



Fluctuating Identities of Diasporas: An Analysis of The Buddha of Suburbia

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Abstract- The present research investigates fluctuation between identities of Diasporas in the *Buddha of Suburbia*. The aim of the research is to find the solution to the problems and challenges faced by the diasporic communities. The methodology used for the research is qualitative in nature and textual analysis has been used as a tool to investigate the main problem of research. The close analysis of the texts of the novel reveals and results in the tracing out of the elements of fluctuation of identities within the novel. The protagonist, Karim, the son of an English mother and an Indian father, identifies himself as an Englishman symbolic for each diasporic individual. Karim is a Muslim of British origin, passing through various social, political, and ideological problems; but, he has many problems because of his parents. He is the offspring of parents who hail from two diverse cultures, and this is the reason that both of their identities have influenced the life and the personalities in a different way. His identity is being fluctuated because he lives in one place but belongs to somewhere else. This creates perplexity in his personality. In this way, identity fluctuates and there are differences within his identity from time to time. He was not notorious in his society, yet, he was more confused of his identity in the first place. This is how we see that there are fluctuating identities throughout the novel and the same happens with so many Diasporic identities throughout the world.

Key Words: Identity, Transformation, Diaspora, Challenges, Resolution.

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of cultural identity has never been static, and it has never been fixed when it comes to the values of a specific category. Homi K. Bhabha (2012) believes that culture is identified by an individual experience and the perception of the people that exists within a society. Such kinds of perceptions are changed and are affected by various factors relating to an individual value, status, economic and many other backgrounds. Such factors are called context dependent factors. Bhabha argues that an individual's identity is never limited to a universal pattern or formula that is applied to everyone. Each and every individual can be influenced by more than one cultures and it has its influence on the reconciliation of the values of the various cultures. Same is the case within the novel where the identities have never been fixed and there has always been a fluctuation between identities.

The study deals with the experiences of Karim, a protagonist in the novel of *The Buddha of Suburbia* by Hanif Kureishi (1990) who strives for finding out such a community to which he can fully belong and to which he can fully adjust to while the novel deals with the contrasting experiences of the first and the second generation emigrants. According to the novel, the first generation immigrants are always to be driven by the need to achieve the economic prosperity which they want to retain their cultural identity within the society where they live in. Karim has such a character whose identity is shaped and influenced by the culture and the environment of his residing country. On one side, he is nostalgic about his home country, India, but on the other side, he does not want to return there. He loves Western culture as well as India and his identity is shaped and influenced by many characters, incidents and the places around. On the other side, Haroon is feeling more attached to Buddhism where it states that the first generation immigrants always try not to mingle with another new culture.

The study aims to explore the fluctuating identities of Diasporas in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990). Identity has different interpretations and is used differently at various occasions. Many researchers have deemed it a social terminology that characterizes social membership rules that highlight a specific category of behavior. We are known by the background in which we born. Karim's father comes here for pursuing higher education in law, but he lost his track and never returns to India as a successful lawyer. Karim is unusual mixture of developed continent Europe and underdeveloped continent Asia. This makes him a biological hybrid as well as cultural one.

Identity is unique to individual. It is not always relevant. At a time, one's has multiple social identities. The relevancy of identity is dynamic and resort to adopted conditions. A Person should have traits which bears resemblance to one's culture and shows differences to another cultures. This resemblance and difference design one's identity. When we use language regarding identity, our histories are explained in a range of social groups into which we are born. Religion assigns us individual identity. Geographical location provides us definite identities such as Chinese, Pakistani and Irani etc. On a regional level, one assumes the identities of Southerners and Northerners. Another kind of identity that one adapts at places such as school, office and the family. In a family we are assigned the roles of a brother, sister, mother and husband. Likewise in the offices, we assume different roles. Some people are stopped by social changes which affect people's identities. This means that change in identities is inevitable. The identity in the case of Karim is fluid, not stable. Karim has to change every time to fit him in the society. He adopts himself according to the required circumstances. The Postcolonial identity is not similar but prone to changing. Karim is an adolescent, belongs to different background, having an unusual name which does not sound English. Karim is desperately searching for his identity.

Statement of the Problem

Stuck in a difficult and awkward situation of survival and caught between two worlds, i.e. Western and Eastern cultures, Karim, the protagonist tries to sense the very basis of his existence. Karim asks about his cultural belongings and is skeptical, but receives unpleasantly a new sense of his fluctuating image. The different identity caters for him a new vision, which seems to be changeable and having the traits of both good and bad. He returns to the previous static identity and feels comfortable with the idea of being authentic and real. Karim finds himself in unceasing endeavors and conflicts of anxiety surrounds him, he feels to be bound in those borders of monitoring which are his cultural assets. He thinks this border to be his destination. The present study aims to analyze various factors responsible for fluctuation between identities of migrants. This is vivid when he urges and wishes to become an actor. His ambitions to become an actor reflect his self-transformation. He assumes different roles, vacillates between two worlds and acts like a pendulum, his identity fluctuates at this point clearly. By adapting, the profession of acting, he chooses a path to transform himself, assuming on different identities.

Research Questions

1. Why does migrants' identity fluctuate in the novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia*?
2. How do cultural differences disturb the peaceful co-existence in the novel?

Significance of the Study

The novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, a semi-autobiographical novel was published in 1990. The novel remained unexplored in the area of fluctuating identities in Diasporas. The researcher focuses on major problems faced by the immigrants in the alien land, the problems emanating from fluctuating identities in Diasporas, regarding Karim and other immigrants, characters. It also focuses on the problems of the emigrants and their migration to the United Kingdom, after the partition of the Sub-Continent. When the colonial power left the region, it also discusses the various problems facing the immigrant community in the alien land. The research explores the importance of acting regarding self-transformation for the search of identity by the principal character as well as by foil. The research also strives to promote the postcolonial concept of hybridity and identity.

II. REVIEWED LITERATURE ABOUT THE BUDDHA OF SUBURBIA

This chapter deals with the available literature on the topic concerned and deals with a review of the data available on the novel as well as topic. There are many reputed theorists in post-colonialism i.e Edward Said, Homi.K.Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty, Spivak, Stuart Hall and Sulman Rushdie, who contributed much to this theory. This topic has become so vast that it is not possible to discuss on it in Post-Colonial studies. Building on a post structuralist understanding of the Saussurean signifier-signified relation, Bhabha states that cultures "are forms of representation and hence, have within them a kind of self-alienating limit (Bhabha, 1990, p.210). Bhabha (1990) further asserts that "All cultures are continually in a process of hybridity" (Bhabha, 1990, p.211). Nothing is permanent and eternal, likewise cultures too, is dynamic and changes, and evolves and takes on new shapes and forms continuously. The reason is obvious; they are not founded on solid footings. Bhabha uses this particularly for migrants of the Post-

colonial era. He is of the opinion that they are not in the position to merge them thoroughly into Western culture or cannot remain outside their orbit; rather it supposes the medium position i-e in-between the two. Bhabha (1990) refers to hybridity and says that it takes place at the moment when there occurs colonial contact and considers it a plus point, not marring originality. He elaborates hybridity, it is the symbol resulting from the mixing of colonial forces and stagnancy, and it is the strategy of to recollect the procedure of domination though not owning it. "Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory effects" (Bhabha, 1990, p.112). In Bhabha's (2012) view, hybridity makes inconvenient the discourse of the colonizer and the colonized and caters a medium for their expression. He argues that hybridity is "the most common and effective form of subversive opposition since it displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination" (Ashcroft et al, 1999, p.9). *'The Buddha of Suburbia'* has characters that embody hybrid identities. Karim, the principal character in the novel, *'The Buddha of Suburbia'* flummoxed betwixt cultures and identities trying to show clearly an edge: a quite difficult task for the theorists too, who even cannot come to an accurate and specific conclusion about the nature of Diaspora, which is not static and is fluid. As modern world is complex and complicated, nothing is perpetual here. Everything seems to change constantly in every walk of life. Definitions too, are prone to change and never remain constant. Nothing is complete in itself just like the situation of being a 'hybrid'.

Shevchenko (2015) talks about the character of Karim and post-colonial elements in the novel. The critic first describes the personality and appearance of Karim. Then, he is in his social sphere the way he lives his life. This is a clear indication that this study is a way of looking into the relationship of some cultural practices in view of their background and their contribution to literature in postcolonial times. After reading this essay, one can easily draw a parallel to Kureishi's character Karim and his experiences as a young teenager. They both struggle to find their place, and none of them is willing to accept what he calls separatism. I observed racism as something based on prejudice and therefore unrelated, uncouthness and the sense of unsuccessfulness prevails that all White are bad and that was unacceptable. (Shevchenko, 2015)

Kalpakli (2015) argues that it can be inferred from the precepts that though these people living betwixt cultures and suffer from the malaise of separatism, their attempts were futile and useless to merge into English society will yield and bring affirmative consequences to both communities. In the words of the critic, Kureishi's claims that contemporary world is hybrid and that what is required is inventive inscriptions that provide us with a sense of the changes and complications which are expressed within our society (Kalpakli, 2015).

Megawati (2014) writes: "Hanif Kureishi brings the characters and characterization in such way to prove the confusion of sexual orientation" (Megawati, 2014, p.14). His confusion leads to problems in his identity. The idea of curving out or retaining an identity seems to be dominantly influenced by the cultures within which this new identity is being formed. The knowledge of their background informs what they do at present, and how they go on with their lives currently. This can be demonstrated by integrating Hall's argument or theory that there are primarily two types of identity. The first one being what he calls identity is his being. This makes individuals common.

Hall (1996) believes that identity is more than a discipline to study or even to criticize; it is still an ongoing process so that its completion cannot be easily established. Indeed, like his counterpart, Bhabha, Hall believes that the concept of identity is an ongoing process.

Ghuman (2000) shows that many Asian adolescents, living in the west, do not want to lose their cultural identities, by adopting western cultural ideals. For example, the Punjabi community has been referred to by the white majority as Indians, but few Punjabis identify themselves this way. We can see that, comprehensively, the postcolonial influence on identity is significantly limited to functional adaptation (Ghuman, 2000, p.24-25).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is analytical in nature. The chief source of this research is the text of the book of a novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, a postcolonial writer, by Hanif Kureishi (1990). The secondary sources were collected and consulted for the research including books, articles, journals, papers, internet and secondary data.

This study highlights the repercussions of cultural differences and class distinction regarding fluctuating identities which include division between the immigrants from the suburb to the city and from the sophisticated lives of the citizens, the once colonized state, the ensuing hatred, prejudice, sexual, emotional, psychological traumas and the political tug of war for maligning the hostile communities. This research also focuses to investigate that how peaceful communities are prone to violence, hatred and prejudice due to difference of ethnic identities. Karim, a second generation immigrant, becomes the victim of inferiority complex by the treatment meted out to him by the so called civilized world. Though Karim considers himself to be an Englishman but his aspirations and dreams are shattered to the wind when he is realized by his inferior societal status. This study also highlights that when cultural and ethnic identities are revealed and accelerated through political gimmick, then it brings destruction and havoc. The research portrays that during their stay in the alien land not only caters hatred among communities but also creates dire consequences as well. At the global level, differences of culture regarding identity of the minority communities can destroy peace and possibly instigate wars on cultural lines. The dominant cultures of the developed countries occupy people of underdeveloped countries for imposing their own cultures. The study explores different aspects of cultural differences regarding ethnic identities and regards it as catalyst for clash of civilization in the near future. The remedies suggested for establishing peace and protect the world from future ethnic conflicts are to promote multiculturalism in order to prevent ethnic differences.

Theoretical Framework

The tool taken for the analysis of the novel is diasporic identity. The diasporic elements in the novel are searched out that show fluctuation in the identity of characters. There are different interpretations and studies about identity, but the focus of this study is the change and fluctuation in identity, keeping in view the theories and ideas of Stuart Hall, Homi. K.Bhabha and Robin Cohen. The theories of Homi.K.Bhabha particularly in his, 'The Location of Culture'(1994) relating to in-betweenness and ambivalent status in diasporic communities and those of the Stuart Hall and Robin Cohen who are directly or indirectly in consensus with the theories of Homi. K.Bhabha regarding the fluctuating identities of the diasporic peoples. The researcher has particularly applied the concept of Homi.K.Bhabha in diasporian communities and their precarious situation in another culture.

Textual Analysis

Migrants' Fluctuating Identity

The novel deals with the fluctuation of the Diasporic identities. *The Buddha of Suburbia* is a true replica of fluctuation between Identities of Diasporas. Jonathan Culler raises two main questions dealing with the identity; first, it "...is the 'self' something 'given' or something 'made'... should it be conceived in an individual or in social terms?"(1994, p.108). It treats the self as unique and inner and it also has something prior when it performs. Whenever it is considered as social and given then it is easily determined by the various social attributes; nationality, ethnicity, class, religion race and gender because such features are considered as given within the social by having its focus on its various dimensions and aspects.

Sometimes, such an identity can be dependent upon an individual and made, then it deals with the changing nature and the changing circumstances of a particular acts and facts. If such an identity is made social, in such a situation, an individual can have many different identities. It is related to the cultural, social, political, religious, and gender identities. Identities are also formed because of our personal qualities; hence, new identities are constructed. Identities are also formed within the control of an individual because it can enhance self-esteem. The poor can turn rich and vice versa. Identities are also self-made, and each individual identity is made and constructed by himself as well as the society around him. Identities are also determined by birth and also by origin. As Karim starts meeting new people, countering new faces, he experiences new reaction to his very existence. In the city, he is greeted unwarily by the father of Helen, a girlfriend of his, who says, "You cannot see my daughter again. She does not go out with boys or wogs" (Kureishi, 1990, p.40). Identities are also associated with cultures, class, nation, caste, family, societies, personal qualities, ethnicity and religion and all such qualities of an individual. For instance, Karim is forced into portraying a stereotype in a play. Being content with an ambivalent identity, Karim does not seek to affirm himself and therefore feels no need to be authentically one thing or another. "You are just right for him. You are dark skinned, you're small and wiry" (Kureishi, 1990, p.142). The monologue is soon forgotten by Karim.

Pyke, another director, is also interested in creating performances that are worthy to be believed that in order to "be someone else successfully you must be yourself" (Kureishi, 1990, p.220). Here Karim wants to imitate Charlie but he is interrupted by Pyke to take inspiration from someone in their lives. He wants Karim to take identity from the black people. He relates Karim identity to Indian roots. The control of the Oriental is again in the hands of the Westerner, as stated by Said,

From the beginning of Western speculation about the Orient, the one thing the Orient could not do was to represent itself. Evidence of the Orient was credible only after it had passed and had been made firm by the refining fire of the Orientalist's work (Said, 1994, p.283).

It is not for Karim to express his identity rather his identity is decided by the director, i-e Eastern identity. Karim also comes in this orbit who is openly declared black, though he being "More beige than anything" (Kureishi, 1990, p.167). Every step he takes toward other expects him a step away who he really is. Karim's becomes a performance of Orientalist ideas, where he incorporates the stereotypes and prejudices he is faced with in his routine life. It is also the journey and the transformation of an individual from original identity to the desired identity. It always happens that the subalterns and the victims within various societies try to transform themselves into a more high-self-esteem which is basically another identity as in the novel: "My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to ... going somewhere" (Kureishi, 1990, p.3). This line indicates that Karim Amir is more confused about his identity. He introduces himself in a very different way where he says that he an English man born and bred. In other words, it can be suggested that to be born into an immigrant's family in England is to be born into the third space, which paves the way for constructing new identities.

In Bhabha's own words when he says in the *Border Lives*: "These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood-singular or communal-that initiate new signs of identity, in the act of defining the society itself" (1994, p.1-2). Therefore the clash of Eastern and Western cultures and the sense of not belonging can be observed in Karim's own words. He says, "Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of belonging or not, that makes me easily bored" (Kureishi, 1990, p.3). He is in the state of uncertainty, as he is hybrid and is from the mixed race. Having a closer look at the novel one can infer that the younger and elder generation immigrants show different reactions to English culture. He is majority of the times considered as a character different from that. Identities are also self-made; same is the case within the novel where Karim tries to make his own identities. Each individual identity is made and constructed by himself as well as the society around him, the same happens within the novel where Karim is trying to make and construct his own identity. Identities are also determined by birth and also by origin and Karim's identity is also determined by his birth where his identity is also determined by his birth as he considers himself as an Englishman of English breed. Identities are also associated with culture, class, nation, caste, family, societies, personal qualities, ethnicity and religion and all such qualities of an individual.

Likely, Karim's identity is also shaped by his background and his culture, religion, ethnicity. It is also the journey and the transformation of an individual from original identity to the desired identity and the same novel has made the transformation of an individual from his own identity to their own desired identity. It also indicates that both cultural and national identities are interrelated to one another. The reason of such a dependence and interrelatedness is all because of the relation of culture with the nation as the nation is the cultural bond that gives shared identities to a group of various people who have occupied or have been aspired to have occupied various/same geographic territory. "He died at the wrong time, when there was much to be clarified and established. They hadn't even started... and that the husband he'd chosen for her was an idiot" (Kureishi, 1990, p.45). It also happens that people have lived in various groups defined by their cultural similarities and thus having political autonomy. Hence, it is also argued that a nation is supposed to be a group of people who have shared common culture, ethnic origin, culture and common history. National identity is a kind of belief in the membership of a nation. It is also expected that an individual can have such a membership of more than one country which can be of the homeland as well as of the adopted country. It can also be referred as a double citizenship. Yet a person is born and adopted in one country, but he is later on considered as the citizen of his homeland and his home country. He is also considered to be a citizen of that nation which he belongs to and this is his national identity. Hence, such a national identity is referred as the outstanding aspects of the same guru and the individual meaning of it. Our histories are described in individuality by our interactions in those social groups into which we are born as religion, social statues, gender and the race. The novel opens with those lines which describes the tantalizing situation of the Karim with which he is faced with. "An Englishman born and bred almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were...and not..." (Kureishi, 1990, p.3). We becomes aware of the fact that he is cognizant of his position and about his awkwardness. The novelist too confesses this situation. He feels him to be in-between. He is an Englishman but not to the point of perfection. He is the son whose parent belongs to two diverse cultures. His father who had come for the purpose of acquiring higher studies, meets an English woman, Margaret, "a pretty working woman from the suburbs" (Kureishi, 1990, p.25). He is therefore, a queer mixture of two continents and two cultures. His identity is mixed and in the state of motion, never stable.

IV. CONCLUSION

The present study on novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia*, dealt with some of the contemporary ideas and concepts; one of the main concepts, that was the focus of the research as well, was the fluctuation between identities in the novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia* by Hanif Kureishi, is one of the most widely read novel in the history of English Literature, owing to diasporic elements. He has depicted the problems of the diaspora in its true way. This research is also one of the master pieces when it comes to the discussion of the problems of the diaspora. It has too many fluctuations within the identities of the several characters like that of Karim and Haroon, Karim's father. His life style also kept on changing as soon as they have new terms with new people all around.

The present research dealt with the problems of the Diaspora living within England. This study highlighted and explored the various significant and popular themes dealing with the classes, identities, in the 1970s London. Karim was the protagonist of the novel who told and discussed the story of his maturity against all such sort of social and political changes. It also tried to attempt and to create his identity and to know and discover his life, place and the way he grew ups. The story is also narrated and told in the first person and the story from the age of 17-23 is narrated in detail. The novel dealt with the experiences of Karim who struggled for finding out such a community to which he can fully belong and to which he can fully adjust to while the novel dealt with the contrasting experiences of the first and the second generation immigrants. According to the study, the first generation immigrants were always to be driven by the need to achieve the economic prosperity which they wanted to retain their cultural identity within the society where they lived in. Here was the answer to the question that why migrants' identity fluctuate? The reason was that such a character, whose identity was shaped and influenced by the culture and the environment outside, was an immigrant one. Haroon was such a character in the novel. On one side, he was nostalgic about his home country, India, but on the other side, he did not want to return there. He loved Western culture as well as Indian and his identity was shaped and influenced by most of the characters, incidents and the places around. On the other side, Haroon was feeling more attached to Buddhism where it stated that the first generation immigrants always tried to resist complete assimilation with a foreign culture.

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