

# Exploring Nazneen's Feminist Traits in Brick Lane

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**Abstract:** Brick lane is a successful novel by Monica Ali. This novel won New York Times Award and was shortlisted for Man Booker Prize also. It represents the miserable condition of a Bangladeshi woman in foreign country (England). The theory of feminist literary criticism is completely applicable on this piece of writing especially on Nazneen. This feminist literary criticism demands equal right for women in male dominant society. Some of the important writings in this context are Mary Wollstonecraft's A vindication of the rights of women (1792), Virginia Woolf's A Room Of One's Own (1929), Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex (1949) are some of the much more important writings which try to give a new kind of awakening and consciousness among women of that times.

**IndexTerms -** *New York Times Award, Man Booker Prize, Feminist Literary criticism, Male dominate society, Greek Times.*

The present research paper explores the novel Brick lane particularly the character of Nazneen from the feminist point of view. "Feminist criticism is a political act whose aim is not simply to interpret the world but to change it by changing the consciousness of those who read and their relation to what they read" (Lombardi, 2000). She is the heroine of the novel. There is great transformation in her personality from starting to ending of the novel in the opening section of the novel we see her image of a timid traditional lady but at the ending of the novel she presents the picture of a bold transform lady who can take her decisions. This novel presents the struggle of a Bengali immigrant woman in London. The beauty of her portrays lies in this how she maintains and develops her on foreign land. She marries a man who is older than her. She agrees to marry Chanu in the hope of a better future. On contrary all her hopes shattered down. "Clearly female and male roles are neither equal nor fixed. They differ from place and this spatial variation is most marked in the Third World" (Momsen, 1996). She very truthfully shows male dominated society. It shows through the behavior of Chanu. He always wants to prove that he was superior and well educated than Nazneen.

Chanu thinks that he did a great job to marry a village girl. Chanu does not allow her to do job. He thinks it is a blow on her prestige that her wife becomes independent. This type of attitude shows patriarchal set up of society where women were confined to the four walls of house. "If the wife is working it is only because the husband cannot feed them. Lucky for you I am an educated man (Brick Lane 184)".

Side by side we can see an inspirational woman in Razia who wants to seek her own ways in life. She is revolutionary by nature. She wants to be independent so that she can live a life of self-respect and confidence. "Only thing I care about is they don't have to do this same thing as me. New chairs, new sofa, and no more second-hand toothbrush for my kids this is what I am working for (Brick lane 189)".

This dialogue of Razia shows the spirit of Razia and her strong personality. Nazneen always want to rise in life but unfortunately she does not get opportunity because girls have not equal importance in society. In fact in the very starting meeting of Nazneen and Razia these two women presents the two sides of women. Nazneen presents traditional side of woman. On the other hand Razia presents the modern woman. There are three important female characters except Nazneen in this novel Hasina (her sister), Shahana (her daughter), Razia (her good friend) these three characters influence her so much to develop herself. Shahana does not want to live under control of anybody. She never accepts the authority of others on her life. She tells in her letters how she left her parents house then the house of her husband because he beats her. She is not a blind follower of fate like her sister. She believes in the theory of making our own fate. Her view impresses Nazneen also. "Whenever she got a letter from Hasina, for the next couple of days she imagined herself an independent woman too (Brick Lane 93). Nazneen shows the Muslim women status in society. Freedom means nothing for them. They are from very far away from this notion of freedom. They learn to support their husbands in their right or wrong deeds. This means that women's role in society is of subordinate only. They cannot play leading role in male dominated society that's why their talent mostly hidden some covers.

"The fact is that substantial numbers of young Muslims women are virtually enslaved in Britain; they grow up in what can only be called a totalitarian environment. I know this from what my patients have told me. They are not allowed out of the house except under escort, and sometimes not even then; they are not allowed mail or use of telephone; they are not allowed to contradict a male member of the household, and automatically subject to his wishes; it is quite legitimate to beat them if they disobey in the slightest. Their brothers are often quite willing to attack anyone who speaks to the women in any informal context. They are forced to wear modes of dress that they do not wish to wear. Their schooling is quite often deliberately interrupted, so that they are not infected by western ideas of personal liberty; ambitious for a career, they are kept at home as prisoners and domestic slaves (Dalrymple 2005).

The live example in front of us is the character of Nazneen. However she is in new environment now but she lives here traditional way of life like a Muslim domestic house wife. On the other hand Chanu always tries to dominate on her. With the

passage of time she becomes able to gain so much confidence. In the hour of dire economic trouble she supports Chanu so much. She starts the work of sewing. In this work her friend Razia helps her so much. 'Ask him this, then. Is it better than our own country, or is it worse? If it is worse, then why is he here? If it is better, why does he complain?' (Brick Lane 72).

This type of attitude of Razia raises a new spirit in Nazneen. She becomes able to see the actual colors of life. Now she wants to have her own identity. She starts seeing life according to her own point of view. In fact it is discovery of her talent and spirit which is long snubbed by male dominated society where women have not a respectable place in society. Now she begins to break the shackles of mental slavery. Chanu wants to keep under control Nazneen. She is the image of traditional and modern woman also. As Peter Barry very beautifully explains in his book *Beginning theory an introduction to literary and cultural theory* "Feminist pointed out, for example, that in the nineteenth century fiction very few women work for a living, unless they were driven to it by dire necessity. Instead, the focus of interest is on the heroine's choice of marriage partner, which will decide her ultimate social position and exclusively determine her happiness and fulfillment in life, or her lack of these (Brick Lane 117)". Bahri also claims that "there are no women in the third world" (Bahri, 2004).

By getting married with Chanu she goes to London. They live in brick lane, the name of a street. This is a street where the Bangladesh community lives. That's why this place known as Banglatown. She gave birth to two daughters however their sexual life is completely mechanical. Nazneen took no pleasure in it. One reason of this is that Chanu is twice in age from her. "A man can live without sex. He can live without it, but he cannot bear the thought of no sex. This is my suggestion (Brick Lane 65)". In man dominated society in sexual relationship women are always considered as a commodity. Then she attract towards Karim who gives her clothes for sewing.

In the very opening chapter we can see very clearly difference between man and woman. Nazneen's father Hamid when comes to know the birth of a baby girl he shows no happiness even he was not worried about her well being. Banesa declared her dead because there was no moment in her body Instead of worry about her Hamid sees her only one or two times. It shows careless attitude towards girls in society. 'A girl,' said Rupan. 'I know. Never mind,' said Hamid. 'What can you do?' and he went away again (Brick Lane 14)".

Her mother is a highly superstitious lady who believes in fate completely "We must not stand in the way of fate. Whatever happens, I accept it. And my child must not waste any energy fighting against Fate. That way, she will be stronger" (Brick Lane 14)".

However Nazneen discover herself in the later part of the novel when she becomes independent. On the other hand now Chanu depends on her.

"Most women lives remained centered on their traditional roles, and they had limited access to markets, productive services, education, health care, and local government" (Heitzman&Worden,1989).

Nazneen shows the condition of an immigrant Indian girl on foreign land. "The hijab (often translated as "veil") is the form of scarf or hair covering commonly worn by Muslim women" (Godlas, 2002). She loves to see ice skating on television. When she see that men and women were doing ice-skating equally she feels so good. When women were going to fall men control them she likes all these things so much there was no kind of adventure spirit arises in her. She becomes to realize now that there is somewhere equal status of man and woman in society. Another reason of change in her nature is the incident of her mother's death who always teaches her to believe in fate she herself decides her fate and committed suicide. Second thing is that when her son falls ill she has full faith in God and leaves everything on God and also did whatever she can did but her son has died then she lost her faith in fate. It is a touch which gives her so comfort and pleasure.

In the later part of the novel we see a completely change Nazneen. There are many reasons of this great change in her personality. One main reason among them is her meeting with Karim who gives her cloth for sewing. They come close to each other. In fact they fall in love. Nazneen feels that her life becomes colorful suddenly. She seeks meaning for her existence also. She never feels so happy and excited in her life before. Even she did sex with him. In the first time in her life she seeks real pleasure of sex in her life. "In the bedroom everything changed. Things became more real and they became less real. Like a Sufi in trance, a whirling dervish, she lost the thread of one existence and found another. 'S-slow down,' he moaned. But she could not (Brick Lane 299).

Now she realizes her importance. All the affection and love feelings which she always tries to find in Chanu all these things and pacification she finds in Karim. Before marriage she submitted to her father and after marriage to her husband without any personal interest. Now she involves with Karim according to her choice. "When the thought crept into her mind that the power was inside her, that she was its creator, she dismissed it as conceited. How could such a weak woman unleash a force so strong? (Brick Lane 300)". Nazneen does her work with much more competence. She talks with her daughters more than before even her daughters surprised to see the intelligence of her mother.

Nobody tries to understand Nazneen except Karim who comes like a blessing in her life. Another important thing happen in her life is that now she becomes independent which becomes her power. "Skills, vocational, and tertiary education are indispensable for enabling women and girls to enter the workforce on equal terms with men and to access better conditions, better pay, and better prospects, the report says.

However she did hard work but she did not feel tired because of her self confidence. "If she had been borne deficient and only now been gifted the missing sense (Brick Lane 301)". She becomes conscious about her rights. Now a clear difference has shown between the personality of Nazneen and Chanu also. Chanu comes under debt because of his extra expenses. Now he put his financial burden on Nazneen. This shows the emptiness of his character. All the situations reverse now. The role of Nazneen and Chanu becomes change. This means that who considered strong and intelligent is actually weak on the other hand who is considered weak and without any talent is actually a strong lady by spirit who can face the difficulties of life with so much brevity and courage. Her situations become changes now.

In the last decades she depends on Chanu completely in order to fulfill her needs now she can earn and can help others also with money. "'I' will give you the money. I have some here. I was going to send it to Hasina (Brick Lane 315)". There is strong desire in Nazneen to help her sister in any ways but she could not do so because she herself depends on Chanu but now she can do so what she wants according to her own wish she is no longer a timid woman. She went market with Razia and shares some of her secrets. She told her about Mrs. Islam debt how her husband borrow money and purchases a computer and sewing machine. Now she becomes able to pay the debt of Mrs. Islam but Razia warns her about the nature of Mrs. Islam how she caught men under her debt and increases it time to time.

Nazneen began to regret sometimes how much time she has wasted in ignorance.

“Some Muslim women experience double oppression from the culture of their community as well as the culture of their religion...our parents traditional attitudes...their cultural values, their family honour, their stubbornness to let go of the traditions. If a girl stands up for her rights, she brings shame on the family. These old fashioned ideas are what oppress Muslim girls (Jawad & Benn, 2003)”.

She cannot want to waste her time. She sees very closely the value of an independent women she can live a life with more confidence and self respect. Automatically things become change in her life. Life means something more for her. Life means not only serving husband and children only. She starts living for herself now which she never did before in her life. “Nazneen laughed loudly. The assistant looked uncomfortable, as though laughter were something new and unsettling (Brick Lane 314)”. Karim makes Nazneen feels that as she falls in love first time. He realizes her importance in society. He invites her in a meeting which is held for Muslim community and for their welfare. First time in life she gets so much respect and regard. She got the right of voting here also. She realizes that there is importance of her decision also. Afary points out: “In Bangladesh most women are excluded from the lives of the community, excluded from all decision making in their community (Afary, 2004)”. She realizes it now that her decision can change someone’s life also. As Karim elected the President of the community only with the difference of one vote because that person got 99 votes and Karim got 100 votes. This one vote is of Nazneen which proves to be a decisive vote. Now she goes ahead with self decision without any male. It is her great achievement in the novel.

The ending of the novel also symbolizes so much important ideas about the freedom of woman. As we see in the later part of the novel Nazneen has to face two choices she can marry with Karim or she can went back with her husband Chanu to Bangladesh. Her choice matter so much what she has to choose for her? This important idea is that now she wants to live with herself only. She did not choose Chanu or Karim. She experiences every kind of life. But at the end of the novel we get self dependent, confident Nazneen who can live without any male support. ‘Here are your boots, Amma.’

Nazneen turned round. To get on the ice physically—it hardly seemed to matter. In her mind she was already there (Brick Lane 492).

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