

Urban Migration and the Crisis of Identity in Contemporary Metropolitan Novels: A Study of Brick Lane by Monica Ali

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Submitted: 10- Mar -2026 Revised: 18-Mar-2026 Accepted: 15-Apr 2026 Published: 30-Apr-2026

Manuscript ID:
IJEWLPSIR-2026-030215



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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.20915380

DOI Link:

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20915380>

Volume: 3

Issue:2

Month: April 2026

E-ISSN: 3065-7873

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How to cite this article:

Swara, J. V. (2026). Urban Migration and the Crisis of Identity in Contemporary Metropolitan Novels: A Study of Brick Lane by Monica Ali. International Journal of English and World Languages and Literature Paradigm Shift in International Research, 3(2), 52–54.
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20915380>

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Abstract

Brick Lane (2003) by Monica Ali explores the life of Nazneen, a Bangladeshi woman who migrates to London through marriage. The novel presents the psychological, cultural, and gendered dimensions of migration, highlighting the crisis of identity experienced in metropolitan spaces. *Brick Lane* is the story of Nazanin, a girl from a small village in Bangladesh, who gets married at a young age and moves to Brick Lane, London, with her husband. Initially, Nazanin finds it difficult to adapt to the English language, the new culture, and city life. Her husband, Chanu, is a traditionalist who confines Nazanin to her home. In the next part of the story, Nazneen's life undergoes many changes. She gradually begins to find her own identity and tries to become independent. A young man named Karim enters her life, who gives her a new sense of thinking and freedom. This relationship creates a conflict in Nazneen's mind – on one hand, traditional family values, and on the other, her own desires. The novel depicts the loneliness of migrant life, the struggle for cultural identity, and a woman's journey of self-reliance in a very realistic way. Ultimately, Nazneen's path to making her own decisions and developing her personality is revealed, which leads to her not being able to do anything.

Keywords: Urban Migration, Identity Crisis, Diaspora, Metropolitan Culture, Gender, Postcolonialism.

Introduction

Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane* is one of the most important and widely read novels in contemporary English literature. Published in 2003, the novel explores themes of migration, cultural identity, female agency, and the struggles of metropolitan life. Set in the multicultural neighborhood of Brick Lane in London, where a large community of Bangladeshi immigrants lives, the novel meticulously portrays the psychological, social, and cultural changes in the life of an immigrant woman through the protagonist, Nazneen.

Nazneen's life begins in a conventional framework – early marriage, migration abroad and complete dependence on her husband. However, through her experiences in London, contact with new people and changing circumstances, she gradually begins to discover her own identity. In this process, her life's journey of inner struggle, willpower and self-reliance is clearly visible. This novel is not just a personal story of one woman, but represents the broader experiences of the immigrant community. In particular, the novel effectively depicts the conflict between traditional values and modern lifestyles, as well as the process of finding one's identity.

Theoretical Framework

The study of migration and identity can be understood through postcolonial and cultural theories:

Homi K. Bhabha introduces the concept of hybridity, where identities are formed in the "in-between" spaces of cultures.

Stuart Hall views identity as fluid, constantly shaped by history, culture, and representation.

These theories help analyze how migrants negotiate identity within metropolitan environments.

Diaspora in Brick Lane:

Portrayal of Diaspora in Novels

1. Life away from roots

Nazneen and the other characters leave Bangladesh and live in Brick Lane, London. Despite their geographical distance, they have a strong connection to their country.

2. Cultural Identity

People living in the Diaspora have to balance two cultures – the original culture (Bangladeshi) and the culture of the new country (British). Nazneen seems to be caught between both.

3. Cultural Hybridity

There are many characters in the novel who embrace a mix of both cultures. This mixed identity is an important part of Diaspora

4. Sense of Belonging

People in the Diaspora constantly ask themselves, “Where is true home?” For Nazneen, the dilemma remains that Bangladesh or London.

Identity Crisis:

Nazneen is home in Bangladesh 18 years old. Her father sent her to London for an arranged marriage with an older man. Her father is going to labor two months early the birth of her eldest daughter, Nazneen. Her life revolves around household chores and raising her two daughters, Sahana and Bibi. Chuanu dreams of returning to Bangladesh, but Nazneen begins to feel more connected to life in London as Chuanu's business ventures fail.

Political tension rises within the Bangladeshi community, with Karim involved in organizing protest and religious activism. Nazneen is torn between her loyalty to Chuanu and her emotional connection to Karim. However, when Chuanu decides to return to Bangladesh, Nazneen decides to stay and embrace her independence, marking her transition from a passive recipient of fate to an empowered individual capable of shaping her own future.

Depiction of Metropolitan Culture in the Novel

Brick Lane is home to many Bangladeshis, Indians, Pakistanis and British people. Different religions, traditions and lifestyles are blended into one area. Nazneen initially finds it difficult to adapt to this cultural mix. Scenes in the metropolis, using English, Bangladeshi and mixed languages, show Nazneen's difficulties. Language is not only a means of communication but also a symbol of cultural identity.

The conflict between affluence and poverty is evident in the metropolis. Nazneen's husband Chuanu tries to achieve financial stability in the city, while Nazneen gradually becomes self-sufficient. Metropolitan Culture offers women more freedom and opportunities. Nazneen finds her identity through new friends, work, and social experiences. Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane*

Depiction of Urban Migration in the novel

1. Rural to metropolitan travel

Nazneen comes from a village in Bangladesh to Brick Lane in London. The journey is not just a geographical one, but one of cultural and psychological change.

2. Cultural Conflict

Nazneen finds it difficult to adapt to the language, lifestyle, and social norms in her new city. She seems to be caught between traditional Bangladeshi culture and Western lifestyle.

3. Loneliness in the metropolis

Even living in a big city like London, Nazneen feels lonely. The novel makes it clear that urban migration often leads to

4. Economic and social realities

Financial stability is quickly achieved, and Nazneen's husband Chuanu struggles to find a good job. After moving to the city, this is a real-life novel....

Conclusion:

Brick Lane is a nuanced exploration of the immigrant experience, gender role and cultural conflict. “Through Nazneen's Journey Monica Ali presents a portrait of female empowerment and the search for identity within a multicultural Society. The Novel's portrayal of the Bangladeshi Community in London reflects the complex realities of diaspora and the evolving definitions of home and belonging.

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who supported me in the completion of this study on *Urban Migration and the Crisis of Identity in Contemporary Metropolitan Novels: A Study of Brick Lane* by Monica Ali.

I am deeply indebted to my mentor/guide for their invaluable guidance, insightful suggestions, and continuous encouragement throughout this work. Their intellectual support enabled me to critically examine themes of urban migration, identity crisis, cultural displacement, and adaptation as portrayed in *Brick Lane*.

I also extend my heartfelt thanks to my teachers and the department for providing the academic environment and resources necessary for this research. Their encouragement played a vital role in shaping my analytical perspective.

I am grateful to my friends and peers for their support, meaningful discussions, and motivation during the course of this study. Their perspectives enriched my understanding and made the research process more engaging.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family for their unwavering support, patience, and belief in me. Their encouragement has been a constant source of strength.

Financial support and sponsorship

Nil.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper

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