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THE STORY OF STRUGGLE, SUFFERING AND SUBJUGATION OF SOUTH-ASIAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE U.K.: AN EXPLORATION OF HANIF KUREISHI'S *BUDDHA OF SUBURBIA*

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Abstract:

*Humans are born in this living world according to the will and consent of our producers. In our life we try to live independently but the circumstances hinder it. Humans in search of better life conditions, does any hardship and sometimes are forced to migrate from their native lands to unknown alien lands. The welcome of migrants on these new lands depends mainly on their class structure and race. The migrants become immigrants on these lands and later settlers but their struggles, sufferings and subjugation continues unceasingly. The immigrant faces different problems due to their language, culture, education, class, race, religion and so forth. The South-Asian immigrant faces such turmoil in the U.K. The South-Asian immigrants have been in the U.K. since the beginning of twentieth century working for British people. But these immigrants till now are not able to get equal rights in employment, education, residence, health-care et cetera. The suffering of immigrants increases with inverse increase in their class status, the Indian immigrants are easy subject to racial attacks and Police oppression. These issues of South-Asian immigrants will be explored, discussed, analysed keeping in focus the novel of Hanif Kureishi's *Buddha of Suburbia*. This paper will explore the issue of multiculturalism through the lens of textual analysis of select text. The theory of postcolonialism, racism, feminism et cetera will be applied. The crisis in the lives of immigrants and their reverting back to these oppressions by the British natives will be observed. It will be seen how immigrants had to form parties and perform public demonstrations in order to get their basic rights and identity, in the U.K.*

Keywords: *Identity, Immigrants, Oppression, Racism, Rights, Suffering, etc.*

The emigration and immigration began in the world with Christopher Columbus's and Vasco Da Gama's discovery of sea routes to distant lands in their pursuit to find new lands. The discovery of sea routes were great breakthrough, through these routes a mass movement of people all around the World began. The Britishers too arrived in Indian subcontinent by reaching through sea routes. After their arrival, they began in Indian subcontinent as traders and businessman'. Growing gradually from the trader's identity, the Britishers became ruler in Indian subcontinent and ruled for more than two centuries till 1947. The British people were regular in arrival and departure after their works in Indian subcontinent were complete. The return of the British people were not solo as their arrival rather they were accompanied by servants, stewards, seamen, coolies, slaves generally who used to work for them in Indian subcontinent. It was easier for the Indian people to move to the United Kingdom (U.K.) during that period of time as they were British Subjects and a citizenship of British Empire and apart from this they also possessed a passport of U.K.C.C. (United Kingdom colonial Citizenship). The 'British Nationality Act 1948' was also a great support for these people to migrate to the U.K., as this act opened the gates of the U.K. to all colonial subjects with or without passport.



In the 20th century, The World witnessed two World Wars, and the U.K. was an active participant in these wars. The U.K. took a large number of Indian Sepoys (Soldiers) to fight along with them in the wars. They also took a mass of servants, stewards, clerks, drivers et cetera for their help as well, as their population was not enough to fulfill the desires of war. After the war, it was intended by the British governments that these people will return to their homelands in total but the real scenario was different.

After the wars the population of U.K. declined to great extent and there was huge shortage of man force in different sectors and industries. In order to fill this shortage of general labour and professional, the U.K. again sought the help from Indian subcontinent for its economic boom. This was the time when doctors, engineers, teachers, managers et cetera were called to the U.K. The labour they took from Indian subcontinent worked in almost every industry including textiles, transport, forge and foundry, et cetera. The labour also worked for the British public transport, railways and at airports. The immigrants thinking them to be British subjects and Colonial citizen saw the U.K. to be their home as well and decided to stay there; this was the first instance when the number of Indian immigrants rose to a significant number in U.K. The South-Asian settled there and in due time to enhance their family and for life mates started marrying British people. The more extension in immigrant landscape occurred with time, as after getting settled down in U.K. with some employment, these people started calling their families to U.K. This led to very rapid growth in U.K. population as immigrants were not only from Indian subcontinent rather from all over the World. The reproduction rate of these immigrants was also high compared to British people. The Britisher thought these South-Asians to be unequal savages, and denied the very equal standards they were trying to maintain. The ideology of “the White man’s burden” (Kipling), was too inherent in Britishers with the superiority thought of a master. They thought these immigrants as oppressor of their resources, land and culture. The situation gave birth to a cold war between the native and immigrants. It affected each individual and immigrant life became many folds tougher.

The immigrants in U.K. suffered very awfully to lead a prosperous life, South-Asians having the same fate. The immigrants are mainly of two classes, the first is the Upper class, who are educated and easily accepted in the society. The second is the lower or working classes, who are mostly illiterate or of low education, considered as a burden in the society. The struggle of these South-Asian immigrants started from the very day they were considered as a burden by the British people and government, who are using and exploiting their resources rapidly. The British people show these immigrants as threats for their society, as ‘Enoch Powell’ said in his ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech, “if immigration to Britain from the country’s former colonies continued, a violent clash between white and black communities was inevitable...in this country, in 15 or 20 years’ time, the black man will have the whip hand over the white man” (Earle Samuel). The initial subjugation of the immigrants started from the very first immigrants restriction act, “the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962” (Aziz, 62), and it continues till today. After it many acts were enacted to control the immigrant inflow in U.K. The immigrants were also left alone as they were not allowed to call on their families.

Struggle for Prosperous Life:

The immigrants in U.K. till present day are suffering to lead a prosperous life. They want an un-disturbing life but the case is not such or rather out of their aura. Racism and cultural conflict is on the center table of the U.K. The coloreds are fighting for their basic rights and to be accepted as true Englishmen, after these many years of life span in the U.K., following their customs, culture and traditions.

The case is so volatile that the whites are not ready to see any white with the blacks and vice-versa. In many cases violence or riots are the result of it. *The riots of Notting Hill and Nottinghamshire*



in 1958 are good example of it. The South-Asian also face issues related to their safety, as “at night they roamed the streets, beating Asians and shoving shit and burning rags through their letter-boxes” (Kureishi, 56). The immigrant are neither easily rented houses, rooms or flats nor they are sold properties. The situation is such that the “Indian households owning their home is 68%, Pakistani 64% and Bangladesi 39%” (minorityrights). The hatred made the condition very worse, thus the Asians always feared death and were ready for a fight, “She was preparing for the Guerilla war she knew would be necessary when the whites finally turned on the blacks and Asians and tried to force us into gas chambers or push us into leaky boats” (Kureishi, 56). Apart from this the education system had also denied the needs of immigrant and has never focused on syllabus or language of teaching to be of multicultural aura. This stops immigrants from getting easy education and equal rights.

Struggle for Employment:

Employment is the most mandatory aspect for survival and in order to attain bread, cloth and roof (Roti, Kapda aur Makaan). In pursuit of a better employment and income source, people migrate. This is one of the main reason for the migration of South-Asian to U.K. The South-Asian moved to U.K. as part of their employment and some in search for employment. The employment is not an easy task for the South-Asians to attain. They are easy subject to racism and hatred by the native white people. The immigrants are not able to find suitable job or of their standards or according to their educational qualification. The wages of these immigrants are also low in comparison to native people. The conditions are so unfavourable for the immigrants that, the unemployment rate among South-Asians are very high. The unemployment among Indians are 5%, Pakistanis 10%, and Bangladeshis 15%, which is very high compared to 4% among the White people (minorityrights). The South-Asians are also stopped to grow in their jobs, and a major concern is, they are not promoted easily. In the novel *Buddha of Suburbia* we can see that Haroon used to work for the British government but he was denied promotion, “the whites will never promote us”, Dad said. ‘Not an Indian while there is a white man left on earth’ (Kureishi, 27). The immigrants are denied employment regularly and thus they are forced to seek out ways for self-employment. It was the reason that corner shops in London and in Whole U.K. rose at rapid rate. In the novel, it is evident as Anwar and Jeeta are running a community shop named ‘Paradise Store’, it may be because Anwar was not able to find a suitable employment or denied to get an regular employment. The employment sector in U.K. is full of racial repercussions; the coloreds are generally denied equal job opportunities. It is portrayed in the novel, as Karim gets a part in the theatre as an actor not for his experience or talent rather for him being a colored or Indian immigrant, “Karim, you have been cast for authenticity and not for experience” (Kureishi, 147). The director Shadwell comments on Karim “You’re just right for him,” he continued. ‘In fact you are Mowgli. You’re dark skinned, you’re small and wiry, and you’ll be sweet but wholesome in the costume” (Kureishi, 142-143).

The condition of South-Asian in employment sector is regularly degrading. The Muslim community in the U.K. mainly belonging to South-Asia is the worst hit section, the hatred against Muslims increased rapidly after the 9/11 and 7/7 London bombings. “According to results published by the Social Nobility Commission in 2017, only one in five Muslims in the economically active population are in full- time employment” (minorityreports.org). The reason for this condition of Muslims is intolerance towards them along with racism, discrimination in recruitment process and hatred for their attires like Muslim Caps, headscarves, Burqa, Salwars, long beard kept by Muslim et cetera.

Struggle for Education:



The struggle of immigrants is not limited to employment rather for education too they have to fight as they are easy subject of subjugation in education sector. The immigrants are not easily admitted in academic institution, the gross enrollment ratio of the immigrants is also very less compared to the native people. The pupils of the immigrants are too prone to racism and hatred in the institutions. Bullying is one the major problem faced by the immigrant's children. In the novel *Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim is observed as a victim of bullying at school and this is the reason he didn't want to attend school and finally leaves his academic institution without completing his degree. It is clearly evident from Karim's words "I was sick too of being affectionately called Shitface and Curryface, and of coming home covered in spit and snot and chalk and woodshavings" (Kureishi, 63). In the present scenario too the condition is not so much changed after these many years. In the year 2021, the student union leader of Oxford University was forced to resign from her post as she was a South-Asian. She was regular victim of opposition, physical comments and cyber bullying. It became very evident from the incidents that the native U. K. people till now are not ready to accept immigrants as their leader or thinks them to be their equivalent, they still have the superiority complex of being a 'master'.

Struggle of Female Immigrants:

The word 'female' itself seems to be meaning weak in the masculine world. The females are always taken to be unequal and unworthy counterparts for the males all over the world. The condition of female immigrants is very worse as they are twice subjugated in the U.K. society. The female immigrants not only face problems due to their race, culture or language rather for being a female. The immigrant females are highly unemployed compared to the males, as the native white don't want to work with them or the white females. They are mostly hated for their dresses in the U.K. society especially for their headscarves, burqa, saree, salwars, et cetera. The white females too show their female supremacy over the immigrant females. In the novel of Kureishi's *Buddha of Suburbia* it is very clear that Jamila feels cheated by Miss Cutmore, "Jamila thought Miss Cutmore really wanted to eradicate everything that was foreign in her" (Kurishi, 53). Jamila also proclaims that "Miss Cutmore had colonized her" (Kurishi, 53).

The problems of female immigrants do not end here rather it has come a long way. The females are forced by the households to wear traditional dresses in the society and it is not accepted by the society, this makes them twice subjugated at very liminal level. The females are also deprived of equal education by their families as in majority of cases the immigrants don't want their girls to study with boys, and the institutions don't allow them with the traditional dresses, and certain cases for being a South-Asian/Immigrant. The South-Asian immigrants are mainly of Muslim and Hindu ethnicity, and they still thinks the

Man for the field and woman for the hearth:

Man for the sword and for the needle she:

Man with the head and woman with the heart:

Man to command and woman to obey (The Princess).

The female immigrants are not allowed to marry according to their own will, forced marriages are very common among the immigrants and settlers, and it also leads to honour killings. The forced marriages are outlawed in 2014 by the U.K. government but till now it is in practice. "Two of the first successful cases were concluded in May 2018. A mother was found guilty of duping her daughter to travel Pakistan to marry an older man; and a couple were found guilty of using violence and threats to take their 18-year old daughter to Bangladesh to marry a cousin" (minorityrights). The immigrants do so in order to protect the sanctity of their religion, culture and tradition and for it opt violence over their wards, this case is mainly with females compared to the males. The case of forced marriage is



very clearly described by Kureishi (1990) in the novel. In the novel *Anwar* a first generation immigrant is seen to force his daughter, a second generation immigrant, who is born and brought up in U.K. watching and following the British traditions and lifestyles, to marry according to his will and with the person he chose for her. He, forces Jamila to marry Changez from India, whom she never met just because he is of their religion and culture. To force this Anwar stops eating and follows 'Gandhi Satyagraha' (Hunger-Strike). Jamila finally gives up to save her father from the clutches of death being brought by prolonged hunger. The females are very prone to psychological violence outside houses by the natives and physical violence inside houses by their relatives.

Struggle for Equal Rights:

The South-Asian immigrants in the U.K. are present from more than a century, and with a significant number since the 1950s. They are now regular settlers and U.K. citizens, but till date they are not termed as equal by the natives. The immigrants fight for equal rights have not ended till today and it may continue. The immigrants are denied equal rights in education, employment, housing (Owning or rentals), healthcare et cetera. The immigrants are so ignored that they are forced to act against the government and demonstrate for their rights. The immigrants are forced to rally for their demands against the system. It is evident in *Buddha of Suburbia* "Yet; these attacks were happening all the time. I should come with Jamila and her friends on a march the following Saturday...we could only march and make our voices heard" (Kureishi, 225).

To conclude, it can be stated that one lives with the choices, but on certain juncture choices itself has limitations. It is very clear that being an immigrant is never a choice rather an option. The South-Asians are immigrants in the U.K. in turn Britishers are immigrants somewhere. The people keep on tormenting each-other apart from this vital reality. The native people of the U.K. are observed, somehow to make the immigrants suffer and in turn they themselves suffer in the hands of immigrants and others. The condition seems so rough that till today people living in the U.K. from 60-70 years and their offspring too, are considered as immigrants rather than an Englishman. The Britisher are not eager to accept the South-Asians as their own people. The native forgets the vital reality, that they get many comforts due to immigrants, as immigrants are working for them in their nation. At this juncture it is very necessary for the U.K. government to stop working against limiting the immigrants' inflow and aura, and has proper rules regarding the immigrants and their livelihood in the U.K. The people should see everyone as their equal and as humans, not with the lens of caste, colour, religion, language, nationality et cetera. This equality for native and immigrants are meager but not extinct. The situations are changing with the growth in the postmodern world, as a result of this; the U.K. is witnessing great changes. It is evident as leaders from South-Asian community are increasing in the present decade; a great example is Rishi Sunak, a South-Asian in the race to become U.K. prime minister. It is high time to harbor hopes that a better sun will rise with every new day, and immigrants will get equal status.

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