

Double Consciousness in Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album*

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Abstract

This article throws light on the issue of identity and Double Consciousness which creates traumatic effects on the psyche, identity and culture of Shahid, the representative of South Asian Immigrants depicted in Hanif Kureishi's The Black Album in Britain. In The Black Album, Shahid is depicted as a South Asian British Muslim who looks at himself from the eyes of the White British and he finds two-ness in himself, which is similar to W. E. B. Du Bois' theory of Double Consciousness that "is the sense of always looking at one's self from the eyes of others" (2). So, the article reveals the double consciousness of Shahid, the protagonist who carries hybrid identity for having British White mother and Pakistani Muslim father. Because of being a South Asian Muslim immigrant living under the hegemony of White Supremacy in Britain, he experiences Double Consciousness, which causes his inferiority complex, lack of self-esteem, rootlessness, in-betweenness and fragmentation of identity. Thus, the article deals with the Double Consciousness within the binary opposition between the East and West, Islamic Fundamentalist and Western Liberalism, and Pakistani Identity and British Identity. According to the theorists Homi Bhabha, Edward Said and Frantz Fanon, the colonized people who become immigrants in the postcolonial era suffer from identity crisis and double consciousness as they face segregation, racism, discrimination and various other forms of Othering.

Key Words: Double consciousness, Fundamentalism, Liberalism, Hybrid identity, Rootlessness, In-betweenness, Othering

Along with the migration of the South Asian Muslims to the UK in the post-war era, they lose their national identity they had at the home land and carry different identities such as being Muslims, immigrants, South Asians, colonized, being racially inferior to the Whites and having the sense of Double Consciousness while living in the diaspora. This article deals with the causes of the protagonist, Shahid's Double Consciousness such as racism, being immigrant, being South Asian Muslim and being the colonized one and its consequences such as lack of self-esteem, inferiority complex, dual identity, rootlessness, in-betweenness and fragmentation of identity that weaken Shahid's identity in Hanif Kureishi's novel *The Black Album*. On the one hand, the article shows how the novel deals with the binary oppositions East Vs West, Islamic Fundamentalism Vs Western

Liberalism, White Europeans Vs Brown South Asians and the Colonized Vs the Colonizer. On the other hand, the article mainly focuses on Shahid's identity crisis because of Double Consciousness and his attempts for negotiation. The article revolves round the concept of Double Consciousness, a postcolonial theory which was first coined by W.E.B. Du Bois who has used it to show inequality and injustice shown to the Blacks in America and which becomes suitable to show how South Asians are also discriminated in Britain. In his book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois writes his theory, "It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (8). It means the condition of the Blacks being both the African and the American, which indicates the marginalization of the Blacks by the Whites. However, this article shows how Double Consciousness weakens the South Asians' identity in Britain.

The Black Album, Hanif Kureishi's second novel, which was written in 1989 and was published in 1995, revolves round Shahid, a British Muslim of Pakistani descent whose sense of Double Consciousness is caused by growing racism in Britain. He is depicted as a second generation immigrant who is brought up in a multicultural and liberal environment in Britain. Since he belongs to a middle class British family having Pakistani Muslim father and White British mother, biologically and culturally he carries a hybrid identity. However, he faces lots of humiliation throughout his life for being a hybrid and knowing the importance of being a White. In *The Black Album*, Kureishi writes what Shahid says:

Everywhere I went, I was the only dark-skinned person. How did this make people see me? I began to be scared of going into certain places. I didn't know what they were thinking. I was convinced that they were full of sneering and disgust and hatred. And if they were pleasant I imagined they were hypocrites. I became paranoid. I couldn't go out. I knew I was confused and ... fucked up. But I didn't know what to do. (10)

It indicates how as racism victimizes non-whites in Britain, he has been humiliated since his childhood because of his ethnicity. Such racial prejudices give birth to the rise of Islamic Fundamentalism which is represented by Riaz, his Muslim friend in the novel. Likewise, the novel depicts another character Deedee Osgood, a White liberal who is Shahid's young Cultural Studies lecturer in his college. Shahid's life is influenced by Riaz, the representative of Islamic Fundamentalism and Deedee, the representative of Western Liberalism. So, the binary between Islamic Fundamentalism and Western Liberalism is caused by racism, which the novel reflects. Kureishi shows his hatred towards racism, which is supported by Jago Morrison's statement "Clearly *The Black Album* is written as a text against racism, which shows both racism's causal violence and the conditions of ignorance and material resentment out of which it arises" (190) in *Contemporary Fiction*. Anthony Mills' comment "In some ways *The Black Album* portrays fundamentalism as a means of fighting against

the racism that is inherent in British society” (32) is relevant here. The problem that racism is inherent in the British liberal society is not only pointed out by Kureishi in his novel but also by different critics and theorists as the idea worth remembering and mentioning, so they raise the issue of racism and deal with it. DuBois's idea “The Problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line,- the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea” (15) apparently shows growing racial conflicts between Asians and Americans, and Africans and Americans, but in totality such racial conflicts are observed throughout the World. Wherever and whenever racism is observed, racial equality and justice can't be experienced and observed. In *SOCIOLOGY AND THE THEORY OF DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS*, karida Brown writes:

Du Bois's theory of Double Consciousness—the phenomenological description of the self-formation of racialized subjects—shows that in a racialized society there is no true communication or recognition between racialized and racializing subjects. The racialized is forced to see him or herself through the eyes of the racializing, a group that does not recognize the racialized's humanity, while the racializing are blind to their own position and participation in the racializing system. (245)

Because of Double Consciousness, the Whites develop superiority complex, whereas Africans or Asians develop inferiority complex, which gets reflected in *The Black Album*. Chill, Shahid's elder brother who embraces Whiteness and has fully adopted western values shows disgust towards Pakistani society. Kureishi shows how Chill resents Pakistani traditions in the following lines:

You see them, our people, the Pakis, in their dirty shops, surly, humorless, their fat sons and ugly daughters watching you, taking the money. The prices are extortionate, because they open all hours. The new Jews everyone hates them. In a few years the kids will kick their parents in their teeth. Sitting in some crummy shops, it won't be enough for them. (201)

Chill's hatred towards Pakistanis despite being a descent from Pakistan is because of White Supremacy which is caused by racism.

One powerful reason why Shahid has Double Consciousness is because he is a South Asian Muslim or a Pakistani who represents the colonized ones. The migration of the colonized to the land of colonizers is mainly observed as a trend of migration in search of better education, job opportunities, social security, quality life and other benefits in the post-war era. The Whites represent the colonizers, whereas the South Asians and Africans represent the colonized. As a result, the conflict between the colonizers and the colonized which has been taking place even after decolonization is reflected through the Postcolonial novels such as *The Black Album*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *The Mimic Men*, etc. In *Critical Theory Today*, Lois Tyson writes, “ Postcolonial theorists often describe the colonial

subject as having a double consciousness or double vision, in other words, a consciousness or a way of perceiving the world that is divided between two antagonistic cultures: that of the colonizer and that of the indigenous community” (368). Tyson further says, “Double consciousness often produced an unstable sense of self, which was heightened by the forced migration colonialism frequently caused...” (368). Tyson’s views on Double Consciousness clearly indicate a sense of insecurity of the self or the identity of the colonized, which becomes clear from the characters such as Shahid, Riaz etc. in *The Black Album*. In order to explain the conflict of postcolonial identity in the colonized people, Homi K. Bhabha uses hybrid identity, which also causes Double Consciousness. According to Bhabha, the colonizers dominate the colonized ones by imposing their culture upon the colonized ones. In his book *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha expresses his views on hybrid identity:

Colonial hybridity is not a problem of genealogy or identity between two different cultures which can then be resolved as an issue of cultural relativism. Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other denied knowledge enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority-its rules of recognition. (114)

Bhabha’s idea of hybridity suggests that cultures, which are a part of an ongoing process, come through the hybridizing processes. Hence, he suggests that liberal western cultures must view themselves through the postcolonial perspectives as Shahid and Deedee do in *The Black Album*. According to Marc Black, “There is a connection between Frantz Fanon’s work and W. E. B. Du Bois’ concept of double consciousness” (393). In his book *The Black Skins, White Masks*, Fanon says the colonialism dehumanizes the natives. So, the Blacks put the White Masks on their black bodies due to their Double Consciousness. Double Consciousness should be taken as a positive force too for the strong survival negotiating with the host culture in the third space as Kureishi shows through his protagonist, Shahid in *The Black Album* ultimately. According to Rutledge Dennis, Paul Gilroy considers Double Consciousness as a positive force. Dennis writes about Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* (1993), “Modernity and the double consciousness have joined to produce something revolutionary in Western ideological, political, and philosophical thought: the formation of racial mutation and hybridity” (22). It even shows that Gilroy differs from Du Bois since Du Bois regards Double Consciousness as a destructive force to weaken and destroy the identity of the Blacks or the colonized ones, whereas Gilroy regards it as a creative force which can help the Blacks/colonized/the immigrants for revolutionizing in Western philosophy, education, and politics for strengthening their identity.

On the one hand, colonialism causes Double Consciousness in the immigrants like Shahid. On the other hand, Double Consciousness causes the state of in-betweenness in the immigrants. Shahid’s mental dilemma gets reflected in his saying “I knew I was confused, and ...fucked up. But, I didn’t know what to do” (10). Shahid can neither abandon his

Muslim friends such as Riaz, Chad and others nor his White beloved, Deedee who is his college lecturer as well. Riaz convinces Shahid to fight for Islam reminding him the importance of being a true Muslim, whereas Deedee tries to convince him to be liberal escaping from the influence of the Muslims or Fundamentalists. So, Shahid is between Riaz, the representative of the Islam Fundamentalism and Deedee, the representative of Western Liberalism. Mills comments on the novel showing Shahid's in-betweenness as:

However, Shahid also meets the persuasive and convincing Riaz, the leader of a militant Islamic group who lives in the same building as him. Riaz preaches that the West, with its decadent philosophies and its corruption is destroying the purity of Islam, and Islamic youth in particular. He insists that the western world is sinking into a morass of evil and that it is the duty of all Muslims to resist this and follow the teachings of the Koran. The conflicting attractions of these two influences create the main tension in the novel. Deedee wants to turn Shahid away from the influence of the Muslims. She is more interested in the hedonistic pursuit of pleasure and she has little time for the constraints of a strict religious life or belief. Riaz, on the other hand, demands that Shahid should focus on the insult that he feels Islam has received "from the author of *Midnight's Children*." (Salman Rushdie's name is never actually mentioned and neither is the title of *The Satanic Verses*.) (34)

Thus his dual identity of being a Muslim and a Liberal Westerner; a Britisher and a Pakistani; and a South Asian and a European confounds him and he is between his two identities. However, he fails to embrace either one throughout the novel till the last part of the novel when he negotiates with the Liberalism. Sahel MdDelabul Houssain and Rajni Singh agree to other critics' view of showing Shahid's dual identity and write, "He is a constant juggle between two tropes pulled in complete opposite directions, the clique of radical Islamic fundamentalism, led by Riaz and company, and on the other, the hedonistic pursuit of life engrossed in love, sex, drug and rave by his liberal minded teacher and lover Deede" (127). Kureishi writes how Shahid's self is divided:

His own self confounded him. One day he could passionately feel one thing, the next day the opposite. Other times provisional states would alternate from hour to hour; sometimes all crashed into chaos. He would wake up with this feeling: who would he turn out to be on this day? How many warring selves were there within him? Which was his real self? (147)

Shahid's division of self can be supported by Salman Rushdie, too who writes in *Immaginary Homelands*, "sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, we fall between two stools" (15). M. Mohankumar regards it as Shahid's state of oscillation as "In *The Black Album*, Kureishi maintains the neutral stance of Shahid, who straddles between fundamentalism and liberalism" (152).

The concept of Eurocentrism is also a cause that creates Double Consciousness in Asian or African immigrants in Europe or America. According to Eurocentrism, European culture or American culture is the standard or universal culture which is used to judge other cultures in literary works. Tyson, argues, “Today, this attitude- the use of European culture as the standard to which all other cultures are negatively contrasted- is called Eurocentrism” (367). Because of this reason, non-European culture is regarded as inferior to the European or British or America culture. Hence, the colonizers are regarded as superior, whereas the colonized are regarded as inferior, which is a form of othering. Tyson writes, “Another example of Eurocentricism is a specific form of othering called orientalism, analysed by Edward Said, which has been practiced in Europe, Britain, and America” (367). According to Said, the Western invention of Orientalism is to show their hegemony upon the East. Said’s definition of Orientalism is : “Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the Orient and (most of the time) the Occident” (2). Said’s this theory is used in different sectors to show the distinction between the East and the West. Unlike Shahid, Chad is a strict Muslim like Riaz. Chad who is aware of Eurocentricism and Orientalism knows the identity crisis of British Muslims. Therefore, he tries to convince Shahid to work for the empowerment of them in place of merely reading books. Chad’s views are expressed by Kureishi as: “It’s true, people in the West, they think they’re so civilized an’ educated an’ superior, and ninety percent of them read stuff you wouldn’t wipe your arse on” (21). Western liberalism in the sense of sexual freedom and taking drugs is unlike Asian culture. Despite the fact Deedee is an adultress and drug-addict unlike a cultured Muslim lady, Shahid not only falls in love with her but also gets influenced by her to embrace Western culture, which reflects the influence of Eurocentrism. When people have inferior complex and Double Conscious, they are in a mental dilemma. Mohan kumar critiques Shahid’s in-between state like this:

Deedee is as enchanting as a sorceress and she speaks of drugs, Pop music and wine which Shahid’s mother considers as “wrong things” (56). The friendship of Deedee and the life of London make him transformed into a Londoner. At the same time, he believes that he is strongly indebted to the doctrines of God’s work. He often oscillates between morality and immorality, fundamentalism and liberalism. He is unhappy that he loses the life of spirituality, due to the sorcery of Deedee. Deedee regrets for taking Shahid where there are only whites. She is sad that she does not have children while her friends have. She reasons out her adultery. (151)

Eurocentrism or White supremacy creates the binary between the colonizers and the colonized; the superiority complex and inferiority complex; the West and the East/Rest; the Whites and the Non-whites; the cultured and the uncultured in such a way that the immigrants in the West from the East/Rest develop Double Consciousness and face different problems of identity crisis as postcolonial writers such as Hanif Kureishi, Anita Deshai, Kiran Deshai, Monica Ali, Mohsin Hamid, Manjushree Thapa, Buchi Emecheta,

Salman Rushdie, W. E. B. Du Bois, Tony Morrison, Maxine Hong Kingston and many more show in their writings.

According to Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, the clash between the indigenous people is because of the dominance of Western culture upon the native culture. *The Black Album* shows the clash between the Muslims such as Shahid and his Muslim friends rather than Deedee and other Whites. Although Shahid is between Islamic Fundamentalism and Western Liberalism throughout the novel, his Muslim friends' act of burning the book (the name not mentioned but Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*) irritates him in such a way that he happens to embrace the White Supremacy or Western culture as Nazneen, the protagonist of Monica Ali's *The Brick Lane* does. Shahid's question to Riaz "Would you kill a man for writing a book?" indicates his being a liberal like his beloved White Deedee. Shahid's negotiation with Western Liberalism is similar to Samir Dayal's view on Double Consciousness: "Double consciousness need not be conceived in the restricted sense in which W. E. B. Du Bois casts it" (48).

Akram Salma et al. point out the fatal consequences of Double Consciousness in the formation of identity of colonized immigrants in the West. They claim, "It is creating dangerous effects on the psyche, culture and identity of colonized people. The blending of two entirely different cultures has given birth to serious identity crisis and fragmentation in the present time" (23). Thus, the blending of host culture and foreign culture causes Double Consciousness in the immigrants, which ultimately degrades and destroys their identity in the host country.

Thus, on the one hand this article explores Double Consciousness in Shahid, a Pakistani Muslim immigrant in Britain who represents not only Pakistani Muslims but also South Asians or Orientals, which reflects his identity crisis. On the other hand, the article deals with the issue of identity crisis showing the dangers of British Muslim violence. Kureishi who is highly influenced by Western Liberalization makes *The Black Album* very didactic. So, his novel seems to remind his fellow British Muslims the importance of racial solidarity and the dangers of religious fundamentalism giving the instance of book burning issue of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. The idea that literature is a mirror of human life is clear from the novel as it unveils the inherent identity conflicts between the South Asian Muslims and Whites in Britain. The novel revolves round the state of in-betweenness of Shahid, which is caused by his Double Consciousness.

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