

Review on hanif kureishi's the buddha of suburbia

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American humorist Molly Ivins once said, " Satire is traditionally the weapon of the powerless against the powerful." It gives the everyday person the unique ability to say something about the world in a critical yet captivating way. Throughout history, many have utilized humor as a way to spark social change. They have used it as a way to comprehend the complicated events going on around them and learn about themselves in the process. Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* is no exception. Through the author's accounts of those around him, he is able to expose the faulty logic of their lives using humor. Each twist of the plotline prompts readers to think further about a character's actions - asking themselves questions like: why does this seem strange to us? This style of storytelling serves as a social commentary. As readers, we notice the follies that the characters themselves fail to see. We serve as " all knowing" figures that have the ability to critique and consider the events we read about taking place in the world. In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Hanif Kureishi uses satire to comment on the imperfections present in the world he lives in, especially society's views on class and race. Kureishi's use of irony ridicules the sheltered way that the wealthy live their lives. This novel details the lives of characters existing in a spectrum of economic status - ranging from the social elite to those living below the poverty line. It also demonstrates the way that money can interfere in intrapersonal relationships and public perception. By incorporating Haroon and Eva's relationship in his novel, Kureishi contrasts two very different lifestyles. Haroon is a lower class civil service clerk and yoga instructor while his wife, Eva, is a social climber whose interests revolve around improving her status and maintaining appearances. This harsh dichotomy between the

perspectives of the two characters creates an interesting dynamic. Haroon's precise job is to work on mindfulness and accepting life for what it is, while Eva is constantly striving for upward social mobility, never happy with where she is. Eva's wealth and desires blind her to the reality of money, evident when she claims that, "“ when we run out of money I'll get us some more”" (115). This behavior ridicules the naivety with which the wealthy view the world. Eva cultivates Haroon's career and arranges instructing jobs for him, serving the upper-middle class. Her desire to " change" Haroon also exemplifies society's views on the lower class. She wants to mold him to become what she deems is superior – an upper class citizen. Charlie's character exemplifies the aspect of fame that comes with status. He is described to be exceedingly handsome and exceptionally talented. Before achieving his successes he announces that, "“ I am suicidal'...as if he were pregnant”" (128). When his career was not doing well, he was very sad and bitter, thinking that death would be better than his life. It isn't until he eventually achieves fame and becomes wealthy that he is finally happy. He claims that " I fell in love for the first time... I loved money... money and everything it could buy" (248). Charlie's warped sense of happiness and love is rooted in the fact that he now has so much money. His belief that money is the ultimate good and all he needs is fundamentally flawed. The irony amongst the wealthy is shown through their augmented perspective of the world and the way they view their priorities.

Kureishi strategically uses irony to show the disparity between how lower class characters are seen by the world and how they wish they were seen. The meaning of irony precisely is something that is contrary to what one

expects or assumes will occur. This is very fitting for these characters because their lives are not what they expected or assumed it would be. Haroon, for example, is the son of a wealthy family who came to London to study law, but found himself dropping out as a result of a drinking problem. Haroon's attitude of superiority is contradictory because in reality, he has no status. Karim shares that "Mum was irritated by Dad's aristocratic uselessness" (24). He carries with him an attitude of entitlement although he does very little with this life. He has no sense of how to take care of himself since he has had "women who would take care of him" throughout his entire childhood (24). This aspect of Haroon's personality is ironic because he has never worked a day in his life, and in spite of it he still expects people to tend to his every need. Similar to Haroon's attitude upon migrating from India, Anwar shares the same false aspirations. Anwar's grocery store, Paradise Stores, carries with it a contradiction within itself. The name insinuates a calm, peaceful and easy-to-run shop, when in reality, they must work very hard in order for it to be successful: "Paradise opened at eight in the morning and closed at ten at night. They didn't even have Sundays off" (51).

Although Anwar and Jeeta work harder than almost any other characters in this novel, their status does not reflect it. Kureishi includes their story to satirize the false hopes that many immigrants have about starting fresh in a new place; they assume they will thrive and achieve high status when this is not the reality at all. In order to succeed, one must dedicate themselves to their future, and even then, an exemplary work ethic does not always equate

to endless successes. The disappointment that many immigrants and lower class members of society feel is similar to that of racial minorities.

Kureishi's use of satire and humor in describing race reflects the harsh and discriminatory ways people treat those who appear to be different. From the very first sentence of the novel, it is clear that crisis of identity and belonging will be a central theme. Karim shares that, " I am an Englishman born and bred, almost" (3). He struggles to balance his half-Indian roots against his own race based insecurities, along with the discrimination and prejudice he is constantly facing. His use of humor when describing the injustices and hypocrisy he endures serve as a protection from his own pain. Satire is his tactic of survival through the racism that would otherwise corrode him. After a night spent at Eva's house, Karim stumbles upon his father " speaking slowly, in a deeper voice than usual, as if he were addressing a crowd. He was hissing his s's and exaggerating his Indian accent" (21). This is particularly bizarre because Haroon has spent his entire life trying to erase his Indian identity and appear as British as possible. This action, little as it seems, serves as a reminder that regardless of how Haroon is going to identify, Indian or British, it will be decided by the mercy of a white person. If Haroon wants to appear as an Englishman, it is so that he can fit in with the others, and if he's going to seem Indian, it is for Eva. Even Karim's aunts and uncles, Jean and Ted, prove to be racially ignorant. They ignore Haroon's real name and insist on calling him Harry. Karim admits that, " It was bad enough his being an Indian in the first place, without having an awkward name too" (33).

By giving Haroon a new name, they are disregarding his true identity. Karim uses comedy, and instead chooses to call them Gin and Tonic, another way he conceals the pain and humiliation he feels from having his own family ignore such a large aspect of who he is. When Karim finally hits a break with his career and is offered a job, his employer, Shadwell, speaks to him in “either Punjabi or Urdu” (139). When Karim doesn’t understand what he is saying, Shadwell inquires, “‘ Well?’ he said. He rattled off some more words. ‘ You don’t understand?... You’ve never had that dust in your nostrils?’” (140). Shadwell acts in a blatantly racist way and makes it very clear to Karim that he must fit into Shadwell’s vision for what an Indian is supposed to be. In spite of this discrimination, Karim remains extremely positive about his new job, gleaming about how he is perfect for his role as Mowgli in the production of the “ Jungle Book” (144). Karim’s outward happiness about his casting covers up for him knowing that the main reason he received this job is because he fits the racial standards for the character. Kureishi effectively uses comedy to serve as a protection for Karim against the violent racism that he faces on a daily basis.

Overall, satire and irony are embedded throughout the text of Buddha of Suburbia as a mask to cover the pain of an identity crisis. They serve the unique purpose of expressing issues with social institutions and behaviors. Kureishi uses irony as a vehicle to illustrate the way that social status dictates the way we see the world. In the case of the rich, it alters their perception of how the rest of the world lives and operates, and for the poor, it shows the unpredictability of life and our own trajectories. Kureishi’s application of humor to incidents and recollections of racial prejudice are

incorporated to sugar-coat the anguish it brought him. It is clear that Kureishi intends for this novel to be more than just an autobiographical expose. Through Karim's coming of age and self exploration, Kureishi yearns for his readers, like Karim, to learn a little bit about themselves and the world they inhabit.