
Decoding '*The Tale of the Identity*': Perturbation and Scrimmage in Monica Ali's novel Brick Lane

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Abstract

This research paper explores the life of Nazneen, the protagonist, and explains how she worked hard to define her identity and eventually succeeded. Going through Monica Ali's Brick Lane makes it easy for the readers to comprehend how a foreign country becomes a place of obstacles and difficulty for immigrants. For the distant observer, the struggle to find a suitable living turns into a false consciousness. This book is an eye-opener for the readers since Ali shapes the idea of individuality and self-realization via the representation of Nazneen, which is stronger than any other conception for any subject in a foreign country or at home. The lack of support from their husband made her determined to take a necessary step, which was indeed needed much ago in her life. While returning to her identity, she also faces many predicaments, which become perturbations and scrimmages.

Keywords: Estrangement, communication issues, Bangladeshi immigrants, disorderly struggle, cultural alienation, personality, individual, self-realization.

Introduction

British author Monica Ali is of Bangladeshi and English ancestry. Her debut book *Brick Lane* was named one of the "Best of Young British Novelists" by *Granta* magazine in 2003. The book *Brick Lane*, the tale of British immigrants who attempt to fit in with British society, is stated. The region is described as a place where visitors of all types live in this vivacious and widely recognized street area. The street's original name came from the brick kilns that the early Flemish settlers brought with them. After a turbulent history, the district is well-known for its great Indian and Bangladeshi restaurants, antique shops, and street art. It also has a lot of other international dining options. The term 'Brick Lane' reflects the breadth of her universe, and the protagonist Nazneen feels a feeling of achievement and excitement after an unplanned excursion outside. There is a noticeable and more challenging understanding of estrangement from supposedly better-adjusted members of the Bangladeshi community. In the story, it can be unraveled that Nazneen believed in her fate; therefore, the ultimate role of 'fate' will decide everything in the end, whatever route is followed. She felt that her sufferings were because of her fate, and she had to bear everything patiently without having any idea of emancipation.

Moreover, it can be said from the novel that our fate comes in unexpectedly, and in the story, Nazneen thinks that fate will ultimately decide everything. She believed that her fate predetermined her misery and that she would have to endure everything patiently without thought of freedom. It is somewhere in the end that Ali portrays that the 'tale of the identity' is not yet over when it is seen that Nazneen finally works for herself and her children after her husband, Chanu Ahmed, departs from London.

After reaching London, Nazneen experiences herself in a world related to social contrasts. Communication issues rapidly emerge when

she meets individuals representing another culture through her husband, Chanu. As stated earlier, she did not speak the language when she arrived, but there were other difficulties. She needs to comprehend what he means when Chanu explains his philosophy, which helps her comprehend British poets. Similarly, if he discusses books, additional assignments he is working on, or his forthcoming promotion, he acts as though his wife is not there. Since Nazneen's cultural background is so diverse from that of the new nation, she needs to be more adequately equipped to grasp the various challenges he puts out. As a result, Nazneen finds it difficult to get by in daily life as communication problems make it more complicated, and this brings in unwanted difficulties, which Ali portrays in the novel from the notion of cultural shifts and differences along with diasporic study. Therefore, when Nazneen returns to her sewing enterprise, Ali states that she achieves a dramatic metamorphosis, represented in the story, by accomplishing her desire to participate in the skate sport, as the conclusion points out.

Objectives

- i) To re-evaluate the 'new' in the study of the novel Brick Lane.
 - ii) To highlight critical issues like cultural shifts, cultural differences, cultural isolation, alienation, the quest for identity, and linguistic barriers.
 - iii) To achieve and ensure that the constructed notion of the 'tale of the identity,' which goes through various hurdles and struggles, is properly established.
 - iv) To demonstrate the distinction in the generations of immigrants who bear commonalities to their ethnic groups regarding their language, skin color, and ethnic backgrounds. They have few of the same beliefs as the earlier immigrant generations, though, and they seek to create a new or reshape their identity, which stands for the loss of the assigned in the novel.
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Materials and Methodology

Participatory, exploratory, and observational research approaches are used to study the subject matter. In addition, this study employs a post-positivism perspective. A critical analytical study, which entails carefully examining the texts and analyzing specific sections to explore the significant and original study results, is how the research is enhanced. In addition to the critical analytical research, several secondary texts, including biographies and journals, have been investigated.

Findings and Results

The ‘Perturbation’ and ‘Scrimmage’ faced by the protagonist in Brick Lane

According to Collins dictionary, the term 'perturbation' exemplifies “worry caused due to some event” and ‘Scrimmage’ in British English denotes “a rough or disorderly struggle”. Both these terms are evident in Nazneen's life. Hence, Ali delineates the notion of ‘cultural diversity’ as a complex idea derived from the life of Nazneen, as this notion signifies a range of cultures that may exist in certain parts of the world and are dispersed throughout the world. Due to the presence of individuals from many origins and cultures, London offers an excellent demonstration of cultural variety, which often becomes a standpoint of unwanted hurdles. Hence, the novelist suggests that everyone, involving people who are not a part of society, is intended to value cultural diversity.

Nazneen, an 18-year-old Bangladeshi girl who has been wedded off to a guy who is 20 years older and presently resides in London, is the subject of the plot. With a face resembling a frog and a deep understanding of Bangladeshi history, her partner Chanu is regarded as a man full of desires yet incapable of completing regardless of what he starts. The marriage, nevertheless, seems to have difficulties

as the days go by and the stress gradually emerges. Nazneen believes that despite being in an unfamiliar context, Chanu remains firmly dedicated to the traditions he has strictly adhered to. He is quite specific in his actions and refuses to let her travel independently. Since her birth, Nazneen has been directed that God's plan, i.e., fate, is the only one who can control her life, and she completely embraces the decisions that her father has taken. She sees her life as dependent entirely on her husband to support her in every matter and negotiates with her limited communication abilities and others who speak English.

With the expected arrival of the first baby, Raqib, Chanu tries to choose whether to remain in their newly constructed home or return to their homeland. He thinks that traveling back to his homeland would improve the situation as he is worried about his child getting lost to the detrimental behaviors of the current generation and thinks that the conditions in the area are unpleasant. Nonetheless, Raqib's death has brought a therapeutic attitude to their bond.

Monica Ali depicts in her novel that Nazneen's married life begins to face difficulties, which appear to worsen following the birth of two more girls, which exposes back Chanu's previous desire to leave the country behind to safeguard his girls from the drug-dominated environment and also the mistreatment of Muslims become the main reason behind his decision. The character of Hasina, who is introduced as Nazneen's sister, may be understood in relation. After disobeying her family and fleeing Dhaka with her lover, Hasina discovers that life is not as pleasant as she thought. It is through letters, Nazneen finds out that her sister turned to prostitution after Mr. Chowdhury got furious due to the betrayal of her relationship by Hasina and therefore; he brutally rapes her, and then Hasina resorts to prostitution, eventually meeting Ahmed, who later deserts her. Therefore, it stands as the loss of a happy and independent life. This becomes a crucial concern and,

most importantly, a perturbation and an unwanted struggle, i.e., scrimmage, as Nazneen has already faced cultural alienation and solitude after coming to Tower Hamlets in London.

“Nazneen struggled to her feet. She reminded Razia to take her hat. She suddenly had a picture of Hasina with short hair, striding about in men's trousers and smoking a cigarette with bright, painted lips.” (Ali, Brick Lane, Pg.no. 102)

In the novel, the conflict also focuses on the contrasting experiences of first- and second-generation individuals living in the diaspora. It brings awareness to the issues resulting from variations that have led to conflicts within immigrant households. Although the second generation examines everything, the first embraces every aspect without demanding more. These are the British-Bangladeshi children who accept their mother nation with its language and culture, as they have no firsthand knowledge of the place where their ancestors were born. While they are taught the English language and past events at school, their parents are teaching them to embrace the Bengali culture and language at home. Consequently, they are uncertain of what they are, embrace multiple identities, or choose one identity at the risk of being excluded or even rejected by peers or family.

The novel shows that the second generation of diasporic immigrants need help to appreciate Bangladeshi literature or understand the historical narratives about the country. As an example, Shahana opposes her father. She also does not adhere to gender norms. She communicates in English instead of Bangla. She wears jeans in place of a kameez, which is ironically related to the concept of 'mimicry' by Homi K. Bhabha to bear resemblance with the Britishers in London and merge their identity.

“Shahana did not want to listen to Bengali classical music. Her written Bengali was shocking. She wanted to wear jeans. She

hated her kameez and spoiled her entire wardrobe by pouring paint on them. It was no contest if she could choose between baked beans and dal. 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, Brick Lane, Pg.no.243)

Ali shows the notion of 'perturbation', which ruins the expectation of disharmonizing parents with their daughters. This causes Chanu and Shahana to enter the realm of arguments and disputations. Chanu once utilized the internet to seek out flowers in Bangladesh, and the outcome gave him an abundance of exquisite flower blooms. Shahana termed the beautiful blossoms "boresome" and did not want to look at them when he invited his wife and daughters to see them.

From the post-positivist approach of study, it can be understood that the explanation is looking forward to bringing out the conflict and issues faced by Nazneen and her husband Chanu, and importantly, Nazneen, who cannot settle in London. This makes the readers predict the text that the novelist has advanced into the logical inquiries about cultural isolation and diasporic nature. Therefore, it becomes a stable pattern in understanding reality as coherent, whole, and singular, as evident throughout the references.

Locating the concept of 'identity' of the protagonist in Brick Lane

From facing 'perturbation' and 'scrimmage' by the protagonist in the novel, which slowly shapes into upheaval, the shift in the protagonist's mindset is found in the latter half. Nazneen collapses under the burden of sadness. Her thoughts express her disappointment and loneliness. Nazneen feels even more alienated because of Chanu's demeaning conduct towards her. Moreover, in specific incidents, like

when Nazneen undertakes the courageous decision of bringing her infant to the hospital instead of letting fate decide whether or not it will live, and for the first time, she never treats herself as a mediocre or subaltern. She understood that if she did not learn or cooperate with the communication in London, she had to face violence, which the English dominated the English dominated upon the Bangladeshi immigrants, i.e., the notion of 'episteme violence' which prevailed in Tower Hamlets. Nazneen gets a chance from the baby to speak out, share her views, and stand up to those who disagree with her.

Moreover, when Mrs. Islam offers to take the baby while Nazneen is cleaning the house, but at that moment Nazneen responds to her with a direct and complex no. Back in her tribe, such action towards the older in the social structure would have been considered unacceptable disobedience. Here, Nazneen's personality begins to take form.

Then Mrs. Islam leaves the house, commenting that white people do what they want as if implying that Nazneen starts acting as an independent, autonomous individual. Also, it is found in the novel that, later on, Mrs. Islam departs the residence by commenting that white people do as they desire, thus implying that Nazneen starts acting like an independent, self-sustaining human being.

Sadly, with Nazneen's attempts to fight against fate, her six-month-old baby passes unexpectedly this time around. Nazneen's rebellion ultimately concludes after he expires. The tragic event demonstrates Chanu's generosity and willingness to stand by and care for Nazneen at times of difficulty. When Nazneen is finally allowed to start earning money to repay the loan Mrs. Islam gave Chanu, she has another life-changing event. At this juncture, she is unsure about who she is and her destiny.

“She knew now. Everything was clear. Chanu took a loan. Mrs

Islam had come to collect. But still, Nazneen did not move. She had no money to give. As arranged. Gesturing towards the sewing machine, she gave her only defense. 'Still practicing. Work still needs to be done.'

Mrs Islam considered for a moment. Her tiny black bird eyes fixed on Nazneen's burning face. 'I understand. Forgive a sick and anxious older woman. This arrangement is between friends. Pay when you can.' She made a show of struggling to her feet, and Nazneen helped her, so they embraced her when she was up. Mrs Islam kissed her, hard mouth to soft cheek. 'We understand each other. I will come again. My salaam to your husband.'" (Ali, *Brick Lane*, Pg.no.269-270)

Later, it can be deciphered in the novel that the most crucial turning of circumstances happens when Nazneen's affair with Karim gets started, leading Nazneen to rethink her opinions on the position and significance of women in society at large. Ali mentions that Nazneen's sexual yearning shows the violation of Islamic law for Karim.

"Karim lay on his back with his arms behind his head. Nazneen did not move, her limbs strewn around like the result of a traffic accident. She lay and waited for disgust to stalk its way over and into her. But nothing came. Only the warmth of his body radiating into hers. She had begun to drift into sleep when Karim turned on his side and started to talk. He uttered caresses, whispered promises, moaned, and mumbled his love, sweet with the stupidity of youth, humbled by his stutter. She got up and went to wash and rinsed away his words." (Ali, *Brick Lane*, Pg.no.468)

By indicating that Karim has significance to Nazneen besides having a relationship, Ali expands on the notion of identification.

However, it is also through him that Nazneen understands the current social, political, and religious concerns impacting Britain and the rest of the world. In addition, Nazneen's enthusiasm to learn about worldwide issues from Karim is evident in the novel. However, at a certain point in the novel, Nazneen attends a political meeting with Karim, becoming stronger and more willing to act out of her free will. The election for chairman is close, and Nazneen realizes she has the power to influence important decisions in the world.

Also, the character, Hasina, i.e., Nazneen's younger sister, also widens her outlook on the condition of London, and this also gives birth to self-realization and also a moment of epiphany for Nazneen, as she discovers the harsh barriers faced by Bangladeshi immigrants from the settled groups. Nazneen's daughters play a huge role in bringing the spirit of confidence and rebellion as an individual, which helps the readers to decode the ultimate objective that Nazneen could find about her life, resulting in answering to Chanu that she is responsible enough to make her own choices with her daughters now in Tower Hamlets, London. Nazneen's choice is eventually triggered by Shahana's missing from their home on the evening of their departure to Bangladesh. Ali eventually establishes Nazneen's choice triggered by Shahana's missing from their home on the evening of their departure to Bangladesh. At that moment, Nazneen continues to possess an honest estimate of what it would be like to go back to Bangladesh. For Nazneen, a particular aspect becomes more evident throughout this time, i.e., making decisions for herself represents what she desires to master.

Discussion and Conclusion

This re-evaluative study makes an astonishing revelation. By the moment Monica Ali's novel "Brick Lane" ends, the main character, Nazneen, goes through a tremendously enlightening and self-discovery journey. Nazneen's representation in "Brick Lane" has been highlighted

by an intense feeling of patience. In an atmosphere of immigration and diversity, the book's conclusion emphasizes the aspects of the ability to adapt, resilient traits, and the multifaceted relationship between tradition and modernity.

Nazneen faces several obstacles, cultural misunderstandings, and personal difficulties throughout the book. Her capacity for adaptability in the face of shifts and difficulties and her understanding of her life's intricate details are proof of her persistence. She overcomes societal, cultural, and individual obstacles through her events on Brick Lane, rediscovering her sense of self and personality. Nazneen's capacity to find her voice, make her own decisions, and be strong in the face of hardship make this persistence an important field of study.

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