
DISPLACEMENT AND FRACTURED IDENTITY IN BRICK LANE

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Abstract: Every post-colonial community struggles with the issue of identity, it would not be exaggeration to say that this is the most controversial and important topic to come out of the post-colonial age and literature. The crisis came to the surface due to the circumstances of the post-colonial age and the challenging situations that challenge newly emancipated nations and countries in their search for and construction of self-identity. The issue of identity is not a clear and fixed concept as it may be imagined. The Oxford English Dictionary defines "identity" as the fact of being who or what a person or thing is. However, in a postcolonial environment, identity is a complicated term that is difficult to define. As one can see, the identity of an individual, a group or a nation in postcolonial terms is linked to the 'other' which means they recognize themselves as 'us' in the presence of the 'other'(web).

Keywords: post-colonial, crisis, self-identity, nations etc.

Discussion: Monika Ali is a British writer born in Bangladesh. Her works, particularly Brick Lane, reflect her personal experience

with identity crisis. It would be fair enough to say that Monica Ali has provided a voice to those who are living a diaspora life in an alien land. Nazneen and Chanu Ahmed play a significant role in the novel Brick Lane. Nazneen is an immigrant from Bangladesh. She and Chanu both are bound together by an arranged marriage. She experiences cultural conflict in London and struggles to strike a balance between the two cultures. She struggles to identify herself with her native country and thus has to deal with an identity problem in the host country.

The novel Brick Lane is the story of Nazneen, an 18-year-old Bangladeshi girl. She is taken to England to marry Chanu whom she has never seen before. He is considerably older than her. Unlike Nazneen's native nation, her life in London is drastically different. She encounters difficulties as she adjusts to this unfamiliar and new life. Her troubled search for identity begins and she eventually changes. This search develops her identity. The other women depicted in Brick Lane also face identity crisis and problems. Monju, Aleya, Jorina, and Amina - all deal with being both women and foreigners. Nazneen's friend Razia seems to represent the modern, feminist, westernized woman that Nazneen eventually becomes. Razia does not care what others say. She wears a Union Jack sweater as a statement of her modernity and

ability to adapt to a new culture and society. She enlightens Nazneen on all of the wonderful things England offers. Life is not easy for Nazneen's daughter Shahana either. Shahana is torn between the cultures of her parents and the only culture she knows. On the one hand, it is expected that Shahana would study English at school. At the same time, her father forbids her to speak English at home. Shahana fears that her father may ultimately relocate the family to Bangladesh. She behaves as if she is ashamed of her family background. She wants to follow western trends like piercing of tattoos and wearing short skirts. She refuses to eat Bangladeshi food, responds angrily to her father's instructions and acts harshly toward her younger sister. According to Julios, similar issues are widespread in the households of second-generation immigrants in the United Kingdom. Children quickly develop multiple identities and wonder who they are and what they want to be. They undergo a sort of uncertainty because the languages, cultural traditions, faiths and ethnic identities they find at home are entirely different at school. "By being brought up in a bicultural and bilingual environment, second generation 105 UK-born immigrants are torn apart between simultaneous but incompatible desires, realities and drives" (Julios 13). Homburger Erikson argues that identity development is a generational issue for young people. There might be more tension between father and daughter because of this issue. Homburger Erikson asserts that a child also seeks out role models against which to measure himself, and finds happiness in resembling them.

Nazneen is forced to adapt to and integrate into a society vastly different from the one she was born in. As a result, she has profound feelings of loneliness. As a woman and a Bangladeshi, she is unfamiliar with the social norms of England. Her spouse discourages her from enrolling in English classes. Chanu emphasises the value of knowledge, which makes his choices about his wife seem paradoxical. As a guy, he is terrified of what other Bangladeshis in the community may say about him, therefore, he tries to exert control over his wife. Christina Julios discusses the value of education and language acquisition in a new nation by saying that ". . . to speak English is part of the British identity" (Contemporary British Identity 14–15). However, when immigrants gather in small communities in their new country, the need to learn the new language is not always obvious: Such population movements into the UK have resulted in the development of large enclaves of minority ethnic linguistic settlements in certain urban and metropolitan areas across the country. London, for instance, has become home to the largest concentration of Sylheti-speaking Bangladeshis in the United Kingdom and anywhere outside Bangladesh.... (Julios 15)

There are many cultural differences that Nazneen has to deal with. She is introduced to a new culture by her spouse Chanu whom her father found for her. Communication issues start appearing quickly. When Nazneen first comes, she does not speak a word of English but the issues go beyond language barriers.

Nazneen has no idea what her spouse is talking about when he discusses philosophy and quotes from various British poets. When he discusses his future promotion, his books, and the other projects he is working on, he acts as if his wife were not there. Chanu converses with no one else but himself. The things that Nazneen observes in her new country are surprising. She does not understand why women care about getting their dogs to lose weight. Such petty preoccupations did not exist in Bangladesh, and being slim may indicate poverty. Nonetheless, Nazneen loves that the English mind their own business in many aspects. When Nazneen gives birth to Raqib, Mrs Islam, regarded by some as the most honorable elderly Bangladeshi neighbour, tries to dictate how Nazneen raises him. Nazneen begins to truly value the English reserve at this point since she dislikes Mrs Islam's visits.

According to Hall, identity is complex and problematic. He argues that identity is a production which is never complete and is always in the process (Cultural Identification and Diaspora) His argument is consistent with Nazneen's character. Nazneen must adjust to the new culture in England and discover her true self to fit in. As the narrative progresses, Nazneen's identity develops and shifts in response to the events in her surroundings. Originally, she is a shy girl from a hamlet in Bangladesh. She matures rapidly in her new town and nation. After the incident where she goes for a walk, she begins to view her existence in a more optimistic way. She is, nevertheless, up against certain challenges. One day, Nazneen walks past a sign that

warns her and others that smoking, eating, and drinking are prohibited: "All the signs, thought Nazneen, they only tell you what not to do" (Brick Lane 64). The notice is a metaphor for the constraints under which Nazneen must work.

Language is frequently used as a means for ethnic groups to identify themselves. This is what Chanu does in the novel Brick Lane. In order to preserve the Bangladeshi identity in his family, he prevents his daughters from speaking English and his wife from enrolling in English classes. Another motive may be that it provides him with power and control. Chanu worries that the traditional values and concepts of Bangladesh would be lost with the introduction of English language. Hence, language of the family must be preserved. He also depicts identity issues through religion. Even though he emphasises the significance of Islam, Nazneen claims that he never prays. Chanu also talks about how Bengalis have been Hindus and Buddhists in the past, "We are only Muslims because of the Moguls. Don't forget" (Brick Lane 197). Chanu also opposes enrolling his daughters in the mosque school. He may be giving off the impression that he is religious to maintain his Bangladeshi identity. Chanu reveals that identity is a concern to him in the following way:

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 children who don't know what their identity is (Brick Lane 113).

Conclusion: In Brick Lane, Bangladeshi immigrants face identity crises in their neighborhoods where they are not the sole settled immigrants. People from various regions and communities surround them. White and black people are with them. "In the flats immediately next door, there were white people"(BrickLane 304). The Bangladeshis come into contact with people of many ethnicities, and share everyday life experiences with them. Ali describes their experiences of shopping: "A group of African girls tried on shoes... a white girl stood in front of a mirror turning this way and that" (Brick Lane, 392-94). This demonstrates that they have the solidarity to identify with other members of society, even though the others belong to various groups, societies and races of the world. They all share one identity in the host country and this new identity is quite different from their original one. The only thing that matters is their current identity

which is fractured and regardless of what race or country they belong to.

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