

## **Globalization, Women, Migration, and Nation: Analyzing Linguistic and Cultural Identity in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane***

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### **Abstract**

The issues of nationality, language, culture and belongings determine an individual's identity. The concept of identity is in constant flux in the (post-)post-modern world as it is being shaped and reshaped in the metropolis global space. This paper aims at analyzing linguistic and cultural identity in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) which concerns individual as well as collective identity caught in the intricacies of globalization and migration and therefore the issues of first- and second-generation migrants in a new/ others land. It explores how the psyche of cultural displacement re-shapes the linguistic and cultural identity in a new land away from home. The paper foregrounds the conflict of identity because of ideological differences and issues of adaptation, assimilation and acculturation in the global metropolis space. Furthermore, it probes the genesis of identity in the twenty-first century globalization in terms of prevalent global politics, the psyche of language and cultural adaptation with reference to the novel. The paper also questions the post-globalization and its idea of nation and nationality.

**Keywords:** *Brick Lane*, cultural, globalization, identity, linguistic, Monica Ali, nation.

*"This is England", she said. 'You can do whatever you like"* (Ali 2003, 492).

*Brick Lane* (2003) represents the twenty-first century globalization which demonstrates the new pictures of contemporary society. The central woman character of the novel is Nazneen, who was born in a traditional Muslim family of Bangladesh. She moves to Brick Lane, London, a metropolis city with her husband, Chanu who has been already living in London. Both of them are first generation migrants. Unlike her husband, Nazneen lives in London as a dependent on her husband and unfamiliar to language, culture, and lifestyle. She was living life full of misery in a ghetto of the Bangladeshi community in Brick Lane where mostly immigrants live. Gradually, her life changes and she starts living a life in London independently as she likes it. *Brick Lane* traces global phenomenon of cross-cultural encounter and emergence of the new idea of issues of identity. Moreover, *Brick Lane* presents the woman narrative of contemporary globalization and the global society of the twenty-first century. The novel moves around the

Bangladesh and Brick Lane in London, a global metropolis space. The depiction of developing and developed countries covers the process of globalization that has paved the way of migration from developing to developed country. The novel artistically and practically tried to present the picture of contemporary globalization which shows the image of immigrants especially the women. The novel is a dramatic fictional narrative of globalization and neoliberal policies that represent the different response of migrants in the twenty-first century.

This study is an attempt to investigate issues of the identity which has emerged due to globalization as it has opened the way of mass migration. It focuses on the identity of Nazneen as she faces many new challenges in life and the situation in an unfamiliar and strange place that has different cultural codes and background. The paper answers the questions that how does she manage her unfamiliar new life in London? How does she experience globalization? How does globalization affect in her life? How does she find herself in the metropolis global space? How does she identify herself in the foreign land? How does her life change? How does her response to cross-cultural interaction? How does her identity reshape? How does she receive a new cultural identity? The paper answers to these questions, moreover. I have also tried to explore the idea of identity, especially woman identity, after a close reading of the text *Brick Lane*.

Ali Rezaie covers in the study "Cultural dislocation in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*: Freedom or anomie?" Ali Rezaie suggests:

...Studying Ali's novel could help postcolonial critics understand how threatening and problematic their relativistic conception of cultures may appear to some members of non-Western cultures who believe in the universality and superiority of the modernity promised by liberalism (72).

Although the main focus of the paper is to trace the new idea of identity in the central character of the novel that is Nazneen. However, I have also tried identifying the other characters of the novel and compare and correlate to one with another one especially with Nazneen, because of her very different situation relating to nature of time, situation and condition. The novel is about the story of an eighteen years old Bangladeshi girl, Nazneen. The eighteen years old girl leaves everything on destiny and sends off to England after her marriage at an early age. Her marriage is arranged to a man who is much older than her, named Chanu. She has never met the man whom she gets married. Chanu is also Bangladeshi but lives in Britain since so many years. Nazneen moves to London with her husband where she experiences the life in London is dramatic and completely different as compared to Bangladesh where she was born and brought up. She faces many challenges and obstacles to adapt to this new life in London. She confronts many challenges in the quest for her identity and she eventually tries to change, and her identity develops.

Shahana is the daughter of Nazneen. She is a second generation, Bangladeshi immigrant. She is born and grew up in England. She has never been to Bangladesh. In so many ways, she feels like a British. However, she faces problems to be the daughter of a Bangladeshi immigrant family in British society dominated by the majority of white people. Shahana faces many difficulties to adapt in the land where she is born and brought up. She feels a sense of contradiction and confusion to be in a label of particular identification as she cares how others see her. Life of Shahana is also not that easy either. She is characterized as divided and self-contradiction because of the conflict and clash between two completely different cultures –her parents` Bangladeshi culture, and the culture she truly knows and lives in: the English culture. She wants and supposes to learn the English language in school but her father always forbids her to use the language at home. Shahana behaves and acts as she is embarrassed by the background of her family. Even she embraces the Western customs and modern popular culture of youth, having a tattoo and a piercing, and to dress short skirts. She also refuses to eat Bangladeshi food, and reacts to her father`s restrictions and disobeys her parents. Bangladeshi culture also looks something different to her. Religion is also a major concern to Shahana. Shahana develops a sense of fear that she will be sent back to Bangladesh and she will be a victim of an arranged marriage.

In the novel, there are other women characters, who are also facing many challenges and difficulties. Aleya, Amina, Jorina and Monju, have to face and deal with difficult situations for being both a woman and a foreigner. At the same time, Nazneen`s friend, Razia tries to represent the modern, feminist, and westernized woman. She does not care about what other people think about her. She dresses like the natives. She seems to be a symbol of being a modern woman as she has adapted to a new culture and western society. She keeps on wearing it in spite of Bangladeshis gossiping about her becoming too English. She also tells Nazneen about all the positive sides of England. She shares her experiences with English people as nice and polite, even they stay out of your business and does not interfere in others life. Razia represents one of the most dramatic, smart and colorful characters of the novel.

The study has tried to formulate the concept of analyzing the idea of identity in the novel at a different level. The novel suggests that there are different response of globalization and migration. In the study, an attempt has been made to correlate the text and its context. As Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall rightly suggest the aspects of linguistics identity in their study "Identity and interaction: A sociocultural linguistic approach." In the study, they argue:

This discursive approach further allows us to incorporate within identity not only the broad sociological categories most commonly associated with the concept, but also more local positionings, both ethnographic and interactional. The linguistic resources that

indexically produce identity at all these levels are therefore necessarily broad and flexible, including labels, implicatures, stances, styles, and entire languages and varieties. Because these tools are put to use in interaction, the process of identity construction does not reside within the individual but in intersubjective relations of sameness and difference, realness and fakeness, power and disempowerment. (607-608)

Identity is a relative term which is shaped and reshaped with the sense of belongings and believing. The more emphasis on the postmodern concept of identity is also being. However, traditionally, identity is determined on the basis of culture, language, and nationality as Stuart Hall covers in his study “Cultural Identity and Diaspora: Identity, Community, Culture, Difference.” He strongly argues:

The first position defines “cultural identity,” in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective one true self, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed “selves,” which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes, which provide us, as “one people,” with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our cultural history. (222)

Although in post-modern world identity is in flux that reshapes in different circumstances, however, identity is always located in terms of the belongings of an individual and collective region, religion, culture and language. Globalization has transformed the life the people, provided an opportunity to adopt and reject multicultural society. The opportunity of acculturation has been intensified due to an effect of globalization. In the novel, although women are allowed to live in England, their lives are far away from England because they are assumed to be the women with the way as brought from Bangladesh that they have to deal with within the boundary of Brick Lane. The Bangladeshi families have settled in this particular part of London but they are living in a small area with their Bangladeshi culture and customs within the English community, where Bangladeshi rules of life are still applied and justified by the patriarchal male-dominated society as it is found in the novel. The novel reveals the double standards of male attitude towards the woman.

However, the protagonist of the novel, Nazneen breaks all the barriers and boundaries of dependency. She rejects the offer to return to Bangladesh with her husband. Although her husband, Chanu leaves London and goes back to Bangladesh, Nazneen decides to stay in London with her two daughters and finds a new and independent life. Throughout the novel, Nazneen

tries to find herself and her new identity in the metropolis third space. She always tries to search a new identity while watching the television and the ice skating which symbolizes the life within an ice-berg which she finds after breaking the barrier of typical Bangladeshi culture of Brick Lane at the end of the novel. She breaks a boundary of bricks of Brick Lane which is symbolized as stereotypical and prejudiced patriarchal Bangladeshi society in London. She gradually explores the other light side of life in London which allows the woman to work and live independently as she starts sewing clothes and generates money to be economically independent and help the family. She accepts the challenges to live freely.

Unlike her husband, she has a very different cultural encounter. She was a young girl and also first-generation immigrant. She was completely unaware of English language and culture, a woman immigrant in London. But with the course of time, she accepts the global multicultural London and gradually starts living the life there better than before. In the end, she embraces London's life despite all odds of cultural differences. She finds a new global identity in global metropolitan space.

This is a more pertinent situation as Nazneen encounters a culture which is completely different and new for her. In the end, she settles in same cultural space which sometimes makes her feel alien. She even does not know the cultural codes and social life of London. She feels completely lonely being a traditional woman and Bangladeshi. Her condition is double marginalized in the metropolitan space. However, she finds a new identity, willingly stays there and feels free. She rejects the patriarchal social and cultural codes and values of Bangladesh and lives without her husband in the metropolis, London. She reshapes her identity from local to the global.

Very distinctly, in the case of Shahana, the daughter of Nazneen and Chanu, who was born and grew up in London. Although she is a second-generation immigrant, it is also an issue and a major challenge for Shahana to find such a model of culture because she is torn between two different cultures. She does not know whether she belongs to and should choose English or Bangladeshi model of culture as she is affected by both of the linguistic and cultural codes. This particular circumstance becomes very complicated in her case. That becomes the source for her identity confusion and cultural conflict within her family and self.

In the study, it is observed that cultural adaptability is an art of life which is measured with the openness of mind of an individual. At an individual and collective level, there is a self-contradiction in the idea of accepting, rejecting and adopting the other culture/global culture in multicultural global space. There are different aspects of acculturation through which an individual adopts a particular culture. The response of cross-cultural encounters differs from

person to person as the study has investigated in the novel. The study analyzed the different responses of culture adaptation between Nazneen and Chanu, although both of them were first-generation immigrants, their cultural interaction is quite different which has been shown in the novel. I have observed that in the case of Chanu who lives in London since so many years, a first generation, English educated man, having a job there, also faces many issues and challenges in London. He encounters many difficulties in dealing with everyday life in the same metropolis place. In the end, he leaves London and goes back to Bangladesh. It is also critically analyzed that he leaves the London aftermath of 9/11.

Chris Weedon studies "Migration, Identity, and Belonging in British Black and South Asian Women's Writing." She observes in her study:

...Whereas Chanu wants to take his family back to Bangladesh, where they will be safe from Western influences and values, Nazeen realizes that her daughters are British not Bangladeshi, and this understanding strengthens the gradual shifts in her subjectivity and identity that allow her to break with conservative community norms and to refuse to accompany him. (28)

The act of accepting and rejecting the global metropolis space are observed in the study both forms. On the one hand, Nazneen accepts the global space and reshapes her identity but on the other hand, Chanu rejects the same global space and returns to the native country. His return to native place leaves so many unanswered questions which need to investigate further as for why does Chanu feel uncomfortable in the place where he lives since so many years? Why does he leave London after 9/11? Does he realize losing the cultural-control in the family? Unlike Nazneen, Chanu wants a life of Bangladesh in Britain, typically with his linguistic and cultural values and practices which allow his conscious to being with what he brings Bangladeshi belongings in Britain. Nazneen adopts a new cultural and linguistic identity and believes as a global citizen of the world in metropolitan space provided by globalization.

Sagarika Chattopadhyay and Jaya Shrivastava study "*Transitional Identities and the Unhomed Space in Monica Ali's Brick Lane and Tishani Doshi's The Pleasure Seekers.*" In the study, they argue:

The question problematizes the identity issue as the diasporic identity is always seen in reference to or as a reaction against the image of the immigrant fabricated by the west... (123)

In the study, it has been observed that there is a completely different response of cross-cultural interaction and the emergence of the new idea of acculturation, adaptation and rejection of cross-cultural identity. On the one hand, Chanu leaves Britain and returns to his native country, Bangladesh. He feels a sense of insecurity and rise of cross-cultural conflict, fear of losing one's native cultural and linguistic identity. On the other hand, Nazneen does not leave and stays in Britain. There are different responses of cross-cultural interaction and the idea of linguistic and cultural identity as I have analyzed in the study. In reference to Samuel P. Huntington's *The Clash of Civilization and Remaking the World Order* (1996) gives an idea of identity-politics and predicts cultural-conflict in the twenty-first century as it is found in the case of Chanu. Furthermore, Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) suggests a world without conflict belongs to "The Last Man" paved the way of globalization: migration as promised by globalists for providing multicultural space, it is also analyzed and found in the case of Nazneen.

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