

**GLOBALIZATION, SOUTH ASIAN DIASPORA AND IDENTITY:  
COVERAGE OF TRAUMA OF HOMELESSNESS IN ANGLOPHONE  
CULTURAL PRODUCTIONS**

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***Abstract***

*This study focuses on the networks between the concept of home and the spaces of residence in the globalized city of London, highlighting how the different trajectories of home resurface in memories of the South Asian diasporic community. This endeavor exposes how, in the oft-(ac)claimed globalized world, the cultural as well as psychological baggage of home poses challenges for people who are away from their native home and are living in their home of residence. So, the questions which are investigated here in this postcolonial analysis of Monica Ali's Bricklane are: How does home appear to postcolonial diasporas in the globalized world? And what does returning 'home' teach us about the inequalities and injustices underlying the current global order? Using the qualitative method of analyzing the aforementioned novel, with special reference to globalization and postcolonial literary theory, this research unearths the problems, which are faced by the South Asian diasporic communities, further highlighting the issue why, every now and then, the South Asian diasporic writers are haunted by their ancestral homes. This research records and analyzes the account given by the Bangladeshi diasporic novelist and is thus helpful in knowing and understanding the complex and oft-ignored problems, associated with the concept of home and belonging in the globalized world.*

**Keywords:** *Globalization; Diaspora; Bricklane; Home; Identity*

### 1.1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization has been resulting in a *complex* set of interconnections among people across the world. People have been migrating, media exchanges interlinking, capital travelling across the globe, and cultures acquiring mobility; thus, bringing forth new ‘civilization of clashes’ between people (Appadurai, 2006, p.16). Using the critical tool of Postcolonial Criticism, which, according to Ashcroft et al (2002), ‘corresponds to stages both of national and regional consciousness of the project of asserting differences from the imperial center’(p. 4), for this analytic endeavor, this study investigates the Bangladeshi born British writer Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*(2003) to discuss South Asian diasporic fiction in terms of its concept of ‘home’ that serves as a subtext and a site to which diasporas aspire to return. As Ashcroft (2009) declares globalization and post colonialism as ‘alternative modernities’, critics such as Waldinger and Fitzgerald (2012) describe transnationalism as a highly particularistic attachment, antithetical to those by-products of globalization denoted by the concept of transnational civil society. Especially after 9/11, descriptions of the Muslim ‘Other’ have been at hype in the Western world. Entering such frame of mind is mainly due to the negative stereotyping that manifests itself in various forms, including xenophobia and Islamophobia, the two phenomena which witnessed new heights in the post 9/11 global north (Awan, 2010; 2013).

With the advent of globalization during the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the world witnessed a new set of values. Ullah and Aib (2017) assert “A hidden agenda behind colonialism was the occupation of the lands to transform them into a commercial venture for the Western colonizing nations (p. 8). Despite the fact that the 19<sup>th</sup> century offered the imperialism of Britain and France, it was after the two world wars that the world saw an end to colonialism. Many nations got freedom from their imperial masters because the previously powerful

countries became weak with the passage of time and a sense of independence and self-rule became imminent among the colonized ones. As a result of this new global order the world somewhat shifted from the colonized and the colonizer dichotomy to the advent of multiculturalism. This encouraged mass immigration to the technologically advanced countries. This tendency towards encouraging the globalized diversity of races and cultures, one the one hand, brought about cultural richness, but on the other hand, it also brought the earlier colonized and their masters, along with their respective sets of values and cultures, against each other and in the same setting. As Glazer (1973) asserts migration always creates problems, among many other complications created by migration, which is an offshoot of globalization, the pinch that the immigrants feel the most is their sense of homelessness. The sense of fatigue and strain that they feel in the host society because of the conflicting cultures may lead to their complete alienation. (Espin, 1999)

In a bid to portray these problems, many writers with such immigrant background have covered these issues in their writing. Remaining true to what Ullah and Arif (2013) highlight as the dawn of a representative literature that marks the dusk of colonialism, Monica Ali, the child of a Bangladeshi father and an English mother is one of those writers who had had the first-hand experience of witnessing immigrants' problems. Her novel *Brick Lane*, which was published in 2003, remains an important repository of issues concerning immigrant life in Britain as Choudhry (2005) asserts "In exploring the experience of migration and the issues of identity, Ali is responding to a situation where location and culture combine to present conditions that would have been beyond conception in the nineteenth century colonial world order. "So, putting the life of immigrants in this new globalized world, the research endeavors to see how their lives are affected, with special reference to their sense of home and homelessness at the same time.

## **1.2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Using the qualitative method of analyzing Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), with special reference to globalization and postcolonial literary theory, this research unearths the problems, which are faced by the South Asian diasporic communities. Through textual analysis, the research endeavors to bring forth the concept of home and homelessness as highlighted by the novelist through her characters, especially Nazneen and Chanu. Thus, the research records and analyzes the account given by the Bangladeshi diasporic novelist, and is thus helpful in knowing and understanding the complex and oft-ignored problems, associated with the concept of home and belonging in the globalized world.

## **1.3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) highlights problems concerning the life of immigrants living in the multicultural setting of Britain. This shows how the immigrants are suffering from the sense of homelessness in the globalized world. The research brings forth the problems which are usually unheard of, mainly because these problems seldom come to the surface. This is the skill of the writer to delve deep into the minds of his characters and speak their mind. So, this research is aimed at putting a concerted effort to look into the novel and record the problems related to the concept of home among immigrants. This will help us know how immigrants, while away from their homes, yearn for the homes they have left behind and how they feel unhomey in their new homes.

## **1.4. THE PARADOX OF HOME AND HOMELESSNESS IN THE NOVEL**

One of the reasons why an immigrant suffers from the homelessness feeling is that s/he is seen as 'the other' by the host society. This has typically been the problem with immigrants in

England as Congnar (2007) quotes Salman Rushdie, “When I first went to England to study, I became the other. I think I am able to understand what it means to be on the other side of the wall.” So, for a start, it is the host society that makes the immigrant feel that he does not belong that place. Later on, the immigrant starts longing for his *own* people and his *own* environment where he is not dealt with as ‘the other’.

Another reason why an immigrant gets the feeling of homelessness in Britain can traced to the colonial history of this country. With the new globalized world order, most of the immigrants originally come from the earlier colonized countries like India and the Caribbean. These immigrants are more likely to be looked down upon by the host communities. They arrive in the new country, leave their homes, and start a new life with a determination to adopt Britain as their new home. However, as Cudjoe (1999) observes, the immigrants and their countries of origin are still under the influence of the British and consider them as colonials rather than genuine Europeans. This attitude of superiority by the British continued towards the earlier colonized nations and it was also extended towards the people belonged to these countries but migrated to Britain. Keeping in view this social and psychological pattern that is pivotal in maintaining the earlier colonized and the colonizer dichotomy in present day Britain, the sense of homelessness is inevitable as portrayed by Monica Ali through the characters of Nazneen and Chanu, who despite all concerted efforts feel themselves misfit in the British society.

The novel tells the story of a Bangladeshi family which is settled in London. Nazneen, a Bangladeshi woman of 18 years of age, moves to London after she is married to a 40 years old man, named Chanu. Representing many immigrant women, Nazneen leaves her rural Bangladesh along with the Eastern culture after the arranged marriage takes place. Following the advice of her mother, she faces all the problems with courage and adapts according to the situation in London. Keeping in view the problems concerning immigrant life, it is appropriate

to look into the situation Nazneen is after shifting from Bangladesh to London.

Despite the fact that Nazneen is resolute to accept the new place as her home, she is doomed to go through the torture of homelessness whenever she tries to fit into the new setting. Her problem in feeling at home in this new land is that she both in appearance and in essence does not belong to the English society. She experiences this feeling when she visits Bishops gate, a place that is close to Nazneen's actual location where she is living. Hailing from a completely different place in terms of culture and values, she feels as if the society is alienating her, as Bentley (2008) observes that the behavior of the people, their style of interaction with the opposite gender and their racial traits separate them from Nazneen. As a result, she feels that these are not the kind of people she had in Bangladesh which was once her home and that she is among people who quite similar to each other in terms of values and cultures but different from her. Here, the novelist describes her:

*"Nazneen, hobbling and halting, began to be aware of herself. Without a coat, without a suit, without a white face, without a destination" (56).*

Leaving her home in Bangladesh where, during her 18 years of life, she had hardly spent a moment alone, she is now forced to live a lonely life in her new home. As Hussain (2005) says that immigrant women are overwhelmingly isolated and they heavily depend on the male members of their family, the novel shows Nazneen in the same situation. Her feelings of homelessness sprout when she, unlike her life in Bangladesh, does not leave her flat for several days. The reason why she does so is that she does not speak the language that is used in her surroundings. The only bits and pieces she knows of the language are "thank you" and sorry". Moreover, Chanu also does want her to learn English because he thinks it is of no use to her.

Similar to Nazneen's problem of communication, many immigrant women go through this

language problem as Wilson (2006) observes:

*“Women who cannot speak English cannot communicate with her neighbors, the police, lawyers, doctors, or advocates. They may even become alienated from their children or working husbands who gain fluency in English, or may become more dependent on family members to interpret the culture for them.”*  
(p. 134)

Being a village girl in Bangladesh, she was used to live among her family members and friends from the neighborhood; she was used to live and communicate with the nature. But in London, she was forced to live days in days out in a room that was filled with furniture and books. She was living in a house which she could hardly call her home because the concept of home was completely different from what this house had to offer to her. She yearns of company, she longs for someone to talk to, she wants to see nature as she saw during the first 18 years of life. But that is not possible now. Everything is different –the people, their faces, their behaviors, their dresses, and the language that they speak. How can she call this a home?

Similarly, Chanu terms the very experience of being an immigrant as a tragedy. Unlike Nazneen, he goes out and tries to assimilate in his new home and the people living there. Despite his efforts to accept this new place as his new home, he remains an immigrant. This feeling comes forth because he now lives in “a society where racism is prevalent” (p. 113). It is due to this portrayal that Hussain (2005) declares the novel as an image that shows England as racist.

It is due to such social prejudices, based on the colonial history of Britain, that immigrants get this feeling of homelessness in their new homes. The same feelings of not being dealt well by the host society is shown when Chanu tells Nazneen: “To a white person, we are all the same:

dirty little monkeys all in the same monkey clan” (p. 28).

It is due to these prejudices towards the immigrants that the feelings of self and the other are created. This gives birth to the immigrant identity which hallmarks the feeling of homelessness. This is where the immigrants are not allowed to assimilate in the mainstream of the host society. This demarcation of the self and the other is not physical but psychological where through a set of behaviors and attitude the immigrants are placed at a distance. Moreover, such attitude from the host society is further authenticated and endorsed by the humble socio-economic background of the immigrant people.

In the words of Butterworth (1972), “To belong to any society is to know it from the inside, to be inward with its forms of social organization and its modes of personal expression, to inhabit its universe of meanings and values, habitually and instinctively, even to share its prejudices. The moment people move to a new cultural situation, they inevitably become strangers.”

This is the reason why Chanu and his family do not identify themselves with the locals because they share very few things with them. The main concern of immigrants is to work hard and save money. Unlike the locals they do not have the resources and preferences for sightseeing and merry making. They cannot call it a home because it is home to those people who are built in this system. We see Chanu and his family going out for an outing after a period of thirty years. This is very unlike the local values of that area.

It is quite evident that when a person moves to a society whose cultural structure is different from the culture he leaves, developing the sense of belonging for that society is very difficult. This absence of the sense of belonging to the host society, gives rise to the sense of homelessness. Monica Ali explains the concept of unbelonging or homelessness in her essay

*Where I'm Coming From* she says: "Growing up with an English mother and Bengali father means never being an insider. Standing neither behind a closed door, nor in the tick of things, but rather in the shadow of the doorway" (Ali, 2003). As Ali herself, "the lives of Nazneen and Chanu are located in between tensions", too (Mishra, 2007:188).

Thus, the sense of homelessness is created in the minds of immigrants because they are seen as the other due to the fact that they belong to an earlier colonized country, they are not white, they are faced with racial discrimination, and they, unlike the locals, encountering social and financial problems. These are the reasons why the immigrants fail to develop a sense of belonging for the host society. This sense of belonging can be developed by an immigrant if s/he, as Butterworth (1972) explains, knows the society from inside and if he is in total harmony with the social organization to the extent that s/he shares its prejudices. This is the reason why the very concept of home and feeling at home disappears whenever the immigrants move to a new cultural setting.

### **1.5. CONCLUSION**

Through *Brick Lane*, Monica Ali highlights the reasons why immigrants fail to develop a sense of belonging for the host society. The writer places Nazneen and Chanu in the globalized setting of *Brick Lane*, London, and makes them face the remnants of the colonial past in a bid to see if the *othering* project can be overpowered by the crucible of globalization. The research endeavor finds out that people from less developed and earlier colonized countries are lured by economic prospects in the technologically advanced countries to the extent that they leave their home countries. Thinking that world had turned global which promised multiculturalism and mutual coexistence, the immigrants endeavor to accept the host country as their new home. However, they fail to call the people, who consider themselves superior, as their own people,

the surroundings which remind them of their humble background, as their own surroundings, and the place of residence which is different in every aspect from their original home as their home. As a result, the immigrants, despite having a home in the host country remain homeless and alienated.

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