

Succumb or Survive: A Diasporic Study of Monica Ali's Brick Lane

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ABSTRACT

The imaginative literature mirrors the authentic feelings in various circumstances. There are so many genres which depicts the reality of the world. When a group of people leave their country because of any adverse conditions, they try to find their unfulfilled dreams in a foreign land. They will get trapped between their old and new lifestyle. Diaspora literature sketches the life of such immigrants in foreign land. *Brick Lane*, written by Monica Ali, silhouettes the shattered dreams of Bangladeshi immigrants in Britain. The novel, published in 2003, tells the story of dilemma of Nazneen, Chanu and their children as representation of anguish of being a minority. Though the novel mainly focuses on the growth of the protagonist Nazneen, there is an efficient delineation of inner conflict of Chanu, a Bengali man trapped in his own fragmented life. The novel also implies how racism affects the life of immigrants. The paper attempts to depict the dejected lives of settlers and how they encounter the hurdles in their life.

Key Words: Immigrants, Unemployment, Marginalization.

DIASPORA LITERATURE

The term Diaspora refers to the emigration of people from one nation to another mostly in search of better living condition. The term first referred Jews community who were scattered from Palestine. Through the ages the term acquired the baggage of relocation of communities from one place to another. Diaspora Literature, thus, delineates the predicament of immigrants. The unwillingness to shed the native identities and the urge to assimilate new identities and the devastated state of belonging nowhere are the foundation themes which diasporic writers relish most. The characters, who are dream stricken, struggle to maintain a decent life in a foreign land. They are trapped between the two cultures. The ambivalent emotions, internally glued to their native culture and explicitly urge to be the part of foreign culture, they encounter challenges in every strata of life.

Monica Ali is a Bangladesh born British writer. Displaced to London at the age of three, she is notable in her free expression of views. Her debut novel *Brick Lane* (2003) was shortlisted for Man Booker prize. *Brick Lane* is not an exception, pictures the inner deep conflicts of characters. This research paper focuses the denigration of immigrants in a foreign land as depicted in the novel *Brick Lane*

Ali, in the novel, portrays her characters in the context of travails and triumphs, success and failures. Her authorial gaze on the life being caught between what they left behind and what they aspire for and tragic dilemma that continues finds life in the characters of this novel. The paper tries to capture the inner conflict of diasporic community by analyzing the characters.

Chanu

The novel looms the theme of identity, self determination, confidence and also the frailties of Bangladeshi- Britain immigrants. Chanu, the microcosm of all Bangladeshi immigrants in Britain faces crisis of being the first generation immigrants. On an intense analysis a reader can understand how being a bread earner in a foreign land faces failures from every nook and crannies. The sense of alienation that any community feels on moving away from motherland manifolds by the hostility of foreign culture and also people. He had his dreams of entering into an affluent life in Britain. He believed his degree from Dhaka University would help him. The place, where racial discrimination writ all over it he neither finds a reputed job nor a decent life. Fate plays a wonderful game in his life who culminated to become a taxi driver to earn money to buy tickets to return to his homeland. His conversation with Dr. Azad, a Bangladeshi Doctor, reflects his shattered dreams:

I am forty years old,' said Chanu. He spoke quietly like the doctor, with none of his assurance. 'I have been in this country for sixteen years. Nearly half my life'... '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. (Ali 34)

He is seen as very ambitious and with full confidence. He thinks he will be fully fledged academic with two degrees and one from British University and thinks of getting good chance. He treats himself as an intellect and different from other immigrants "peasants who jumped off the boat possessing only the lice on their heads" (Ali 34). He did all he can do and made a promise to himself to be a success and to back to his country when he is a success. This feeling in the words of Dr. Azad is 'Going Home Syndrome'. Chanu does not want to integrate to the new land. He only needs to have a rich life. He treats England only as a money land. He does not want to imbibe the foreign culture in him or his family.

The mental state of Chanu is analogous to the mind of a colonized man. According to Homi K Bhabha, the colonized subject to mimic the colonizers by adopting the colonizers' cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values. Bhabha (1994) says that "Mimicry is thus the sign of double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which "appropriates" the Other as it visualizes power" (122).

Chanu's sojourn has the aim of getting a decent and respectable life in Bangladesh after he gets back to his country. This mentality is shadowing in his every deeds. As a husband and also as a father of two girls he is trying to imbibe the native culture in them. He had a perfect idea of getting his girls the native culture, in their dressing and also religiously. The patriarchal ideology creates tension in the family. Bibi and Shahana, as they are second generation immigrants, who born and brought up in Britain, have a rude attitude to their own culture. When Chanu declared that they are going back to Bangladesh, the girls protest harshly. Different from Chanu theirs is not Mimicry but hybrid. They inculcate the foreign culture as their own and would encounter any hurdles to achieve their goals. But Chanu Succumbed.

Nazneen

Nazneen, an uneducated, naïve village girl, after an arranged marriage to twenty year elder Chanu displaced to an unaccustomed situation. Most of her time, she confined in her four walls of apartment, really not having any companions. Yet she settled in east London, hers is not a fascinating life. Her relationship with mother and her sister portrays the plight of women in Bangladesh Nazneen cleaned and cooked and washed. She made breakfast for Chanu and looked on as he ate, collected his pens and put them in his briefcase, watched him from the window as he stepped like a band leader across the courtyard to the bus stop on the far side of the estate. Then she ate standing up at the sink and washed the dishes. She made the bed and tidied the flat, washed socks and pants in the sink and larger items in the bath. (Ali 41)

At first she is not seen as a woman with dreams and at times she fails to become a supportive partner to Chanu. But later on she started to find new horizon. As they settled in London and Chanu, as educated husband, yet she fails to find freedom. "I don't stop you from doing anything. I am westernized now. It is lucky for you that you married an educated man" (Ali 45). She loves the company of other Muslim Women from her neighbourhood. But Chanu denied companionship with other women. The constant struggle between two racial identities and the treatment as other, Nazneen is a representation of woman who tries to overcome the double discrimination. Nazneen undergoes double marginalization, as a woman and also a member of minority. Loss of their first son and financial fluctuations, birth of two daughters further made her just a living robot inside four walls.

From a mentally paralysed condition, Nazneen sprouts to an independent business lady at the end. When Chanu worry about their fate in the foreign land and decides to get back to Bangladesh, Nazneen helps him by starting a small business. Karim, a young and vibrant man, helps her to identify the harsh realities of Muslim population in Britain. When their daughters protest against Chanu's decision, Nazneen with strong determination express their wish to stay back in London. Stuart Hall in *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* says that Diasporic identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. Nazneen transformed and determined to battle. From a self-denied village girl to a woman with self-esteem, Nazneen finds a world of dreams "In front of her was a huge white circle, bounded by four-foot-high boards. Glinting, dazzling, enchanting ice. She looked at the ice and slowly it revealed itself" (Ali 492) Nazneen, unlike Chanu, is not ready to succumb, she fought, survived. She falls in a relationship with Karim, who helps her to identify herself. But, towards the end Nazneen either returns to her husband or continues relation with Karim. She evolved as an independent woman who is not afraid to sing publicly and is confident to raise her children in an alien land.

Ali looms the story of ethereal battles of Diaspora. The resilient self of characters is determined to win. Chanu, Nazneen and their family are puppets of the external world and the miniature of expatriate who with an affluent dream about life. Either they win or succumb. Displacement from native place to another country for financial and academic reasons becomes a painful experience for Chanu and also for Nazneen. But the return from Britain back home is more painful for Chanu as his plans, aspirations, ambitions are scattered and he has to leave his family behind in Britain.

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