



GOING AWAY AND COMING BACK: JOURNEY OF CHANU IN MONICA ALI'S BRICK LANE

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Movement from one place to another lead to various changes in social and cultural practices. Diaspora is a mode of cultural production. Cultural identity is fluid, produced and reproduced so that it often results in hybrid forms of expressions. The issues dealt in diasporic literature are issues of identity, the problem of history, confrontations with racism, intergenerational conflicts, difficulties in building new supportive communities, alienation, and rootlessness. Diaspora is not merely a scattering or dispersion, but an experience determined by who travels, where, how and under what circumstance. Homelands, and even the lands of adoption, crop up between the imaginary and the real. The diasporic writers exemplify the disturbing shifting and enliven the past cultural heritage and tradition in their works.

The novel *Brick Lane* (2003) by Monica Ali explores immigration, cultural shock and the problems involved in the movement from one country to another. The novel depicts the journey of Nazneen and Chanu from Dhaka to London. Nazneen migrates to London after her marriage with Chanu. Chanu is much older than Nazneen and is described as a man with "a face like a frog". Chanu is working in London.

Chanu is the first generation immigrant with high dreams in his eyes but he suffers from going home syndrome. He came to England to earn money but when his daughters grow older he wants to go back because he does not want to bring up his daughters in this atmosphere. He thinks that this place is not suitable for his daughters. He tries to retain his ethnicity. He finds faults in the surroundings of London. He thinks that it's good to make money. He is unable to completely acculturate and assimilate in London and in the end goes back to his native land.

Chanu feels proud on his coming to England and tries to show that he is a very educated person and

thinks himself worth of living in London. He tries to show that is very much attached to his native land. He always talks about Bangladesh and tries to live according to that culture and he lives in cultural nostalgia. At home he does not want to come out of his native culture. He is always nostalgic about his culture. Although he has a lot of degrees but still he is unable to settle in London and as Dr. Azad says, he suffers from 'going home syndrome.' Chanu who himself is an immigrant, comments on the yearning of the immigrants in London for their native land. His comments justify the nostalgic feeling of the immigrants. "These people are basically peasants and they miss the land. The pull of the land is stronger than the pull of the blood." (BL32) He further adds, "They don't ever really leave home. Their bodies are here but their hearts are back there" (BL32).

Chanu tries to posit that he is English and he has all the qualities which are needed in an English man. He is having degrees and he can speak English. He wants to assimilate in the host nation but due to the racial discrimination he feels alienated and marginalized. When a white man gets promotion instead of him, he feels lost and says:

You see... it is the white underclass, like Wilkie, who are most afraid of people like me.

To him, and people like him, we are the only thing standing in the way of them sliding totally to the bottom of the pile. . . .That is why you get the phenomena of the National Front. They can play on the fears to create racial tensions and give these people a superiority complex. (BL38)

Sometimes the racial discrimination makes an immigrant to feel uncomfortable in the host nation and he feels alien and lonely. This feeling becomes the



hindrance and obstacle in his acculturation and assimilation. The same situation is faced by Chanu. He faces injustice in regard to his job. This makes him feel that he is not fully accepted by the society he lives in. It is not easy to change the host culture according to the immigrants, but the immigrants would have to change themselves to adapt to the host culture.

Dr. Azad and Chanu are not able to fully acculturate themselves in the British society. When his daughter asks for money to go to pub in front of Nazneen and Chanu he feels chagrined, his deep rooted culture and traditional values come in his forefront and he feels ashamed. As such kind of attitude is not acceptable in their country. Chanu also feels abashed and talks about the immigrant tragedy. This incident shows that inspite of living in other nation it is not easy for the first generation to give up their cultural values and accept the other. For the first generation immigrants it is sometimes very difficult.

Shahana, Chanu's daughter does not consider herself Bangladeshi and relates herself with England. She belongs to second generation of immigrants. She does not like to listen to Bengali classical music" (BL180). Chanu is reluctant to nurture his daughters in England as they will move away from their land and culture. He does not want his daughters to give up their ethnic and cultural identity.

Chanu forces his daughters to learn about their culture and speak Bengali at home. He says that they must learn Tagore's poems as it will make easy for them to settle in Bangladesh. He is so nostalgic about his country that he always keeps on comparing between Bangladesh and London.

Chanu thinks that through literature they can connect to their native land. He praises his native land in front of his daughters:

He sat up a little and cleared his throat. 'In the sixteenth century, Bengal was called the Paradise of nations. These are our root. Do they teach these things in the school here? Does Shahana know about the Paradise of Nations? All she know is about flood and famine. Whole bloody country is just a bloody basket case to her.' He examined his text further and made little approving purring noises. (BL185)

Chanu tries to tell his daughters about the past of their native land. But his daughters are not interested in the past of Bangladesh. The second generation immigrants don't feel the same as their parents feel about their native land. They feel proud for their past but the second generation believe in the present. He says:

If you have a history, you see you have a pride. The whole world was going to Bengal to do trade. Sixteenth century and Seventeenth century Dhaka was the home of textiles. Who invented all this muslin and damask and every damn thing? It was us all us. All the Dutch and Portuguese and French and British queuing up to buy. (BL185)

Nazneen wants to assimilate but her language becomes barrier in her acculturation. On the other hand, Chanu has integrated in this society:

I'm talking about the clash between Western values and our own. I'm talking about the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve one's identity and heritage. I'm talking about children who don't know what their identity is. I'm talking about the feelings of alienation engendered by a society where racism is prevalent. (BL45)

At the beginning of her life in London, Nazneen does not leave her flat and remain trapped in the flat. Her language becomes a barrier for her, as a result she feels alienated. She can speak only two words of English 'sorry' and 'thank you'. She spends her days alone; she doesn't move out of her home and does not meet the strangers. Chanu does not encourage her to learn English and finds it unnecessary. Whenever Nazneen says that she would like to learn English, Chanu reactions "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?'" (BL37).

Nazneen tries to learn English with the help of her friend Razia but Chanu again discourages her, Chanu's attitude is the same:

'What for?'

'For the English lessons.'

'You are going to be a mother... Will that not keep you busy enough? And you can't take a baby to the college. Babies have to be fed; they have to have their bottoms cleaned. It's not so simple as that. Just to go to college, like that.' (BL77)

Nazneen suffers extreme social isolation. Able only to say 'sorry' and 'thank you' in English, Nazneen spends entire days completely by herself, cleaning the flat in which she and Chanu live, her only human contact being the sight of a mysterious tattooed lady who sits all day staring blankly out of the window of one of the facing buildings (BL7). Nazneen says that in her whole eighteen years, she can never remember having spent a moment alone until arriving in Britain (BL10)



Chanu's condescending attitude towards Nazneen elevates her isolation and alienation. Chanu does not torture her physically but psychologically he does not allow her to do anything. Chanu's pretentious didacticism alienates Nazneen, he also sees that she should not interact and intermingle with any other person from her native land. He thinks that they are uneducated yokels. (BL14)

Her life is opposite to what it used to be earlier. She feels lonely and lost in this new environment. "On one of her first days in Britain, Nazneen cuts her finger when chopping onions: 'The drops slid together like mercury and rolled down the drain. How long would it take to empty her finger of blood, drop by drop? How long for the arm? And for the body, an entire body?'" (BL24) this incident describes her loneliness. Chanu is unable to understand the alienation felt by Nazneen because of lack of communication in the new world. He does not like her association with anybody outside her house.

Chanu is divided into two. He wants to be English as well as wants his family to follow Bengali tradition and culture. He wants that his children should learn the poetry written by Tagore and must speak and write Bengali. She develops an extra marital affair with Karim. His revolutionary ideas impressed her a lot and this relationship brings a lot of change in her attitude and outlook. She started thinking about herself and her daughters.

Various cultural differences of the immigrants make them feel alienated and make their life difficult in new land. Chanu sees the life "This is the tragedy of our lives. To be an immigrant is to live out a tragedy" (BL112). There are various reasons which make an immigrant feel alienated in the host land, they see themselves as strangers and feel uncomfortable to adopt the new culture and tradition. As a result they inevitably feel alienated. The fact of being seen as 'the other' in the new environment plays a vital role to rouse the feeling of alienation. In the novel "the debilitating feeling of being an outsider, not quite being a part of the culture that one is surrounded by, is also embodied by the character of Nazneen's husband, Chanu" (Kathy A. Tan, 229). Chanu frequently mentions that the colonial process of England still continues in a different way and the West always despises them and considers the immigrant as lower. He says:

All these people here who look down at us as peasants know nothing of history...in the sixteenth century, Bengal was called the Paradise of Nations. These are our roots. Do they teach these things in the school here? Does Shahana know about the

Paradise of Nations? All she knows about is flood and famine. Whole bloody country is just a bloody basket case to her. (BL185)

The conflict with the character of Chanu's mentioned by Kathy-Ann Tan as follows:

The irony of Chanu's character is that, although he bitterly resists assimilating into British culture, hanging on to his cultural and historical roots and sense of national identity, he himself is an exaggerated parody of the archetypal product of post-colonialism, a scholar from the Commonwealth who pursues his university studies in the U.K., acquainting himself with, and steeping himself in, British culture and literature, spouting random quotes from Shakespeare to compliment the occasion. (229)

Chanu is caught between two cultures; he represents the immigrants' experiences. As stated by Catronia "Nazneen's husband, Chanu, is similarly caught. The more his desire for recognition is frustrated the more he feels alienated both from the English culture from which he once hoped to gain respect and from the East London Bangladeshi community, which is driven with internal dissension, intergenerational conflict and hostility towards the dominant culture.

Chanu is an exemplary of commingle of violent, identity related contradictions. He vacillates among his vitalizing faith that he and his family should be "English" and the rigid force which pulls him back towards the culture he has all but abandoned. Chanu tries to maintain his native identity and talks about two cultures and says that:

I'm talking about the clash between Western values and our own. I'm talking about the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve one's identity and heritage. I'm talking about children who don't know what their identity is. I'm talking about the feelings of alienation engendered by a society where racism is prevalent. (BL45)

Chanu who is educated and has a lot of degrees, desires promotion but he does not get while other Englishman gets the promotion. Then he feels isolated and discriminated and wants to return back. Chanu could have assimilated if he would have got promotion in his job. But due to racism, he did not get promotion and he wants to return back to his native land.

Chanu returns from London to Bangladesh as he could not adjust himself. For Chanu, of *Brick Lane*, being a non-white, hostland London is so



discriminatory that he decides to go back to Dhaka alone leaving his family in London.

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