Problematics of Multiculturalism: Exploring the Dynamics of Cultural Proximity in Hanif Kureishi's Trilogy: *The Buddha of Suburbia*, *The Black Album*, and *My Son the Fanatic*

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Abstract To examine any social condition, it is essential to understand that subject-object equivalence of the society which lies "… [in] the denial of difference" (Mark Bahnisch). The article employs this critical approach to examine the situation that sprang-forth with the practice of conservatism in the postcolonial Britain. Cultural Nationalism is an intermediate point between ethnic and liberal nationalism. It is a byproduct of the dissociation of the immigrant population from the host society and acts as a motivating factor for separatist movements. The article attempts to analyze the discourse of Cultural Nationalism which is seminal in the works of Hanif Kureishi. Social theories such as Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the creation of "Cultural Capital", and Derrida's notion of "Desire," stand — useful in examining the political-literary narratives of post-World War Britain. This article argues human as a cultural product, and the process of thinking about their social recognition as a fulfilment of the generated "desire." The article also examines the problematic of cultural assimilation and how it cultivates, minorities' problems, social disintegration-degeneration, and cultural fundamentalism.

Key words Hanif Kureishi; immigrants; multiculturalism; otherness; in-betweenness

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Introduction

The "demand for multiculturalism is strong in the contemporary world" (Sen 149), however, in the much increased global contact, especially in diverse cross-cultural-communication, multiculturalism as a project seems to be partially successful. The assertion "love thy neighbour" (Sen 149) has gained a different dimension in the context of multiculturalism. Amatrya Sen says that the "entreaty to love one's neighbour now requires people to take an interest in the very diverse modes of proximate people" (Sen 149). This practice of differentiating the socio-cultural-spaces has grown. Majority of the nations despite following democratic governance witness cultural clashes and problems of assimilation in a surmountable way. This problem has already been triggered out by Amartya Sen (2006) who puts in an optimistic tone that "… the main hope of harmony in our troubled world lies in the plurality of our identities" (Sen 16) and that the "illusion of unique identity is much more divisive than the universe of plural diverse classifications that characterize the world in which we actually live" (Sen 17).

Problematic of Multiculturalism

The cultural artifact to identify human-being as the "Other" has developed the persistent sense of otherness where the "us" receives the social benefits while "them" lives with demeaning identity. This sense of "othering" comes from the invention of "categories." Thus 'othering' becomes a "… process of casting a group, an individual or an object into the role of the 'other' and establishing one's own identity through opposition to and, frequently, vilification of this Other" (Gabriel 2012). This 'other' creates a conflict of boundaries in the intended project of global assimilation and becomes the cause of cultural clashes. Kureishi (1995) aptly observes the divisive nature of the present day society when he says "… these days everyone … [is] insisting on their own identity, coming out as a man, woman, gay, black, Jew-brandishing, whichever features they … [can] claim, as if without a tag they … [will not] be human" (*The Black Album* 92). The categories that Kureishi mentions are invented categories (other) which have their own modal accessories

and are used to enter in any kind of dialogue for cross-cultural communications. Despite the global reach of secular-democratic ideas, the cultural production of such categories plays an important role in the crisis of the psychological space occupancy[1] of the inhabitants' of the region. Kureishi talks about how there is an invisible "… subtle mechanisms of discrimination … [operating in England] (Kureishi qtd. in Gilbert 3). Gilbert (2001) to emphasizes on "… geographical concentration of the immigrants in the certain areas … which recalls the ethnic zoning in colonial cities like Chandrapura[2] …" (Gilbert 3).

In the beginning of 21st century, the globalization-effect and the de-colonization process impacted the inflow of foreign population in the developed countries. The crucial point in Britain's history was the 1960's when people from different commonwealth countries were invited to take up jobs in Britain[3] "… to facilitate … [and] redress the country's ageing workforce … [and] partly to meet [up] reputed labour shortage[4] in the range of jobs …" (Conway 1)[5]. The massive inflow changed the demography of the country and, "… cities like London, Leicester or Birmingham … appear[ed] to have no connection with England of Arthur Bryant" (Conway 66-67). Multiculturalism became "a face of life, in which the Church of England has been replaced by mosques or temples … old corner grocers by *halal* butchers and *sari* shops"[6] (Conway 66-67). Resultantly, the immigrants were seen as a counter negative to the social cohesion. The inflow with such massive counts

1 Independent stories of Xenophobic Experiences: For instance the case of Michael Luo, a New York Times Editor was told to "go back to China." <https://in.finance.yahoo.com/news/asian-americans-share-stories-racism-073233936.html > Louise Liu | Business Insider – Tuesday 11 Oct, 2016 1:02 PM IST.

2 Chandrapura is an Indian town described by E M Foster in his book A Passage to India (1924). E M Foster has depicted the colonial pattern of ethnic zoning in that that place (Foster 7).

3 Flexibility in the immigration norms, the "Imperial Act of 1914" and "The British Nationality Act" of 1948 extended a right of entry to all the inhabitants of Commonwealth Countries (Conway 48).

4 This acute labour shortage was because of the devastation faced in World War II.

5 South-Asians became the visible immigrant community in cities like Birmingham, Leicester, Bristol, Liverpool, Bradford, Leeds and Manchester. Their combined number increased from 80,000 to 3 million between the years 1951 to 1991. In Spitalfields sixty percent (60%) of the population consists of Bangladeshi and in Bradford, over half the population was from Pakistan (Conway).

6 The district of Saville Town, home to Mohammed Sidique Khan, leader of the July 2005 London Tube-Bombing, consisted of 90 per cent of South-Asian population.

accordingly affected the factional cultural communication (between the natives and immigrants) prompting an increasingly suspected situation of "continued home country loyalties" and identities.

Never the less the immigration policies solved the labor shortage in the newly developing industrialized British Society, no thoughts were given to the needs of immigrants. Denied social space and public amenities made their situation worse. Nor a conscience developed among the majority community in accepting these people from other countries as equal in status. As a response to the situation, world political domain started experiencing domination of different separatists' uprisings and that demonstrated a violent struggle to assert control over certain part(s) of London and England as a whole.

The main driving force behind such uprisings originates from a shared belief of a unique cultural identity, which justifies the separatists' rights to have an exclusive separate home-space and identity within the inhibited land. Such confrontations against a government or a social setup, demanding a separate, virtual-geo-political-boundary based on the uniqueness of the cultural practices, gives rise to the concept of new boundary within a boundary which is the core of 'Cultural Nationalism/ Sub-Nationalism'. The article focuses on the emerging concept of Cultural Nationalism with Great Britain as a plot to emulate the situation of the immigrant's inflow, the interaction of the natives in the post-World-War-II era. Further, it also attempts to decipher the socio-cultural matrix and the escalated tensions that emerge out of cultural conflicts as depicted in Hanif Kureishi's works published during the 1990's.

Hanif Kureishi's trilogy[1], *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1991), *The Black Album* (1995), and *My Son the Fanatic* (1997)[2] are the paradigmatic examples of the post-imperial-ethno-English socio-conscious writings. These stories written between 1990's to 2005 draw on the ethnic differences as found in the immigrants and the native communities of England. "Quest for identity" becomes seminal in his work, also because of the writers status of a second generation Pakistani immigrant, with multiple identities — Pakistani, immigrant, Londoner, Muslim, 'Black British' writer. The complexities are embedded in multiple identities, and the problem to identify someone with something specific which is more related to social conditioning where "… high status cultural signals [are] used in cultural and social selection" (Lamont & Lareau 153). In the social mechanism, the concept

1 The Buddha of Suburbia, and The Black Album was published as novels. My Son the Fanatic was published as short story in the collection of short stories Love in Blue Times.

2 Abbreviations used for in-text citation of the selected novels: The Buddha of Suburbia; TBS; The Black Album: TBA; My Son the Fanatic: MSF

employs the collection of symbolic elements such as skills, taste, postures, clothing, mannerism, material belongings, belief-system, credentials etc. that one acquires by being part of a particular social class in a definite geographical location, and acts as tools of engagement to condition the target population. Therefore being a 'Londoner' in the social-mechanism designates "… being and belonging to … [the] polyphonic … [British identity, but not being British] (Madhuri 5). "Londoner" is a cultural production of the dominant British imperialism.

Anxiety of In-Betweenness: Struggle for "Being" and "Belonging to"

Karim Amir, the central character of in *The Buddha of Suburbia* lives with the anxiety of in-betweenness: as a Londoner and of being born to a Pakistani father and an English mother:

> 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 histories … Perhaps it is the odd mixture of blood, of here and there, of belonging and not [,] that makes me restless … . (Kureishi, *TBS* 3)

Despite being a racial mix (half-English on his mother's side) and oblivious to any other cultures than English, Karim is still seen as just another foreigner in the country. His restlessness, therefore can be described as a result of pressure from both the cultures in constructing the "self." Likewise, Shahid (*TBS*), Pervez and Ali (*MSF*) also express their anxiety of being the other: "Everywhere I went I was the only dark-skinned person … ['I had been kicked around and chased a lot'] … I began to be scared of going into certain places … ['I kept on thinking there was something I lack']" (Shahid, *TBA* 10); or the public humiliation of Pervez in the pub: "*Suddenly spotlight ... on Pervez's face ... Comedian is telling Paki, Rushdie and Muslim Jokes. He ...* [being] *the only brown face there ...*" (Kureishi, *MSF* 69). Shahid's outburst in-front of Riaz about his experience as an immigrant, and Pervez's public-humiliation to be the "only brown face" amid the crowd shows the unwillingness of the host society to give the immigrants a proper space in the polyvalent nature of multicultural identity. Their stand amid the cultures can be termed as the "confused desi" (Madhuri 21) who were "… supposed to be English, but to the English … [they] were always wogs and nigs and Pakis" (Kureishi 24). The "monolithic whiteness" (Werbner & Modood XV) of the British has been a conditioned fact to look for the race based human segregation. Enouch Powell in support of racial prejudices says "… England … [is] becoming overrun with 'wogs' and [is] in danger of becoming a

'black coloney'" (Madhuri 13). The racial demagoguery reflects how the immigrants are seen as competitors of the natives who feel that the resources of their land would be consumed by them.

The social mechanism that operates in the formation of identity for the South-Asian immigrants can be viewed from Bhabha's ideas on dialogic tools for conditioning. Bhabha (1994) believes that there "… is … [an] emergence of the interstices — the overlap and displacement of domains of difference" where in "… community interest, or cultural value[s] are negotiated" (Bhabha 3). The subject-object co-relevance in the colonial gaze is the hegemony of [S]ubject['s] … "in-between," or in excess of, the sum of the [I] "parts" of difference (Bhabha 3). Bhabha's assertion can be understood as the process of the formation of the subjects' "I" part in the new British imperialism. "I" can be seen as a process of double conditioning in the immigrant context, first as the direct subject to the colonial empire in their native lands, and second, as an immigrated subject in that country.

Formation of "I" and the Creation of "Cultural Capital"

Kureishi's representation of the father figures in the selected texts, stands alibi to Bhabha's mentioned process of the formation of "I" under the canopy of British Colonialism, and Bourdie's creation of the "Cultural Capital." Haroon (Father of Karim) in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Shahid's "father" in *The Black Album*, and Pervez (Father of Ali) in *My Son the Fanatic*, all have the exposure to double oppression. Their "… dream of doing well in England" (Kureishi, *MSF* 64.) has been an antecedent-conditioned for being accepted in the host society with a status of a lower-middle-class non-European immigrant. This status also calls for something distinctive; and Haroon tries to make himself distinct by banking on the idea of the exotic east: his part-time fantasy of teaching *yoga* to the English is an outcome of it (Kureishi 5). He takes this "this yoga thing" (Kureishi 13) very much business-like, to sell to the West and also to satisfy their Eurocentric ego. Shahid's "Papa," the Travel Service Entrepreneur firmly believes in "the ways of British life" (Kureishi, *TBS* 53) and expects his sons to practice it; he would take "… Shahid and Chili into the bathroom to demonstrate the only correct way to shave … [and] for bathing demonstration … courtesies, and how to shake hands firmly while saying 'How do you do?'" (Kureishi 53). Shahid's father's approach to make an Englishman out of the "confused desi[s]" is to overcome the sense of racial inferiority he has internalized. Pervez (in *MSF*) desires that his son Ali becomes an accountant and marries an English girl (Kureishi 65) and if he succeeds in doing so, his dream of doing well in England will come true. Right from the beginning Pervez

is "… both terrified and ecstatic to be … [in Fingerhut's house]" (Kureishi, *MSF* 3). The engagement of his son with Madelaine serves as an achievement to him as "All the years … [he] lived here, not a single Englishman has invited … [him] to his house" (Kureishi, *MSF* 65). For Pervez, to be in a relation with an Englishman, and preferably by a marriage bond between his son and the English girl will elevate his status and will help him in moving in the circle of the elite race. Haroon, Papa (Shahid's father) and Pervez create their own space of "liminality" in a hope of cultural transformation which in reality fails completely.

The attempt of the fathers to assimilate with the English society is the reflection of their moulded psychology of invariable marking their difference as the 'other'. The anxiety of being the other and the urge for integration in the host society aggravates the propensity of the "… self-oppressive role-play and anglophile mimicry" (Schoena 109). Their preferences "of the love of yoga" (Haroon in *TBS*), "love for Pakistani Cricket Team" (Shahid's Father in *TBA*) "love for the English food and music" (Pervez in *MSF*) and their "propensity to mock the British" (Gilbert 132) reflects that the Englishness they have espouse in public life, to some degree are tactical forms of mimicry to deflect racial gaze of the dominant culture. They represent the "brown Englishman" (Gilbert 132) who desires to be the Englishman without any affixations.

Being the "Other": Desire, Memory, Flux of Cultures, Hybridity

The transcultural approach in Kureishi's characters draws on political perceptions of the conditioning of the sense of power and behaviour among people which is indoctrinated in them by "… deep memory, cultural flow, and the hybridisation of indigenous and imported categories" (Mitra 2012). The acceptance of inferiority by the first generation immigrants later, problematize the intercultural interaction for the second and third generation immigrants in the country. The indifference in acceptances of the prejudices of the foreign by the second and third generation immigrants then can be translated in terms of Derrida's concept of "Desire" and its practical failure in social mechanism to create a sense of identity. Jacques Derrida's notion of desire signifies an impermanent lack of something. So eventually when someone acquires that desired object, desire ceases to be in operation. But then, the nature of desire is an unattainable reality. In social mechanism, this continued sense of emptiness comes into creation of reality to fulfill the lack. This point is well illustrated in Andreas:

> … [D]esire is already invested in social formation, which … creates … interest

> … creates the sense of lacking … I am interested in the way desire actually produces reality, and moving beyond the psychoanalytic view of desire as 'lack', … I put forward a different view based on Deleuze and Guattari's idea in *Anti-Oedipus*, that 'lack' should not be identified with desire; rather desire constitutes production in the social field. (Andreas 57-58)

Andreas views on cultural production of the British imperialism, is the representation of the equitized role-play of lack and desire. Their lack of a non-British background produces a binary of pure versus impure in the racial politics (Natives=English=Pure, Immigrants=Non-English=Impure). Though the constitutional democratic governance of the country does not differentiate as such, yet the immigrants remain in the periphery for their livelihood needs for their lack of being English. Either way, their acceptance or rejection of their status does not improve their living situation. Overtly their acceptance of their status acts inversely for double oppression in the society.

Kureishi describes Shahid's (*TBA*) college as a "brand for the population of mostly black students." Also he specifies that the teaching staff of that college are Whites:

> The college was a cramped Victorian building … It was sixty per cent black and Asians, with an ineffective library and no sports facility. Its reputation was less in academic area but more for gang rivalries, drug, thieving and political violence. It was said that college reunions were held in Wandsworth Prison. (Kureishi, *TBA* 24)

Kureishi's contrasting representation of the ruling class (the teachers) and the ruled (black students from the third world countries) brings in Bourdie's conditioning and the imperial gaze of the British. In the case of Karim, his employer chooses him to play Kipling's protagonist "Mowgli."[1] His hybrid ethnicity (an off spring of an Indian-Pakistani Father and an English Mother) acts positively to get him his breakthrough as a performance artist. The think tanks of the theatre group identifies Karim as an Indian, and see him a perfect fit for the role because of his third world affiliation: 'Indian black boy in knickers'. Karim's inverse exposure to his levied motherland feeds the imagination of the British colonial mind: "'This is your costume, Mr Mowgli' … It turned out that on stage … [he] would wear a loin-clot and brown make-up … [to] resemble a turd in a bikini-bottom" (Kureishi, *TBS*

1 The Jungle Book (1894) is a collection of stories by Rudyard Kipling.

146). The audiences' views on Karim's "knicker" is suggestive of the orientalist discourse. Despite Karim's ability to speak "… English with an English accent" (Siddiqui 2), he is asked to perform authentic accent; "Shadwell took me aside and said, 'A word about the accent, Karim. I think it should be an authentic accent.' 'What d'you mean authentic?' 'Where was our Mowgli born?' 'India.' 'Yes. Not Orpington. What accent do they have in India?' 'Indian Accent.' 'Ten out of ten'" (Kureishi, *TBS* 147). This trajectory is also seen in the lives of Pervez and Ali (*MSF*). The first meeting between the two families sets the nature in motion again. In the engagement ceremony, Mr. Fingerhut (father Madelaine) carries a disgusted look because of his daughter's choice of an Indian boy as her life partner. The unwillingness of the police chief in marrying his daughter Madelaine to Ali depicts the institutionalized racism and indifference of the British Culture.

Degeneration and Disintegration: Loosing the Solidarity in the Social Fabric

The affective nature of desire for "lack," acts as an indictment to create reality. The debate on the complexity of belonging in the postcolonial British subjects' is because of the unwillingness of the host society to understand properly the "created lack" among the second and the third generation immigrants. To understand such hegemonic discourse on formation of the British immigrant identity in the 1980s and the 1990s, it is essential to look beyond the discriminatory dynamics of the society and to focus on the "re-imaging of desire" (Andreas 57). An interesting thing about "desire" is its unattainable reality. As Deleuze and Guttari argue that "… there are no desiring machines that exist outside the social machines ... and no social machines without the desiring machines … " (Deleuze & Guattari 340), therefore, in the practical ground of cultural interaction, desire always constitutes production in the social fields. Sara Upton stating on this idea says that the failure of political institutions and theoretical academia to convey the society with a direct engagement to the real world about the "… alienation and disaffection of certain communities within the host society" (Upton qtd. in Andreas 58), has resulted in the disintegration of the social fabric in the postcolonial Britain.

As a cultural instigator, Kureishi recognizes this nature of the social mechanism of "desire." Indifference towards the immigrants grew adversely during the Thacherite period with British Muslims being affected "… more so than others" (Andreas 60). The desire for cultural production in immigrants grew intense. Karim, Shahid, and Ali's, upbringing in the Western cultural mould, their education, their taste for British rock-music, sexual liberation of "hedonism" and "fetishistic" British life-style nothing results in improving their as the other. Second generation

immigrants face the humiliation as faced by their fathers:

> '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.' 'We don't like it' … However many niggers there are, we don't like it. We're with Enoch. If you put one of your black 'ands near my daughter I'll smash it with a 'ammer! With a 'ammer.' (Helen's father to Karim *TBS* 40)
>
> 'Paki! Paki! Paki!' she screamed. Her body had become an arched limb of hatred with a livid opening at the tip, spewing curses. 'You stolen our jobs! Taken our housing! Paki got everything! Give it back and go home.' (A female racist to Shahid, *TBA* 139)
>
> 'The Western materialist hates us … how can you love something which hates you.' (Ali to Pervez, *MSF* 69)

Result of such ousted racial remarks draws the second and the third generation immigrants towards cultural fundamentalism. The suppressed rage for racism and indifference in the second and third generation British immigrants compels them to come out loud with their native identities, for instance, Mohammed Emwazi, who turns a British jihadist and loves to be nicknamed as "Jihadi John," or Mohammed Sidique Khan, the "London Tube-Bomber" (7th July 2005). The failure of the "desire of acceptance" in the second and third generation immigrants leads them to seek identity through religion. As Maurice O'Connor (2016) observes this as a new zenith of "separatist cultural fundamentalism" with a religious mould. Commenting on Kureishi's representation of such youths, he further says that "Seen from the post 9/11 perspective, the relevance of … [Kureishi] is that … [he] represents … the first fictional accounts of the radicalization of those disposed Muslim Asian youths who, while born and bred in the UK, were no longer seen themselves as British" (O'Connor 150). West cease to exist as a hope of betterment for the settled immigrants. The disenfranchised Asian youth who had a Muslim heritage now started seeing Western modernism as "… eroding their cultural values" (O'Connor 143). To stop such erosion, they took an active stand in protesting against all discrimination and look forward to creating a virtual geo-political boundary with indigenous culture and religion as a shield of a stable identity for Cultural Nationalism.

Aspiring for cultural nationalism the young British Muslims do not hesitate to revisit Islam from a radicalist perspective:

For young religious radicals, extreme *Islam* worked in many ways. It kept

> them out of trouble, for a start and provided some pride … At the same time they were able to be rebels. (Kureishi 8)

For the young religious radicalist like Riaz-Al Hussain, Chad, Hat, and Tahira (*TBA*) and Ali/Farid (*MSF*) Islam becomes the culture, a past bond to be renewed for asserting their identity. But unfortunately the plurality of identity of the immigrants comes in their way: neither their attempts of assimilation nor their resistance through religious affiliations helps them in coming out of their state of in-betweenness. Kureishi, while investigating for the changing dynamics of the English society in the post Thatcherite period observes:

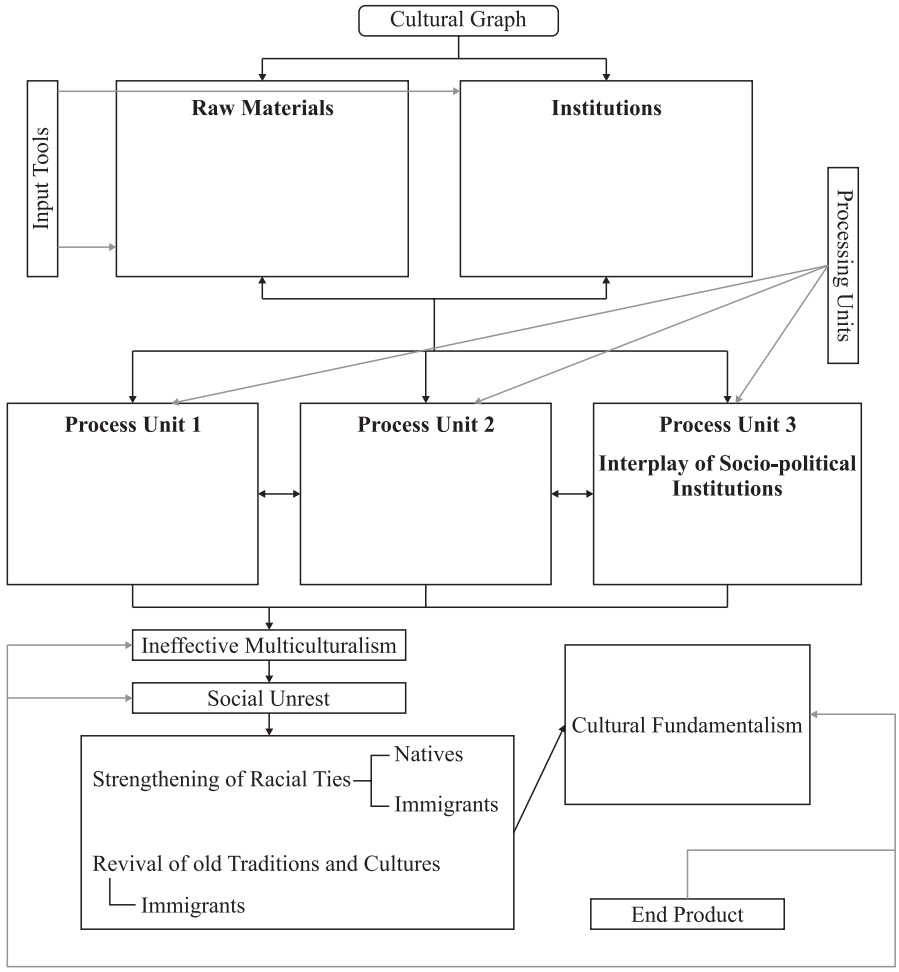
> It seemed to me that … younger kids would be interested in what I was interested in: Bhangra music, pop culture, all that stuff. But they had completely rejected all of that, and I was really shocked, because, those kids were English as me. They were born and raised in England, yet they rejected the West. (Kureishi qtd. in Kumar 127-128)

Conclusion

From the immigrants' perspective, the thought of cultural nationalism in a foreign land is difficult concept to emulate as people with no direct interaction with their native land start identifying it as their home. Schiller (2010) raises the question: "… [If] such an attachment … [to the homeland in a foreign land is] different from and in opposition to classic nationalism? Can either kind of identification - whether it is to the national's territory in which one lives or from which one descends - be reconciled with a broader project of identifying with human aspirations for social justice and for substantial life for everyone on the planet? (Schiller 27) or if then, a nation is not merely a cultural configuration but "… [to invest in] a cultural community with sovereignty, and at the very least, with political autonomy" (Schiller 27). Karim, Shahid and Ali, all remain Londoner rather than a citizen of the country. Though their birth and up-bringing signifies the British mode of cultural production of subjects, their status of being a Londoner pushes them towards the periphery of national identification. Kureishi's discussion of the British society in the span of the last three decades of the twentieth century is still matter of concern in context of insider-outsider/native-non-native relationship. Apparently the immigrant question in Kureishi reflects the minority interest, but the wide consolidation of cultural fundamentalism in UK and around the world, and with an increasing number of

terrorist attacks, the subject has come to appear increasingly prescient and topical.

Kureishi's contribution as an instigator to the debate of the contemporary culture in identity formation provides us with insights to re-evaluate the modern day transnationalism. Kureishi exploration of this polyphony in the psychological identity construct of the immigrants shows the embedded stereotyped category of the South Asian immigrants as 'others' in British eyes. His representation of these characters signifies his personal quest to counter the "… homogenization of catagor[ies] by representing the characters that are divided on the basis of race, class, gender, generation … sexuality [and nation]" (Madhuri 20). As Ania Loomba rightly comments, Kureishi upholds the lost cause of acceptance in the British society and tries to save the archetypal immigrants from being drowned as "an anonymous collectivity" (Loomba 137).



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