



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## Representation Of Bangladeshi Women In Monica Ali's Brick Lane: A Postcolonial Feminist And Diasporic Analysis

Maya Khatun

Independent Researcher,  
Department of English,

The University of Burdwan, Purba Bardhaman, West Bengal, India.

**Abstract:** This paper presents an in-depth postcolonial feminist and diasporic examination of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), concentrating on how Bangladeshi women are portrayed in transnational settings. By conducting a thorough textual analysis, this study investigates the interplay of gender, migration, class, religion, and cultural identity in shaping female subjectivity. Utilising theoretical perspectives from Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Homi K. Bhabha, Avtar Brah, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, this paper contends that *Brick Lane* challenges simplistic Western depictions of "Third World Women" by emphasising agency, negotiation, and transformation. Nazneen's evolution from passive compliance to self-empowerment exemplifies how diasporic environments serve as both restrictive and empowering spaces. The analysis reveals that the Bangladeshi women in the novel are multifaceted individuals who actively redefine their identities within changing socio-cultural contexts.

**Index Terms**— Postcolonial Feminism, Diaspora, Bangladeshi Women, Migration, Nazneen, Self-empowerment.

### I. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the representation of Bangladeshi women in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* through the perspectives of postcolonial feminism and diaspora studies. I. Rascanu delves into the experiences of Bangladeshi women and their efforts to gain agency within a society depicted as still deeply patriarchal, where women are compelled to accept and perpetuate a principle based on fate rather than personal choice. Arzoo Zarnen analyses postcolonial women in the era of globalisation in relation to Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*. Louis Anitta investigates how the novel reflects transnational feminist identity, agency, and resistance, focusing on the intersection of gender, race, class, and culture in the immigrant experience. While much research has explored migration and identity in *Brick Lane*, this study specifically concentrates on the intersection of gender, diaspora, and postcolonial feminism in portraying Bangladeshi women as dynamic subjects who transform their identities. This paper also explores how Nazneen, Hasina, and other female characters navigate oppressive structures and construct new forms of identity within the diasporic space.

## II. Theoretical Frameworks: Postcolonial Feminism and Diasporic Analysis of the Novel

Postcolonial feminism examines how colonial history, cultural power structures, and patriarchy shape women's lives in non-Western societies. Mohanty argues that feminist scholarship must recognise the historical and cultural specificity of women's experiences rather than portraying them as universally oppressed (Mohanty 340). This perspective is particularly relevant for analysing Bangladeshi women in *Brick Lane*, as the novel portrays diverse female characters who respond differently to patriarchal constraints. Spivak's concept of the subaltern refers to marginalised groups excluded from dominant systems of representation. According to Spivak, "the subaltern cannot speak" because structures of power prevent marginalised voices from being recognised within official discourse (Spivak 308). Nazneen initially embodies this subaltern position. She has little control over decisions regarding her marriage, migration, or social interactions. However, her gradual transformation illustrates the possibility of reclaiming voice and agency within oppressive structures. Bhabha's theory of hybridity emphasises the emergence of new identities within cultural intersections. He argues that cultural meaning is produced in a "third space" where elements from different traditions interact (Bhabha 38). In the novel, immigrant women occupy such a third space, negotiating between Bangladeshi cultural traditions and British social norms. Avtar Brah introduces the concept of diaspora space as a site where identities are constantly reconfigured through interactions between migrants and host societies. She defines diaspora as "the entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of staying put" (Brah 181).

This concept helps explain the dynamic cultural environment of the Bangladeshi immigrant community depicted in the novel.

## III. Representation of Bangladeshi women in the novel *Brick Lane*

Nazneen grows up with strong patriarchal beliefs. Her mother teaches her to obey, "If God wanted us to ask questions, he would have made us men" (Ali 80). These beliefs limit women's freedom. Her marriage reinforces that, "She was leaving everything behind to become the wife of a stranger" (Ali 18). Chanu controls his wife's life, showing male dominance. Hasina faces similar oppression, "Every man thinks he can do what he likes" (Ali 162). This shows the widespread gender inequality. Moving to a new place makes Nazneen feel increasingly marginalised. She feels disconnected, "She felt like a shadow... without substance" (Ali 34). Language barriers add to her isolation, "She did not know how to ask for what she needed" (Ali 36). However, migration also presents new opportunities. As Avtar Brah notes, the diaspora can both limit and free people. Nazneen's work as a seamstress is a big change, "The money was her own" (Ali 195). Earning money boosts their confidence. She starts to question authority, "Why should she not decide?" (Ali 210). This demonstrates her growing empowerment. Chandra Talpade Mohanty's idea that women are active agents is clear. Nazneen's relationship with Karim is about defiance and self-discovery, "She felt a new kind of freedom" (Ali 320). However, she eventually rejects her reliance on men. Her realisation is crucial, "She did not want to be owned again" (Ali 389). Nazneen's identity becomes a mix, "She was no longer the girl from the village" (Ali 250). However, she does not fully assimilate. Homi K. Bhabha's idea of hybridity is seen as she balances different identities. Hasina's letters tell a similar story, "I fight every day to survive" (Ali 147). Their bond reflects their shared struggles. This aligns with transnational feminist views that stress solidarity. Religion is used to control, "It is written" (Ali, 91). Nazneen reinterprets faith, "God had given her a mind" (Ali 405). Nazneen's movement symbolises freedom, "She stepped outside alone" (Ali 430). Her final act of skating shows change, "This is England... You can do whatever you like" (Ali 500).

## IV. CONCLUSION

Brick Lane presents a complex portrayal of Bangladeshi women, challenging the typical stereotypes of passivity and victimhood. Through the character of Nazneen, Monica Ali explores the intricate issues of diasporic identity, gender oppression, and cultural negotiation. This paper, by engaging with postcolonial feminist and diaspora theories, demonstrates that the Bangladeshi women in the novel are proactive individuals who confront and resist various forms of oppression. Although the diasporic environment poses challenges, it also offers avenues for empowerment and transformation. In essence, Brick Lane enhances the understanding of migrant women's experiences, emphasising the importance of intersectional and culturally specific analyses in feminist discussions.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Ali, Monica. Brick Lane. Doubleday, 2003.
- [2] Anitta, Louis. "Transcending Borders: A Transnational Feminist Interpretation of Identity, Agency, and Resistance in Monica Ali's Novel "Brick Lane"." International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research, 2025.
- [3] Bhabha, Homi K. The Location of Culture. Routledge, 1994.
- [4] Brah, Avtar. Cartographies of Diaspora. Routledge, 1996.
- [5] Rascanu, I. "Bangladeshi Women and the Concept of Agency in Monica Ali's Brick Lane: Patriarchy, Love and "Sisterhood"." An International Journal of Asian Literatures, Cultures and English, 10, 2016. pp. 27-42.
- [6] Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." Boundary 2, vol. 12, no. 3, 1984, pp. 333-358.
- [7] Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp. 271-313.
- [8] Zarneen, Arzoo. "Postcolonial Women in The Era of Globalisation: A Study of Monica Ali's Brick Lane." ShodhKosh, Journal of Visual and Performing Arts, 2024.