

The Buddha of Suburbia Study Guide

The Buddha of Suburbia by Hanif Kureishi

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Plot Summary

The Buddha of Suburbia by Hanif Kureishi is a satirical coming of age story set against a background of racial and social tensions in 1970s London. Karim is a half-English and half-Indian teenager struggling to find his place in the world and discover who he is. The Buddha of Suburbia examines human behavior and how the choices we make affect those around us.

Karim's father, Haroon, is a first generation immigrant who has been stuck in a job he hates and an unhappy marriage for too long. He begins a relationship with Eva, a woman with whom he shares a common interest in Buddhism and Eastern Philosophy. Eva encourages Haroon to share his outlook with others. Karim accompanies his father to the early meetings arranged by Eva, mostly because he has a crush on Eva's son, Charlie.

Karim searches for fulfillment and experiments sexually with anyone who is interested. Haroon is angry to discover that Karim is bisexual and stops talking to him for a long time. Karim is equally angry to discover that Haroon is having an affair with Eva.

After discovering that Haroon and Eva are more than just friends, Karim seeks advice from his childhood companion, Jamila, but discovers that her situation is more dire as her father is forcing her into an arranged marriage. Karim cannot save his friend and in fact, likes Changez, the man she is forced to marry, although Changez is a grave disappointment to Jamila's father, Anwar.

Haroon leaves Karim's mother, Margaret, for Eva and Karim goes to live with his father and Eva. Eva enlists Karim to help redesign her house, which she then sells and moves from the suburbs into the city. Karim discards his educational opportunities, seeing them as unimportant. He enters his twenties, and a new life in the city, naive but hopeful for his future.

His new life proves to be a disappointment, but he does begin a career as an actor. His first role, in "The Jungle Book" proves disappointing as he is required to portray racial stereotypes, but the production and his performance is successful enough to attract the attention of Matthew Pyke, a noted theater director, who casts Karim in his next play.

In Pyke's acting troupe, Karim begins a love affair with Eleanor, a fellow actor, and discovers a lot about himself. He also allows himself to be used by Pyke, Eleanor, and others around him. He struggles to find his own identity and continues to feel lost and disappointed in the world around him. The play is a success and he moves to New York.

Karim grows to hate the people he has come to associate with. He stays in New York when they all go home. For a time, he lives with Charlie, who has become a rock star, but he is as unhappy in New York as he was in London and goes home.



Back in London, Karim continues his professional success, becoming a soap opera actor, but also begins to find success in his personal life, realizing that the key to being happy is to surround yourself with family and people who genuinely love and care for you, even through all your disagreements. Karim truly begins to discover who he is and where his place is in the world and looks to the future with optimism.



Part One - In the Suburbs, Chapter One

Part One - In the Suburbs, Chapter One Summary

The Buddha of Suburbia by Hanif Kureishi is a satirical coming of age story that deals with issues of class, race, and identity. Karim is a youth of two cultures, half Indian and half English looking for identity and fulfillment in 1970's London. Against a backdrop of class and racial tension, Karim transitions from adolescence to adulthood, trying to discover who he is and what he wants while also discovering the true meaning of home and family.

Karim Amir is a mixed-race teenager growing up in the South London suburbs. He is restless and bored until one day, when he is seventeen, his Indian father, Haroon, returns home in an unusually good mood. Haroon has been invited to speak on Eastern Philosophy to a group of interested people at the house of Eva Kay, the mother of Karim's schoolmate, Charlie. Karim goes with him.

On the way to Eva's, they stop at a local pub. Haroon confides that he is unhappy with Karim's mother. Karim suggests divorce, but his father rejects the concept.

Karim wants to go to Eva's for two reasons. Firstly, he is fascinated by Eva who both frightens and excites him. Secondly, he has a crush on Charlie and wants to spend time with him. At the meeting, Haroon leads the group in some yoga while spouting some basic philosophy, a field in which everything he knows is self-taught. Charlie and Karim quickly tire of the display and retreat to Charlie's room to smoke a joint and listen to music. Karim feels unrefined and childlike compared to Charlie.

Karim goes to check on his dad. Haroon and Eva have left the others meditating and Karim discovers them having sex in the garden. He returns, unseen by Eva and his father, to Charlie's room. Karim makes a move on Charlie and they get physical with each other but are interrupted by Haroon and Eva.

At home, a drunken Haroon is distraught to have discovered his son with another boy. They argue and Karim reveals that he saw his dad with Eva. His mother, Margaret, is disgusted to find her husband so drunk and reveals her own unhappiness with the marriage to Karim. Haroon doesn't speak to Karim for weeks. During this time, Karim investigates his parents and discovers that his mother knows about the affair.

Haroon speaks to Karim again when he is invited to make another appearance to lead yoga and expound of philosophy. He invites Karim along, taking pride in showing his son that he is in demand.



Part One - In the Suburbs, Chapter One Analysis

The protagonist is introduced straight away. He is also the narrator of the story. Events are filtered through his perception of them. Karim is the seventeen year old son of an Indian father and an English mother. His appearance marks him as foreign, but his upbringing is very English. Karim is restless and bored with suburban existence. He craves excitement, but when the routine of his life is broken by discovering his father's affair and the seeming breakdown of his parent's marriage, he is deeply unsettled by it.

Karim is a confused teenager, still searching for his identity. His search is complicated by confusion over his sexuality and race. He admires Charlie's sophistication and translates this into romantic feelings for him, all the time aware that rather than truly liking Charlie, he wants to be like him. He identifies himself as English, but is aware that he is "considered to be a funny kind of Englishman" (pp.1) Karim is filled with the emotional conflicts that teenagers struggle with as they try to comprehend the world and their place in it.

The first chapter foreshadows people and events that will become integral to the book later. There is an introduction to the conflict of mingled interest and distaste that the white characters have about Indians and Indian. For example, the guests at Eva's party make blatantly racist comments about Haroon, mindless of Karim's proximity, yet are perfectly willing to be led by him as he demonstrates yoga and spouts self-taught philosophy at them. Charlie is very taken by Haroon and his yoga and meditation, yet he ridicules Karim's Indian appearance, telling him he should dress differently.

The differences in class between two suburban families are also introduced, as is the further gulf in class between the suburbs and London proper. Karim is very aware that Eva's house is bigger than his and that their family is much better off. This class awareness will continue to permeate the whole novel. The city of London looms in the background, spoken of as if it is the Promised Land. The youths of the suburbs yearn to escape there. The realities of the great city are unknown and irrelevant next to the mystical promise of an escape from suburban drudgery.

Important characters are introduced. Some, like Karim, Eva, Haroon and Charlie are shown in some detail. Each character's important traits are displayed. From Karim, there is a great deal of uncertainty, confusion and inferiority. We can also see that he is keenly perceptive and very aware of how the world around him affects him. Haroon's dissatisfaction with his everyday life is front and center, as his deep seated need for approval and respect. Charlie is shown as a little removed from everything. His emotions are suppressed and he views most things with a kind of detached interest. Eva is exuberant, inappropriate, exciting and dangerous and it is clear why Karim and Haroon are drawn to her. She is the opposite of their routine, everyday lives. Other characters, such as Allie and Shadwell are shown only in passing but will become important later.



Part One - In the Suburbs, Chapter Two

Part One - In the Suburbs, Chapter Two Summary

Karim reflects on his father's history. Haroon and his best friend Anwar grew up together in Bombay. In India, they were both from well-off families, growing up with servants and living an aristocratic lifestyle. They hung out with Indian movie stars and went to big parties. Karim recalls that his father once suggested he should become an actor, though he really wants him to become a doctor. Anwar and Haroon were sent to England to be educated. It was a shock to their system. Both the weather and the culture were unlike anything they were used to. Haroon met Margaret at a dance and she fell for his boyish helplessness that triggered a maternal instinct. This reaction was not an uncommon one to Haroon and he exploited it.

Anwar was already married to Jeeta. He came into some money and opened a toy shop. It failed, but Jeeta made him turn it into a grocer and he became a success. Haroon was a poor student. His family cut him off when they discovered he spent more time drinking than studying and he ended up working for the Civil Service. He discovered Eastern Philosophy, but had nobody to discuss it with, neither Margaret nor Anwar being interested. Haroon's disinterest in his work led to him being stuck in the same job, which he believed was due to racism rather than a poor work ethic. Eva was the first person he met who was really interested in Eastern Philosophy.

Back in the present, at the second party, Karim meets Helen. He thinks she is interested in him, though his thoughts are mostly with Charlie. Karim is disconcerted to see Eva and Haroon acting like a couple in public. Just as Haroon starts his presentation, Karim's aunt and uncle arrive.

Part One - In the Suburbs, Chapter Two Analysis

The first half of Chapter Two deals with Karim's family history, in particular his father's arrival and early years in England. Shown in these experiences is a mirrored ignorance and attraction to the strange English culture from the Indian characters. This is the same kind of curiosity tempered with lack of knowledge demonstrated by the English towards Indian culture in Chapter One.

The culture shock Haroon and Anwar experience upon arrival in England is based not only in this deficiency of understanding about what they were going to, but also in a class disparity. Both of the Indian men came from affluent Indian families with servants and arrived in place where they were expected to do things for themselves and work hard to achieve success, in essence building from scratch. Anwar, with luck but also perseverance and hard work, builds up a successful business while Haroon uses the racism he encounters as an excuse for why he is not successful, covering his inherent laziness with excuses based in the culture clash that he encounters.



Margaret is also caught in the class issue as she is torn between irritation at Haroon's attitude and lack of skills, anchored in never having learned to do things for himself, and pride at his relatively aristocratic background and the added status it brings to their family.

The second half of Chapter Two further emphasizes the gulf in class between Karim's family and other suburban families, as Haroon's second presentation is in a solidly middle-class neighborhood. The class attitudes are tied in with racial attitudes as the same factors of mingled fascination and misunderstanding can be seen in the attitudes of characters on both sides of the divide.

Apart from the race and class issues, Karim's sexual confusion and insecurity is demonstrated through his interaction with Helen and his observation of Eva and Haroon. He is unsettled by Eva and Haroon showing a level of intimacy in public and doesn't know how to deal with it, pushing it to the back of his mind to deal with later. He is aroused by Helen's proximity, while strongly denying attraction to her. He focuses his thoughts on Charlie, yet ultimately turns to Helen, the person he is currently with, to test out undeveloped theories about attraction and sexuality.



Part One - In the Suburbs, Chapter Three

Part One - In the Suburbs, Chapter Three Summary

Karim's Aunt Jean has come to spy on Haroon's activity after being told about it by her sister, Margaret. Jean and Ted don't know how to react to what they have entered into and are cajoled into sitting and watching. Karim leaves the presentation and goes to the garden where he finds Charlie, virtually unrecognizable after dying his hair, reading poetry to a girl. Charlie invites Karim to join them.

When the evening ends, Karim and Helen exchange phone numbers and Karim sits in the car, waiting, while Eva and Haroon kiss in the back seat. When they get home, Jean is on the phone with Margaret, explaining the evening's activities. She insists on speaking to Karim and commands him to come and visit them the next day.

On the way to Jean and Ted's house, Karim stops to see Helen. Helen's dad intercepts Karim and tells him he doesn't want Karim anywhere near his daughter, using a variety of racial slurs. Helen's dad sets their dog on Karim, but the dog, rather than attacking him, humps him, messing up Karim's coat.

At Jean and Ted's, Jean tells Karim that Haroon's activities have to stop because they are embarrassing to the whole family. She wants Karim to put a stop to it. Karim does nothing, but things seem to return to normal for a few weeks until Margaret intercepts a phone call. She replaces the receiver immediately and won't say who called.

Part One - In the Suburbs, Chapter Three Analysis

Once again, race and class are at the forefront of this chapter. Many of the characters have a ready, or at least grudging, acceptance of interracial relationships. The younger characters think little of it, many of the older characters, such as Jean and Ted, have dealt with their reservations somewhat, although their insistence on calling Haroon "Harry" demonstrates that they still have issues with it. In sharp contrast to this is Helen's dad, who is outraged at the thought of Karim being near his daughter. He neither knows nor cares what Karim is, only that he is not white. Many of the racial epithets he uses don't apply to Karim. What counts to Helen's dad, however, is that Karim is different.

In terms of class, Jean is very concerned with how she is viewed by others. She is terrified that Haroon's actions will affect her, and to a lesser extent Margaret. Status is very important to Jean. Karim, as always, is very aware of the class differences surrounding him. He notes how much bigger everyone else's houses seem to be, though he seems to find the class struggle faintly ridiculous, noting some of the silly things his aunt and uncle do to keep up appearances.



Part One - In the Suburbs, Chapter Four

Part One - In the Suburbs, Chapter Four Summary

Tension about Eva is ever present in Karim's house, but left unspoken. Karim doesn't know if Haroon and Eva are still seeing each other. Two months after he had been summoned to Jean and Ted's house, Ted arrives at Karim's door. He is there to investigate what the situation is. Ted is anxious and looking to pick a fight with Haroon, but Haroon turns things around and, using techniques from his Buddhist studies, releases Ted's pent up emotions and reduces him to tears. Haroon tells Ted to let go of his previous life, to stop working so hard and to pursue what makes him happy.

Karim tries to escape the stress with a visit to Anwar's. Anwar isn't there, unusually, but Karim goes for a walk with his daughter Jamila, who Karim had grown up with. Karim reflects on his friendship with Jamila. He views her as more advanced than him—better educated, more sophisticated and more driven. Karim tells Jamila all his news. She thinks that love is the most important thing and that Haroon should follow his heart. Jamila wants to renew their on-off sexual relationship, but Karim is not in the mood. He reflects on his sexuality, recognizing that his bisexuality is a little unusual and turning his thought, once again, to Charlie. To distract Jamila he asks her what is happening in her life.

Anwar, uncomfortable at the self-defense groups Jamila had gotten involved with, has decided it is time for Jamila to get married. He arranges a marriage with a man from India who wants to come to England. Jamila refuses. She wants to walk out, but feels she has to stay to protect her mother. Anwar abuses Jeeta and Jamila has stopped the physical abuse, but is scared what will happen if she leaves. Anwar goes on hunger strike to get her to obey. Jamila takes Karim to see Anwar, who has now not eaten or drunk for eight days. He is dying. Karim tries to reason with Anwar, but Anwar is beyond reason. Jamila doesn't know what to do. Neither does Karim, but he promises to try and help.

Part One - In the Suburbs, Chapter Four Analysis

Chapter Four deals with Indian immigrant culture more deeply than the earlier chapters have done. The most blatant example is in Jamila's upcoming arranged marriage, but the chapter is riddled with references to unfamiliar cultural concepts from the type of food they eat to rituals of personal hygiene and well-being to Anwar's extreme way of dealing with family conflict.

Earlier chapters have mentioned, in passing, the prevalent attitudes of Indian men towards women, but Anwar's treatment of his wife and daughter in this chapter bring these attitudes front a center. For the Indian patriarch, family, particularly female family members, are something akin to property, with obedience expected at all times.



Karim continues to struggle with his sexuality and identity, addressing the conflict he feels about liking men and women. He also clearly feels inferior to Jamila, who acts almost as his conscience here, presenting him with uncomfortable truths that Karim doesn't wish to face up to. Yet, in her own time of crisis, Jamila turns to Karim for help, looking for a strong male figure for aid and contradicting Karim's own feelings of inferiority.

The Eastern Philosophy that has, until this point, borne a faint air of the ridiculous through Karim's perception, is shown to be effective in this chapter when Haroon uses it to release Ted's pent up emotion. This is the first time that the reader is shown Haroon's Buddhist leanings in a mostly positive light. Karim's attitude towards his father is beginning to shift here. He is still conflicted about Haroon, but there is the beginning here of the deeper realizations that will come to Karim by the end of the book.



Part One - In the Suburbs, Chapter Five

Part One - In the Suburbs, Chapter Five Summary

Karim suffers through the mingled tedium and abuse that constitutes his school days. His thoughts are fixed on helping Jamila, but he can't find a solution. While cycling to help focus his thoughts, he spies his father acting strangely in the street. Haroon is trying to disguise his appearance and make a phone call from a payphone. Karim watches Haroon brightening as he talks on the phone and sees that he looks depressed when the call is over. He confronts Haroon.

Haroon confesses that he loves Eva, but Karim realizes that he has not thought through the consequences of this. Karim pushes him to start thinking about what he is doing. Later, they pretend the conversation never happened.

Karim meets Helen outside his school. Charlie is there too. Charlie does his best to ignore Karim. Charlie has been having some success with his band and is waiting for his manager. Karim thinks that Helen is there to see Charlie. When Charlie leaves, Karim realizes that she is actually there to see him. Karim and Helen go for a walk and bump into Jamila.

Jamila and Karim tell Helen what is going on. Anwar is getting worse and Jamila is desperate for a solution. Helen suggests speaking to Haroon about it, which Karim has been avoiding, but the situation has gotten so bleak that they decide to do so. Haroon gives them a mystical response that seems to apply to his own situation as much as Jamila's. Jamila returns home, but Karim and Helen can't tell what she has decided to do. Karim and Helen have hurried sex in the park. Karim's thoughts are with Charlie, and he thinks Helen's are too.

Part One - In the Suburbs, Chapter Five Analysis

In Chapter Five the life of an immigrant is brought to the forefront. The daily abuses suffered by Karim and the other Asian students at school and the abuses suffered by immigrants on the street give an insight into the confusion they struggle with over their place in the world. Karim has these problems but they are only in their infancy. His confusion is acute because it mixes with the adolescent search for identity and his struggles over his own sexuality, but the older immigrants, like Haroon and Anwar, continue to look for their own place in their world.

Both Haroon and Anwar have sought solace in their Indian roots. They have spent years trying to live as Englishmen, but the role doesn't really fit them so they have reached out to an idealized version of their Indian roots, taking on roles which they have never previously adhered too. Haroon's role as a mystic seems ridiculous to some of the other characters, in particular the Indians, because it is not only unfamiliar behavior for him, but lacks grounding in any genuine Eastern mysticism. The characters to whom Haroon



is now appealing don't really know him any other way, so they can buy into him as a mystic. Likewise, Anwar is seeking refuge in strict Muslim doctrine to which he has never previously adhered. He is just as lost as Haroon and tries to use the notion of absolute patriarchal control to ground his place in the world. This foreshadows the same kind of crisis that Karim will face towards the end of the novel when he feels out of place in America.

In Haroon, we can see a reflection of Karim in this chapter during their confrontation. Haroon's realization that he has to think through his choices and face the consequences of his actions puts Karim's struggle to find his own path into sharp focus. Karim pushes his father into realizations he doesn't want to face because his father's identity is central to his own search for self.

Yet it is not only the Indian characters that face this crisis. Charlie and Helen are as lost as the rest of the people searching for their place in the world. Charlie is so desperate to find a persona that he takes refuge in imitation of others. In his case he is modeling himself on David Bowie and acting as if the small recognition he is getting from the moderate successes of his band is making him a star. Later he will adopt another persona when he senses it will bring him greater success. Helen is desperately seeking for something to attach herself to so that she can escape the roles that her parents are trying to impose on her.



Part One - In the Suburbs, Chapter Six

Part One - In the Suburbs, Chapter Six Summary

Karim picks up Changez, Jamila's fiancée, as he arrives in England. Jamila has decided to give in to her father's wishes to save his life. There is an awkward welcoming party at Anwar's house. Changez and Jamila do not even speak. Anwar becomes upset as he realizes that Changez not only has a minor disability—one of his arms is withered—but has no interest in Anwar's business. Changez is not the husband that Anwar had imagined for his daughter. Karim takes pity on Changez and talks to him, angering Jamila. Karim feels sorry for Changez, and actually quite likes him. Changez asks Karim to show him around. He wants to see some cricket and visit lots of bookstores. Changez is a voracious reader.

Haroon arrives and asks Karim to go with him and Eva because they have something to discuss. Karim wants to go with Helen, but they use Charlie as bait and Karim agrees to go with them. He never sees Helen again.

At Eva's, Charlie is initially dismissive of Karim, then patronizes him. Karim and Charlie have a small fight resulting in a nosebleed for Karim. Haroon announces that he is going to live with Eva. He leaves to break the news to Karim's mother. Karim calls Jean and tells her that Margaret is going to need her.

Part One - In the Suburbs, Chapter Six Analysis

This is a transitional chapter and sets up the next section of the book. Changez is introduced and immediately becomes an object lesson for Anwar—be careful what you wish for. After nearly killing himself to get Jamila to agree to an arranged marriage, the husband is a big disappointment to Anwar. His adoption of a way of life that he never really adhered to before spectacularly backfires. One of the main messages of the novel is apparent in this incident—if you aren't true to yourself, things will not work out well.

This is contrasted in Haroon's behavior. Haroon has made the decision to follow his heart and go to Eva, who he is truly in love with. Gone is the doubt and misery of the previous chapter. Haroon is buoyant, and though filled with doubt about his decision, is happy at having made it.

A lot is revealed about Karim in this chapter. His desperation for approval from others and the kinder side of his personality is on display. Of everyone, he is the only one who realizes the difficulty Changez is having in coming to a new place and marrying someone he doesn't know. Despite his closeness with Jamila, he is able to welcome Changez too. Yet, Karim's confusion leads him down the wrong roads too. He discards Helen, not without regret, for the promise of some attention from Charlie, yet Charlie's behavior to Karim is not that of a friend or a lover. Charlie abuses Karim, dismissing him and then hurting him. Despite this, Karim remains happy for any attention from Charlie.

Finally, when change is upon his family, Karim's caring side comes through again. He is not in the best position to help his mother. He isn't mature enough to be the crutch she needs, but he ensures that Jean knows the situation as he realizes that she is in the best position to help his mother.



Part One - In the Suburbs, Chapter Seven

Part One - In the Suburbs, Chapter Seven Summary

Jean moves Margaret into her house with Karim's brother Allie. Haroon and Karim go to live with Eva. Eva does her best to make Karim feel welcome. She is interested in helping him find a career. Karim stops going to school, but Eva arranges for him to go to a college to finish his schooling. Neither Karim's heart nor his head are interested in education, however. Karim just wants to observe those around him.

Jamila and Changez have married and moved into a flat that Anwar pays for, though Jamila won't let Changez into her bed. Changez is miserable at home and at work, where he refuses to do the simplest tasks for Anwar. He is capable of the jobs Anwar finds for him, but has no interest in helping Anwar with his business. Anwar abuses him daily. Jamila and Changez develop a tolerable amiable relationship, but Jamila still won't sleep with him. Karim and Changez become good friends. Changez eventually asks Karim if Jamila will ever sleep with him. Karim tells him there is no chance of it ever happening, so Changez decides to go to a prostitute for satisfaction.

Karim visits his mother. Jean and Ted are at odds all the time. Ted is following Haroon's advice of trying to find happiness and has stopped working. Karim tries to cheer up his mother who is in a state of deep depression. He has her draw him, as she used to love drawing, but instead she draws a picture of Haroon.

Karim goes to visit Changez and Jamila. When Changez goes out to see Shinko, the prostitute who he has now befriended, Karim has sex with Jamila while she complains about Changez. Karim reveals that Changez has regularly been seeing Shinko. Jamila and Karim fall asleep, and when Karim wakes up he sees Changez watching them. He leaves, feeling he has betrayed everyone in his life.

Part One - In the Suburbs, Chapter Seven Analysis

Changez's arrival in England shows another side of immigrant culture. Through Haroon and Anwar has been shown the development of long-term immigrants. Karim and Jamila represent second generation immigrants, English, but not fully. In Changez, England is viewed through the eyes of a newcomer. He reacts to English life with a mixture of horror and fascination. The sexual openness of English society and the opportunities to experiment ultimately prove too much to resist, though this process is helped along by Jamila's refusal to touch him or treat him with any respect. It is from those of his own culture that he is disappointed and shunned. Anwar views him as useless and is angry both at this and the deep realization that the situation is of his own creation. Jeeta's only interaction with him is as a tool of revenge against Anwar. Only



Karim, more English than Indian, makes an effort to befriend Changez, but even in this, Karim uses Changez to boost himself, much as Charlie treats Karim, and ultimately Karim has no compunction in betraying him.

The continued role of the search for identity is strongest in Changez during this chapter, but different stages of that search are shown through different characters as well. In Margaret is seen the deep depression of a person whose life has been upended and her identity, as a wife and mother, completely stripped away. Without her family she doesn't know who she is anymore and she is crippled by that.

Ted, on the other hand, is reveling in the search for himself, having discarded many of the trappings of his previous life. He has yet to let go of everything—after all he remains with Jean despite being constantly at odds with her but he has begun to leave behind a life that he was unhappy with after the realization that he was not happy as he was. He was not being true to himself.

Karim continues his adolescent search for identity. He tries on the roles of friend, son and lover, but does not find comfort in any of them and feels like a failure that has let down everyone around him.



Part One - In the Suburbs, Chapter Eight

Part One - In the Suburbs, Chapter Eight Summary

Karim fails all his exams because he doesn't show up to them. His father is furious and takes Karim's failure personally, as if it is an extension of his own failures. Eva persuades Ted to come and work on her house and enlists Karim to help. Jean agrees that Ted can do this in exchange for him spying on Haroon and Eva. Ted, Karim and Eva take great pleasure in making up gossip for Ted to provide to Jean. Eva and Haroon have taken to going out in London and attend the theater a lot as Eva's friend, Shadwell, starts to have some success as a director.

Karim begins to worry about money as, without any apparent income, Eva's spending on the house gets out of control. She assures him that, when they need money, she will provide it. Haroon is in demand as a spiritual advisor and is reveling in the sense of achievement, though he is mocked for it at his civil service job. Despite Haroon's new found happiness, he is plagued by feelings of remorse about leaving Margaret. This angers Eva and he has to suffer these bouts of grief in silence, or retreat from Eva to discuss them with Karim. When the house is finished, Eva decides to sell it and move to London.

Charlie's band continues to play gigs and develops a small following, but Karim's infatuation with Charlie is fading and he starts to see Charlie more clearly—a charming but cruel individual with less talent than he believed. As Karim leaves adolescence and enters adulthood he grows to resent Charlie. He positions himself to cut Charlie down to size and seizes an opportunity to tell Charlie that he is ordinary. Stung, Charlie breaks up the band and disappears.

On the cusp of beginning a new life in London, and entering his twenties, Karim sees possibilities opening before him. He believes that he knows what he wants and is ready to step into a new world with confidence.

Part One - In the Suburbs, Chapter Eight Analysis

This chapter is about endings and new beginnings. Eva and Haroon finish their old lives in the suburbs and move to the city, with the hope of dispelling the negatives of their existence and jettisoning regrets. Karim continues to grow and discards some of the negatives of his life—an education he had no interest in and Charlie—while exploring new possibilities, such as working with his uncle. By the end of the chapter, he is eager to move away from the suburbs and into the possibilities of the big city. Rather than continuing to try to emulate Charlie, Karim is taking possession of his own identity and realizing his own possibilities. In doing so, Karim discards Charlie by pointing out that Charlie himself is entirely derivative and lacks his own identity. This deconstruction of

Charlie by Karim opens the door for Charlie to recognize his limitations and use them to his benefit later on.

The chapter reintroduces an important concept and character that has only been touched on before. Shadwell's developing success as a director is the key to opening up later opportunities for Karim, whose dream of being an actor can soon flourish thanks to Shadwell.



Part Two - In the City, Chapter Nine

Part Two - In the City, Chapter Nine Summary

Karim, Eva, and Haroon move into a squalid little flat in London. Haroon hates it but Eva sees possibilities. Karim enjoys exploring at first, but finds the city overwhelming and falls into depression. Charlie returns, equally depressed. Karim and Charlie go to hear a band play. It is a punk rock band, a new kind of music, and they have never seen anything like it before. They are mesmerized by the passion and anger of the group. Charlie is inspired by the possibilities of this new form of music and disappears with some fans of the band, abandoning Karim.

Eva again enlists Karim and Ted to remodel the flat, but first she throws a housewarming party. The party is full of artists and theater professionals, friends of Shadwell. Jamila and Changez arrive, accompanied by Shinko. Karim expects an explosive confrontation with Changez, but instead Changez calmly lets Karim know how much Karim's betrayal hurt him. Changez reveals that Jamila and Shinko have become friends and that Anwar has gone insane. Before he can elaborate, Eva drags Karim away to talk to Shadwell.

Karim instantly dislikes Shadwell, but Shadwell wants him to audition for his new play. Finally presented with an opportunity to be passionate about, Karim works harder on his audition than he has ever worked before and wins the role of Mowgli in Shadwell's production of "The Jungle Book."

Part Two - In the City, Chapter Nine Analysis

After the promise of new beginnings, the reality of the move to the city proves disappointing to most of the characters. In reality, changing location does not provide the new start that Karim and Haroon are searching for, because they have not changed. In fact, for Karim, the move to London proves a backwards step initially. When Charlie returns, Karim falls back into old patterns, letting Charlie use him until something better comes along for Charlie.

Yet change is coming, if not as quickly as Karim hopes. Karim and Charlie witness the early stages of the birth of the punk rock movement, which represents a coming change in society. Charlie's instant adoption of this new idiom is characteristic of him. Rather than developing his own identity, Charlie simply adopts one fueled by outside stimuli. Likewise, Karim's more cautious approach is very much in character for him. Karim is an observer who does not instantly adopt anything without careful consideration.

Yet, when presented with an opportunity about which he can be passionate, Karim throws himself into the task wholeheartedly. Up until now, the idea of Karim being an actor has been a fleeting thought, but we are shown in this chapter that this idea has been burning in the back of Karim's mind waiting for an opportunity. Karim has not been



shown as a conformist until now, and although his thoughts remain non-conformist, he is shown to be capable of taking on the role of a follower when required. Though he instantly dislikes Shadwell and identifies him as a phony, when it benefits him, Karim can be obsequious when required. This skill both serves Karim well as he progresses in his career and proves to be a block to his development as a person.

Changez's reference to Anwar, though passing, serves to contrast Anwar and Haroon further. Haroon allows himself to be dominated by Eva because the attention and respect he is gaining through her fuels him. Changez reminds us that Anwar has developed in the opposite way by adopting the misogynistic tendencies of Indian culture and pursuing the path of the absolute patriarch.

Changez acts as a mirror for Karim. As a friend he is the opposite of Charlie. Just as Karim returns to Charlie, even after his revelation about Charlie's true nature, Changez returns to Karim even after his betrayal. The dual friendships of Charlie and Changez allow the reader to see the light and dark sides of Karim's personality.



Part Two - In the City, Chapter Ten

Part Two - In the City, Chapter Ten Summary

Karim goes back to live with his mother in their old house, while he waits for rehearsals to begin. Margaret is beginning to put her life back together. When rehearsals start on "The Jungle Book," Karim's dislike of Shadwell intensifies, but he finds that the rest of the cast agree with him. Karim befriends Terry, an older socialist actor to whom he is very attracted. As rehearsals develop, Karim is upset that Shadwell wants him to wear dark makeup and adopt an Indian accent, turning him into a racist caricature, but he agrees to it under pressure.

Haroon and Eva's relationship has left its honeymoon period and, though they still love each other, strains have started to appear. Eva is less interested in Haroon's Eastern Philosophy and Haroon begins to find her a bit pretentious. Eva, however, is having some success in breaking into London society, and Haroon enjoys meeting all the new people she brings along.

Charlie returns again. He has changed his band into a punk band and is having a lot of success with his new punk persona. Charlie has become a media personality by embracing punk, acting antisocially and hurling insults at everyone around him. Eva and Karim attend one of his concerts where a riot breaks out. Eva is convinced that Charlie needs to ditch his band because he is on his way to becoming a star.

After some technical problems in previews, the production of "The Jungle Book" is a success. Although Haroon and Jamila are offended by Karim's caricature performance, the rest of his friends and family are impressed. Shadwell asks Karim to be in his next production. As the production is coming to an end, Terry invites Matthew Pyke, a noted theater director, to the show. Terry is confident that Pyke will want to work with him, but instead, Pyke offers Karim a role in his next production. Terry is devastated by this. Karim accepts and ditches Shadwell, much to Shadwell's disappointment.

Part Two - In the City, Chapter Ten Analysis

As Karim matures, so does the language of the novel, and Karim's first professional acting job marks an exponential growth in him as a person. He finds confidence as an individual and an actor and, although he bows to pressure in creating a character that he finds offensive for "The Jungle Book", he learns how to manipulate the system and people surrounding him.

Terry introduces Karim, and the readers, to the concepts of socialism, even though he marks another conflicted character that can't quite live up to the ideals that he talks about. Alongside this, Charlie's rise to fame demonstrates the punk movement in further detail. He has much more success in his goals than Karim because he is free of conscience. Charlie does not believe in the anarchism of punk, but he uses it for his



own gain. By the end of the chapter, Karim is doing this too by manipulating the system, but Karim is less comfortable in adopting the roles he needs to. The side by side comparisons of punk and socialism are revealing, as the punk movement is having much more success in achieving the revolution that the socialists hope for.

The events of this chapter foreshadow the later events of the book, as Karim is being used for others' benefit during the production of "The Jungle Book." He realizes it, because it is crudely done, but he goes along with it for his own benefit. Later chapters show Karim being used in a much more subtle way, without his knowledge, leading to Karim's key revelations about himself at the end of the book. His growing confidence that he can manipulate those around him here set him up for devastation later when he learns that others can manipulate him better than he can them.

The reactions to Karim's performance in "The Jungle Book" are very revealing about the other characters. Haroon's outraged reaction showcases his value of honesty over other's feelings. Margaret and Jean are proud of Karim and easily swayed by how impressive it is that Karim associates with semi-famous people. Changez is typically less concerned about the offensive portrayal of Indians as he doesn't care about appearances. His determination to make the best of everything allows him to simply enjoy how comical it is. Jamila continues her role as Karim's conscience. Nothing that she says is surprising to Karim—he feels it all himself—but Jamila forces him to confront his conflicted feelings about selling out his morality for his own gain, and whether he will continue to do so.

The importance of class in Karim's world is highlighted by his encounter with Matthew Pyke. All it takes for Pyke to persuade Karim to work with him is to mention that the play will be about class. From Terry's socialism, to Haroon and Eva's societal climb to Pyke's insistence that class is "...the only subject there is in England." (pp.164), class remains one of the central components of the novel and this chapter marks the point at which it takes center stage from race as the key issue of the book.



Part Two - In the City, Chapter Eleven

Part Two - In the City, Chapter Eleven Summary

Karim begins rehearsals with Pyke's troupe of actors, a mix of races and classes. Karim and Tracey are the only two non-white actors. There are two other men and two other women. Carol is older and ambitious, Eleanor is younger and from an upper class background, though she tries to hide this, Richard and Jon are veteran actors, happy in their jobs. They begin playing games and bonding as a group. Karim is a little disturbed when Pyke announces he is going to predict who will sleep with who and reveal his predictions on the last night of the show. As part of the creative process, Pyke has them all tell their life stories. When Eleanor tells her story, Karim falls for her and decides to pursue her romantically. Pyke asks each of the actors to create a character based on someone they know. Karim chooses Anwar.

The disappointment of having Changez as a son-in-law has been a crushing blow to Anwar who has become a bitter old man who has taken to roaming the streets, waving a stick and daring white boys to beat him. The violence in the area around Anwar's shop has gotten worse and the shop is targeted, but Jeeta endures.

Eleanor introduces Karim to a new world of intellectualism and sophistication. Karim and Eleanor become close, though she refuses to sleep with him, making obscure reference to a traumatic event from her past. Heater, a friend of Eleanor's, sees Karim as a romantic rival. They take an instant dislike to each other.

When Karim presents his characterization of Anwar to the group, Tracey, a radical black actor, is offended by it, accusing Karim of hating himself and his race. Karim argues for the portrayal of truth, but Tracey says he is perpetuating "white truth." Pyke makes the decision that Karim must find another character.

Part Two - In the City, Chapter Eleven Analysis

Class infuses this chapter as Karim moves to a different class of theater and begins to associate with higher class people such as Pyke and Eleanor. He realizes the differences between their world and his and regrets having discarded his education so readily. In being exposed to an entirely different world, Karim realizes how self-fulfilling the class attitudes are—the working class disdain for education perpetuates the lack of opportunities that working class people complain about, while the upper class intellectualism over experience leads to a lot of discussion over issues without any real understanding of the problems they try to address.

Though Pyke is largely a background character in this chapter, he lays the seeds for important events later in the novel. His game of predicting who will sleep with who seems innocuous now, but Karim's instinct that "there was a shadow side to him" (pp.168) proves to be absolutely correct. Pyke epitomizes the kind of higher class



person that pays lip service to the social problems of class, while really using class and race issues as a kind of toy for his own amusement.

Anwar's deepening connection to his Indian roots makes him a perfect foil for Karim to imitate when he needs to create a character from his own background. Ultimately, however, Anwar proves too close to the truth for the others to really confront. When presented with something quite so real, it is too close to the bone for people to want to witness. Tracey doesn't want to confront the truth and the problems in society; she wants to manipulate the truths. Like many of the other characters in the book, she is more invested in manipulating perceptions than solving problems, both personally and in society at large.

Karim's developing relationship with Eleanor shows a dichotomy. On the one hand, he has matured. His interest in Eleanor is not purely physical and he keeps pursuing her even when she refuses to have sex with him, or even kiss him. On the other hand, he still lacks an understanding of love. In pursuing Eleanor he believes that he has "chosen" her to fall in love with. Rather than let his feelings develop he, like others, is still attempting to manipulate his feelings to the end he seeks.



Part Two - In the City, Chapter Twelve

Part Two - In the City, Chapter Twelve Summary

Karim decides that Changez will be the basis of his next character. Changez likes the idea initially, but after an argument Karim about Jamila he tells Karim not to do it. This causes Karim a moral dilemma since he doesn't want to betray his friend again, but he needs something to take to Pyke. He goes to Eleanor and finds her in a deep depression. He stays with her to comfort her and they finally have sex. This leads Karim and Eleanor into a passionate sexual relationship and Karim falls deeply in love with her, with all the fear and paranoia that brings. He feels inferior at work and in his relationship and is worried he is not good enough for either.

Karim presents his "Changez" character to the group and, though Tracey seems about to object again, Pyke loves it, using it as the basis for the entire play. Pyke starts giving Karim a ride home after rehearsals and opens up to Karim about his sex life. Pyke and his wife, Marlene, have an open marriage and Pyke offers Karim the opportunity to sleep with Marlene as a "present" for his contribution to the play. Pyke also reveals that he had told Eleanor to go out with Karim and that Eleanor's last boyfriend had killed himself. Pyke invites Karim and Eleanor to his house for dinner.

Back at Eva and Haroon's flat, Karim realizes that his anger and resentment towards his father is growing and he storms out after arguing with Haroon. He asks Eva and Jamila for advice on what to do about Pyke's offer and decides to go to the dinner.

Part Two - In the City, Chapter Twelve Analysis

Karim's maturation continues in this chapter. For the first time he is shown having feelings of guilt about his choices. Karim realizes that, though Changez clings to him for friendship, he is aware of Karim's condescension towards him and hasn't forgiven Karim for his previous betrayals. Karim also enters his first adult love affair in this chapter. His relationship with Eleanor is much deeper than any feelings that he had for Charlie, and he struggles with all the feelings that a first love affair brings.

Karim is learning to trust his feelings, but still harbors doubts. When his paranoia about his place in Pyke's acting troupe proves unfounded, it goes a long way to assuaging his growing doubts about Pyke as a person which in turn helps him to decide to accept Pyke's dinner offer. Karim knows that this is also accepting Pyke's other offer to sleep with Marlene. For Eva, there is no reason not to accept the offer. She sees the value in Karim's social climbing. For Jamila, it is just another step for Karim in moving away from his class roots and "moving away from the real world." (pg.195.)

Class continues to be the central issue of this section of the book, but Karim's portrayal of Changez keeps racial issues in the reader's mind and Karim's continuing sexual

explorations are about to become key to his development and cause painful and dramatic growth to him.



Part Two - In the City, Chapter Thirteen

Part Two - In the City, Chapter Thirteen Summary

Karim and Eleanor go to Pyke's house for dinner. When they arrive, Karim and Eleanor argue. Karim feels that Eleanor is shutting him out and Eleanor is worried that Karim will ruin the evening. After dinner, Karim is left alone with Marlene. He gets her to tell him exactly how Eleanor's last boyfriend killed herself—by overdose after he didn't get a part with a big theater company. Karim and Marlene have sex. Eleanor and Pyke come back and all four of them have sex together despite Karim's misgivings.

Part Two - In the City, Chapter Thirteen Analysis

On the surface, this chapter is simply about sex. Karim and Eleanor are drawn into the Pyke's world of sexual experimentation. The actions of the characters, however, are revealing about their true selves. Pyke has manipulated the situation so that Karim feels that he can't refuse Pyke's invitation. Though Pyke does want Karim, he is more interested in Eleanor. Pyke's role as a director extends beyond the rehearsal room. He enjoys being a director because he truly enjoys manipulating people. Eleanor craves affection from wherever she can get it. Even with Karim's devoted attentions to her, it is not enough. She continues to string along Heater, the local road sweeper who is obsessed with her, for his attentions. The mingling of Pyke's special treatment and his power is an aphrodisiac to her. So much so that she brushes Karim aside as an annoyance, worried that he will spoil the evening.

After Jamila had called Karim selfish in the previous chapter, Eleanor echoes that sentiment here. That the other characters view Karim in such a way draws attention to Karim's actions. He can be loving and kind, but he is still relatively immature and his thoughts do tend to dwell on how everybody's actions affect him, not how his actions affect others. It is for this reason, as well as her own insecurities, that Eleanor won't fully open up to him and he has to turn to others to find about her. This fuels the unease that he feels about his relationship with Eleanor. In the midst of their orgy, Karim's thoughts are centered on Eleanor's words and, though he has yet to process what she is saying fully, there is a sense of deep hurt and betrayal overhanging the tone of his thoughts. Eleanor has been using Karim, like so many others have used him, and though he thinks he is manipulating those around him for his own benefit, the opposite is frequently true.



Part Two - In the City, Chapter Fourteen

Part Two - In the City, Chapter Fourteen Summary

The actors take a break from rehearsals for a few weeks while the play is written and polished. In the meantime, Karim persuades Eva to hire Eleanor along with him to work on her refurbishment projects. Karim and Eleanor do not discuss the night at Pyke's and resume a normal relationship.

Anwar has deteriorated further. Although he got what he wanted through his hunger strike, it has alienated his family, who now hate him. Jeeta subtly works against him and takes pleasure in causing Anwar misery. While returning from mosque, Anwar sees Changez out with Shinko. They have just visited a sex shop. Anwar attacks Changez with his stick. To defend himself, Changez hits Anwar with a sex toy. Anwar has a heart attack and dies. Changez is arrested for the assault but released when the heart attack is confirmed as the cause of death.

At the funeral, there is a minor disturbance when the grave turns out to be pointing in the wrong direction. Jamila takes her father's death hard as they never reconciled. Changez supports her, but she continues to reject him sexually.

With Anwar gone, Jamila decides to move into a commune. Changez wants to go with her. She resists, but Karim and Changez talk her into it. Karim throws himself into creating his "Changez" character. The play is due to open soon.

Part Two - In the City, Chapter Fourteen Analysis

Chapter Fourteen brings an end to the racial journey of the older generation, coming down firmly on the side of the immigrant who chose to embrace English culture over India. Anwar dies in misery, shunned by everyone around him except Karim. This is entirely in character for Karim who really is a kind soul who, despite his faults, finds it difficult to be cruel. Anwar's fate is a complete rejection of his old Indian ways and the ridiculous way in which he dies is the final insult. It is also a commentary that extreme measures to have your own way often lead to little else than misery.

Jamila, out from under her father's control, wants to discard Changez, but her own morals and beliefs about community do not allow her to do so. Changez knows this and manipulates her using her own ideas to ensure he can remain close to her. Despite Changez's appearance as helpless and stupid, he shows he is actually quite astute, especially when it comes to self-preservation.

For Karim there is a return to his strongest role. Once again, he is the observer of others. This is Karim's true strength, and what makes him a good actor. Contrasting this is the refusal of Karim and Eleanor to confront the ramifications of their evening at

Pyke's. They simply ignore that it happened. This is truly in character for both Eleanor, who doesn't confront her problems and for Karim who doesn't know how to confront his.



Part Two - In the City, Chapter Fifteen

Part Two - In the City, Chapter Fifteen Summary

The play opens with a small tour of preview performances, though Karim's relationships with the rest of the troupe are fracturing. Carol, with whom he has most of his scenes, hates his performance, Eleanor is becoming more and more distant and Karim suspects, accurately, that Pyke has been using him for his own amusement.

Karim visits Changez, who is enjoying communal life, though Jamila is sleeping with Simon, one of the other commune members. A few days later, Changez is attacked by racist thugs. He is alright, but shaken up.

Karim is supposed to meet Jamila and some friends for a protest march, but instead decides to follow Eleanor in a fit of paranoia. Eleanor goes to Pyke's house and stays for a few hours. Afterwards, Karim confronts her. Eleanor says that she wants Karim to stay with her, but she won't be dictated to by someone else. Karim resolves to break up with her and does so, but very impersonally—with a letter.

After the play opens in London, Karim is surprised to see his mother and father talking to each other happily. Terry approaches Karim and asks him to solicit funds from Pyke and Eleanor for the Party. Karim talks to Changez, who reveals that Jamila is pregnant with Simon's child and the commune is going to raise the baby. Changez seems to have failed to recognize that Karim's character was based on him. Jamila is furious that Karim blew off the protest march for his own reasons.

Karim leaves to be on his own. He is followed by a girl called Hilary who had liked his performance. They encounter Heater, who sees Karim as a rival for Eleanor's affections, and is looking for a fight. Karim attacks him, injuring himself in the process, before running away.

Part Two - In the City, Chapter Fifteen Analysis

Success in Karim's professional life is tempered by the apparent collapse of his personal life. His love for Eleanor has always been something of a mirage. Having "chosen" to fall in love with her, he "chooses" to break up with her. Jamila continues to make Karim confront his own selfishness with her characteristic honesty.

Changez's apparent inability to recognize himself in Karim's creation gives further insight into the basis of Changez and Karim's friendship. Despite everything that has happened between them, Changez and Karim's similarities draw them to each other. Changez and Karim are both skilled at observing others, but continually fail to recognize their own deficiencies. Changez is physically stunted and Karim, though maturing, remains emotionally stunted. The two are very similar, which forms the basis for a strong friendship that weathers Karim's betrayals of Changez.



Though class continues to be at the forefront of the social issues confronting the characters, the attack on Changez reminds us that race is an ever present tension in their world. Change is becoming more violent. The protest rally that Karim doesn't go to ends up with Jamila's lover, Simon, being disfigured with a broken bottle and the lack of action taken regarding Changez's attack is telling. The authorities are as poisoned with racism and classism as the general public.

Karim is increasingly aware of being used, by Pyke and by Eleanor, for example, yet he continues to allow others to use him. When Terry tells him to ask for money from his friends, Karim allows himself to be bullied into it. His belief in these causes has never been strong, but his need for acceptance in a group is and he has failed to find this acceptance and love in his acting troupe. Disappointment continually leads Karim to be easily manipulated by others.



Part Two - In the City, Chapter Sixteen

Part Two - In the City, Chapter Sixteen Summary

The play is a huge success, selling out every night. The cast become minor celebrities and Pyke gets an offer from a theatre in New York to take the show there. Karim asks Pyke for money, as Terry requested. Karim realizes that Pyke and Marlene hate each other. He takes Pyke's money and leaves. Karim asks Eleanor for money too. She refuses him.

Karim gives the money to Terry and tells him he is going to America. This deepens Terry's resentment that Pyke chose Karim over him and they fight. Terry admits he will miss Karim. Karim fondles Terry for a minute. He realizes Terry is confused over his feelings for Karim because Terry doesn't consider himself gay. Karim leaves, ready to go to New York.

Part Two - In the City, Chapter Sixteen Analysis

Karim's descent into isolation continues as he ties up loose ends in his former life. After Karim asks Pyke and Eleanor for money, it leaves him with little reason to talk to either again, although he sees them almost every day. As his relationship with the rest of his cast has become a purely professional one, his goodbye with Terry severs all ties with his life from before other than family and close friends. The move to America is a chance for a fresh start for Karim.

The encounter with Terry is unsettling for Karim who realizes both that he has outgrown Terry and that, despite his own feelings about being used by others, he is using Terry. Karim continues to grow, but he remains as confused as ever about himself.



Part Two - In the City, Chapter Seventeen

Part Two - In the City, Chapter Seventeen Summary

At the opening night party in New York, Karim realizes that he never loved Eleanor; in fact he barely knew or understood her. Pyke reads out his predictions about who would sleep with whom in the cast, and reveals that he had manipulated Karim and Eleanor's relationship from the beginning. This is the final nail in the coffin of Karim's relationships with these people. He calls Charlie, who is now in New York, desperate to escape. Before Charlie arrives, Karim attacks Pyke, but is swiftly subdued.

Charlie and Karim get reacquainted, and Karim is surprised to find that Charlie is a big star in America. He also recognizes that Charlie's false persona is making him miserable. Even Charlie's adopted passion has faded. Karim moves in with Charlie to minimize his contact with Pyke's acting troupe for the rest of their short New York run. When everyone else goes back to London, Karim stays with Charlie in New York. Karim feels as lost as Charlie and descends into depression again. They become dependent on each other, clinging together for comfort and meaning in their lives.

After a few months, two things happen that make Karim want to get away from Charlie and go back to England. Firstly, Charlie assaults a journalist in the street. Secondly, Charlie begins experimenting with bondage. Viewing Charlie's desire for pain, emotional and physical, and seeing Charlie allow himself to be used makes Karim realize that he has outgrown Charlie. Karim decides to go home. Charlie is upset that Karim wants to leave, but agrees to pay for his ticket back to London if Karim agrees to come back to America sometime.

Part Two - In the City, Chapter Seventeen Analysis

America is not the opportunity that Karim hopes. He is uncomfortable in a different culture and almost instantly seeks attachments to his former life while at the same time trying to discard his current attachments, which are making him miserable. As a result he rekindles his relationship with Charlie. Early on there are indications that Karim has outgrown Charlie. His understanding of Charlie has deepened since they were last together. Karim's own experiences have given him a better insight into how Charlie works and that Charlie runs away from being himself by adopting other personalities. He sees how miserable Charlie is, and while having Karim around gives Charlie "a full-length mirror that could remember" (pp.251), the reverse is also true. If Charlie is given meaning by Karim viewing his success, Karim can see in Charlie that both of their successes are meaningless and have done nothing to fulfill them.

The reason that Charlie's foray into bondage is the final straw for Karim is that it is the physical manifestation of what Karim has been going through since the beginning. Bondage is experimenting with pain and allowing oneself to be objectified and used. It



represents everything that has happened to Karim since the beginning of the book. As Karim has experimented and grown he has gone through a series of painful experiences and allowed himself both to be used and to use others, causing them pain in the process. Seeing this explicitly happening to Charlie brings home everything that has been wrong with Karim's approach to life. Even worse for him is that he is, once again, the observer—watching it all happen to another person, but this time Karim realizes how it all applies to him and his life. His decision to return to London is based on the fact that, without Charlie, he has nowhere else to go but back to his family and friends. He has distanced himself from them, but they are the only people left in his life who he has not discarded. In essence, what Karim needed was not a new beginning, but a return to his own roots. In order to move forward positively in his life he needs to stop running away from it and understand fully where he came from.



Part Two - In the City, Chapter Eighteen

Part Two - In the City, Chapter Eighteen Summary

Karim returns to London, seeing it with new eyes after his time abroad. He sees everything changing. The country is on the brink of a political decision between two extremes—the socialist revolution or the rise of the Right.

Karim gets a part on a soap opera and, feeling he has some success to present to them, returns to see his father and Eva. Eva greets him like a prodigal son. She is being interviewed for a magazine about the refurbishment of her flat. Ted arrives and Karim sees his transformation into a fulfilled, happy person is complete. When Eva and Ted leave, Haroon and Karim reconnect. Haroon is unhappy that Eva's attentions are no longer focused on him. He has also decided, finally, to leave his job and properly pursue his teaching of Eastern Philosophies to others. Haroon feels unfulfilled.

Karim goes to visit his mother and brother. For the first time he has an adult conversation with Allie. He finds out that Margaret is seeing someone. Karim and Allie argue about their father. Margaret is happy to see Karim, but is eager to get Karim and Allie out of the house so that her boyfriend can come over.

Later, Karim visits Changez and Jamila. Changez is looking after the baby. Simon has gone to America to teach and Jamila has entered into a lesbian relationship. Jamila has not forgiven Karim for abandoning her cause by not going to the protest march. Karim falls asleep. When he wakes up he inadvertently witnesses Changez and Jamila arguing. Changez still wants a sexual relationship with Jamila, and she refuses. He is outraged that she has become a lesbian. When Changez discovers Karim eavesdropping he is even angrier.

Karim returns to his father. He tells Haroon about Margaret's new relationship which devastates Haroon. Eva and Haroon argue over Haroon's reaction to the news. Karim takes everyone out to dinner to celebrate his new job. Eva and Haroon announce that they are getting married. Karim realizes that his family is the most important thing to him and that his home is with them. He remembers how bad things have been, but that they won't always be that way and resolves to live better in the future.

Part Two - In the City, Chapter Eighteen Analysis

The end of the book is not so much a definitive ending to Karim's story as it is a realization about him. Karim visits everybody that is important to him in this chapter. He acknowledges his brother as an adult for the first time. He begins to form more adult relationships with his parents and with Eva. He realizes that his childhood friendship with Jamila has come to an end. He continues his dysfunctional relationship with Changez, which is a relationship that both need. After all he has been through, he surrounds himself with the people that love him and have his interests at heart despite



everything that has passed between them. Karim is beginning to get to know himself and is positioning himself to build from there.

Haroon is a reflection of Karim in this chapter. He is an older version—the person who Karim could become if Karim fails to find himself. Haroon is dissatisfied because he has never truly found himself and has failed to recognize the true consequences of his actions. His decision to finally marry Eva is a hopeful one and a sign that he too may finally be maturing.

There are only two characters whose stories truly come to an end by the book's conclusion. Ted, whose path to a happier life was begun by Haroon's mysticism but completed by Eva's refurbishing projects giving him new purpose and Margaret who was ultimately given new life by Haroon's leaving and freeing her from an unhappy marriage. For the others, at least in Karim's immediate circle, their stories continue but down more hopeful paths. Karim discards the negative influences upon his life and begins with a true fresh start, surrounded by those who love him and on whom he can depend. In essence, the book ends with the true beginning of Karim's adult life.



Characters

Karim Amir, Creamy

Karim is the main character of the novel. The plot follows him from late teens into his mid-twenties. Karim is his given name, but his close friends call him Creamy. Karim begins the novel as a bored teenager looking for action and excitement in his life. He is the son of an Indian father and an English mother. Although more English than Indian due to his upbringing, he still has to deal with the problems that come from being of a minority race.

Throughout the course of the book, Karim is constantly searching for his place in the world. He is unsure of his sexual identity and lacks ambition. His father wants him to be a doctor, but Karim only holds a vague notion of becoming an actor.

Karim moves through a series of sexual relationships. He thinks he is in love with Charlie, but it is really nothing more than a childhood crush. He has sex with Helen partly because she shows interest in him and partly as an act of revenge against her racist father. He has a long term on-off sexual relationship with his childhood friend Jamila. Later, he enters into a more mature relationship with Eleanor, another actor, and allows himself to be sexually used by theater director Matthew Pyke, who he is working for. His relationship with Eleanor is the closest to an adult relationship, and this disastrous first adult love affair leads to significant growth. It is a vital learning experience for Karim.

Karim endures racial abuse both blatant, in the form of racial insults and violent, and subtle. When he is starting out as an actor, Karim is required to play an offensive caricature of an Indian for "The Jungle Book." He compromises his own ethics to do so and advance his career, but is overwhelmed with guilt at doing so.

Karim explores the worlds of different classes during his journey. Eleanor is from a rich family and he feels out of place in her world. Karim grew up in a poorer middle-class household and went to a fairly working class school. He is more comfortable in those surroundings because he has deep roots there.

Karim is a keen observer of others, which makes him the ideal narrator for the book. All the other characters' actions are filtered through his perception. This skill is what makes Karim a good actor, but his lack of self-awareness is what prevents him from becoming a great actor.

By the end of his journey in the book, Karim has matured to a beginning point. His experiences have led him to a place as a young adult where he is finally ready and mature enough to truly seek where he fits into the world around him. He doesn't fully realize his identity, but he has a firm grasp on his roots and has created a solid foundation for his adult life.



Haroon Amir, Buddha of Suburbia, God, Harry

Haroon is the title character of the book, though not the main character. Karim assigns him the nickname "Buddha of Suburbia" after Haroon starts giving lectures to other suburbanites about Eastern Philosophy, particularly Buddhism, in which Haroon has had a long standing interest. Karim also refers to Haroon as God.

Haroon is a first-generation Indian immigrant. He came from a wealthy Indian family and moved to England for his education. Haroon lacks a strong work ethic and this led him to flunk out of his education and become stuck in a Civil Service job which he dislikes.

Haroon is dissatisfied with his family life. His marriage is an unhappy one, although he loves his children. He also cares deeply for his wife, Margaret, which is apparent when he leaves her for Eva, but is unable to let go of his guilt about causing her pain and, later, his jealousy when Margaret finally moves on and starts seeing someone else.

He is quite a selfish character who follows his desires without fully realizing the impact his decisions have on others. Although he agonizes about breaking up his family, he is unable to escape the lure of excitement that Eva brings to his life. In truth, Eva is a better match for Haroon than Margaret. They share similar interests and Eva brings vibrancy to life that Haroon feeds off and which Margaret lacks.

Haroon, like Karim, is in search of his place in the world. The longer that he is away from India, the more he idealizes it, although he has no desire to return there. He latches on to his sons as a way of legitimizing his place in the world and takes their failures personally, as if they are an extension of his own.

Even after leaving Margaret for Eva, it takes until the end of the novel for him to think of marrying Eva, and this step is a hugely positive and hopeful one for Haroon, who is able to let go of the disappointments of his earlier life and look towards a better future. Haroon can be quite an immature character despite his role as a wise guru to others and his journey mirrors that of Karim. They are looking for the same thing in life, which is an identity, and are able to position themselves to find that identity by the book's end.

Eva Kay

Eva is a suburban wife who takes an interest in Haroon because she is attracted to the exotic and they share an interest in Eastern Philosophy. Even before her relationship with Haroon blossoms into a full love affair, she also takes an interest in Karim. Eva and Haroon's passionate affair leads to the dissolution of Karim's family, yet her maternal role leads Karim to a close relationship with her. She looks out for Karim, in some ways more than her own son, Charlie.

Eva is a cancer survivor, which has given her a zest for life. She lives life to the full. She is a social climber who uses her contacts to her own benefit and that of those she loves.



Eva is instrumental in getting Karim started in acting. She also promotes Charlie's fledgling rock career.

As the other woman, Eva could easily have been painted as a villain, but instead she is a sympathetic character, truly invested in bringing out the best in herself and those around her. She is flamboyant and outspoken and, though driven to climb higher in the class structure of English society, she is largely free of the prejudices that plague other characters in the book.

Charlie Kay, Charlie Hero

Charlie is Eva's son. He is callous and manipulative. He has no true sense of self and adopts personalities as quickly as others change clothes. He has aspirations to becoming a musician, though he himself lacks talent and originality. Nonetheless, Charlie is astute enough to recognize trends and his ability to discard personas and adopt new ones enables him to embrace the fledgling punk rock movement and act the role required to become a big star.

Charlie's success fails to make him happy. At heart he is filled with self-loathing. His friendships last only as long as convenient for him and he ends up as something of a tragic character, lost in a world which he doesn't fully understand.

Jamila, Jammie

Jamila is Karim's childhood friend and sometime lover. Her father, Anwar, is Haroon's oldest friend. She has grown up with a lot of freedom which makes her father's shift to a strict Muslim way of life particularly devastating. She is forced into a marriage by her father, but has a strong enough personality to endure it and continue to make her own life. This is aided by the fact that her new husband, Changez, is easily dominated.

Jamila has a strong sense of community. The reason she allows herself to be pushed into the arranged marriage is to protect her mother. She is politically active and has strong socialist tendencies. After her father's death she finds a place in a commune.

Jamila often acts as Karim's conscience. She knows Karim very well and voices the doubts that Karim harbors, forcing him to confront hard truths that he is trying to avoid. Jamila can be very hard and unforgiving. When Karim lets her down with an act of selfishness, she never really forgives him.

Jamila is very much a rebel, and is able to cope with the disappointments that life throws her by rebelling against the status quo. She is even able to get some enjoyment out of conforming, by viewing it as a rebellion against rebellion itself.



Changez, Bubbles

Changez is Jamila's husband, sent to England by Anwar's brother. He is an odd character, both fascinated and repulsed by England. Changez has a withered arm and, on the surface, is stupid and lazy, but this appearance hides a man who can be quite astute when needs be. He is devoted to Jamila although she consistently rejects him. Although he never gets the traditional marriage that he wants, he is able to manipulate her well enough to ensure that he remains in her life.

Changez forms a friendship with Karim. Even when Karim treats him badly and betrays him, he hangs onto this friendship. Changez often serves as a mirror to Karim, allowing Karim to see aspects of himself that he tries to ignore. In Changez, Karim sees how others treat him and in his own treatment of Changez, Karim sees the darker side of his personality. Changez is a comic character but also a tragic one. He never gets what he wants, but makes do with what he has.

Eleanor

Eleanor is Karim's first adult lover, his first serious relationship. She is an actor in Matthew Pyke's troupe. She comes from a wealthy background but tries to hide this fact as much as possible. Eleanor has a tragic past. Her last boyfriend committed suicide and she has never really gotten over it.

She is a selfish character, taking affection and using people to boost herself. She uses Heater, Karim and Pyke in her constant need to be loved. Her relationship with Karim is an important learning experience for him, though it ends badly.

Matthew Pyke

Matthew Pyke is a well known theater director who elevates Karim's career. He is a good director because he can manipulate people and situations, but he carries this into his real life as well. Pyke is coldhearted and uses others for his own amusement and gratification. He is the architect behind Karim and Eleanor's relationship and he engineers its downfall as well as its inception. Karim is always suspicious of Pyke, but allows himself to be used, mentally and physically, to advance his own career.

Margaret Amir

Margaret is Haroon's long-suffering wife. She is a sympathetic character, stuck in an unhappy marriage and aware of Haroon's infidelity. Her sons don't really see her. It is devastating to her when Haroon leaves because her sole identity is as a wife and mother, even if she is unhappy in the role. Ultimately, the divorce proves a boon as she is able, once she recovers from the devastation of the failed marriage, to find happiness as an individual.



Anwar

Anwar is a first generation Indian immigrant like Haroon. Unlike Haroon, he discards his English life and latches on to strict Muslim doctrine as he searches for his identity. In forcing Jamila into a marriage, he gets what he thinks he wants. The disappointment of his son-in-law, however, and his family turning against him because of his behavior, leads him to become a lonely, angry man. His ridiculous death of heart failure after being bludgeoned with a sex toy is fitting for a character who acts in such a ridiculous way and destroys his own life as a result.

Jeeta, Princess Jeeta

Jeeta is Jamila's mother and Anwar's wife. Although initially portrayed as a weak and subservient woman, her subtle torture of Anwar after he forces Jamila into a marriage she does not want proves her to be astute, vicious, and perfectly capable of caring for herself.

Uncle Ted

Ted is Karim's uncle. He is unhappy in his job and is dominated by his wife. Haroon's Buddhism releases Ted from what he feels are his obligations and he seeks out happiness. He finds it in a business partnership with Eva. He helps her to refurbish houses and becomes one of the few people in the book to find happiness and their place in the world by the end of the book.

Aunt Jean

Jean is Karim's aunt and Margaret's sister. She is a severe woman, very concerned with appearances and how the actions of those connected to her reflect on her.

Shinko

Shinko is a prostitute frequented by Changez when Jamila won't have a physical relationship with him. Changez and Shinko become close and Shinko even befriends Jamila. Despite the unorthodox relationship, by the end of the novel she is a fixture in the lives of Changez, Jamila and Karim.

Jeremy Shadwell

Shadwell is a theatre director of limited talent. He gives Karim his first acting job. His actors grow to hate him, although his productions are quite successful. His insurances on making Karim wear dark makeup and adopt an Indian accent in the play show him



as a person with little awareness of racial issues. He is inherently racist without even realizing it.

Terry

Terry is an actor that befriends Karim. He is a strong socialist, although Karim realizes that Terry doesn't fully understand socialist issues. Terry is bitter that Karim gets to work with Pyke. It causes a rift in their friendship. He can be a bully, but he is also another confused and lost soul.

Marlene Pyke

Marlene Pyke is Matthew Pyke's wife. They deeply dislike each other. They have an open marriage. Marlene takes a fancy to Karim which leads to the Pyke's orgy with Karim and Eleanor and the breakdown of Karim and Eleanor's relationship.

Heater

Heater is a road sweeper in Eleanor's neighborhood. He is interested romantically in Eleanor and sees Karim as a rival for her affections, although Eleanor is just using Heater to fulfill her own needs for affection.

Helen

Helen is a teenager from Karim's school. Her father is a racist. This pushes Helen to be interested in Karim to be rebellious. Her relationship with Karim is short. She helps Karim and Jamila try to come up with a solution to Jamila's crisis, but after Karim leaves her at a party to deal with a family crisis, she disappears from the book.

The Fish

The Fish is Charlie's manager. We never discover his real name, but he engineer's Charlie's rise to fame and allows Karim to stay with him after Karim returns from New York.

Allie Amir

Allie is Karim's brother. Karim has little relationship with him throughout the book, but at the end they begin to relate to each other as adults and a relationship begins to form. Allie harbors a lot of resentment to Haroon after Haroon leaves Margaret, but starts to let go of this when Margaret finds happiness.



Objects/Places

Buddhism

This is an Indian religion based on the teachings of Buddha in India around the 5th Century BC. Buddha's teachings help the follower reach self-awareness and enlightenment.

London

This is the capital city of England, located in the southeast of the country. It is considered a global center of finance, culture, fashion and politics. In the 1970s it had a population of approximately 7 million people.

New York City

This is the largest city in the United States of America, located in the northeast of the country in New York State. In the twentieth century the city rose to a preeminent center of finance, culture, and fashion. In the 1970s it had a population of approximately 7.5 million people.

Punk

This is a form of rock music and surrounding subculture that rose in the mid-1970s. Frequently associated with anti-establishment messages and preaching personal freedom, punk was a major cultural movement that still has influences today.

Socialism

This is one of the most important philosophical and economic philosophies of the last two hundred years. It is based on the idea of public ownership and distribution of resources.

India

This is one of the world's largest and most populous countries. Located in southeast Asia, India is an important part of the British Commonwealth and in the 1970s had a population of approximately 620 million people, encompassing a multitude of religions and ethnic groups. England has a large number of Indian immigrants because of the historical link between the two countries.



Civil Service

This group includes the collective employees of non-military governmental agencies.

Commune

This is a group of people living together that share common resources, income and possessions.

The Jungle Book

This is a collection of stories written by author Rudyard Kipling in the 1890s. The stories depict the adventures of a boy, Mowgli, living among animals in the Indian jungles.

Bourgeoisie

This is a class of people that owns the means of production in society. In modern society it refers to the upper and upper middle classes.

National Front

This is a far-right political party in 1970s and 80s Britain. It was a party for white people only and is considered racist and generally objectionable by society at large.

Muslim

This is a follower of the Islamic religion. Islam is the world's second largest religion and its fastest growing. India has a large number of Muslims.

The Party

In the case of this book, The Party refers to the Labour Party. The Labour Party was a socialist party in 1970s England, though they have since become a centrist party. They were the ruling party in the last part of the 1970s.

David Bowie

This is an English musician and actor associated most closely with glam rock. The height of his popularity was in the 1970s.



Themes

Race

Race is one of the themes that defines all of the characters in the book. The novel is infused with Indian immigrant culture and the racial tensions surrounding the immigrant population in London and its suburbs. Karim is caught between two cultures, being a child of both. Although he is English, he must suffer the abuses that Indians suffer because of how he looks.

To a greater or lesser degree, all of the Indian characters live under the threat of violence. Racist groups such as the National Front perpetrate attacks on immigrants. Racist individuals without group affiliations attack what they do not understand. Karim is under threat as much at school as Anwar and his family are in their shop. This threat is a part of their everyday lives and affects their actions unconsciously.

Karim encounters racism from a variety of sources. These can be overt such as attacks at school and racial epithets from Helen's father and others. They can also be more subtle such as Shadwell's desire for Mowgli to be portrayed as an Indian caricature by Karim. Karim also encounters reverse racism from Tracey, who believes he hates his race because he is more interested in portraying truth than perpetuating a positive lie about Indians.

Many of the white characters do not even realize that they are acting in a racist manner. They act from a position of ignorance. From casual jokes thrown out at Haroon's presentations to patronizingly giving Karim and Tracey "seats of honor" for a Haitian dance performance, the encompassing presence of racial issues infuses even actions that are meant kindly. The racism in the book, as in real life, is based in both hatred and ignorance of other cultures.

Class Struggle

The other defining theme for these characters is class. The class struggle is a constant background issue in their world. Karim is from a lower middle class family, but gets to see the world of the upper classes through his relationship with Eleanor and his association with Pyke. He also encounters lower class characters. Being on the middle rung of the class structure gives Karim a strong insight into the class differences. At the same time his behavior towards lower class characters mirrors how he is treated by upper class characters. Karim is not immune to class expectations or behaviors. He feels superior to Heater, much as he feels inferior to Eleanor.

Shame in one's class is an issue for some characters. Eva is a social climber, trying to get to a higher class and better herself, as she sees it. Conversely, Eleanor pretends to be lower class than she is, hiding her wealthy background as much as she can. The Pyke's are decidedly upper class, yet strong proponents of socialism. They are willing to



pay lip service, even contribute to the socialist cause, but they are not willing to truly give up their privileged position.

In fact, many of the characters pay lip service to the class struggle without really understanding the issues behind it. Terry talks about socialism and condemns places like America without truly understanding what he is talking about. Charlie adopts the anti-establishment persona of punk for his own benefit, not out of any real belief in the cause.

Race and class cross issues when it comes to the Indian characters that are often viewed as second class citizens purely because of the color of their skin. There are no characters in the book to whom class is a non-issue. Even if they try to avoid the class struggle, their lives are infused with it by society at large. Like race it is part of the daily world in which everyone lives in the culture of 1970s London.

Identity

As a coming of age tale, the search for identity, for one's place in the world, is a key theme of the book. The narrative follows Karim's coming of age and his search for an identity, but in this novel that search is present in the older characters as well. Karim is an observer of people, but not so good at introspection. There are several moments when he believes he has found the right path, but they prove to be false starts because with every new beginning, Karim is still unaware of who he is. Only by the end of the book does he start to understand his roots, and this is the key to discovering his identity.

Anwar and Haroon face their own searches for identity. As first generation immigrants, both of them have a souring view of life in England and both idealize life in India. Their searches take them along very different paths because Haroon tries to be true to himself while Anwar adopts an unfamiliar role. Haroon pursues happiness through his beliefs. Though not always successful, and guilty at the pain he causes along the way, he does eventually find some peace and happiness with Eva. Anwar clings to Muslim beliefs he has never previously adhered to and creates his own personal hell. He lives and dies in misery because he has adopted a role that doesn't fit him.

Charlie presents a great example of the quest for identity. He never looks for his own identity, but simply adopts others. Though this leads him to fame and success, he is, ultimately, a hollow shell, living in pain and misery because he doesn't know who he is.

Margaret and Ted are two characters who are able to free themselves from roles that have been imposed on them and find their own true identities. Ted's adoption of Haroon's philosophy and his search for fulfillment is more successful than Haroon himself manages. Margaret is freed from the role of wife and mother when Haroon leaves. This loss of identity is devastating to her initially, but it releases her to search for a new identity and she finds one that brings her happiness. Margaret and Ted are the two characters who arguably find themselves in the best place by the end of the book.

For others, the search for identity continues. For most of them, as in real life, it is an ongoing struggle, but they end further along the path than they began and, in that sense, the book comes to a hopeful, optimistic ending.

Style

Point of View

The point of view of the novel is the first person and in the past tense. Karim relates the events of his past to the reader after they have already happened. The events are filtered through Karim's perception of them. As is often the case in first-person narratives, Karim is the main character of the story. Karim's voice is a reliable voice. He knows how the action of the narrative unfolds and his emotional reaction to them. He also relays his interpretation of other characters' emotional responses.

The story is told mostly through exposition, with occasional blocks of conversation scattered throughout. There is a lot of focus on Karim's reactions and emotions. We are mostly privy only to events at which Karim is present, although he does occasionally relay pieces of other's characters' history for context.

This serves to focus our attention on the events that Karim is currently relaying and the emotions attached to them. The emotional content of the book is very important as the events are focused on the emotional growth of the characters, particularly Karim.

Setting

The novel is set in England and America in the 1970s. The first part of the novel takes place in the suburbs of London, mostly the suburb of Beckenham. Karim attends a school that has a mix of races and classes. He lives in a lower middle-class neighborhood and he cycles wherever he needs to go. Karim lives in a mostly white neighborhood, which is accepted because he is half-white and half-Indian and because his father holds a respectable job. His friend Jamila lives in an Asian neighborhood which is under constant threat of violence from racist groups. Karim is bored in the suburbs and longs for the excitement of the city.

The second part of the novel takes place in London itself. London is a vast cosmopolitan city filled with many classes and races of people. Karim encounters an eclectic and diverse group of people from different backgrounds and areas. He finds the city quite overwhelming and often returns to the suburbs for some relief.

Towards the end of the novel, Karim moves to New York City. It is even more overpowering than London because there is not much that is familiar and Karim cannot escape to the familiarity of his childhood haunts. He clings to Charlie while in New York because Charlie is an anchor of familiarity in a strange setting. New York depresses Karim and he has to move back to London for his own good.

The time frame of the novel is a time of great social and political change in England. There is a political struggle between the socialist left and the capitalist right. An increasing immigrant population leads to growing racial tensions and the class struggle



is on the forefront of societal concerns. In the midst of this, social and cultural movements such as political theater and punk rock are on the rise and the setting influences everyone who lives in it.

Language and Meaning

The language of the book tends to be informal. The construction of the sentences is lax and riddles with period slang. Although some of the slang terms may be unfamiliar to the reader, in context they do not hinder comprehension. In fact, the language adds a layer of style to the novel that allows greater development of the characters and draws the reader into the world of the novel.

The dialogue distinguishes the characters. Though it is relayed through Karim's perceptions, there is a definite shift in tone and use of language between characters from different racial and social backgrounds and between the older and younger generations.

The narration is limited to important events and does not waste much time in dealing with the passage of time between events. Where required, there are passages of background and personal history to give context to an event or its emotional impact, but these are infrequent and short.

Structure

The novel is comprised of eighteen chapters, each of which is approximately fifteen pages in length. The chapters are untitled, but the novel is broken into two sections of roughly equal length. The first half of the novel deals with Karim's late teenage years while living in the London suburbs. The second half deals with Karim's early adult life while living in the City of London.

The novel is full of subplots and characters that entwine Karim's life, but the subplots mostly relate to their effect on Karim. He remains the focus of the novel most of the time. The plot follows Karim through a series of events that either directly happen to him or directly affect him and how those effects push along his search for an identity as he grows up.

It is a relatively fast paced book with little time spent on needless descriptions. The narrative favors a mix of action and introspection, but the introspective passages tend to be short and rarely come to strong conclusions before moving on to the next event. It is a fast and entertaining read with sympathetic and colorful characters.



Quotes

"In the suburbs, people rarely dreamed of striking out for happiness" (Karim, Part I - In the Suburbs, Chapter One, pg. 8.)

"I could see my life clearly for the first time: the future and what I wanted to do. I wanted to live always this intensely: mysticism, alcohol, sexual promise, clever people and drugs" (Karim, Part I - In the Suburbs, Chapter One, pg. 15.)

"However many niggers there are, we don't like it. We're with Enoch. If you put one of your black 'ands near my daughter I'll smash it with a 'ammer! With a 'ammer!" *Hairy Back, Part I - In the Suburbs, Chapter Three, pg. 40.)

"The lives of Anwar and Jeeta and Jamila were pervaded by fear of violence" (Karim, Part I - In the Suburbs, Chapter Four, pg. 56.)

"Every day I considered myself lucky to get home without serious injury" (Karim, Part I - In the Suburbs, Chapter Five, pg. 63.)

"Now, as they aged and seemed settled here, Anwar and Dad appeared to be returning internally to India, or at least to be resisting the English here. It was puzzling: neither of them expressed any desire to actually see their origins again" (Karim, Part I - In the Suburbs, Chapter Five, pg. 64.)

"Because I'm so frightened. Because she will suffer so much. Because I can't bear to look at her eyes as I say the words. Because you will all suffer so much and I would rather suffer myself than have anything happen to you" (Haroon, Part I - In the Suburbs, Chapter Five, pg. 67.)

"Life goes on tediously, nothing happens for months, and then one day everything, and I mean everything, goes fucking wild and berserk" (Karim, Part I - In the Suburbs, Chapter Seven, pg. 91.)

"But the spirit of the age among the people I knew manifested itself as general drift and idleness. We didn't want money. What for? We could get by, living off parents, friends or the State" (Karim, Part I - In the Suburbs, Chapter Seven, pg. 94.)

"Watching Jamila sometimes made me think the world was divided into three sorts of people: those who knew what they wanted to do; those (the unhappiest) who never knew what their purpose in life was; and those who found out later on" (Karim, Part I - In the Suburbs, Chapter Seven, pg. 95.)

"Ted had lost his life in order to find it. So Ted was Dad's triumph; he really was someone Dad had freed" (Karim, Part I - In the Suburbs, Chapter Seven, pg. 101.)



"I was reluctant to kiss my mother, afraid that somehow her weakness and unhappiness would infect me. Naturally I didn't think for a minute that my life and spirit could stimulate her" (Karim, Part I - In the Suburbs, Chapter Seven, pg. 104.)

"I was twenty. I was ready for anything" (Karim, Part I - In the Suburbs, Chapter Eight, pg. 121.)

"I still had no idea what I was going to do. I felt directionless and lost in the crowd" (Karim, Part Two - In the City, Chapter Nine, pg.126.)

"The immigrant is the Everyman of the twentieth century" (Shadwell, Part Two - In the City, Chapter Nine, pg.141.)

"I thought: You prefer generalizations like 'after the revolution the workers will wake up filled with unbelievable joy' to standing up to fascists like Shadwell" (Karim, Part Two - In the City, Chapter Ten, pg.148.)

"Actually, you've got no morality, have you? You'll get it later, I expect, when you can afford it" (Jamila, Part Two - In the City, Chapter Ten, pg.157.)

"I had chosen Eleanor to fall in love with, and was making progress" (Karim, Part Two - In the City, Chapter Eleven, pg.172.)

"I still craved adventure and the dreams I'd desired that night when I had my epiphany on Eva's toilet in Beckenham" (Karim, Part Two - In the City, Chapter Eleven, pg.178.)

"Pah. Truth. Who defines it? What truth? It's white truth you're defending here. It's white truth we're discussing" (Tracey, Part Two - In the City, Chapter Eleven, pg.181.)

"Fear entered my life. It entered my work. In the suburbs there had been few things that seemed more petty than the fear everyone had of their neighbour's opinion" (Karim, Part Two - In the City, Chapter Twelve, pg.188.)

"But I did feel, looking at these strange creatures now—the Indians—that in some way these were my people, and that I'd spent my life denying or avoiding that fact" (Karim, Part Two - In the City, Chapter Fourteen, pg. 212.)

"Paradox of paradoxes: to be someone else successfully you must be yourself!" (Karim, Part Two - In the City, Chapter Fifteen, pg. 220.)

"In eighty years the lot of us would be dead. We lived, having no choice, as if that were so, as if we were not alone, as if there would not come a moment when each of us would see that our lives were over, that we were driving without brakes towards a brick wall" (Karim, Part Two - In the City, Chapter Fifteen, pg. 233.)

"England's decrepit. No one believes anything. Here, it's money and success. But people are motivated. They do things. England's a nice place if you're rich, but



otherwise it's a fucking swamp of prejudice, class confusion, the whole thing. Nothing works over there" (Charlie, Part Two - In the City, Chapter Seventeen, pg. 256.)

"Maybe you never stop feeling like an eight-year-old in front of your parents" (Karim, Part Two - In the City, Chapter Eighteen, pg. 280.)

"I thought of what a mess everything had been, but that it wouldn't always be that way" (Karim, Part Two - In the City, Chapter Eighteen, pg. 284.)



Topics for Discussion

How do racial tensions affect Karim's choices in the novel? Does Karim's mixed-race background affect his position in the groups he associates with?

Most of the characters in the novel are in search of an identity. Which of them successfully finds their place in the world, and why are they able to do so when others aren't?

Class struggle plays a defining role in the world of the book. How do class differences affect the interactions of the characters and what role does class play in the success or failures of their relationships?

What role does sexual experimentation play in Karim's development and the success and failure of his relationships?

Changez and Karim form a friendship that proves important to both of them despite Karim's frequent mistreatment of Changez. Why does Changez continue to come back to Karim and why is the friendship important to Karim?

Haroon leaving Margaret for Eva is a defining event of the novel. How does this decision affect the characters and should it be viewed, ultimately, as a positive or negative choice for those involved?

Haroon's Buddhist sayings are supposed to lead people to enlightenment. Which of the characters reach a level of enlightenment, and do Haroon's teachings have a role in this? Is Haroon a successful spiritual leader?