

Identity Entanglements of British “desis”: From the ‘Old self’ to the ‘New self’ in Gautam Malkani’s *Londonstani*

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Abstract: *The thesis of this paper is that of identity crisis¹ permeated through deep race relations and conflict, integration into the British society and re-examination of the ‘self’ is a recurrent theme in Londonstani, a novel written by Gautam Malkani. The successful realization to ‘belong’ is to be achieved through aggressive masculinity among South Asians, which in Hindi is referred to in the novel as “desis”.² Malkani defines it as a “self-referential term for the Indian diaspora that refers to people and culture. It is the Indian version of the term “Latino” (Glossary at the back of Malkani Londonstani, Penguin p. 337). Londonstani is a novel woven with what we refer to as “rudeboy” slang. Identity crisis in Londonstani has been the cynosure of various scholars (Elia, 2010; Goh, 2011; Karoline, 2009; Paganoni, 2010) and this motif has also been critiqued in newspaper articles (Harrison, 2006; Kamila, 2006). The main thrust of the present study, however, apart from the examination of multiculturalism, which subsequently has birthed racial stereotypes in London, is the psychological motivation in the characterization in Londonstani. Through the 1st person narration by our protagonist, Jas, this paper interrogates and examines the fulcrum on which the teenagers rebel against the societal ethos and the British cosmos in a psychological point of view. What is their motivation for adaptability in the context of language, arrogance, lifestyle and so on? In answering these questions, I will critically explore Horneyan theoretical considerations whose main concern is with the socio-cultural undercurrents that define the personality of a child later in life. Indeed the Horneyan theory has been applied elsewhere to investigate works of art³ but never before in Londonstani. Its key component aims at deciphering psychological motivation of functional and dysfunctional behaviour. Although Jas will be the main focus in this paper, his actions are a reflection of the other main characters, namely Amit, Ravi and Hardjit, and his character and characterization is exemplified by these three. Their language use is central to this essay. This paper has been significantly motivated, and justifiably so, by the recent election of the new mayor of London Sadiq Khan (a British Muslim whose family originally came from Pakistan) and whose life mirrors the narration of Jas in many ways. Central to this observation is that he has a Pakistani heritage. He is a ‘Paki’, which is a racial slur. The current paper however is not concerned with this new development (the election of Sadiq Khan) but rather, the thematic concerns of Malkani through the narration of Jas which appears to have borne fruit. It is a dream that has partly shed some light onto the whole complexities of identity. It appears that Londonstani has finally reached a threshold.*

Keywords: *Identity, Paki, Multiculturalism, slang, psyche, desis.*

1. INTRODUCTION

To preface the present paper, the focus is simply to highlight by exemplifications Malkani’s novel *Londonstani*, which tells the poignant story of four protagonists Jas,⁴ Amit, Ravi and Hardjit who

¹ For a more comprehensive discussion on identity, see Karoline, Slåttum (2009) “The New Power Generation: Hybridity in Malkani’s *Londonstani*,” Unpublished MA thesis, University of Oslo.

² A detailed etymology of the word “desi” is provided by Adriano Elia who states that the word originally is from Sanskrit and literally means ‘from the country’ or ‘of the country’. See his article “Multiculturalism and Contemporary British Fiction: *Londonstani* and the *Islamist*” in *Journal of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences*. International University of Sarajevo, No. 4.

³ For example Ratna Roshida Ab Razak (2012) *Understanding al-Mutanabbi: A Humanistic Psychological Approach*. Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, accessed on 31/06/2016, <https://books.google.co.kr/books>.

⁴ An article published in *The New York Times* by Sophie Harrison allows us to view Jas’s breathless narration. [Http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/23/books/review/23harrison.html?_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/23/books/review/23harrison.html?_r=0). Accessed on 24/4/2016.

hustle in Hounslow, West London. The four make an attempt to ‘belong’ in an effort to disentangle themselves from the chains of some identity crisis. This is so critical that the narrator, Jas, manages to make the reader come to a quick realization that indeed there is disenchantment among Indian teenagers who are raised in Britain. The relationship between language and behaviour is expressed vividly as are the characteristic features of the protagonists. They feel marginalized and are very determined to seek answers to their identity crisis, although Jas appears to be at the centre of it all. It is an emotionally gripping narration juxtaposed by British slang while remaining very stimulating indeed.

My goal in this paper is not to argue for the prosecution of those advancing racial identity complexities. Rather, the essay examines the crisis that four youthful boys undergo in an effort to know their identity, albeit, with a psychological dimension. More specifically, at issue is the attempt to disentangle themselves from the maze of this identity crisis, whether they are British ‘desis’ or British or both. Both of these identities construct an image of racial ambiguity. They do not have a choice, but to blend into society. They have to fit in to adapt to the British ways of life. The result then is a hybrid of sorts, mushrooming into an overt culture which is neither British nor South-Asian. It is a subculture unique to Jas and his ilk. In spite of the fact that they were born and raised in Britain, the four boys do not feel that they wholly belong to this culture. Perhaps the observation made by Goh (2011, 338) points towards an alienation of some sort when he says that, “Gautam Malkan’s *Londonstani* can be seen as a reinforcement of this estrangement from the Indian homeland and all that it represents”.

The main characters in *Londonstani* are teenagers and this is evident from the street-wise slang that they use in their conversation. London is changing rapidly with many migrants coming in and the four are descendant of these migrants. The result of this sudden upsurge of change in British society boomeranged and Jas, Amit, Ravi and Hardjit, the four British “desis” minds became entangled and began revolving around and interrogating their ‘Britishness’. The questions are; are they British enough? Even as much as they are British citizens, are they British? And what makes these doubtful thoughts linger in their psyche? This situation gives rise to their questioning of their British identity and the uncharacteristic anger they experience

2. ABOUT GAUTAM MALKANI

Malkani, the author of *Londonstani*, was born in London in 1976 (Malkani, “About the Author”). His mother, who was of Indian origin, came to the UK from Uganda during the height of Idi Amin Dada’s unrelenting economic sabotage and massive deportation of Indians from Uganda⁵. This is rehearsed by Karoline:

When dictator Idi Amin expelled Indian Asians from Uganda in 1968⁶, 25 000 refugees with British passports were relocated in Britain ... Several ministers were worried about the effect the arrival of the Indian Asians would have on Britain, and were trying to convince other nations such as Japan, India and Australia to take in the refugees. They even looked into the possibility of setting up an island territory and send all refugees there, the Solomon Islands and the Falkland Islands were both suggested for this purpose. (p. 39)

The mid-seventies were the most difficult period in the history of Uganda. I postulate that Malkani’s mother must have left Uganda during the period of Idi Amin’s intense crackdown on members of the Asian community. The Asian community underwent a period of constant scorn, degradation and physical torture. Throughout that period, Asians were deported and a majority went to Britain as asylum seekers. According to Karoline, his mother worked as a radiographer while raising him and his brother (2009, p. 4). She adds that Malkani grew up in Hounslow (a London suburb) and got his degree in Social and Political Sciences at Christ’s College at the University of Cambridge (p. 4). In

⁵ See in this regard an article in the *London Evening Post*, “Revealed: Why Idi Amin expelled Asians from Uganda” on <http://www.thelondoneveningpost.com/features/revealed-why-idi-amin-expelled-asians-from-uganda/>. But I read the comments as stereotyped and most likely heresay. In addition, one of the themes that is narrated in the biographical movie, *The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin*, is the deportation of thousands of Asians from Uganda by Idi Amin (Joseph Olita). The imagery portrays a period reminiscent to the holocaust orchestrated by the dictator. Interestingly, the director of the film is of Asian origin, Sharad Patel.

⁶ It is important to note that Karoline erroneously put the year Idi Amin expelled Asians as 1968. The correct year was 1972.

addition, *Londonstani* is a result of Malkani’s research on gender identities for his own undergraduate thesis at Cambridge University on British South Asian identity. In the 1950s and 1960s, the majority of immigrants to Britain were people from the West Indies and South Asia (Thomson 2005, p. 216).

3. THEORETICAL METHODOLOGY

I apply the theory of Karen Horney, which Antony (2015, p. 65) argues does not rely on having detailed knowledge of an individual’s past or childhood to infer the motivations behind their later adult behaviour. I must state here succinctly, that my theoretical construct may not adequately address the present problem statement. However, it is my view that the theory that I present below will provide direction towards understanding the narration of Jas and counter the views of Antony.

3.1. Horneyan Theory and *Londonstani* Characters’ Psychological Motivations

Karoline (2015) builds her premises on the theoretical focal point of post-colonial theory and the concept of hybridity. This paper, however, transgresses and uses Horneyan theory in examining psychological motivation of this emerging sub-culture. Just like Karoline states, “hybridity is highly relevant because of the globalization of the world. More and more, we have to deal with and accept other people’s different customs, traditions and beliefs”. Following the election of Mayor Sadiq Khan of London, Navid Akhtar who too has Pakistani heritage, rehearses this observation and remarks as follows:

This is a watershed moment in which the disengaged and cynical among us have to accept that we have one of the world’s fairest societies. I voted for him as I am looking for a return to centrism. The world is becoming increasingly polarized and that is a scary prospect for people like me who have dual heritage. I am a proud Londoner born and bred and at the same time I care about my Pakistani heritage and live my life—in business, with my neighbours and family—following the values of Islam...I don’t care about the colour, race, gender, sexual orientation or religion of any politician. All I care is that they care and want to serve not to rule over us.⁷

Returning to Horneyan theory, it will be useful at this juncture to look at tenets that are more relevant to my discussion. A key component of Horneyan theory is what is referred to as ‘Neurotic claims’⁸ which is a term that she coined herself “for an inappropriate sense of one’s superiority,” where one feels that others should rightly fulfill all one’s wants and needs (Razak, 2012). Razak, quoting Horney, states that “each human being possesses unique potentialities, known as the “real self” and that the cause of the development of a false pride is the loss of a healthy self-esteem.” She says that the effect of it is that the individual’s spontaneity is destroyed, and their behaviours become compulsive. The ability to make decisions is subverted and situations as well as other people are seen not as they really are, but in accordance with the neurotic needs generated by the false pride. Razak adds that, “Because of their pride, neurotics cannot take responsibility for themselves, and they know neither how they feel nor what they want”.

From the above quotation(s), one can conclude that people’s motivations, like those of Hardjit, Ravi, Amit and Jas, involve deeper consideration of their personalities. After deciphering and scrutinizing their language and overall behavioural trends, in addition to their personalities, it is possible now, to have a fairly accurate perception of how they felt the burden emanating from their circumstances in the streets of Hounslow, West London, in addition to their social environment. Those circumstances and the social environment they grew up in played a pivotal role in the way they responded, in various ways, to situations as narrated by Jas in *Londonstani*. They use the British Asian youth subculture word “batty” or “batty boy” as a reference to homosexuality (Glossary at the back of Malkani *Londonstani*, Penguin p. 335) and there is frequent use of formulaic expletive like the lexical item “f**k”. “— Serve him right he got his muthaf**kin face f**k’d, shudn’t be calling me a Paki, innit” p. 1). What are the psychological motivations of this swearing and the use of the ‘f’ word? Grohol

⁷ See “What Sadiq Khan’s election means to British Muslims, www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/may/07/sadiq-khan-london-mayor-british-muslims-readers-what-it-means accessed 7/5/2016, cite accessed on 07/05/2016.

⁸ For a more detailed discussion of the Horneyan theory and particularly the neurosis component, see Ratna Roshida Ab Razak (2012) *Understanding al-Mutanabbi: A Humanistic Psychological Approach*. Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, accessed on <https://books.google.co.kr/books>.

(2009) [in his essay] *Why Do We Swear?* quotes an article by Timothy Jay (2009),⁹ published by the Association of Psychological Science's *Perspectives on Psychological Science*. Grohol notes "Swear words (or taboo words, as he calls them) can include sexual references (f**k). He adds that, "taboo words can be used for a variety of reasons, including achieving a specific reaction from others. Swearing injects a direct, succinct emotional component into the discussion, usually in order to express frustration, anger or surprise."

Throughout *Londonstani*, Malkani portrays the character and characterization of British 'desis' as full of anger, rage, resentment, rebellion and disorientation. Jas and his friends are very emotional. They throw tantrums at the slightest provocation. Grohol (ibid) notes again "Swearing is often cathartic—it often frees us of the feelings of anger or frustration we hold and allows expression for them. It can also be useful substitute to physical violence". This clearly manifests itself in the novel when Jas, after the commencement of an episode of swearing, reaches a catharsis. These views are aptly captured by Horneyan. The frequency of other homophobic lexical items arises sufficiently. The term used to refer to a gay person is "coconut". Thus, Harjit rebukes Jas "Oh, I see, Jas, Homophobia again. You boys think that by constantly insinuating that I'm gay that somehow makes you big men? Well, you know what? You boys could end up in so much trouble you'll end up in jail one day where you can develop your homophobia further". (p. 124)

The personality disorder can be seen thus, as stated by Goh (2011, p. 338):

The narrator of Londonstani, Jas, and his three "rudeboy" (Asian hooligans or gang member) friends Hardjit, Ravi and Amit, roam through London ... aimlessly getting into fights with Muslims and goras (white people) while pursuing their stolen cellphone business and doing whatever it takes to project a front of "rudeboy authenticity."

The behaviour exhibited by gang members conforms to their way of 'belonging'. In order to 'belong', the adherents of his gang must be seen to behave according to what a 'proper' desi is supposed to be. In this context, Harrison (2006) observes that, "the novel is studded with observations on how to fit in, covering everything from dating ("Ladies judge how you're gonna handle their bodies by how you handle a car") to family affairs ("Gotta respect your elders innit") to the correct way to help a girl into a Porsche" ("stand behind the door and keep both hands on the top of the frame, that way you won't be tempted to do that batty swimming movement with your right arm, ladies-first style").¹⁰ There is constant conflict between their 'old' self and 'new' self. These opposite prisms are in continuous conflict and an immense effort is made to get out of the 'old' self and into the 'new' self. Goh reiterates my view when he states that, "This necessitates living a kind of double-life, in which the boys put up a front of Asian politeness and respect in front of their families, while committing their atrocities in the name of street "respect" outside of their homes". (ibid)

On the other hand, Kamila (2006)¹¹ in a critique says that, "Unfortunately, *Londonstani* largely fails to live up to the promise of the opening chapter. Jas is so firmly entrenched in his "new" identity that we see almost no conflict between his old self and the newer version, except for occasional statements about his discomfort with the homophobia and misogyny that are enmeshed in the rudeboy culture." She also states that, "Jas's narration which alternates between describing a scene of vicious brutality and digressing into considerations about racial tags, facial hair and "authentic rudeboy fronts", is both disturbing and compelling". They are in perpetual confrontation in an effort to assert their identity and authority. They hate to be "gorafied desi" which refers to an Indian with English mannerisms, appearance and who conforms to English etiquette. Goh says, "they are baiting a "coconut", someone they identify as a "gorafied desi" on the basis of his car and clothing, accusing him of being "embarrass'd to be a desi" (p. 338). He adds that "these confrontations, and the "lessons" they contain, are the triangulation points through which the desi rudeboys seek to locate their identity." (ibid)

⁹ See Timothy Jay (2009) "The utility and ubiquity of taboo words," *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 4(2), pp 153-161.

¹⁰ Sophie Harrison's who is a contributing editor at Granta. Her full article on *Londonstani* is published in the New York Times and can be read online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/07/23/books/review/23harrison.html?r=2&>, accessed on 14/5/2016.

¹¹ For more on Kamila's critique of the 'old self' and new version, see her article available online: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/may/06/featuresreviews.guardianreview23> (accessed 14/5/2016).

When it comes to the religious aspect, the ‘old’ self and ‘new’ self in these young boys are again in conflict regarding spiritual matters. The boys are born of families practicing Hinduism and Sikhism. They begin to question the real understanding of their parents’ religion. Jas says of Hardjit’s mum:

I tell him he shouldn’t be dissin Christianity, that he should check out his mum during Christmas time. You can tell from the way his eyes kick back that he’s considering this for a minute: the way his mum always sends out Christmas cards with a picture a the Nativity on them. How she even puts up a plastic Christmas tree with an angel on the op, right next to the Buddha statue they got in their living room. (76-77).

But in a rather interesting paradox of opinion, Elia (2010, p. 1) is of the view that *Londonstani* “displays a religion-free kind of identity describing the life of apolitical British-Asian teenage rude-boys”. This view is lacking solid facts and arguments to be sustainable. In a counter-argument, I posit that the issue of religion is succinctly narrated by Jas and it is a deeply entrenched motif. Issues and glimpses of religion and conflicts appertaining to religion are widespread in the novel.

3.2. Findings, Presentation and Analysis

In an article, *I Am What I Speak: Multicultural Identity in Londonstani*, Paganoni states that:

according to a poll commissioned by the BBC in 2007, over 30% of young British Asians (i.e. aged 16-34) do not feel British, half of them feel they are not treated as equals by white British people, and three quarters consider themselves to have been deprived of their own culture. These data would seem to suggest that approximately 70% of young British Asians do feel British but think, at the same time, that their parents’ or grandparents’ culture is relevant to the shaping of their own identity. In other words, most second-or third-generation British Asians find themselves involved in a constant struggle for identity, in a space that lies between the allegiance to an often mythical and remote tradition they originally came from and the need to conform to the principles and norms of Western civilization.”¹²

In discussing this paper, I will steer away from interconnected thematic patterns surrounding the depths of Islamophobia because the main characters in the novel are Hindi. Nevertheless, I see similar situations elsewhere, especially with the increase in ISIS activities and Islamophobia in the West. However, our protagonists are Hindi and the story is interwoven in the Hindi Cosmos and ethos. Thus, I am not going to talk about Islamophobia because it has no close relation with the topic under discussion in this paper. More generally, though, the problem of identity has plummeted in other areas, the United States notwithstanding.

Londonstani has a more youthful subject matter and explores multicultural motifs. The multicultural thematic pattern emanates from a British society which has embraced a significant amount of migrants from South Asia and elsewhere. Britain is a multi-cultural society. In-Jin (2009, p. 64) defines multiculturalism as a “concept or a government policy and program that seeks mutual respect and the coexistence of diverse ethnic and racial groups in a single society without attempts to integrate their different cultures”. On his part, Inderpal (2009, p. 101) mentions that in 2005, the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression (CDCE) was signed by 148 countries in Paris. He adds that the Convention’s goal is to protect “cultural diversity” against what is seen as a globalization that is homogenizing the world (ibid). It claims that cultural diversity is necessary to protect human rights, democracy, and development, as well as to create security, peace, and freedom of expression.

Returning to my theoretical construct, I re-examine probable psychological motivations that could have caused Jas and his friends to enter into this sort of gangsterism. To do this, I combine my focal theoretical methodology as expounded by Karen Horney (1945) and quoted by Antony (2015) with the views of Marianthi and Portelanos (2015, 103). In this regard, Marianthi and Portelanos (ibid) discuss important aspects of race relations. They argue that “the acquisition of qualitative internal relations is a mental ‘cultivation’ of each nation’s spirit”. They claim that culture is linked to religious education since it refers to the spirituality of people, shaping consciousness and illuminating the unconscious of a human being. Here, it is interesting to note that the reaction and counter-reaction of Jas and his friends are solidly embedded in their psyche. It is a two-pronged state of the mind, the conscious and the unconscious. Jas, who is the teenage narrator, loves good things and talks about himself and his friends. His narration mirrors what is in his mind. Consider the views of Foster (2008,

¹² See http://www.academia.edu/11442155/I_Am_What_I_Speak_Multicultural_Identity_in_Londonstani. cite accessed 04/05/2016.

p. 67) who asserts that “Narrators are like cats. They may talk about other people, but the world is mostly about them”. Narrative presence in *Londonstani* is pretty clear and straightforward. Jas makes himself known right away. First person narrators normally have their presence felt as soon as possible because they carry the reader along.

Turning to a similar scenario of immigrants struggling with the burden of acculturation, Juin (2008, p. 63) explores how immigrants from Morocco have lived as “cultural others” in Spain through an analysis of the novel *Tánger*. He further discusses immigrant identity and social integration from a human point of view. I postulate that this disorientation of Jas and his friends could be a result of differences in British customs and those of the immigrants of Pakistani descent. Juin adds that “Today, the Moroccan immigrants cannot exercise their rights, falling victims to morofobia or xenophobia and racial prejudice (p. 65). Elsewhere, Chambers (2009, p. 91) in an interview with Leila Aboulela has attempted to define the term “British Muslim” (by Aboulela herself) which apparently is a contested term. She is asked how she feels about being referred to as British Muslim writer. She opines:

Yeah, I mean, I'm Ok with it. I feel as though this is the type of question where I should answer, "I don't want to be labeled or tagged as a Muslim writer; I want to be seen just as a writer." That's the right answer today, I suppose, and it's true. But at the same time, when I get appreciated by Muslims themselves, it's nice, because then it feels that they are saying to me, "Yes, you are authentic, you are part of the community, you know what you're talking about." It's good to have this recognition, but it does sort of constrict you. And certainly, in terms of literary circles in Sudan, they don't like me having this tag of "Muslim writer"; they think that that's not an appropriate label. So I have mixed feelings about it, but I don't mind it too much, because I think there's truth in it, and so I don't feel very strongly against it." (91)

The thematic concern of Gautam Malkani is essentially on the identity crisis that is confronted by a later generation of Indo-Pakistani immigrants to Britain. In this context, Gardiner (1988, p. 66) defines identity as “the moral and existential request and that it is necessary for him to gain the self-fulfillment by dint of social praise and honour”. She is referring to Abdul who cannot establish self-identity by correlation with others. She adds that it is impossible for illegal immigrants such as him, who have to suffer the negligence and prejudice against immigrants, to acquire self-fulfillment in a society like Spain.

On the other hand, Wald (2007, p. 235) observes that Indian classical music has never caught on with a broad Western audience. He adds that, “the usual reason Westerners give for ignoring the Indian classical tradition is that it is too sophisticated—which is often a polite way of saying that we admire it in theory, but in practice find it boring”. This problem (of music tradition) is written about by Gautam Malkani. The question of ‘Britishness’ is even tested by the presence of *bhangra* a “traditional Punjabi dance music based on rapid *dhol* drum beats which has been modernized by the UK diaspora to encompass more Western dance music style” (Glossary at the back of Malkani *Londonstani*, Penguin pp 335-336). He also mentions *Dandia* which he describes as the “Gujurati style of dance, specifically the two wooden sticks that are used for it.” (337) From this, we can clearly see that cultural hybridity is even finding its way into music. So much so, that urban spaces are a conglomeration of both South Asia and British hip-hop lives fused together.

Karoline (2009, p. 28) observes that “in *Londonstani*, Jas and his friends are moving away from conventional immigrant identities and instead they pick and mix their own identities, influenced by, for instance American hip-hop, Bollywood and Afro-Caribbean and Asian street gangs.” She reiterates our observation by stating that “the popular music, which reflects influences from all corners of the world, such as Bhangra, hip-hop, Arabic, R & B and Funk” is another hybrid urban subculture” (ibid). But even here, they still have differences. While Amit’s brother Arun enjoys listening to the Asian Underground, Jas disapproves of it because he is strongly of the view that it has become common:

Some desi who lives next door starts blasting some tune out their bedroom window, probly to ell us to shut the fuck up so they can concentrate on their own A-Levels or whatever. The tune is 'Signs' by these guys called Badmarsh and Shri. They're part a the desi scene that some gora people like to call the Asian Underground. Arun's really into dat kind a stuff stead aproper hardcore bhangra cos he's a semi-coconut. An so I ask him how comes so much a tha stuff they call the Asian Underground, desis don't even listen to? I mean, look at Talvin Singh an Nitin Sawhney, it's mostly goras who download it innit? Not lager-lout yobs, obviously, but goras all the same". (p. 225)

In his mind, Jas’s idea of ‘cool’ music is “hardcore bhangra” and indeed he gets a rejoinder from Arun who tells him to be liberal, break free and broaden his mind. Arun tells Jas “Jas, you’re just like Amit. Just cos some desi tune isn’t bhangra, that doesn’t mean it isn’t a proper desi tune. I keep telling Amit that you boys need to go beyond all that hardcore bhangra, open your minds, break free” (p. 225). Upon which, again, Jas replies to Arun by explicitly refusing to give in, “Dude, you’re chattin like we’re locked in the Matrix or someshit. So what if we like our bhangra tunes stead a all that poncey gora stuff?” (p. 225) The exchange reaches a crescendo, and Arun throws the ball back to Jas “You only think it’s poncey goraffied stuff cos you never make the effort to listen to it. Nitin Sawhney’s one of this country’s biggest musical geniuses, but you never give your culture a chance.” (p. 225) Arun gets his reply from Jas: “Arun, you can hardly talk bout givin our culture a chance. You’re, like, anti-bhangra with your coconut ways. I mean, look at the skintight Levi’s you’re wearin now. Even a skinhead wouldn’t think you’re a desi looking like that” (p. 225).

From these excerpts it is clear that these two characters represent opposing views. But as Karoline opines, “Arun is probably the character in the novel who best personifies the hybrid nature of modern society” (p. 37). This hybridity is reflected in their language, their appearance and their behaviour. Karoline (2009, p. 60) quotes extensively from *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English*.¹³ In this book, as Karoline aptly puts it, “his intention was to create a hybrid language that combines Nigerian Pidgin English, broken English and “occasional flashes of good, even idiomatic English.”

In *Londonstani*, characters use idiomatic expressions as a strategy to protest against mainstream English tradition. For example:

It ain’t necessary for u 2 b a Pakistani to call a Pakistani a Paki, Hardjit explains, -or for u 2 call any Paki a Paki for dat matter. But u gots 2 b call’d a Paki yourself. U gots 2 b, like, an honorary Paki or someshit. An dat’s da rule. Can’t be calling someone a Paki ess u also call’d a Paki, innit. So if you hear Jas, Amit, Ravi or me calling anyone a Paki, dat don’t mean u can call him one also. We b honorary Pakis n u ain’t. (p. 6).

Amit’s mum uses English but with heavy Indian accent: But vhy you talk? You don’t understand such things, so then vhy you telled him such things? Vhy you talk? Vot you know about our proper style of shaadi? You not understanding nothing, Arun not understand, Amit not understand even, only we understand. We know vot needs to be done, not you boys. You not know our ways. These bloody badmarsh ideas you put into my son’s head. Look vot you’ve done to my house. (p. 253).

Hardjit has the Sikh *Khanda* symbol tattooed on his arm and he wears a *Khara* bracelet. “This bracelet is one of the five physical symbols that a Khalsa Sikh must wear.” She adds: However, he uses the bracelet as a weapon in fights, which is hardly the intended use. The boys use the term “izzat,” (*izzah* is an Arabic word which refers to dignity or honour) which is originally a Muslim expression, when they talk about a family’s honour, and Hardjit has taken it upon himself to be the defender of *izzat* for those Sikh and Hindu families who have been shamed, for instance by their daughters going out with Muslims” (p. 28)

Jas who is the first person narrator and the protagonist brings to fore the entanglement about his identity as British “desis”. He says:

*First we was rudeboys, then we be Indian niggas, then rajamuffins, then raggastanis, Britasians, f**king Indobrits. These days we try an use our own word for homeboy an so we just call ourselves desis but I still remember when we were happy with the word rudeboy. Anyway, whatever the f**k we are, Ravi an the others are better at being it than I am.” (pp 5 & 6) He adds, “I swear I’ve watched as much MTV Base an Juggy D videos as they have, but I still can’t attain the right level a rudeboy finesse. If I could, I wouldn’t be using poncey words like attain an finesse, innit. (p. 6).*

From the above excerpt, there is an attempt to justify some sort of hybridity fusing of the ‘desis’ identity and that of ‘British’. Amit, Ravi, Hardjit and Jas are experiencing an identity crisis not knowing exactly where they belong. They are not able to come to terms with ‘whom they are’. While it is not denial per se, they do not want to be identified as British ‘desis’ or just native British. There is

¹³ One could perhaps see the attribution to Ken Saro-Wiwa as a “Kenyan writer” as portrayed by Karoline (2009, p. 60) as an oversight or just gross research anomaly. In actual fact, Ken Saro-Wiwa was a Nigerian writer from the Ogoni tribe who are found in the southern part of Nigeria.

a compounding of thoughts and afterthoughts, to an extent that the four really are not able to decipher their identities. This scenario is juxtaposed by frustration and indeed, the inability to get an answer. A very frustrated Jas then makes a most disheartening remark, “Anyway, whatever the f**k we are, Ravi and the others are better at being it than I am” (p. 5).

In *Londonstani*, Jas appears to be deeper in identity crisis in comparison to his three friends. It is worthwhile to quote Paul Gilroy’s (1987, p. 217) ideas about culture and which mainly focus on the Afro-Caribbean black communities but he also mentions the community in which Jas and his friends lived:

.... even more complex genealogy (...), created in the synthesis and transcendence of previous styles. The effects of this can be seen not only where the cultural resources of the Afro-Caribbean communities provide a space in which whites are able to discover meaning in black histories, style and language, but also where a shared culture, over determined by its context of the urban crisis, mediates the relationship between the different ethnic groups that together comprise black Britain. The explosion of interest in hip-hop culture which occurred in West London’s Asian areas during the 1985 is an important example of this. For these young people, the language symbols and artistic repertoires produced in the confluence of Afro-American, Hispanic and Caribbean cultures in the Bronx have yielded powerful sources of solidarity and pleasure as well as a means to organize themselves.

In a similar vein, one can argue that this is typical of many cultures. Bonate, in this regard, commenting on the Swahili says that, “even when people are not considered Swahili ethnically or are not speakers of a Kiswahili-inspired language, they can still be identified as Swahili on the basis of a culture that they share with the rest of the Swahili world. Even the foods mentioned, like *Aloo ki subhji* (Indian potato dish), *dokras* (Indian snack), and *mithai* (Indian sweet), are mixed with influences from other cultures from different continents. This culinary fusion is well illustrated by Sanjay who is looking for a chef who “fuses Japanese, Lebanese and traditional kosher food” (2006, p.15). Apparently, “it is the only fusion experience London’s restaurant scene doesn’t offer yet.” (p. 154)

Notwithstanding the above stance, when reading *Londonstani*, stereotypes still abound. This simply means a collection of commonly held beliefs or opinions about what are “appropriate” behaviours and activities for males and what is “appropriate” for females. As a result of this, even though men such as Jas condemn societal deprivations his language still betrays subtle inclination to sexist socialization.

3.2.1. The Relationship between Language and Behaviour

Among other points, this paper also examines *Londonstani* with a view to highlight its characteristic language usage as well as the psychological disposition that informs such use of language. Research findings by anthropologists, educationists and sociolinguists show that traditionally, males use non-standard language. Females use the language of rapport while males use the language of report. Discursive language style is meant for women while men are given the language of theories and abstractions. Females use polite language meant to maintain harmony and strong relationship as well as to keep conversations open whereas males use the language of assertiveness and insistence. Therefore, women use the language of solidarity but men use the language of the expert.

Jas and his friends struggle to rejuvenate the wounded dignity of British “desis”. They have to fight against an “oppressive” culture and its attendant discrimination against the British “desis” in order to survive. The “oppressive” nature of the British culture sparks off the rebellious reaction which is illustrated by the swearing. In this respect, Osakwe (1999, p. 128) explains that the language we use is very powerful and loaded with meaning. It is usually the only genetically endowed information storage system that humans have. This implies that all our experiences and memories are, to a large extent, encoded in a language system. She highlights that great linguists and psycholinguists have established that language and behaviour are related. The language we speak clearly reflects the way we think and behave. That is to say, our speech exposes our thoughts, feelings, behavior and attitude. Similarly, in Lindgren’s (1973, pp 318-326) contention, language implements and reflects culturally determined attitude and values and helps to reinforce, sustain and perpetuate them. He adds that the kind of language used by a communicator indicates his identity in terms of culture. Many studies including Strain champs (1971, p. 18) have been carried out to investigate the connection between language use and sexist attitudes. Strain champs indicates that sexism and sexist language and attitudes are some of the ways an oppressive society maintains the status quo. There is immediate anger shown in the beginning of *Londonstani*. The first sentence foreshadows the tone for the rest of the novel as seen here below:

—Serve him right he got his muthafuckin face f**ck’d, shudn’t b calling me a Paki, innit ... After spitting his words out Hardjit stopped for a second, like he expected us to write em down or someshit. Then he sticks in an exclamation mark by kickin the white kid in the face. —Shudn’t b calling us Pakis, innit, u dirty gora” (p. 3).

Elia (2010, p. 3) states that “the language used is a striking, challenging and incessant mixture of slang, texting, Panjabi, Hindu, MTV Base slang and gangsta rap”.

4. CONCLUSION

From the analysis of the postulations and questions that this paper sought to answer, the following conclusions were drawn. When reading *Londonstani*, there are events that take place ahead of our protagonists coming to the fore. The Indo-Pakistani community migrates to Britain. This is followed by the settlement of these groups in Hounslow, West London. As they settled there, the processes of urbanization began with members of the Pakistani community going back decades. This is in consonance with the basic cause of socio-cultural conflicts in the novel. It has been observed that during this time, there was also trade and power struggles amongst community members. In the course of these community interactions, the likes of Jas, Ravi, Hardjit and Amit began feuding with other members of their community. As these disputes escalated, the process of cultural interaction underwent serious challenges, and subsequently the process of fission and fusion that characterize *Londonstani*.

The observation raised in this paper is that, when reading *Londonstani*, our protagonist Jas easily slides into oblivion and engages in all manner of ills with his friends. For instance, he was once one of the best students in his class and kept himself in shape by working out often. *Londonstani* is a novel that depicts the traditional theme of peer pressure and how young boys make an attempt to fit in with various gangs to conform with the societal expectations of the said gangs. Mannerism of how to date women ‘the gang way’ are well illustrated. The underlying argument here is that individuals ought to be responsible for their behaviour and subsequent decision-making.

Yet, above all, *Londonstani* seems to be an oxymoronic work of art following the election of Sadiq Khan as the mayor of London, who despite the fact that he does not practice Hinduism traces his double heritage back to Pakistan. He is among those who put up with derogatory and racial labels, like the lexical item “Paki”. It is a paradox of some sort that, perhaps, an individual could allow available spaces and dual heritage to permeate into the inner sancta of a multiracial society and thin down racial divides. London appears to be a mosaic and a mural with different images which is indeed culturally appealing.

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