

Home and Belonging in Transcultural Spaces: Exploring Cultural Hybridization in ‘Brick Lane’

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Abstract

Monica Ali’s novel ‘Brick Lane’ (2003) delves into a discussion of cultural disparities within a postcolonial context specifically situated in the East End of London. The literary work explores the nuanced and multifaceted aspects of immigrant encounters, the formation of hybrid identities, and the inherent conflict between traditional values and contemporary ideals. The inclusion of a wide range of characters in the narrative serves to illustrate the various obstacles and successes associated with the processes of assimilation, integration, and the preservation of cultural heritage. This paper examines the portrayal of cultural differences in the novel ‘Brick Lane’, with a focus on the intricate and multifaceted challenges faced by individuals as they navigate the intersection of their cultural heritage and the dynamic nature of modern society. By engaging in an analysis of characters, settings, and narrative techniques, one can effectively unveil the intricate and diverse characteristics of these disparities as well as their wider ramifications within the context of a globalised society.

Keywords: Cultural differences, Brick Lane, Multiculturalism, Diaspora, Hybridity, Post-Colonialism.

Post-colonialism, an influential theoretical framework that emerged in the mid-20th century, offers a critical analysis of the multifaceted consequences of colonisation on the social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions of both the colonised and coloniser societies. This paper examines the intricate relationships between power dynamics, identity formations, and cultural interactions that have emerged as a consequence of colonial histories. It uses a tranquil mode to disclose “an extreme spirit of cultural hegemony and cultural imperialism” (Yang 1996: 109). Post-colonialism is an academic field that investigates the consequences of colonisation on individual and collective identities, leading to the emergence of hybrid identities that incorporate elements from both the colonised and coloniser cultures. The concept of hybridity poses a challenge to conventional understandings of identity and

culture. Post-colonialism investigates the enduring consequences of colonisation on phenomena such as migration, displacement, and cultural interchange. These effects have significant implications for processes such as globalisation and the formation of diasporic communities. According to Derek Walcott, a prominent author and intellectual, individuals who migrate and form diasporic communities frequently exhibit a phenomenon known as “double consciousness.” This concept refers to the coexistence of two distinct cognitive frameworks within these individuals, one stemming from their native country and the other originating from a First World nation (Nayar 2009: 179). Individuals residing in a Diaspora frequently amalgamate two pre-existing cultural frameworks. The novel ‘Brick Lane’ encompasses postcolonial themes, providing an opportunity for scholarly examination of cultural disparities, hybridised identities, and the enduring consequences of colonisation on both individuals and communities. Alistair Cormack’s perspective regards the novel as a narrative that encapsulates the experiences of Bangladeshi immigrants residing in London, emphasising the intricate dynamics and interactions between these distinct cultural groups. He also mentions that the novel has “a realistic narrative with a postcolonial story; it offers an excellent opportunity to examine the relationship between the formal strategies of mimetic fiction and the historical contexts of multiculturalism and immigration” (Cormack 2006: 695).

The influence of culture on individual and group identities is substantial, as it fosters a sense of belonging, shared historical experiences, and the preservation of traditions. The cultural backgrounds of characters in literature have a substantial influence on their motivations, choices, and interactions with other characters. Bhabha states, “Culture is less about voicing a pre-given identity (whether the root is national or ‘cultural’ culture) and more about bargaining, governing, and approving overlapping, sometimes contradictory demands for mutual self-representation” (Fernandez 2009:157). The recognition of cultural identity, also referred to as cultural recognition, holds significant importance within post-colonial societies. It encompasses the assessment of national and cultural attributes in the realms of literature and cultural research (Ling and Shun-sheng 2018: 470-471). Scholars like Edward W. Said and Homi Bhabha have explored the academic value of cultural identity. In Edward Said’s book, “After the Last Sky’ he states that “identity—who are we, where are we from, and what are we—is hard to maintain for the refugee” (Ibid.). Said suggests that in order to deal with the shock of cultural hegemony, cultural politics should be developed. The presence of cultural hegemony, specifically in the context of postcolonialism, poses a substantial obstacle for Bengali immigrants residing in East London, the United Kingdom. Homi Bhabha embraced the notion of cultural hybridization, elucidating it through the lenses of hybridity, imitation, and the concept of the ‘third space’ (Bhabha 1990: 211). The Brick Lane community is widely recognised as a ‘third space’ that exists outside the boundaries of mainstream western society, thereby posing challenges in comprehending the process of cultural assimilation. Bhabha’s exploration of hybridization and the subsequent resistance

arising from these conflicts is evident in the narrative of Brick Lane. As John Hutnyk defines it, “With relation to Diaspora, the most conventional accounts assert hybridity as the process of cultural mixing where the diasporic arrivals adopt aspects of the host culture and rework, reform, and reconfigure this in the production of a new hybrid culture or hybrid identities” (Kalra, Kaur, Hutnyk 2005: 71). The analysis of postcolonial themes, hybrid identities, and diverse character interactions in the novel is significantly influenced by culture.

Monica Ali, the British modern novelist and author of Brick Lane, was born in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in 1967 and embodies a hybrid identity. She migrated to Britain during her childhood, relocating her family to England in search of safety and a better future. The family encountered a sense of discomfort stemming from both English relatives and unfamiliar individuals, while Ali’s father was subjected to instances of racial discrimination (Ali 2003: 1). The challenges associated with the process of emigration exerted a significant impact on her literary works of fiction. Ali is “both Bangladeshi and British, who lived as former colonies, so we cannot consider them to be one part or another” (Nilsson 2010: 4). The influence of a multicultural background has a substantial effect on the approach to addressing issues in various domains. She draws on secondary sources to make sense of her experiences, and as an adult living in a former colony, she cannot be classified as belonging to the East or the West. She may be seen as partially oriental by Westernised women and partially westernised by Third-World women (Ibid.). In her narrative, Monica Ali delves into the exploration of cultural disparities, conflicts, and adjustments, offering valuable insights into the lives of her characters and the trajectory of the narrative.

Brick Lane delves into the intricate nature of individuals, seamlessly incorporating diverse cultural influences and constructing multifaceted identities that mirror the realities of globalisation. It adeptly navigates the convergence of various influences at the intersection of these identities. Monica Ali’s literary work examines the enigmatic facade of Bangladesh and the cultural conflicts arising from the juxtaposition of Western and Eastern societies, as depicted through the actions of its characters. The novel underscores the significance of economic and political circumstances in moulding cultural identity, irrespective of the cultural background of immigrants. The characters in the novel engage in the intricate process of reconciling their cultural heritage with their unfamiliar surroundings, effectively adjusting to their new environment while simultaneously safeguarding their inherent identity. This entails skillfully manoeuvring through the multifaceted journey of cultural adaptation. Nazneen, an individual of Bengali descent who has immigrated to Britain, serves as a symbolic representation of the connection between British values and Bengali culture. The novel depicts the protagonist’s exploration of personal identity and purpose while also contrasting her husband’s struggle with a lack of identity and purpose and her lover Karim’s pursuit of rediscovering his religious and ethnic heritage. Ali’s research provides evidence for the presence of modernization and the fusion of Eastern and Western cultures in Britain, as

exemplified by the characters Nazneen, Chanu, and Karim. Cultural identity serves as a manifestation of cultural fluidity within postcolonial societies, underscoring the significance of accounting for various factors that contribute to the formation of cultural identities.

According to Timothy Brennan, it has been stated that “nations are imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fiction in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role” (Brennan 1990: 49). The novel *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali delves into the notion of nationhood and the formation of national cultural identity as it follows the experiences of immigrants from Bangladesh or second-generation British-born children of immigrants. The literary work explores cultural identity, intricate racial dynamics, and the presence of racism while also shedding light on the experiences of characters who navigate a multicultural existence. In accordance with Bhabha’s perspective, “cultural difference marks the establishment of new forms of meaning and strategies for identification” (Bhabha 2021: 40). *Brick Lane* explores the portrayal of characters who possess hybrid identities as a consequence of their experiences with migration, Diaspora, and cultural assimilation. Nazneen and Chanu exemplify the complexities and prospects associated with traversing diverse cultural spheres. According to Chanu, the protagonist, he states:

“behind every story of immigrant success there lies a deeper tragedy I’m talking about the clash between Western values and our own. I’m talking about the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve one’s identity and heritage. I’m talking about the children who don’t know what their identity is. I’m talking about the feelings of alienation engendered by a society where racism is prevalent. I’m talking about the terrible struggle to preserve one’s sanity while striving to achieve the best for one’s family” (Ali 2003: 88)

The novel ‘*Brick Lane*’ probes into the significance of establishing and maintaining ethnic cultural identity within the context of a multicultural society. The portrayal of interculturality by Monica Ali serves as a catalyst for Nazneen’s transformative journey from a submissive housewife to an empowered individual. She experienced personal transformation due to her marriage, relocation to Britain, relationship with her spouse and lover, feelings of dissatisfaction, and subsequent liberation (Tongur 2013: 561). She exhibits a willingness to engage in hybridization and demonstrates adaptability within her multicultural surroundings, thereby manifesting ethnic and cultural characteristics from both Eastern and Western societies. The three primary protagonists in the novel *Brick Lane* exhibit distinct perspectives on cultural identity, thereby engendering a distinctive process of constructing their individual identities. Monica Ali’s endorsement of liberalism underscores the pervasive yearning for autonomy and self-determination, shedding light on the obstacles encountered by individuals residing in non-Western societies with less authoritative structures. This particularly resonates with women, who find themselves constrained by

cultural norms and traditional practises. The primary focus of the novel lies within the Bengali community residing in Britain, wherein the characters encounter various challenges and grapple with the intricate dynamics arising from the coexistence of diverse cultures and traditions. According to Parekh, it is argued that “Britain [...] contains many conflicting traditions and is differentiated by gender, class, region, and religion, as well as by culture, ethnicity, and race. Assimilation is a fantasy, for there is no single culture into which all people can be incorporated” (Parekh 2000:45). British culture encompasses a diverse range of distinct cultural identities. However, it is generally expected that the host society’s culture will facilitate the integration of minority groups rather than assimilating other cultures.

Ali’s narrative fiction delves into the experiences of Bangladeshi immigrants residing in London, examining their lives and prospects for career advancement. The work sheds light on the juxtaposition of two distinct cultural spheres that coexist within this context. Chanu, the spouse of Nazneen, and Karim, her paramour, symbolise the two cohorts of Bangladeshi immigrants. Chanu, the spouse of Nazneen, immigrates to Britain with the intention of accumulating wealth and subsequently returning to his home country. In contrast, Karim, a younger individual who was born in England and identifies as a Muslim, engages in the discourse surrounding global political matters and establishes a radical religious organisation. The novel delves into the intricate dynamics of the relationships among immigrants and their experiences, emphasising the significance of comprehending and accepting diverse identities within global society.

Nazneen assumes the role of a central character that adeptly manoeuvres through the complexities of cultural disparities and the process of hybridization. Ali states, “Since she first came [to England], she had learned about isolation, then anonymity, and eventually a different kind of culture.” (Ali 2003: 182). The journey undertaken by Nazneen serves as a prominent illustration of the difficulties, personal development, and intricate processes involved in managing a hybrid identity within a postcolonial framework. The initiation of her encounter with cultural disparities commences with her marriage to Chanu, which has been arranged for her. This journey entails the transition from her conventional upbringing in the rural regions of Bangladesh to the dynamic environment of London’s East End. Her transformation in the context of Britain gives rise to novel prospects for cultural associations and the emergence of hybridised cultures. Nazneen encounters obstacles in acknowledging her cultural identity as a consequence of post-colonialism and multiculturalism, despite her aspiration for social standing within British society. According to Kim, “the national identity encompasses intercultural ties such as assimilation, integration, incorporation, pluralism, and separation. Multiculturalism merges individualistic belief with contradictory statements of collective unity in opposition to integration, which promulgates individualism, a cultural mentality that promotes individuality, personality, and personal accountability” (Kim 2007: 239). Nazneen encounters difficulties in mastering the English language, thereby shedding

light on her cultural disparities and impediments to effective communication. Over a period of time, she undergoes a process of adaptation to her new surroundings, wherein she embraces the cultural aspects of Britain and selectively integrates them into her personal identity. As her level of self-awareness increases, she begins to formulate her own thoughts and make independent decisions. She actively embraces cross-culturalism within the urban setting of London, where they undergo a process of self-discovery and the formation of a new identity within the third space of the metropolis. She examines the various prospects for independent employment and residential arrangements in the city of London (Mortada 2010: 56). At the end of the novel, Nazneen undergoes a significant transformation, transitioning from a position of subordination and submission to one of self-assertion and independence. The Western clothing and fashion preferences of Nazneen serve as a manifestation of her developing hybrid identity, signifying her openness to adopting new cultural conventions while upholding fundamental principles. Nazneen's engagements with her Bangladeshi community, British neighbours, and English partner Karim provide her with opportunities to encounter a wide range of cultural viewpoints. The romantic relationship she engages in with Karim serves as an exemplification of her inclination towards hybridization and her inclination to explore relationships that extend beyond the confines of conventional marital norms. Even the correspondence exchanged between Nazneen and her sister Hasina, residing in Bangladesh, provides insights into the cultural disparities experienced in the context of London as well as the process of assimilation and adjustment encountered by immigrants in a foreign culture. The experiences of cultural hybridization among Shahana and Bibi, the daughters of Nazneen, serve as a notable illustration of generational disparities. They actively embrace Western influences, thereby encountering a conflict between their own identities and those of their parents. Accordingly, what emerges is Nazneen's struggle to find her identity through her growing confidence and self-determination" (Kanal 2008: 56). The process of self-discovery undertaken by Nazneen is intricately connected to her hybrid identity as she navigates the complexities of cultural influences that mould her understanding of her own identity. The character of Nazneen in the novel 'Brick Lane' engages with the intricate dynamics of identity, belonging, and the negotiation of diverse cultural influences within a postcolonial framework. The narrative arc of her work depicts the themes of assimilation, identity formation, and the complex interplay between traditional values and modern influences within a multicultural setting.

Nazneen's husband Chanu, who is of Bengali descent and resides in London, encounters difficulties in effectively navigating the complexities arising from cultural disparities and the process of hybridization. The aspirations, cognitive endeavours, and process of adapting to a new cultural environment vary between him and Nazneen. Chanu's hybridization is indicative of his endeavour to reconcile the disparity between his cultural heritage and the prevailing societal norms. He places great importance on education as a tool for establishing rapport with his British counterparts and broadening his perspectives. He

undertook a doctoral programme in London with the aim of mitigating cultural disparities and integrating into British society. Chanu's desire to achieve success within British society presents a significant obstacle to his professional and social endeavours. He demonstrates a capacity for assimilating into British social norms and customs, yet he faces various constraints and difficulties inherent to the immigrant experience. Nevertheless, his aspirations are met with disillusionment, leading him to reassess his strategy for integrating and blending cultures, thereby confronting the actualities of his cultural disparities. Chanu observes life: "This is the tragedy of our lives. To be an immigrant is to live out a tragedy" (Ali 2003: 112). Chanu encounters challenges in attaining professional advancement within the context of London, yet manages to attain an elevated position within British society. Despite his aspirations, he encounters challenges related to cultural differences and experiences difficulties in the process of assimilation. His interactions with British colleagues shed light on the presence of cultural obstacles and indicate that his educational background and expertise are not accorded the anticipated level of appreciation. Sincerely, he hoped "to be a British civil servant. I was going to sit all the exams and be a High Flyer, Top Earner, Head of Department, Permanent Secretary, Cabinet Secretary, and right-handed Bloody Man of the Bloody Prime Minister" (Ali 2003: 406). His encounters encompass various trials such as rejection and displacement, which arise from the navigation of cultural barriers and the struggle to assimilate into an unfamiliar cultural context. Following a series of professional setbacks, his objective is to relocate to Dhaka alongside his family and establish residence in Bangladesh. The narrative of 'Brick Lane' illuminates the intricate nature of cultural disparities and the process of hybridization within the context of postcolonial immigrant encounters, as exemplified by Chanu's personal journey. The author emphasises the difficulties associated with navigating one's sense of self and affiliation, alongside internal struggles and changing viewpoints. Chanu's astute observations regarding British culture, including his insightful analysis of historical events and discerning viewpoints on the works of Dickens, exemplify his active involvement with British values while simultaneously upholding a critical stance that is firmly grounded in his own cultural heritage. The protagonist's persona encapsulates the challenges, ambitions, and introspective processes that individuals encounter when navigating cultural disparities and amalgamation within a postcolonial context. In the novel, "the debilitating feeling of being an outsider, not quite being a part of the culture that one is surrounded by, is also embodied by the character of Nazneen's husband, Chanu" (Kathy A. Tan 2007: 229). Chanu's return to Bangladesh prompts contemplation of his intricate connection to cultural disparities and the process of hybridization. He derives significance and meaning from his native land, experiencing a sense of pride in his Bengali cultural background. His endeavours to transmit conventional principles to his daughters demonstrate a steadfast dedication to safeguarding cultural heritage, thereby upholding a sense of ancestral identity within the context of a blended milieu.

The characters Shahana and Bibi in the novel engage in an in-depth analysis of the intricate dynamics involved in adopting hybrid identities within the context of a multicultural society. These individuals symbolise the cohort of young people who are maturing in a diverse cultural setting, adeptly navigating the juxtaposition of customary principles and Western influences. The inclination to adopt Western attire and engage with popular culture demonstrates their aspiration to incorporate British identity into their daily existence. Ali states, “She wanted to wear jeans. She hated her Kameez and spoiled her entire wardrobe by pouring paint on them” (Ali 2003: 80). The desire to conform to British norms is regarded as a form of empowerment, as it enables them to carve out a place for themselves within a diverse and multicultural society. They navigate the complexities of multiple identities and engage in a process of self-exploration, which mirrors the dynamic and interconnected nature of identity development in a contemporary and fluid society. The juxtaposition between Shahana’s inclination towards Western attire and her parents’ adherence to traditional norms serves as a manifestation of her active involvement in the process of hybridization. She considered London to be her home and “did not want to listen to Bengali classical music. Her written Bengali was shocking. She wanted to wear jeans. She hated her kameez... If she could choose between baked beans and dal, it was no contest. When Bangladesh was mentioned, she pulled a face. She did not know and would not learn that Tagore was more than a poet and Nobel laureate and no less than the true father of her nation. Shahana did not care. Shahana did not want to go back home” (Ali 2003: 146–147). Shahana exhibits a refusal to conform to stereotypes surrounding Muslim women, exemplifying her unwavering strength in the face of discrimination and thereby highlighting her unwavering resolve to establish her own identity on her own accord. According to Hall, “Identities are never united and, in late modern times, constantly scattered and fractured; they are never discrete but multiply built through various, frequently intersecting and antagonistic discourses and practises” (Hall 1995: 4). Shahana skillfully handles the delicate balance between asserting her individuality and adhering to cultural norms by cultivating a friendship with Marcia, which serves as a conduit for her exposure to British culture and colloquial language. Even Bibi’s profound interest in popular culture exemplifies her active involvement with Western influences, thereby juxtaposing the expectations of her parents and illustrating her affiliation with culturally amalgamated expressions. The protagonist’s encounters with Rupban exemplify her internal conflict as she grapples with the tension between assimilating into Western culture and preserving her ties to her Bengali heritage. Bibi’s inclination to partake in social gatherings and engage with her British acquaintances exemplifies her endeavour to assert her autonomy, negotiate the influence of her peers, and reconcile her familial customs. These interactions serve to underscore the intricacies involved in preserving cultural connections while simultaneously embracing hybridization.

The engagement of Shahana and Bibi in Western culture presents a conflict with their parents’ adherence to traditional values and expectations. Chanu says, “Does Shahana know

about the Paradise of Nations? All she knows is about floods and famine. The whole bloody country is just a bloody basket case to her. He examined his text further and made little approving purring noises” (Ali 2003: 185). The dichotomy between the preservation of cultural heritage and the adoption of modernity is apparent in the endeavours of Shahana and Bibi as they strive for autonomy. This paper explores the interplay between generational perspectives in relation to cultural preservation and adaptation, with a focus on promoting comprehension and mutual respect. The friendship between Shahana and Marcia, as well as the interactions between Bibi and Rupban, exemplify instances of cultural exchange between individuals from diverse backgrounds. The experiences of Shahana regarding stereotypes and peer pressure serve to underscore the difficulties associated with managing hybrid identities, thus underscoring the importance of resilience and self-confidence when confronted with external influences.

Karim, a youth hailing from Bangladesh, exemplifies a new cohort characterised by a hybridised identity, amalgamating elements of British and Bengali cultures. The moniker “Two-Jugs” aptly symbolises his bifurcated persona, deftly navigating the divergent societal norms imposed by distinct cultures while simultaneously carving out a unique trajectory for himself. The exploration of assimilation and the complexities of identity are facilitated by the protagonist’s seamless ability to transition between the Bengali and English languages. Karim’s adeptness in seamlessly transitioning between different cultural contexts serves as a testament to the inherent phenomenon of hybridization within a multicultural society. In the novel, Karim is employed at a restaurant that caters to the culinary preferences of the British population, thereby showcasing his active involvement with and adjustment to Western gastronomic inclinations. The individual’s occupation exemplifies his practical mindset in terms of securing a livelihood while actively participating in the prevailing societal norms. Additionally, his active participation in political demonstrations and engagement in activism serve as a testament to his aspiration to challenge established societal conventions and foster transformative outcomes, all the while upholding his Bengali heritage. His familial interactions, specifically with his father, serve as a poignant illustration of the generational divide and the divergent viewpoints regarding the preservation of culture and the inevitability of societal transformation. The friendship between Karim and Chanu exemplifies an intergenerational exchange, offering valuable insights into conventional values and lived experiences while simultaneously introducing contemporary and youthful viewpoints. The romantic relationship between the protagonist and Nazneen serves as a means to examine the intricate dynamics of intergenerational and intercultural connections, delving into the multifaceted aspects of age, ethnicity, and individual aspirations within a blended framework. The dynamic interaction between cultural disparities and collective encounters contributes to the complexity of their relationship, exemplifying the intricate characteristics of relationships influenced by hybrid identities. The discourse between Karim, Chanu, and Nazneen offers valuable perspectives on the perceptions of cultural disparities and the process of

hybridization as observed by them from different age groups. These discussions place significant emphasis on the dynamic and evolving nature of cultural identity.

The hybrid identity of Karim serves to highlight the disparities in the perception of cultural distinctions across different generations. His interactions with Chanu, Shahana, and Bibi serve as illustrations of the changing perspectives on assimilation, preservation, and adaptation across different generations. The character of Karim provides a multifaceted depiction of how individuals navigate the complexities of cultural differences and the process of hybridization. His capacity to adapt, exhibit flexibility, and embrace diverse cultural influences serves to underscore the complex and multifaceted nature of identity within a globalised and interconnected society. The experiences he had also served as a demonstration of the various challenges, opportunities, and personal developments that can emerge from the process of engaging with hybrid identities within a postcolonial context.

Further, Monica Ali introduces Hasina, the sister of Nazneen residing in Bangladesh, who articulates her encounters and trials in navigating cultural disparities and the process of hybridization via epistolary communication with Nazneen. These correspondences shed light on the difficulties encountered by women in Bangladesh and their migratory patterns between Britain and Bangladesh. According to Hussain, “The connection between Bangladesh and Britain is maintained through the transnational sisterhood between Nazneen and her rebellious sister Hasina. The representation of Bangladesh in the novel is then considered largely in terms of the migrant Nazneen’s memories of it and her sister Hasina’s negative experiences of continuing to live there, which we learn through the device of Ali presenting the reader with Hasina’s letters to her sister” (Hussain 2016: 93). The Hasina subplot in Ali’s work serves as a depiction of the economic subjugation experienced by women workers within the garment industry of Bangladesh, thereby shedding light on the capitalist economic structure perpetuated by dominant entities. This statement underscores the role and status of women in Bangladesh amidst the era of globalisation and the prevalence of low-cost labour, which has propelled them from a state of domestic seclusion to active participation in the urban workforce. Ali’s treatment of gender roles encompasses the broader historical context of colonialism and subsequent post-colonial globalisation within a Western socio-cultural framework which has persisted over time “the dissemination of the standards of Western” industrialisation and the market economy even after the end of the manifest, “administrative structures of Western imperialism” (Dallmayr and Devy 1998: 15). The activism and advocacy undertaken by Hasina serve as a means to challenge prevailing cultural norms and foster the development of a more equitable society, particularly in relation to women’s rights. The author’s experiences shed light on the economic difficulties and cultural obstacles that serve to restrict the opportunities available to women, particularly those hailing from marginalised communities. Monica Ali depicts the representation of Bangladeshi women in both Bangladesh and Britain, highlighting the differences in adherence to purdah norms and

the conformity to rigid gender roles within the diasporic social order of London. According to Kabeer, “In Bangladesh, a country where strong norms of purdah, or female seclusion, had always confined women to the precincts of the home and where female participation in public forms of employment had historically been low, the apparent ease with which women appeared to have abandoned old norms in response to new opportunities went against the grain of what has been presented in the development literature as one of the least negotiable patriarchies in the world. By contrast, in Britain, Bangladeshi women were largely found working from home, in apparent conformity with purdah norms.” (Kabeer 2002: viii) Despite lacking adherence to traditional or religious customs, Chanu also demonstrates a strong inclination towards compliance with the legal framework of his homeland. He forbids his wife from walking alone through the streets: “She did not go out. ‘Why should you go out?’ And I will look like a fool.” (Ali 2003: 39). He does the shopping: “Chanu would push the pram, and she would walk a step behind... At the shops, Chanu would buy vegetables” (Ali 2003: 90). He purchases a sewing machine so she can work from home. Bangladesh encounters patriarchal social limitations that result in women’s participation in the labour market as a response to heightened insecurity, as evidenced by the growing prominence of the garment industry. Despite the imposition of stringent limitations on their mobility, they “have increasingly moved out of seclusion into wage employment within modern, large-scale, export-based garment factories to work alongside men.” (Lewis, Rodgers, and Woolcock 2014: 8) In Brick Lane, “Hasina labours in Dhaka sweatshops and Nazneen does piecework in London” (Marx 2015: 430). Hasina is employed in a garment manufacturing facility located in Dhaka, whereas Nazneen is engaged in a remote occupation based in London, which aligns with domestic conventions and purdah customs. This strategy enables her to circumvent interactions with men in the public sphere.

In London, there is a prevalent tendency among women to opt for home-based employment as a means of generating income. However, it is worth noting that Nazneen perceives such a choice as discretionary. Due to the economic challenges and the limited social welfare system in Bangladesh, Hasina places a higher emphasis on seeking employment opportunities in outdoor occupations. According to Chakravorty, “If Hasina’s journey is propelled by a material lack that is hardly met, Nazneen’s is a spiritual, mental, and material journey towards a freedom that is equally unconvincingly idealised” (Chakravorty 2014: 178). Nazneen and Hasina contend that engaging in factory labour beyond the confines of the household poses a potential transgression of established gender norms. Conversely, Hasina expresses a degree of acceptance towards the derisive comments made by individuals passing by in Dhaka. The urban society of London demonstrates a favourable stance towards female involvement in employment opportunities outside the home. However, the prevailing domestic ideology that has been imported from elsewhere restricts their visibility in public spaces. The text elucidates the intricate nature of individual agency within a cultural framework, shedding light on the obstacles and possibilities that arise when adapting to a

multifaceted and rapidly changing milieu. This statement underscores the various trajectories that individuals may pursue when negotiating societal norms and embracing hybrid identities.

The character of Razia serves as a conduit between different cultural realms, thereby highlighting the complexities and potentialities inherent in the process of hybridization. The friendship between Razia and Nazneen, an immigrant originating from Bangladesh, provides valuable perspectives on effectively managing cultural disparities, embracing composite identities, and establishing a sense of belonging within a diverse society. The discussions they engage in provide valuable perspectives on the process of assimilating into unfamiliar cultural environments while simultaneously maintaining one's personal sense of self. The presence of their friendship facilitates her adaptation to the cultural norms and expectations of Bangladeshi society, enabling her to liberate herself from the confines imposed by societal conventions. Razia, a person representing a combination of British and Bengali identities, was raised in London while concurrently upholding ties to her cultural heritage. The individual in question provides Nazneen with valuable advice and support, aiding her in effectively addressing various obstacles such as child-rearing and interpersonal dynamics. Nazneen's perspective serves as a means for her to reconcile the divide between her cultural heritage and her unfamiliar surroundings. The initial step involves acquiring proficiency in the English language, followed by the alteration of her hairstyle to a shorter length and the cessation of her practise of wearing a Sari. The novel delves into the interplay between Bangladeshi cultural practises and the ways of life in London, as exemplified in the concluding scene where Nazneen engages in ice skating while wearing a sari. "By one knee, a woman swooped. There are no sequins, and the skirt isn't too short. She was dressed casually in denim. On two wheels, she continued to sprint. "But you can't ski in a sari," she said. She explained, "This is England. You are free to do whatever you want" (Ziegler 2007: 148). The protagonist of the narrative embarks on a journey of self-discovery, wherein she encounters a new environment that underscores London's ability to provide a more favourable environment for migrant women compared to their male counterparts, who have historically faced greater constraints. Razia's life choices and perspectives serve as a source of inspiration for Nazneen, prompting her to embark on a journey of self-discovery and exploration of her desires and the potential for cultural hybridization. Her self-assured disposition serves to challenge prevailing stereotypes surrounding Asian women, while their proactive approach to navigating a multifaceted identity serves as a contrasting element to conventional cultural norms and expectations. The assertive nature exhibited by Razia serves as a means to challenge prevailing stereotypes and offers a contrasting perspective to conventional societal norms. Chanu encounters distinct challenges associated with the Diaspora that are distinct from those faced by Nazneen. He experiences challenges related to isolation, social withdrawal, and ostracism, actively striving to overcome psychological barriers and adapt to the norms of mainstream society. The character of Chanu assumes the role of a comparative element to Nazneen, thereby accentuating his complex cultural identity. Chanu's display of

arrogance and ambivalence leads to a series of dilemmas as he navigates the tension between his individual self-worth and his sense of national identity. He encounters difficulties in establishing a stable presence in London but ultimately decides to return to their home country of Bangladesh. However, Shahana Ahmed and Bibi Ahmed, representing the second generation of the immigrant community, express a lack of desire to repatriate due to the gradual erosion of Chanu's endeavours to preserve Bangladeshi culture caused by the dominant British cultural influence. Chanu, a paternal figure of Bengali descent, endeavours to imbue his daughters with conventional cultural principles. However, their upbringing within a milieu characterised by a fusion of diverse influences poses a formidable obstacle to his aspirations. The individual's strong sense of pride in his Bengali heritage and his commitment to its preservation may result in tensions as he navigates his unfamiliar environment. Chanu's approach to hybridization is indicative of intergenerational disparities, as Karim exhibits a greater receptiveness to Western influences. Monica Ali adeptly captures the complexities inherent in hybrid identities, thereby prompting readers to contemplate the intricate dynamics of residing at the intersection of diverse cultures. Through her portrayal, she invites an exploration of the multifaceted aspects of identity, the concept of belonging, and the profound influence of globalisation on the lives of individuals. The novel 'Brick Lane' delves into the impact of hybrid identities on the experiences, decisions, and interactions of its characters throughout the narrative.

Conclusion

The novel delves into the assessment of cultural disparities and the process of hybridization within a postcolonial framework. It sheds light on the intricate nature of diverse influences, emphasising the difficulties, intricacies, and profound impact that these interactions can have. The novel chronicles the experiences of a varied ensemble of characters as they navigate the complexities of personal identities, negotiate the challenges posed by generational shifts, and grapple with the tensions that arise from the juxtaposition of tradition and modernity. Nazneen, an immigrant woman, encounters challenges in assimilating into the multicultural environment of London's East End. The process of her transition from a reserved individual to an empowered one serves as an illustration of her hybridization, wherein she assimilates novel customs and values while still preserving her Bangladeshi heritage. Chanu's endeavours in the realm of intellect and his aspirations for recognition serve as a manifestation of his assimilation into a particular culture, while his disillusionment underscores the constraints within a system that may not entirely embrace his presence. Karim, Shahana, and Bibi exemplify the contemporary phenomenon of the younger generation adopting hybrid identities, which serves as a manifestation of the malleability of identity in an increasingly interconnected world and the intricate task of reconciling diverse cultural influences. The character of Razia in 'Brick Lane' serves as a mediator between different cultural backgrounds, offering valuable guidance and perspectives that enhance the protagonist Nazneen's personal development. Her interpersonal connections and efforts in

promoting a cause serve as a testament to the capacity for comprehension and unity that arise from embracing hybridity. The novel exemplifies the multifaceted reactions of individuals to the circumstances that arise in the aftermath of colonialism, demonstrating that the process of hybridization is a vibrant exploration influenced by a range of cultural heritages. Monica Ali adeptly portrays characters within their respective cultural contexts and effectively transposes them into alternative environments, thereby highlighting the complex dynamics that emerge from the interplay of diverse cultures. Ali's research places significant emphasis on the significance of engaging in dialogue, fostering mutual respect, and embracing the ever-changing identities that emerge at the intersection of diverse cultures.

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