the individual as well. Avtar Brah endorses this idea when she states: “Asian feminism is one of the most creative and vigorous forces with contemporary black politics in Britain. It draws
upon the political traditions of women and men in the sub-continent, but its identity is indelibly composed within the British social and political dynamic” (Brah 83).

Like most diasporic writers, Aslam is concerned with the multifarious disturbances of an immigrant’s life. The three novels mark a step by step ascension. The author doesn’t focus on any one particular aspect. In the first novel he is the insider as he concentrates on the homeland; the outsider in the second for he looks at Britain as a Pakistani- British diasporic; and he becomes a global citizen concerned with the recent concerns of the world, as Afghanistan in his latest novel, *The Wasted Vigil*. However though he claims to be a non-believer, his fascination is undeniably, Islam. He perceives religion and religious bigotry at the roots of the crisis of the Islamic group in the West. Aslam’s concern becomes apparent as he comments on the 9/11:

*Maps for Lost Lovers* is set in 1997, but it’s about 9/11. I remember looking at the planes going into the towers and thinking: There is my novel, on the screen. Chanda and Jugnu are the 9/11 of this book in that violence was done to them in the name of religion, but it wasn’t religion at all: it was hundreds of different things. There were so many reasons why Chanda’s brothers did what they did. I didn’t set out to write a relevant book. I was worried that nobody would understand it. As a writer, as an artist, as a human being, one has a duty to explore one’s place in the world and try to bring news to the rest of the world. If you come from places like Pakistan, and if you keep an eye on them, you are aware of the good, and also the bad. And hopefully, if you are looking at the thing honestly enough, and diligently enough, and intelligently enough, you are able to identify those things, and then as an artist, bring them into the work that you are trying to do (Aslam, *Interview*).

Aslam speaks of the disturbances in the foreign land, the binding to assimilate yet without the proper scope for the same; the discrimination, the inconveniences and the different adjustments that the immigrants have to make, from the trivial to the grave. While a woman in Kaukab’s neighbourhood discusses how a woman Ateeka had been fondled and hand-cuffed for wearing head-to-toe veil, and fears that, “it would soon be a hanging offence to be a
Muslim anywhere in the world” (Aslam, Maps 107); Chanda’s mother warns Shamas against returning at odd hours in the night for “[a]nything could happen: you should remember that this isn’t our country” (79). The omniscient narrator in Maps even marks how immigration laws came into being when the gradually accommodative West suddenly felt the alarm as by the 1970s “the immigrant families had to live somewhere and were moving in next door to the whites” (Aslam, Maps 11).

Aslam’s version shows no dichotomy regarding his sympathy for the Pakistani community and for the mass of dispossessed and deprived. He restricts his concern to the people of his community and confesses to Michael O’Connor— “England is not absent from my novel— only the WHITE England is absent” (O’Connor). However his stance is not anti-British, rather he can see through the frailties and guiles of his own land. He unravels the bitter experience of the people even in the homeland and never deters from stating the stark reality.

The subjects admit the problems and the lack of infrastructure but certainly not before their British counterparts. Before them it is only the stories of Sohni Dharti which comes out of the conversation. When it comes to discussion behind closed doors amidst people brought from the homeland, they discuss the torments that had forced them to look for home in the outer world. The conversation between the two sisters Kalsum and Suraya, show how life in the diaspora create ripples in the lives of the individuals and in the lives of the home country, evoking feelings and sentiments alternately for the homeland and hostland:

‘Flowers in winter,’ Suraya said quietly. ‘When I left for England I thought I’d never see flowers again. I hadn’t seen many flowers in winter here and I knew that England was a very cold country.’ ‘There are flowers in those countries but you still dream of the place you come from.’

‘It’s easy to dream when your stomach is full,’ Kalsum said. ‘Don’t forget you left this country because you didn’t have anything to eat here. It didn’t seem very pretty then? Did it?’ (Aslam, Season 143).
In his novels Aslam’s characters always lament the simple truths of the homeland such as the skipping of the monsoon in British cycle of seasons, "among the innumerable other losses, to come to England was to lose a season, because, in the part of Pakistan that he is from, there are five seasons in a year, not four” (Aslam *Maps* 5). Monsoon in the South-Asian countries is not merely the season of rain but brings along memories and aspirations of love and longing. Along with monsoon is lost not only the freshness, vigour and liveliness, but the joy of living and life itself in its thousand manifestations. Aslam pathetically observes that the hand “stretched in the flakes’ path is a hand asking back a season now lost.” As the omniscient narrator in *Maps* recalls:

Pakistan is a poor country, a harsh and disastrously unjust land, its history a book full of sad stories, and life is a trial if not a punishment for most of the people born there: millions of its sons and daughters have managed to find footholds all around the globe in their search for livelihood and a semblance of dignity. Roaming the planet looking for solace, they’ve settled in small towns that make them feel smaller still, and in cities that have tall buildings and even taller loneliness (Aslam, *Maps* 9).

While speaking of the home world in *Season*, Aslam too shows how even in the close-confined society in Pakistan migration and immigration form an integral part of the people’s lives.

Aslam also shows how diasporic life proceeds through a series of loss and lamentation. The diasporic subject constantly conjures up the memories of home and the homeland. The lost traces of the land and experience return as a relic in the mind, consoling the soul. With the passage of time the details of the homeland dwindle even in the mind. Losing the remains they feel themselves cornered; and to avoid this loss they revivify the memories consciously and reinvoke the places. As the narrator in *Maps* observes, “As in Lahore, a road in this town is named after Goethe. There is a Park Street here as in Calcutta, a Malabar Hill as in Bombay, and a Naag Tolla as in Dhaka. Because it was difficult to pronounce the English
names, the men who arrived in this town in the 1950s had rechristened everything” (Aslam, *Maps* 28-9).

**In Maps for Lost Lovers** the author also brings in several controversial issues. The South Asians’ struggle to bypass the strictures of immigration rules is one of the predominant issues. In the face of grim immigration rules the immigrants resort to illegal practices. Nephews, brothers and relatives are introduced as family members. They also try and get married to the British on contractual terms and then do away with these unwanted relationships. Aslam cites several issues of illegal immigration. He mentions an American woman for whom it had become a trade “to marry illegal immigrants and divorce them after they had been granted legal status” (Aslam, *Maps* 27). These illegal acts at times resulted in further complexities.

Apart from nostalgia and illegal immigration, in his novels Aslam also mentions how new bondings are forged simply out of economic reasons. Whichever nation they belonged to, the diasporic subjects of the same financial condition or class meted the same fortune in the host country. The poverty-stricken immigrants were forced to pack up ten or more in a room and live in plight. However, with the passage of time, conditions improved. Compared to the dire condition in the homeland where they were plagued by the dearth of money or scope, things proved better in the new land except for the feeling of alienation. For Aslam’s characters this new land of Britain is not detestable. It is rather a space for opportunity for the considerate characters as Shamas, who has risen to prospects; Mah-Jabin, who had been released from her brutal husband in Pakistan; and Chanda and Jugnu, who had found their space in this hospitable land but for the hostility of their own people. However the other side reveals characters as Kaukab who relentlessly criticize the West as an embodiment of evil and the
seat of moral corruption. Nothing would change Kaukab and the changes in the locale would only increase her sense of alienation.

Language and communication are two significant tropes used by the diasporic writers to signify both alienation and acculturation. The greatest form of alienation in a new land and environment is posed by the loss of a tongue. One cannot express his/herself and this creates a rupture at the psychological level. When her parents meet Chanda’s brothers in prison, they are allowed to speak to them in no other language than English to avoid any chances of further conspiracy. The mother fails to tell what she had been preparing to tell in an alien language, and thus communication fails. Language moves along the heart’s line and it is that which enlivens life. As Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak in her “The Politics of Translation” writes, “…language may be one of the many elements that allow us to make sense of things, of ourselves. I am thinking, of course, of gestures, pauses, but also of chance, of sub-individual force-fields of being which click into place in different situations…” (Spivak 397).

This issue of language recurs over and again in all Aslam’s novels. Language spoken differently speaks different language of the heart too. Expressions thus seem to change in the new land. As Kaukab observed, “[I]n England the heart said boom boom instead of dhak dhak, a gun said bang! Instead of thah! ; things fell with a ‘thud’, not a dharam; small bells said ‘jingle’ instead of chaan-chaan; the trains said ‘choo choo’ instead of chuk chuk…” (Aslam, Maps 35).

The communication established through food as a device to track the memories of the past comes as another predominant diasporic phenomenon. Kaukab, for whom life in Britain is a veritable prison, a suffering for all her life’s sin, feels she could make for the loss, bridge the gap between this land and that through the pool of food peculiar to her land—
Bamboo tubes pickled to tartness in linseed oil, slimy edoes that glued the fingers together as you ate them, naan bread shaped like ballet slippers, poppy seeds that were coarser than sand grains but still managed to shift like a dune when the jar was tilted, dry pomegranate seeds to be patted onto potato cakes like stones in a brooch, edible petals of courgette flowers packed inside the buds like amber scarves in green rucksacks, chilly seeds that were volts of electricity… (Aslam, Maps 31).

Food connected to the old land is thought to be close to a talisman, a memento which brought back the charisma of the long-forsaken homeland. It is in a way a compensation for the long lost land, a kind of consolation to the big losses. Food connects the entire world making a global hub. South Asian food mesmerizes the entire world and to whichever corner of the world a South Asian may travel, he is not very far from his food. As Azhar, in the Season admits, “‘I agree with Imran Khan,’ he had often said, ‘the best food in the world is sold on the footpaths of Lahore.’” (Aslam, Season 103).

Aslam resembles Kureishi in his concern for the Islamic community and the community’s encounter with the changing meanings of Islam in the new context. In Season of the Rainbirds Aslam speaks mainly of the Islamic culture, the intricacies, the discrimination in the religion and the subtleties and superstitions which form the Islamic community in Pakistan. To some the forsaking of the land of one’s birth is a sign of betrayal. This shift is also laden with religious consequences and acquires a graver tinge of sin. Like Kureishi, Aslam foresees the awkward notions with which a native of the subcontinent arrives in the west. Kalsum and Suraya meditate upon the pre-conceived notions with which Burkat, Suraya’s husband landed in Canada to meet his ruin:

“I remember just after you were married,’ Kalsum said. ‘Burkat said he’d leave for England soon. Everybody was going in those days. He said he would make lots of money. ‘It’s a rich country, England is, sister-in-law,” he said.”

Suraya smiled painfully. ‘He ended up in Canada, in a restaurant, washing dishes like a woman.’
‘When he left he said the first thing he was going to do on reaching England was to employ a gora to clean his shoes. It was to be his revenge for the hundred and fifty years of their raj.’ (Aslam, Season 143).

Aslam nonetheless mocks the Pakistani’s vaunting of the sanctity of his culture and heritage. The proud harping upon morality and the taboos of past culture shows futile as the mind takes new turn when encountering a new land along with its ideals. The past culture which was the greater part of the immigrant’s concern once upon a time is kept aside as a meaningless appendage when necessity demands. However the hangover remains, and cryptic interpretations of the past culture are made to suit the tastes and meet the desires of these immigrants fighting for survival in a new land. As Suraya discusses her husband with Maulana Hafeez regarding his second marriage, she recalls her husband saying, “a Muslim man is allowed four wives. He wants a Canadian divorce from me so he can marry again in that country. He says in the eyes of Allah we’d still be married since our Muslim marriage is not affected by the Canadian divorce”’ (Aslam, Season 82). Aslam gives to understand that culture, religion, heritage, are some of the most impalpable terms whose meanings shift and the signified shift with lands and situation. The diasporic subjects counter their loneliness by keeping up the sanctity of their culture and religion in the new land. As an atheist Aslam questions how far the very attempt of keeping the norms of culture and religion intact is possible in the face of compelling circumstances. The clerics do not lose their hold on the community amidst the inhibitions of foreign land. The restrictions which had proved too caustic in the homeland extend its tentacles in this new land as well. However in the face of an inward urge to associate with the British and get accustomed to their ways of life, and on the other hand, an outward force posed by these clerics, the diasporic subjects face a tough time. Aslam speaks of a Pakistani immigrant living
in Norway who when inquired a cleric whether he could take small draughts of “whisky” or
“vodka” was reprimanded saying, “Allah was perfectly aware of the climate of Norway when
he forbade humans from drinking alcohol” (Aslam, Maps 9). Instead he advised the person to
carry a basket of burning maple leaves “under his overcoat the way the good Muslims of
freezing Kashmir do to keep themselves warm.” The restrictions and inhibitions which had
sounded like god’s words sound funny or the seriousness is somewhat lacking when
encountered under altered conditions. Asking a Norwegian to carry a kangri as in Kashmir
does certainly sound ridiculous. What comes up as a result of this is the failure of religion as a
meaningless system or a code of rules.

Aslam sets his debut novel Seasons in Pakistan but like most diasporic writers he is not far
from the sense of exile. As the narrator states: “After the Partition, Hindus had emigrated to
India and Muslims coming in the other direction to replace them— to settle in the new
homeland — ” (Aslam, Season 11), we at once understand that to face exile one need not go
very far. Several instances of the days of Partition, the communalism, the clash between
countries and states, the superstitations and religious tensions all come up throughout the novels
revealing Aslam’s critical point of view. Aslam represents the Muslim community settled in
and out of Pakistan and though the picturization does not pose apparent comparison between
this land and England, the delineation of the superstition, the poverty and stultifying
environment in the Pakistani conclave show the need for traveling abroad. One is forced to
shift and poverty acts as the most compelling force. However when in the foreign land, the
crisis emerges from other directions. Though the home is Sohni Dharti, the glorious world,
and the abode in Britain is “Dasht-e-Tanhaii / The Wilderness of Solitude / The Desert of
Loneliness” (Aslam, Maps 29); the suffering of the mass is extended to all quarters. Aslam’s
projection of Britain in Maps is very much a reflection of the manners and mores, the travails
and adjustments that the people of the South Asian community have to take up. As James Procter observes in Contemporary Writers.com’s note on Nadeem Aslam, “Through the synaesthetic description, a sensual, spiritual landscape emerges, and England is effectively orientalised. It is all achieved without the now familiar hybridity associated with certain migrant writers” (Procter).

It must be further added that it is not only the bias of the native British which stands in the face of assimilation, but the Pakistanis too consider the Europeans inferior, and prevent assimilation through conjugal ties. They feel the need to prevent their teenaged sons and daughters from associating with the whites. In almost every South Asian community the marriage between an Asian and a white is considered contemptible. For some it is a sin, evoking vengeful ire of god. In Maps Shamas introduces his grandchild, son of his eldest son Charag and his British wife as “half Pakistani and half er…er…er…human” (Aslam, Maps 10), to conceal the fact of his son’s alignment with the white community. The parents take the upper hand and dismiss the relationship in case of an interracial marriage, for it is taken to be an anomaly in nature. Consequently, girls are treated much brutally than boys. They are thought at times to have been possessed by djinns for behaving in an unruly manner, in case of a girl’s relationship with a white boy. They are forcefully married off to friends and relations back in their native places, whether Pakistan or Punjab, and mostly with relatives as first cousins; and honour killing is no new phenomenon.

As a novelist of Third World origin in the First World, Aslam takes a dubious stance as to his role as the authentic commentator and observes critically while moving through different planes. Like Kureishi he too denies the responsibility of representing his South Asian community as quoted by Marianne Brace in The Independent:
Is Aslam apprehensive about how the Muslim community will receive his novel? He shakes his head. “Writers have always got into trouble with people who think they know the answer.” He adds that “there’s no message in my books. My writing is my way of exploring my own life and the workings of my own consciousness” (Brace).

However it needs to be mentioned in this regard that in both the Pakistani writers, representation of the community cannot be claimed as outrightly original. Stuart Hall’s analysis of the difference between the position of the diasporic writer who has the voice and the community which is represented can be applied to these two writers’ works in general: ‘What recent theories of enunciation suggest is that, though we speak, so to say “in our own name,” of ourselves and from our own experience, nevertheless who speaks, and the subject who is spoken of, are never identical; never exactly in the same place’ (Hall 234).

Further, when questioned about his affinities to the British culture Aslam states, “I shifted to London when I was 13, and I am constantly being asked the questions regarding my nationality. If you were to ask me, as a writer my nationality is confined to my desk where I sit and write, no place else matters” (Khan). He curiously clarifies the point of departure from his parents and attempts a gross simplification of the cause for the difference between the first and second generation diasporic people. “Even after living in England for so many years, they discuss the weather by saying, ‘It’s quite cold here today, I wonder what it must be like there’ — the ‘there’ being Pakistan. And I can understand why that is. It’s much easier for me – I had my parents with me, in England. But they had left their parents behind, and that made such a difference to how they felt about life in the new place” (Khan).

Having delved into the diverse ways of looking into the meanings of Pakistani and Islamic identity, the chapter has further studied the new ways of looking into Islam by the people of the Pakistani British diaspora. In this chapter a specific account has been given of the turmoils
and travails that the male and female characters in both Hanif Kureishi and Nadeem Aslam’s novels face though with a difference in outlook. The positioning of the authors, the politicized projection of the community’s status and other factors like the influx of money which cures imbalance, have been studied. The forthcoming chapters will deal with similar issues evident in the texts of the authors of Sri Lankan and Bangladeshi origin.
Works Cited


