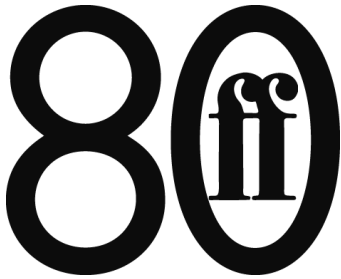


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The Buddha of Suburbia by Hanif Kureishi



The Buddha of Suburbia by Hanif Kureishi In brief

The Buddha of Suburbia is Hanif Kureishi's rumbustious, satirical coming-of-age novel set in the early seventies, a time of change, racial bigotry and idealism. Karim Amir is seventeen years old, the son of an eccentric Indian father and working-class English mother. Karim is on the cusp of adulthood – his hormones are in a state of riot. Meanwhile, his father Haroon is in the middle of reinventing himself as 'the Buddha of suburbia'. In an attempt to avoid one kind of stereotype he becomes another by transforming himself into a mystic, holding in his thrall a circle of suburban seekers of the truth. But their family is soon devastated when Haroon leaves them to live with the charismatic and ambitious Eva. Karim goes with them unable to resist the lure of a charmed life with Eva and her son, the enigmatic and sexually charged Charlie. What follows is a wild and witty romp through London, its bars and clubs, sex and drugs, and tender and troubled relationships.

The Buddha of Suburbia is awash with wonderfully vivid characters, a key one being London itself, buzzing to the vibration of seventies music and drugs culture. Against this backdrop Hanif Kureishi explores themes that have become keystones of his writing: race and the immigrant experience, sex and identity, class and assimilation, and more personally relationships, crucially the defining bond between father and son.

**THE
BUDDHA
OF
SUBURBIA**

**HANIF
KUREISHI**

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Background

Hanif Kureishi has consistently used his life as copy and *The Buddha of Suburbia* is undeniably semi-autobiographical. Like Karim, Kureishi grew up in the suburbs, had an Indian father and an English mother, but that's where the similarity stops. He says, 'To make a story, you need something dramatic. [But] the drama in my family was very slow ... So to make a novel, you throw a bomb in it. You say, "What would happen if...?" The autobiography thing is much more tenuous than you would think. The Buddha really began to work when I stopped writing about my real family and began to make up another family.'

Kureishi has won much critical praise for both his novels and his screenplays. He has been especially important for dealing so directly with issues of race, identity and the plurality of sexual desire. His novels and films have been inspirational cross-genre - in popular music (Corner Shop, Talvin Singh, Nitin Sawhney), television (Goodness Gracious Me), films (East is East, Bhaji on the Beach) and literature (Meera Sayal's Anita and Me, Shyama Perera's Haven't Stopped Dancing Yet). Even the Nigerian-born Black British writer Diran Adebayo has acknowledged Kureishi as an influence in his decision to become a writer.

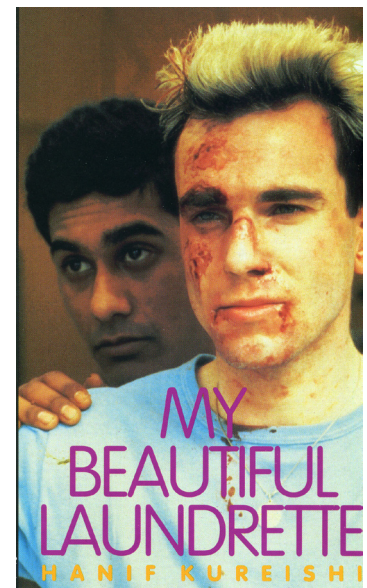
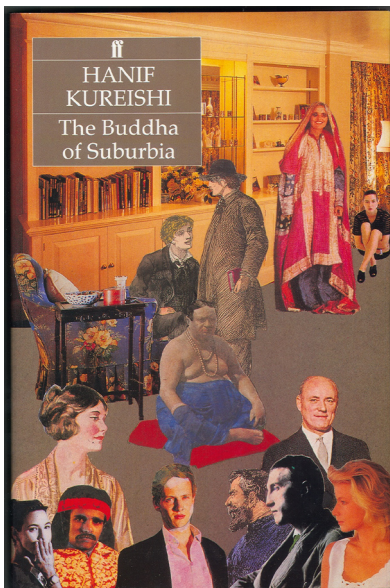
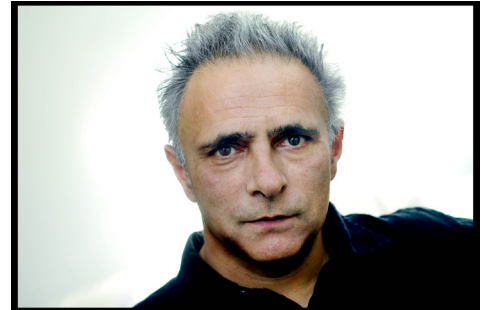
For discussion

- The novel opens with the lines 'I am an Englishman born and bred, almost.' With the emphasis on 'almost' what does this tell you about Karim, the protagonist in particular and the meaning of 'Englishness' in general?
- 'Security and safety were the reward of dullness' (page 8). What does this refer to? Which, if any, of the characters conform to this view?
- Karim's mother didn't want her Indian husband Haroon confused with the 'swarms of Indian peasants who came to England in the 1950s and 1960s' (page 24). What does this tell us about her perception of race, and is she representing?
- What effect does Haroon's abandonment of his family have on Karim and his younger brother Allie?
- How does Karim's relationship with Charlie plot his own development to maturity.
- 'The immigrant is the Everyman of the twentieth century' (page 141) What does Shadwell, the theatre director mean by this?
- Self-realisation is a recurring theme throughout the novel. Which of the characters would you say achieves some degree of it.
- How does prejudice and disappointment affect Anwar's view of the world? How does this impact on Jamila's life?
- Do you feel the portrayal of the Asian immigrant community in the 1970s is accurate? Is it consistent with your perception of it?
- Would you agree that the novel deals dynamically with the clash between East and West as well as the hybridisation of East and West in the character of Karim?



About the author

Hanif Kureishi was brought up in suburban Bromley in Kent. He read philosophy at King's College, London. He is the author of several novels, short story collections, screenplays and plays. In 1984 he wrote the screenplay for the film *My Beautiful Laundrette*, which received an Oscar nomination for Best Screenplay. *The Buddha of Suburbia* won the Whitbread Prize for Best First Novel in 1990 and was made into a four-part drama series by the BBC. It was followed by *The Black Album* (1995), his first collection of short stories, *Love in a Blue Time* (1997). His film *My Son the Fanatic* (1998) was based on a story from this collection. *Intimacy*, his third novel, was published in 1998, and was adapted for film in 2001. A second collection of short stories, *Midnight All Day*, was published in 2000, followed in 2001 by his fourth novel *Gabriel's Gift*. He is also the author of *The Body and Other Stories*, *Dreaming and Scheming: Reflections on Writing and Politics* and *My Ear at His Heart: Reading My Father*.



Suggested further reading

Fiction

Brick Lane by Monica Ali

Transmission by Hari Kunzru

Londonstani by Gautam Malkani

Cosmopolis by Don de Lillo

White Teeth by Zadie Smith

Anita and Me by Meera Sayal

The Inheritance of Loss by Kiran Desai

Midnight's Children by Salman Rushdie