

## Chapter I: Introduction

### Ali and Islamic Culture

Monica Ali was born in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 1967 and she immigrated to Britain in 1971. She married Simon Torrance. She worked in the marketing department of Pluto. In 2003, Monica Ali's published her debut novel *Brick Lane* which portrays a young Bangladeshi woman and her life in London. Across the Atlantic, *Brick Lane* has been also resonated with critics. *Brick Lane* inspires confidence about the career that is to come.

Islamic culture generally includes all the practices which have developed around the religion of [Islam](#), including Qur'anic ones such as prayer and non- Qur'anic such as [divisions of the world in Islam](#). It includes as the [Baul](#) tradition of [Bengal](#), and facilitated the peaceful conversion of most of Bengal. Indeed, Islam insists on the free consent of both bride and groom, so such marriages could even be deemed illegal under religious law.

A woman forbidden from driving a car in Riyadh will cheerfully take the wheel when abroad, confident that her country's bizarre law has nothing to do with Islam. “Afghan women educated before the Taliban rule know that banning girls from school is forbidden in Islam, which encourages all Muslims to seek knowledge from cradle to grave, from every source possible” (23).

The Quran is addressed to all Muslims, and for the most part it does not differentiate between male and female. Man and woman, it says, "were created of a single

soul," and are moral equals in the sight of God" (12). Women have the right to divorce, to inherit property, to conduct business and to have access to knowledge.

Since women are under all the same obligations and rules of conduct as the men, differences emerge most strongly when it comes to pregnancy, child-bearing and rearing, menstruation and, to a certain extent, clothing.

The veiling of Muslim women is a more complex issue. Certainly, the Koran requires them to behave and dress modestly - but these strictures apply equally to men. Only one verse refers to the veiling of women, stating that the Prophet's wives should be behind a hijab when his male guests converse with them.

The story's focal point is Nazneen, born in a Bangladeshi village and is married at the age of 18 to a man several years her senior, who takes her to live in London. They settle in the South Asian stronghold of London's East End. Nazneen is bewildered by life in London, lonely, and ambivalent about her husband, Chanu, even as her dependence on him grows with the birth of each of their children. The course of the novel spans 13 years, from 1988 to the events that follow 9/11, and Nazneen eventually begins to venture further from *Brick Lane* as the years pass. When she first arrives, she is afraid to leave the apartment, but eventually meets her neighbors and even takes a job as a seamstress. Through her job she meets a young, charismatic Muslim activist named Karim, and it is only with him that she begins to explore the parts of London a world away from the insular community centered on *Brick Lane*.

Reviews for *Brick Lane* hailed it as the successor to Smith's *White Teeth* as well as the debut of a talented new literary voice for twenty-first century Britain. Commenting on the text, *Brick Lane* Abu-Jabber asserts:

*Brick Lane* fulfills that early promise and establishes Ali as a writer of real literary depth and dimension. There is elegance and a steadfast, patient, careful construction of observed detail to this prose, a meticulous layering of character and social observation that endows *Brick Lane* with a sophistication and maturity that might surprise readers who've come to expect flash and dash in modern fiction. (15)

The novel's only shortcoming, some reviewers feel, is delivering a too-neat wrap-up of the strand of plot between Nazneen, Chanu, and Karim. Exasperatingly, Ali's complex story ends with a discordant postscript of mushy self-fulfillment. Other assessments find comic warmth in Ali's characterization of Chanu. Writing in the *Observer*, Lane terms him "one of the novel's foremost miracles: twice her age, with a face like a frog ... and the boundless doomed optimism of the self-improvement junkie, he is both exasperating and, to the reader at least, enormously loveable" (4). Benedicte Brown comments the portrayal of the husband, calling him a wonderfully drawn character: "pompous and an arch self-deceiver, and yet endearing, with his passion for learning and his endlessly disappointed hopes for self advancement" (8). He seems to have looked at the linguistic aspect of the text.

Islamic [culture](#) is a term primarily used in [secular academia](#) to describe the cultural practices common to historically [Islamic](#) peoples. "As Islam originated in the 7th century [Arabia](#), the earlier forms of [Muslim](#) culture were predominantly [Arabic](#)" (Shadat, 21). With the rapid expansion of the [Islamic empires](#), Muslim culture has influenced and has assimilated much from the [Persian](#), [Turkic](#), [Pakistani](#), [Mongol](#), [Indian](#), [Malay](#), [Berber](#) and [Indonesian](#) cultures.

Islamic culture is itself a contentious term. Muslims live in many different countries and communities, and it can be difficult to isolate points of cultural unity among Muslims, besides their adherence to the religion of Islam. “Anthropologists and historians nevertheless study Islam as an aspect of, and influence on, culture in the regions where the religion is predominant” (Mohammad, 18).

The noted historian of Islam, [Marshall Hodgson](#), notes “the above difficulty of religious versus secular academic usage of the words Islamic and Muslim in his three-volume work” (*The Venture of Islam, 1992*). He proposes to resolve it by only using these terms for purely religious phenomena, and invented the term "Islamicate" to denote all cultural aspects of historically Muslim peoples. However, his distinction has not been widely adopted, and confusion remains in common usage of these articles.

Islamic culture usually includes all the practices which have developed around the religion of [Islam](#), including Qur’anic ones such as prayer and non-Qur’anic such as [divisions of the world in Islam](#). It includes as the tradition of [Bengal](#), and facilitated the peaceful conversion of most of Bengal. Marriage in Islam is measured to be of the utmost importance. The final [prophet of Islam](#), [Muhammad](#), states in *Hadith and Koran* "marriage is half of religion" (7); there are numerous [hadiths](#) lauding the importance of marriage and family. In Islam, marriage is a legal bond and [social contract](#) between a man and a woman as prompted by the principles of Islam.

### **The Status of Women in Islamic Culture**

It often seems that in the western world everyone knows about certain religions--namely Christianity and Judaism. However, there are numerous other religions that we, as a society, know very little about even though they are very popular throughout the

world. "One fifth of the world population is composed of Islamic people yet in this part of the world we seem to know very little about this religion" (Chaudhary, 11). Islam is fairly simple and extremely similar to those religions that we do know a lot about.

Ramazan Ali says, "Allah, the most inclusive of the names of God, is the same God that is worshiped by Muslims, Christians, and Jews" (51). The name Allah is an Arabic word meaning, one who is adorned in worship, who creates all that, exists, who has priority over all creation, one who is lofty and hidden, who confounds all human understanding. Islam means self-surrender to the will of God. In order to understand Islamic culture one must first understand their beliefs and rituals.

From the beginning of time, women have been looked down upon as inferior to men. Societies have long since been patriarchal, with only men holding positions of authority. Women were excluded from public life and were left to be in charge of home and children. Even in America today, women fight for many social issues traceable to the biblical idea of the "evil woman" who introduced original sin to the world. Far more controversial, however, is the issue of women in Islamic and Hindu cultures. While it is generally agreed that the rights granted to women in the Quran and by the prophet Mohammed were a vast improvement in comparison to the situation of women in Arabia prior to the introduction of Islam, Mohammed's death marked a gradual deterioration of the condition of women, as it began to revert back to pre-Islamic ways. Hindu women, on the other hand, are gradually becoming equal in society and have played influential roles in shaping the country. Nevertheless, one should not forget what the women in India have endured for thousands of years. However, poor treatment in Islamic cultures can be

attributed to radical regional customs, which are easily debunked by the words of the Quran. Simone de Beauvoir asserts in her *The Second Sex* (1949):

*Man enjoys the great advantage of having a god endorse the code he writes; and since man exercises a sovereign authority over women it is especially fortunate that this authority has been vested in him by the Supreme Being. For the Jews, Mohammedans and Christians among others, man is master by divine right; the fear of God will therefore repress any impulse towards revolt in the downtrodden female. (23)*

Since Islam exerts absolute power over every aspect of Muslim society, from diet to relations between the sexes, why has it failed in fourteen centuries of its existence, to eradicate injustices against half of its adherents?

Women in Islam have distinct background in accordance with the policies of the nations. Women in Turkey are the most liberated in the Muslim world since the policies in the constitution of the country are based on equality and respect the rights of all citizens regardless to gender, race and religion. Moreover, the lives of Turkish people are much influenced by the European life-style. This has been achieved not through Islamic reformation but through secularization established by the founder of the modern Turkish republic Kemal Ataturk. He pursues a program of westernization that affects all aspects of Turkish life - women are granted the vote and veiling is prohibited. If the Turkish system were to collapse and replaced by an Islamic theocracy we can be certain that women's progress will be reversed and women would be at the mercy of the mullahs. In countries where there has been a raise in fundamentalism and reversal to strict religious

law such as Pakistan, Sudan and Afghanistan women are targeted with vengeance and brutality.

Some Muslim scholars agree that Mohammed did proclaim some rights for Muslim women. For example he abolished the pre-Islamic Arabian custom of burying live unwanted female infants. Salman Chaudhary, a Pakistani writer in Urdu states: "Mohammed also decreed that women could own and inherit property, and that women have the right to enjoy sex!" (23) However, he does enshrine women's inequality and inferior status in immutable Quranic law accepted by Muslims as the infallible word of God. "Men have authority over women because God has made the one superior to the other, and because men spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient. They guard their unseen parts because God has guarded them. . . . "Beat them"(4). Women have rights similar to those of men although men have a status above women.

Under *Shari'a* - Islamic law - a man can marry up to four wives. He can divorce his wife or wives by saying "I divorce you" three times. For a wife to obtain a divorce is usually very difficult. Muslim apologists claim that Muslim women have the right to divorce and that in Islam the mother is revered and respected. Upon divorce, fathers win custody of boys over the age of six and girls on the onset of puberty. Many women would be reluctant to divorce violent or polygynous husbands for fear of losing their children. Despite the exaltation of motherhood - Mohammed once told a follower that paradise is found at the feet of the mother - children are considered the property of the father with the mother being merely the caretaker. How is it possible for a Muslim man to respect his mother when immutable religious law proclaims women's inferiority and inadequacy?

Under the *Shari'a*, compensation for the murder of a woman is half the amount of that of a man. A woman's testimony in court is worth only half of a man's. Women are entitled to only half the inheritance of males; the reason given for these is that males have families to provide for. In *sura* 4:34 men are granted superiority and authority over women because they spend their wealth to maintain them; this implies that women are a burden on society and that their work in caring for children, household and livestock is insignificant and trivial.

Girls as young as nine can be married by their father even if the mother disapproves of the marriage, often they end up as second or third wives of much older men - here is a way to instantly eradicate illegal practices! Rehana Banu, an Afghani critic resists moves to rise the minimum age for girls. She further says in her book, *Women in Medieval Islam*: “One of Mohammed’s wives, Aisha was seven when she was betrothed to Mohammed and nine when the marriage was consummated; Mohammed was in his fifties with several wives” (23). It gets pretty clear even the prophet enjoyed having more than one wife.

Any attempts by various governments to give women more freedom, greater property and marriage rights have been vehemently opposed by conservative Islamists, who insist that the reforms are against Islam. Sameera Nisha comments on the lines of the Koran and quotes

“In the Qur’an the prescribed penalty for adultery is one hundred lashes and a year in exile. However, Mohammed did condemn people to be stoned to death, in one case the rabbis brought a man and a woman accused of adultery, Mohammed ordered the pair to be stoned to death” (24).

She further says that the Jews practiced stoning for adultery and it is mentioned in the Old Testament under Mosaic Law. Today many Islamic fundamentalists advocate the stoning of women and stoning does occur in many Muslim countries.

In Muslim countries, men have the power of life and death over their women. Honor-killers usually escape punishment and the ones that are tried and convicted, receive only a few months in prison where they are treated like heroes by other inmates. Honor killings are carried out by men against women in their family for disobedience or suspected sexual transgressions. Even women who have been raped are killed for defiling the family honor.

Female genital mutilation is an African custom that pre-dates Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is widely practiced in African countries, the Middle East, Malaysia, and Indonesia and also among certain ethnic groups living in Europe, North America and Australia. In Africa female genital mutilation is practiced not only by Muslims but also by some Christians as well.

Some Muslims believe that Islam mandates FGM and they continue its practice in order to ensure that their daughters will remain chaste until marriage. The doctrine of “‘chastity equals goodness’ is nothing more than a device designed to control women’s sexuality and to reduce women into objects new and used!” (*The Quran*, 89). In the US, Christian fundamentalists have embarked on a chastity and family values crusade in order to curb women's sexual freedom and autonomy.

In Muslim societies religion governs all aspects of life and has priority over secular laws and local customs, therefore, the excuse that tradition alone is responsible for women's oppression is untenable. Unless Muslim apologists are prepared to back their

claims by a campaign to reform their religion and improve the situation of women, their assertions that Islam is blameless in oppressing women, are null and void.

There is a risk that multiculturalism and freedom of religion will ensure that tradition and religion remain eternally immutable. People of should respect other cultures mean that we should turn a blind eye to sadism, torture and brutality. The text, *Brick Lane* reveals the fact that people in the Islamic culture have certain religious obligations that each devotee has to obey. But especially women suffer exploitation and male hegemony imposed by the Islamic structure. Nazneen, the central character in the text does undergo myriad levels of complications and difficulties.

The second chapter deals with the Islamic Feminism and further it will link up with the issue of the text raised to be discussed in the thesis. Similarly the third one does have the elaborate version of analysis of the text in order to test the hypothesis pretty clear. Islamic feminism will be used as a methodology to read the female issues. Eventually the fourth chapter unifies the entire research work which is termed as conclusion.



## **Chapter II: Islamic Feminism**

### **Islam and Women**

The status of women in society is neither a new issue nor it is a fully settled one. There is a diverse collection of social theories, political movement, and moral philosophies, largely motivated by or concerning the experiences of women. Advocates of equality of the sexes and the rights and duties of women can be found throughout history. As a matter of fact women's issues have had a great effect on many aspects of religion and civilization. Despite the fact that life is the gift of nature, human culture and religion do not seem to have agreed with this truth right from the initiation of the human civilization. It would be evidently proven fact if a keen glance at women's position in major civilizations and religions was had.

Islamic feminism is a global phenomenon. It is not a product of East or West. Indeed, it transcends East and West. As already hinted, Islamic feminism is being produced at diverse sites around the world by women inside their own countries, whether they are from countries with Muslim majorities or from old established minority communities. Islamic feminism is also growing in Muslim Diaspora and converts communities in the West. Islamic feminism is circulating with increasing frequency in cyberspace.

Islamic feminism advocates women's rights, gender equality, and social justice using Islamic discourse as its paramount discourse, though not necessarily it is only one. Islamic feminist discourse in Iran draws upon secular discourses and methodologies to strengthen and extend its claims. Wadud in her women-sensitive interpretation of the

Quran combines classical Islamic methodologies with new social science tools and secular discourses of rights and justice while retaining a firm and central grounding in Islamic thought.

Islamic feminism serves people in their individual lives and it can also be a force in improving state and society. As far as Muslim women in Western Diaspora communities and in Muslim minority communities are concerned, second generation Muslim women are often caught between the practices and norms of the original home cultures of parents who migrated from Middle Eastern or South Asian countries, and the ways of life in their new countries. Islamic feminism helps these women untangle patriarchy and religion; it gives them Islamic ways of understanding gender equality, societal opportunity, and their own potential. On the other hand, Islamic feminist discourse is equally relevant in predominantly Muslim countries. It constitutes a different statement of the views of the people and their understanding of an attachment to their religion and culture, by attempting a strong and Islamic articulation of gender equality.

A good Muslim woman, for her part, should always be trustworthy and kind. She should strive to be cheerful and encouraging towards her husband and family, and keep their home free from anything harmful (haram covers all aspects of harm, including bad behavior, abuse and forbidden foods). Regardless of her skills or intelligence, she is expected to accept her man as the head of her household - she must, therefore, take care to marry a man she can respect, and whose wishes she can carry out with a clear conscience. However, when a man expects his wife to do anything contrary to the will of God - in other words, any nasty, selfish, dishonest or cruel action - she has the right to refuse him.

Her husband is not her master; a Muslim woman has only one Master, and that is God. If her husband does not represent God's will in the home, the marriage contract is broken. What should one make of the verse in the Koran that allows a man to punish his wife physically? There are important provisos: he may do so only if her ill-will is wrecking the marriage - but then only after he has exhausted all attempts at verbal communication and tried sleeping in a separate bed.

However, the Prophet never hit a woman, child or old person, and was emphatic that those who did could hardly regard themselves as the best of Muslims. Moreover, he also stated that a man should never hit "one of God's handmaidens" (3). Nor, it must be said, should wives beat their husbands or become inveterate nags. Finally, there is the issue of giving witness. Although the Koran says nothing explicit, other Islamic sources suggest that a woman's testimony in court is worth only half of that of a man. This ruling, however, should be applied only in circumstances where a woman is uneducated and has led a very restricted life: a woman equally qualified to a man will carry the same weight as a witness.

While the spirit of Islam is clearly patriarchal, it regards men and women as moral equals. Moreover, although a man is technically the head of the household, Islam encourages matriarchy in the home. Women may not be equal in the manner defined by Western feminists, but their core differences from men are acknowledged, and they have rights of their own that do not apply to men.

E.A. Allen avers: "Athenian women were always minors, subject to some male-to their father, to their brother, or to some of their male kin" (444). Her consent in marriage is not generally thought to be necessary and she is obliged to submit to the wishes of her

parents, and receive from them her husband and her lord, even though he is stranger to her.

In this way a Roman wife was described as a babe, a minor, a ward, a person incapable of doing or acting anything according to her own individual taste, a person continually under the tutelage and guardianship of her husband. In the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, we find the summary of legal status of women in the roman civilization:

In Roman law a woman was in historic times completely dependent. If married she and her property passed into the power of her husband . . . the wife was the purchased property of her husband and like a slave acquired only for his benefit. A woman could not exercise any civil or public office . . . could not be a witness, surety, tutor, or curator; she could not adopt or be adopted or make will or contract. (782)

Among the Scandinavian races women are under perpetual tutelage, whether married or unmarried. As late the code of Christian V, at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it is enacted if women marry without the consent of her tutor he might have, if he wished, administration and usufruct of her goods during her life. Similarly the ancient mythologies of the west have attributed some peculiar characteristics of women in the form of goddesses. Apollo represents wisdom, knowledge and supremacy while Venus and Eros represent beauty, sensuality and jealousy respectively. There is not god who depicts man's handsomeness nor is there a goddess acting on behalf of Apollo's qualities. Goddesses are portrayed to have got inferior position. Christianity, the major religion that shapes western thought, presents women as subordinate to men. Men according to the Bible are the owners of women, just like an animal is owned. Exodus incorporates the matter which states the

famous tenth commandment, lumps a wife together with his servants, animals and house. A man can sell his daughter as a slave (Exodus) or give her in marriage to whomsoever he chooses. After the birth of a male child, a woman is ritually impure for seven days; however after the birth of a female child ritually impure for fourteen days according to the law of Bible. Helen Ellerbe, in her book, *The Dark Side of Christian History* (1995) elaborates on the church's treatment of women. In the second century St. Clement of Alexandria writes: "every woman should be filled with shame by the thought that she is a woman" (12). The church father Tertullian explains why women deserve their status as despised and inferior human beings: "You (women) are the devil's gateway: you are the unsealed of the tree: you are the first deserter of the divine law. You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert-that is, death – even the son of God had to die" (81). Moreover the thirteenth century Christian theologian in *Christian Theology* suggests that God has made a mistake in creating women: "Nothing deficient should have been produced in the first establishment of things; so women ought not to produce then" (31). In fact orthodox Christians hold women responsible for all sin.

In this way keeping women silent is practiced in Europe and in the Christian world. As late as the 19<sup>th</sup> century as authority to ancient law, Sir Henry Maine writes: "No society preserve any tincture of Christian institution likely to restore to married women the personal liberty conferred on them by the middle Roman law" (81).

### **Women in Major Religions**

Explaining the commercial concept, the *Encyclopedia Biblica* states: "to betroth a wife to oneself meant simply to acquire possession of her by payment of the purchase money; the betrothed is a girl for whom the purchase money has been paid" (2942).

Hereby, it has become pretty clear that the women's position in Christianity has been very fragile and parasitical throughout the history.

Eventually the Islamic civilization based on the most authoritative holy book, the Quran needs to be presented in such a way that the interrelationship between the female and male somewhat be pretty clear. The verse in the Koran which causes trouble to most liberals that men have been given the duty to protect and support women is a controversial debate. God has given preference to one gender over another in certain duties. Men have been given preference in being provider of women and women are given preference in for a child. Even if divorce separates a man from his wife, he has to seek her help in caring for the child or another female if the mother agrees. Men are told to spend of their property on and not ask the women for anything even she happens to be rich. It is this reason for primarily that the Koran asks that out of a parent's property the son get twice that out of the daughter. It is expected that the daughter would marry and gets a man's property as marriage gift (*mahar*) and not have to worry providing for herself since it is the man's duty to provide for her. The son on the other hand would Islamically expected not only to provide for his potential wife but also give a major part of property to her as marriage gift.

In recent years, largely due to the pressure of anti-women laws in some parts of the Muslim world., women with some degree of education and awareness are beginning to realize that religion is being used as an instrument of oppression rather than as a means of liberation. To understand the powerful impetus to Islamize Muslim societies, especially with regard to women-related norms and values, it is necessary to know that of all the challenges confronting the Muslim world perhaps the greatest of modernity. Muslims in

general, tend to think of “modernity” in two ways; (a) as modernization which is associated with science, technology and material progress, and (b) as westernization which is associated with promiscuity and all kinds of social problems. While “modernization” is considered highly desirable, “westernization” is considered undesirable. What is important to note, here, is that emancipated Muslim woman is seen by many Muslims as a symbol not of “modernization” but of “westernization”? This is so because she appears to be in violation of what traditional society is assumed of being a necessary barrier between “private spaces” which belong to men. The presence of women in men’s space is considered to be highly dangerous for. But in today’s Muslim world, due to the pressure of political and socio-economic realities, a significant number of women may be seen in “public space”. Caretaker of Muslim traditionalism feels gravely threatened by this phenomenon which they consider to be an onslaught of “westernization” under guise of “modernization.” They believe that it is necessary to put women back in their “space” if the integrity of the Islamic law of life is to be preserved.

The term ‘female’ since the inauguration of human civilization has preserved its validity and conception as a biological contrast to male ‘sex’ is under discussion. Indeed the natural biological contrast pervades each individual sex with distinctive features, physical qualities and assertions that are assume to be essential and vital to sustain the true nature of human evolution and civilization. In fact the sex is the natural creation. Some natural cultural variations lie in term of their behavior, manners, food habit, education and attitude of society towards them. However, these discrepancies are apparently based on society. This is how some based definitions, along with physical assertions are attached to each sex and they are bound to find identified with

asymmetrical, hierarchical socio-cultural nations called 'gender'. Nature based female and male relation turns into society based women and men's feminine and masculine relation. The every relation exists on as a hierarchical power relation where men dominate women in every social, economic, cultural and religious milieu of human life. The prejudice sustains itself in the form of male domination against female subordination through ideological practices. The patriarchy nurtures the gender based inequalities that present men superior and women inferior, men power full and women powerless.

As a matter of fact feminism is a divergent collection of social theories, political movement and moral philosophies, extensively motivated by the bitter and sweet experiences of women. Most feminists especially concerned with social, political, religious racial and economic inequality between women and women; some have argued some gendered and sex identifies, such as "women" and "man", is socially constructed. Feminists differ over the sources of inequality and the extent to which gender and sexual identities should be questioned and critiqued. Variations of issues of feminists are because of their distinct belonging and upbringing to and in diverse cultures and societies. Time does play a vital role to distinguish the type of feminists. In fact feminists born and up brought in the Hindu civilization are concerned with double domination one by upper caste and secondly by the male figures within the so-called lower caste communities. Similarly feminists from African are found to have been concerned with double suppression: one because of being black and the next due to having female qualities.

Feminist political activists commonly campaign on issues such as reproductive rights (including the right to safe, legal abortion, access to contraception, and the

availability of quality prenatal care), violence within a domestic partnership, maternity leave, equal pay, sexual harassment, street harassment, discrimination and rape. Many feminists today argue that feminism is grass-root movement that seeks to cross boundaries based on social class, race, culture and religion. Feminism is culturally specific and addresses relevant to the women of that society. Themes explored in feminism include patriarchy, stereotyping, objectification, sexual objectification, and oppression.

Feminism as a philosophy and movement in the modern sense is often dated to the Enlightenment with such thinkers as Lady Wary Worthley Montagu and the Marquis de Condorcet championing women's education. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) is one of the first works that can unambiguously be called feminist.

Thus feminism becomes an organized movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> as people increasingly come to believe that women are being treated unfairly. The feminist movement commences especially in the reformation movement of the 19 century. The origin of women's voice against male-domination is a kind of political consciousness of inferiority of women in comparison to men. Women in the west are economically and academically advanced. They have realized the undervalued position of women imprisoned within the narrow domestic world of mothering and house managing and the biasness in the domain of education and employment. Consequently, they are demanding for proper place in society. Nancy F. Cott surveys the origin of women's movement: "Such consciousness of . . . inferiority was the first group of consciousness likely to produce a feminist movement because it acknowledged cultural and social determinants

of women's capabilities as well as divine and natural ones, and thus allowed for the possibility of change" (22). The revolutionary origin has given impetus to the development of historical feminist figures.

Historical feminist personalities have raised strong voice for women's liberation from the biased male-tyranny on women. Mary Wollstonecraft in the 18<sup>th</sup> century attempts to emancipate women for male dominating motives hidden in the emphasis of feminine features like meekness, docility, humility, passivity, emotion, shyness, and childishness. Unraveling the bases of women's socialization whereby they are thought to be feminine, Wollstonecraft points out the drawback in process of socialization. She deplores the false education system that inspires women to read the sentimental novels of her time their pernicious influences on women's intellectual development. Rosemary examines Wollstonecraft's views about women's education that they should "be provided with a real education, one that sharpens and focuses her mind and gives her a chance to develop her rational and moral capacities. Her full human potential" (15).

In the same way, Virginia Woolf, advocates for the radical change in the conception of family and social life. She refutes the traditional view about women that they are submissive, and cried for a separate space for the women in literature and society since they are independent human beings like men as well. Hazard Adams has presented Woolf's attitude about women:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally, but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brother do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation . . . ; it is narrow minded in their more privileged

fellow- creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting, stocking, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. (822)

In course of time another historical figure Charlotte Perkins Gilman, emerges and directs women towards useful task related to modern industries and factories. She focuses on economically beneficial occupation for women by highlighting their capability to work in the public in the public world. She refutes the child care and house work that deprive them of opportunities and the advancement for their genuine potentiality. Nancy F. Cott speaks of Gilman: “she proposed . . . the socialization of remaining home employment such as cooking and laundry and argued that house cleaning and childcare would be better performed by specialized paid employees than by housewives and mother not necessarily suited and not paid for the tasks” (41).

Similarly Simone de Beauvoir has brought a widespread consciousness on the part of women, pointing to the socio-historical construction of women. She contended against the socialization that persuaded the women to be sexy and to be flesh for the mere entertainment of male ego. Rather she created a mentality for women to be self-assertive and determinate to tackle impediments, and to release them from the social construction of femininity. Jane Freedman says that her “distinction between biological sex and the social creation of the ‘eternal feminine’ is a precursor of the distinction between sex and gender that is common in much feminist theory”(14).

In this way Shulamith Firestone proposes a world dichotomized by biology: male and female, where women are the unpaid means to social production of off-springs. And males are the owners of the labor market; female are no more than the workers to the

reproductive system. Oppression on the due to the productive function as historical act and emancipation of women depends on the escape from the biological destiny. Firestone denies the emotional attachment of parents with their children. Freedman further demonstrates her: “Firestone maintains, to the dissolution of the family until, with children over a period of time. Children develop no especial bonds with their ‘parents’ but would instead from love ties with people to their own choosing, whatever their age and sex” (70). Her revolutionary modification of familial structure throws doubt on the traditional belief in familial unity and solidarity.

Thus divergent movements regard the social injustices to be bad and pernicious and help women’s liberation from the evils. Social reform in the 19<sup>th</sup> century advocates for ideals of Vedic period that let women exercise their inner potentialities. Indian great figure like Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore favored for women’s upliftment, betterment, progress, prosperity and participation in literary career, teaching, medicine, business etc. Anjani Kant writes:

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Indian began to discover her long cherished ideals and cultural self-consciousness . . . The reformers, who advocated the emancipation of women, aspires the restoration of such healthy and congenial conditions which once prevailed in the early Vedic period (61).

Indeed Indian women’s emancipation movement cannot remain isolated from the male’s ideology in the formation of women’s liberation just; male’s values are predominant in society. Forbes indicates the vitality of the male reformers: “There would have been no women’s movement in India if Indian men in the nineteenth century had not been concerned with modernizing women’s roles” (252).

As the demand of time, the national movement for the freedom of Indian from the unnecessary regime of British people came as additional fuel of consciousness for women to realize their mental physical capacity. Their participation and in the very movement energized them to tolerate atrocities and filled them with national feelings. It was the Gandhian ideology which enhanced the movement. Ronald J. Terchek and Nitidas Gupta have evaluated the movement and vital role of Gandhian ideology: “the Gandhi-led freedom struggle in India ushered a new era of consciousness on the part of India women” (36). Gandhi viewed that women should be self-assertive, yet they have to comprehend duty and responsibility towards nation and family.

The contribution of British women in helping Indian women get aware of their rights cannot be neglected. As a matter of fact British women missionaries in Indian energize Indian women to be individuals. Kant avers: “under the western impact, Indian women experienced an air of freedom and the stir of the new era . . . It brought to women a total new concept of themselves as persons individually important and nationally needed” (61)

### **Women in the Quran**

By virtue of being human, every human individual certainly longs for liberation from oppressive rules and regulations set up by the selfish exploiters. No doubt women as thinking beings do dream of having lives according to their choice and taste. It is factual that women seem to have been passive and less reactive throughout history of every civilization. But it fact must not have been their deliberate act. Rather they must have been culturally made so. The very case does not apply to only but also to all the marginalized. As every individual has got innate power by birth which needs education to

get enlightened, slowly and gradually all levels of humanity are in the process of becoming conscious and aware. There are rarely any cultures which have carried up birth and pleasant history of women's position. Therefore the fragile and oppressed place of women in the Islamic culture could not be an exception. To demonstrate their lives in Islam, it would be commendable enough to have a glance at the marriage system in the Islamic culture as prescribed in the hadiths.

It is strongly recommended in Islam that a person who has made up his mind to propose to a family to get married to its daughter should see the girl. Jabir ibn Abdullah quotes the prophet saying: "if anyone of you intends to propose to a woman and he can see of her what encourages him to marry her, he should do so" (30). This promulgation by the prophet has made it clear that women do not have any chance to propose to a family to get married to its son. A Muslim girl may go unwedded provided that no Muslim boy proposes to her family for marriage.

There has long been practiced custom of singing and playing to the tambourine by girls on the auspicious occasion of marriage. Some report of the Hadith quote the prophet as saying: "why have you not sent with her a girl to play to the tambourine, and sing" (30). A girl is considered as a means for pleasure and entertainment. Even the prophet asks for a girl to sing and play to the tambourine. He does not prefer any boy for such act. Women are thus made instrumental.

The most essential aspect of marriage contract is the commitment and acceptance. One, party normally guardian of the bride makes the commitment by stating that he marries away the woman on whose behalf he is acting to the prospective husband according to the terms specified. That constitutes the marriage contract. Both

commitment and acceptance but these must be done in the same season, and should not be separated by other matters. As a matter of fact marriage requires commitment and acceptance but these should be from bride and bridegroom who are on the verge of initiating a new lifestyle. But the Islamic marriage system seeks for consent from the male guardian. He does not have to make commitment and acceptance and at the same time female parent is not welcome in the matter of handing over the daughter. Moreover the male guardian of bride should be present. The bride's guardian is normally her father.

If the father of the bride is dead or absented, then her closest relatives will act her as guardian such as her brother, grandfather or uncle. The prophet in *Six Hadith Anthology* says: "No marriage can be made without the presence of a guardian and two prepare witness" (31). Here it has become pretty clear that women guardians are not considered to be decisive and responsible for completion of their daughters' marriage. In this way marriage of Muslim women is not possible with a non-Muslim man. A person can marry to a Muslim girl providing that he converts him to a Muslim. After all it can be sad that love marriage is not permissible in the Islamic culture. Along with this the arranged marriage based on the decision and commitment by the male guardian is preferred and considerable.

There have been numerous practices in Islam which contradict to the Quaranic statements. Despite the social acceptance of female infanticide among some Arabian tribes, the Quran has strictly forbidden this custom and considered it a crime like any other number.

In fact the Bible recommends the women veil themselves or have off their hair. Contrary to what Muslim practice has been for many centuries, the Koran does not ask women to cover themselves from head to toe. The Quran states:

Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their chastity; that is purer for them. And tell believing women to lower their gaze and guard their chastity, not to make a display of their beauty except what is apparent, and let them cast a cover over their bosoms . . . and turn to Allah altogether, o believers, in order that you might succeed. (*The Quran*, 30-31)

The Quran suggests that both men and women dress modestly and guard their chastity. Other than this the Quran suggests that the women put a covering on their bosoms over the regular clothing they wear and not make a wanton display of their beauty. This does not fit in any way the picture of a woman wearing a chador (veil) covered from head to toe.

It would more closely resemble a picture of a woman wearing a shirt and pants, which do not deliberately reveal her body, with a scarf over her bosom. Tradition and not the Quran makes tradition based Muslims bring the veil onto Islam from Christian custom. The Quran does not sanction it. The statement in the Quran that talks about both men and women dressing modestly, guarding their chastity and lowering their gaze does not discriminate between the sexes except in the case of women it asks them to take an extra covering over their bosoms only.

The powers of conventional Islam, and western media preconceptions, both have their own reasons for ignoring the phenomenon of strongly Muslim, very activist women

who claim that complete equality for women both in private life and in public, and a host of other radical reforms, can be read in true Islamic scholarship.

In the Quran, they say, men and women are both equal, and complementary, with the same rights to education and self-fulfillment. "Islam gives women a very high position and a lot of rights, but over the years the patriarchal system and political power have marginalized women and made them invisible - it's a gross misunderstanding which has to be corrected. Women should reclaim their rights given by Islam," (32) says the Malaysian artist, Yeti, whose group is called [Sisters in Islam](#).

Malika Hamidi, coordinator of the [European Muslim Network](#), and the main speaker next weekend, is a young academic. She underlines the complexity of the emerging current and the "pluralism in the Muslim women's movement - as in western feminism" (23) in her debut text, *Pluralism in Islamic Feminism*. Most of these women wear headscarves, but not all of them, nor all the time.

Not all these activist women accept the "feminist" tag: to some its image is too white, or too western, or too secular, or simply too American. But Ismahane Chouder, a feminist says in her book *Feminist Collective for Equality*, "I'm a western, Muslim, feminist, and I work on campaigns across the board for all women's rights" (6). She makes her stance clear regarding the multiple identities of women in Islam.

In the UK, the Birmingham councilor and vice-chair of the Stop the War Movement, Salma Yacoob, speaks for many when she says she feels "a debt to an earlier generation of women who struggled for their rights - it would be disrespectful to ignore them ... so, despite 'feminist' being a loaded word in the community, I do define myself as

an Islamic feminist" (3). Who the actual Islamic feminists are is the matter of deep thought and precise definition. Hence she puts her in the category of Islamic feminists.

Embattled Muslim women, suffering the burdens of the worst cultural attitudes to rape and adultery enshrined in medieval laws in Pakistan and Northern Nigeria; or the sexual violence and rolling back of their rights, unleashed by the war in Iraq; or the [targeted killings](#) of women activists in Afghanistan, are turning for help to Muslim women's groups. From those in Morocco and Malaysia, in particular, the skills of self-help training, experience of long legal battles, linking scholars and activists, are in great demand. Malika Hamidi, who is French, of Algerian origin, points to the practical needs of Muslim women in Europe on many fronts:

Victims of domestic violence, polygamy, those threatened with honor killings, circumcision, discrimination of all sorts, forced marriages, with little Turkish and Moroccan girls in Brussels just disappearing to be married. Muslim women are not involved enough in these debates, but we have to denounce that these are traditional and cultural practices - it has nothing to do with Islam. (7)

Hamidi describes how different educated activists like her are from her parents' generation and they are claiming public space, affirming an identity beyond wives and mothers. She calls for education and consciousness rising for the older generation of Muslims in Europe.

The dawn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century marks the initiation of an era of worldwide social change that has continued to challenge the religious and social basis of all societies to this day. European and colonial powers form the political and economic ideological and

framework that is to encroach upon the Islamic world. The gradual emergence of the global economy and the political ascendancy of the west dictate a global trend that is not easy for non-western nations to avoid. These changes have distinctively been multidimensional in nature; from the emergence of territorial states in their current format to educational reforms. One of the areas to go under a radical transformation is the relation between the sexes, as women searched for their identity and place in the new world. As a feminist Fatima Mernissi argues throughout the history of Islam, small numbers of women have seized power in both political and military spheres where their western sister were unable. Throughout the Islamic world, there has been a growing awareness of feminism as a movement of feminist issues.

As a matter of fact the most authoritative book of Muslims, the Quran forms the basis of family law, and is regarded as the literal and unmitigated word of God untainted by any human interpretation, including the prophet himself. Being beyond reproach, the Quranic regulation regarding women is followed with great strictness.

Despite the positive reforms, the Quran states that men are superior to women on account of the qualities with which God has gifted one above the other. However, women are equal before God. Both sexes have had equal responsibility to submit to God and the opportunity to receive salvation throughout the human civilization.

Seema Hussain finds that the issues raised by Islamic feminists are not directed at God's word as revealed in the Quran, but with the religious scholar's interpretation of the Quran and the contrived or inauthentic tradition of later provenance which either does not reflect what the prophet said or represent fallible variations of his *Hadith*.

Fatima Mernissi finds that the religious basis for the political seclusion of women can be traced back to the philosophical basis of the *Caliphate*. “A *caliph* was part of an apostolic succession; he succeeded the prophet in time and ruled with the authority of God, as a duty of the prophet. The first caliph, Abu Baker replaced the prophet of after his death and thus inherited both spiritual and material leadership that Muhammad had been given by Allah” (*The Reformed Hadith of Islam, 2001*). The two major terms that denote power in the Arabic language, *imam* and *caliph* do not possess a feminine form. With Islam being a complete way of life, power becomes essentially religious in nature. It was the caliph duty to coordinate the political administration via the use of religion so that society could be in harmony with the cosmic order. The *caliph* becomes the executor of the will of Allah on the earth. If God is one and male, then the caliph, as Allah’s representative on the on the earth cannot be female. Women are automatically excluded from exercising power.

Other feminist writers like Elizabeth Schemla suggest that it is the mixing of civil and religious spheres within many Muslim states that is at the base of feminist concerns. Leila Ahmed describes the Islamic social system as having combined the most negative way is possible. Women challenge this blending of civil and religious spheres that constitute the basis of Muslim society risk the death penalty. One such woman, Bangladeshi writer, Taslima Nasreen has proposed in *Islam from Women Perspective*: “secularism is a necessary step in the promotion of women’s rights” (13). Nasreen further argues that morality standards should not be dependent on either social or religious rules. Society’s moral standard should be relative to the sum of the social, cultural and

structural factors. To choose one element such as religion will invariably lead to an unjust society.

Nawal El Saddawi finds that “the oppression faced by women is not essentially due to religious ideologies . . . but derives its roots from the class and patriarchal system! Islamic history paints a picture of pre-Islamic society where women’s sexuality is chaotic, all- embracing, rampant promiscuity whose essence is women’s self determination” (9). The male is left with a lack of initiative, and is unable to control relationship through a position of privilege. Such fears are behind the construction of Muslim sex roles, which find their basis in the assumption that proper social order relies on the curtailment of female sexuality.

The worst example of this sexual paranoia can be found in the act of female circumcision in the Islamic culture. For Egyptian feminist, Nawal El Saddawi, her circumcision was the driving force behind her feminist journey. Her operation had led to feelings of insecurity, anger and rebellion. She went through life unable to understand how her well educated parents had participated in such a barbaric act, and was unable to provide answers with any more substance than ‘that is the way it is. Overall variations in Islamic feminists’ attitudes can be seen.

Monica Ali in her debut novel, *Brick Lane* raises the issues of women in the Islamic culture that how she is grown up and cultivated in society. The protagonist, Nazneen in the text grows in a very patriarchal milieu and thus her mind is shaped and starts believing in fate rather in action. She is not free from mundane ideas of Islam until she enters the world of individual freedom that is England. She starts thinking of her self when she is made to believe that she does not need to learn anything from the outside

world. Rather her husband, Chanu is sufficient source she can learn a lot from. The question of self motivates her to uncover the mystery of oppressive and mundane rules and instructions constructed by the Islamic culture. Hence the question of self leads her to the state of emancipation and individual pleasure. Feminists do advocate the problems women face in patriarchy and especially feminists in Islam strike the traditional notion and pattern of the Islamic society.

### Chapter III: Women in Islamic Culture in *Brick Lane*

Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*, a tough and tender novel traces the life of Nazneen, a simple Bangladeshi village girl, whose family marries her off to an emigrant, living in the dispiriting tower flats outside of London. Seen through Nazneen's eyes, England is at first utterly baffling. Ali is tender and interested in the slow emergence into consciousness of a single humble woman. The heart of *Brick Lane* is Nazneen who lives as a wife and mother and has not, for many years, thought of herself as an individual except in stolen moments. Nazneen, raised in a devout Muslim community in Bangladesh, has long been nurtured in the belief that fate is not to be questioned. When she finds herself married off to Chanu, a roly poly blowhard more than twice her age, it becomes apparent that her parents have bitten off more fate than Nazneen can chew. Chanu whisks her away to London, where he already spent 16 years trying to break through the English caste-system. He, who puts great stock in his many degrees from a third-rate Bengali university, thinks of his wife as little more than a servant.

Despite the fact that Nazeen has entered the gate of multicultural society where people believe in action more than in fate, she has strong faith in the fatalistic life due to her Islamic bringing up. During her childhood she frequently heard the story of fate. She got accustomed to having faith in fate:

As Nazneen grew she heard many times this story of How You Were Left to Your Fate. It was because of her mother's wise decision that Nazneen lived to become the wide-faced, watchful girl that she was. Fighting against one's it can be fatal. Not once did Nazneen question the logic of

the story of How You Were Left To your Fate. Indeed she was grateful for her mother's quiet courage, her tearful stoicism that was almost daily in evidence. (15)

Indeed culture plays a vital role in the process of psychological development. Nazneen was trained in such a way by her mother that she did not see any ground to voice against the determining power of fate. Nazneen's mother had a belief that nothing could be changed. That is why everything had to be borne. This principle has been ruling Nazneen's life since her childhood. She has got married to an educated man and is never beaten by him, is simply because of her fate. Furthermore, she accepted the marriage proposal forwarded before her by her father replying that it was good that he had chosen her husband to whom she could be a good wife like Amma, must have been because of her belief in fate.

Contrary to Nazneen, her sister, Hasina, who listened to no one, eloped to Khulna with the nephew of the saw-mill owner at the age of sixteen when her beauty was becoming almost unbearable town. Nazneen is too concerned to Hasina's elopement as it troubled her:

It worried her that Hasina kicked against fate. No good could come of it. Not a single person could say so. But then if you really looked into it, thought about it more deeply, could you be sure that Hasina was not simply following her fate? If fate cannot be changed, no matter how you struggle . . ., maybe she struggled against that, and that was what she could not alter. (22)

Nazneen is very logical regarding to the matter of Hasina's elopement, when everything is determined by fate and non can struggle against it, Hasina eloped to a person she was in love with due to the fact that she must have been fated to do so. On this ground Nazneen speaks in the favor of Hasina as well as adds the strength to fate itself. In course of Nazneen's life in the companionship of Chanu, she finds him as a man who is highly inclined to fate. She further avers: "He cannot accept one single thing in his life but this: that my sister should be left to her fate. Everything else may be altered, but not that" (70). Nazneen seems to be critical enough to evaluate Chanu's personality and his dealing with incidences. Fairly speaking she finds him as self-assertive and boastful. He doesn't see anyone superior to him. However he believes in fate.

Nazneen as married woman has got a son Raqib due to the merciful blessing of the Almighty. Though she provides him good mothering, Raqib has happened to the victim of sickness. Culturally she has been made to succumb to the power of the invisible God. So she often appreciates the God who in her view determines the fate of every individual: "She put her hand on Raqib's forehead. Just for the feel of him. To give him strength. Although, of course, only God gave strength. Whatever she did, only God decided. God knows everything. He knows the number of hairs on your head. Don't forget" (135). Nazneen going to back to the past days, remembers that her mother used to deal with her similarly. The God is all in all since. He is the source of strength, energy, intellect, knowledge, good life, and even capacity to decide something. The God has the healing power. Nothing can cure except the God's will and longing for mercy to the human beings.

Similarly Nazneen does have the belief in the supernatural power; God doesn't come in his real shape. Rather he sends some angels to the test human beings. Nazneen's mother was like a teacher of the fatalistic world who used to tell numerous stories about the supernatural elements. She remembers how Amma defined the earthly life:

Nazneen turned and looked at her and Amma smiled, showing her curved yellow teeth. God test us', she said. Don't you know this life is a least? Some He tests with riches and good fortune. Man men have filed such a test. And they will be judge. Others he tests with illness or poverty, or with jinn who come in shape of men or of husband. She took hold of the hem of Nazneen's nightdress and being to tug at it. Come down here to me and I will tell you how to pass the test. (322)

The Islamic culture based on the fatalistic life enforces Nazneen to walk in the path drawn by the imam in the hadith in spite of the fact that she is in the accultured society where everything seems to be possible through human incessant efforts. Nazneen is herself immigrant from Bangladesh. The way people behave in the English culture is quite different from the indigenous Bangladeshis in their homeland. Nazneen is not an exception that she as immigrant faces a number of obstacles and hindrances to adjust her in the new world due to being non white and not having capacity to speak English sufficiently. Rather there have been a huge number of immigrants who undergo many ups and down in England in course of their stay and professions.

## **Problems of Immigrants**

Brick Lane is perhaps the most popular Britain inhabited by the Bangladeshi immigrants. Their lifestyles are diverse. It is the profession that determines the type of life one is living. Because of being uneducated and close minded, immigrants can't have occupied the prestigious jobs. But it is only the common reason. In fact the immigrants are no longer given opportunities in accordance with their qualifications and capacities as well. Rather they are deprived of being successful in the respective career. They are looked down upon as no more than animals. And you see, to a white person we are all the same dirty little monkeys all in the same monkey clan. But these people are peasants:

Uneducated. Illiterate. Close-minded without ambition. He sat back and stoked his belly. I don't look down on them, but what can you do? If a man has only ever driven a rickshaw and never in his life held a book in his life held a book in his hand, and then what can you expect from him? (280)

The above remark as stated by Chanu clarifies that the immigrants are not only oppressed and hated by the white people but by the non whites as well. No doubt life is just a journey which must be completed at any cost. As the social being one has to perform her/his job, the very person cannot be good at dealing with. Chanu, a boast full guy expresses his disgusting attitude towards the working immigrants and tries to prove him superior to other immigrants before Nazneen. He is a misfit who seems to have neither to mixed up with the whites nor to the Bangladeshi immigrants. He only dreams of being promoted.

Chanu filed the silence with his laugh. My wife is just settling in here. He coughed shuffled in his chair. The thing is, with the promotion coming up,

things are beginning to go well for me now. If I just get the promotion confirmed then many things are possible. (32)

In fact the Diaspora life of immigrants is full of hope in the initial phase of their transplantation. They see possibilities a lot. Chanu a Bangladeshi immigrant thinks of getting promoted so soon that many things can get possible. Although his wife, Nazneen has been village girl, she is slowly setting in the new commercial world where reason rules over emotion. But before Chanu's arrival in England, he had uncountable number of ambitions and dreams for he has got certificates. As he gets to the intended place, England he finds things entirely different from his preconception. No doubt Chanu is educated, university scholar and highly optimistic. He is an immigrant from the east as well which stops him from being successful. For the white people from the east are not whites whether they are university graduates or peasants:

When I came I saw a young man. I had ambition. Big dreams. When I got the earphone 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 (. . .). These people here didn't know the difference between me (. . .) and the peasants who jumped of the boat possessing only the lice on their heads. (34)

As a matter of fact the family members and other related people to expect money and other sorts of co-operation from those who as immigrants working in the developed countries like England. How complicated and challenging life immigrants are living in the foreign land can hardly be thought by the relatives since they have never undergone such

diaspora experience. Through the view point of Chanu, the difficulties people face in *Brick Lane* can be seen and realized. Nazneen is in her melting stage for the new world, she is instructed how the Bangladeshi do live in tower hamlets. Chanu explain:

Three points five people to one room. That is a council statistics, Chanu told Nazneen. All crammed together. They can't stop having children, or they bring over all their relatives and pack them in the like fish in a tin. It's a Tower hamlets office statistic: three point five Bangladeshis to one room.  
(49)

Two things simultaneously get clear through Chanu's detail about the Bangladeshis: one he is educated, learned, conscious, civilized superior to others and another they do strictly follow the Islamic way of life that is to say the family planning is forbidden. They go on having children. Hereby obviously be spoken that the illiterate are emotional enough to welcome their relatives. They are less calculative than the educated like Chanu. In fact Chanu's assertions are the medium to know his psyche and the life of degree holder in the foreign lap. Chanu is in dilemma and not sure whether he gets promoted or not. Somewhat he is hopeful. He thinks he would be promoted sooner if he were a white. He suspects the whites and sees the racial discrimination swarming through England: "all the time they are polite. They smile. They say 'please' this and 'thank you' that. Make no mistake about it, they shake your with the right and with the left they stab you in the back" (72).

Frankly speaking Ali's *Brick Lane* is a mirror in which the hardcore prevailing reality in *Brick Lane* regarding suffering, misery struggle, domination, suppression of the Bangladeshi can clearly be seen. No doubt Ali has maintained her standpoint by balancing

the drawback in the Bangladeshi Muslims and predicaments they have been facing since their arrival in England. The culturally set-up mind does hardly permit one to welcome another culture entirely different from her or his own. Acculturation demand flexibility sense of humanity, easy-going nation and inclination towards psychological mutability. Chanu seems to have been a racist himself. He can't stand the English society as he sees many discrimination factors extant over there. As the matter of fact his bringing-up in the strict Islamic culture has overpowered him in such way that he can't go beyond the cultural boundary:

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 racist society. I don't want him to talk back to his mother. I want him to respect his father. (111)

In order to reflect on the clash of culture existing in England, Ali has taken Chanu as her mouthpiece. Chanu talks about a deeper tragedy behind the success of every immigrant. He further explains the very tragedy:

I'm talking about the clash between western values and own. I'm talking about the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserves one's identity and heritage. I am talking about the children who don't know what their identity is. I am talking about the feeling of alienation engendered by a society where racism is prevalent. I'm about the terrific struggle to preserve one's sanity while striving to achieve the best for one's family. I'm talking- (113).

Obviously the culture emerged out of the multicultural situation, is blurred and hybridized. The older culture becomes intolerant to the children born in the new culture. Right from the birth they have certainly adopted the ways of life from their surroundings. No doubt parent make ceaseless effort to preserve their identity and heritage due to which an immense rift gets created between the old generation and the newer one. Chanu advocates against the loss of heritage and identity on the part of the new generation. He wants them to know their real identity and become serious about that. People certainly feel alienated in the world of commerce, business and industry and precisely of money. Further the more the world of reason and mathematics is too challenging to the immigrants. They are bound to the struggle a lot since their fundamental objective to have come to the foreign land is only to earn money. There are many chances of being failure as there are class conflict, culture conflict and even racial clash. Indeed humanity is withering in such a place where the mind rules over the heart.

It would be remarkable enough to be noted down how Nazneen is living in the world of diverse clashes: class, culture, race and gender. As the matter of fact Nazneen doesn't know English more than two phrases: sorry and thank you. She has merely been trained to believe in fate and its determining power to daily happenings. She is a woman who is considered to have locked the decisive power. Her state is indeed fragile to develop in the new world. Truly speaking language creates power. Nazneen grown-up in the orthodox Islamic culture finds England puzzling and odd. However, her immense longing for education glorifies her and gradually energizes her to seek for liberation from divergent barriers. Chanu her husband does not seem to have freed Nazneen in order to quench her thirst of education:

I would like learn to some English, said NAzneen. Chanu puffed his cheeks and spat the air out in a fuff. It will come. Don't worry about it.

Where's the need anyway? He looked at his book and Nazneen watch the screen (37).

### **Nazneen as Free Individual**

Every human being is a thinking animal. Caste, gender, race, culture and so on cannot stop one from the thinking act. No doubt Nazneen a village woman has not got university degree like Chanu. What is needed when can easily be realized by her. Indeed every individual is always in the process of becoming. Nazneen is the very process as well. The desire for learning English is self-evident that she want to make her adjustable in the English culture frankly speaking she dares cope with the multicultural society the despite the fact that she has the scarcity of many things such as English language, self earning academic certificate and freedom. She is very inquisitive and interested. Moreover she brings about the her intimate friend Razia who is going to college to learn English. But Chanu makes efforts to deprive of her to the going college:

Razia is going to college to study English

Ah, good'.

Perhaps I could go with her:

Well perhaps he didn't look up from his book.

You know, I should be reading about politics.

.....

To the college. With Razia'

What for?

For the English lesions'

You are going to be a mother. (76-7).

Thus Nazneen is emotionally controlled. Chanu is only engaged in complaining against the English culture and in boasting of his degrees. He is pompous, oppressive and vainglorious who divests Nazneen of her fundamental rights. Right to educate to one is the unalienable virtue. Perhaps Chanu represents the male dominated society. Though he does not seem to have been dominating Nazneen, he is indeed a great exploiter. He frequently indicates university certificates and directs her to gain knowledge a lot from novels which are about society, politics, land, reform, and social division. In spite of the fact that Nazneen makes ceaseless attempts to go to the college, he doesn't sympathize with her yearning for English. She tenderly expresses her wants before him but here is no favorable response. As a matter of fact Chanu is a great criminal in the sense that he has killed someone but on the basis of his treacherous nature, behavior, and treatment with an innocent, lovely, meek and optimistic wife, Nazneen. He deals with her in such a way that he is the ruler and she is the ruled; he is the king and she is the subject; he is superior and she is inferior; he is the master and she is the slave and so on. The dichotomy has automatically emerged in the family of Nazneen and Chanu. She is tolerant, patient, sanguine and cheerful enough despite his selfish, tyrannical and ruthless demeanors.

As a matter of fact *Brick Lane* gives a transparent reflection of the Islamic complicated practice that is to say fasting. Along with this other intolerable and impractical as well as groundless practices are obviously presented through the acts of characters as well. Chanu has not been villainous only to Nazneen but to Bibi and Shahana as well especially regarding their education. He forces Nazneen not to send them

to English school in England. In order to persuade Nazneen he glorifies the Quran, Hindu philosophy, Buddhist thought and Christian parables. He is very much proud of the lingering culture and tries to impose his views over children. Nazneen does not react. Rather she bears insistent manners of Chanu. Shahana and Bibi are also female victims in the family who are trying to be deprived of having English education:

Shahana and Bibi were supposed to go after ordinary school had finished for the day but Chanu forbade it. He raged. Do they call it education? Rocking around like little parrots on a perch, reciting words they do not understand. He would teach them. The Quran but also Hindu philosophy, Buddhist thought, Christian parables. Don't forget, he told Nazneen, Bengal was Hindu long before it was Muslim and before that Buddhist, and that was after the first Hindu period. We are only Muslim because of the Moguls. Don't forget. (197)

Chanu, the vain guy is very boastful of his heritage and nationality. In fact he has nothing but shows as though he has got everything and is very worthy in lineage. As a matter of fact no individual desires a caged life what culture or religion one belongs to. Muslim women are trained to put on burkhas and girls have been grown in hijab. But as they get conscious, they start raising voice for liberation from the orthodox and inhuman practice: "The girls in hijab had grown more relaxed. They no longer whispered but talked to each other without raising their hands. And they shouted out suggestions freely. Women's rights, called one: "sex education for girls, called the other" (240).

Though the female characters follow the Islamic way of life, they use their reasoning faculty and argue. In Karim's view they are forbidden to argue and if they do,

they are not good women. Hence we do see male chauvinism on the part of Karim as well. He presents two distinct choices before Nazneen:

There's your westernized girl, wears what she likes, all the make-up  
Going on short skirts and that soon as she's out of her father's sight.  
She's into going out, getting good jobs, having a laugh. Then there's your  
religious girl, wears the scarf or even the burkha. You'd think they know  
best because they've been off to all these summer camps for Muslim  
sisters. (385)

As a matter of fact Karim seems to be another male figure, which has tenderly entered the emotional world of Nazneen. No doubt he has brought a good solace of life in the Nazneen's world of romance and sexual intercourse. However, he does follow the way of the Islamic intolerance. Due to being Islamic, women should not put on clothes of their choice and rationalize. In course of time he seems to have taken women as the instrument simply because he compares the religious girl who wears the burkha with good wife material.

Hanufa another Muslim woman who once attends a massage course with a purpose of curing her husband's a bad back. Despite she has done this act with a beneficial objective, she has been tried to be forbidden from doing so accusing her of conducting un-Islamic behavior:

Only recently Hanufa has been frozen out when it was discovered she has been attending a massage course. It was un-Islamic behavior and apparently, the imam the Jamme Masjid had preached against that very

thing. Hanufa protested that it was a woman-only course and that she was praising for the sake of her husband who suffered with a bad back. (391)

Hasina is already out of Islamic code of life. When she writes a compassionate letter to Nazzneen she expresses her innovative and revolutionary attitudes. She shows a contrast between her and Amma. In her view Amma was passive and docile but she is the seeker of liberation from the oppressive religious and cultural boundary. She prefers the life of her own despite the fact that it is challenging and miserable. In the letter she writes:

Amma always we are women what can we do? If she here now I know what she say I know it too well. But I am not like her. Waiting around, Suffering around, she wrong. So many ways, At the end only she act. She who think all path is closed for her. She take the only one forbidden. (434)

Because of cultural obligations women in Islam do think inferior to men and can't anything against the culturally drawn path of life. Hereby Amma may stand for the traditional and superstitious women while Hasina for the new and revolutionary ones of the present and protests against male domination in the name of culture and religion.

Ali's first and foremost attempt seems to have been voiced against the false message prescribed in the *hadith* by the imam. When it is looked at from her standpoint, it becomes pretty clear that the imam doesn't speak the word of God. There is an unbridgeable rift between the words of God and what the imam speaks. The one generation passes the false message to another. The children do not get a chance to question since they have already been trained not to rationalize especially in the matter of messages handed down by the imam and caliphs:

When the imam speaks, it is not the word of god. Does he speak true? It is easier to believe than not believe. Just think about gossip. The things our mothers told us, that fill our bones like marrow. We learned them before we learned to question. (78)

Thus Nazneen is evolving psychologically through rationalizing and suspicion on the word of the male imams. She might think why there have not been any female imams. Had there been female imams, women would not have been prohibited from using their reasoning faculty. Rather they would have been free to go out and experienced diversity of the materialistic world.

### **The Quest for Emancipation**

Nazneen has indeed spent her maximum time for others. She has never been selfish and thought of her own individual identity. By nature she is virtuous, kind, merciful, sacrificing, innocent, emotional, co-operative, and passionate and a source of compassion. As the matter of fact she has been a product of the Islamic society in which the male is considered to be superior to the female. Women are mostly in the service of the male in the very culture. They rarely think of their own life. Nazneen proved an obedient daughter of her parents in the affair of marriage that she married to an old man without questioning has been serving her husband, Chanu starts rearing the son. Here compassionate inclination towards baby can be asserted:

For Nazneen, the baby's life was more real to her than her own. His life was full of needs: actual and urgent needs, which she would supply. What was her own life, by contrast, but a series of gnawings, ill defined and impossible to satisfy? (83)

Nazneen remains fully dedicated to the baby's life. Though male always claim that the children are theirs, they rarely seem to rear the child. A mother is mother because she is selfless. A mother is mother as she is indeed superior to the male. A mother is mother since she has got the immense quality of mothering which men are deprived of. If men boast stating their fake ideological philosophy about the women and men relationship, it will be a great blunder on their part. Nazneen never boasts. She simply does whatever she sees essential and urgent. The life of a baby entirely depends on the good mothering.

In fact the creation of the human world is impossible without Nazneen like personalities. Nazneen proves a mother who thinks of children not about her happiness. Her happiness lies in the betterment and satisfaction of her children Bibi and Shahana. When the times come before her to decide whether to go to Dhaka or not, she starts thinking a lot about the adjustment and life of Bibi and Shahana since they have grown in the world of freedom and individuality. So they will feel complicated enough to adapt to the restrictive world which does not allow girls and women to put on shorts and jeans. Rather it compels them to live the caged life. Naturally Nazneen is very loving, empathetic, laborious, dutiful, active, responsible, considerate, and patient. She has been serving Chanu since her marriage not because of being his servant but out of love and the Islamic compassion.

As a matter of fact hadiths instruct women to be entirely devoted and dedicated to the service of their husbands. The hadiths which have carried up biased rules and restrictions are rarely suspected by the Islamic women. When Nazneen sees Chanu never do namaz and pray, the old Nazneen gets sublimated and the new Nazneen is filled with white light, glory and reasoning power. Knowledge is the outcome of experiences.

Nazneen has long experienced that Chanu has only been imposing the Islamic rules and obligation on Nazneen and girls but never applied in his daily activities. She has never seen him with the Holy Koran. Then suspicion arises in Chanu's behavior and his pretentious nature. Chanu has drawn a boundary for Nazneen. When she prefers to go out, Chanu interrupts her stating she should not go out simply because people will see her in the street and Chanu will be like a fool if seers say something about her. Thus he emotionally and culturally compels her to live a caged life like a domestic parrot. He does never intend her to live in the natural condition. But the poor, Nazneen says nothing to such fake instructions:

She did not often go out. Why should you go out? Said Chanu, "If you go out, ten people will say", I saw her walking on the street. "And I will look like a fool. Personally, I don't mind if you go out but these people are so ignorant . . . it is lucky that you married an educated man. That was a stroke of luck. (45)

Chanu's severe oppression goes to be intolerable and indigestible. When atrocities reach the climax, Nazneen commences revolting against this barbarian and nefarious figure. Ali's woman character, Nazneen exposes the bitter truth that men are selfish social products who seek for opportunities to dominate females who are indeed sources of their origins.

Since Nazneen has been grown up in the Islamic culture, she accepted marriage her father arranged for her after the death of her mother. Her younger sister, Hasina, who eloped in a love marriage, has been disowned. Now Nazneen's only contact with home is through letters she exchanges with Hasina, whose own fate back home in Dhaka changes throughout the fifteen years that *Brick Lane* takes place. Through Hasina's letters, Ali shows the similarities and contrasts in the lives of Nazneen and Hasina, both second class

citizens, and like other Bengali wives, powerless to control their own fate in the culture in which they live.

## Chapter IV: Conclusion

### Painful Experience of Women

Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* revolves around frequently tragic comic and permanently resigned-to-her-fate Nazneen, born and apparent still birth in a village in Bangladesh, and is married to Chanu, with whom she moves to London. Taught from the day of her birth that fighting against one's fate can weaken the blood, she accepts the miserably lonely existence fate bestowed on her in a London council flat. Though there are others from Bangladesh living there, Chanu believes that other immigrants to be uneducated, illiterate, and uncultured, and he discourages any reaching out Nazneen might do to these people who are below them.

With surety and meekness, Ali has drawn readers into Nazneen's world, a world of regular prayer, regular housework, regular remembrance of Karim and frequent visit with Razia. As the author seems to have focused on the minute details in Nazneen's everyday life, the readers observe equally minute changes taking place in the relationship of Nazneen and Chanu as it waxes and wanes in response to life's daily challenges. Hasina's life in Dhaka on another side is far more dramatic. Both Nazneen and Hasina accept Hasina's subsequent beatings as normal, and neither questions the circumstances surrounding the death of their mother when they were younger.

Ali herself Bangladeshi born English writer might have come across the similar situation. The feelings and acts of Nazneen are tender and meek. Since the women's position has been presented inferior and fragile in every civilization throughout history, Nazneen's place in the multicultural society which is heavily dominated and influenced by the Islamic way of life cannot be much different. Nazneen's opinions are no more

valued and prioritized by Chanu since he does not consider her capable of making serious decisions. The very psychological exploitation gradually and slowly takes an immense form of reaction. And when the reaction from Nazneen begins coming, the constant waves of revolution do not seem to take any break.

In *Brick Lane*, other female characters do seem to have been in search for liberty. Hasina, the sister of Nazneen, has sought for freedom by denying the arranged marriage and eloping with a man she was in love with. Similarly the daughters of Nazneen and Chanu: Shahana and Bibi do seek for liberty in order to put on English dresses which Chanu entirely opposes against. They do not take any interest in reciting poems by Tagore as well. Moreover, they do not get ready to go to Bangladesh as they are preoccupied with the fact that they will have to put on Islamic female dresses. They are sure that they will not enjoy the Bangladeshi culture.

The world of Nazneen's romantic love affair with Karim is different from the world prescribed in the Islamic culture. She enjoys a beautiful life full of feelings and romance which cannot be digested in the orthodox Islamic culture. Nazneen has thus sexually got emancipated. Her liberation from the Islamic way of life is indeed a great slap on the face of the imams themselves who have drawn a biased and partial map as the domain of women.

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