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Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* presents us with many conundrums that children of immigrants face, including issues of belonging and home. Although I am not the child of immigrants, but rather an immigrant myself, I nevertheless could understand and relate to some of the cultural confusion that Karim faced throughout the novel, especially because I came to the United States at a fairly young age. But, the character to whom I could relate the most, especially around issues of family unity, home and homelessness is Jamila. Kureishi does a brilliant job of presenting the cultural confusion that these two young people face and the ways in which our designated gender determines how we get to act and be in the world.

In direct contrast to the wishy-washy Karim, Jamila is presented as very headstrong and determined young woman from the outset. Karim, in fact, comments that "Jamila was more advanced than I, in every way" (52). His admiration for her is evident in the way he describes her intellectual endeavors – her pursuit of knowledge, of really wanting to know the world through writers such as Baudelaire, Colette, Simone de Beauvoir and performers such as Billie Holiday – and, eventually, her gender transgressions. She is unafraid of "[...] strolling straight into the Men's and locking the cubicle behind us" (ibid.). What these descriptions suggest is that Jamila is a woman who makes her own choices and is unafraid of venturing into the world that has historically been hostile to women.

Perhaps this is why Karim is so shocked when Jamila is pressured into marrying Changez. The scenes that lead up to her acquiescence to Uncle Anwar, while making us chuckle at the absurdity of this grown man who loves his daughter enough to blackmail her, nevertheless speak to a deeper truth about the status of women in the South Asian culture, no matter what space it inhabits. As an immigrant woman, I could certainly relate to some of the

challenges that Jamila faces although, for all intents and purposes, she is British, and thus, Westernized. Unlike Jamila, I grew up in a home that consisted of three women – my mother, my sister, and myself. My mother instilled a very strong “feminist” ethic in us from the time we were very young in India. After we moved to the United States, my sister and I became very involved with the feminist movement at a young age (I was eleven and she was twelve). Therefore, several years later, it came as a huge shock to me when my mother tried to arrange a marriage for me. I was only nineteen! I couldn’t understand how someone who had raised me to be independent and strong within myself would succumb to what I then thought was an antiquated and patriarchal practice.

Like Anwar, my mother attempted to get me to accept this idea (but not as humorously as Anwar). However, unlike Jamila, who, perhaps out of “perversity” or “rebelliousness” decides to marry Changez (82). I, perhaps out of the same reasons, chose not to. I had a hard time with the decision that Jamila makes in the book because it seemed very out of character for her and even Kureishi’s framing her decision as a reflection of the “rebellious and unconventional” times in which they lived, seemed like an easy out. Furthermore, I have a hard time accepting the fact that Changez and Jamila eventually find happiness. Life doesn’t give us tidy, happy endings. While I appreciate Kureishi’s attempt to sensitize us to gender difference, ultimately, it seems to me, that women (as evidenced through the character of Jamila) are not allowed to overcome the cultural barriers that is widely available to men. Certainly, the fact that Karim gets to travel and make his own decisions and Jamila, who is smarter and more savvy than him in every way, is trapped and forced to stay at “home.” This leaves us with the question: what kind of home is this for her if a home is meant to give us a foundation upon which we build our lives and gain a sense of ourselves?

#### Work Cited

Kureishi, Hanif. *The Buddha of Suburbia*. New York: Penguin Books, 1990.