



Exploring the Development of a Diasporic Female *Bildung* in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*

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Abstract— Throughout millennia, the synchronic and diachronic study of South Asian literary writings has been predominantly written by male writers, reflecting the social and religious traditions in the region. But, since the late 20th century, women's artistic abilities have gained significance. Their writings have reached the mainstream cultural imagination and have had significant impact on deconstructing the Britishness and the South Asian diaspora. The present study examines Monica Ali's magnum opus *Brick Lane* (2003) as a Diasporic Bildungsroman about a female immigrant, navigating the problems of reassembling autonomy, individuality, and South Asian British identity. Further, this paper may also underscore how Ali realistically questions the traditional notion of South Asian womanhood and offers an alternative to living in an ethnic ghetto, while sexual and political seizures continue to be considered forbidden in Islamic traditions.



Keywords— *Bildungsroman*, *Diaspora*, *Identity*, *Self*, *Subjectivity*

INTRODUCTION

Human existence has always been fluid, with people experiencing countless incomparable changes that have altered their behaviour on spatial, temporal, psychological, social, cultural, and economic levels. And these shifts are intricately linked to the complex cusp of human life. They have consistently travelled between syntagmatic and paradigmatic domains, a phenomenon termed diaspora. The voyage of these human subjects from home to their new foster home instils nostalgia, belonging, and longing in the diasporic subject, effecting their survival in resettling. The most unique aspect is what they bring from home to the host country. Throughout the process of becoming diasporic, the self undergoes a number of modifications. Due to geographical, cultural, and psychological adaptations, the subjugated self in this case continues to negate and negotiate which becomes the *prima mover* of the current study.

The poetics of diaspora according to Sudesh Mishra in *Diaspora Criticism* (2006) is “the meta-critical art, the

technique, of witnessing the witnesses of the event called diaspora criticism” (14). Diaspoetics addresses the journey of the arborescent (rooted) and the rhizomorphic (routed). Thus, the literature of diaspora engages with the discourse of affected psychology, geography, culture, economy, and politics in the routed journey of the uprooted subjects. The Diaspora, often noted as a worldwide trend, refers to individuals who have been forced to leave their native lands, seeking refuge in new countries. These people move for various reasons, including psychological, economic, political, and social factors. The term Diaspora is associated with feelings of being exiled, longing for the past, feeling out of place, leaving one's homeland, facing difficult times, mixing cultures, experiencing a deep desire for home, feeling a sense of belonging, and so on. It is also constantly changing in what it represents and how it is interpreted. As a result, the discourses instigated by postcolonial studies have fostered examination and microscopic re-visioning of the modified individual in the process of Diaspora. Countless conversations and studies have been conducted to untangle and unravel the delicate relationship between

diaspora and the identity it structures. According to a multitude of such study, the occurrence of Diaspora, derived from the Greek terms *diaspeirein* and *diasperio*, dates back to the fifth century B.C. and has been utilized by Sophocles, Thucydides, and Herodotus in a variety of ways and interpretations. Diaspora is a term that has been traditionally defined over time. Ian Buchanan in *The Oxford Dictionary of Critical Theory* (2010) describes the concept of Diaspora as “scattering of seeds” which most exclusively refers back to the “Jewish peoples’ forced exile from Israel in the pre-Christian era. . .” (133), and thus all other forms of Diasporic experiences are elucidated by the primal evocation of the disturbing and sinister Jewish Diaspora being the primary and elemental ethnic prototype for Diaspora theory. Makarand Paranjape in the introduction chapter of *In Diaspora: Theories, Histories, Texts* (2001), negotiates with the pristine description of Diaspora, enunciating, “The Diaspora of the OED refers only to the dispersion of the Jews almost 4000 years ago. Even the examples of the usage of the word cited in the dictionary stop at 1889; in all these sentences barring the first one, Diaspora refers exclusively to the Jewish experience” (3). The emerging postmodern theorists like Jean Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Michael Foucault, Felix Guattari, and Giles Deleuze confront the belief system of modern society which is characterized by stability, universality, doubt, flux, fluid identities, and fragmentation. This epistemological condition of diaspoetics meets the English Cultural Studies movement in 1980s which on an onset studies postcolonial experiences and interpretation (subalterns, immigrants, minorities, self and other, and so on). The vision of Diaspora is seen as a radical event departing from both open and categorical definitions. Thus, the Oxymoronic definition of diaspora instead celebrates the paradoxical identity and gives pride to hybridity and the condition of non-center. The postmodernist vision of diaspora is majorly established by three authors: James Clifford, Stuart Hall, and Paul Gilroy. The cultural theorist and political activist Stuart Hall in “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” (1990) explains that:

I use this term metaphorically not literally: Diaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return, even if it means pushing other people into the sea. This is the old, imperializing, hegemonizing form of ‘ethnicity’. . . . The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of ‘identity’ which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity.

Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference. (235)

Thus, Hall presents a poststructuralist view of diaspora which favours multiplicity and nonuniformity as against the structuralist notion of oneness and boundaries. Paul Gilroy, British academic and historian, stands somewhere along a similar view. He, too, believes that the experience of diaspora does not imply fixed and static concepts of identity. Instead, he focuses on Leroi Jone’s concept of the “changing same”, which is close to neither the absence nor the essence of oneness. Correspondingly, James Clifford, American cultural anthropologist, in his work “Diasporas” (1994) juxtaposes the medieval Jewish diaspora with the modern African diaspora also defined as black Atlantic by Paul Gilroy. He also opposes the two versions of diaspora: a territorial, centered, and modern vision, versus a deterritorialized, decentered and postmodern one. The historical and conceptual analysis of diaspora gradually realizes a shift from pejorative to positive enabling a released and liberal application of the term. Hitherto Diaspora marked association with Jewish, Greek, and Armenian displacement however the wave of the 1980s widened the semantic domain of the umbrella term “Diaspora” gathering other terms like exile, refugee, expatriate, immigrants, guest-worker etcetera. Thus, Diaspora is defined as any type of migration, voluntary or forced, that manages cultural practices despite contact with the surrounding alien culture, and the neutral use of diaspora has been distinguished by adherence to fundamental diaspora models, such as Jews, Armenians, Greeks, or Chinese.

Diaspora as an event has given immense rise to diaspoetics that greatly deals with the study of the unsettled epistemological construction of a diasporic self. As discussed earlier, the rubric of self and subject are interwoven with the winding empirical, cognitive, and pragmatic realities and ‘diaspora’ is one such event that influences a subject in all his/her realities. There have been varied discourses to unknot and unwind the complicated link between diaspora and the subject fashioned through it. In the entire discourse of diaspora, the dialectics of self and subject play an important role. The transcendental self is seen to undergo a ruptured, fractured, and bricolaged plurality. Diaspoetics here, explores and examines the subtle (and sometimes blatant) transformation of a subject in respect to his/her geographical and cultural displacement. The generic event of diaspora is much to do with the individual invasions of foundational diasporic critiques namely, Walker Conner, William Safran, Gabriel Sheffer, Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall, James Clifford, Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin, Avtar Brah, Vijay Mishra etcetera.

Walker Conner in his exemplar article, "The Impact of Homelands Upon Diasporas" (1986) broadly addresses diaspora as a group of people living outside their homelands and talks about the identification of homelands which he terms as 'homeland psychology'. He asserts,

In such an environment, diasporas are viewed at best as outsiders, strangers within the gates. They may be tolerated, even treated most equitably, and individual members of the diaspora may achieve the highest office. Their stay may be multigenerational, but they remain outsiders in the eyes of the indigenes, who reserve the inalienable right to assert their primary and exclusive propriety claim to the homeland, should they so desire. (Conner 18)

Diaspora links directly with the theory of self and many writers and theorists have captured the nuanced relationship between the two. The literature of Diaspora also provides a syntagmatic and paradigmatic structure of Diaspora within the world. There are different Diasporas that has spread its course in the theory as well as literature like African-Black Diaspora, Australian Diaspora, British Diaspora, Chinese Diaspora, Indian Diaspora, Sri Lankan Diaspora, etc. The present research concentrates on the South Asian Diaspora in general and Bangladeshi Diaspora in particular. British being the most crucial impetus of spreading South Asians to abroad in the nineteenth and twentieth century are responsible for "massive communal schizophrenia"(1) as remarked by Vijay Mishra in his book *Literature of the Indian Diaspora* (2007). Susheila Nasta in her book *Home Truths: Fictions of the South Asian Diaspora in Britain* (2002) seeks to project the belated acknowledgment of black and Asian writings in Britain. She manages to evaluate both the famous as well as the lesser known South Asian writers. The book studies the cultural traveller of the late modern period who traverses the national, ethical, and political boundaries of the local to become the part of the global. Nasta scrutinizes how "cultures and literary representations of those cultures are to be located in an inherently fluid and transnational global world" (1). The narratives of South Asian Diaspora plunge into the journey of the subaltern self who travels from the once colonized and exotic land to the technologically advanced and capitalist first-world countries. This displacement begets the most intriguing part of the traveling: a hyphen. Authors like Shyam Selvadurai lament about the insularity they suffered from their mother country Sri Lanka due to the hyphen. In the introduction to his book, *Many Roads through Paradise: An Anthology of Sri Lankan Diaspora* (2014) Selvadurai talks about the unseen and unrecognized Sri Lanka that he had left unknown and untouched of its ethos. Similarly, Nayeem Sultana in "The Bangladeshi

Diaspora in Malaysia: Organisational Structure, Survival Strategies and Networks" (2008) talks about how Globalisation and migration have led to cultural mobility and how even then the migrants try to maintain transnational contacts. *Geographies of Muslim Identities: Diaspora, Gender, Belonging* (2012) a book by Peter E. Hopkins describes how a Muslim Diaspora is constructed as other and the way there is an increase in incidents of 'Islamophobia'. The unprecedented upsurge in South Asian literature of Diaspora by writers like Michael Ondaatje, Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, Hanif Kureishi, M.G. Vassanji, Bharati Mukherjee, Monica Ali etc. promote the idea of adaptation of English, the language of the colonizers. Peter Barry in *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (2002) enlists three phases: 'Adopt', 'Adapt', and 'Adept'. He says that the writers of the colonial and postcolonial period "begin with an unquestioning acceptance of the authority of European models (especially in the novel) and with the ambition of writing works that will be masterpieces entirely in this transition" (189). Thus, these writers cite the sight of disturbed relationship between self, nation, and the world in the language of the masters who with their hegemonic interference hindered the world at large. The sum and substance of Diaspora can be attained by what Jasbir Jain mentions in her article, "The New Parochialism: Homeland in the Writing of the Indian Diaspora" (2001) "The "immigrant" or the "diasporic" self is simultaneously open to two epistemologies, two histories and two social realities. There is the history (and the memory) of the colonial past and the racial discrimination, which jostles with the native history of resistance and freedom struggle. Two systems of knowledge and two sets of cultural influences construct identity and socio-economic reality of both the societies confronts self" (80). The narratives of self in the literature of Diaspora traverses through the phenomena of "deterritorialization" to "re-territorialization", concepts created by Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), encapsulating the journey of self. Diasporic literature has been looked at as a chronicle of migration from the old and familiar to the new and unfamiliar. In narratives as such few common threads connect each Diaspora.

Mourning for home and resettlement in the host country is segmental in diasporic narratives. As in the novel *Brick Lane* (2003) in spite of his stay in England for more than ten years, Chanu still believes in the Bangladeshi values and hence recommends that his wife stay at home and bear children. Very early in the novel, after migrating to London, Nazneen overhears her husband's telephonic conversation and is absolutely mortified: "What had she imagined? That he was in love with her? That he was grateful because she,

young and graceful, had accepted him?...Yes. Yes. She realized in a stinging rush she had imagined all these things. Such a foolish girl" (Ali 23). Hence it goes without saying that Nazneen's married life is marked by monotony. Though Chanu is never violent towards his wife, he cannot be the loving, caring and romantic husband which his eighteen year old wife desires him to be. Nazneen however never complains about anything. She makes desperate attempts to compromise with her unfulfilled longings as a young girl. Though while attending to Chanu's hair, corns and nails, she sometimes thinks of revolting, her idea does never materialize: "She razored away the dead flesh around his corns. She did not let the razor slip" (Ali 30). She cooks aromatic dishes for her husband, and eats all by herself at midnights just to avoid sharing the table with Chanu. Steeped in domestic chores, Nazneen's life therefore becomes mechanized to a great extent: "Life made its pattern around and beneath and through her. Nazneen cleaned and cooked and washed... Then she ate standing up at the sink and washed the dishes... And the days were tolerable, and the evenings were nothing to complain about" (Ali 40-41).

The monotony of Nazneen's married life is finally broken with the birth and death of her son Raqib. At the birth of the boy, both Nazneen and Chanu are naturally very happy. Nazneen puts all her personal needs aside to take care of the baby. The child brings enormous joy as well as responsibility in her life. She feels "the baby's life [is] more real to her than her own" (Ali 83). On the other hand, for Chanu the baby "was a set of questions, an array of possibilities, a spark for debate and for reflection. He pondered on Raqib. He examined, from a distance, his progress and made plans for his future. The baby opened up new horizons and closed others; he provided a telescope and a looking glass" (Ali 83). Hence for both the parents, having the baby is surely an amusing experience. But unfortunately, Raqib soon falls ill and is taken to the hospital, and just when Nazneen and Chanu plans to bring their son home, he dies unexpectedly. Ali poignantly describes their sense of tremendous loss in the novel and one can only imagine the enormous pain resulting from the loss of a child. This situation however leads Nazneen to confront the question, whether everything should be left to destiny, or one should take the initiative to find solutions to one's problems. She realizes that, what she has done for her son is in absolute contrast to what her mother had done for her: "Amma did nothing to save her. And she lived. It was in God's hands" (Ali 135). But then, after a while she thinks differently: "At once she was enraged. A mother who did nothing to save her own child! If Nazneen ... had not brought the baby to hospital at once, he would have died" (Ali 135). Truly, the baby's death was inevitable, but as a mother, Nazneen has

at least tried to save him, while her mother had left her to 'fight against death' all on her own. Much later, Nazneen's mother appears in her dream and criticizes her actions: "You thought it was you who had the power. You thought you would keep him alive. You decided you would be the one to choose ... When you stood between your son and his Fate, you robbed him of any chance ... Now say this to yourself, and say it out loud, 'I killed my son. I killed my son'" (Ali 432). Hence Nazneen is once again left wondering whether she has done the right thing by interfering in the 'matters of fate'. Her mother had not done so, and she has lived.

The death of Raqib changes both Nazneen and Chanu to a great extent. Due to the baby Nazneen's otherwise empty days jostled with activity. But with his unfortunate demise, she once again is left deserted. Chanu too cannot bear the death of his son and consequently, his gentleness gives way to aggression. Hence, when his daughters Shahana and Bibi are born, Chanu behaves like a very stern father and even beats them occasionally. However it is also noteworthy that Raqib's death leads to the first emotional attachment between his parents. Ali beautifully hints at this occurrence in the following lines:

Raqib was still asleep. Sometimes he opened his eyes but they were not seeing eyes... Chanu sat on the other side, arms folded across his chest. Whenever a nurse walked by he half unfolded them and looked up. Abba did not choose so badly. This was not a bad man... She could love him. Perhaps she did already... now she understood what he was, and why. (120)

But, in spite of such growing compassion for Chanu, Nazneen's early life in Tower Hamlets is still characterized by tediousness and alienation. She describes how lonely she feels after migrating to Britain. She greatly misses her family as well as her familiars. While her stay in Bangladesh, people surrounding her were quite inquisitive about the happenings in her life. But in Britain, life seems to be quite the opposite. Indeed, the two settings of the novel, i.e. London and the Mymensingh District, are placed in sharp contrast to one another. Evidently the description of Nazneen's native village is fraught with vitality, colourfulness and humour, while Brick Lane appears to be dull and sordid to the readers of Ali's novel. While portraying Bangladesh, Ali uses images like "children playing" (11), the "scent of fried cumin and cardamom" (12), mango trees and wide green fields. On the other hand her depiction of England comprises of such ugly images like "dead grass", "broken paving stones", and the smell from communal bins (18) etc. Again descriptions such as "sick orange light of a lamppost" (Ali 468), "a desolate building" (Ali 468), and "children ... behind bars" (Ali 468) too build

up a negative image of Nazneen's hostland. Consequently, she feels claustrophobic while being in Brick Lane. But as a remedy to this Nazneen closes her eyes and smells "the jasmine that grew close to the well, heard the chickens scratching in the hot earth, [and] felt the sunlight that warmed her cheeks and made dancing patterns on her eyelids." (Ali 76)

Now, Nazneen and Chanu, along with their family dwell in a small and cramped flat in Tower Hamlets. The inhabitants in such flats feel trapped as they do not even have enough space to move freely. To Nazneen, who has been brought up in a village and amid ample space, the distinction between the constrained flat and vast meadows of the village is even more stupefying. The furniture makes the flat look even smaller, and the sense of immurement is apparent from the following lines:

[Nazneen] looked at the brown carpet, at the patch worn through to the webbed plastic that held it together. She looked at the ceiling light that lit up the dust on the shade and bent shadows across the walls. She looked at her stomach that hid her feet and forced her to lean back to counter its weight. She looked and she saw that she was trapped inside this body, inside this room, inside this flat, inside this concrete slab of entombed humanity. They had nothing to do with her. (Ali 76)

Nazneen's sense of confinement and suffocation is explicit in the phrase "concrete slab of entombed humanity" (Ali 76). Overcrowding in their respective houses often cause discomfort to the young diasporic inhabitants, as they (especially the boys) are forced to stay out of their flats. Consequently, they gather outside and "roam around like goats" (Ali 388). While the young men (many of whom even become anti-socials) occupy the streets, the women are confined within their households. Nay, even without men wandering outside, they are not permitted to go out alone. Thus we find, though Chanu takes pride in being educated and liberal, says to his wife:

If you go out, ten people will say, "I saw her walking on the street." And I will look like a fool. Personally, I don't mind if you go out, but these people are so ignorant. What can you do? ... I don't stop you from doing anything. I am westernized now. It is lucky for you that you married an educated man ... And anyway, if you were in Bangladesh you would not go out. Coming here you are not missing anything, only broadening your horizons. (Ali 45)

Chanu's comment here highlights the extent to which he is steeped in the conservative patriarchal Bangladeshi culture. Evidently, he is concerned only about his own reputation in

the community which may be harmed if Nazneen goes out of the flat alone. Hence in spite of Chanu's big claims of being westernized and open minded, in reality he imprisons Nazneen by adhering to the imported Bangladeshi taboos.

Nazneen's physical confinement within the flat in Tower Hamlets along with her inability to communicate with the foreigners (as she does not know English) causes depression in her. Now, there is no denying of the fact that spaces are gendered, and in patriarchal societies, women are allowed to exercise influences in only those spaces which are assigned to them by the society at large. A woman's domain is generally the domestic space where she is expected to carry her duties as a 'responsible' daughter, wife and mother and Nazneen's case is not an exception. Her imprisonment is further accentuated by the symbol of the wardrobe. Throughout the novel, the black wardrobe in the bedroom agitates her. She keeps on dreaming about it. In one of her dreams, she sees herself locked in it, and then it falls down and crushes her. The closet bears resemblances to a coffin and represents death. Nazneen hates the wardrobe but Chanu is not affected by her pleas to remove it. Hence this piece of furniture remains standing in Nazneen's bedroom in spite of all her protests. Thus, being a woman she does not have any power even in own her flat, where she is the one who is assigned all the domestic responsibilities.

In this regard it is important to mention that, though the Bangladeshi society assigns subordinate and inferior status to the woman in comparison to their male counterparts, the women too are responsible in upholding such unjust discrimination, especially in closed diasporic communities. The gossiping within the community, especially by the women, reinforces patriarchal values and discourages the women from transgressing their limits as determined by their homeland society. Ironically therefore, the women themselves become the preservers of gender inequality within the community. They keep an eye on one another, and hence everyone is obliged to abide by the social codes for the fear of being condemned, scorned or excommunicated.

Nazneen however adjusts to such circumstances without complaint, which in turn is due to her Bangladeshi upbringing. In Bangladesh, women are characterized by "modesty, shame, and the avoidance of behaviours that might threaten the good name of the family" (Gill 475). They are expected to comply with their husband's wishes, without stating their personal choices and opinions. Nazneen too, tries to conform to such ethnic dictates in her early years of migration. Even when she feels the bed to be too soft and uncomfortable, she urges Chanu to express his opinion instead of stating directly that she wants a new

mattress. Again, whenever she wants to go out, she takes permission from him, and never argues even if Chanu refuses to grant her wish whimsically. Traditionally, Bangladeshi women are also expected to accept domestic violence. Hence in spite of all adjustments which she has to make after her marriage with Chanu, Nazneen feels fortunate to have a husband who at least does not beat her up. She considers it to be a blessing and remains thankful to Chanu for his non-violent attitude towards her.

Gradually, when the yearning to transgress the line of decency and decorum, drawn for the women by the patriarchal society, grows profound in Nazneen, she reminds herself of the omnipotence of fate. She also reads incomprehensible passages from Quran, to mollify her mind temporarily. Nazneen always experiences solace and peace of mind after reading Quran. She often cites suras from the holy text, which are in Arabic and though she does not know the meaning of the words, the rhythm of their recitation soothe her. Nazneen has learned the suras in school, in her childhood, and the very memory of that time used to give her the strength to endure a monotonous and lonely life. Thus she prays whenever her mind is filled with restlessness. Mere cooking and cleaning does not satisfy Nazneen, it gives her enough time to pray, and reciting Quran comforts her to a great extent. Here it is implicit that Ali's protagonist turned to religion in order to pacify the surge of resentment and rebellion, which often grew high in her mind. Again, we find that she also associated her faith with her destiny. In other words, Nazneen believed that her life in Tower Hamlets is the outcome of God's will. And just as her individual efforts could not save Raqib from death, she too couldn't be saved from destitute without the will of God. In other words, Nazneen was consoled by a sense of powerlessness over destiny. No power meant no responsibility and hence nothing was required on her part to do in order to change her circumstances, as everything was predestined. One of the most significant passages which highlight such a conviction of Nazneen is: "Regular prayer, regular housework ... She told her mind to be still. She told her heart, Do not beat with fear, do not beat with desire" (Ali 51).

Apart from the psychological comfort which she draws from religion, watching iceskating on TV also provides Nazneen with a means to evade the monotonous reality of her life. When she watches what she calls ice e-skating on television, she is completely flabbergasted. Nazneen has always wanted to do what the female skater did in reality: "She stopped dead and flung her arms above her head with a look so triumphant that you knew she had conquered everything: her body, the laws of nature, and the heart of the tight-suited man who slid over on his knees, vowing to lay down his life for her" (Ali 36). But, where on the one hand

the show kindles her dormant desires, it also makes Nazneen aware of her the apparent impossibility of transcending her domestic borders:

Nazneen stared at the television. There was a close-up of the woman. She had sparkly bits around her eyes like tiny sequins glued to her face. Her hair was scarped back and tied on top of her head with plastic flowers. Her chest pumped up and down as if her heart would shoot out and she smiled pure, gold joy. She must be terrified, thought Nazneen, because such things cannot be held, and must be lost. (Ali 37)

In Nazneen's life, happiness has always been transitory. And hence, in spite of being awestruck, she gradually begins to consider ice skating as something artificial, just like the skater's flowers. Yet, she continues to watch the show as she feels exalted while watching it:

For a whole week it was on every afternoon while Nazneen sat cross-legged on the floor. While she sat, she was no longer a collection of hopes, random thoughts, petty anxieties and selfish wants that made her, but was whole and pure. The old Nazneen was sublimated and the new Nazneen was filled with white, light glory. (Ali 41)

Indeed, while watching ice-skating Nazneen feels herself to be a different being altogether. The image of the sport is used by Ali to indicate her protagonist's fantasy to escape from her entrapped life. But then, Nazneen has methodically tutored her heart not to beat with desire, and hence feels glad when the program is broadcasted no more on television:

But when it ended and she switched off the television, the old Nazneen returned. For a while it was a worse Nazneen than before because she hated the socks as she rubbed them with soap, and dropped the pottery tiger and elephant as she dusted them and was disappointed when they did not break. She was glad when the ice e-skating came no more. (Ali 41)

In this way Nazneen desperately endeavours to fashion herself in the mould of an 'obliging housewife' like the other women within her community. Sukhdev Sandhu points out that the South Asian women often suffer from 'Begum Syndrome', which is a medical condition involving pain, burning sensation and extreme tension among the sufferers. It is perceived to be a form of somatisation, an internalisation of the women's depleted resources and cramped dwellings. Nazneen too in the course of the novel becomes a victim of similar illness, which the doctor terms as "nervous exhaustion" (Ali 325) and prescribes bed rest.

The turning point in Nazneen's life comes when she ultimately decides to come out of the cocoon of her secure domestic life and participate in the omnipresent hostland society. One day she decides to take a walk to temporarily elude her feeling of claustrophobia. Nazneen walks without any destination in mind and even gets lost. Apparently, she was trying to run away from her flat, her husband and even her ethnic identity. Her act of getting lost in the milieu of the host society is also indicative of the loss of direction, comfort and even certainly in her life. But then, Nazneen manages to find her way back home through the heavy traffic of the city and even exchanges few words and looks with strangers. This isolated incident alights the first ray of confidence in her. Ali eloquently depicts the state of Nazneen's mind when she returns home after her first solitary encounter with the city:

She was cold, she was tired, she was in pain, she was hungry, and she was lost. She had gotten herself lost because Hasina was lost... She, like Hasina, could not simply go home. They were both lost in cities that would not pause even to shrug... It rained then. And in spite of the rain, and the wind which whipped into her face, and in spite of the pain in her ankle and arm...and in spite of the fact that she was lost and cold and stupid, she began to feel a little pleased. She had spoken, in English, to a stranger, and she had been understood and acknowledged. It was very little. But it was something. (58)

Nazneen's act of getting lost and then returning home all alone also leads her to expostulate against Chanu's convictions. So, when Chanu ridicules her suggestion of going back to Dhaka in order to find her sister Hasina, Nazneen feels the initial spark of rebellion in her mind:

Anything is possible. She wanted to shout it. Do you know what I did today? I went inside a pub. To use the toilet. Did you think I could do that? I walked mile upon mile... And to get home again I went to a restaurant. I found a Bangladeshi restaurant and asked directions. See what I can do!... [H]er heart...was ablaze, with mutiny. (62-63)

This simple yet significant incident of homecoming after temporarily getting lost leads Nazneen to realize, perhaps for the first time in her life that, she could actually frame her life without the help of a man and that there was no need for her to feel lost like most of the women in *Brick Lane*.

Stuart Hall in *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* has commented that, "Identity is a production which is never complete and always in process" (224). Hall's observation corresponds to Nazneen's gradual transformation from

being an insecure girl from a Bangladeshi village to an independent native of London's *Brick Lane*. The longer she stays in London, the more she gets distanced from her past memories. As the novel records:

The village was leaving her. Sometimes a picture would come. Vivid; so strong she could smell it. More often, she tried to see and could not. It was as if the village was caught up in a giant fisherman's net and she was pulling at the fine mesh with bleeding fingers, squinting into the sun, vision mottled with netting and eyelashes. As the years passed the layers of netting multiplied and she began to rely on a different kind of memory. The memory of things she knew but no longer saw. (217)

The passage emphasizes the reality that Nazneen no more wanted to go back to Bangladesh. Rather she craved for the carefree state of her childhood. To quote the lines from the text, "by now she knew that where she wanted to go was not a different place but a different time" (Ali 45). And, finally towards the end of the novel we found Nazneen realizing: "This is England, [and here] You can do whatever you like." (Ali 492)

CONCLUSION

Nazneen's attainment of the *Bildung* experience is the result of the moments of realization that one experiences while undertaking the odyssey of life. All aforementioned deliberations are explicitly or implicitly associated with the journey of becoming of Nazneen as a diasporic *Bildung*, who has been found to be deeply embedded into social, cultural, and diasporic reality. But gradually by experiencing the stark reality in *Brick Lane*, she unveils that the order of the world is transient, contingent and flitting. The paper thus traces the way Nazneen unveils her conflicting self under the prevailing pull within the framework of the theory of diaspora, Self, and *Bildungsroman*. Throughout the process of self-exploration of Nazneen, subjectification and interpellation perform as a catalyst in the process of her becoming. In essence, Monica Ali recounts the change and transformation in Nazneen's character further redefining her development as a diasporic *Bildung*.

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