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Cultural Crossroads: The Dilemmas of Identity and Assimilation
of Bangladeshi Immigrants in the United Kingdom
in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003)

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Master in
Civilization and Literature

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Abstract:

This dissertation delves into the intricate theme of Bangladeshi immigrants identity within the UK's cultural landscape. It explores how individuals navigate dual backgrounds, addressing key issues like identity crises, discrimination, generational shifts, religion, language, and cultural influence. The focal point is the case study of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, shedding light on the challenges and triumphs in identity formation. The research uncovers a persistent identity crisis, influencing assimilation outcomes. This study aims to highlight the fact that identity crisis of immigrants is ongoing, same as the struggle for adaption that they encounter due to the antagonism between their cultural background and the culture of the hosting community. Through analytical-qualitative methods, the main findings of this study reveal three distinct groups: seamless assimilation, profound identity crisis leading to failed adaption, and successful assimilation while preserving cultural heritage, forming a hybrid identity. This study contributes to the fields of identity studies, literature, and cultural studies by offering a thorough analysis of Bangladeshi immigrants identity and its difficulties within the setting of *Brick Lane*. It improves the knowledge of this particular community while also providing insightful information that can be used in the more general study of identity, immigration, and integration in multicultural societies.

Keywords: assimilation; Bangladeshi immigrants; identity; identity crisis; cultural heritage.

ملخص:

تتناول هذه الأطروحة الموضوع المعقد لهوية المهاجرين البنغاليين في السياق الثقافي للمملكة المتحدة. تستكشف كيف يتنقل الأفراد بين الخلفيات المزدوجة، مع التركيز على قضايا رئيسية مثل أزمات الهوية، والتمييز، والتحويلات الجيلية، والدين، واللغة، والتأثير الثقافي. نقطة التركيز هي دراسة الحالة لرواية "بريك لين" للكاتبة مونیکا علي، حيث يتم تسليط الضوء على التحديات والانتصارات في تكوين الهوية. يكشف البحث عن أزمة هوية مستمرة تؤثر على نتائج الاستيعاب. يهدف هذا البحث إلى إبراز حقيقة أن أزمة هوية المهاجرين لا تزال مستمرة، تمامًا كما هو الحال مع الصراع من أجل التكيف الذي يواجهونه بسبب التناقض بين خلفيتهم الثقافية وثقافة المجتمع المضيف. من خلال أساليب البحث التحليلي النوعي، تكشف النتائج الرئيسية لهذا البحث عن ثلاث مجموعات متميزة: الاستيعاب السلس، وأزمة هوية عميقة تؤدي إلى فشل التكيف، والاستيعاب الناجح مع الحفاظ على التراث الثقافي، مكونة هوية هجينة. يسهم هذا البحث في مجالات دراسات الهوية والأدب والدراسات الثقافية من خلال تقديم تحليل شامل للهوية للمهاجرين البنغاليين وتحدياتها في سياق "بريك لين". فهو يعزز المعرفة حول هذه المجتمعات الخاصة بينما يقدم معلومات مفيدة يمكن استخدامها في دراسة الهوية والهجرة والاندماج في المجتمعات المتعددة الثقافات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاستيعاب؛ المهاجرون البنغاليون؛ الهوية؛ معضلات الهوية؛ التراث الثقافي.

Dedication

First of all, we are grateful to God for granting us the strength to complete this work. To God
who is the light to our darkness.

We dedicate this work to our families, friends, and our feline companions.

To the future generation and researchers.

May this dissertation serve as a testament to the love, friendship, and divine guidance that have
shaped our academic journey.

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General Introduction

The rich tapestry of human existence is woven from threads of culture, identity, and the unending journey towards self-discovery. At the cultural crossroads, where heritage meets the winds of change, lies the profound dilemma of immigrants and their offspring. In the multicultural landscape of the United Kingdom, the Bangladeshi community has embarked on a quest to reconcile their ancestral roots with the dynamics of British integration. The corridors of literature have borne witness to this intricate dance of identities, and in the heart of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, we find a compelling narrative that illuminates the path to selfhood. We would like to emphasize that the title chosen by the author, reflects a subtlety in its meaning: This Avenue with its walls of red bricks, tarnished by time, gloomy, and sad, symbolises the gathering of Bengali immigrants in particular. The alignment of these bricks is an image of migrants, lined up in this foreign English society, where the feeling of being observed by others is present, and they are cautious and fearful of making mistakes, so they align themselves like these bricks.

The problem we explore in this dissertation is the intricate issue of identity faced by Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK. Our study offers a nuanced exploration of how gaining a deeper understanding of the history and culture of Bangladesh provides valuable insights into the identity struggles experienced by both UK Bangladeshi immigrants and their progeny. Using Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane* as a lens, we closely examine the lives of the characters who wrestle with the multifaceted challenges of identity while navigating the process of assimilation.

In this study, we draw upon key concepts as defined by experts. Identity, as described by Jenkins, is the way people differentiate themselves in social relationships. Identity crisis,

as delineated by experts like Erik Erikson, represents the psychological conflict arising from the struggle to establish a sense of self. Assimilation, the process of individuals or groups integrating into a dominant culture, forms the crux of our exploration. These concepts are fundamental to understanding the experiences of Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK as portrayed in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*.

The exploration of immigrant identity, cultural assimilation, and the challenges faced by immigrant communities has been a central focus in the field of cultural studies and psychology. Scholars such as Sinha (2008) have provided valuable insights into the intricate nature of identity formation among immigrants, emphasising the significance of cultural background and the tensions that may arise during the process of assimilation.

In the realm of psychology, theorists like Erik Erikson have laid the groundwork for understanding the broader concept of identity crises, which immigrants often grapple with. Erikson's psychosocial development theory (Erikson, 1968) posits that individuals go through various stages of identity development, and immigrants may encounter unique challenges during this journey. Furthermore, Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943) can be applied to the context of immigrant identity, highlighting the importance of belongingness and self-actualization in the assimilation process.

Our journey through the landscape of cultural identity begins with an exploration of broader concepts related to immigration, assimilation, and cultural heritage. We traverse from general discussions of identity theory and acculturation to more specific examinations of Bangladeshi immigration in the UK. Each chapter of this dissertation unfolds as a chapter of discovery, building upon the knowledge and insights of experts in the field.

The purpose of our study is twofold. Firstly, we aim to unravel the intricate layers of identity crisis experienced by Bangladeshi immigrants and their descendants in the UK,

emphasising the interplay between cultural heritage and British integration. Secondly, through the characters in *Brick Lane*, we seek to understand how these individuals negotiate their identities and cultural backgrounds within the context of assimilation. In order to achieve all the objectives of this study, the following questions are addressed:

- How does understanding the past and culture of Bangladesh deepen insights into identity challenges among UK Bangladeshi immigrants and their offspring in *Brick Lane*?
- How do characters in *Brick Lane* illustrate the intricate identity crisis of Bangladeshi immigrants and their offspring in the UK, showcasing the interplay between cultural heritage and British integration?
- How do the characters in *Brick Lane* negotiate their identities and cultural backgrounds within the context of assimilation?

An analytical approach is adopted to carry out the current study, using data from books, articles and websites.

This dissertation consists of three chapters. The opening chapter will trace the historical context about Bangladesh and Bangladeshi immigration in the UK, establishing the backdrop for our exploration. The second chapter will delve into the theoretical foundations of identity and identity crisis, grounding our study in established frameworks. The third chapter will analyse the characters in *Brick Lane*, exploring their assimilation experiences in the context of British society.

As we navigate these chapters, we invite the reader to join us on a voyage of cultural discovery, where the past meets the present, and the self meets the other, at the crossroads of identity in *Brick Lane*. We shall embark on a threefold quest: to understand, to empathize, and to illuminate the intricate identities of those who walk the path of cultural crossroads.

Chapter I

A Broad Overview of the History and Culture of Bangladesh

Introduction

This chapter will provide a general summary of the history of Bangladesh. It will initially offer the country's geographical location. The fundamental issue will then be traced, which is the history of Bangladesh as a whole from British colonization until the post-independence period. Additionally, this chapter will describe the causes which led to the immigration of Bangladeshis to Britain, and the issues relating to their identity struggles in the host country.

1. Geography and Origins

Under an exotic polluted sky, majestic women dressed in faded saris and men in faded Punjabis near villages ravaged by the floods of the rivers it is the image of a country crushed under the weight of misery and poverty. Unfortunately, it is just an image because too much injustice is happening on this land and it has a great impact on the condition of women. A land whose inhabitants have hybrid multi-racial origins, including Indo-Aryan, Dravidian and Tibeto-Burman, Middle Eastern, and Asiatic ancestry. This land is Bangladesh. This poor South Asian country is bordered by India to the west, north, and east, and by Myanmar (Burma) to the southeast. To the north, the magnificent Himalayas are located at a distance. It is a country bordering the Bay of Bengal¹ between Burma and India. Around 169 million people live in the country that has an area

¹The Bay of Bengal (largest bay in the world) forms the northeastern part of the Indian Ocean. It is bordered mostly by the Eastern Coast of India, southern coast of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka to the west and Burma (Myanmar) and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (part of India) to the east.

of 148,460 square kilometers. It is the eighth most populated country in the world. The country's name 'Bangladesh' means simply 'the country of Bengal' in the Bengali language or Bangla.



Figure 1. Geographical Situation of Bangladesh²

²https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https%3A%2F%2Fgeology.com%2Fworld%2Fbangladesh-map.gif&tbnid=enH7j2W03mk7IM&vet=12ahUKEwjzlpLio_z_AhWfticCHTYIDGAQMygGegUIARDRAQ..i&imgrefurl=https%3A%2F%2Fgeology.com%2Fworld%2Fbangladesh-satellite-image.shtml&docid=ovCRXLB5_hJ8xM&w=900&h=1131&q=map%20of%20bangladesh&client=opera&ved=2ahUKEwjzlpLio_z_AhWfticCHTYIDGAQMygGegUIARDRAQ



Figure 2. Bangladeshi Women in Traditional Garment³



Figure 3. A Bangladeshi Man in Traditional Garment⁴

³https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https%3A%2F%2Ffrongpolli.com%2Fstorage%2Fproducts%2Fhalfsilks%2F801-dengu%2F813-half-silk-lemon-ganga-jamuna%2Fblog-24.jpg&tbnid=ftibjXeV4spxCM&vet=12ahUKEwiAwPPPpvz_AhXspCcCHAqvDEYQMygNegUIARDeAQ..i&imgrefurl=https%3A%2F%2Ffrongpolli.com%2Fblog%2Fsaree-a-traditional-women-wear-survives-in-the-modern-age&docid=aQPJ0X3UhPxY-M&w=960&h=645&q=bangladeshi%20women%20in%20traditional%20saris&client=opera&ved=2ahUKEwiAwPPPpvz_AhXspCcCHAqvDEYQMygNegUIARDeAQ

⁴https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.lifestylefun.net%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2020%2F07%2Fbengali-dress-for-men-min-1024x1024.jpg&tbnid=ejUxB1bA1c89PM&vet=12ahUKEwizvermpvz_AhWipkwKHYYtD50QMygIegUIARDLAQ..i&imgrefurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.lifestylefun.net%2Ftraditional-dress-of-bengal-for-men-women%2F&docid=58o0T59_Dj9DxM&w=1024&h=1024&q=bangladeshi%20men%20in%20traditional%20clothes&client=opera&ved=2ahUKEwizvermpvz_AhWipkwKHYYtD50QMygIegUIARDLAQ



Figure 4. Bangladeshi Men in Everyday Traditional Garment⁵

2. British Colonial Rule in India and the Bengal Region

Before the colonial rule, the British had pure economic intentions. They had a trading post built by the East India Company in the Bengal region which was then the eastern part of India. Afterwards, the Eastern India Company began to extend its territory into the land. This land extension turned into colonization.

⁵https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=https%3A%2F%2Fsteemitimages.com%2F640x0%2Fhttp%3A%2F%2Fi63.tinypic.com%2F10zqrsj.jpg&tbnid=asHDrdMMI8dYpM&vet=12ahUKEwizvermpvz_AhWipkwKHYYtD50QMygvegUIARckAg.i&imgrefurl=https%3A%2F%2Fsteemit.com%2Ftradition%2F%40hafi%2Fthe-tradition-of-bangladesh-is-lungi&docid=-u9_W4dchc6GJM&w=640&h=428&q=bangladeshi%20men%20in%20traditional%20clothes&client=opera&ved=2ahUKEwizvermpvz_AhWipkwKHYYtD50QMygvegUIARckAg

2.1. The First Interaction between the British and the Local People in the Bengal Region

The East India Company was given a royal charter by Queen Elizabeth I in 1600, in order to conduct with the eastern nations, more specifically India. The East India Company then built a trading post in Calcutta (Kolkata) after the Mughal Emperor Juhangir had given the company permission in 1612. Over the years, the East India Company progressively broadened the scope of its operations in Bengal. They started developing more trade stations and taking part in several kinds of business activities; therefore, they got involved in local politics. The company sponsored many local leaders as they fought for control of the area. Even though the Mughal emperors tried their best to stave to contain the company's power to limit the company's influence on India, the Mughals failed and the company established a combination of diplomacy, military conquest, and economic power. The company was able to create a significant presence in India over time.

The Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb was a powerful and efficient king, but his lengthy and costly battles exhausted the empire's coffers and weakened it; hence, during his reign (1658-1707) the economy began to deteriorate and the high taxes impoverished the agrarian population. As a result, the quality of Mughal governance was slowly deteriorating. The local leaders rebelled and claimed themselves independent of the central government, hastening the empire's collapse. Aurangzeb's death eventually had worsened the situation for the empire, which led to its decline. The British took advantage of this situation, and controlled large parts of India. After years, the British officially ruled, and gained control over all of India including Bengal after the battle of Plassey in 1757.⁶

⁶When the British first arrived in India, their initial presence was established in the Indian subcontinent rather than specifically in Bengal. It was eventually given priority due to its economic importance. The Bengal region, particularly Calcutta, became a major trade center.

2.2. The Battle of Plassey as a Turning Point

The major reason behind the battle was a trade dispute between the East Indian Company and Bengal's Nawab Siraj-Ud-Dualah. In other words, the company became more powerful in Bengal; in addition, the British decided to build a trade office in Calcutta (Kolkata). The Nawab ordered the company to stop interfering in his government's affairs and to pay taxes, yet the company refused. The company challenged the Nawab's authority, and he decided to take action. So, he set up an army of around 30,000 soldiers and marched towards Calcutta, which was the base of the company then. The British were not prepared, nor expecting the Nawab's attack. The Nawab's army easily defeated the British garrisons stationed in the city, and took Fort Williams. It did not stop at that point, and the Nawab's men robbed and destroyed the city, taking a lot of British hostages. Most of the hostages died as a result of asphyxia and sickness. After that, Robert Clive was sent from Madras to get back Calcutta. Eventually, that led to the Battle of Plassey (Palashi) which took place on 23 June 1757 near Plassey, on the banks of the Bhagirathi-Hooghly River about 100 miles north of Calcutta.

The British won the battle, and Clive became the governor of Bengal. The battle of Plassey is considered as the birth of British colonial rule in south Asia. A Bengali writer, Ghulam Hussain Khan, describes the battle as follows:

The fire of battle and slaughter, that had been hitherto kept alive under a heap of embers, now blazed out into flames. But as the nation of hat-wearers have no equals in the art of firing their artillery and musketry with both order and rapidity, there commenced such an incessant rain of balls and bullets, and such a hot endless firing, that the spectators themselves were amazed and confounded; and those in

the battle had their hearing deafened by the continual thunder, and their eye-sight dimmed by the endless flashing of the execution (1781).

2.3. The Beginning of British Direct Rule

The British victory helped to give more political power to Britain. From a mere trading post established by a chartered company, Britain became the official colonizing power of the whole region and India. This new situation contributed enormously to the decline of the Mughal empire and the subjection of the Bengali (Indian) natives.

2.3.1. Events after the Battle of Plassey (1757-1858)

From 1757 to 1858, Bengal was characterized by the development of British rule. During that time, the East India Company established influence over numerous Indian states, and gradually extended its control over all Indian regions including Bengal. After the battle of Plassey, the aim of the East India Company to exist in South Asia had changed from building a trading post to controlling and colonizing the land. Their desire was to restructure the Bengali economy so it would provide significantly more wealth for them. They exposed the Bengali people to an endless series of economic, social, and administrative trials. Some were successful, while others were devastating. A radical change had happened on different aspects: economic, political and social.

2.3.1.1. The Economic Aspect

The British East India Company took control of huge areas of the Bengal's economy, and began to extract resources from the country. The Company introduced new agricultural processes and crops including indigo, opium, and tea. These had a considerable impact on traditional agriculture in Bengal. For example, the establishment of factories and trading posts by the Company resulted in the formation of new commercial hubs and the expansion of metropolitan centres. Furthermore,

Bengal became a key supplier of raw materials to British industry.

2.3.1.2. The Social Aspect

The British introduced new social and cultural practices to Bengali civilization, such as the English language, Western education, and Christianity. The British also imposed new laws and regulations, such as the prohibition of sati (the practice of widows immolating themselves on their husband's funeral pyre) and the establishment of a uniform judicial system. Moreover, the Western notions of equality and democracy disrupted the caste system and other traditional social systems.

2.3.1.3. The Political Aspect

Through agreements with local rulers and military conquest, the British East India Company progressively increased its authority over Indian regions. The Company built a governing system based on the divide and rule theory, which exploited existing religious, regional, and racial differences in Bengali society. This includes the development of a civil service, and the adaptation of a modern judicial system. They implemented a variety of policies that were harmful to Bengalis, such as high taxation, the exploitation of the labour and resources of the Bengalis. This sparked a series of uprisings and rebellions. The most famous was the Indian Rebellion of 1857. It was known as the First War of Independence. This posed a substantial challenge to the East India Company, and resulted in ceding power to the British Crown. The rebellion was caused by poverty and violence from British traders of the Company. In addition, the Bengali labourers were forced to sell their goods to the British at rock-bottom costs. In return, they bought British goods at higher prices, which resulted in the great famine. After the British Crown took control over Bengal (India), this era in

Indian history in general and in Bengali history in particular was called the British Raj.⁷

2.4. The British Raj

The British Raj was the British colonial control over the Indian subcontinent from 1858 until 1947. Following the Indian Rebellion of 1857, the British Crown took direct control of India from the East India Company. The British Empire ruled the whole of India politically and economically during the British Raj. Control and governance were consolidated in the colonial administration. The British constructed a hierarchical administrative organization, with major positions of power and influence held by British officers. The Viceroy was the head of administration and was nominated by the British Crown.

Economically, the British Raj sought to exploit Bengal's riches for British profit. They implemented laws that encouraged the export of raw resources from India, including cotton, jute, and tea, to suit Britain's industrial demands. As a result, British goods undermined indigenous industry; therefore, Bengal deindustrialized. In addition, Bengal was used as a captive market for British manufactured goods. The Raj introduced new industries and infrastructure. This included the establishment of a modern railway system, allowing for faster transportation of goods and greater communication across the country. The Raj also encouraged foreign investment, which helped to spur economic growth and development.

Socially, the British Raj had a significant influence on Indian society. The caste system remained a key element of Indian society socially, but the British administration attempted to implement reforms aimed at resolving social ills, such as the prohibition of rituals such as Sati

⁷In Hindi and other Indian languages, 'raj' means 'rule' or 'dominion. It refers to the exercise of power and authority over a particular territory or people.

(widow burning) and child marriage, and during this time education witnessed enormous changes. The British pioneered a Western-style. The English-educated elite and the mass of the population were divided by the British introduction of a Western-style education system that placed a strong emphasis on English language instruction. However, Indian thinkers and reformers had a significant role in advocating social and educational changes.

Politically, the British Raj first used an indirect rule strategy that gave regional princely republics some degree of autonomy. However, the British government gradually expanded its power and control. The Indian National Congress, which was established in 1885, became well-known for promoting increased Indian representation in government and ultimately self-rule.

The British Raj was a time of dramatic change and upheaval as well. During this period, various movements and uprisings against the colonizers emerged, eventually leading to the Indian independence movement. This struggle for freedom was spearheaded by a number of influential leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Subhas Chandra Bose, each playing a crucial role in mobilizing support for independence. Their tireless efforts resulted in the end of British rule in India in 1947, and the establishment of the Republic of India. Thus, the Indian independence movement was a momentous event that changed the course of history in the subcontinent.

Despite independence, the British Raj left a lasting legacy on India, and its impact is still felt to this day. The political, economic, and social changes brought about by the Raj have helped to shape the course of Indian history, and its influence can still be seen in the modern-day subcontinent.

3. The Partition of India

The year 1947 marked the partition of British India into two separate countries, India and Pakistan. This event had far-reaching consequences for the Indian subcontinent, and was significant in its history. Partition occurred as a consequence of the Indian Independence Act of 1947, which was passed by the British Parliament. India gained independence from Britain under the act, and split into two separate countries: India, whose majority was Hindu; and Pakistan, whose majority was Muslim. Pakistan was further divided into two parts: East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh), and West Pakistan (present-day Pakistan). The two-nation doctrine, which claimed that Hindus and Muslims were two distinct nations and could not cohabit inside the same entity, served as the foundation for the partition. Between Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, the division resulted in massive bloodshed and rioting. As they crossed the newly established boundaries, millions of people became refugees and were forced to flee their homes.

4. The Liberation War of Bangladesh

In 1971, Bangladesh was born as an independent nation as a result of the Liberation War of Bangladesh. After 1947, East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and West Pakistan (now Pakistan) were at odds due to political and cultural tensions. Prior to the war, East Pakistan was marginalized economically and politically by the West Pakistani ruling elite. East Pakistanis were dissatisfied with government policies that discriminated them, suppressing Bengali language and culture, and denying democratic rights.

The situation escalated in March 1971 after Awami League, a political party representing Bengali-speaking citizens, won a majority in general elections. The Pakistani military cracked

down brutally on the Bengali population. Violent actions by the military resulted in human rights violations and a large influx of refugees into India.

In the course of the nine-month war, Bengali resistance fighters used guerrilla warfare tactics, and were assisted by the Indian government. The latter provided the fighters with weapons, training, and refuge. As a result of the conflict, the Pakistani military committed large-scale human rights violations, including mass murder, torture, and rape. As the Bengali independence movement gathered pace throughout the struggle, Pakistani soldiers were compelled to surrender to the combined forces of the Indian Army and the Bengali on December 16, 1971. When Bangladesh gained independence, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the leader of the Awami League, was named as the country's first Prime Minister.

As part of South Asian history, the Bangladesh Liberation War marked the emergence of an independent Bangladesh, and symbolized the Bangladeshi people's pride and tenacity. Approximately, hundreds of thousands to millions of people were killed in the conflict, and the conflict had a long-term effect on the region's sociopolitical situation.

5. Post-Independence Period

The post-independence period in Bangladesh refers to the era following the country's freedom from Pakistan in 1971. Bangladesh gained independence on December 16, 1971, following a nine-month independence struggle. Significant political, social, and economic changes occurred in the country following independence.

5.1. The Formation of a New Nation

After years of political and cultural upheaval in East Pakistan, Bangladesh declared its independence on March 26, 1971. Bangladesh was victorious, and came into existence with a parliamentary republican political system. However, Bangladeshi society still depended on a hierarchical caste system with both a Muslim majority and a Hindu minority. The war had severe repercussions, including death, widespread devastation, and a significant influx of refugees. Following independence, the country's infrastructure was rebuilt, the war-affected populace was rehabilitated, and government institutions were established.

5.1.1. The Political Situation

After independence, there were phases of political instability in Bangladesh, with numerous changes in administration and military interventions. Several military coups and temporary administrations occurred, obstructing the process of democracy. The first Bangladeshi constitution created a parliamentary system of government, and was approved in 1972. The country evolved into a multi-party democracy, with regular general elections.

5.1.2. The Socio-Economic Situation

Following independence, Bangladesh had considerable economic hurdles. The economy had suffered greatly as a result of the conflict, and the country relied significantly on foreign help for rehabilitation and development. Attempts were undertaken to revive agriculture, stimulate industrialisation, and attract international investment. The country does, however, have certain natural resources, such as gas, coal, and lumber, which are still undeveloped. *The World Population Review* reports:

Chapter I: A Broad Overview on the History and Culture of Bangladesh

Bangladesh confronts significant hurdles as a result of its geographical position. On average, the level of elevation in Bangladesh hovers around 30 feet above sea level. The lowest point of elevation is along the southern border of Bangladesh where the country touches the waters of the Bay of Bengal (2023).

From a social perspective, Bengali society is a predominantly Muslim society. Islam has shaped the vision of the world, the way of life and traditions. Nonetheless, there is a difference between Islam as a dogma and Islam as it is integrated into a cultural environment of a given society.

Next, Bangladesh is a country where little girls are married at the age of 12, 13 years old at the risk of their small bodies in the face of household chores and the risk of pregnancy being very young. Despite the fact that the law prohibits marriage until the age of 18, poverty forces very young girls to marry to lighten the family's burden. Those who enter into these marriages are frequently from low-income households, with the father working for a low wage, homeless, or carried away by river erosion.

6. Bangladeshi Immigration

Recent decades have seen a variety of migration in Bangladesh, including immigration⁸ and emigration.⁹ Economic concerns, political instability, and natural calamities all have contributed to migratory trends. In search of work and better economic prospects, Bangladeshis have emigrated to the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Middle Eastern nations, and Southeast Asian

⁸Immigration is to come into another country to live permanently.

⁹ Emigration is to leave one's country to live in another.

nations. Therefore, Bangladeshis seeking asylum¹⁰ and better chances in the UK rose as a result of the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971. Bangladeshi immigration to the UK increased significantly in the 1970s and 1980s. Many Bangladeshis immigrated as economic migrants in search of more stable economic conditions and better career possibilities. The majority chose to settle in big cities like Manchester, Birmingham, and London. Bangladeshi migrants encountered several obstacles upon arriving, including socioeconomic issues, integration problems, prejudice, and language limitations. Over time, they formed tight-knit neighborhoods, especially in East London neighborhoods like Brick Lane in Tower Hamlets, which developed into a hub for the Bangladeshi diaspora.

It is critical to recognize that immigration is a complicated and multifaceted phenomenon that is impacted by a variety of historical, social, economic, and political causes. Bangladeshi immigration trends have changed throughout time, impacting the country's demographic, cultural, and economic environment.

6.1. Reasons for Bangladeshi Immigration

Predominantly, it is the economic factors which have played an important part in influencing and causing Bangladeshi migration to the United Kingdom. Many Bangladeshis want better job prospects and greater income in order to enhance their level of living. In comparison to Bangladesh, the United Kingdom has a higher standard of life and more work opportunities, attracting people seeking economic improvement. Second, people in Bangladesh might migrate to the UK in pursuit of stability and a more secure future due to political turmoil, social unrest, and

¹⁰Asylum is a legal right conferred by a government to those who have fled their home country as a result of persecution, violence, or fear of persecution on the basis of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a certain social group.

lack of security in Bangladesh. Religious discrimination, racial unrest, and lack of social as well as political freedom are just a few of the variables that might influence someone's decision to migrate, especially in the case of Bangladeshis. In addition, they move to the UK to pursue their academic interests. Prestigious educational institutions, particularly those in Bangladesh, draw foreign students to the UK. Students may decide to study in the UK in order to receive access to a top-notch education, experience life abroad, and improve their professional possibilities.

7. British Bangladeshis

Immigration may seem to be the best option for some Bangladeshis, yet it does have other negative aspects. Bangladeshis in the UK have had a variety of social and psychological experiences. There are some typical factors that have impacted the social and psychological well-being of Bangladeshis living in the UK.

7.1. The Positive Aspects of Living in Britain

Generally, British Bangladeshis settle within their community where they can find support. These social networks give them a sense of belonging, support, and cultural connection, assisting them in preserving their culture and customs. A second advantage of living in Britain for the Bangladeshis is to have better access to education, and to get unlimited job opportunities. However, earlier generations of Bangladeshi immigrants frequently experienced discrimination, poor qualifications, and linguistic problems in Britain.

7.2. The Negative Aspects of Living in Britain

Among the extremely unfortunate aspects of life in Britain for Bangladeshis, we find racism and discrimination. Bangladeshis have experienced racism and discrimination in the UK, just like

other minority communities. Experiences of bias, stereotyping, and unfair treatment based on race or religion can fall under this category. Such incidents may negatively affect a person's sense of identity, mental health, and self-worth.

Next, language and cultural barriers are other important negative aspects. Bangladeshis living in the UK may face difficulties due to language and cultural barriers. This is perfectly true for older generations of Bangladeshi immigrants to Britain. These older generations of immigrants had more difficulties, may make it more difficult to communicate effectively, obtain services, and integrate socially. Feelings of loneliness or difficulties negotiating various social norms and expectations might result from cultural differences.

After that, concerns have been raised about the social and psychological well-being of Bangladeshis living in the UK. For instance, stress, anxiety, and mental health conditions can be exacerbated by experiences with migration, discrimination, and cultural adaptation. It is crucial to note that not everyone has had these experiences, and members of the Bangladeshi community in the UK have diverse backgrounds and circumstances.

7.2.1. Identity Crisis

Due to issues like generational gaps, prejudice, and cultural differences, Bangladeshis living in the UK may have a variety of identity-related issues. For example, Bangladeshis living in Britain experience the issue of identity and cultural integration because they often juggle various identities. In other words, they balance their British identification with their Bangladeshi ancestry. This may entail conserving cultural traditions and beliefs while simultaneously adjusting to Western cultural norms. Finding this balance can occasionally result in internal tensions and difficulties building a solid sense of belonging. Therefore, dual cultural identity is the most known

identity crisis that face Bangladeshi immigrants in Britain. They can find it difficult to strike a balance between their British upbringing and traditions and their Bangladeshi origin.

This may cause a sense of cultural clash and identity uncertainty. While attempting to protect their Bangladeshi cultural history, Bangladeshis may struggle with pressure to assimilate into the prevailing British culture. A sense of being pulled between two cultures and a sense of not fully belonging to either can result from this predicament (cultural assimilation vs. cultural preservation). Next, generational differences and identity conflicts may arise as a result of generational gaps between first-generation immigrants and their offspring. While their parents may adhere to traditional Bangladeshi norms and expectations, younger generations may connect more strongly with British culture and values. As a result, within the same family, relationships among the members may become tense owing to a collision of ideals. British Bangladeshis could have trouble feeling accepted at home. Some people could feel that they are neither entirely welcomed by Bangladeshi society nor totally accepted by British society. However, not all Bangladeshis living in the UK have similar identification issues.

7.2.2. Modernity Versus Tradition

Traditions are important to the Bangladeshi community; therefore, British Bangladeshis frequently tend to make an effort to uphold their cultural traditions while juggling modernity's demands. There are some ways in which they strive to keep up with traditions. For instance, the Bangladeshi network of communities is very important in preserving and transmitting cultural practices. These British Bangladeshi communities plan community celebrations, festivals, and events where traditions are honored and passed down to future generations. Also, religious and cultural institutions, such as mosques and Islamic centres. These institutions frequently act as

cultural centres where customs are preserved through religious rituals, lectures, and neighborhood gatherings. These institutions also organize cultural performances, music and dance events, and educational programs to foster a sense of cultural identity and tradition.

Moreover, family and the home environment may help since in the family and home, traditional customs and values are usually perpetuated. Bangladeshis living in the UK might prioritize educating their children about their culture, including their language, cuisine, attire, and rituals.

Despite the fact that efforts are made to uphold their tradition, the struggle between modernity and tradition can be difficult for Bangladeshis living in the UK. Younger generations who were born in the UK or who were raised there may have different values and interests that have been impacted by British culture. When it comes to observing cultural norms and following traditional rituals, this may lead to generational gaps and conflict. Also, the cultural assimilation can create barriers for Bangladeshi immigrants, for they may feel pressure to fit in with British society's norms and values, which can conflict with traditional customs.

Furthermore, traditional values may be put to the test by the influence of contemporary British culture, which includes fashion, lifestyle, and relationships, and this may create conflict between tradition and modernity. Communication is another obstacle they face. Language is a crucial component in cultural preservation. Although the use of Bengali among younger generations may gradually dwindle due to the dominance of English in the UK, this may affect their capacity to participate fully in cultural practices and interact with senior family members. Besides, Westernized ideals and lifestyles may be adopted as a result of globalization and the influence of Western media. This may obscure or dilute ancient rituals, making it difficult for some

Bangladeshis to uphold their cultural identity and traditions.

Finally, a dynamic process that encompasses personal decisions, family relationships, and broader cultural influences is balancing tradition and modernity. Bangladeshis living in the UK frequently negotiate this difficult terrain while making an effort to preserve their traditional history and adopt modern lifestyles. All of this is represented by Bangladeshi postcolonial literature.

8. Bangladeshi Postcolonial Literature

The collection of literary works that has been created in Bangladesh since its independence from Britain and then from Pakistan is referred to as Bangladeshi postcolonial literature. The social, cultural, and political problems caused by colonial legacy and the process of decolonization are frequently examined in postcolonial literature. Postcolonial writing from Bangladesh illuminates the nation's distinct past, identity, and difficulties. It includes a range of literary forms, such as novels, poetry, short stories, plays, and essays. These works frequently address topics like national identity, cultural heritage, language, religious conflicts, social inequity, gender roles, political oppression, and economic inequities as their themes and motifs. For instance, Taslima Nasrin is one of the most well-known authors of Bangladeshi postcolonial literature. Her works, such as *Lajja (Shame)* and *Amar Meyebela (My Girlhood)*, tackle contentious subjects including religious extremism, women's rights, and social injustice. Humayun Ahmed, another prominent novelist, is widely considered as one of Bangladesh's most popular and influential writers. His works, such as *Deyal (The Storm)* and *Aguner Poroshmoni (Flames in the Sky)*, frequently highlight social and political realities, and his literary style combines humour with a social critique. Moreover, postcolonial literature from Bangladesh explores the experiences of marginalized communities and minority groups. Authors like Selina Hossain and Shaheen Akhtar have highlighted the struggles

and aspirations of women in Bangladeshi society, offering a nuanced portrayal of their lives and challenges.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a general overview on the history of Bangladesh, with a particular emphasis on Bangladeshi modern history. This chapter has also focused on Bangladeshi social life and culture. In addition, it has described the various reasons behind Bangladeshi massive immigration to different parts of the world, especially to Britain. This immigration has caused an identity crisis for the Bangladeshi community in Britain, especially the Bangladeshis who were born in the United Kingdom. Therefore, the concept of identity will be dealt with in the next chapter within the novel under study.

Chapter II

The Issue of Identity in *Brick Lane*

Introduction

This chapter delves into the enthralling world of identity and identity crisis, exploring a number of the facets of these phenomena from the perspectives of psychology, sociology, and cultural studies. These two phenomena are investigated simultaneously with an analysis of some characters from Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane*. So, in this chapter, the concept of identity and hybridity will be defined; in addition, the process of identity formation and identity crisis will be explained.

1. What Is Identity?

In etymology, the first records of the word 'identity' came from around the 1560s. It ultimately came from the Latin word *identitas* which means the quality of being the same, the condition or fact that an entity itself and not another thing. The Latin word *identitas* is derived in part from the Latin adverb *identidem* which means 'again and again, repeatedly.'

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines 'identity' as the characteristics, feelings or beliefs that make people different from others. In the broadest sense, identity may be defined as a person's sense of self, characterised by their distinctive qualities, affiliations, and social roles. Furthermore, identity has continuity, since one perceives oneself to be the same person throughout time despite significant changes in one's surroundings. According to James D. Fearon, identity is a social category defined by membership criteria and supposed distinctive qualities or anticipated actions (27). Jenkins (1996) defines it as the ways people or

collectivities differentiate themselves in their social relationships with other individuals and collectivities (4). Deng (1995) defines identity as the way individuals and groups define themselves and are characterised by others based on race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture (1). Furthermore, Hogg and Abrams (1988) view identity as people's sense of who they are, what kind of people they are, and how they connect to others (2). It can also be the state or reality of being the same one or ones amid changing circumstances. Self, individual, ego, personhood, character, personality, and role are all concepts related to identity. Identity is formed through a gradual process.

1.2. Identity Formation

Identity formation or identity development or identity building is a complicated process by which individuals create a clear and distinct image of themselves and their identities. The first stage in the creation of a person's identity is to embrace a group identity in order to satisfy his or her desire to belong somewhere as a member of a community (of a family, or a wider community, to the given society/state, to a generation, etc.). Ferguson argues that our environment and society are the forces that influence the aspects that define our identity, deciding what is proper and what is not. People acknowledge themselves through adapting to the notion of 'we' as a key manner of knowing where they belong. During this stage, a person adopts the rules, beliefs, and experiences of his or her group as a proper place to live, since collective security protects one from loneliness and the fear of the unknown world, which he or she is unable to cope with at birth. (13)

1.3. Cultural Hybridity

Cultural hybridity occurs when a new culture emerges from a combination of two other cultures. Monica Ali's novel delves into the notion of cultural hybridity, which refers to the incorporation of many cultural influences into the lives of people or groups. As a melting pot

of many cultures, *Brick Lane* provides an atmosphere in which people such as Nazneen and her daughters may personally experience this hybridity. The novel's characters struggle with their two identities as they move between their Bangladeshi origin and the British culture in which they now live. Nazneen, for example, navigates her life in London while adhering to her traditional Bangladeshi beliefs and rituals. The collision and synthesis of these two identities is important to her personal development and decisions. *Brick Lane* depicts the fluid and ever-changing character of cultural hybridity in the context of migration and diversity. The novel praises cultural variety while also underlining the difficulties and conflicts that emerge from negotiating many ethnic identities. It is a stirring examination of the human condition and the complications of belonging in a diverse society.

According to Sinha (2008), Ali is acknowledged as a significant new voice of Postcolonial Britain. In her discussion of *Brick Lane*, Ali creates the road for migrant voices to be heard in Britain through her portrayal of gender, history, and displacement. Furthermore, Ali provides us with a look into London's heterogeneous society by concentrating on a location in East London's Brick Lane that is primarily populated by Bengalis. In other words, she promotes a location that is unfamiliar to the majority of its residents. Furthermore, Sinha states that 'the book provides a rich insight into Bengali culture.' The work 'captures the struggles, cultural clashes, and frustrations of a family caught between two worlds (233). This allows Ali to concentrate on the exile experience and the agony of belonging. As a result, she depicts the experience of Bengali immigrants by focusing light on the barriers and struggles they face as they search for identity.

2. What Is Identity Crisis?

In his *Dictionary of Psychology* (2009), Andrew M. Colman defines identity crisis as 'a state of confusion arising from an inability to reconcile conflicting aspects of one's personality

(209). The concept was popularized by the German-born ego psychologist Erik H. Erikson (1902–94) in his book *Identity: Youth and Conflict* (1968). In psychology, an identity crisis is a moment of internal conflict and uncertainty regarding one's self-identity and personal values. It entails examining and debating one's core convictions, principles, objectives, and sense of self. Psychologists investigate how people deal with the difficulties of forming an identity and resolving identity crisis, which may have an impact on their general well-being and psychological development. Erik Erikson explains identity crisis through his theory of the eight stages of psychosocial development. Those eight developmental stages begin from early childhood and end with late adulthood. Each stage characterised by a distinct psychological struggle that people must overcome in order to have good personality development. The fifth stage of adolescence (ages 12 to 18) which Erikson names 'Identity vs. Role Confusion,' deals with identity crisis. Adolescents strive to develop a strong sense of self, but if they are unsuccessful, they may become confused and unsure of who they are and what they should be doing in society.

Erikson develops the idea of identity crisis as a vital developmental stage. According to him, overcoming an identity crisis results in the development of a strong and solid identity, whereas if unattended, crises cause confusion, self-doubt, difficulty forging meaningful relationships, and problems with life fulfillment. Sociologically speaking, a person 'tries on' several identities and ways of being when he/she is experiencing an identity crisis. People might begin to challenge the cultural norms and values of their family and form their own distinct moral code independent of their family. However, in sociology, an identity crisis is a situation of ambiguity and conflict that happens when people encounter a mismatch between their own identities and the societal expectations, roles, and norms imposed by society. According to Charles Taylor, identity crises occur when people encounter a disconnection between their own sense of self and the larger social context in which they live. He contends that modernity has

significantly altered how people conceptualize and create their identities, leading to a greater awareness of numerous possible identities and the requirement for self-reflection. Taylor claims that people in contemporary society have a variety of options for defining who they are, which might cause them to feel fragmented and confused. With so many options available and self-expression and authenticity gaining in significance, one may feel under pressure and unsure of who they are. Individuals may experience an identity crisis when they attempt to balance competing social standards and personal wants.

Integrating Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs offers profound insights into the intricacies of an identity crisis. As proposed by Maslow (1943), this theory outlines a hierarchy of needs, ranging from fundamental physiological requirements to higher-order psychological aspirations. Within this framework, belongingness and social needs hold a pivotal place. An identity crisis can be understood through the lens of this third category, wherein the desire for social acceptance, relationships, and belonging becomes salient (Maslow, 1954). In the context of identity crisis, the tension arises from the collision of this social need with the pursuit of self-discovery and self-actualization, essential aspects of identity development (Maslow, 1962). This internal conflict stems from the desire to comprehend oneself while concurrently navigating immediate social demands, potentially amplifying the complexity of the crisis experience. Consequently, Maslow's theory elucidates how the interplay between social needs and self-discovery shapes the narrative of identity crisis and resolution.

In cultural studies, an identity crisis is investigated through the lens of how people and communities negotiate their sense of self within a larger cultural framework. Researchers in the field of cultural studies investigate how cultural representations, discourses, and power dynamics influence identities and the experiences of identity crises. However, it is important to note that identity crises are not inherently negative or aberrant. They can be seen as chances for self-reflection, personal development, and eventually the growth of a truer and satisfying sense

of self.

In *Youth and Crisis* (1968), Erikson offers his theory of psychosocial development, focusing in particular on the idea of identity creation during adolescence and young adulthood. The book advances his well-known idea of the eight stages of psychological development and builds on his past writings on identity. Erikson uses the term 'identity crisis' to refer to the internal conflict that occurs during the fifth stage (identity versus role confusion). The phrase describes the internal conflict that young people go through as they try to forge a solid and unified identity. During crises of identity, individuals must examine their values, ambitions, and sense of self while also experimenting with other personas and career options. The book explores the various facets of identity, such as the cultural, societal, and personal facets. Erikson talks about the value of commitment, experimentation, and identity exploration as people move through this developmental period. He investigates how interpersonal relationships, cultural circumstances, and social interactions affect identity development. Erikson emphasizes the importance of achieving one's identity, which entails discovering one's purpose, values, and direction in life. He talks about the effects of not dealing with identity crisis, such as identity diffusion or role confusion, as well as the possible effects on people's psychological health and future growth.

According to Al Deck (2016), *Brick Lane* is a novel that examines the lives of these migrants in greater detail and contains and depicts various generations of displaced migrants. In particular after 9/11, it also incorporates other cultures and geographic regions (East Pakistan, Bangladesh, and England). He further adds that this specific novel includes a variety of subjects, including mental and cultural ghettoization, memories, representations of identity, what home means, and London's heterogeneous society.

3. A Study of Identity Crisis through the Characters of *Brick Lane*

Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* is a compelling novel that examines the lives of central characters, such as Nazneen, Chanu Ahmed, and Karim as they navigate the complexities of identity and cultural adaptation in their journey as immigrants living in London's Brick Lane neighborhood.

3.1. Nazneen

Nazneen, the female protagonist, is depicted as a rich and complex character throughout the novel. This lady lacks any notion of independence, and struggles to discover her own identity. She is introduced as a closed rural girl who has been influenced by all parts of her patriarchal society and the masculine influences in her life. Nazneen moved to London in an arranged marriage with Chanu, an educated man twice her age, to live with him in this new location with a different language, atmosphere, and even people. Nazneen accepts the husband her father picked for her, despite the fact that he is significantly older with repulsive ugliness having 'a face like a frog' (Ali 17). Chanu sometimes disgusts her, when she sees his 'puffy face on the pillow next to her, his lips parted indignantly even as he slept.' (18). She also accepts being moved to London and being confined to a small, cluttered flat. For a long time, Nazneen's mother Rupban has been her role model. Rupban has been supposed to tolerate everything without ever rebelling or questioning her status, even when her newborn daughter's life was at risk. Thus, she believes in fate and never questions its logic. It takes Nazneen a while to realise that her mother's approach to life does not work for her, nor has it for her mother, who committed suicide when her daughter was nine. The protagonist is described as innocent, isolated, subservient, marginalized, and a submissive girl who embraces black-boxed legacy beliefs received from her parents and community.

The control of men is manifested in her husband's 'weak' character, despite being described as an 'educated' man. In fact, Chanu, her spouse, believes it is wrong for her to walk outdoors alone because others would begin gossiping. Even though he is not convinced, this idea reveals his brittleness and incapacity to confront society. Nonetheless, he demonstrates his masculinity by discouraging Nazneen from going out, learning a new language, or working. In addition to all her problems, Nazneen feels 'trapped inside this body, inside this room, inside this flat, inside this concrete slab of entombed humanity' (56). As a result, women had to inherit pre-built views and beliefs without the opportunity to question or contradict them, even if this results in severe outcomes, such as letting Nazneen or her child die rather than providing her/him with medication merely because fighting against fate, as her mother has said, 'can weaken the blood' and 'can be fatal' (4). Her mother used to tell her 'What could not be changed must be borne. And since nothing could be changed, everything had to be borne' (Ali 7).

The author gives insight when depicting the routine of Nazneen which can be metaphorized by the Greek myth of Sisyphus¹. She even imagines herself being stuck in the closet or having the wardrobe crush her. Nazneen's impoverished conscience (caused, among other things, by her relationship with Karim) made her unwell. Her mother appears to her, telling her to bear everything and attempts to pull her down, both physically and psychologically. She falls and gets diagnosed with 'nervous exhaustion' (339) and depression by the doctor. The physical impact is precisely represented through her mother's ingrained ideas that 'if God wanted us to ask questions, he would have made us men' (60). In the days that follow, Nazneen takes comfort in saying 'You are nothing. You are nothing' (Ali 332), which relieves her of duty. When she reads the Qur'an for familiar calming sections, she cannot locate any or does not appear to completely understand it. She feels a little better after reading her

¹ According to Greek mythology, Sisyphus is condemned by the gods for eternity to repeatedly roll a boulder up a hill only to have it roll down again once he got it to the top.

sister's letters. Hasina's letters appear to cause a shift, they cause Nazneen to consider how much of what happens is her fault and how much is fate, if such a thing exists at all.

The greatest impediments to Nazneen's ambitions for self-determination and emancipation are mirrored in how her spouse regards her as an object with no voice to speak for herself and no opportunity to express her own opinion or point of view on anything. He believes that studying English is unnecessary. However, her secret lover Karim urges her to learn the language and read books in order to understand what is going on around her. As a result, 'reading became a sweet and melancholy secret' to her (Ali 198).

After suffering from an identity crisis enormously hindrance to her path to self-discovery, she engages with society in order to gain new experiences, as well as the freedom to embrace or reject those she deems bothersome. Finally, she embraces a feeling of hybridity as a result of her experiences and relationships. She has not decided to be Western and abandon her own culture, or to remain Bangladeshi and be marginalized. For example, despite having an option she chooses not to remove the Sari. She picks from both cultures what has shaped her identity and best suits her life in London.

3.2. Chanu

Chanu Ahmed is a Bangladeshi immigrant to London and Nazneen's husband. Chanu is portrayed as an educated and ambitious man with dreams of success and recognition in his new homeland. Chanu works as a low-level civil official after moving to London. Despite his educational background and aspirations, he struggles to advance his career, which frustrates and disappoints him. He says,

When I got off the airplane I had my degree certificate in my suitcase and a few pounds in my pocket. I thought there would be a red carpet laid out for me. I was going to join the Civil Service and become Private Secretary to the Prime Minister. As he told his

story, his voice grew. It filled the room. That was my plan. And then I found things were a bit different. (Ali 26-27)

Chanu views himself far superior than his fellow Bangladeshi immigrants, the most of whom worked in menial labour tasks back home and continue to do so in England. Yet for the British community they were all alike: Bangladeshi immigrants. Chanu says,

These people here didn't know the difference between me, who stepped off an aeroplane with a degree certificate, and the peasants who jumped off the boat possessing only the lice on their heads. I did this and that. Whatever I could. So much hard work, so little reward. More or less, it is true to say I have been chasing wild buffaloes and eating my own rice. (Ali 27)

In a society that does not fully value his abilities and aspirations, Chanu struggles with his status as an immigrant. He constantly seeks validation and respect, and his inability to achieve his desired status leads him to question his identity and self-worth. Due to his race and immigration status, Chanu is faced with racism and discrimination at work. This lessens his chances of obtaining a suitable job and affects his self-esteem. Nazneen says, 'My husband [Chanu] says they are racist, particularly Mr Dalloway. He thinks he will get the promotion, but it will take him longer than any white man. He says that if he painted his skin pink and white then there would be no problem.' (Ali 58)

The setbacks that Chanu has experienced in his career are a part of his identity crisis. He struggles with emotions of alienation and doubt about his role in British society as a result of his sense of failure and lack of self-worth. In fact, the novel explores the difficulties faced by several immigrants who arrive in a new country with hopes for a better life but face obstacles and feel disappointments on their path to achievement and acceptance. Therefore, Chanu confronts a serious dilemma about his cultural identity, and tries to stay connected to his

Bangladeshi ancestry while trying to find his place in the British society. Chanu is a complex character who struggles with questions of cultural identity, worth, and belonging. He experiences a lack of belonging and a feeling of being an outsider in both cultures. Thus, neither is he able to fully fit into British society due to his background, nor does he feel close to his own Bangladeshi community in Britain. This in-betweenness contributes to his identity crisis because he is lost between the traditional principles he was reared with and the Western influences he comes into contact with in London. Another reason for Chanu's identity crisis is his own family: the conflict between Chanu's traditional cultural ideals and the realities of raising a family in a foreign nation is at the heart of his identity dilemma as it relates to his family. As the head of the household, Chanu has a strong sense of duty to care for his family and secure their well-being. He has a number of difficulties and dilemmas that are related to his family which cause him to experience internal conflict and uncertainty about his responsibilities as a husband and father. Chanu struggles to raise his girls, Shahana and Bibi, in a culture that is very different from his own. He struggles between the urge to allow his girls to assimilate to British cultural norms and his desire to uphold his Bangladeshi cultural beliefs. He struggles between wanting his children to embrace their Bangladeshi ancestry and the fact that they will be raised in a multicultural society, which might put those traditions to the test. As Chanu examines his parenting choices and their effects on his girls' life, this cultural conflict strains the family and adds to his identity struggle. Moreover, as Chanu tries to deal with his frustrations and disappointments, his marriage to Nazneen becomes strained. Their marriage is strained by the pressure of financial responsibilities and unfulfilled expectations, which further exacerbates his feeling of self. He says,

It's a success story . . . But behind every story of immigrant success there lies a deeper 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 ones

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 sanity while striving to achieve the best for one's family. (Ali 91)

Finally, Chanu's identity issue is portrayed throughout the story as a battle to fit in and fulfill his goals in a strange land. He experiences repeated setbacks in his career, and the strain of having to support his family and deal with the cultural differences in his home only exacerbates Chanu's identity dilemma. Chanu's identity crisis is still unsolved by the end of the novel, although it has grown more complicated and introspective. He becomes more conscious of the challenges that immigrants like himself endure as well as the value of relationships with family and friends. His persona shows phases of development and reflection as he works through the challenges of his identity.

3.3. Karim

Unlike Nazneen and Chanu, Karim was born and reared in Britain. He acts as a change mediator or catalyst. Nazneen defies a variety of social norms as a result of her romance with Karim. Karim's personality is intriguing since he contrasts with Nazneen in that he was born and reared in Britain, and identifies as a Briton. More significantly, he seems self-assured and at ease mixing and matching British and Bangladeshi characteristics. Although Karim is portrayed as a second-generation immigrant growing up in a different cultural context than his parents. However, as the tale progresses, it becomes clear that Karim is going through an identity crisis as well. He is divided between his parents' conventional beliefs and expectations, as well as the chances and challenges that living in a cosmopolitan metropolis like London presents. Several variables impact Karim's identity dilemma, including generational and cultural divides. He struggles with his history, feeling of belonging, and what it means to be

both British and Bangladeshi. He also has to deal with the stress of managing his parents' and society's expectations of him.

Conclusion

Investigating the notion of identity and the associated identity crisis has produced important insights into the experiences of the central characters of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*. Throughout this chapter, we have examined the complex interplay of personal and societal elements that created the characters' struggle with identity crisis, prompting them to reflect on who they are and where they belong. As a natural continuation to what has been studied in this chapter, another theme which is specifically related to identity and identity crisis will be studied in the subsequent chapter. This theme is assimilation and how it is treated in Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane*.

Chapter III

Understanding Assimilation in *Brick Lane*

Introduction

In this chapter, the theme of assimilation in Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane* will be explored. This chapter will be divided into three sections. In the first section, the key concept of 'assimilation' will be defined. In the second section, the analysis of this fundamental concept will be performed within the multicultural context of *Brick Lane*. In the last section, the personal experience of the main characters of the novel with assimilation will be discussed. Primarily, this chapter will demonstrate a better understanding of the importance of assimilation in identity formation and cultural dynamics in the novel.

1. What Is Meant by 'Assimilation'?

The term 'assimilation' derives from the Latin word *assimilation*. The latter means 'likeness' or 'similarity'. This Latin term stems from the verb *assimilare* which combines *ad* (to) and *similis* (similar), conveying the concept of becoming similar or alike. This linguistic evolution is outlined in various dictionaries and language references, such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* and *Merriam-Webster*. The historical and linguistic development of the term underscores its application in describing processes of cultural, social, or individual integration, as observed in various academic fields and contexts.

In the fields of anthropology and sociology, ‘assimilation’ denotes the intricate process by which individuals or groups with diverse ethnic origins gradually integrate into the prevailing culture of a society. This phenomenon involves the adoption of traits and elements from the dominant culture to such an extent that the assimilating group becomes virtually indistinguishable from the broader societal membership. Assimilation, which is considered the utmost level of acculturation, signifies a comprehensive transformation that leads to the seamless coalescence of diverse cultural identities into a unified whole (Gordon, 1964; Park, 1928).

2. The Phenomenon of Assimilation in *Brick Lane*

In Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*, assimilation serves as a central theme that underscores the experiences of the characters within a complex cultural landscape. The novel provides a multifaceted exploration of how individuals and families from diverse backgrounds navigate the process of assimilation in the context of their new lives in London's Brick Lane neighborhood. The story offers insights into the challenges, conflicts, and transformations that accompany the assimilation journey, as characters grapple with their identities, values, and connections to their cultural roots.

The backdrop of Brick Lane, a multicultural and immigrant-rich area, provides a dynamic setting for examining assimilation. The various characters in the novel come from different cultural backgrounds, reflecting the rich tapestry of diversity in the neighborhood. As they strive to adapt to a new society while holding onto aspects of their heritage, the characters' experiences mirror the broader realities of immigration and cultural integration.

In *Brick Lane*, assimilation is portrayed as a multifaceted process that involves negotiating

cultural norms, language barriers, and societal expectations. Characters experience a range of outcomes in their assimilation journeys, from embracing the dominant culture to resisting it or seeking a balance between their heritage and the new environment. The novel sensitively captures the complexities of assimilation, recognizing that the process is neither uniform nor linear for all individuals. Moreover, the novel also highlights the impact of external factors, such as historical events and personal circumstances, on the assimilation process. For instance, the characters' responses to major events like the 9/11 attacks underscore how assimilation can be influenced by larger geopolitical dynamics and shape perceptions of identity and belonging.

In essence, *Brick Lane* weaves a narrative that illuminates the intricacies of assimilation within the multicultural context of London's Brick Lane. Through its diverse characters and their assimilation journeys, the novel offers a nuanced exploration of how individuals negotiate their identities, traditions, and aspirations in the face of cultural change.

3. How Do the Characters of *Brick Lane* Experience Assimilation?

The idea of assimilation dominates Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane* overwhelmingly, as the protagonists struggle to maintain their unique identities while navigating the challenging process of adjusting to a new cultural milieu. Nazneen, Chanu, Shahana, Bibi and Razia's struggles with the difficulties and changes brought on by their life in London's Brick Lane district are the main focus of the narrative.

3.1. Nazneen

Nazneen, a central character in *Brick Lane*, embarks on a complex journey of assimilation

and cultural adaptation throughout the narrative. Initially portrayed as a submissive and obedient wife, Nazneen's experiences in London lead her to evolve and negotiate her identity within the new cultural context. Nazneen contemplates, 'Life had a tendency to lead you in circles' (35). Her journey highlights the multifaceted nature of assimilation and its impact on an individual's growth.

Nazneen's early life in the rural Bangladeshi village sets the stage for her initial passive acceptance of circumstances. Her arranged marriage to Chanu and subsequent move to London mark the beginning of her transformative journey. As she navigates the challenges of a new country, Nazneen grapples with a mix of emotions—nostalgia for her homeland, curiosity about the foreign culture, and a longing for personal agency¹. These complexities contribute to her gradual awakening and assimilation process. Her interactions with other characters like Karim, a young radical activist, expose her to the possibilities of personal agency and self-expression. As Karim urges her to consider her own desires, Nazneen reflects on her journey: 'What is happiness? Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony' (Ali 262). Karim's influence prompts her to question societal norms and reevaluate her role as a woman within the context of a conservative cultural framework. This marks a significant turning point in her assimilation journey, as she begins to challenge her own preconceived notions² and embrace the potential for personal growth.

Nazneen's assimilation journey also encompasses her experiences as a mother, her

¹ Agency is the capacity of an individual to actively and independently choose and to affect change; free will or self-determination.

² A preconceived notion is an idea or judgment about something formed before encountering any evidence or firsthand information.

participation in the garment industry, and her gradual connection with the diverse residents of Brick Lane. Through these interactions, she becomes increasingly attuned to the various cultural nuances³ and dynamics that shape her new environment. Her growing independence and determination to improve her circumstances reflect her assimilation into British society.

Furthermore, Nazneen's assimilation is intricately tied to her evolving relationship with her husband, Chanu. As Chanu grapples with his own identity crisis and the challenges of assimilation, Nazneen's transformation becomes a mirror of his struggles. Her ability to adapt and find her voice is contrasted with Chanu's struggles to reconcile his ideals with the realities of their new life. However, Nazneen's assimilation is not without its conflicts and dilemmas. She faces internal conflicts between her personal desires and societal expectations, particularly in her relationship with Karim. Additionally, her assimilation journey is marked by feelings of guilt and loyalty towards her Bengali heritage, which continue to shape her choices and actions.

In conclusion, Nazneen's assimilation journey in *Brick Lane* is a complex narrative of growth, transformation, and self-discovery. Her evolution from a passive observer to an active participant in her own life reflects the intricate interplay between personal agency, cultural adaptation, and self-realization⁴. Through her experiences, the novel illuminates the multifaceted nature of assimilation and its profound impact on individual identities in the face of cultural change.

³ Cultural nuances are the differences in the way that people in different cultures think, feel, and behave.

⁴ Self-realization is the fulfillment by oneself of the possibilities of one's character or personality.

3.2. Chanu

Chanu is a complex character that goes through his own process of assimilation and cultural adaptation throughout the novel. Chanu is presented at the start of the narrative as an intelligent, passionate, and master's-educated man. He frequently shares his opinions on politics, history, and his Bengladeshi culture because he is proud of his origins and his culture. But in his new life in London, his ideals and goals are constantly met with disappointment. It becomes evident later in the story that Chanu's initial enthusiasm for his new surroundings is beginning to wane. In his work life, he encounters difficulties, suffering, setbacks and disappointments that prevent him from achieving the success he had planned for, which contributed to his identity crisis. Chanu is fed up with the disappointments he faces and the fact that he could not be the big successful man he wants to be. This contributed to his choice of not staying in a country that he could not adapt in, he says to Nazneen:

Chanu smiled, his fat cheeks dimpled. His eyes darted here and there, looking for an escape route from this inappropriate face. He explained as if to a child. 'All this time they thought I was rich. Why should I stay here in this foreign land, if it did not make me rich? I let them think it. It suited them and it suited me. Actually, I told them some things that are not true, have never been true. Made myself a big man. Here I am only a small man, but there . . .'

The smile vanished. 'I could be big. Big Man. That's how it happened. (Ali 107)

His contacts with his coworkers and neighbors also show how difficult it was for him to fit in with British society. The process of Chanu's assimilation is characterized by a growing sense of disappointment. He learns that his goals of fame and fortune in London might not be as feasible

as he had thought. He struggles with emotions of inadequacy and displacement ⁵ when he encounters cultural and social limitations. This internal struggle contributes to his evolving perspective on assimilation. Chanu's journey is marked by a blend of pride, annoyance, and self-awareness. He shares his hardships and aspirations in moments of solidarity with other immigrants. He also discusses the realities of prejudice and discrimination faced by immigrants in a new country. It is crucial to remember that Chanu's assimilation is a difficult process. Instead of completely rejecting his cultural roots, he seeks to strike a balance between upholding them and assimilating into his new surroundings. His life story is a mirror of the difficulties and obstacles that immigrants experience as they try to navigate their identities and cultural integration⁶. Chanu's biggest concern is his children, even though he tried to assimilate into the host country yet, he did not want his children to adapt to a culture that he thinks is dangerous for them. He plans his move back to Dhaka when he reveals to Dr Azad his plan saying: 'We will be in Dhaka before Ruku is in any danger. I've drawn up plans for the house, did I tell you? Very simple, very classical in design. I intend to be the architect myself' (Ali 89). Ruku is Chanu and Nazneen's first child who died as infant. Chanu is worried about his children to act like Westerners who drink and do not respect their parents. He says,

I don't need very much. Just enough for the Dhaka house and some left over for Ruku's education. I don't want him to rot here with all the skinheads and drunks. I don't want him to grow up in this racist society. I don't want him to talk back to his mother. I want him to

⁵ Displacement is to move physically out of position.

⁶ Cultural Integration is defined as when people from a culture adopt the essence of another culture, while maintaining their own culture.

respect his father.' Chanu's voice had grown impassioned. Mrs. Azad tutted and held up her purple-taloned hand. Chanu assumed a loud whisper. 'The only way is to take him back home. (Ali 89)

Chanu and Nazneen had two daughters: Shahana and Bibi after Raqib's death (Ruku). Chanu is more determined than ever to move back to Bangladesh as his girls get older because he worries more and more about what will happen to them in Britain. He accepts a job as a cab driver to pay the moving expenses, permits Nazneen to work as a sewer, and borrows money from Mrs. Islam, a wealthy British Bangladeshi woman.

The conflict between Chanu's conventional values and the realities of life in a fast- changing world frequently gets in the way of his ambitions to achieve and provide a better life for his family. His traditional views and sometimes rigid beliefs can lead to conflicts within his family and with the broader community, particularly in light of their immigrant experience in London's Brick Lane neighborhood. Also, his attempts to make a point of emphasizing the worth of his girls' Bangladeshi cultural background and encourage them to appreciate their ancestors' traditions in his frequent attempts to teach these values. However, his attempts to convince them of these cultural values do not always go smoothly.

Chanu faced so many difficulties and disappointment since he first landed, his adaptation journey was hard. Chanu's character develops throughout the narrative, and his choices are influenced by a variety of elements, such as the happiness of his family and his fear for their future in a Western country. He chooses eventually to go back to his homeland after failing to adapt to the British culture, yet his family which is one of the reasons he wants to go back for, choose to

stay in London. Finally, as a result of his identity crisis, Chanu fails to assimilate.

Chanu's journey reflects the reality that assimilation is not always a straightforward or linear process. While he may adopt certain aspects of the dominant culture, he also holds onto elements of his Bengladeshi identity and heritage. His experiences exemplify the tension between the desire to assimilate and the desire to maintain one's cultural roots. Ultimately, Chanu's character showcases the diverse ways in which individuals navigate assimilation, and his story emphasizes that success in assimilation can vary greatly depending on personal circumstances, perspectives, and societal dynamics.

3.3. Shahana and Bibi

Shahana and Bibi are Nazneen's daughters, and a representation of second-generation immigrants who are influenced by both their parents' cultural background and the society in which they are growing up. They both react differently to this situation which they are lost between neglecting their origins and the assimilation to the country they were born in.

3.3.1. Shahana

Shahana is the eldest daughter. She is independent, inquisitive, and ready to challenge the traditional norms. She is affected by the multicultural environment in which she lives; as a result, she investigates Western culture, fashion, and modern trends. Her character displays a yearning for independence and self-expression, which can occasionally be at variance with the standards of her traditional Bangladeshi ancestry. Throughout the novel, her character contributes to the exploration of generational gaps, cultural adaptation, and the difficulties second-generation immigrants face in

navigating their identities.

The bond between her father, Chanu, and her is extremely complicated. Chanu, who is a first-generation immigrant, might adhere to more conventional beliefs and values as a result of his Bangladeshi ancestry: he is a traditional man. Shahana's outspokenness and willingness to challenge these traditions create friction between them. Chanu finds it difficult to comprehend Shahana's desire to adopt Western society, and he worries about her detour from her traditional norms. Shahana refuses to listen to her father's lessons about their Bangladeshi history, and finds it boring. Therefore, she hates speaking Bengali and hates her father for not allowing the use of English. She neglects her origins and adapts more to the British culture. She is exposed to various cultural beliefs and conventions as a second-generation immigrant growing up in London, as opposed to her parents. Her father has traditional expectations that conflict with her desire for personal freedom and self-expression, which can occasionally cause problems and misunderstandings. Shahana is described in the novel as follows:

Shahana did not want to listen to Bengali classical music. Her written Bengali was shocking. She wanted to wear jeans. She hated her kameez and spoiled her entire wardrobe by pouring paint on them. If she could choose between baked beans and dal, it was no contest. When Bangladesh was mentioned, she pulled a face. She did not know and would not learn that Tagore was more than poet and Nobel laureate, and no less than the true father of her nation. Shahana did not care. Shahana did not want to go back. (Ali 135)

She actively questions and challenges aspects of her cultural heritage that she sees as limiting due to the way she is naturally inclined to think. She is more likely to adopt aspects of Western

culture and integrate into her new setting, even if that means departing from some customs. Her quest for personal independence implies a more overt rejection or alteration of some traditional conventions. When her father decides that they have to go back to live in Dhaka, Shahana is the first to refuse. 'I'm not going,' says Shahana. 'I'll run away.' she opens a cupboard and pulls out a bag. Inside, she has put a nightdress, a pair of shoes, jeans and a T-shirt. 'I'm ready to run.' (Ali 163- 164). Shahana is always bothered by her father's ideas and lectures about Bangladesh. She talks back to her father which gets her father on his nerves. Overall, Shahana's relationship with her parents, more specifically with her father Chanu, serves as a microcosm of the larger themes in *Brick Lane*, such as the clash between generations and the complexities of cultural identity within an immigrant family. Finally, Shahana neglects her origins. She says, 'I'm from London.' (226). She assimilates to the British culture and integrates successfully.

3.3.2. Bibi

Bibi is the youngest daughter. She typically adopts a more conventional philosophy of life. She might feel particularly connected to her Bangladeshi cultural beliefs, which places a high priority on family and community. Bibi's willingness to uphold certain customs and her sense of commitment to her ethnic heritage could be considered traits that best describe her personality. She runs into problems between her own desires which are affected by the culture she is growing up in, and her father's expectations, which are based on his traditional values. Bibi's character adds depth to the exploration of the challenges faced by second-generation immigrants in reconciling their heritage with their present environment.

Unlike her sister, Shahana, Bibi respects her parents more. She feels more at ease upholding the traditions and principles of her Bangladeshi ancestry, as taught by her parents. Bibi tends to

balance between both, her heritage and the multicultural society she grows up in. She focuses on her father's lectures about the Bangladeshi culture unlike her sister. She is always the first to appear when their father calls them to teach them about Bangladesh history.

Bibi's character contributes to the investigation of the variety of experiences among second-generation immigrants. Her perspective helps the reader gain a better understanding of the various ways in which young people adjust to their ancestry and their new environment. Bibi blends her heritage with the cultural influences she has been exposed to in her adaption. She carefully integrates aspects of both worlds into her identity to create a special synthesis that reflects her own experiences. Finally, Bibi does not neglect her origins but tries to make balance between her origins and the British culture. She integrates successfully, but without neglecting her origins.

3.4. Razia

Razia, a prominent character in *Brick Lane*, embarks on a dynamic journey of assimilation and cultural adaptation throughout the narrative. Initially introduced as Nazneen's sister and a devoted wife to Karim, Razia's experiences in both Bangladesh and London contribute to her intricate evolution and negotiation of identity within varying cultural landscapes. Razia reflects, 'Life's choices were . . . a web. Each step you took led you further into a trap' (Ali 156). Her journey vividly illustrates the multifaceted nature of assimilation and its influence on personal growth.

Razia's early life in the Bangladeshi village, marked by her marriage to the radical Karim, sets the stage for her initial exposure to broader ideological viewpoints. The allure of Karim's activism and her involvement in political movements shapes her perception of both herself and her

place within a larger societal context. As she navigates the complexities of life in London, Razia

grapples with a tapestry of emotions—attachment to her homeland, fascination with the novel culture, and a quest for individual agency. These internal conflicts contribute to her gradual process of assimilation. Her interactions with Karim and his revolutionary comrades expose her to new possibilities of self-expression and socio-political engagement. The power of her convictions is palpable: ‘We all have to be who we are. Not everything is worth compromising for’ (Ali 332). These interactions serve as catalysts⁷ for her to question traditional norms and reassess her role within her marriage and society at large. This pivotal shift in her assimilation journey marks her embrace of self-determination and the pursuit of her beliefs.

Razia's assimilation experience extends beyond personal growth to encompass her role as a mother, her professional aspirations, and her burgeoning⁸ sense of belonging within the diverse community of Brick Lane. Her transformation is exemplified through her involvement in social and political activities, where she becomes attuned to the nuances of the multicultural environment around her. This journey culminates in her fervent pursuit of justice for her own community. Furthermore, Razia's assimilation is intricately interwoven with her relationship with Karim. As Karim navigates his own identity struggles, Razia's evolution serves as a counterpoint to his convictions. Her ability to harmonize her own ideals with the realities of their surroundings illustrates her adaptability and perseverance. However, Razia's assimilation is not devoid of challenges and dilemmas. She faces internal conflicts when her political ideals clash with her familial responsibilities, particularly as a mother. Her assimilation journey is characterized by the

⁷ A catalyst is an agent that provokes or speeds significant change or action.

⁸ Burgeoning means growing, expanding, or developing rapidly.

tension between her commitment to her heritage and her desire for progress, which persistently influence her decisions and actions.

Razia's assimilation journey is a rich narrative of transformation, resilience, and the quest for self-actualization⁹. Her evolution from a compliant observer to a proactive participant in her own destiny underscores the intricate balance between personal identity, cultural integration, and societal engagement. Through Razia's experiences, the novel provides insight into the diverse facets of assimilation and its profound implications on individual identities amidst the backdrop of cultural change.

Conclusion

In the world of *Brick Lane*, assimilation becomes a tapestry woven from linguistic origins, characters' transformations, and the essence of multicultural neighbourhood. The characters' journeys, like Chanu's intricate negotiations and Nazneen's self-discovery, offer windows into the intricate nature of identity and belonging. Against the vivid backdrop of Brick Lane, assimilation takes on a nuanced significance, revealing the interplay between heritage and adaptation in an increasingly globalized society. Through Monica Ali's storytelling, we witness universal struggles and triumphs as characters and communities grapple with preserving tradition while embracing change. As the pages turn, *Brick Lane* unfolds assimilation as a profound and transformative force shaping characters and the diverse fabric of multicultural societies.

⁹ Self-actualisation is to realize fully one's potential.

General Conclusion

This research embarked on a journey into the intricate identity dilemmas faced by the Bangladeshi immigrants in the United Kingdom, as portrayed through the lens of Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane*. The research problem that guided this exploration was to unravel how understanding the past and culture of Bangladesh deepened insights into the identity challenges among UK Bangladeshi immigrants and their offspring in the novel. Through a comprehensive analysis of the novel's characters and their experiences, this study sought to illustrate the multifaceted identity crisis of Bangladeshi immigrants and their progeny in the UK, emphasizing the interplay between cultural heritage and British integration. Furthermore, the research explored how the characters within *Brick Lane* negotiate their identities and cultural backgrounds within the context of assimilation.

In response to these research questions, several key findings emerged to illuminate a diverse spectrum of experiences among Bangladeshi immigrants in the United Kingdom. Firstly, there is the group characterized by seamless assimilation, where individuals have effectively integrated into British society, often to the extent of overshadowing their cultural heritage. Secondly, a significant segment experiences profound identity crises that impede successful adaptation, resulting in a challenging struggle to reconcile their cultural background with the demands of their host community. Lastly, there emerges a group that demonstrates successful integration while preserving cultural heritage, exemplifying the concept of cultural hybridity, where individuals harmoniously blend elements of their Bangladeshi heritage with British culture, forming a dynamic and adaptive hybrid identity. These distinct groups underscore the multifaceted nature of the immigrant experience,

highlighting the complexities of cultural assimilation and identity formation within the Bangladeshi immigrant community in the UK.

Looking forward, there are promising avenues for future research in this domain. Exploring the identity dynamics of second and third-generation UK Bangladeshi immigrants beyond *Brick Lane* could provide a broader perspective. Additionally, comparative studies that analyse the experiences of Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK with those in other Western countries could yield valuable insights into the role of societal context in identity formation.

In conclusion, this dissertation's journey through the cultural crossroads of identity among UK Bangladeshi immigrants and their offspring has shed light on a complex and evolving phenomenon. It is a testament to the enduring significance of literature as a mirror reflecting the intricate interplay between cultural heritage and individual identity in an increasingly interconnected world.

Appendix 1:

Summary of the Novel *Brick Lane*

Source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/rv1eyLVScp855VNn8>

Brick Lane is the main street in London's Bangladeshi neighborhood. Monica Ali's 2003 novel of the same name follows the life of the protagonist of the book is Nazneen, a Bangladeshi immigrant who gets married to Chanu Ahmed, an older man, in an arranged marriage. To begin her new life with her spouse, she moves to London. Nazneen encounters a different culture in London and attempts to strike a balance between modern potential and enduring customs.

Nazneen grows more and more impatient with Chanu as time goes on for his lack of decisiveness. A son is born to the couple, but he passes away as infant. The couple becomes more inseparable as a result of this loss, and Nazneen gives birth to two daughters, Shahana, who strongly opposes anything related to her parents' Bengali ancestry, and Bibi, who works arduously to please everyone. Chanu decides to return because as his children get older, he worries more and more about what will happen to them while they are living abroad.

Nazneen eventually meets Karim, who brings her sewing supplies from his uncle's shop, after she starts working. They end up having a relationship, and Karim helps Nazneen see how racial tensions and injustice are rising. Nazneen, however, is plagued by remorse and ultimately has a breakdown. Nazneen quits her affair with Karim after she recovers. Nazneen is under increasing pressure to repay their debt and grows more and more certain that she cannot return to Bangladesh. She and her daughters stays in London, while Chanu leaves. As she works to support herself and her kids in the months following Chanu's departure, Nazneen discovers a fresh sense of freedom and independence.

Source: GradeSaver. "*Brick Lane Summary.*" *GradeSaver*, 28 Nov. 2021,

www.gradesaver.com/brick-lane/study-guide/summary?fbclid=IwAR1lhVZtZWYRcwZcmjZiNjAKpyzoSTdcY5VvSsmCIzmberp2wkb7Bt3st68.

Appendix 2:

Biography of Monica Ali



Source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/GwDEvdR4kBKJZyRx5>

A British Bangladeshi writer and novelist. She was born in Dhaka, Bangladesh (1967). Her mother is British, worked as a counselor, and her father is Bangladeshi and worked as a teacher. At the age of three, Ali moved to England with her family due to civil war. She attended Oxford University to study philosophy, politics, and economics after growing up in Bolton. Monica is nominated one of Granta's Best Young British Novelists. Her first book, *Brick Lane*, was named to the 2003 Man Booker Prize for Fiction shortlist. The book was transformed into a movie with the same name. The novel is also named for the Guardian First Book Award, the National Book Critics Circle Award, and nominated amongst the New York Times Best Books list of 2003.

Source: Ali, Monica 1967– | Encyclopedia.com.

www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/ali-monica-1967-0.

Monica Ali - National Portrait Gallery.

www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp81916/monica-ali.

Appendix 3:

Book Review of *Brick Lane*

Ian Jack states that *Brick Lane* is a good book. Last year it reached the judges of Granta's Best of Young British Novelists awards in typescript form, long before it was published (and so minus endorsements or reviews), and all five of us unhesitatingly voted for Ali to be on our list. She had created interesting and believable people, and given us insight into their predicaments. That's the literary justification.

But I also think we liked the book because we (none of us Bengalis from east London) felt that it showed us a glimpse of what life might be like among one of the largest and least described non-white communities in Britain. That might not be a strictly literary reason, but then again many far greater novels than *Brick Lane* owe their reputation to subject as well as to form.

Source: "It's Only a Novel..." *The Guardian*, 30 Nov. 2017,

www.theguardian.com/books/2003/dec/20/featuresreviews.guardianreview3?

Glossary

Adaptation: In the context of sociology and cultural studies, adaptation refers to the process of individuals or groups adjusting their behaviours, beliefs, or customs to fit into a new or different cultural or social environment.

Ancestry: Ancestry, in cultural studies, refers to an individual's or group's familial heritage, lineage, or genealogical background, often considered as a significant element of one's identity.

Arranged marriage: An arranged marriage is a cultural practice where individuals are united in matrimony based on the choice and arrangement of their families or other intermediaries rather than through personal choice.

Assimilation: Assimilation, in sociology, is the process by which individuals or groups from a minority culture adopt the norms, values, and behaviours of the dominant culture, often resulting in a loss of their distinctive cultural characteristics.

Belonging: In cultural studies, belonging represents an individual's sense of inclusion, connection, or affiliation with a particular cultural, social, or communal group, often influencing one's identity and well-being.

Bengali: Bengali refers to the cultural and ethnic identity associated with the people of Bengal, a region in South Asia. In the context of cultural studies, it signifies the language, traditions, and customs of this group.

Bangladeshi: Bangladeshi denotes the nationality or cultural identity of individuals from Bangladesh, a South Asian country. In cultural studies, it relates to the customs, practices, and traditions of the Bangladeshi people.

Community: In sociology, a community refers to a group of individuals who share common characteristics, interests, or experiences and often interact and support one another within a particular social or geographic context.

Confusion: In psychology and sociology, confusion represents a state of mental or emotional disorientation, often stemming from a lack of clarity, understanding, or a sense of belonging in a particular cultural or social setting.

Culture: Culture encompasses the shared customs, beliefs, practices, values, and behaviours of a specific group or society. It is a central concept in sociology and cultural studies, shaping human identity and social interactions.

Custom: Customs are established traditional practices or behaviours within a particular cultural or social group, often passed down through generations and influencing various aspects of life.

Depression: Depression, in psychology, is a mental health disorder characterised by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and a lack of interest or pleasure in daily activities. It can be influenced by cultural and societal factors.

Displacement: In sociology and cultural studies, displacement refers to the forced or voluntary movement of individuals or groups from their original cultural or geographical location to another, often resulting in cultural adaptation and identity shifts.

Fragmentation: Fragmentation is a concept in sociology and cultural studies that describes the breaking apart or division of a cultural or social group into smaller, distinct units or subgroups, often due to various factors such as conflicts or globalisation.

Hybridity: Within cultural studies, hybridity refers to the blending and recombination of cultural elements, practices, and traditions from different cultural backgrounds.

Identity: Identity is the qualities, beliefs, personality traits, appearance, and/or expressions that characterise a person or a group.

Identity crisis: It is a period of uncertainty and confusion in which a person's sense of identity becomes insecure, typically due to a change in their expected aims or role in society.

Immigration: In sociology, immigration is the social phenomenon where individuals or groups of people from one country or region move to another country or region with the intention of settling there.

Immigrant: In sociology, is a person who has moved to a new country or region, often referred to as the host society, to live and work there.

Integration (cultural): It is the extent to which individuals experience a sense of belonging to a collectivity by virtue of sharing its norms, beliefs and values.

Melting pot: It is a metaphorical representation of a society or community in which individuals from diverse cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds come together and assimilate into a unified culture.

Multiculturalism: It is the quality or condition of a society in which different ethnic and cultural groups have equal status and access to power but each maintains its own identity, characteristics, and mores.

Self: It is the totality of the individual, consisting of all characteristic attributes, conscious and unconscious, mental and physical. Apart from its basic reference to personal identity, being, and experience.

Self-actualisation: It is the complete realization of that of which one is capable, involving maximum development of abilities and full involvement in and appreciation for life, particularly as manifest in peak experiences.

Self-determination: It is the process or result of engaging in behaviors without interference or undue influence from other people or external demands.

Societal: It is an adjective that means to relate to a society as a whole, encompassing the collective behaviours, norms, values, and structures that characterize a given community, culture, or nation.

Society: It is an enduring social group living in a particular place whose members are mutually interdependent and share political and other institutions, laws and mores, and a common culture.

Tradition: It is a long-established custom or belief that has been passed on from one generation to another.

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