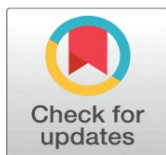
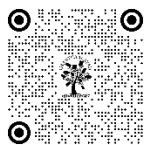


POSTCOLONIAL WOMEN IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION: A STUDY OF MONICA ALI'S BRICK LANE

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to critically analyze postcolonial women in the age of globalization concerning the novel Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2004). Monica Ali is a Bangladeshi-born British writer and novelist. She shows in her book the changes due to globalization that have been seen in women's lives in third-world countries. Globalization increases the gap between the haves and have-nots. It also impacts the life of postcolonial women who belong mainly to the middle and lower class, since upper-class women are comparatively less affected and barely benefit from economic globalization as their male counterparts. Women in the third world are labourers both low-priced and employed for longer working hours than men. They are influenced negatively by economic inequalities, leading to an increased sexualization of lower and lower-middle-class Third world women. This sexual exploitation is executed at manifold levels. Hence, the paper will analyze both the negative and positive aspects associated with globalization in the life of Bangladeshi women, Nazneen and Haseena, who are sisters but living in different countries, and their economic condition as they interact with the globalized economy both within the national framework and the Diaspora community, makes a relevant case to analyze the positive or adverse impact of economic globalization on the lives of postcolonial women.

Keywords: Globalization, Marginalization, Oppression, Diaspora, Postcolonial Women

INTRODUCTION

Globalization is derived from the word globalize, which refers to an increase in a global relationship in socioeconomic, technological, and cultural domains. It donates the build-up of a new global order in political, economic, and cultural arenas. Globalization changes people's temporality, social, and spatial existence due to the connectivity of various parts of the world through societal, intellectual, and spiritual connectivity, besides connectivity through technological means. Local, national, and international boundaries contract and expand the account of globalization. It has been increasingly used since the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s. It is a process of international integration arising from exchanging world views. "Globalisation, therefore, can be explained as a multidimensional process of creating, multiplying, deepening, fostering, intensifying, stretching, and expanding worldwide social interdependencies and exchanges, along with inculcating acceptance of the inescapable connection between the local and global, near and farther, and national and international" (Jindal and Kumar 01).

The new circumstances created by globalization are diverse and cover almost all aspects of women's lives. It has undermined the traditional role of women in homemaking, farming, livestock, animal husbandry, handicrafts, handlooms, etc., and resulted in a relatively better environment for women. More positively, some feminist philosophers

contend that globalization has enabled women to claim their human rights by creating "new spaces, institutions, and rhetoric where the notion of universal human rights is a powerful justificatory principle" (Walby 534).

Women have more jobs, become more active in avenues generally reserved for men, have played a more prominent role in society, and are not just restricted to the household. It has affected both the quantity and the quality of work available to most women. Globalization has posed a major challenge to the institution of patriarchy. As women take up jobs and achieve mobility, they have also begun to stand up for their rights. But, along with all these, globalization has increased the number of low-paid, part-time, and exploitative jobs for women. At the same time, the migration of women for economic reasons has led to increased exploitation including sexual exploitation and trafficking. Since, "it is a complex phenomenon involving positive and negative features, which both empowers and disempowers individuals, groups, and nations" (Jindal and Kumar 01). Thus, women have been the worst sufferers of inequality, violence, trafficking, labor, and exploitation despite globalization. Jaggar argues that- globalization has promised many things that are crucial to feminists: peace, prosperity, social justice, environmental protection, the elimination of racism and ethnocentrism, and, of course, an increase in the status of women. However, neoliberal policies have brought about the opposite of these aspirations. Rather than peace, they have created conditions for war and increased militarism; rather than prosperity and social justice, they have increased the gulf between the rich and the poor; rather than environmental protection, they have led to the privatization and destruction of publicly-owned natural resources; and rather than eliminating racist, ethnocentric, and sexist barriers, globalization has been, ultimately, "a system hostile or antagonistic to women (Jaggar, 301).

Many feminist political philosophers have argued that globalization has contributed to human rights violations against women, "the economic insecurity and concomitant increase in poverty associated with globalization have made women more vulnerable to sexual exploitation. In particular, girls are sold as child brides or pushed into prostitution or sexual slavery to support their families" (Okin 45).

Monica Ali is a contemporary Bangladeshi fiction writer settled in London. *Brick Lane*, her first novel published in 2003, was nominated for the Booker Prize and is worldwide acclaimed as a remarkably rich text, largely depicting the ethnic life of Bangladeshi immigrants living around Brick Lane, a street in the centre of Bangladeshi residential community in London. Part of the novel delineates characters and lives rooted in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. A critical study of her female characters and their economic condition as they interact with the globalized economy both within the national framework and the Diaspora community makes a relevant case to analyze the positive or adverse impact of economic globalization on the lives of postcolonial women. John Marx uses *Brick Lane* to back up his point that "women change in the process of globalization" in his article *The Feminization of Globalization*. Alistair Cormack claims that *Brick Lane* "is particularly of interest as an examination of the double bind that female migrants face, treated as alien by their host nation and as commodities by the men in their own communities" (700).

Nazneen, the main character of the story, at the age of eighteen, is married off by her parents to a much older man Chanu, who is a lower-middle-class man with a low-paid clerical job, living in London. Nazneen comes to live in Tower Hamlet among the Bengali Diaspora community the centre of which is the street called Brick Lane. At first, the only English words she succeeds in speaking are 'Sorry' and 'Thank You' but soon adapts better. Formerly when she roams around London on her own, she feels pleased when she conveys herself in English to a white man. When she thinks about her village Gauripur back in Bangladesh, all that comes to her mind is a hard life. The study of a life without a gas cookstove and flushing washroom sounds annoying and tiresome to her now. She feels she is better off here because when her husband Chanu goes out of a job, the British government provides free primary education, a place to live without rent, and allowance for the jobless.

When Nazneen's husband quits his job, Nazneen starts supporting her family by sewing, hemming, buttoning, zipping, and all feathers of stitching and mending jobs. She doesn't go outside the house to do the jobs; rather work is brought home to her by her husband through a mediator called Karim who belongs to the same community. The restriction isn't assessed upon her by any external profitable factor but by her patriarchal husband. The money earned therefore is stingy yet liberates her as an individual and helps the family go on. She managed to send some financial backing to Haseena in Dhaka as well. She saves some of her income for the going-back-home project and fulfils her eldest daughter, Shahana's cravings for luxury items through her same income. She arranges to pay back the quantum amount taken by her husband from the usurer woman, Mrs Islam through the same private sewing job. It's her skill with the sewing machine and the designing of garments that gives her the courage and profitable security to stay behind in England when her husband, Chanu leaves for Bangladesh.

Razia, her friend from the Bengali community, has formerly set up her garment business and has been going over places like Southall, Wembley, etc. to get orders for dresses. Razia opts her way out of the sweatshop and chooses to work on her own, experimenting with all feathers of private force demands and designing both Eastern and Western stuff for a free request. Nazneen joins her and manages to raise her daughters, keep the house, and keep up transferring to Haseena through her free-existent enterprise in the neoliberal commercial business. At the end of the novel, her daughters grant her lifelong desire by taking her to an Ice Skate. The jubilation of the girls on this casting up occasion and Nazneen's dream of freedom coming true makes Razia conclude that "This is England, you can do whatever you like" (Ali 409).

On the other side, Haseena is the sister of the protagonist, Nazneen. She was brought up in a village called Gouripur with her sister. She is a lively and pretty young girl who falls in love with a boy and thinking their love marriage to be impossible in the face of conservative rural customs, runs away to Dhaka with her lover. Her romantic dreams of a happy-ever-after soon dash to the ground and after going through a few months of tormented married existence, she decides to abandon her husband and seek a new life. She flees to Dhaka and finds a job in a garment factory where a great number of lower-class women work. The garment factory where women work is looked down upon by the patriarchal society which does not approve of women working outside the house. Haseena expresses the general social response in such terms: "How easy to call the garment girls. Zainab says one hundred and fifty girls in one factory getting pregnant. This is kind of thing people say. Who going to stop them?" (Ali 126). The garment factory sounds synonymous with a brothel for chauvinist men who don't let their wives work. Haseena is given quarters to live in at a cheap rate and provided with other facilities, yet these are not the privileges of employment. A feudal Lord called Chaudry, who is the owner of the factory where she works, visits her frequently and soon exploits her sexually. The main clerk in the factory named Abdul comes to her rescue and guarantees support when the factory women boycott her due to rumours about her relationship with Chaudry. The clerk also ends up manoeuvring to make her sleep with him. Feminist political philosophers argue that "jobs on the global assembly line tend to be difficult, insecure, and dangerous: working conditions are poor, hours are long, wages are low, and sexual harassment is widespread" (Young 164-65). Thus, they contend, the results for women are contradictory at best. As Jaggar argues, while women's increased economic power may provide them with some freedom within their families, they are also "super-exploited by foreign corporations with the collusion of their own governments. As employees, they often experience a type of labor control that is almost feudal in its requirement of subservience and dependence" (Jaggar 306).

Thus, the economic and sexual maltreatment of a lower-class postcolonial woman is consummated at the hands of a feudal private industry owner and his administrative manager. If the proprietor and the directors exploit her sexually and monetarily, another cog in the capitalist wheel i.e., the fellow drudge doesn't lag before. Hussain, a drudge in the jute plant, at first sympathizes with her and tries to help with minor tasks. The man abuses her sexually and eventually, regarding it as a profitable business, turns into a pander and contrives to offer her as a Courtesan or "flirting girl" to men with money. The man suggests to her to make money out of prostitution while youth and vigour are there with her.

Inside the garment plant, where Haseena works with other women, they've distributed complicated and further time-consuming jobs like sewing and stretching while men comprise the administrative body as well as take up the easy jobs of cutting clothes and making patterns. Supply orders from Japan bring money for the commercial possessors but only overtime for the female workers. Women's duties in the domestic sphere, watch-taking liabilities, and particularly the exacting duties of motherhood aren't given any consideration by the local feudal proprietor. The overtime goes unpaid or meagrely paid for. For the toughest job of brick breaking, women have preferred workers because they settle for cheap stipends to meet the requirements of their children who frequently help them break bricks. Out of jobs and out of favour with her second husband, Haseena ends up at a destitute hotel for prostitutes. The house is set up by Brother Andrew from Canada. An elite-class woman Lovely and her industrialist husband James recover her from the house to employ her as a maid in their house. In that position, she must do the multiple duties of washing and drawing jobs as well as the work of an Ayah or nurse for a merge sum. At night she sleeps at the bottom of the baby son's room and has to tend all night to her. Her physical and profitable exploitation under rough working conditions in the household of an industrialist continues until she, formerly again, runs down for another life.

The ending comment is largely significant as it reflects upon the fair occasion and liberty allocated out to individualities by global frugality unchecked by patriarchal domination, state neglect, or sexual exploitation.

CONCLUSION

The positive and negative aspect of globalization is analyzed by post-colonial women in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*. The negative aspects of globalization i.e. exploitation of Third World women as cheap labour, reduction in the provision of

public services by the state, limited privatization, and sexualization were particularly analysed concerning the two central female characters Haseena and Nazneen. The position and situation of the two postcolonial women were altogether different since Haseena lived in Dhaka, Bangladesh and Nazneen was a member of the Bangladeshi Diaspora abiding in London. Haseena fell from a lower middle class to the smallest strata while Nazneen stayed the same. Haseena's exploitation and sexualization in the garment plant at Dhaka have been a consequence of the unqualified privatization of local industry and the lack of state authority over the fiscal and ethical terrain of the private sector.

In Nazneen's Diasporic situation, globalization proves economically liberating for her. Through private deals and offers for sewing, she succeeds in supporting her family. At the end of the novel, when her husband leaves her alone in London, she acts as an independent, delivered, and independent individual by becoming part of the new liberal commercial economy. Globalization gives her fiscal support and enables her to exercise her agency and subjectivity. The standpoint of regarding globalization as a complete monster does not hold ground in every situation. In the case of Bangladeshi Diaspora woman Nazneen, Globalization, and its major angles prove to be upgrading and liberating.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None

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