Cultural Clash and Identity search in Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*

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*Brick Lane* reflects the growing shifts in culture and identity that arise with immigrants of the first and second generation. The novel shows that the second generation faces a different setting when it comes to immigrants, due to a change in their environment and exposure to different cultures, which leads to their identity crises. Yet their new identity contrasts with their parents’ identity and therefore generates a ‘cultural clash.’ Characters in the first generation start sharing the qualities of being outraged at changing cultural values during immigration, while in exchange for the freedom to be accepted by British society in the second generation they want to conform. Monica Ali shows how immigration induces a difference in culture between the first and second generation through its characters and the use of language.

Life of Nazneen becomes a cavern as she crosses the obstacles set down for herself and her daughters by her parenting, society, nation, and individuality. Leaving a profound impact on Nazneen, the mother of Nazneen was controlled by Nazeen's father who never gave her the chance to speak up her mind and emotions. Nazneen's mother is trying to construct her daughters Nazneen and Hasina's personalities by showing them the value of destiny and femininity in women's lives. The life of Nazneen and her birth itself stand as a testimony to the fate of her mother.

When she grew up, she heard many stories of "How you were left to your destiny."... Blood can weaken her by battling one's destiny. It can be deadly sometimes or maybe most of the time. The birthplace of Nazneen is an example of closed confines of cultural boundaries and
patriarchal set-up that treat women as inferior. As a human being born to follow and regulate all around them.

On the other hand, West's multicultural atmosphere gives Nazneen the opportunity to challenge East and West's hegemonic practices. In Brick Lane's concrete quarters she is uncomfortable with her boring life. She feels a complete stranger, leaving Gouripur's open skies in the first years of her arrival in a foreign country. Wherever she goes, a constant ghost home follows her. She finds her hand in hand with her sister Hasina always in her dreams. Her childhood flashbacks continue to occupy her. The only hope in her worldly life is the ghetto company that is a closed cultural group. She gets an opportunity to communicate in her own language at the Bangladeshi women's party, celebrate home festivals, and discuss the land memories left behind with nostalgia.

The household of Nazneen is revolving around Chanu. She keeps herself busy throughout the day by keeping the apartment clean, preparing meals and either watching the by-passers or the 'tattoo lady' from the window of her apartment. Nazneen is an example of all those women who follow their husbands to the foreign land not in search of any personal effort but in serving the wife's social responsibility. Nazneen follows Chanu to London like a mute animal following its owner. She is an outsider who does not know the foreign language, people and the multiculturalism challenge.

The theme of the novel centers on Nazneen's transformation and her journey to other country. Because of moral obligation, she gets married to a man older than her. She gets the courage to practice her company as a powerful individual who has the ability to challenge the gendered boundaries in work and culture in her home only in the open environment of the West.
She slowly gains confidence in exploring the world of earning money, expressing her latent sexual desires with Karim—a young Bangladeshi boy and emerging emancipated from all barriers.

The uptick of Nazneen's personality leads her to experience the loss, happiness, maternity, friendship, and ultimate rejection. The novel is split into two stages that show the individual development of Nazneen. The first period starts from her London advent and ends with her first Raqib child's death. The next phase of empowerment ranges from the birth of her daughters Shahana and Bibi, Karim's affair, Chanu's time in work, and Nazneen's financial development in a foreign country, to the dream of assimilation of her daughter. Her relationship with Razia encourages Nazneen's transmutation from inferior to equal society members. All the protagonists of this novel by conventional Bangladeshian women in confines have a west slice. The struggle for home constraints and intrinsic passion is that of witnessing the whirlpool of the radical West that induces the Brick Lane Bangladeshi women's diaspora to doubt and demand freedom from gender roles.

In Brick Lane, Monica Ali presents immigrants of the second generation whose expectations and preferences generally clash with those of their parents or the Bangladeshi community or the British society's mainstream. The novel provides plenty of material about the cultures clash and the generations clash. The novel describes how these children found refuge in this kind of life because in one culture they refused to suit fully. Ali's visions of the 2001 protests and the effects on Bangladeshi immigrants' lives of the 9/11 attacks reinforce the big picture. None of these second-generation Bangladeshis passively lament about or surrender to their status in society; on the contrary, they revolt against all aspects of their lives, including the dominant racist and discriminatory attitudes, political, social and family stresses, and their own economic problems. Ali depicts Bangladeshi girls who imitate British girls of their age in the same way
that they are subjected to the hegemonic impact of British culture and society from the time they were raised, through their preferences, fashion, tastes, education, and linguistic abilities. Shefali is totally different from her mother as she is totally absorbed in her exams to be admitted into college; however, she stuns her mother by sharing her desire to spend a year doing nothing before university, as most teens do in Britain.

Compared to Shefali’s, Azad’s boy is completely assimilated with her attitude and etiquette because she has discoloured hair, wears short skirts, chews gum before parents, and goes to pubs with her mates. Azad, Shefali, Shahana, and Bibi are fluent English speakers, and at school, they have British education. Mastering a different language also provides Shahana with an opportunity to demonstrate her distinction and denounce her father. Shahana learned English as her second language, unlike her mum, who can barely speak a few words in English. Although Chanu speaks English fluently, his daughters don’t like to speak English, but when he is out the girls turn to English as a conversation. But unlike Azad and Shefali, Chanu remains conventional and does not allow Shahana and Bibi to enjoy the fluency of freedom and they should be provided with schooling in English. Chanu’s fury stems from his assumption that the girls fit Karim’s pejorative description of a westernized girl who

“wears what she likes, all the make-up going on, short skirts and that soon as she is out of her father’s sight. She’s into going out, getting good jobs, having a laugh” by speaking their language and by imitating their behavior, manners and tastes “(Brick Lane, p. 384).

Shahana and the girls like her obviously don't want to live like her parents and are totally different from their parents. In contrast to her mother, she refuses to wash her hair with liquid hair and calls for lotions and skin hydrating. As Chanu tries to teach his daughters how to use a
computer, he is amazed to learn that Shahana knows a lot more about technology than her brother.

Another point of conflict between the girls and their parents is clothes. Occasionally, Shefali's clothes bother her mother. Once Razia wore one of the glittering jackets and complained bitterly about it “Shefali tried to go out of the house wearing some little thing like this” (BL, p. 231). Likewise, Shahana insists on wearing Bangladeshi traditional clothing and insists on using jeans and skirts in school, as her British friends. Chanu also gets upset with her for her inadequate clothing and warns her “to put on some decent clothes” (BL, p. 252); however, Shahana seizes every chance like her mother’s nervous breakdown and her father’s consequent distraction as an opportunity to wear “her tight jeans” (BL, p. 327). When Chanu warns her about rubbish on TV, she dares to talk back to her father: “How do you know it is rubbish if you even don’t know what it is?” (BL, p. 319).

Ali depicts Shahana as a disobedient girl who fails to contribute anything to the culture, behaviors, beliefs, likes, and practices of her parents. Shahana is one of the second-generation immigrants who are

“stranded between two cultures, in conflict with their parents, facing the difficulty of negotiating two incommensurable value systems. The problem was that they might not integrate smoothly into British society; the authoritarian and old-fashioned cultures of their parents deemed to be holding them back” (Parker, 1995: 12).

In preparation for mela, she shared bluntly her hatred of Bangladeshi music. Chanu plays music from the renowned singers in Bangladesh but "Shahana has stuck her fingers in her ears and has her face distorted" (BL, p. 359). She rejects everything she compares to the people and culture of Bangladesh: Shahana does not want to hear classical Bengali music. She chose jeans to wear.
By rubbing paint on her she despised her kameez, her whole wardrobe was ruined. It wasn't a competition if she could choose from baked beans and dal. When Bangladesh was mentioned she pulled a face.

“She did not know and would not learn that Tagore was not more than poet and Nobel laureate, and no less than the true father of her nation. Shahana did not care”. (BL, p. 180)

Chanu is fiercely trying to teach his girls about Islam, the history of Bangladesh, and the Bangladeshi culture; but Shahana obviously sees his culture and traditions as inadequate and filthy. During their first and only bus trip, their self-consciousness and self-discrimination became evident when their parents worry they "stopped the bus" (BL, p. 290); this indicates that they felt that sub continental stinks were a stereotypical characteristic. Her disaffection with her family and the culture they represent becomes exasperation and overt insubordination with the decision by Chanu to come back for good to Bangladesh. She does not want to go to Bangladesh at all and she regards her father’s decision as “kidnap” (BL, p. 374) because for her Bangladesh is a foreign country that she identifies with backwardness, oppression, and degradation. Bangladesh is, for Shahana, a country in which men use brush and water rather than toilet paper, and husbands beat their wives. She has such a gloomy view of the country that her husband will "lock her up in a room with fine stones to make...... weaving tapestries throughout the day" (Ali BL, p. 395). She takes more drastic steps beside her sobbing, hysteria and physical attacks on her friend, Bibi and her husband. She attempts to cajole her father with different forms of self-mutilation because she needs her lip to be cut and a piercing that her dad does not take from her such disgusting marks.
But this jury does not work, "because children have been anxiously corrupted" (BL, p. 438). "Shahana was-564-stamped on her foot...' I pray she'd get broke,' said Shahana. She took another step and attempted to pull off his leg to avoid or at least delay her return. Her thumb joints were broken "(BL, p. 438). She fled to Paignton with another girl of her age "with no Bangladeshi men and they could do what they wished" with a helpless awareness that she cannot make her father change her mind (BL, p. 466). It is worth noting that Nishi, with whom Shahana escapes, does so because Nishi doesn't like her elder sister who got married when she was seventeen. She clearly said "I didn't demand that I was born here" (BL, p. 181), and indeed, Shahana clearly expressed her distress. From her birth, she was exposed to the irrefutable impact of British culture and is being anglicized all the time and inevitably. The hegemonic British culture minimizes the influence the Chanu has actively tried to impress on the Bangladeshi community. Therefore, Shahana cannot meet with her father's expectations and the larger community in Bangladesh hopes to have her. Her defiance is a result of her lifestyle that exposes her to British society and culture's hegemonic effect. As a typical teenager of the second generation who was raised and born in Britain, she is fully responsive to British culture's cultural impositions. If it were not for her father, it would be easier and simpler to incorporate her into the British culture. Shahana, Shefali, Nishi and Azad's aunt, amid all the setbacks, veer towards eventual incorporation into the dominant culture.

_**Brick Lane**_ depicts the plight of various characters torn among their origins in Bangladesh and the new British culture they could not fully fit into. The community is broken down by this cultural dilemma and the family characters feel compelled to take other instructions. Nazneen, the female protagonist in the story is fed up with trying to carry a heavy burden of infancy that is ever trailing the remnants of her society of Bangladesh, who push her to
blindly obey and exist as a shadow to her husband. Nazneen struggles to balance and relies on her to choose a different path very late. And she sits on her husband’s ‘ faces for the first time in her life and refuses to return to Bangladesh. The main reason for her decision to stay in the UK is her desire to stay with her daughter. For her children, Nazneen doesn’t want anything to compromise. She thus embraces the change and feels free for the first time in her life to make her own choice. The Half-Bangladisia-Half-British Nazene creates a new identity. A woman's identity that preserves and works in Bangladeshi takes her own choice and above all adapts to life's changing circumstances. And we eventually come to the conclusion that Monica Ali has brilliantly represented the lives of different characters only broken between two worlds: between their own backgrounds and acclimatization into a new cultural setting.

Ali seems to prove successfully the argument that the clashing ideologies and opposing cultures will always remain as the horizon in which the world (conflicting generations) and the sky (clashing ideologies of gender) will never merge and coexist, and thus the writer shows that this collision of culture will only lead to the creation of a new identity. The novel also sheds light on the racial clash's distinct impact on both sexes. While all male characters struggle to develop their cultural and social identities and eventually give up accepting failure, from the broken pieces of both identities, the female characters emerge with flying colors and excel in building a new identity. Without a question, both Brick Lane and Nazneen Ahmed will certainly prove to be ' sirens of consciousness' for all the diasporic immigrants of the 21st century striving to build their identity and authentic self-confidence in the midst of a demanding social environment of conflicting ideologies and intergenerational disputes.

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