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**An Overview of Hanif Kureishi's *Gabriel's Gift*: A Study**

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**Abstract**

Hanif Kureishi is one of the foremost authors of British Asian Writing. Born in Britain in 1954, Kureishi overcame all his problems and became a prominent novelist and screenplay writer. He has been vocal in sharing the experiences and sufferings of Asians in Britain. His works have diverse perspectives and emphasize postcolonial Britain. His works contain postcolonialism, diasporic elements, immigrant sufferings, experiences, etc., of subalterns in Britain. His works highlight the multicultural aspects of Britain. His important works include *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), *Intimacy* (1998), and *The Last Word* (2014). The paper focuses on the thematic aspects of Hanif Kureishi's *Gabriel's Gift* (2001).

The novel *Gabriel's Gift* revolves around the life of a fifteen-year-old teen named Gabriel, who embarks upon an arduous journey to realize his dreams. He faces many difficulties and attempts to overcome them. He also experiences the suffering of his parents and their estrangement, which leaves Gabriel disillusioned. However, he overcomes all his problems in the end and emerges successful by fulfilling his dreams. Hanif Kureishi explores family conflicts, the generation gap, the power of Imagination, migrant issues, gender, and sexuality. Sufficient research has been carried out focusing on the postcolonial elements, identity construction, and the problem of identity, inter-generational relationships, and Multiculturalism present in the novels of Hanif Kureishi. The study analyzes the text, exploring the themes in the work, with a particular focus on Multiculturalism and the sufferings of immigrants.

**Keywords:** Immigrant, Multiculturalism, themes, sexuality, and family conflicts.

**Introduction**

Hanif Kureishi is a well-known British Pakistani novelist, playwright, short story writer, and screenplay writer. Kureishi was born on 5 December 1954 in

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Bromley, South London. His father, Rafiushan Kureishi, was a Pakistani, and his mother, Audrey Buss, was an English lady. Kureishi was shot into fame soon after the publication of *The Buddha of Suburbia* in 1990, which eventually won him the Whitbread First Novel Award. Kureishi initially began his career as a pornographic writer but later eschewed it to become a novelist and screenplay writer. His works mainly focus on immigrant issues, identity crises, Multiculturalism, gender, sexuality, and family conflicts in British society. He has published several important works, including *The Black Album*, *Gabriel's Gift*, *Intimacy*, *The Last Word*, and many notable works. Kureishi highlights Multiculturalism and the problems immigrants face in England. Susie Thomas observes the novel as follows:

*"Kureishi seems to have lost faith or interest in the 1970s agenda for political and social change. Now, he is more likely to talk of literature's role in considering the 'human condition' than in examining the 'condition of England.'"* (Thomas, Susie, "Hanif Kureishi: *The Buddha of Suburbia* -1990." *London Fictions*. [www.Londonfictions.com/hanif-kureishi-the-buddha-of-suburbia.html](http://www.Londonfictions.com/hanif-kureishi-the-buddha-of-suburbia.html), 151).

Hanif Kureishi's *Gabriel's Gift* was published in the year 2001. The novel revolves around the thirteen-year-old protagonist, Gabriel, who fights against the odds present in society to pursue his dreams. Gabriel not only fights against societal problems but is also wretched by domestic issues. Pankaj Mishra aptly remarks that: *"In his new novel, Gabriel's Gift, Kureishi seems to be looking back at himself, at the young man who first received the subtle invitations of art. The problem he wishes to dramatize is how people trapped in the most unpromising social and cultural circumstances can awaken their artistic destiny. This is an intangible process, not easily defined; and, although people talk at great length and go to many places, Gabriel's Gift contains very little by way of essential action."* (Mishra, Pankaj. "A novelist lost in the labyrinth of his ego," 05 Mar 2001).

Gabriel is bullied at school for hailing from the lower strata of the society. He is very often looked at differently by people around him. This consideration of Gabriel makes it impossible for him to actualize his dreams. Gabriel is hindered not only by society from realizing his aspirations but also by his family. Christine, Gabriel's mother, sternly believes that Gabriel could overcome his hardships by pursuing law but never by arts. She informs Gabriel that his growth as an artist in a society that caters to the interests of its citizens will not allow him to become an artist. She insists that Gabriel focus on academics, but Gabriel is hardly interested. Gabriel also feels sorry for the atypical relationship that his parents are in.

Gabriel partly draws inspiration from his father, a bass artist in Lester Jones's troupe in the 70s. Gabriel is disturbed by the separation of his parents, Rex and Christine. Christine believed that having an opulent life alone would make them stay safe in Britain. She opined that Britain was a place where people with affluence would make their way to pursue their dreams. That is the reason why Rex was abandoned

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by Christine soon after he turned out to be jobless. To maintain her social status, she hires an au pair, Hannah, an immigrant to Britain, who is expected to look after the household chores, and her son Gabriel. Gabriel urges Hannah to stay at a distance from his school because he is afraid that students would look down upon him and bully him if they find out that he is being taken care of by an au pair and that his mother is a waitress. This fear of being considered underprivileged and bullied by affluent and elite classmates haunted Gabriel. The London Kureishi portrays itself as hostile to immigrants due to the stringent policies devised by the government. David Jays, speaking about London in the novel, in a review, asserts London as *"a swarming London novel, but a charming, light-textured, fable about talent, about how single-minded creativity might embrace and even be buoyed by the heartbreaking muddle of everyday life"* (David, Jays. *Never trust a man in platform heels*, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/feb/25/fiction.hanifkureishi1>. 25<sup>th</sup> Feb 2001. Accessed on 30 January 2023. 6).

Gabriel also felt estranged in his father's absence. He lost his twin brother Archie, who died early. Gabriel always felt his presence and believed his inner voice to be Archie's. Christine reprimands Gabriel after learning about this eccentric behavior and considers it queer. Gabriel thinks about his father and, on being permitted, goes on to live with his father, Rex, who lives in an untidy apartment. Gabriel is traumatized by the poor living conditions of his father and the debts he has gotten into. Gabriel also helps his father by giving him some money his mother gives him. Gabriel learns about Lester Jones and the association Rex had with him. On being invited by Lester, Rex, and Gabriel believe that the tables will be turned but are disheartened instead. Gabriel's artistic talent is appreciated by Lester Jones, who sees Gabriel's paintings in his picture book. Lester Jones appreciates Gabriel's talent as a potential artist and gives his insights on the concept of Imagination and artistic mania. *"Oh, everyone is mad. However, some people can do interesting things with their madness." Lester was looking at Gabriel. 'You are talented,' he told him. 'I am telling you- and now you know forever. Hear my voice and carry these words wherever you go.'"* (Kureishi, pg.50.)

Gabriel is excited by Lester's words because no one has ever known his works. He feels elated and starts developing reverence for Lester Jones. After meeting with Jones, Gabriel is gifted a painting by Jones, which he signed. As they leave the hotel where Jones resides, Gabriel and Rex experience considerable stardom. However, Rex is split between praise and humiliation because Jones does not pay him anything.

*"The crowd had turned to Gabriel's father, pushing and shoving to get a better view. Some people clambered onto the backs of others. Gabriel saw that Dad did not know whether to be delighted or humiliated by the attention."* (Kureishi, pg. 56)

Gabriel's father understands Lester Jones's charisma and decides to sell the

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Painting that Lester gives to Gabriel. Gabriel initially refuses to give the Painting to his father but succumbs to his father's helpless situation. Gabriel agrees to give the picture but demands time to study it. Gabriel's mother also becomes aware of Gabriel's meeting with Lester and learns about the picture. She insists that Gabriel hand over the picture to her so that the picture can be preserved. Gabriel is now stuck between the diverse intentions of his parents. This confusion impels Gabriel to deceive them by forging the picture into two copies, which he believes could be given to both his father and mother, and retaining the original picture with him.

*"Gabriel returned to his two copies. He was pleased with them; he had done what he had set out to do." (Kureishi 85).*

After forging the picture, he hides the original picture behind the wall, which catches Hannah's attention, who tells Gabriel that she will inform Christine about this. Gabriel apprehends Hannah as he would tell Christine that Hannah does not treat him well and points out to her the pitiable and traumatic lives of au pairs, whom their masters abandoned for being so rude. Gabriel says, *"Child abuse is a very serious matter in this country. The jails are bursting with weeping au pairs, but there is room for just one more!" (Kureishi 131).* This indicates the traumatic life of immigrants in Britain due to the laws passed by the British government. Helpless, Hannah remains silent on what she has seen, without saying anything to Christine, for fear that she will become homeless.

Rex is more concerned about the picture, and after receiving it from his son, Gabriel, he sells it to Speedy, Rex's friend, who also owns a hotel named Hamburger. Gabriel soon becomes Rex's friend, who, in turn, introduces Gabriel to James Ambler, the producer of *Timeless Saturday*, Charlie, a composer, and his friend, Karim Amir, the half-Indian actor. Speedy urges Rex to work as a music tutor to Carlo, the son of James Ambler. Rex despises Speedy and opposes his decision. Rex also informs Gabriel that he is not interested in teaching, so he turns down the offer Speedy gives him. Rex tells Gabriel that, *'Money is not everything. It is just that I have been feeling a bit low these days.'* (Kureishi, pg.102). He also gives his insights into learning and remarks, *'Why would anyone want to be taught to play the guitar? Play is playing. I learned from the records.'* (Kureishi, pg.102). Rex believes learning is natural and does not need to spend time exclusively learning things. He also believes that people always are interested in learning what they want and never what they are expected to learn. *'People only ever learn what they want to learn, just as you cannot force them to eat.'* (Kureishi, pg.102). This view of Rex even helped Gabriel to enjoy Painting at the expense of his studies, despite Christine's intentions to make him study law. He also criticizes the role of teaching and considers it *"the death of invention."* However, after being insisted on by Gabriel and understanding his financial conditions, Rex agrees to teach Carlo. Initially, Carlo proved careless but slowly developed his interest in learning. Rex, besides being paid, also enjoyed teaching. He loved visiting

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Carlo and rejoiced in teaching.

On the other hand, Christine ends her illicit relationship with George, which irritates Gabriel, and informs Gabriel that she will work as a waitress in Speedy's restaurant. Gabriel felt happy but was bothered by the picture in the restaurant. However, Gabriel manages to get the picture from Speedy on the condition that he paints Speedy. Speedy gets his Painting, and Gabriel retains the picture. Gabriel also learns that Rex and Christine are meeting each other and have decided to live together, but he is disappointed that he has not informed anyone about it so far.

*"He wondered if she would say anything about having seen dad. It was odd how secretive parents could be while at the same time demanding to know everything about their children." (Kureishi 132).*

Rex and Christine are invited to a party by James Ambler, where Christine expects Gabriel to promise him he will be gifted a camera by Ambler, which will help him record his film, which he plans to record with one of his school friends, Zak. Finally, Christine and Rex decide to marry, ending their live-in relationship. Gabriel also eventually embarks upon shooting a film with Zak, Ramona, Zak's niece, and other friends. Petr Chalupský opines that:

*"Gabriel's Gift can be read as a kind of sequel to its more acknowledged predecessor, though its main focus has shifted from racial and political issues to a more private, and also more light-hearted, exploration of the state of humanity. The last section focuses on one of the central characteristics of Kureishi's oeuvre, his celebration of London as the city of countless opportunities and positive social and cultural diversity."*

(Chalupsky, Petr. "You Only Have to Wish High Enough – Gifts in Hanif Kureishi's Gabriel's Gift."

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Vol. 2, 2009, pp. 13-24,

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257365762\\_You\\_Only\\_Have\\_to\\_Wish\\_High\\_Enough\\_Gifts\\_in\\_Hanif\\_Kureishi%27s\\_Gabriel%27s\\_Gift](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257365762_You_Only_Have_to_Wish_High_Enough_Gifts_in_Hanif_Kureishi%27s_Gabriel%27s_Gift)).

### **Conclusion**

Hanif Kureishi's *Gabriel's Gift* is a novel that focuses on the issues of immigrants, especially their sufferings. It emphasizes the relationship between Rex Bunch and Christine and the sufferings their son Gabriel had to go through because of their relationship. The clashes between two different generations can be found in the relationship between Gabriel and his mother, Christine, and his efforts to achieve his dreams. The work contains themes like Family conflicts, the Nature of Talent, the Power of Imagination, migrant issues, and sexuality. A thorough and keen observation of the middle-class manners and lifestyle is delineated in the work. Readers well received the work, and *The Guardian's* remark of the novel, "Kureishi's blithe inventiveness makes for entertaining scenery – from the shrewd observations about contemporary city life to the confident sketches of an entire generation of semi-

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talented has been.' Exemplifies the significance of the novel and how the audience received it.

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