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STRUGGLE OF WOMEN FOR EQUALITY AND EMANCIPATION, IN *BRICK LANE*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the challenges faced by Bangladeshi women based on gender. The aim of this study to explore those points and revisit all types of discrimination and inequality deeply rooted in Bangladeshi culture. Bangladesh is an orthodox and conservative country, where women are treated as a means of entertainment. Women are counted as house cat, whose only work is to give birth to babies and suffer for family. Women always grow up with feelings of insecurity for various reasons. They feel embarrassed when speaking in public, while purchasing something, or in a social setting. If a woman dares to question male authority, she may face punishment in some or the other way. She could be slapped, or if not physically punished, she might impose self-punishment in some way. Traditional beliefs dictate that women should not raise their voices against male supremacy. As a result of this oppression, a protagonist character, Nazneen, fights against male dominance and to free herself from social boundaries. Monica Ali, portrays the picture of Bangladesh in the light if Nazneen. How a common Bangladeshi woman rebels against male supremacy and becomes an independent woman.

KEYWORDS: *Struggle, Rebel, discrimination, culture, emancipation*

INTRODUCTION

Monica Ali was born in Dhaka, East Pakistan, on October 20, 1967. She is a British writer and novelist of Bangladeshi and English heritage. Ali currently lives in South London with her husband and two children. In 2003, she was selected as one of the "Best of Young British Novelists" by Granta magazine, based on her unpublished manuscript. Her debut novel, Brick Lane, was published later that year and was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize. It was adapted into a 2007 film of the same name. Bangladesh is a traditional and conservative country, where most people belong to the Muslim community. Whereas Nazneen has also followed the same tradition since her birth. When she learns that men and women are equal by birth, she discovers that society treats only women as subordinate to men. Women are forced to marry an old man, while they don't even understand the meaning of marriage and family. In the 1980s, when the protagonist Nazneen is forced to marry a double-aged man named Chanu, it marks a time when she has to get ready for her fate and struggle with a new culture and a new land. She faced all types of oppression in Bangladesh, and now even in London. After arriving in London, her fate never changed. She is never allowed to go outside without the permission of her husband, and she must wear purdah, which is one of the most important prescriptions of Islam. To regular women's behaviours. These kinds of discrimination are faced by women in Bangladesh. Women can't escape from old ideas, moral values, and societal facilities. Freedom is a natural right through which anyone can acquire peace and live with dignity. Bangladeshi male society throws this freedom in the garbage, giving birth to several difficulties in the lives of ordinary Bangladeshi women. These kinds of personal and social obstacles are faced by women in Bangladesh. Like the Muslim characters in Brick Lane, the characters in each of these novels are confronted with racism and bigotry as they figure out where they fit in cultures that are ignorant of Muslim communities. London's East End has housed immigrant populations for centuries, but in the latter half of the 20th century, the Brick Lane neighbourhood experienced an influx of immigrants from Bangladesh.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To identify and analyze the primary barriers to women's growth in Bangladesh.
2. To evaluate the specific struggles faced by Muslim women in the name of religion.
3. To explore multiple opportunities and strategies for improving equal rights and providing social and cultural equality for all.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The present paper has gone through various approaches, mainly descriptive and analytical approaches. Authentic primary and secondary data has been collected from multiple sources including books, novels, academic journals, research works and publications related to the present issue.

1) Discussion

This study identifies some important reasons why women face discrimination in various societies. The process of oppression starts after a baby is born and depends upon his or her sex. If the baby is male, he gets special treatment and is taught from birth that he is born to rule over women. On the other hand, if the baby is female, she is taught after birth to take care of her family. She threw in the kitchen to learn cooking. Because the male-dominant society never allowed women to work like men. A woman's area is fixed and decided by her family members' cooking and nurturing. As the American philosopher,

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Judith Butler argues between sex as a biological concept and gender is a social construct. (Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity: Routlage:1990.)

Gender is a secondary construct which is imposed over the top. This natural distinction, sex itself, became a social category. This means the difference between male and female is a social distinction created by society. Much research in sociology assumes that each person has one sex, one sexuality and only one gender.

2) Discrimination on the basis of sex

The concept of gender in feminist writings and other sociological discourses became popular in the early1970s. In simple terms, gender explains the differences between men and women in social terms. Therefore, gender is an analytical category that is socially constructed by society between men and women in the material world. Anna Oakley, in her book Sex, Gender and Society-1972, explores the term gender. In western culture, it is believed that, any effort to change the traditional roles of men and women in society could change the fabric of society.The protagonists, Nazneen fights against her husband and Bangladeshi orthodox society. She has dream of becoming an independent woman, without controlling anyone.

Ones upon a time she went out of house, she asked her husband for a new sari. They looked in the shop windows on Bethnal Green Road, the pink with yellow is very nice. she asked for, do you think so? Let me think, said Chanu. (Ali, Brick Lane: p.43)

As a sign of male dominance, Chanu never allowed his wife to choose the color of her sari. She needed to get permission from her husband. In the Bangladesh Muslim Community, males have a supreme power to control women. Because in society seductive power is attributed to women, they are a protentional danger for men. The practice of purdah reinforces popular practical norms. Because purdah is connected with women's and her entire family's honor.

3) Male Dominance

This study identifies how women are double oppressed in modern society. Women are always trapped in their houses by their family members and at work places by strangers. That means women should perform double roles, as a housewife in her family and at work as an employee.

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. What can you do?' Besides, I get everything for you that you need from the shops. Anything you want, you only have to ask. (Ali, Brick Lane, p.45)

Although Chanu has lived in the western country for sixteen years, he hasn't forgotten his cultural roots. He is the typical patriarchal figure, and doesn't allow Nazneen to step out of the house if there is no vital reason. He especially argued with the taunts "It is lucky for you that you married an educated man. That was a stroke of luck". Nazneen experienced a year exploring the Western world. She was taught by her mother to never argue or raise questions about male decisions. If you want to ask questions, God (Allah) should give you birth as a male. Males are superior by birth. It is up to God's hand we do not raise our voice against God. Nazneen's principle in her life was "what can not be changed must be born." Her mother told said when she was a child. The novel repeats her mother's voice again in her mind. Just bear and endure. These sentences clearly explain the difference in roles between men and women in Bangladeshi society. While women characters in the novel are familiar with some of these expectations due to their upbringing, others are acquired after their marriage. Yet, these come naturally to them. Nazneen never talks back to her husband, except when he asks her a question. All their conversations are single ended.

4)Nazneen trapped in her own house

Monica Ali carefully portraits Nazneen's character in a way that touches every woman's social and family life. Every Bangladeshi woman is trapped between two cultures. One is her own and the second is where she comes to earn money for a better future.

She looked and she saw that trapped inside this body, inside this room, inside this flat, inside this concrete slab of entombed humanity. They had nothing to do with her. For a couple beats, she closed her eyes and smelled the jasmine that grew close to the well, heard the chickens scratching in the earth, felt the sunlight that warmed her cheeks and made dancing patterns on her eyelids. (Ali, Brick Lane, p.76)

Through the quotes, Nazneen represents her mindhood, how she is trapped between two cultures. As a homemaker, she has to work for her family and husband. But after observing the western culture, she observed in London, men and women were treated equally. Women also work the same as men do in the various offices, factories, day and night, all together, without any prohibition. London is the land which gives equal opportunities to men and women. But she was caught in the room by her husband. She understood that she was trapped in the body, she couldn't move out of the house. Her daily routine starts from making food for Chanu and taking care of her daughters and sometimes watching the world through the window. Her soul, mind, heart and goals are trapped in her own body, which is waiting to do something useful for her life.

'One woman, I believe it was Reba, a seamstress said, "Sisters, it is obvious. We must make the men suffer so that they will come to our aid and dig a new well. all we have to do is withdraw our labour. We go on strike if they want water, let them fetch it for themselves." Was it possible for the women to bring only their own ration of water and not share it with the men? Would the children be the ones to suffer most? Would the men see reason and begin to dig, or would they resort to violence? (Ali, Brick Lane, p.65)

Nazneen remembers the incident, she is inspired and starts to lead her life along with her daughters. She knew how an

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uneducated woman in her village, Gauripur, fought against male dominance and gained freedom from labor work. If that uneducated woman can fight for freedom, then why me not? Therefore, she started rebelling against her husband and started on London's streets wondering along with her son. There she realized life is beautiful if there is no one for her to control. The day she did not remain an innocent Bengali woman. She became an independent woman as most western women have been doing since their birth. Now, the journey starts from an innocent Bengali woman to a rebellious modern Westernized woman. From that day, she has never asked her husband to do anything. It is the inspiration for all those migrant Bengali women who are suffering the same problems in the host land.

CONCLUSION

The title of the study represents the sorrow of all Bengali women. Who is ever allowed to enjoy freedom? On the other hand, male members always discriminated against them. If God has given you the gender of woman, it means you are only born to suffer. Through the portrayal of Nazneen, Monica Ali carefully depicts the world of oppressed women in Bangladesh and how a common Bangladeshi woman adopted western culture and changed her life. Nazneen is the symbol of struggle, and her story represents emancipation from an old orthodox male-dominated society. The only way to live life with self-respect and independence is to raise one's voice against injustice. Every woman must become financially and mentally independent. That is the only means of true emancipation. The way Nazneen transformed herself from an oppressed woman into a modern Westernized woman. Her journey was full of struggle, but she dared to face them and set an example for all oppressed Bangladesh women.

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