

## Identity Crisis in Hanif Kureishi's *My Son the Fanatic*

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### Abstract

Postcolonial subjects find it difficult to self-define their identities in territories of colonizers. Study implies the postcolonial ideology of Kaletha that “search of identity has become a pressing fact in the global world” (02) upon Hanif Kureishi's short story *My Son The Fanatic*. Asians migrated to the Britain colonies tend to mimic the white residents in order to discover their identities by assimilating with the dominant culture. The colonial subject reconstructs themselves in all social domains of tradition, customs, behavioral pattern, and language in order to assimilate in Britain society. Assimilation can only occurs when any black resident of society tries to abandon his personal ethnic identity in favor to adopt ideals of Britain society.

**Key words:** Post colonialism, Identity Crisis, Society, Mimicry, Assimilation.

### Introduction:

We were frequently referred to as ‘second generation’ immigrants’ just so there was no mistake about our not belonging in Britain( Bradford: 1996: 135)

Hanif Kureishi, a British author, is a writer of *My Son The Fanatic*. He grew up in England, being the son of Pakistani immigrant and English woman. He faced problems in adjustment to western society. He was not successful in retaining his eastern identity and unable to resist western ideology. He was hybrid of two races. In a conversation with Amitav Kumar, Kureishi demonstrates that “Identity crisis, if you see what I mean. Asians in Britain were princess, in those days. This idea-is not quite true-was that the only Asians in Britain were the children of upper class only. I still remember going to school. I was racially abused. I can recall my mother going to school for complains....Suddenly, everybody spits on you and you are completely devastated” (215). Such were the ruins and impacts of identity crisis of Asians in Britain colonies.

Identities of people from ex-colonies are endangered to get disrupted in their need to assimilate by mimicking the dominant social norms. Thompson expresses:

Subjects with the 'hyphenated' identities, then, have to come across such racist beliefs, possibly will find themselves having to choose amongst colluding with central cultural and social practices, thereby probably failing their personal sense of rootedness, or discarding the ideas of integration or assimilation in total and remaining 'rootless' on societies margin. Or they may have little choice but to inhabit the 'in-between' which is not always an easy place to be (p.13).

Racism, prejudices of white people dissect the society into two halves i.e. Britain and black Britain. Subjects exasperated them in mimicking the values of Colonizers but failed to feel oneness to them. Homi Bhabha expresses in *The Location of Culture* that mimicry mean to be ‘almost the same’ (p.84) as it is always a difficult task to be the exact replica of colonizers. Boehmer claims that postcolonial subjects were at all times ‘mentally colonized by the European culture’ (p.170). It was always difficult for subjects to be exact copies of colonizers. Further, Boehmer opines that people of contemporary world try to mimic the expressions of colonizer when all the ‘conduits of self

expression were closed for them' (170). It could be said that he considers mimicry not as a positive effect rather as a side effect of one's personality

*My Son The Fanatic* (1994) is a story of Pervaiz and his family. It focuses on the relationship between colonizer and Colonized. The problems of identity, class as well as race are dealt at length. Pervaiz migrated to England for the better future of his family. He always dreamt of "doing well in England" (218). In urge to buy the comfort of home and family, Pervez has forgotten his true identity and tried to mimic the Western culture. He drinks alcohol, eats pork and has a relationship with a prostitute, Bettina. Pervaiz brought up his son according to the norms of British culture, so that, he might not have to face identity crisis. Ali is a student of accounting at England's University. While, Parvez, drives taxi and works late till night so that Ali could excel well in studies as well as extracurricular activities such as cricket, swimming and football. He is well assimilated in the Britain culture when he social prejudices develops split in his personality and made him to question his true identity in the multicultural society of England. Ali questions his father, Pervaiz, "The Western materialists hate us", "Papa, how can you love something which hates you?" (126).

### **Objective of Study**

This study aims at investigating the short story *My Son The Fanatic* by Hanif Kureshi from the perspective of postcolonialism. In this paper the researcher has tried to examine the text of *My Son The Fanatic* to find out that how Kureshi has portrayed the identity crisis in the first and second generation of immigrants in Britain. The main objective of this study is to find out the impact of post colonialism in defining crisis faced by immigrants after migration to colonies.

### **Research Methodology**

Research methodology is a tool to analyze any type of the data to reach a certain conclusion. Chitanda demonstrates that "the selection of a competent research methodology is an essential stage in the collection of data in any research" (03). The content analysis of this study is qualitative and descriptive in its nature. We have analyzed the text through Kaletha perspective of post colonialism.

### **Research Questions**

*My Son the Fanatic* is analyzed with reference to post-colonial theory of Kaletha. My purpose of study is to explore that:

1. How societies form the individual's identity?
2. How Kaletha thinks the global world pressing?
3. To identify the problems of identity faced by people, who migrated towards the Britain after 2nd world war.
4. To explore the effects of identity crisis on the people, who are standing at the cross road of Eastern and Western life style

### **Literature Review**

Post colonialism deals with cultural legacy of colonial rule. It deals with cultural as well as social identity matters. It depicts the struggle of colonized societies to establish their national identity. Colonized ideologies and discourses are constructed in such a way that they always feel themselves inferior and exotically other. They are unable to shake yoke of colonizer. It portrays that knowledge of subaltern is always created and certain ideologies are imparted to them. Their language, culture, lifestyles, manners and mentality is constructed inferior and they are stick to that. West always seems to them superior. Colonized discourse always serves the interests of colonizer.

Human beings cannot live in isolation. They have to live with other human beings. They have to share experiences with one another. Society is an important factor in formation of individual's identity. Social cultures are the set of patterns, behaviors and experiences. Different societies exist and share their cultures. Edward Said takes culture as a mixture of experiences which are accumulated with the passage of time. It is socially transmitted from societies to societies. We as human beings interact with each other and share or exchange ideas. Sometimes members of one culture develop likeness for another culture due to cross-cultural exchange that is termed as acculturation. Culture distinguishes one human group from others. People who are living in Britain face cultural changes. Sometimes people face problem to fit in another culture. Multicultural societies create sense of confusion, disorientation and tension among immigrants. This often leads to ethnocentrism as Ali felt that his eastern culture is superior to western culture. Postcolonial writings reject the notion that colonized people are shallow mimics of European culture. Our ideologies make us to take our culture, values and ethics for granted. We blindly imitate western values. We neither remain united to our culture nor completely dissolved in western culture. We are just imitators.

According to Bhabha, "an attempt to copy culture of colonizer by colonized is both a resemblance and a threat (86). Characters such as Pervaiz and Ali generate personal spaces which perturb them to transform themselves in British culture. This is impossible for immigrants to avoid culture of host country. They have to adopt themselves into a new culture. They give up their values, traditions, customs to fit into culture of hosting country. Colonial identity is often provokes confusion. It is not monolithic and the interaction between the culture of colonized and colonizer is not harmonious.

According to Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H., hybridity occurs when Indigenous people are forced to assimilate to new social patterns by colonizer. This happens when powerful colonizer wants to take control of economy and political situation of territory and colonizer suppress their cultural identity through conscious efforts (183).

Moreover, Huddart explains in his book Homi Bhabha that, "Bhabha brings insights from literary theory to his analysis of mimicry, and literary theory shows us that representations construct as well as mirror the world" (39). Therefore the readers become aware to the mirror of double foils concerning metaphor of post-colonial migrancy. The mimicry of the text itself pointing "subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite" deconstructs the colonial construction of the hierarchy between the colonized and the colonizer because "...the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference (89).

### **Analysis**

*My Son The Fanatic* is a story of father and son grappled between them is clash of customs, lifestyles and as well as cultures. Parvez, the father is a Pakistani immigrant living in England. He works as a taxi driver who has integrated in west culture and ignores the moral beliefs of his own culture.

As the story progresses it shows the realization of Parvez for Ali's unusual behavior. He worries for the change in attitude of his son. Once Pervaz asked him why he is not playing his guitar? Ali replies that he wants to perform "more important things" in life. Ali's strange behavior disturbs Parvez. He was worried why Ali's inclination has changed towards the things which he once loves most. Excluding guitar as a Western instrument and pleasures from his life indicates the change of taste in Ali's attitude. So he questions Ali why he doesn't play guitar the reply was harsh that there are more important things to be done. By referring important things means the obligatory

ones which are to be done. Parvez could not sleep. He went out to drink whisky. He wanted to discuss the matter with someone who understands the position of Parvez being a father. The curiosity of Pervaz had increased about strange behavior of his life. He enquires from Ali:

Where is that going?

You loved to make an awful noise with these instruments!

Farid mocks: You said all the time that there are other significant things than 'Stairway to Heaven'. You could not be more right Papa.

Parvez has the conclusive evidence to his suspicions when he sees Farid praying in his room (309).

He wants to know the reason behind the odd behavior of his son. He has start drinking more than the usual routine. This action of Parvez shows his detachment with the religion and attachment with the Westerns. He neglects all the norms of his own culture and has to get adopted the customs of West.

The narrator describes the familial lifestyle of taxi drivers in England. They were spending a boy's life. They were busy in playing cards, exchanging practical jokes and stories. They avoided their wives and took food to eat from nearby shops. They were spending their days in beds. The life of an immigrant is shown that how they live in the other community in order to be called the members of same community. They do not show interest towards their family, they prefer night work and sleep at day time. There is no order in their lives. They spent more time with their friends than their family. They earn money for their family, work for their family but forget the responsibilities. He came in England to do well. His dream came true. But his son attitude forced him to think "where had he gone wrong?" (319). Parvez like any other father wishes a good future for his son in the form of right girl as his wife, good job and bright future. He wants him to start family life in England.

Parvez was too much implicated in western culture. He has a girlfriend, Bettina. Bettina is the only person with whom he discusses all his problems. Bettina is a prostitute by profession. She in turn told him about his clients and night's activities. Their friendship is based on incident when Parvez rescued her from a bullying client. This incident brings them closer. Parvez was tired of home environment and wanted to hold something different. According to critics like Kaleta that Parvez thinks of England as a land where his dreams lies. She signifies west.

Although having a wife and a son, Bettina is the mistress of Parvez who reduced the role of Parvez wife. He mostly talks and shares his worries with Bettina (prostitute). By this intimacy of their relationship and ignorant attitude towards his wife can be seen. He has another women or being with another women it is the new taste which England offers them. Disrupted family system often causes the children to be at conflicts with one or both the parents. Pervaiz had a varied opinion about religious fundamentalist. When Ali tends to seek fatherly permission to allow Maulvi to stay at their place, his reaction is that "Maulivi will stir up all the pots. You do not know these religious people. They like to impose mad ideas" (351). Pervaiz propelled Ali to set the stay of Maulvi at some hotel. Pervaiz never likes to listen to religious talks. Pervaiz affirms:

Boys gather up and never stop talking about good and bad. God says to do this or that, or to burn in hell, or to celebrate in Paradise. I am tired of being instructed, as if I am a fool or a bad man without my own mind. You are right, they thirst for something. But why is there so much violence and hatred there (371).

Kureshi has shown the polarity of father's and son's opinion in an extensive manner. Farid differs from the machismo estimation for most of the times. On the sight of favoring Maulvi and at the other time spitting on the face of Bettina, Pervaiz almost gets infuriated at Farid. He brings his

son home and begins serious conversation. Taunting Farid for having soft corner for Maulvi and expectorating Bettina, Pervaiz shouts:

Parvez: I won't stand for the extremity of anti-democratic and anti-Jewish rubbish.

Ali: Only the corrupt would say it is extreme to want goodness! (381).

Parvez was very suspicious about Ali's problem and he discusses the matter with his friend Bettina. Bettina advises Parvez to observe his son. Pervaz notices only one thing unusual that is "But he's growing a beard" (390). He observed Ali's inclination towards religion. He also observed that Ali's prays five times a day.

Parvez not only tells to Bettina but to his friends also, the friends who were very curious before are now in shock. Because in England discussing a teenager addicted to drugs is easier than to discuss a teenager attracted to religion. Ali's devotions are what they have left behind in Lahore. Parvez and his friends used to make fun of caps and beard of mullahs walking around and now he's own son is also being one of them so he's really annoyed.

In order to talk about the current circumstances Parvez invites Ali for a dinner. In nervousness he starts drinking, before Parvez could speak Ali harshly questions Parvez about drinking. Parvez explained that in all his life he had worked a lot. He sacrificed his interests, enjoyments and hobbies for his son. He wants few enjoyments in his life. He justified his desire for drinking as "we are only human" this statement of Parvez shows human beings are not perfect, he's giving an excuse for the things he's doing which are forbidden in Islam. Parvez gave excuses to run away from truth. Ali again questions that it is forbidden to drink alcohol in Islam. Parvez replied he knows, it shows the two knows the rules of Islam despite this Parvez still drink and gamble. Although drinking is prohibited in Islam. He has not committed a crime. He broke many principles of Koran. He ate pork pies although they are haram to eat in Islam. He ordered his wife to cook pork. He said to her that we are not living in eastern village now. We are living in England so "we have to fit in" (311).

In Ali's opinion Parvez is implicated in western civilization too much and shows no respect for Quran, by eating pork and drinking alcohol which is forbidden in Islam. Ali is appalled by his father behavior, for Ali, Parvez only lives for Western pleasures. He does not see any philosophy of life behind Parvez lifestyle. He also adds that he want to give up his studies because the western education cultivates an anti-religious attitude. So this shows that the character Parvez portrays by Hanif Kureishi neglects the religion. The question arises why he neglects the religion? Does their anything which make Parvez away from religion? Answer to such question can be extracted from his childhood. A maulvi taught him Koran. Maulvi fastened his hair with ceiling and a piece of string. He started fan if fell asleep. If would result in jerk which instantly awake him. So that he started to avoid religion.

In the story can be seen that Parvez and his taxi driver fellows make fun of the beard and caps of mullahs walking around. Other reason can be that Parvez is too involved in western civilization. According to Ali the principal to live a good life is according to Islam which require more than having a conscience. Ali continues his verdicts without a moment of delay. He also questions about the "pork pies" which he used to relish. Eating pork pies is prohibited in Islam. Although Parvez knows the Koran rules, just utters "Well..." to gain time in order to gather an excuse.

By saying "we have to fit in" Parvez aim is to fit in the lifestyle of West and by eating pork his point of view that fitting in involves a new style of living to be accepted by English people. To be full and equal member of the community, one has to adapt to their lifestyle. Only then colonizer's superiority cannot overpower anymore. Parvez don't want to be isolated from West community so he



does not want to be defined with their ethnical identities like most immigrants do. He doesn't want to be called "others" in foreign country so he adopt their values, customs and norms to fit in their lifestyle.

Ali takes another point for discussion that you love something which returns you hatred and inferiority complex. Ali declares his idea of jihad and reward of paradise. Ali asks his father "Pray beside me" for your removal of sins. He is forcing Pervaz for worship.

In this story Ali is the character who is more inclined to religious beliefs and is condemn by his father. Parvez think that by swinging to Islamic religion will make Ali away from the opportunities provided by the West. Parvez was very disappointed about Ali's inclination towards religion. As an argument of Ali and Parvez shows that Pervaz likes lifestyle of England. Parvez said that he loved England because they allowed you to almost anything. Ali replied to his father that "that is the problem" (315).

It is clear that Pervaz is a loose identity. He is a mixture of two civilizations that is east and west. He is a hybrid individual. He adopts western norms. He commits crimes like fornication, drinking and eating pork dishes. He feels no shame in it because he has to fit in western civilization. He wants to forget every sign of identification of eastern civilization. He likes England because it offers freedom and liberation. He imitates western values at all extent to become like a western man.

### Conclusion

Person's identity is formed by interacting with people, their lifestyle and society. Ali's identity cannot be taken for granted. His identity was deeply affected by his postcolonial heritage. Multicultural societies with heterogeneous nations often possess its individuals with the issues of identity. Therefore, one can possibly agree to Ranasinha's opinion that Kureishi himself has an "ironic distance" (236). This led the immigrant to face the defective elements of their identity formation in a "pressing global world" (Kaletha, 02).

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