

INDIAN-BRITISH: DILEMMA OF KARIM'S WORLD IN THE NOVEL *THE BUDDHA OF SUBURBIA* BY HANIF KUREISHI

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ABSTRACT

This research purposes to explain the dilemma experienced by Karim, the main character in the novel *The Buddha of Suburbia*. The objectives of this research are to find out the kind of dilemma faced by Karim as an Indian-British marriage child and how he faces it. This research is a descriptive qualitative study and uses a mimetic theory by M.H. Abrams with an extrinsic element approach. The data of this research are all things taken from the novel in the form of text and dialogues of the main character. Based on the data analysis, the writer found the results as follows: There are four things that constitute the dilemmas of Karim, i.e. national identity, sexuality, family, and the place where Karim lives. The conclusion shows that family takes the biggest role to create and heal the dilemmas due to living in a multicultural society. Through the literary work readers can see that what is written in the novel is a reflection of the real condition of the society.

Keywords: Dilemmas, Main Character, Mix-Marriage, Multicultural Society, and Literary Work.

INTRODUCTION

A human being is a person full of desire. He will do anything to fulfil his need. Besides that, he is also a social being. When the society does not fit with him, he will try to find a new environment. Life needs and dreams sometimes force him to move or leave his own country. He might go to another country that he thinks is capable to fulfill his desire. His goal is clearly to achieve a better life – physically and mentally. To get a better life, he will choose a country that he considered better than his own country.

When he comes to the country that he wants, his statues becomes an immigrant. Based on Longman Dictionary Immigrants, the people who come from

another country to live are perhaps permanently in a foreign country (Longman, 2021). Being immigrants are not easy. They need to adapt with their new environment. Sometimes they have to face the negative stigma that society gives to immigrants.

The life of immigrants and their generation is quite interesting to study. It can be said that they have a quite complicated problem. For example, the second generation often get a crisis identity. They are often confused about their identity. They are born from a family that can be said not from the country that they live, but they grow up influenced by the environmental condition of that country. They do not know their parents' country or perhaps they know very little. They feel that they are not part of their parents' culture.

Some of immigrants also decide to marry with the local person. Sometimes marriage does not solve the problem. When they have kids, their kid will get the crisis too. Their kids will also experience what the first generation experienced. There will be time when they will be confused by their identities. They are born in the country where their parents live now. They learn all about the culture where they live but at the same time they also learn about their parents cultures even little bit.

Talking about immigrants and children of mixed marriages, reminds the writer to the very interesting novel. The writer knew this novel from her friend. It begun from an assignment in one of the courses-Modern English Literature. The writer was asked to read a novel in the postmodern era. *The Buddha of Suburbia* by Hanif Kureishi (Kureishi, 1990), it tells about the life of a child from a mixed marriage. This novel tells about the confusion of a child from an Indian-British marriage in living his life. The main character, Karim is looking for his identity in many aspects such as nationality and sexuality. Karim experienced many events in his life. Many people perhaps think that being an immigrant is something extraordinary. Being a child from mixed marriage children is fun. In fact, Karim experienced unexpected things.

Young Karim does not care when people talked about him. The most important thing for him at that time was thinking about how enjoy his youth life, listening to music, going out with the girl that he likes, and laughing with his friends. Everything changes when his parents divorced. Karim begins to be confused about his identity. He begins to think about the words of those people who does not seem to accept him. On his way, Karim starts to have desires or dreams. He goes to New York, being an

immigrant in New York to change his life. He thinks if he is successful, people will accept him.

Hanif Kureishi as the author of the novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* is really good at conveying the conflicts in the story. With a background that is almost similar to the main character in this novel, he makes this novel feels very real. This novel was Hanif Kureishi's first work after he wrote two well-known scripts namely *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1984) and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987). *The Buddha of Suburbia* won the Whitbread Prize that is prize for literary works for the nomination Best First Novel in 1990 and it was made into a four-part drama series by the BBC London in 1993 (Faber, 2016).

Based on the story on the novel, *The Buddha of Suburbia* mostly tells about racism, crisis identity, immigrants, and dream. The author wants to tell the reader about feeling of the mixed marriage children. The author divides this novel into eighteen chapters, with the total 284 pages.

Based on the description above, the topic of the thesis is to analyze the dilemma that the main character has and how the main character faces his dilemma. Beside that this novel can represent how the society works in the literary works.

Based on the background of the study, there are several reason for choosing those topic. First, the novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* is very interesting because it presents social issues that occur with the society. Through the novel can help us to see the world wider. With the topics that will be analyzed, it can help us to understand the situation of other people and even the society around us. Other that, this topic is chosen to show how a novel or a literary work works to represent the society.

According to the topic that the writer want to analyze, the tittle that the writer chose for this thesis is *Indian-British: Dilemma of Karim's World in the Novel "The Buddha of Suburbia" by Hanif Kureishi*.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, the writer conducted the research by applying the descriptive qualitative. The data is collected in the form of words, not in the form of numbers. According to Miles and Huberman, (Huberman, 1994) a qualitative research does not focus on numerals or statistic qualification, but it gives most attention to how deep the

researcher's knowledge is toward the interaction among concepts which is being learnt.

Meanwhile Lambert (2012) explained that a qualitative descriptive approach needs to be the design of choice when a straight forward description of phenomenon is desired. It is an approach that is very useful when researchers want to know, regarding events, who was involved, what was involved, and where did things take place. Qualitative descriptive indicate the studies used a grounded theory, ethnographic or phenomenological approach.

In addition to qualitative descriptive study, Sandelowsky (2000) stated that qualitative descriptive studies have as their goal a comprehensive summary of events in the everyday terms of those events. Researchers conducting qualitative descriptive studies stay close to their data and to the surface of words and events. Qualitative descriptive designs typically are eclectic but reasonable combination of sampling and data collection, analysis, and re-presentation techniques.

The conclusion, a descriptive qualitative study need a researcher enable do gain new insights about a particular phenomenon, develop new concepts or theoretical perspectives about the phenomenon, and discover problems that exist within said phenomenon. But, they allow a researcher to test the validity of certain assumption, claims, theories or generalizations within real word contexts.

To analyze *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the writer will do several procedure, as follow:

1. Reading the novel repeatedly.
2. Observing the character, conflict, and extrinsic element.
3. Analyzing the novel.
4. Reporting the result of the analysis.

DISCUSSION

A. Research Findings

After reading *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the writer finds several issues in the novel that makes Karim dilemmas. Karim has dilemma to find his truly identity. He is a child from a mix marriage between an Indian man and an English woman. He has tanned skin and looks Indian. In the society he is treated as Indian immigrant but in some situation he is treated as an English.

His family becomes ruin because his father has affair with another English woman. He is very mad with his father but at the other moment he is happy because he can escape from his origin family. The family that he thinks too bored for him. The concept of family makes Karim dilemma. He likes for being part of the family that he wants. The family that he can express his self freely but he is also mad to this family because it ruins the other happiness. The happiness of his mom and his younger brother.

Karim's love stories also makes his self-confuse. He falls in love with a man and a woman. Love that belongs to opposite gender. Not all people can accepted the love that he has, even his father. Feeling that for some people consider taboo. Karim is also confused about the concept of love. His feeling is only the reason of his resentment or really the true love.

Living in the South London and centre of London gives different feeling for Karim. In the suburb he gets a lot of wounds. Started to be treated unfairly by other, the economic shortage, and the ruin of his family. His expectation of London is gone. He also gets the same life like he was in suburbs. He wants to go back to South London but he still remember how his life in there.

Karim's dilemma is found the by the culture differences between Indian and British, including the elements of culture, life style, and traditions. The problems include the role of family and different arguments.

B. Discussion

1. National Identity

Karim Amir, the main character in this novel, is a son of an Indian immigrants and an English woman. As a second generation immigrant he experiences unclear feelings about his national identity. It writes in the very first paragraph,

"I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old of histories. Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored." (p.3)

He is neither proud nor ashamed of being English or Indian. Karim knows that his self is different from other people. He is different from other immigrants who still have memories about their homeland or home country. His homeland is

only Orpington, a suburb area in the South London. He gets the situation when people ask about his national identity and put him in a position which requires from him to either embrace or reject his Indian origin.

2. *Sexuality*

Karim has many sexual encounters with several people. He fall in love with both genders, man and woman. At the beginning of novel, Karim declares about his self: *"I was looking for trouble, any kind of movement, action and sexual interest."* (p.3)

In the first of his romance stories, he tells that he ever had a crush to Helen. A girl that he liked when he was in Junior High School but her father did not like Karim because he was look Indian.

When Karim meets Charlie at Eva's house, Karim introduces Charlie as an extraordinary beautiful boy.

When I looked up I saw that Charlie, her son, who was at my school in the sixth form and almost a year older, was sitting at the top of the stairs, partly concealed by the banisters. He was a boy upon whom nature had breathed such beauty – his nose was so straight, his cheeks so hollow, his lips such rosebuds – that people were afraid to approach him, and he was often alone. Men and boys got erection just being in the same room as him; for others the same effect. (p.9)

This is how Karim describes about the appearances of Charlie. Karim also describes his feeling about Charlie. He has interesting on Charlie.

"And Charlie? My love for him was unusual as love goes. It was not generous. I admired him more than anyone but I didn't wish him well. It was that I preferred him to me and wanted to be him. I coveted his talents, face, style. I wanted to wake up with them all transferred to me. (p.15)

Karim looks express his feeling but he is also jealous about Charlie's appearances and abilities. The love that he has for Charlie is kind of obsession. When Karim falls for Charlie and doing more to Charlie at Eva's house, Haroon – his father catches him (p.17-18). He yells to his son. At that moment Karim realizes that he cannot with Charlie.

I turned and saw across the attic Dad's flaming eyes, nose, and his famous chest hoiking itself up through the square hole in the floor... Dad hurried over to me. Dad looked from Charlie to me and back again." (p.17)

"I saw you, Karim. My God, you're a bloody pure-shitter! A bum-banger! My own son – how did it transpire?" (p.18)

3. Family

Family relationship take roles to Karim's dilemma. In the first of story, he tells about this family. Karim has several types of family. It puts Karim to another dilemmas.

Karim's first family or his origin family, which consist of his father (Haroon), his mother, and his younger brother (Allie). They represent the environment in which Karim has to grow up and express the boredom for him:

I was looking for trouble, any kind of movement, action and sexual interest I could find because things we were so gloomy, so slow and heavy, in our family, I don't know why. Quite frankly, it was all getting me down and I was ready for anything. (p.3)

He feels that his family nothing special, it looks like prison for him. His parents expect that he become a good child. One day he gets fact that his father has affair with Eva another English woman. Their parents decide to divorce and Karim decides to follow his father. He feels guilty about not doing exactly what they expect of him. His father cheating on his mother. Karim is mad to his father.

He started to laugh. The happy fucker laughed and laughed. It was the exhilaration of someone I didn't know, full of greedy pleasure and self. It brought me all the way down. (p.16)

Karim's faith in his father is lost. Even he follow his father to Eva's home, he does not to stay close to his father. Karim's relationship with his father is not good. After few days, Karim finds his mother's sketch book with a drawing of his father and Eva is standing next to him and holding each other hands. The drawing surprises Karim. It seems that the picture have been drawn by his mother for a long time. He feels more confused than before. After Karim meets Aunt Jean – his mother's sister, she wants Karim to stop his father affair.

"Your mum can't take no more," she said

"It's your job to stop the rot right now. If you do that nothing more will be said. God's honour." (p.45)

Jean tries to make Karim feel guilty about the whole situation and tries to make him believe only he can stop it. Karim is only being young adult at that time and have nothing to do. His aunt makes Karim to take responsible for it. He describes the atmosphere of his home after the cheating event:

What a weekend it was, with the confusion and pain between Mum and Dad virtually tangible; if it had physical substance, their antipathy would have filled our house with mud. It was as if only one more minor remark or incident were required for them to murder each other, not out of hatred, but out of despair. I sat upstairs in my room when I could, but kept imagining they were going to try and stab each other. And I panicked in case I wouldn't be able to separate them in time. (p.50)

Karim feels very confused about his family. Karim's mind set makes him feel that he is a person who takes this responsibility for his family. He is afraid of not being able to separate them for each other.

The divorces between his father and his mother bring Karim into his second family. It consists of Eva and Charlie. On one side Karim likes them (Karim's feeling toward Charlie). He sees that this family such a chance of escaping his boredom life and his origin family environment. Eva such a person who understands Karim. She is different from his mom.

The only person I knew who'd be helpful and objective and on my side was Eva. But I wasn't supposed to like her because her love for my father was bugging up our entire family. (p.63)

Karim declares that Eva is the person who he likes. Karim can be a person that his self wants to be, even for his father. Besides that, Eva is a person with the stable financial. Karim feels that she can fill their need. This problem makes Karim dilemma. He is happy for being part of his new family because he is free but he is also mad because his origin family destroy. He still remember how hurt his mom and his younger brother.

Karim's father feels that Eva is someone who really understands him. He tells Karim, he would rather suffer himself than put his family through the suffering. This is the conflict between the loyalty and living passionately. Karim's father wants to live with a woman who has feeling for him. Anabelle Cone mentions through her article *The Politics of Intimacy in Hanif Kureishi's Films and Fiction*:

The immigrant men often suffer from "liminal" malaise, at home neither in England nor in their native country. When they seek refuge in the arms of white women, these women always seem willing to listen to their confused dislocation. (Cone, 2001)

The third family that Karim has is Anwar's family. Anwar is Karim's father best friend. Anwar is an Indian immigrant likes Karim's father but Anwar married

with Indian woman – Jeeta. The culture in the Anwar’s family is still Indian origin culture. Anwar has one daughter from his marriage – Jamila, she becomes Karim best friend. For Karim, Anwar’s family is a place where he can escape from problems: “*Jamila and her parents were like an alternative family*” (p.52). Through this family Karim can laugh, tell everything what he wants to tell. He feels comfort to this family. This family accept Karim without looking his origin. They treats Karim very well. Anwar’s family always remind to Karim that he is still being the part of India. Anwar makes Karim confused when he knows that Jamila will marry with the man who is chosen by Anwar. Karim knows that Anwar is a person who really firm with his ideology. He does not expect that Anwar will keep their Indian origin by this way. Karim knows that Anwar is a good Muslim but he never expect that he will do it.

It was certainly bizarre, Uncle Anwar behaving like a Muslim. I’d never known him believe in anything before, so it was an amazing novelty to find him literally staking his life on the principle of absolute patriarchal authority. (p.64)

Should people pursue their own happiness at (other) expense? Or should they be unhappy so others can be happy? (p.65)

Jamila will be married with other Indian man. She will marry with the man she does not love. The pure Indian man with very good job and well background. Jamila is an educated woman with strong feminist believe, it is even more tormenting for her to accept her father’s order. Karim still thinking how a father can sacrifice his daughter’s happiness only to keep up the tradition. Arranged marriages still are part of the Indian culture. The family do the straight selection. They see about the background of the man’s family, the man’s education, and several background. When it feels suit, the two families will meet and talk about it. Usually they will talk about how big the brideprice. Bigger is better. Woman family does it for the better future. They do not want their daughter have struggle in her marriage life. Unfortunately they forget about the happiness of their daughter. Many divorce cases was reported with the reason wife was treated worse with their husband. The fact is really surprise, the husband feels that they have bought their wife with the expensive price. Some people have opinion that arranged marriage such a human trafficking (Suri, 2020).

Because of this, the relation between Karim and Anwar’s family become different. They have difference perspective about the concept of marriage. Karim

thinks Anwar's can tolerate with this culture because he has been living in England for the long time. Karim confuses. After Jamila married, he cannot meet his best friend every time he wants. He hates Anwar when he looks Jamila does not happy with her husband. Karim feels lost his family.

4. *The Suburbs and the City*

From the beginning of the story there is a wish that Karim wants to leave his area where he lives. He introduces the reader that he is "*from the South London Suburbs and going to somewhere. Where life is bottomless at its temptation.*" (p.8).

Karim is come from the lower class society. In the past Karim's father was a wealthy child. His family sent him to England for study after the study was finished Karim's father decided to come back to England because he could not live without Margareth—Karim's mom. They decided to marry. A few months after the marriage Karim's parents did not send money to him again. Unfortunately the firm that Karim's father has not really making money for them. His mom should take a job, she works in a shoe shop in the High Street to finance Allie. She also do the households although Karim's father spends more time at home. What Karim can expect from living in the lower social class in remote area. He wants the better life.

When he visits Eva's house for the first time with his father, he ruminates on how people in the suburbs do not want to pursue happiness but their live are filled with dullness instead, and that it would still take a long time before he can escape to London. Karim has thought that suburbs as a place where people only pretend to be happy and where one personality and desire cannot be freely expressed. He does not identify with the values and behavior of the people living in the suburbs. Karim remembers how he gets bad treats when he was in school. For Karim suburbs is relate to racism. One of the reasons Karim does not enjoy his life in South London is he sees the suburbs as only a leaving place, the start of a life.

In packing up the house and moving us to London, Eva was also in pursuit of Charlie, who was only rarely around now. For him too. It was obviously true that our suburbs were a leaving place, the start of a life. Each day was an adventure that could end anywhere. (p.117)

When he is in London Karim feels different. He does not feel ecstatic about it. He dreams about London filled with cultural intellectual experiences but he finds his self not really knowing where to go and what to do.

The city blew the windows of my brain wide open. But being in a place so bright, fast and brilliant made you vertiginous with possibility; it didn't necessarily help you grasp directionless and lost in the crowd. I couldn't yet see how the city worked, but I began to find out. (p.126)

I wanted to run out of the room, back to South London, where I belonged, out of which I had wrongly and arrogantly steeped. I hated Shadwell and everyone in the cast. (p.148)

Karim passes his life in London. He also get job but people over there do the same things as suburbia does. People like to make joke of him in the theatre. Although he never wanted anything more than being accepted in London. When things do not run as he wants, he draws back and starts thinking about returning to the suburb. The place where he feels familiar to him. The place that he feels better, but when he remembers suburb he remembers about all of his hurts.

From all of Karim's dilemmas the role of culture and people in society really influence the personality of someone. It can be said that Karim is a victim of the miss-culture. If his parents are willing to give better explanation about the cultural differences, Karim can grow up as a person who is proud of the cultural diversity that exist in his family. Karim can think that his self is lucky. Racism is something that cannot be avoided but at least he will able to respond it wisely. When other people making joke of him he only keep quiet. He tends to avoid it.

Karim relationship with his father is not good after he gets fact that his father has affair with another English woman—Eva. Karim loses the figure of father. When he decides to follow his father, their relation still awkward. He does not feel that he lives with his father. Karim loses his faith in the values of his home and family. It makes Karim looking for the substitute. The divorce of his parents give big impact for him. Karim being a person who loves men and women. Seeing from his family background, Karim seems to lack affection especially from his father.

I was looking for trouble, any kind of movement, action and sexual interest (p.3), this sentence is like a form of Karim's protest toward the dilemma that he has. Karim still looking for his sexual tendency. He dates women and men until he decides to ignore it because he thinks that he is still young.

Moving from suburbs area to the centre area gives different perspective for Karim. Karim, Charlie, Eva, and Haroon decide to move to London. They looking for better life. Even they live in the flat, it does not matter for them. The profession of Haroon as spiritual guru and yoga instructor more desirable than in suburbs.

Another that Karim has a job as an entertainer even he finishes his school only until Senior High School. Whereas Charlie can be a part of famous band in London. Even though everyone has their own struggles. Karim's life does not change too much. After they move they become a middle family class, when they were in suburb they were a lower family class. One of the reasons why they move to London because London is a capital city. They think that London is a multicultural city. It will be easy to adapt with the differences, but it does not. In the end Karim try to deal with his condition. He realises that he cannot force people to accept him as he wants. He cannot always avoiding racism. He decides to love Eleanor and forgive his father and Eva.

What has been experienced by Karim also experience by other Indian-British mixed marriage children who live in United Kingdom. Nayna Florence, a youtuber from two races family (Indian father and British mother). She tells his dilemma through her Youtube channel (Florence, 2020). She gets crisis identity, gets different treatment from her classmates because she has different colour skin. Her family also decides to move to London from Manchester. They expect that London is multicultural city but Nayna still gets racism when she is in the school. As the second generation and child of mix marriage she has the similarity with Karim. Nayna is not the only one, Sonia Sood also has the same crisis. Through her youtube channel (Sood, 2020) she tells that she gets racism when she is in school just because she looks Indian than her sister. Her mom and her father also divorce because her mom loves another British man. She conveys that she almost lack of her mother affection. After the divorce, her dad asks to move to London. Once again, London is not like what they expect but it is better. Sometimes Sonia misses her old residence and wants to come back but she cannot.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing *The Buddha of Suburbia* by Hanif Kureishi, some conclusion can be deduced from the whole result of the study. Here are some points the writer draw as the conclusion of the study.

Karim has struggle to find his identity. Identity is not only about the nationality but also about the things that related to self-label as well. It can be said that identity is a form of how people recognize us. In this case, Karim has dilemmas where he cannot

find his truly identity. First, Karim is confused about his nationality. It is commonly happens for children mix-marriage. Which under the law, he is a British citizen but his appearances says the opposites. Second, Karim confuses with his sexuality identity. Men are destined to love women but Karim does not. Karim can love both of them, men and women. It is caused Karim lack of affection from his father and his mother. Third, the concept of family confuses Karim. He knows that family should support and complement each other, but this is not found by Karim. He only see that family is the people who should sacrifice for the happiness of other family members. His mom chooses to end up her marriage life to see his husband happy, his friend--Jamilla chooses to obey her parents to marry with a man she does not love to see his father happy, and Eva is willing to sacrifice her self-esteem to get love from the man who is married. And last, identity for the place where Karim's lives. Orpington the suburbs area gives many scars to Karim but London does not heal him. He expects that London is a city where he can find anything he wants. The confusions or dilemmas can be caused by the family environment, social environment, divorce, and norms.

Life must go on, thus with Karim's life. To face his nationality's dilemma Karim decides to keep quiet. Racism is the thing that Karim cannot avoid but he keeps to ignore it. He feels mad when people making jokes of him because his origin but there is nothing to do. In the end he tries to accept his Indian because he realize that through his Indian gen he gets the job as an actor and his life is changing. To make sure his sexuality, Karim chooses to date several men and women. He wants to be sure. When Karim should break up with Eleanor, he realize that he really loved Eleanor. Every family that Karim has help Karim to face the world although any things that should be sacrifice. From each family Karim learns how people run their life. He chooses to respect to every family that he has and deal with them. Karim also choose to stay and live in London especially after he comes back from New York. Even though London does not fill his expectation, at least it is not as bad as Orpington's.

It also can be said that family takes the biggest roles for someone's life. Culture is form of many aspect but family is as the base for someone to face the multicultural. Family is the first social environment, it becomes a place to educate, teach basic knowledge, social norms, values and social ethnics. Multicultural like a double edged sword. If it is equipped with a good foundation—the role of family, it can form someone into a good character but if it not then it will put someone in full of doubt.

What Karim experiences also experience by other mix-marriage children (even they are not experience all of Karim experience). This show how *The Buddha of Suburbia* reflects the society. Literary work shows about what really happen in the society around people and it helps society to see the world wider.

Based on conclusion above, the study is expected to be useful for the readers generally and English literature students particularly. Here, the writer presents some suggestion to the readers. First, family should give the better explanation to their children about the concept of multicultural especially in the children from the mix marriage because family takes the big role in children growing. Second, the writer hopes this study can be a useful reference for the next research that relate to topic. Also, it may become another perspective so that there will be comparison study to get comprehensive study.

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