



## DIASPORIC CONCERNS AND SENSIBILITIES IN MONICA ALI'S BRICK LANE- A CRITICAL STUDY

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### Abstract

The translators of the Hebraic Bible coined the term "Diaspora" into Greek in the 3rd century BC from the Greek *diaspeirein* meaning scatter. Diaspora is a large group of people with comparable homeland scatter to other countries or all over the world. Originally this word was closely associated with Jews since Jewish Diaspora was moved over countries. The term "diaspora" took on a wider meaning in the second half of the 20th century. It was often being used synonymously with migration, in those decades, Eastern European nations migrated to Western Europe and the West Indians who relocated to the United Kingdom; the Asian and South Asian Diasporas in America, the United Kingdom, and Canada.

I attempt to synthesize "Diasporic concerns and sensibilities in Monica Ali's Brick Lane" into a representative research framework. This paper is also an attempt to bring out beyond debates concerning Monica Ali's Brick Lane as a Novel of Diaspora and prove how people comprise their identity in another country. However, immigration is defined as individual risk, the collective dimension is central to the diaspora experience as diasporas are not only made up of individuals but also of groups of people who leave their home countries.

Despite their relocation to a new land, Diasporas maintain a strong bond with their homelands; Diasporas are therefore often associated with nostalgia, a mood largely reflected in their cultural productions, particularly in film and literature. Brick Lane is the first novel by Monica Ali. The novel was highly anticipated despite being the work of a debut writer. Ali's name appeared on the 20 Best Young British Novelists under 40 lists in the prestigious literary journal *Granta* before the novel had been published In January 2003.

**Keywords:** Diasporas, Postcolonial Literature, Racism, Gender inequality, and History.

### INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the theme of diaspora in Monica Ali's novel Brick Lane. Ali is a Bangladeshi-born author. Bangladesh was a part of Hindustan until 1947. When India was partitioned in 1947, it

became East Pakistan, a province of Pakistan. Bangladesh gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1971. Many of its English-language authors were born prior to that year. Novelist Razia Khan Amin is well-known. Poets Farida Majid and Kaiser Haq have published five collections of poetry.

Popular short story writers include K. Anis Ahmed, Farah Ghuznavi, and Rashid Askari. Goodnight, Mr. Kissinger, K. Anis Ahmed's debut collection, tells the story of Dhaka.

#### **TIME AND TYPE OF MIGRATION**

People who have migrated to a foreign country, as well as their children who were born in either Bangladesh or the host country, make up the Bangladeshi diaspora community. As a result, the diaspora population is far larger than the country's immigrant population. In Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, Various characters in the novel depart from their homeland at various ages and under various circumstances. Before marrying, Chanu travels to London and establishes a home, a higher standard of living, a livelihood, and the ability to earn money so that he can purchase a large home and property in Bangladesh and become prosperous. He works hard to do it on a regular basis. He believes that, unlike the other illiterate immigrants from his country, he does not need to look for a regular job. As a result, he is migrating voluntarily in order to become wealthy. Chanu arrives in Bangladesh and marries Nazneen, a woman half his age.

Nazneen follows him after their marriage and settles in London's Brick Lane neighborhood. Nazneen's migration cannot be considered voluntary because she is required to visit her husband's home after marriage; a patriarchal practice. She flees her father's home and travels to an unfamiliar country.

Aside from Nazneen and Chanu, *Brick Lane* is home to a large number of Bangladeshi immigrants. They are confined to ghettos. They strive to fit in by adopting the host country's lifestyle, traditions, and dress style while ignoring their religious code. Mrs. Azad, Razia, Hanufa, and others work there and fight for survival in London. In addition to first-generation immigrants, these migrants' children are second-generation immigrants.

Apart from first generation immigrants, there are children of these migrants who are second generation immigrants. Most of them are born and brought up there and they feel more comfortable with the culture and lifestyle of London rather than

imitating the Bangladeshi lifestyle, copying language and customs. Bibi and Shahana-the daughters of Nazneen, do not like the Bangla language and even on the insistence of Chanu, they do not like the literature of their homeland. Dr. Azad's daughter follows western culture to a great extent. Karim is a second generation immigrant engaged in delivering vests. But he feels racial discrimination against his people and starts agitation about the same.

#### **SNIPPETS OF HOME IN THE NOVELS UNDER CONSIDERATION, INCLUDING GEOGRAPHY, POLITY, ECONOMY, AND SETTING**

Monica Ali describes Bangladesh's geographical locations, agriculture, industry, population, economy, and politics in her novel *Brick Lane*. In Bangladesh, jute is a big industry, and jute sacks are used as bed rolls. Banesa, an elderly woman in East Pakistan, gives birth to Nazneen when the novel begins in 1967. The people of Bangladesh are often described as fatalists. Nazneen recalls paddy fields and mango trees, contrasting them with her current situation in London, where *Brick Lane* is nothing more than a pile of bricks. Ali speaks about the feminine in Dhaka in 1942-43, which was drawn by Abedin – an artist and is now in a Dhaka museum.

Remittances are one of the benefits that immigrants bring to their home countries. Bangladeshi immigrants give money to their relatives here. They used to transfer money won in other currencies back to their home country. Razia's brother-in-law is in charge of the money she sends to her brother-in-law in Bangladesh. Males in patriarchy are allowed to engage in polygamy and adultery, according to Bangladeshi culture. Monika Ali employs a novel technique for depicting her homeland through letters Nazneen receives from her Bangladeshi sister Hasina. Hasina tells us about a new factory, trade union strikes, her living place, and corruption in Bangladesh via letters dating back to 1988.

The novelist discusses numerous topics in the postcolonial world, including colonised attitudes against colonisers. The colonised reminisce about their glorious past, and Chanu in Shahana's novel does the same. Bangladesh's glorious history is

discussed. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Dhaka was the clothing capital of the world, where muslin and damask were invented and exported to the Dutch, Portuguese, French, and British. During the 18th century, this region of the country was stable, prosperous, and educated, contributing one-third of the British Indian Empire's revenue. Bangladeshi immigration has a negative impact on London's economy. For job security, British citizenship is required.

People from Third-World countries are keen to move. Hasina says that to travel to another country, one requires 150000 taka. It is much more to Singapore. Hasina's letters debunk the idea that Bangladesh is still a paradise in the countryside; it is urbanised and violent. Hasina explains to her sister how garment girls have been labelled as sexually immoral as a result of their near proximity to men at work. Bangladesh's patriarchal society is similar to that of the United Kingdom, but it is more powerful. For example, Hasina, who was left without a husband, was raped and forced to become a prostitute in order to survive, and her companion, Monju, was murdered by her husband by drenching her in acid.

Hasina works as a mechanist in a factory, whereas her sister works as a mechanist in the liberated world of the West in purdah inside the family. As a result, the novelist paints a detailed picture of the culture of the protagonist's homeland, but not through any current events. It's told through the memories of various characters and Hasina's letters.

#### **THE DIASPORA GROUP'S DISPOSITION AT OTHER MIGRANTS AND THEIR HOMELAND**

The novel depicts events in the lives of Bangladeshi immigrants in Brick Lane. Mrs. Islam is a Bangladeshi woman who has lived in London for 30 years. Ali narrates the relationship between immigrants from the same homeland through Chanu. Sylhetis make up the majority of the population. They're all from the same neighbourhood, so they stick together. They know each other from the villages, and when they arrive in Tower Hamlets, they mistakenly believe they have

returned to the village. The vast majority of them have jumped ship.

That's how they come. Chanu says, "They have menial jobs on the ship, doing donkey work, or they stow away like little rats 86 in the hold... And when they jump ship and scuttle over here, then in a sense, they are home again. And you see, to a white person, we are all the same: dirty little monkeys all in the same monkey clan "(20-21). When a person goes from a family abroad, the family begs for items and money. "They think there is gold lying about in the streets here and I am just hoarding it all in my palace" (27). The attitude of the settled immigrants towards the new immigrants is both supportive as well as non-supportive. For Nazneen, language is always a barrier to communication. Her husband boasts about his knowledge of language and makes sarcastic remarks to Nazneen, considering her illiterate. Nazneen could not pronounce the word 'Ice-es-kating' to which Chanu remarks, "It's a common problem for Bengalis. Two consonants together cause difficulty... I have conquered this issue after a long time. But you are unlikely to need these words in any case "(29).

Nazneen's Bangladeshi neighbours assist her during her pregnancy. In the future, Mrs. Islam loans money to Chanu while he is in financial need. Mrs. Islam also contributes to the mosque's fund for underprivileged children. Karim, a young Bangladeshi second-generation immigrant, assists Nazneen in her economic activity of knitting vests. Karim picks up the finished knitted dresses from Nazneen after delivering the raw materials. He is depicted here as a refugee who is assisting others. Karim also assists Nazneen with her English.

#### **FEELINGS OF ISOLATION AND THE QUEST FOR BELONGING**

The immigrant community seeks refuge in an alien land, and Ali observes, "They never really leave home."Their bodies are here but their hearts are back there. And anyway, look how they leave: just re-creating the villages here "(24). Dr.Azad says these migrants will never save enough to go back "Every year they think, just one more year. But whatever they save, it's never enough "(24). Ali mentions that among immigrants, there is a

tendency of thinking to go back home, which she says is "Going Home Syndrome" (24). These are typical characteristics of the immigrants narrated by the diaspora writers. Chanu reiterates his qualification and will be getting B.A. Honors from a British University. He faces the harsh reality of his life as an immigrant.

When I came, I was a young man. I had ambitions. Big dreams. When I got off the aeroplane, I had my degree certificate in my suitcase and a few pounds in my pocket. I thought there would be a red carpet laid out for me. I was going to join the civil service and become Private Secretary to the Prime Minister...And then I found things were a bit different. These people here didn't know the difference between me, who stepped off an aeroplane with a degree certificate, and the peasants who jumped off the boat possessing only the lice on their heads. What can you do? (26-27)

Nazneen feels alien in a foreign land. She accepts her husband, who is almost twice her age. In her 18 years, Nazneen could scarcely remember a moment that she had spent alone. And now in London she has to sit day after day in a large box with the furniture to dust, and the muffled sounds of private lives sealed away above, below, and around her. During the day, after household work, she feels that the old Nazneen is sublimated and the new Nazneen is filled with white light glory.

Migrants searching for their own origins and culture in a foreign country. Chanu makes every effort at home to maintain his Bengali identity. Ashima and Ashok attempt to teach their children their mother tongue in *The Namesake* as well. However, both Gogol and Bibi, the daughter of Nazneen and Chanu, are hesitant to speak Bengali, their mother tongue, in *The Namesake*. Migrants of the first generation work hard to preserve their language and culture. Chanu makes his daughters recite Bengali poems. Shahana, who he refers to as "mehsaib," refuses to listen to Bengali classical music.

Ali mentions Karim and the Bengal Tigers to show how Islamic fundamentalists focus on maintaining both their Muslim and British identities. In this regard, Garbin points out that various Islamic

groups in the UK place a strong focus on preserving Islamic identity alongside a British identity, as otherwise assimilation would occur.

Monika Ali describes the plot of the novel as cultural dislocation, alienation, and generational tension in an interview with Allan Gregg on 'Brick Lane and Alentejo Blue.' The novel was well-received, and she is now regarded as one of the best writers of the last decade. "She has also grown up in two distinct cultures, namely Bangladesh from her father's side and Britain from her mother's side," she says. In response to the novel's portrayal of fundamentalist, extreme Islam, she says, "It's the indignation of young men who feel alienated and alone after September 11." (Interview, Ali)..

#### **THE ROLE OF NOSTALGIA AND CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE PRESENT**

Immigrants yearn for their homeland as a result of their memories of the past. It evokes nostalgic feelings and aids in the adjustment to a new setting. Food, language, rituals, religious holidays, and time spent with family, among other things, evoke nostalgic feelings. These feelings of nostalgia have increased in the Information Technology age, with quick and easy means of communication and social media. Ali depicts, Nazneen recalls in her sleep events from her past, such as going to school with Hasina, visiting green-rice fields, and so on. She has visions of Hasina and her birthplace. She claims that their society is primarily peasant, and that they lack their own land in London, so this pool of land is even greater than the pool of blood.

Dr.Azad also highlights the harsh reality of Bangladesh, as well as all emerging South Asian countries in general. Despite the fact that the villages have been recreated in the hostland, the poor souls are in exile and intend to board an aeroplane once they have saved enough money. However, there is no way of knowing that enough is enough. There may be a variety of explanations for staying in an alien country. Awaiting a long-overdue promotion and a substantial increase, or becoming a more popular and prosperous person and when one continues to wander through the alien world, the desire to return grows stronger. Apart from these

materialistic concerns, there are other conveniences that one becomes used to that are almost non-existent at home. The diaspora texts are like a candle on a threshold, illuminating both countries' realities. Dr. Azad says:

Every year I think, 'May be this year.' And I'd go for a visit, buy some more land, see relatives and friends, and make up my mind to return for good. But something would always happen. A flood, a tornado that just missed the building, a power cut, some mind-numbing piece of petty bureaucracy, bribes to be paid out to get anything done. And I'd think, 'Well, maybe not this year.' And now, I don't know, I just don't know. (25)

#### ISSUES CONCERNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES, ECONOMIC MOBILITY, AND THE NATURE OF SURVIVAL IN THE NEW COUNTRY

One of the factors that make immigrants feel alienated is language. They felt inferior because they couldn't express themselves in a foreign language. In English, Nazneen could only say "sorry" and "thank you." She struggled to make friends with the residents of Tower Hamlets at first. She sees English as a foreign language that prevents her from expressing herself to others. Dr. Azad does not talk much when she comes to Nazneen's house for dinner because she is shy due to the language barrier. Just one's mother tongue allows them to recall their history. When Ashima goes to America after her marriage and lacks her mother tongue, Jhumpa Lahiri shares the same feelings in *The Namesake*.

Monika Ali speaks about immigrants' struggles to survive in a foreign country. Mrs. Islam believes that in order to mix with other nations, one must give up one's own community in order to embrace theirs. Mrs. Azad is a follower of western culture. She smokes, drinks beer, and dresses inappropriately for a Muslim woman from Bangladesh.

The plight of first-generation immigrants is depicted in the early years of Dr. Azad's arrival in London. Dr. Azad and his wife had a lot of difficulties when he was studying medicine in London. They just ate rice and dal and drank water to keep their

stomachs from bloating. When her son Raqib becomes ill and she must accompany Chanu to the hospital, Nazneen's physical, emotional, and financial hardships are portrayed. Raqib passes away in the hospital while undergoing treatment. Nazneen makes an effort to clear her mind and consider new experience with grace or indifference. Chanu lives solely in both the past and the future, despite her desire to look neither back nor forward. Chanu seems to be pessimistic.

He does not want to remain in a foreign country if it would not make him wealthy. Chanu is disappointed that, despite getting degrees and qualifications, he has been unable to secure a decent job. Nazneen begins knitting and earns 3 shillings and 50 pence in an hour. Nazneen considers fashion and style as a means of bringing about change in her life. Suddenly, she is gripped by the notion that changing her clothing would change her entire life. She considers donning a suit, sweater, and high heels, walking around the glass palaces on Bishops Gate, conversing on a slim phone, and eating lunch from a paper bag.

She imagines that if she dressed like the girl with the big camera on Brick Lane, she would walk down the street fearlessly and proudly. Chanu lends a hand to Nazneen's sewing company. As a middleman, he collects orders, money, and other items. Chanu is also a survivor of an alien planet. He obtains his driver's licence and begins working at Kempton Kars as a driver. He believes that now is the time for his home fund to flourish. Karim, a new middleman, enters Nazneen's life and helps her to change her mind. She decides to stay in London and not return, despite the fact that she would have to make several adjustments to make her decision a reality. After strife, an illiterate female protagonist transitions to life in an alien world.

Nazneen, who is resigned to her fate and has the choice of battling, escaping, or flowing with the tide of her fate, chooses to flow with it. Nazneen goes through the agony of being uprooted before finally discovering the thrill of being a global soul. For Nazneen, a first-generation expat, Bangladesh is the place that has shaped her and her values. It is the position to which she is emotionally connected.

Later, she is eventually drawn to her adopted homeland as a result of different events, and she adapts to the new overseas lifestyle. She distances herself from her original home, deciding to 'return' despite the fact that her husband, Chanu, whom she had followed to the alie, had left her.

Chanu has never been a part of the so-called "adopted" territory. Chanu's situation is typical of a diasporic life: becoming a part of a country but not a state; claiming citizenship in one place but belonging to another. He's constantly juggling approval and rejection on a see-saw. Razia is another example of someone who has succeeded in assimilating. She has no one to speak to at first, but she learns English and changes her lifestyle. She gains faith in her ability to prove her worth and achieve success once she obtains citizenship.

Nazneen considers her hostland to be a good place to live because she has the right to go wherever she wants, whenever she wants. Chanu, on the other hand, is dissatisfied because his plans to succeed in London have been put on hold. His appointment has been delayed, and he is concerned that his children will be exposed to Western culture. Pubs and clubs belong to a different world. Nazneen attempts to adapt to life in a strange country, while Chanu attributes his shortcomings to a variety of factors, including cultural clashes, generational gaps, racism, and so on.

#### **RELIGION AND BIGOTRY IN THE BIRTHPLACE AND HOST NATION**

Ali narrates issues related to faith, specifically Islam, in the novel. Mrs. Islam discusses the madrasah, which is a new academy. Chanu rejects the London educational system and says "Don't forget, Bengal was Hindu long before it was Muslim, and before the Buddhists and that was after the first Hindu period. We are only Muslims because of the Moguls. Don't forget "(208).

Ali discusses via Chanu how one must flatter the boss in order to advance in this foreign world. Chanu believes that he is not being promoted because he is a non-white. Chanu makes every attempt to advance in his career. He does not take vacation time, even though some do. He believes

this because Dr. Azad knows his boss, Mr. Dalloway, who is a patient of Dr. Azad. So, if Dr. Azad says anything nice about him, he'll get the promotion. As a result, he invites Dr. Azad to dinner at his house. In the age of globalisation, racial clashes are a common occurrence.

There are some people who are orthodox in their homeland, but after coming to a foreign land, they may consider other native people as orthodox and themselves as progressive. Chanu does not believe in reading the Holy Qur'an. He says, "rubbing ashes on your face doesn't make you a saint. God sees what is in your heart "(35). The conflict due to religion, race and culture is highlighted in the novel. The Bangla Muslims talk about how Shibli Rahman, a person opposing racism, had been stabbed to death in the past. Karim suggests their mission: "We are for Muslim rights and culture. We're into protecting our local ummah and supporting the global ummah "(256).

Karim at Nazneen's residence gives her some new letters called 'The Light' and 'ummah'. In London, the issue of strife between the Islamic fundamentalists and the Britishers is mentioned. The Lion Hearts i.e. Britishers have made a remark opposing the activity of the Bengal Tigers.

#### **POSTCOLONIAL ISSUES, ESPECIALLY THE SITUATION OF WOMEN IN THE HOMELAND AND HOST COUNTRY**

The novel is written by a Bangladeshi diaspora artist. She has been a strong advocate for women's rights, especially for women in the Muslim community. The birth of a baby girl is frowned upon in patriarchal societies. Nazneen's parents were disappointed when she was born. She needed medicine as a child, but she was left to her fate. Nazneen is a very submissive woman who lets her father choose her husband. Nazneen's father decided her to marry a person of his choice, to which Nazneen replied, "Abba, it is good that you have chosen my husband. I hope I can be a good wife, like Amma "(7).

Chanu is a domineering husband, and Nazneen fears that if Chanu finds the house untidy, he will scold her. When Nazneen first meets Chanu

after their marriage in Bangladesh, she considers him gentle and kind, but after a week in the UK, Chanu describes Nazneen to a friend as "not stunning, but not ugly." He goes on to say that his wife is a hard worker who does not speak English, is a village girl, and is completely unspoiled.

A woman who has never had a child has been discovered to be tortured by society. A woman from Bangladesh committed suicide on the 15th floor of a London building because she had not had a child after twelve years of marriage. Ali tells Chanu that the birth of a male child is welcomed in the patriarchy, while the birth of a female child is not. When Nazneen announces that she is expecting a boy, Chanu becomes ecstatic and declares that Mr. Dalloway will be unable to stop my promotion because he is about to have a son.

Chanu, as a husband, is an orthodox, conservative. He does not allow Nazneen to go out. She has to cut corn Chanu. But he, as a hypocrite, says: "I don't stop you from doing anything. I am westernized now. It is lucky for you that you married an educated man. That was a stroke of luck "(39). Ali depicts a patriarchal Muslim society in which what the husband feels is often followed. Chanu wants to return to Dhaka. Chanu objects to Nazneen's proposal to sew at home with other women like Razia, and tells her to mix with respectable people.

## CONCLUSION

Ali has given voice to various issues of diaspora, according to a comprehensive critical analysis of the novel based on the selected parameters. The reasons for migration vary, including pursuing a job, leading a comfortable lifestyle, raising children, marrying an immigrant, and in some cases, illegally seeking opportunities in developed countries.

Brick Lane, as a diaspora text, depicts the state of Bangladesh in great detail. Chanu, Nazneen, Razia, Dr. Azad, Mrs. Azad, and others discuss their homelands and how they compare to their current lifestyles. The transnational sisterhood between Nazneen and her rebellious sister Hasina keeps Bangladesh and the United Kingdom linked. The novel's depiction of Bangladesh is largely based on

migrant Nazneen's memories of it and her sister Hasina's negative experiences of staying in the country, as revealed through Ali's device of providing the reader with Hasina's letters to her sister.

As a result, the novel still portrays Bangladesh from afar, as a fragmented recollection or a letter written in broken English, never as a clear portrayal of the Bangladeshi community in Britain. Ali recounts Bangladesh's glorious history as well as the country's current condition. Ali depicts life in Brick Lane, the ghettos, small homes, and the immigrant's struggle to find work in London as a bifocal visionary. As a diaspora journalist, Ali points out that life in London isn't always rosy, and immigrants must compromise on different levels in their host country.

Ali deals with the dichotomy between the 'home' nation and the 'host' group as well as the construction of identity within the minority culture. The subject of racism is not treated as a plot device, but rather as a part of daily life. As Hussain Yasmin mentions, "Issues of home, belonging and identity are central to Brick Lane. The idea of diaspora in Brick Lane invokes the imagery of the traumas of separation, dislocation and adaptation that are central to the experiences of migration "(95).

As a result of the criteria review, the novel gives adequate voice to diaspora issues such as depiction of homeland, hostland, settlement, identity, alienation, and assimilation on the hostland. It also addresses questions of race, faith, and women's status as second-class citizens.

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