

## Imperialism, Hybrid Self And The Third Space In Hari Kunzru's The Impressionist (2002)

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### Abstract

Hari Kunzru's *The Impressionist* (2002) provides us a different way of looking at the relationship between the colonized and the colonized in the context of British imperialism in India. The writer satires the myth of cultural absolutism by presenting a character, Pran Nath, a bastard child of casteless Englishman and expounds the theme of miscegenation. Narrative of displacement is also a part of the colonial reality of British India. The effect of Pran Nath's cruel eviction from his first home ruptures him and it problematizes the articulation of his individual and collective self. Kunzru puts the protagonist in the middle of Empire itself with a false identity of a real Britisher beyond hybridity model and the colonizer-colonized binary but he still has problems which demands exorcism of European spirit.

Keywords: Imperialism, colonial intervention, border-zone, miscegenation, hybrid space.

### **Introduction**

Cultural and historical miscegenation during imperialism breaks down fixed definition of one's identity, history and culture and demands redefinition. Hari Kunzru's fictional character, Pran Nath, is in a constant flux through different

historical circumstances, taking on identity available to him according to the needs and demands of a particular location, leaving behind unnecessary cultural baggage and moving forward with only the essential gear. Regarding interpretation of culture, belonging and identity in the postcolonial landscape, his narrative emphasizes that during colonialism fluidity not fixity and changeability not stasis, hybridity not purity, was a crucial reality. In an interview, Kunzru said about his novels, "The thing that is entirely consistent through the books is this question of what the same remains for a person through all possible circumstances, and what changes. How much of yourself and your sense of yourself are dependent on context - time and place, the cultural furniture of what's around you - and how much is innate" (Interview, 2007). Kunzru's novel foregrounds the theme of intermingled histories, intertwined cultures, hybrid selves and the unfeasibility of claims for pure cultural absolutism or an unproblematically static cultural identity.

### **Colonial Intervention and the Hybrid Space**

Hari Kunzru's *The Impressionist* (2002) provides us a different way of looking at the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized in the context of British imperialism in India. Written in humorous tone, Kunzru does not let the reader feel the pain and loss of the protagonist who is caught in the in-between space of the colonizer and the colonized and the problems of colonial mimicry and cultural ambivalence that come with it. Paul Scott's Hari Kumar in *The Raj Quartet* was an oxymoron, an "English boy with a dark brown skin," whose existence destabilizes absolute distinction between England and India. The colonial British have always defined her people and the nation, by identifying and excluding those who are not British. On the contrary, Kunzru presents a mixed boy with the white skin highlighting the limitation and unfeasibility of such absolute distinction between Indian and Englishman in the context of colonizer-colonized relation. Kunzru's choice of an epigraph from Kipling's *Kim* underlines the fluidity and hybridity of identity of the English boy "burned black as any native" who could dress as an Indian and pass as a native in the bazaars. Kunzru's epigraph, "Remember I can change

quickly ..." and "What shall the third incarnation be?" points towards the non-fixity of the identity of Pran Nath who inhabits the hybrid space of cultural encounters, the border-zone of the East and West, the colonizer and the colonized. This in-between space, this border-zone, may be called the third reincarnation.

The novel, set in the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial India, opens with Forester, a British engineer, meeting Amrita, an opium addicted lady, who is on her way to her uncle's house in Agra. In flood, they find together in a cave and cross-pollinate. Later, the Englishman dies. Though Pran Nath, a hybrid, is born of the British officer and the Brahmin woman, he is brought up ironically as the only son of the wealthy Hindu Pandit Amar Nath in Agra. In 1918, he is 15 with "a talent for mimicry" (28). Everybody considers him as "Such a perfect Kashmiri!" (20). His skin's whiteness is not like that of an Angrezi but "a perfect milky hue". "Kashmiris come from the mountains and are always fair, but Pran Nath's colour is exceptional. It is proof...of the family's superior blood" (20) and "Blood is important, as Kashmiri Pandits, the Razdans belong to one of the highest and most exclusive castes in all Hindustan, across the land...the Pandits are known for their intelligence and culture" (20). Only the maid knows the truth that the Brahmin woman was defiled by a Britisher before her marriage. Ironically, his father Amar Nath Razdan believes in a nationalism based on separate identities of all communities. "He is terrified of pollution...The maintenance of impermeable boundaries between himself and the world's filth has gradually come to take up most of his energy, time and love." (31).

The writer satires the myth of cultural absolutism by making the maid reveal the true identity of his only son to the father who is fanatic about cultural purity. She tells him that Pran Nath is a bastard child of casteless Englishman, expounding on the theme of miscegenation and its terrible consequences. "Impurities, blendings, pollutions, smearing and mucking-up of all kind are bound to flow from such a blend of blood, which offends against every tenet of orthodox religion" (39). Amar Nath dies of shock and Pran Nath is thrown out of the house. The orthodox Hindu society turns hostile and unsympathetic about the cultural

defilement. Even, the street Agra beggar who knows about his mixed blood tells ran to go and eat with your own people, meaning the Anglo-Indian folk. When Pran goes to that Anglo-Indian folk, he is beaten by Harry Begg because Pran has an English face which he does not have. Pran's "very good looks and whiteness" (48) enrages him as it reminds him of his blackie-white skin and his years of imitating a "hat wearing" true English man. Though Pran is ready to accept his mixed heritage, the incident confuses him. If he is just another blackie-white like them then why do not they accept him as one of their own? "If his mother was his mother and his father was the strange Englishman...then logically he is a half-and-half, a blackie-white." (52).

Rejected both by the Hindus and the Anglo-Indians, alone in the world, hunger takes him to the brothel where he is drugged and kept locked in a room for days. Just before Pran Nath is bought and dressed up in women's clothes, he is aware of the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of identity. The writer wrote about his transformation in old Hindu thought of destroying a thing before a new creation like this: "You could think of it in cyclical terms. The endlessly repeated day of Brahman – before any act of creation the old world must be destroyed. Pran is now in pieces. A pile of Pran-rubble, is ready for the next chance event to put it back together in a new order." (65); without this quality for transformation according to external forces, he knows he will not be able to stay alive.

#### **Fatehpur: Rukhsana/Clive**

Hijras takes Pran Nath from Agra to Fatehpur and give him the name "Rukhsana". With it comes another way of life. He forgets the world associated with the name Pran Nath. Chief Hijra in the Palace of Fatehpur tells him. "You may think you are singular. You may think you are incapable of change. But we are all as mutable as the air! you can be a myriad! An army!... Names are just foolishness of language, which is a bigger kind of foolishness than most." (82). The need to remain fluid and the necessity of transformation is what he learns from these words. Rukhsana wears sari and is forced to do women's work and even tries to commit suicide. But, Pran Nath Razdan falls away and "in his place, silent and complaint, emerges Rukhsana." (101). Pran/Rukhsana is

introduced to the Major as “Clive”. At the British Residency, the Major ordered Pran to wear English clothes like an English school boy, his first introduction to English culture. The Major says that Pran has got “some white blood” (109) and if he listens to what the white is telling him, he cannot go wrong. The Major, “interested in improving the boy’s mind”, makes Pran read out English poem to improve his English accent. Pran’s aspiration to acquire an English identity starts from his contact with the Major. Pran’s talent for mimicry becomes handy. The Major believes in orientalist stereotypes of the superiority of the West over the East. British Empire is built on the binary concepts of orientalism like the superiority of the West over the East, Western manliness and Eastern effeminacy, Western rationality and Eastern irrationality. The Major believes in ‘Englishness’, built on ideas of purity, rationality and cultural dominance. Kunzru lampoons this superiority myth by making the Major, a symbol of Western manliness; develop a lascivious weakness for the beautiful boy.

#### **Amritsar: White Boy**

In the tiger hunting expedition, Pran is with the Nawabs and all the British officers. For money and freedom, he has to seduce the Major where their photograph will be taken. In the mayhem of forest intrigues, Pran escapes from Fatehpur and reaches Amritsar a week after the massacre of the Jallianwala Bagh. The streets are deserted with evidences of terrible happenings. English soldiers are ill-treating a Sikh labourer and Pran is afraid that he will be treated like them as he is an India too. With his English school boy dress and his white skin, the white Sergeant mistakes him for a white English boy and tells him to be at the station. That he was mistaken for a real white boy makes him happy. He runs to the Railway Station which is filled with families of English officers. As he walks in at the entrance, English soldiers do not even question him. With his white skin, he is “walking into whiteness” (187). Nevertheless, he feels like “a trespasser, a black cuckoo in the nest” (188). The train takes him to Bombay.

#### **Bombay: Pretty Bobby/Robert/Chandra/Chandra-Robert**

In Bombay, an estranged missionary Scottish couple takes Pran in. Mr. Macfarlane calls him by an English name 'Robert' while Mrs. Macfarlane by a Hindu name 'Chandra'. He is Chandra-Robert, indicative of his hybrid biology and culture. Once Pran steps out on the street, he is known by another name 'Pretty Bobby', "crown prince of that most notorious of all red light districts, the sewer of India: Falkland Road." (201). He does errand works for all kinds for brothel keepers. Mrs. Macfarlane remarks, "The boy is such a chameleon... When he arrived he was so gawky, so foreign. Now he has become part of the place." (205). Reverend Macfarlane believes that they belong to a superior culture whose hallmarks are literacy, European manners and values and technological progress. They have little knowledge of the cultures that they are trying to convert. Often disgusted by several Hindu and tribal practices of the natives which they see as 'uncivilized practices', the missionaries desire to 'save' and 'redeem' them. This notion of cultural superiority also influenced biological theories of evolution, enlightenment thoughts and legacy of slave trade which shaped British Empire. Kunzru brought out the ambiguities inherent in this project of 'civilizing mission'.

### **Politics of Orientalism**

Under Mr. Macfarlane and his civilizing mission project, Robert continues his informal education of Western culture. He learnt about the Aeneid and Paul's Letter to the Corinthians and craniometry, whose scientific methodology put the foundation of British imperial domination of the world. Mr. Macfarlane turns out to be a product of Orientalism too as he believes that "differences in brain size correspond exactly to degree of civilization and capacity for rational thought throughout the world [...] at the top is European...Hence, Empire." (196-197). Edward Said views the Orient as a European invention. Since antiquity, the Orient has been a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences. It is also "an integral part of European material civilization and culture". In short, Orientalism is Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient. The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power and domination, of varying degrees of

a complex hegemony. Discourse of Orientalism leads to the cultural hegemony of the West over the East. Orientalism, an idea of Europe, identifying 'us' Europeans as against all 'those' non-Europeans built up European identity as superior to the non-European peoples and cultures. Orientalism is a discourse by which European culture managed and produced "the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (Said, 3). But, Kunzru shows that Orientalists despite their hegemonic discourse are not fully self-confident people. We see that, isolated and ostracized, there is no safe "home" for the colonialist. Some of the British characters find the colonial project and civilizing mission a fragile concept as their ambition and power and hide their internal isolation and doubts. Their works make them forget themselves temporarily, but in self-reflective moments they see their inadequacy and misery.

They have their own repressed fear, doubts and insecurities. Reverend Macfarlane working in the North Eastern hills cannot spread the words of God successful and cannot resist temptation of the flesh. Even in Bombay, his own wife discovers his inner fear and isolation and lack of love for those whom he was trying to convert. Later, Mr. Macfarlane despite his belief in Western science likes craniometry, his doubts its methodology. While studying Robert's head, he thinks, against his own preconceived notion of East inferiority, that Robert's fine nose and thin, sharp lips to be "strangely pure." "For a mongrel, incredibly pure. Really almost too pure. Almost European"(197). He puts Robert's category as the criminal type but he finds him brighter than both his two dead sons at that age. Later, Mr. Macfarlane lectures Robert "on points of morality, and finally teaching him Latin and history and English grammar."(204). He teaches Robert "to write and speak proper English and giving him the rudiments of culture." (235). He wants to find out the effect of the boy's mongrel heritage on his intellectual and moral capacities. To his surprise, he finds the boy to be "amazingly quick and eager, almost desperate, to learn"(235).

### **The Strategy of Mimicry and the Condition of Exile**

One morning Pran went out in a suit and an elderly white man wished him “good morning”. He was surprised because the man was greeting him like “one man to another... The man thought he was English.” (244). After this, he loiters around places where English people go and talk to them. He likes this new game. He introduces himself using various English names like Peter Walker, John Johnson, Clive Smith, David Best, etc. They believe him. Booby reinvents himself, talking on a new gora identity after another. To support his fragile pretence and looks and accent, he tries to smell like them. For that he develops taste for “tasteless slabs of meat, unsliced vegetables and sweetened concoctions of flour and fat” like them. (249). He is on the right path to becoming a mimic man. In “Of Mimicry and Man”, Homi Bhabha states mimicry as an important strategy of colonial power and knowledge. Mimicry, not a simple aping of the imperial master, characterizes the ambivalent relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. When the imperial master encourages its colonial subject to ‘mimic’, the resultant product is never exactly the same. ‘Mimicry represents an ironic compromise’, one which means that ‘colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite’. (1994:86). Bobby’s mimicry for the colonial culture is “almost the same, but not quite”. Mimicry is only a copy not the real thing. Though he tried hard to be like the English, something always makes him different from them. Mrs. Macfarlane notices in Chandra “an instinct to cover himself” (238). He is afraid that his non-English side will come up to destroy his mimicry game, “For all his swagger and beauty and flamboyance, there is something in Bobby, which craves invisibility” (237).

This craving for invisibility is related with his inability to accept his mongrel identity. This forced repression puts him a condition of exile. Narrative of displacement and exile is part of colonial reality. The effect of Pran Nath’s cruel eviction from his first home ruptures him and it problematizes the articulation of his individual and collective self. This fissure between Pran Nath and his native place results in an alienation from his self. Without a strong grounding, Pran goes through feelings of uprootedness and non-belonging, endangering his personal sense of being and



pushing him into repression and in articulation of his self. The inability to find a stable ground puts Pran in a crisis of self, a fragmented subjectivity placed in a continuous state of lack. Denied home and integrity everywhere, his life is confined to the space of absence and loss, or what Said calls "a perilous territory of not-belonging".

Amy Kaminsky states exile as a kind of "presence-in-absence." Emphasizing its spatial configuration, she points out that exile is primarily "from, and not to, a place" (1993:30). As a physical topicality constituted by departure, exile is defined by "what is missing, not by what it contains," and its conditions of loss and emptiness foster "a will to return into presence" (Kaminsky 1993: 32). Desire to reclaim presence is seen in perpetual longing, nostalgia, a wish to return, and a fear of return to the place where one can no longer be. Consequently, exile is experienced as dislocation, both physical and psychic, which is Pran's condition throughout the narrative. "Because of the unusually fluid moral outlook... Bobby often finds himself lost. Though the Macfarlanes have given him a home... He belongs to no group or gang. There is nothing much he feels connected with at all." (242). He avoids introspection. "If Bobby makes himself invisible to others, shape-shifting, changing names and keeping his motives hidden, he does so no less to himself." (250). Bobby convinces himself, "Better...to live an unexamined life. Otherwise you run the risk of not living at all." (250) He avoids depth. He becomes a creature of appearance, "a creature of surface" (250) which is a result of his extreme self-alienation. Without any scope for normal self-development, he chooses what is available to him – appearance. For him, personality is about stitching a few items together. "Calico arms, wooden head. A hat and a set of overheard opinions...It does not matter if you believe them; belief is nothing but a trivial sensation in the stomach" (250). Nevertheless, Bobby builds and lives "his puppets "of identities and discovers the marvel of English people, "English lives, conquering and functional, industrial lives" (250-251).

However, Kunzru does not portray his character as helpless, incapacitated by his exilic circumstance. Exile also offers liberating possibilities. The experience of physical and emotional rupture can lead to personal growth and

transformation. Through the discovery of an inner capacity "to survive and grow in the new environment"(37), one may find a greater independence and confidence and thus gain a more fulfilling self-affirmation and realization. Kaminsky compares this act of self-discovery to rebirth, an emergence of new personhood and subjectivity. Pran also transforms his state of exile into a site of self-affirmation. He gains confidence not only through the "capacity to survive and grow in the new environment" but also through the willingness to seize opportunities for self-transformation in the new location. Evidently, this individual liberation comes with the process of death and rebirth attained in traumatic circumstances. Before he takes on Rukhsan-identity, his old identity breaks down traumatically. In Bombay, before he becomes Jonathan Mrs. Macfarlane is arrested. After she is gone he realizes that she loves him. For his betrayal, he cannot live in her house anymore. "He has a sense of collapse, of scaffolding falling away... Now he feels as if he is leaking, all the particulars that go to make up Pretty Bobby draining away to leave behind nothing but an empty vessel, a husk" (273).

The pain of losing one identity comes the freedom of taking another new one. When the real Jonathan Bridgeman is killed in the riot, Pretty Bobby takes his passport and a notepaper with an address in London and takes on the identity of Jonathan Bridgeman. Having no anchor is also liberating he tells himself; he is made of a different element. 'Man was created out of dust, says the Reverend. But if men and women are made of dust, then he is not one of them. If they feel a pulse through their bare feet and call it home, if they look out on a familiar landscape and see themselves reflected back, he is not one of them... Earth out of man, say the Vedas... born out of the body of the Primal Man. But he feels he has nothing of the earth in him at all... he must have come from somewhere else, some other element. (285). His feelings of non-belongingness and rootlessness are a part of the borderline experiences. These feelings are also expression of his extreme self-alienation emerging out of being a part of the hybrid cultural space of the colonial and the colonized. "The margin of hybridity, where cultural differences 'contingently' and conflictually touch, becomes

the moment of panic which reveals the borderlines experience”(Bhabha 296).

### **In the (un)comfortable Third Space**

Pran Nath is caught in the third spaces, the space in-between space, which forces him to work out “strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (Bhabha 2). Hybridity shows the spaces between the colonizer and the colonized which has become a means of understanding and examining the in-between cultural space, a by-product of East-West encounter, colonizer-colonized interface where one can seek out those that have been marginalized, colonized, and ostracized. In this case, colonialism is seen as transactional rather than conflictual. Cultural hybridity is privileged as a productive space of culture owing to the advantage of in-betweenness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference. A new hybrid identity emerges from the interwoven elements of the coloniser and colonised challenging the validity of any essentialist cultural identity. It replaces the established pattern with a ‘mutual and mutable’ representation of cultural difference. The indeterminate spaces in-between subject-positions are a site of the disruption and displacement of hegemonic colonial narratives of cultural structures and practices. The third space questions essentialist positions of identity and a conceptualization of ‘original or originary culture’. (Bhabha 1) History of Pran Nath shows it. The third space is an ‘interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative’ space of new forms of cultural meaning and production blurring the limitations of existing boundaries and calling into question established culture and identity. This hybrid third space is an ambivalent site where cultural meaning and representation have no ‘primordial unity or fixity.’ (Bhabha 1)

Pran Nath’s case is not a case of resisting colonial acts of authority and oppression or going against local elements but of exploiting the third space to stay alive. Copying the white gives him security as the white is a symbol of power and authority. When Mrs. Macfarlane asked him to be proud of his Indian side, he hated the idea. Pran

pushes historical concerns to the margin. "He is too preoccupied to think about politics, barely registering that around him agitation against the British is growing to fever pitch. Mrs. Macfarlane's parlour is full of other young men, students who have obeyed the call to leave their English-run schools and work full time for liberation...Parsis, Muslims and upper-caste Hindu boys" who talked about Gandhi, Patel and the other leaders and the unspoken question is "Won't you join us?" (256) But Bobby does not join them. Neither an Indian nor a Britisher, he does not know where his loyalty should be. The young nationalists dislike his well-cut suits and newly minted accent, such a contrast to their own proud-Indian attire of Congress caps, white kurta-pyjamas and high-necked achkans. When they ask him if he is not going to work for his country, he shakes his head. They insult him by calling "mongrel, English lackey" (256). Yet, acting as a guide, after the tourists had gone away tittering at the hermaphrodite figure of Shiva, he touched the statue for luck. Mrs. Macfarlane once tells him, "You should be proud of what you are." (256). He retorted, "So what am I?" (257). Belonging neither to the Hindu community or the colonial British, he lives like a creature of surface. He will never be at "home" in the third space due to his inability to take side.

### **Crisis in the Heart of Empire: Jonathan in England**

In England, Pran Nath/Jonathan's mimicry of English culture appears as a parody of Macaulay's 1835 "Minute on Indian Education" whose aim is to produce "a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, in intellect." (Quoted in Bhabha 1994:87) Kunzru puts the protagonist in the middle of Empire itself with a false identity of a real Britisher. Beyond hybridity model and the colonizer-colonized binary, in England, Jonathan finds "the originals of copies...all the absurdities of British India restored to sense by their natural environment." (299). With his fair skin and mixed blood, he develops his English taste in opinions, in morals and in intellect. Now the content of his new life is 'life itself, an English life.' (299). He "feels Englishness begin to stick to him, filming his skin like city grime. That is what he wanted.

That is enough.” (303) In Norfolk, he learns that “English is sameness and the comfort of repetition” (314). Despite his best effort to be like a real Britisher, there is something underneath which cannot be fully absorbed. His isolation is attracting attention. Under Mr. Hoggart’s suggestion, he takes interest in cricket and ends up as a scorer. “He felt as if he has found his place in the cricketing world. Neither inside nor outside, participant nor uninvolved spectator, he becomes a minor recording god, observing the actions of others with dispassionate concentration, marking them down as dots or little figures in this oblong-gridded book” (334). Neither an insider nor an outsider, internally he is completely free from his in-between space.

In Oxford, throughout all his various activities, Bridgeman’s watchword is convention. He has copied all the necessary items to pass off as English people but he does not think he is fully absorbed into British life. Mimicry can become mockery and parody. “Mimicry is at once resemblance and menace.” (Bhabha: 86) In case of Bridgeman’s mimicry, there is no visible menace in the sense of dismantling colonial authority. Then he meets Astarte Chapel, daughter of an Anthropology Professor. He becomes close to her and her father and the subject of Anthropology. Jonathan feels happy, so like a comfortable British home, to be at the same table with the father and daughter. He even thinks of marrying her. He goes on an Anthropological expedition to Africa with Professor Chapel with the hope of coming back to England and settling down with Astarte as his wife. In France, Astarte introduces him to a Black man called ‘Sweets’. Explaining her preference for Sweet, Astarte clarifies to Jonathan that Sweets is different, “Exotic, Strong, I’ve never met anyone like him” (414). She says that Jonathan is exactly like everybody. “You do the same things as everybody else and you say the same things as everybody else” (415). Rejecting her Englishness, she tells him that he is the most conventional person who likes following rules from birth to marriage to death. She wants primitive emotion and someone who has soul and Negroes have soul. “English people... we haven’t got soul.” Soul, for her, means “music and suffering” (415).

It is a moment of crisis for Jonathan who has been trying all his life to become English. Now, he has become a

true Englishman by all conventions and appearance. Yet, paradoxically, he is rejected by the lady whom he loves because he is so English. All his life he has been hiding his mongrel origin, behind his white skin pretending to be white. It hurts him to see Astarte loving the touch of the black hand of a Negro or the white bare shoulder. He is rejected because he is an Englishman without suffering and musical soul of a Negro. He is ready to tell his true identity like there is still one. He tells her that he is “as black as him” even blacker. She dismisses him as playing silly games. This is the moment where the real identity becomes a false one. After this, Jonathan is in a state of collapse. “This terrible blurring is what happens when boundaries are breached. Pigment leaks through skin like ink through blotting paper. It becomes impossible to tell what is valuable and what is not.”(417). Throughout his travel from Agra to England, he favours the white culture taking advantage of his white skins, his white masks. His masks come apart when because of his whiteness and perfect British manners, Astarte dumps him.

### **The Impressionist’s Archeology of Self**

Despite his different place-and situation-bound impressions of identity, Kunzru’s protagonist fails to grow into a seminal personhood. Retrospection or flashback does not disturb him because he has nothing to go back to. The transitions from one incarnation to the next are hardly elaborated upon, making the character meaningful only in parts, thereby making it hard to think of him as a unified person. As a result, he does not have the cultural confidence to know who he is and why he is in connection with the changing forces. His condition reminds one of Kenneth Ramchand’s remake: “Cultural confidence is knowing who you are and why you are in the midst of all the convulsions that are changing your life... it can never be fixed or final...Knowing who you are and why you are in a dynamic and provisional way makes it easy for you to be open to, and selective about, influences from outside yourself; at the same time, it makes it very difficult for those who want to tell you what you should be” (115-116).

The toppling of centre-margin opposition also comes into the picture. Consigned to a world of mimicry and

imitation, he avoids self-representation, and therefore his self remains silent. His life on the periphery of Empire is disorder and inauthentic and it is posited against the authenticity and order of the centre, that's, British Empire. The polarity is visible in text in an aggregation of opposites: order and disorder, authenticity and inauthenticity, reality and unreality, power and impotence, being and nothingness. Using his white skin and white cultural trappings, Pran Nath, located in the far powerless periphery of the colonial world, wants to be in the centre of British Empire, a symbol of order and power, the source of imperial authority. The peripheral lacks order because it lacks the power of self and self-representation. The perception of 'being' itself is located at the centre and that 'nothingness' in the margin operates as a driving force in Kunzru's protagonist. Pran Nath thinks he has become something by imitating white English culture owing to the centre's construction of the 'periphery' as an area of nothingness. When Jonathan finds himself in the centre he discovers that its power and order is only an appearance, so an illusion. The Anthropology Professor, fed up with Oxford life, wants to move out of that boredom and misery to study the West African native. His daughter Astarte moves from London to French and falls for a Black man. Finally, the protagonist is rejected just because he is just like any other conventional English man. The centre has become a source of loneliness, misery and disillusionment. At the end, what Fotse priest did to Jonathan, the act of emptying out European spirit, may be read as the need to abrogate the dominance of the centre before the experience of the 'periphery' can be validated.

The protagonist needs more self-awareness than other-awareness. His constant effort at blending with his location is self-avoidance. In this case, to talk of a proper self or to talk of self-autonomy is useless. No personality to obliterate, his talent of mimicry helps in creating himself in the image of others only. His self can be derived from all the creative possibilities that can come from new amalgamations of cultural practices and this new personality needs a voice of his own, like the Black guy who is honest and bold enough to show his true self. Pran Nath instead of growing into a new personality ends up inhabiting

temporary identities. The performative impressionism the book plays out reaches a self-reflexive highpoint when he visits a Paris cabaret, where a “nondescript little man” (418) takes the stages. The man’s performance reflects Pran Nath’s true character: the impressionist delivers credible renditions of various characters, each lasting “a few seconds, a minute. Each erases the last.” (419). Each impersonation, convincing for the duration, only appears under the erasure of the next one. In-between the performer’s sequential acts, the protagonist observes, “the man becomes these other people so completely that nothing of his own is visible” (419). He understood that “in between each impression, just at the moment when one person falls away and next has yet to take possession, the impressionist is completely blank. There is nothing there at all” (419). Pran Nath equates himself with the Russian Impressionist. What he realizes is that, despite the pain at the breakdown of his temporary identity, there is nothing “just at the moment when one person falls away and next has yet to take possession” (419) In Fotseland, due to his self-alienation, he wants to commit suicide. But he finds himself in a tragic-comic situation as he cannot do it because it is “one of Bridgeman’s qualities, not his own.” (463).

The Fotse old priest tells Jonathan that he has been possessed by a European spirit and he will draw out that spirit from Jonathan. Jonathan is made to drink a liquid and he discovers that he is an abyss. “The thing he thought was himself is plucked out and flung away, leaving only a nightmare, a monstrous disorder.”(477). His European spirit all emptied out, now he has no name. One can read it as metaphor of decolonizing the colonized mind. Talking about colonialism from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category; Ashis Nandy states that “the West is now everywhere, within the West and outside, in structures and in minds.’ Decolonization of the mind is central to liberation—a process that transcends the end of colonial occupation and starts a way of self-determined life. But the confrontation between coloniser and colonised is inherently paradoxical and any notions of colonial cultural superiority are false, liable to generate conflict if not stripped of their illusory power. The Impressionist deconstructs the notion of fixity and purity in the terms of nation, community, history



and subjectivity. Kunzru's protagonist is neither a part of the Resistance Figure nor the Colonial Oppressor. What is happening to the protagonist is incommensurable as he goes beyond the binaries of master/slave, free/bonded, ruler/ruled. What we find at the end is not a hybrid identity, but someone emptied out of everything. From there, where he will proceed to next historical circumstances or interact with which culture still remain to be discovered. The author points towards a new beginning in the life of the protagonist. After the exorcism of European ghost, he thinks, "For now the journey is everything. He has no thoughts of arriving anywhere. Tonight he will sleep under the enormous bowl of the sky. Tomorrow he will travel on." (481). In the middle of African desert, devoid of any cultural masks, he comes face to face with his emptiness and many possibilities are open. On the positive side, we may say that his travel will bring about the creation of "true self", a rebirth, Kaminsky's "a will to return into presence", an emergence of new personhood and subjectivity

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