



RESEARCH PAPER

Hybridity in Hanif Kureishi's Fiction

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ABSTRACT

Study examines hybridity from the viewpoint of post-colonial intelligentsias who are orient geo-biographically. The narratives of Hanif Kureishi would be critically analyzed with the significant post-colonial theories of Robert Young and Homi K. Bhabha. The ones born with the colonial legacy of hybrid in the culturally constructed identities of Britain had to strive hard for social recognition. Kureishi's biracial protagonists often felt themselves displaced amongst dominant white Western. Children born to the Asian immigrants in Britain often developed the split in their personalities. The different color of Asian skin rendered them perceptible in White Western society irrespective of their social achievements. White Britain enjoys authority over hybrid or black Britain's. Experiences of the colonial immigrants are critically explored in the social realms of Britain as portrayed by Kureishi in his artistic writings.

Introduction

Hanif Kureishi belongs to biracial parents i.e. Asian father and British mother. He was born in Britain and had a rare chance of visiting Pakistan. His writing signifies him as a British from cultural as well as psychological viewpoint and at the same time celebrates his Pakistani origin. Kureishi's literary contribution questions the hybrid sense of colonial discourses that decolonize the immigrants. The field of Social Sciences has paved the way for intellectual post-colonial hybrid writers such as Hanif Kureishi to win many awards and distinctions. The study tends to argue that the individuals born to the Asian parents, settled in the Britain colony, are educated in the distinguished institutions of Europe. Such intellectuals who are exposed more to the Western style of life, culture, media and rituals produce hybrid Orients. Edward Said's work of Orientalism in the year of 1978 provokes the criticism of Western representation of Orients and how the Asian immigrants are represented in literary writings. The position of the hybrid individuals in Britain society was always considered with the dogmas of difference.

Differences in the skin color, language, culture and identity made the identity of post-colonial subjects delicate.

The multicultural society of Britain made the transformation of identity an essential requisite to adjust in the colony. Bhabha(2003) claimed in an interview with Rutherford that "identification is a progression of identifying with and through another entity, an entity of otherness. Hybridity levitate to something new, something different, which may be unrecognizable" (p.211). Hybrid intellectuals are in a constant flux of identification. They struggle to leave their parental culture and attempt to assimilate and get transformed to be acceptable in Britain society.

Young (1995) claims that "hybridity in itself is a hybrid idea" (p.195). It's a complex term that is derived from the act of mimicry. Bhabha (1994) asserts, "Mimicry is similar to camouflage which is not synchronization or oppression of difference. It is a form of semblance that differs/preserves its manifestation by displaying it in parts, metonymically" (131). Post-colonial writers such as Kureishi tend to portray hybrid characters in their writing. Ashcroft (2000) opines in *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*:

Hybrid individuals tend to settle themselves in the zones generated by colonization. Subjects try to refrain associations along the terrains of forbearers. However, they only come to terms with a culture they inhibit (p.117).

Post-colonial subjects are destined to remain in between their culture and the culture of Britain. Bhabha (1994) asserts:

The second generation of migrants or the post-colonial subjects does not need to assimilate into the culture of Britain or to completely remain outside it. Translation as a tool allows the position to be "in-between" both the cultures. This in-betweenness allows the rejection of binarism of margin/center, self/other, colonizer/colonized. (p. 211)

Kureishi is appreciated as well as criticized for producing the biracial characters and sanctioning them the sense of loss in the world they are much acquainted with. Moreover, Rushdie (1992) opines that the hybrids do not surrender completely to the host's culture. They will not hold the customs and traditions of parental native land completely. Hybridity is a link between diverse nations that gives birth to an entirely new personality (p.196). Moreover, Berry (2001) states, "in hybridity, individuals or groups belong simultaneously to more than one culture" (p.199).

Kureishi portrays the life of South Asian communities residing in White dominating Britain society. He analyses the life of all those individuals who make an unending effort to transform and assimilate with the British ideals. Thomas (2005) asserts that Kureishi as an artist highlights the problems of Asians and tries to assert that minority subjects are having equal importance as the White Britains (p. 05).

Research Methodology

Research of this research would be qualitative and explanatory in nature. This work is descriptive as well as interpretive. It follows the hermeneutic method for interpreting and understanding the text of Hanif Kureishi's fiction.

Results and Discussion

Post-colonial subjects are aware of their biracial identities. Karim's sense of hybridity is eminent in the opening of the novel when he asserts that "My name is Karim Amir. I am an Englishman born and bred, almost" (p.01). The word "almost" shows protagonists' sense of awareness about hybridity. Kureishi himself was descendant of a rich brown Indian father and a white mother. His identity was a blend of two different cultures. But he himself refuses the label of being a hybrid. He thought himself to be an Englishman in his Essays. But people use of mock at his affirmation saying that "how comes a brown-faced person with Muslim name having well-known family roots in Pakistan could claim as Englishman" (p.12). Gilbert (2001) asserts that hybridity emerges "when possibly two or more monoliths interact with each other" (p.107). *The Rainbow Sign*, compares the life of people living in Britain with Pakistani society. He narrates his experience in his father's homeland. His Pakistani relatives gave him a warm welcome. In Pakistan, he was at times, called with the disparaging term of being a "paki". In Pakistan, Kureishi used to wear jeans instead of Shalwar Kameez and was mocked for his western fashion. For the short span of time, he feels at home in Pakistan but later he began to miss England. Being born and bred there he feels England as his first home. In Bradford, the whole city presents the condition of post-colonial Britain. The city of Bradford becomes the microcosm of Asians living in Britain. Kureishi manages to have talked with an Asian Mayor named M. Ajeeb. He was often attacked on racial and hybrid grounds. Both of them discussed the hybridity of the British-Asian community and the political condition of residents. Bradford also discusses the issue and problems of separatism. In Britain, it was due to politics among British government and Islamic schools by Asians. Britain's government never liked the origin of Islamic schools in their community. Tariq articulates that if anyone attends Islamic school, he will definitely have a problem in finding a good living opportunity in Britain. It's a better option to attend schools of mixed race or single sexed. (p.15) Kureishi narrates the story of Ray Honeyford in this essay. He was headmaster of the school where ninety-five percent of students were from Asian families. Later, Honeyford publishes two articles showing how racist explorations and hybrid identity hinders the learning procedure of Asian students. Honeyford was finally exempted from his job after the publication of the second article. New Right Party favors the stance of Honeyford. Right Party holds that 'Asian's are only acceptable if they are hybrids. They might have to leave if they won't behave like whites" (p.55). They wished to reduce the threats of anti-racism in the educational system by arousing the sense of national sentiment amongst all residents of Britain.

Moreover, Shahid, the protagonist of *The Black Album* expresses to Riaz his feelings of hybridity due to cultural split posing the threat to his firm identity and feeling of something lacking in his personality. Shahid states:

I began to feel as a freak than I did normally. I had been kicked around and chased a lot you know. It made me terrifying sensitive. I kept thinking there was something I lacked. Everywhere I went I was the only dark-skinned person. How did this make people see me? I began to be scared of going into certain places. (p. 11).

Later, Shahid discovers his inability to identify himself as either an Asian or a Britain. He was never certain of either being self or being other. He began to feel the sense of insecurity as if he belongs nowhere. He is no longer able to feel one with the Whites. Shahid states his feeling of displacement as:

[he] discovers through the course of events that he is always – already all of these people and none of them. He cannot place himself with certainty – and more important without questioning – within any of the narratives that the other characters inhabit (p. 123).

Shahid feels as a wanderer trying to get himself settled by mimicking and adopting the hybrid identity. Amir Karim, the protagonist of *The Buddha of Suburbia* tends to let himself feel as an Englishman or one may say as a hybrid English man. He has adopted all the manners of Britain community. He prefers to listen to the soft machine, Frank Zappa, Wildman Fisher and King Crimson (p.63). He knew the best shops for buying music. He felt great in London but later realizes that he is an Asian. Helen's father reminds Karim about the place of brown people in the white community. Karim tries to assimilate himself with the white girl, Helen and wished to have date with her. But Helen's father provokes him to feel as Other :

The front door opened. Helen's dad stood there. He was a big man with a black beard and thick arms.'You can't see my daughter again,' said Hairy Back. 'She doesn't go out with boys. Or with wogs.... We don't want you blackies coming to the house.' (p.41).

Gandhi(1998) in her work *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* focuses:

Helen's father makes Amir Karim disturb due to his hybrid identity. Though he has learned all the manners of British and is by no means less to white Britain color of his skin and hybridity puts him into a relationship of master and slave. (p.17).

The revelation of the relation between 'boys', 'wogs' and 'blackies' limits Karim's feeling of being an English man. He feels more rootless on the exposure of Helen's father's thoughts about Asians. Helen's father thought Karim as a threat for

producing hybrid generation and humiliated him at worst. Not only this, but Kureishi also highlights the other worst picture of Britain society where Asians humiliate each other. For Example, Jamila marries Changez who has just arrived in Britain from India. Changez criticizes the manners of his people in England:

'Look at that low-class person,' he'd say in a loud voice, stopping and pointing out one of his fellow countrymen – perhaps a waiter hurrying to work or an old man ambling to the day center....To be accepted they must take up the English ways and forget their filthy villages! They must decide to be either here or there. Look how much here I am! And why doesn't that bugger over there look the Englishman in the eye! (p.211)

Changez instead of feeling one and united with his fellow countrymen leaves no chance to humiliate them. This shows the lack of unity amongst Asians residing in Britain. They themselves were responsible for developing a “master-slave relationship” (Gandhi. p.17) with Britain. If they might have been a support to the people of their own race, their living conditions in Britain would have been much better. Asian people like Haroon never gave their children (Karim) full knowledge about Asia, its heritage and culture. Such intellectuals from the second generation of migrants never felt to have their strong roots in India. Karim failed simply to identify his personality with Indians. He always thought that he is thoroughly Britain. By the end of the novel, Anwar dies. While attending his funeral Karim got the knowledge that no one can deny his origin. He felt guilty for being not able to appreciate his origin. Karim realizes:

In some way these were my people and that I had spent my life denying or avoiding that fact. I felt ashamed and incomplete at the same time as if half of me were missing, and as if I had been colluding with my enemies, those whites who wanted Indians to be like them (p.211).

The best option available to Karim was to have a hybrid personality. First-generation immigrants like Haroon and Anwar never shared the stories about India with pride and honor. This representation leads Karim to consider India not worth living. Haroon and Anwar intended to live their whole life in England and not in India. They never enunciated about their country and their experiences with esteem. Therefore, Karim considered his father and uncle utterly responsible for his lack of respect for Asia. He develops the hybrid personality as he black and Britain at the same time.

In *My Beautiful Launderette*, Omar is portrayed as more of an English and less of an Asian. He is often tagged as a “wog” and possesses the hybridity in his nature. Omar is often alleged by Salim for “having too much of white blood in his veins” (p. 31). Omar has a white boyfriend named Johnny and shares all the experiences being a white fascist and he rejects the idea of being other in Britain community. He considers himself as English man and refuses “his identity of being an Asian but doing so cannot let Omar escape his roots. Bhabha opines “such migrants are less than one and double” (117). Omar has to face the trauma of being alienated for

refusing his origin. He becomes the worst example of a hybrid being as white do not accept him and he himself intends not to be considered as a black. Character's like Papa (Omar's father) refuses to be a hybrid. He never considers himself fit into the country of white's. He spends his whole day wondering about Omar, his education and drinking vodka. Papa married an English woman who later committed suicide. He desires Omar to be a successful Britain and expresses, "Omer, you have to study hard. Education is power. We are under siege of white men" (p. 17). Papas, unlike other Asians, consider that power lies in being well educated and the only way to defeat white man. While many other Asians think that wealth is power. Britain usually despised the first generation of migrants like Papa who fails to fit them into white heritage. He wishes in his later years to return to Pakistan saying "this damn state has doe us in. That is why I exist to like this. We should have been there. Our Home" (p.85).

Characters like Salim and Cherry were more hybrids. Though they never liked white racists at heart they consider themselves placed in Britain. They thought as Britain was their home and tried to assimilate with the British. Both were from the second generation of migrants. Cherry even slaps the face of a white person for calling him "scum, pig and grubby rich shit" (p.05). She feels at home in Britain. Once Omar asked that has she been to Karachi ever? The reply of Cherry was, "What a stupid. England is my home" (p.24). This shows a strong sense of Cherry's belongings. She never wished to identify herself as an Asian. When Omar says to Cherry that he never had a chance of visiting Pakistan, she asserts, Oh my God! I am much sick of earshot about these in-betweens. People should make up their minds firmly that where they are from" (p.19). Saleem expresses his hatred for hybrids in Britain. While scolding Omar for his inability to understand the business properly, Salim asserts:

You have got too much white blood. It has made you frail like those pale-faced adolescents that call us wog. You know what I do to them? I take out this. (He takes out a pound note. He tears it to pieces.) I say: your English pound is worthless. It's worthless like you, Omar. Your whole great family - rich and powerful over there - is let down by you. (p.30).

Omar, Salim and Cherry try to escape from their hybrid identities. They hate all those Asian's who were not able to get themselves settled in Britain. Moreover, whites never like to work in factories or businesses set up by Asian's. When Johnny decides to work with Omar in launderette, Ganges articulates Johnny:

Why are you working for them? For these people? You were with us once, for England...I'm angry. I do not like to see one of our men groveling to Pakis. They came here to work for us. That's why we brought them over. OK... Do not cut yourself off from your own people. Because there is no one else who really wants you. Everyone has to belong (p.47).

It could be said that white never liked to work under the black community. The Ganges suggested Johnny to find work at some other place instead of working with a Paki. Gang of Ganges never liked the mixing of whites and blacks. Tania, who is Naseer's daughter often protect Johnny from being exploited by her family. Tania like Papa is an idealist. She is a feminist who hates her father's mistress Rachel. When she discovers that Naseer has extramarital relationships, Tania "begins to detest the notion of family and began planning to leave the house of the father" (p. 23). She abhorred the rich people who used to exploit the poor. Omar, to Tania's surprise, was following the footsteps of his father. Omar never knew how to speak Urdu but has got a sense of Asian pride from his father. He intended to have superiority over white people like Johnny and assert their relation of being a mastery over English. Relationship of Johnny and Omar highlights "people of two disparate communities who are made resilient by joint advantage of enterprise and together, tend to generate a new hybrid community" (Thomas, 2005, p.59). Both the boys create an intricate realm of discrepancies.

One can easily visualize the difference between the two generations of immigrants. The parents like Papa, Haroon, Rafi e.tc. had a different attitude towards life as compared to their children of the second generation. Omar, Amir, and Sammy were better hybrid to fit into the society of Britain. Being born, brought up and bred in Britain, Kureishi's protagonist shows a strong sense of placement in the UK. Their sense of belongingness is far ahead of their racial exploration. Their parents were not the successful hybrids and experiences worst experience in trying to settle them in Britain. Boehmer (1995) asserts:

Those belonging to ex-colony by birth. Third World in cultural interest. Cosmopolitan in almost every other way, he or she works within the confines of the Western metropolis. While at the same time retaining thematic and political connections with a national background (p.235).

Boehmer tries to show a strong sense of being rooted in Asia and its culture. It was not an easy task for ex-colonies to get themselves settled in a new community. First-generation finds it difficult to submit completely to the heritage of Britain. They were the followers of a forced form of hybridity. While the second generation of migrants had a better sense of belongingness. Kureishi is much hopeful that one day the hybrid families of migrants would be accepted as full citizens irrespective of their origin. Kureishi asserts in *Dreaming and Scheming*, "belonging, means in a sense, not having to notice where you are, and, more importantly, not being seen as different, would happen eventually..." (p. 220). First-generation of migrants usually feel struck in a condition that they can neither go back to Asia and nor they get adjusted in Britain. For such individuals, Kureishi states, "West was a dream that did not come true. But one is stuck. One cannot go home again" (p.220). Such hybrid people possess a disrupted personality and lack a sense of belongingness. They belong neither to India nor to Britain. They feel trapped in an inescapable tapestry. Such migrants try to soothe themselves by confirming Rushdie's optimistic ideology:

We are nowhere. And we are not willing to be excluded from any part of our legacy... we are now partially of the West... sometimes we feel that we straddle dualistic cultures; at other times, that we fall amid double stools (p.15).

Such hybrid personalities feel impossible to escape from their choices of getting themselves rooted in Britain and leaving behind their strong family roots in Asia. They fall into the trap of developing disrupted personalities. Haroon and Anwar tried their best to adapt all the cultural values of Britain to get themselves adjusted. But all their efforts bore no fruit. They felt themselves belonging inertly to Asia and outwardly to Britain. Said asserts in *Culture and Imperialism*, Cultures are often associated with land or state. At times, this differentiates "us" from "them". Anwar and Haroon always felt like others in Britain while as for us in Asia. It could, therefore, be said that identity and sense of belongingness come with ages and needs a lot of time. Both characters retain the universal tendency of attachment to their culture. The strong attachment to the heritage of their fatherly states leads them to prevent their culture in one way or another. Amir observes the feeling of reminiscence in Haroon when he was getting old. Anwar's sentiments were not so different from Haroon. Amir was surprised that by the time Haroon and Anwar have placed them well in Britain why do they still possess nostalgia for Asia. Amir observes:

For years Haroon and Anwar were happy to live like Englishmen... Now as they are old and seem like settled here, Anwar and Dad give the impression to be returning internally to India, or at tiniest to be repelling the English here. It was confusing: neither of them communicated any yearning actually to see their origins again. "India is a rotten place", Anwar grouched. "Why would I want to go there again. It's filthy and hot and it is a big pain-in-the-arse to get something done (p.65).

It could be assumed that the misfits of ex-colonies consider it difficult to express their emotions. They fear of being displaced by their expression. Their complex hybridity hinders their wish to return home. The voice of their self is ultimately suppressed in their desire to be other, similar to Britain's.

Nina, the protagonist of *With Your Tongue Down My Throat*, is a biracial character whose father was born and brought up in London while her grandfather was from the generation of first migrants. Nina is often humiliated badly by his father. Her father accentuates the condition of hybrids in Britain as:

half-caste waster, belongs nowhere, problematic to everyone, wandering around the face of the earth with no home alike a stupid-mistake-mongrel dog that no one wants and everyone kicks in the backside (p.101).

Nina finds it much difficult to live with her white new mother in London. By the time she visited Pakistan, she used to miss England and now when she was in London she missed Pakistan. Such hybrid individuals like Nina face a lot of difficulties to fit themselves in society. In Pakistan, Nina was not respected for being

too much of an English lady. Her stepmother and stepsisters never showed any likeness for her. In England, she never considered her fit because she was black and too much of an Asian. The color of her skin and her racial identity led her to have a disrupted identity. She was not confident where to find space for her true self-identity. She was simultaneously trapped by England and London. Nina finds herself emotionally attached to Pakistan and missed England when she visited it but back in London she feels disrespected for being a hybrid of black and white. She was in a constant state of transition and lacked a sense of belongingness. Kureishi claims in *Dreaming and Scheming* that the very name "Pakistan was used as an insult" in England and especially London. This was humiliating and tormenting for Kureishi. He planned to visit Pakistan when he was 29 years old. But to his surprise, he felt more torn amongst the transition from unawareness to awareness. Kureishi remarks:

When I said, with the unnoticed irony, that I am an Englishman, people laughed. They chop about. Why would anyone with a Muslim name, brown face, and large well-known family in Pakistan want to place claim to that unkind little dilapidated island off Europe where you at all times had to spell your name? Eccentrically, anti-British comments made me feel patriotic. However, I only sensed patriotic when I was absent from England. (p. 34).

The people from ex-colonies are always the hybrids of East and West. Their journey of self-revelation of their identity is a metaphor for transition amongst two cultures. Hybrid protagonists of Kureishi are in persistent dynamics of transformation. McLeod asserts in *Beginning Post-colonialism*:

Hybrid personalities never possess totality and completeness in them. Instead, they continue to stay in perpetual motion, chasing wayward and random routes, vulnerable to alter and re-inscription (p.220)

Therefore, it could be said that the discovery of the whole self-identity is a difficult task for the hybrid subjects post-colonial communities.

Conclusion

It could be said that a person's identity in a multicultural society is formed and transformed after interacting with different people, custom and social lifestyles. Kureishi being an artist neither favors White Britain's or black Britain's. He focuses that in order to get acceptability Asians to tend to assimilate with the domineering culture of white. Kureishi never poses that hybridity is a negative process. He resists to presents the solution of hybridity and offers readers the true reflection of the life of Asians residing in Britain. Post-colonial migrants in today's world need to strive much hard in order to be placed or accepted in colonial discourses.

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