

Acculturation In Monica Ali's Brick Lane: A Theoretical Exploration

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Abstract:

This paper will attempt to analyze Monica Ali's Brick Lane from a postcolonial perspective, to analyze the various stages and strategies of acculturation used by immigrants and their European-born children to adapt and adjust to the new dominant culture in the host society using acculturation as a theoretical standpoint. We explain the thematic and structural qualities of migration literature, as well as the manner in which the phenomenon of migration-the displacement of an individual from one country to another-influences literature and literary products of any culture.

Keywords: Acculturation, immigrants, theorists, displacement, culture.

Brick Lane tells the story of Nazneen and Chanu Ahmed, two Bangladeshi immigrants at London's East End, and their two British-born daughters. Migration has come to play an increasingly significant role in relation to such basic social foundations as culture, politics, economics, and geography.

Culture is a person's identity and the self that shapes them throughout their lives. Every culture is distinct, and each individual is affected by it. Cross-cultural psychology has found significant connections between cultural context and individual behavioral development. Given this relationship, cross-cultural research has increasingly focused on what happens to people who grow up in one cultural context and attempt to re-establish themselves in another.

In the novel, Chanu explains the success story of immigrants who strive for cultural adjustment.

"It's a success story," said Chanu, exercising his shoulders. "But behind every story of immigration success, there lies a deeper tragedy." Kindly explain this tragedy."

"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. I'm talking about the feelings of alienation engendered by a society where racism is prevalent. I'm talking about the terrific struggle to preserve one's own sanity while striving to achieve the best for one's family. I'm talking--" (92)"

The classical definition of acculturation was presented by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936, p.149): "acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups".

In a debate (Social Science Research Council, 1954), it is stressed that assimilation is not the only type of acculturation; it can also be reactive, creative, and oftentimes delayed.

In all plural societies, cultural groupings and their individual members must cope with the dilemma of how to acculturate, in both dominant and non-dominant contexts.

In the novel, Nazneen experiences the culture of the English society directly and the culture of Bangladesh through Subsequent letters written to tell the story, over a period of 13 years, of Hasina's life in Dhaka.

In their daily interactions with one another, groups and individuals usually work out strategies for two major issues. These issues are cultural maintenance and contact and participation.

The acculturation of the characters is examined in this research paper using the acculturation model developed by John Widdup Berry, a Canadian psychologist. According to his model, every migrant uses one of four acculturation strategies to integrate into the host culture - Integration, separation, assimilation, and marginalization.

Nazneen was born in the East Pakistani district of Mymensingh. Rupban, her mother, misinterprets the pain of her contractions as dyspepsia. Rupban lets out a cry that sends her husband Hamid running to kill whoever is

attacking her after an hour and forty-five minutes of silence. But it's too late; by the time Hamid figures out what's going on and summons Banesa, the baby has already been delivered and is exhibiting no signs of life.

Banesa, who has claimed to be 120 years old for several years, announces that the baby has died and accuses Rupban of failing to call her on time, accusing her of trying to save money. Mumtaz, Rupban's sister-in-law, accidentally drops the slippery new-born on the bed, and the dead baby begins to cry, much to their surprise. Banesa, who is slightly embarrassed by her error, informs Rupban that she has two options.

She said, addressing herself solely to Rupban.

"Take her to the city, to a hospital. They will put wires on her and give medicines. This is very expensive. You will have to sell your jewellery. Or you can just see what Fate will do'." (9)

Rupban decides not to fight Fate, and for four days, Rupan weeps and frets about Nazneen's inability to eat. Nazneen begins to accept her mother's nipple on the fifth day after her birth.

"As Nazneen grew she heard many times this story of How You Were Left To Your Fate." (10)

Rupban encourages her daughter Nazneen to remain still in her heart and mind, to accept God's Grace, and to be unconcerned about her surroundings. As a result, Nazneen grows up believing that what cannot be altered must be endured. Nothing can be changed, according to Rupan, so everything must be accepted. Hasina, Nazneen's younger sister, has a mind of her own, and Nazneen's life is a stark contrast to that of her younger sister's. Hasina eloped at the age of 16, much to Hamid's displeasure. When Hamid arranged for Nazneen's marriage to a man over twice her age, she accepted without complaint, hoping to be as good of a wife as her mother was.

It is the story of Nazneen and Chanu, who were born and raised in Bangladesh, a developing country with many social issues such as superstitions, environmental pollution, mob violence, child labor, child trafficking, HIV AIDS, and domestic violence. They moved to a small Bangladeshi estate community in London, which is a developed nation scientifically and has drug culture. Every facet of culture and tradition differs between the two countries.

What happens when people who have grown up in one cultural setting try to live in another?

Nazneen uses Integration, the second acculturation strategy to integrate into the host culture by following native culture as well as host culture.

At London's Tower Hamlets, The story picks up with Nazneen, who has recently married Chanu Ahmed at the age of 18 and is getting ready to prepare dinner after doing the housework. Nazneen considers her newfound alone and determines that she misses people more than anything else. She reads a random verse from the Holy Qur'an to reassure herself, and it brings her the peace she was looking for. Nazneen recites another portion from the Holy Qur'an, this time from memory, to refocus her attention. She falls asleep during the recitation.

Nazneen gestures from her window to a chubby, tattooed woman in her apartment across the courtyard, who sits by her curtainless window. Nazneen considers paying her a visit, but she is concerned that she will knock on the wrong apartment door and would be unable to interact with The Tattoo Lady once she locates her. Nazneen has been in London for six months, but her English is limited to two words: 'sorry' and 'thank you'.

Nazneen's days quickly settle into a routine, with the only significant exceptions being when she watches ice skating on TV. Nazneen forgets about all the petty small things going on in her mind and life while watching the skaters, and she feels like a new and magnificent person. Nazneen begins to pray five times a day after the skating competition ends after a week.

One day, Nazneen tries on a pair of Chanu's jeans. Then Nazneen raises her underskirt to see how she appears in a short skirt. She enjoys pretending to ice skate in front of the mirror for a time. She puts on one of the sequined vests and imagines herself ice skating with Karim.

Chanu brings Nazneen a sewing machine and a computer for himself. He calls the girls to come to see. Nazneen is curious about where he got the money for the items, but she does not inquire. Later, back in their room, Shahana complains that her father has forbidden them from speaking English, but he does so whenever he wants. Nazneen wonders if the conflict between Chanu and Shahana would be as intense if Shahana were a boy. Nazneen has picked up some English over the years, primarily from her children, who insisted on being understood. Their neighbours Razia and Mrs. Islam, who are mostly interested in gossip and rumours, start to pay regular visits.

In this chapter, Nazneen's dialogue demonstrates her maturation. She's come to a lot of her own conclusions, and she's no longer hesitant or embarrassed to discuss them with Chanu or her friends. This showcases the method of integration as slowly, Nazneen's cultures are gradually uniting to form into a complex whole.

Chanu uses Separation, the first acculturation strategy to integrate into the host culture by following native culture and avoiding host culture.

Dr. Azad laments the degradation of the Bengali youth who visit pubs and nightclubs over dinner with Nazneen and Chanu. Dr. Azad discloses that he, too, had the Going Home Syndrome when Chanu swears to return home before this occurs to his children. According to Dr. Azad, the Going Home Syndrome occurs because, while the body is in England, the heart is still in Bangladesh. People constantly find an excuse not to return, whether it's

because of natural calamities, bureaucracy, or, more commonly, a lack of finances. Chanu is noticeably upset that she has spoken up when Nazneen suggests they wouldn't need much money to live back home. Dr Azad speaks,

“Every year I thought, ‘Maybe this year. And I’d go for a visit, obtain some more soil, see relatives and friends, and make up my mind to return for good. But something would always happen. A flood, a tornado that just missed the building, a power cut, some small bureaucracy, some brain-numbing piece, kickbacks to be paid out to do anything. And I’d believe, well, this year than not. I just don’t know.” (24)

Nazneen can't help but compare the two men while they eat. Dr. Azad is petite, quiet, and dressed immaculately. Her husband is chubby and boisterous, and his shirt has an oily yellow stain where he spilled food. Chanu, who has been in England for sixteen years, is hoping to gain a promotion from Mr. Dalloway based on his qualifications and a recommendation from Dr. Azad. When Chanu first arrived in London, he had high hopes and enormous goals, but he discovered that things were not as he had planned. His intellectual and familial backgrounds are meaningless to the British. He's simply another Bangladeshi peasant here.

Chanu resumes his discussion of the promotion he so much desires. His brilliant idea is to go to the pub with his employer, and Nazneen is disgusted by his folly. Chanu also mentions a potential promotion competition, a man named Wilkie, who, according to Chanu, is part of the racist white underclass that doesn't want people like him to thrive. Chanu forbids Nazneen from going out, claiming that if Bengali men see her on the streets, they will gossip about her and ruin her 'image'.

Chanu reveals that he intends to return home and construct a home before Ruku becomes spoiled by Western society. Chanu surfed the internet and was amazed at its potential on her husband's new computer. Chanu dismisses Shahnaz's announcement that they use the internet at school. Her new internet fringe irritates him, and he interprets it as yet another proof of her defiance. Chanu pulls up a few Bangladesh-related websites, but Shahana refuses to look at them because she claims they are dull. Chanu maintains his composure till her grammar is corrected. Bibi doesn't want to tell Shahana about his threat, so she begs Nazneen to do it instead. Chanu erupts in wrath, threatens to murder Shahana, and begins thrashing her with the mouse.

Dr. and Mrs. Azad use acculturation tactics similar to Chanu and Nazneen.

A woman opens the door to Dr. Azad's house while smoking a cigarette and wearing a short purple skirt with purple painted nails and streaked hair, later she turns out to be Mrs. Azad. However, Chanu is confident they are in the incorrect location, but in actuality, it is Dr. Azad's residence. Dr. Azad, while in a conversation with Chanu, exclaims

“It’s a part of the culture here. It’s so ingrained in the fabric of society. Back home, if you drink you risk being an outcast. In London, if you don’t drink, you risk the same thing. That’s when it becomes dangerous, and when they start so young they can easily end up alcoholic. For myself, and for your wife, there’s no harm done.” (90)

This showcases his interpretation of the cultural divide between the western society (London) and his home (Bangladesh). Mrs. Azad is loud and uncouth, she orders her husband around, speaks her opinion, drinks beer openly, and dares to shush her husband and his guest when they are talking and 'disturbing' her television-watching. Dinner is unpleasant, and Nazneen thinks that maybe Dr. Azad comes over to her place just for the food.

Soon after Nazneen and Chanu arrive, the daughter of the Azads' arrives. She requests for money in order to go to a pub wearing a short skirt and speaks in English. Dr. Azad is enraged and ashamed, but Mrs. Azad complies with the girl's wishes. Chanu is inspired by this exchange to discuss the sad collision of cultures and generations that immigrants endure. Mrs. Azad is unimpressed by Chanu's academic credentials, and she dismisses her own husband's creative endeavours. Dr. Azad, she says, "puts his nose inside a book because the fragrance of actual life offends him" (pg. 77). Dr. Azad, Nazneen claims, comes to them to get away from his wife. Mrs. Azad dismisses Chanu's allegations of racism.

Shahana and Bibi use Assimilation, the third acculturation strategy to integrate into the host culture by completely ignoring native culture and following host culture.

The story resumes in February 2001, Tower Hamlets, London. Raqib's death was thirteen years ago, and Nazneen is now 34 years old. Chanu is teaching Shahana and Bibi, their daughters, how to recite "My Golden Bengal." They intend to return to Bangladesh as soon as they have sufficient funds. Shahana is adamant about not returning home. She dislikes Bengali music, clothing, and food, and she prefers to dress in jeans. Shahana irritates her father, who frequently threatens "the tiny memsahib" through her sister, Bibi. The females retire to their beds after the tense and forced recitation. Shahana had a temper tantrum and stomps on her mother's shins.

The intergenerational struggle between immigrants and their European-born offspring has not spared Nazneen and Chanu. The two girls have already become westernised and refuse to follow Bengali customs and clothing codes.

Generational clashes:

In Brick Lane, there are generational clashes. Monica Ali distinguishes the disagreement and makes a distinction between the two postcolonial generations in a persuasive vein. Chanu wanted to return because he was unsuccessful in London. As a first-generation immigrant, Chanu perceives Britain as a Monetary Territory. He travelled to England with the expectation that the English soil would be proud of his accomplishment; he expected to come to England and find that Bangladesh would not provide him with a booming success and fortune. Chanu has become a symbol of the English-dream narrative, according to which most Asians go to England in pursuit of a permanent residence. However, they must break the apologetic figure in the end because they look to be misfits in the U.K. society and social-cultural system, as Chanu does. Chanu gives full vent to his frustrations, stating that he has been in Britain for seventeen years and has yet to find a solid and well-paid job. His fantasies of accomplishments have never been fulfilled. Chanu was not even able to save wealth to come back to his country.

“His disappointment and disillusionment with England (U.K) take centre stage as he states:

When I came I was a young man. I had ambition. Big imagine’s When I got off the plane, I had my degree credential in my suitcase. I thought there would be a red mat laid out for me. I would join the civil service and become the prime minister’s private secretary. That’s what my plan was. And I discovered stuff a little distinct.” (120)

As a result of this inconvenience, Chanu desires to return to Bangladesh, whereas the second generation, all of whom were born and raised in England, wishes to remain there. The conflict has now been identified. The second generation of diasporas, Shahana Ahmad and Bibi Ahmad, unlike their father Chanu, do not wish to return to Bangladesh since they cannot relate to a country they have never seen. The couple was born, raised, educated, and felt more at home in England than in Bangladesh. They are unable to comprehend either the mythical tales or the literary works of Bangladesh. For example, Shahana opposes her father Chanu by refusing to follow sex ideas, wearing skinny jeans instead of shalwar, and choosing to talk in English. Monica Ali says that: “Shahana did not want to hear classical music from Bengali. Her written Bengali was shocking. She wanted to wear Jeans.” (147).

Conclusion:

From a postcolonial perspective, the various stages of acculturation were clearly traced out in Monica Ali’s portrayal of the cross-generational struggles of the Chanu family across post-colonial Bangladesh and western England. The aspects of cultural clashes juxtaposed with a narrative that works as a pseudo familial history manage to shed light on the various experiences of immigration that the members of the Chanu family experience. From the longingness for home the first migrant generation yearns for, to the complete cultural transformation of the second generation, we see a spectrum of perspectives through the lens of acculturation. The study provided key insights into the mental aspects of immigration as a human experience.

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