

# **THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES**

## **Courage through Migration: In Monica Ali's Novel *Brick Lane***

**K. Krishna Kumari**

Assistant Professor, DMI Engineering College  
Aralvaimozhy, Kanya Kumari District, Nagercoil, India

**Abstract:**

*In this paper, my aim is to focus on a woman character Nazneen, who always sinks in her difficulties throughout the novel. She is a eighteen year old typical Bangladeshi woman, who marries to a forty year old Chanu, settles in London after marriage. She is forced and pushed into her marriage life. Chanu is very proud of his language and shows himself as the one and only educated person in London. As a Bangladeshi, Nazneen is an uneducated woman who experiences different kinds of problem throughout her life. Nazneen tries to develop her English language, but he bands her not to speak. He prevents Nazneen and his daughters not to speak English at least at home. According to Chanu, a woman should stand in their life only as a servant to man. They should not have any wishes or ideas to develop themselves. After marriage, Chanu forgets to cut his hair, nails, and clip his nose hairs. It is she who does everything and keeps his apartment clean, wash his clothes and bear his children. Nazneen is always insecure, confused, lonely and isolated. She always suffers between her Bangladeshi background and her new identity in London. Nazneen's identity is shattered not only by the British cultural identities but also by her husband. Her mother always instructs her to accept all distresses with unresponsiveness. She agrees all her sufferings which are imposed by different roles in her life. She is a serene human being who is tied to her fate for all time. Nazneen has an attraction with a political devotee man called Karim, who always demand her to begin a new life with him. After realizing the true love of her daughters and her husband, Nazneen full stops her attraction with Karim. She starts changing her life and decides to take decision by her own and diverts her husband. She stays in England with her children leaving her husband. She also gets a job, and decides not to turn her life to Karim. The title "Courage through migration" proves Nazneen, whose courage is brought out through migration to London after her continuous sufferings.*

### **1. Introduction**

A woman's courage is always within herself. It comes out when the situation is apt to show off. A woman always sinks in her difficulties. She tries to come out when there is only option to face her death. Why a woman should face the death? Why can't she face her life? Yes. In this novel *Brick Lane*, Nazneen the protagonist, migrates from Bangladesh to Britain after her marriage with Chanu. Nazneen is a typical Bangladeshi woman. In Bangladesh, women are forced to suffer in all ways. They are like a wood which never sinks, but always breathe their pain throughout the life. Nazneen faces many obstacles and challenges in her personal life. She puts herself to fate and searches her power and identity.

### **2. Migration**

Migration always creates problems. It leads to isolation. In the novel *Brick Lane*, Monica Ali has shown the position of women in families after migration. They arrived without ambition, but grasp their chances as they turned up. Through revealing the problems of immigrant woman in this novel, Monica Ali is recognized as the "*Brick Lane* Writer" throughout the world. Diaspora writers always pursue to stop any universal idea which is accepted by others. They protect their prejudice, difference and marginality. As a diaspora writer, Monica Ali begins the novel through Nazneen a Bangladeshi girl, marries at least forty years old Chanu and shifted to London after her arranged marriage. They live in the border line of gladness. She has no right to say her ideas. "The man she would marry was old. At least forty years old. He had face like a frog. They would marry and he would take her back to England with him. She looked across the fields, glittering green and gold in the brief evening light" (17).

### **3. Double Alienation**

Nazneen experiences double alienation throughout the novel. She does not feel societal in England. London culture totally changes her. Monica Ali always declines to accept open finding about the community. This novel disappoints all the Bangladeshi Muslims for showing them as a cartoon picture with no respects.

Monica Ali has written an amazing introduction "What could not be changed must be borne. And since nothing could be changed, everything had to be borne. And since nothing could be changed, everything had to be borne. This principle ruled her life. It was mantra, fettle and challenge" (16).

Monica Ali has given importance to the characters like Nazneen, Shahana and Tariq and shown their identity crisis through double alienation. Their identity always has a constant change. These characters are insecure, confused, lonely and isolated. It expresses many common and individual clashes. Nazneen suffers between her Bangladeshi background and her new identity in London. Nazneen's identity is shattered not only by the British cultural identities but also by her husband. Chanu prevents Nazneen and his daughters not to speak English at least at home. "We are not allowed to speak English in this house," said Shahana, transgressing at top volume" (193). He is very proud of his language and shows himself as the one and only educated person in London. "I have a degree in English Literature from Dhaka University. I have studied at a British University – philosophy, sociology, history, economics. I do not claim to be a learned gentleman. But I can tell you truthfully, madam, that I am always learning" (112).

#### 4. Suppression

*Brick Lane* is a unequalled novel that portraits the society. Nazneen is looked upon with suspicion throughout the novel. She always thinks that it is waste to fight against fate. Her mother always instructs her to accept all distresses with unresponsiveness. She agrees all her sufferings which are imposed by different roles in her life. She is a serene human being who is tied to her fate for all time.

She had to concentrate hard to get through each day. Sometimes she felt as if she held her breath the entire evening. It was up to her to balance the competing needs, to soothe here and urge there, and push the day along to its close. When she failed, and there was a cheek, she felt dizzy with responsibility. When she succeeded, she made it a mantra not to forget, not to let it go to her head. *Becareful, becareful, becareful*. It took all her energy. It took away longing. Her wants were close at hand, real and within her control. If only of Hasina, but she made her thoughts as efficient as possible. (205)

After marriage, Chanu forgets to cut his hair, nails, and clip his nose hairs. It is she who does everything and keeps his apartment clean, wash his clothes and bear his children. She judges her life believing that nothing can bring changes in her fate.

#### 5. Two Images

Two images of femininity are shown through the characters like Nazneen and Hasina. Nazneen invites her arranged marriage and a perfect daughter to her family.

"As Nazneen grew heard many times this story of How You Were Left To Your Fate. It is because of her mother's wise decision that Nazneen lived to become the wide-faced, watchful girl that she was. Fighting against one's Fate can weaken the blood. Sometimes, or perhaps most times, it can be fatal. Not once did Nazneen question the logic of the story of How You Were Left To Your Fate" (15).

Hasina takes her fate into her hands. She prostitutes with all kinds of men. "It worried her that Hasina kicked against fate. No good could come of it. Not a single person could say so. But then if you really looked into it, thought about it more deeply, how could you be sure that Hasina was not simply following her fate?" (22).

Nazneen is always dilapidated between her present and past life. She always feels lower and inferior. "Hasina tugged her away and they raided the store for tamarind sauce and henna. They stuck their fingers in the tamarind and sucked it off, like sweet and sour toffee. They drew circles and stars on their palms with the henna, and then smudged them doing handstands in the dust" (103).

Nazneen has an attraction with a political devotee man called Karim, who always demand her to begin a new life with him. After realizing the true love of her daughters and her husband, Nazneen full stops her attraction with Karim. She starts changing her life and decides to take decision by her own and diverts her husband. She stays in England with her children leaving her husband. She also gets a job, and decides not to turn her life to Karim.

"Karim had a new style. The gold necklace vanished; the jeans, shirts and trainers went as well. Some of the parents were telling daughters to leave their headscarves at home. Karim put on Panjabi-pyjama and a skullcap. Nazneen saw him running his finger over the labels. When he took off the fleece he laid it down with care. Nazneen felt that Karim did not want her to mention the new clothes. The matter was either too trivial or else too important to be discussed" (376).

Hasina's continuous prostitution makes her life a question mark. "My liver is gone I cannot last much longer. Who will protect you if not him? I let you go. This life is finish. Begin another. I speak to Ahmed again. Again he is pressing. I tell him this. I am a low woman. I am nothing. I have nothing. I am all that I have. I can give you nothing. Still he insists. I do not know what to do" (171).

Chanu and Karim are shown as a two different poles. Karim is one of the leaders of Muslim community who opposes and fights against the British people. "Lion Hearts," someone shouted from the floor. We are against," said Karim, "any group that opposes us" (241).

Chanu is an old and unfit man who does not mingle with British people. He stresses the importance of Islam but he never used to pray. "Narrow hips! You could wish for such a fault, Nazneen said to herself, thinking of the rolls of fat that hung low from Chanu's stomach. It would be possible to tuck all your hundred pens and pencils under those rolls and keep them safe and tight" (23). He is a dedicated father and believes that his daughters are a wonderful blessing of God. But he never shows off his love openly.

The girls stood before their father and twisted their toes into the carpet. Chanu sat cross-legged on the floor. Leaning forward, his belly filled the thigh-and calf cradle. Chairs were out of favour. He was a floor man now. 'Come,' he said. 'Begin.' He clapped his hands together. Shahana pushed Bibi with her elbow. Bibi drew circles with her big toe. Her plaits hung around her face; rope ladders to the roof of her head. Chanu held up an open hand. It was a gesture for peace, or a threat to Bibi. (178)

## 6. Immigrant Women

As we all knew that understanding the situation of an immigrant woman is not an easy thing, which is completely different from her original tradition. Monica Ali has shown Nazneen as an out coming woman who at last realises her identity and strength. She goes for a job and takes care of her daughters. She brings out her power through her independent life and changes her fate which is fixed from her child birth.

There are many themes in this novel like race, gender and class. Migration is the most important theme, which is explored through Nazneen. Western people are separated from Eastern people in the name of cultural variation. The writer has given much importance to Muslim religion, which is shown as an only religion, struggle and develop their community and create a new identity. "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" (113).

## 7. Conclusion

Monica Ali has written the novel from the Nazneen's point of view. In the beginning she is suppressed by her husband. On contrary to that, she suppresses her husband and faces her fate in the end. She depicts Nazneen "looking out of the window of her flat; caring for a very sick child in a London hospital; trying to sort out the changing politics around her, both of the racists and the young Muslim militants; relating to life in her flat with her husband and teenage children; swept up a love affair with a spirited young man; and searching for her runaway daughter amidst a rebellion of Bengali gaining confidence and acting to change her circumstances" (380).

Thus, Nazneen the protagonist, at last develops herself and becomes an independent women who trust her own decisions. In the beginning of the novel Nazneen is very shy and underpowered. But towards the end, she becomes much stronger and takes in-charge of her family. She understands that she gets a successful life in England that she could not get in Bangladesh. As we all know that Muslims are very dedicative, enthusiastic and true to their religion. Why not, they donate their blood and soul for their community people. But why Monica Ali has shown Nazneen and Hasina eloping and hunting for Islamic men, why Karim a Muslim community leader, falling in love with a married woman is a question mark.

## 8. References

1. Ali, Monica. Brick Lane. London: Black Swan, 2004.
2. <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/jun/14/featuresreviews.guardianreview20>
3. <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v25/n19/sukhdev-sandhu/come-hungry-leave-edgy>
4. [http://www.bookbrowse.com/reviews/index.cfm/book\\_number/1285/brick-lane](http://www.bookbrowse.com/reviews/index.cfm/book_number/1285/brick-lane)