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FEMALE IDENTITY IN DIASPORA SOCIETY: NILANJANA IN TASLIMA NASRIN'S "FRENCH LOVER" AND NAZNEEN IN MONICA ALI'S "BRICK LANE"

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ABSTRACT

This article explores female identity in diaspora society portrayed in Taslima Nasrin's (1962) "French Lover" and Monica Ali's (1967) "Brick Lane". Nasrin writes about the female identity of the Indian diaspora, and Ali writes about the female identity of the Bangladeshi diaspora. This comparative study highlights two female characters from two novels, Nilanjana and Nazneen, who are always in-between tradition and adaptation. It also explores the intrinsic intersections between gender, migration and cultural dislocation. Nilanjana pursues personal liberation and Nazneen's journey tends to the balance between traditional values and self-empowerment. The encounter of these two female characters with cultural differences is highlighted through the postcolonial lens of diaspora and diasporic identity, hegemonies, feminism, and cultural studies. Drawing on the themes of migration, assimilation and resistance, this study focuses on characters' identities shaped by diasporic experiences as they face challenges of adapting to new cultures, the question of self-identity, cultural assimilation and freedom. As the boundaries of nation-states are redefined by the influence of globalization, and the growth of migration, the migration leads females from Third World countries to form their identity in the complex socioeconomic conditions, cultural divergences, and psychological landscapes. The primary objective of this research is to reveal the complexities of female experiences within diasporic communities. The positions of Nilanjana and Nazneen are very liminal in the new countries and new cultural backgrounds where diasporic patriarchal frameworks of power dynamics and cultural differences play crucial roles. This analysis sheds light on the multifaceted experiences of diasporic females who negotiate their identities in the intrinsic tapestries of cross-cultural encounters. Their relationships with the home countries and host societies, and traditional and modern values, as well as the role of language, help in shaping their identities. The basic finding of this study is a deeper understanding of the multifaceted challenges and opportunities faced by women within diaspora societies.

Keywords: diaspora, female, feminism, identity, loneliness, exile, culture

INTRODUCTION

“French Lover” (2001) (*Forashi Premik*) was written in Bengali by Taslima Nasrin and translated into English by Sreejata Guha, and “Brick Lane” (2003) was written in English by Monica Ali. Nasrin was brought up in a conservative Muslim society in Bangladesh and Ali was born in Bangladesh but lived in England from her very early childhood. The themes of their works are not identical: in her poems, stories, novels, and columns, Nasrin mainly concentrates on women’s oppression, fundamentalism, and sexuality. Later on, when she is exiled, she concentrates on diaspora. Ali focuses on the diasporic life in general. In “French Lover”, Nasrin portrays Nilanjana, an educated twenty-seven-year-old girl, whereas in “Brick Lane”, Ali, who belongs to a new generation of Anglophone diasporic writers, highlights an eighteen-year-old girl Nazneen. Nilanjana migrates to Paris whereas Nazneen moves to London after marriage. Through a comparative analysis of these two famous novels, this study intends to explore the challenges of female immigrants in diaspora societies and how women’s experiences help to form new identities.

METHODOLOGY

This article provides an exploration of diaspora, diasporic female identity, and their position in the societies of Paris and London through a comparative analysis of two famous novels: “French Lover” and “Brick Lane”. To analyze the female identity in a diaspora society, this article will employ the qualitative analysis approach. The analysis will be conducted following feminist lenses to interpret gender dynamics in the diaspora society. Concepts of diasporic identity, culture and cultural identity of in-betweenness, diasporic hegemonies, and diaspora feminism will be applied to make a comparative study of the novels.

Secondary sources have been consulted for understanding the broader concepts of diasporic hegemonies, female identity and their position in the diaspora. Citation is properly provided and the analysis is unbiased considering ethical issues. The study contributes valuable insights by presenting cultural elements and gender roles of the main male characters of the two novels. The methodology enables a comprehensive analysis of the novels of Nasrin and Ali from diasporic feminist perspectives.

FEMALE WRITERS IN BANGLADESHI DIASPORIC LITERATURE: NASRIN AND ALI

Women play a very important role in domestic and public spheres in diasporic societies. South Asian immigrant women carry the traditional cultural values of the homeland and transmit those among posterior generations. In postcolonial discourse, diasporic female writers concentrate on the issues of women of homeland and a host country:

[...] the diasporic women writers emerge to write down the experiences of women through female perception and perspectives. The women writers depict the characters and their experiences in foreign countries in such a way that immigrant women feel identified with the women writers who articulate for them. (Karche and Mane 2022, 34)

Diasporic women writers present females' roles to interrelate their home cultures with the host-land cultures. Bangladeshi diasporic writers write about migration, identity, displacement and experiences of diasporic women.

Bangladeshi literature and Bangladeshi Anglophone literature refer to the literary works of pre-independence and post-independence Bangladesh. There are three historical phases: Bangladesh was under the British colonial rule as a part of the Indian Subcontinent before the Partition 1947, which divided Bengal into two parts – West Bengal and East Bengal (known as East Pakistan). As the majority of the people of East Pakistan were from Bengali culture and had a distinct linguistic identity, they fought against West Pakistan for independence in 1971.

Bangladeshi literature in English has made considerable progress since its inception in the colonial period. [...] there has been a surge of activity in the new millennium, with several writers making breakthroughs in the international literary scene and winning prestigious prizes. [...] the tradition seems to be growing more rapidly in the diaspora than at home. [...] To address this imbalance and to create a vibrant anglophone literary site at home, the country's leadership needs to take appropriate measures to strengthen the state of English and its literary fabric. A robust English writing tradition will help bring Bangladesh closer to the world by sharing its history and culture with people of other

countries in the global lingua franca, something that cannot be achieved if the national spirit is invested wholly in Bangla. (Quayum and Hasan 2022, 740)

Bangladeshi Bengali literature and Bangladeshi writing in English emerged after the independence of Bangladesh. Bangladeshi writing in English refers to the literary works of the writers who write in English at home and abroad. Bangladeshi diasporic literature refers to the literary works written by Bangladeshi writers who are living outside of Bangladesh.

Bangladeshi diasporic literature often delves into the discourse of dual identity and the tension between old and new cultures to which they belong. Bangladeshi female diasporic writers focus on the issues related to feminism, gender roles and women's rights within Bangladeshi communities. They assert their perceptions on femininity through female protagonists and reveal that migration cannot change female immigrants' identity. Bangladeshi female diasporic writers are Monica Ali, Tahmima Anam, and Taslima Nasrin who are living in the UK and the USA. They are considered South Asian Anglophone writers who focus on women's issues and their dilemmas about home culture and the diasporic cultures they encounter. They show that women are doubly marginalized and can raise their voices. In an article titled "Diasporic Feminism and Locating Women in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Arranged Marriage*," it is asserted:

The diasporic women writers have tried to represent women from margin' to 'centre' through their writings. Apart from that, in a diasporic place women faced double marginalization, but in diaspora they get chance to raise their voice because of the influence of western culture or being conscious about their rights. Mainly in diaspora, women go through the problems of assimilation, alienation, negotiation, past memory in this condition they think for themselves and try to raise their voices. (Pawar 2019, 6)

Diasporic women writers write about women's problems in their homeland and their host lands where they settle to build a new home. They write about females who are the models of South Asian women and interact with the outside world in the diaspora.

In Bangladeshi feminist writing, Nasrin is vocal against patriarchy. She was exiled for writing "Lajja" in 1994 and became a global author. She got a shelter in India; in 2004, she was

expelled from India, moved to Sweden, lived in some other European countries, and now she lives in New Delhi. Feeling exiled, displaced, alienated, dispossessed, and rootless after migration, she writes "French Lover" to focus on the psychological sufferings and it signifies "homeland" for a diasporic woman. Ali left Dhaka when she was barely four years old, and she is a part of both Bangladesh and England. She became a well-known diasporic author for writing "Brick Lane" which "is the first novel written in English by a diasporic writer of Bangladeshi origin" (Lahiri 2019, 116). Ali rises as a diasporic author belonging to a new generation of Anglophone diasporic writers.

Nasrin and Ali concentrate on immigrant women's challenges and struggles to form their identity to live in diaspora societies freely. They contribute immensely to Bangladeshi diasporic literature writing about the female characters who face a diasporic patriarchal society. They clearly demonstrate "the diverse ways in which constructions of identity are being reshaped within a transnational context" (Ranasinha 2016, 42). Diasporic women face double marginalization and they can raise their voices and become conscious about their rights due to the influence of Western cultures. In their novels, both Nasrin and Ali write about migration, assimilation, negotiation, and diasporic women's loneliness and cries for home.

DIASPORIC FEMINISM: AN OVERVIEW

"Diasporic Feminism" is a feminist theory that intersects the fields of postcolonial studies, diasporic identity and feminism. It examines diasporic female experiences, struggles and perspectives of women within diasporic communities and highlights gender, identity and cultural contexts which help to shape female identity. It emerges from migration and cultural encounters which help to shape gender relations and identities. The critical reading of diasporic feminism examines the concepts of diasporic identity, intersectionality, hybridity, cultural tension, and adaptation.

The concept of "diaspora" refers to the migration, scattering, and dispersion of people from one land to the geographical locations of another. Movement is a common phenomenon in the time of globalization and immigrants fight to adjust to the new cultural setup. Migration shapes the experiences, identities and struggles of women within a diaspora society and "The experiences of migrancy and living in a diaspora have animated much recent postcolonial literature, criticism and theory" (McLeod 2007, 207).

In the broader narratives of postcolonial studies, female migration refers to the understanding of gender dynamics which helps to understand female identity, resilience and experiences.

Postcolonial diasporic studies come from the idea of migration which changes the identity of immigrants who are from different geographical locations. Diasporic males and females face certain problems:

Exiles or emigrants or expatriates are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. If we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing; that was lost; that we will in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (Rushdie 1991, 10)

Rushdie points out the loneliness and uncertainties of immigrants who cry for the past and memories. Their inability to return home becomes imaginary and invisible to them. In this regard, diasporic studies focus on the identity of immigrants who face many similar and contradictory problems.

Women of the diaspora face identity politics as they remain busy with domestic chores and patronize the cultures in the male-centered family structure. At the same time, they also challenge the male-centered perspectives. There are three categories of diasporic women: some diasporic women are free and cosmopolitan as they are neither influenced by the culture of their homeland nor completely carried away by the host culture, some are in-between modern and traditional values, and some are completely socialized into culture. Diasporic women “bear the traces of particular cultures, traditions, languages, systems of belief, texts and histories which have shaped them. But they are also obliged to come to terms with and to make something new of the cultures they inhabit, without simply assimilating to them (Hall 1993, 361). They become the product of cultural hybridity and never think to return. Their identities are formed and are always in formation.

The issue of identity is very significant in diaspora and it naturally constructs and reconstructs cultural identity in multiple socio-cultural situations. Various races or communities migrate and face racial, cultural, and linguistic confusion in the formation of a new culture and they have to encounter defamiliarization and

hybridization. Diasporic identity constantly produces and reproduces immigrants' identities which "are marked by the multiplicity of subject positions that constitute the subject. Hence, identity is neither fixed nor singular; rather it is a constantly changing relational multiplicity" (Brah 1996, 123). Identity is a process and cultural identity is a combination of social group and collective identities. It represents the personal and individual identities of an individual who carries double consciousness which "often produced an unstable sense of self" (Tyson 2006, 421). The unstable sense of self-identity in the diaspora creates an identity crisis which makes a migrant culturally displaced and psychologically traumatized.

Culture refers to the way of life of different societies and their cultural habits. When women move to another country, they feel torn between the cultural identities of their homeland and the host land. They face problems and difficulties in diverse cultural situations; some people can partially adjust and some cannot. Cultures cross borders with migrants and "[c]ultures travel across geographical borders; they merge and separate; they cross and disrupt political and social divisions, and also, sometimes, strengthen them" (During 2005, 6–7). Culture is a process of change and it develops through practices. Interacting with other cultures is a challenge and immigrant women's identities transform into hybrid identities because "groups and individuals do not have a single identity but several" (Ibid., 151). In-between home and host cultures, diasporic women negotiate modern and traditional values and they prefer the socialisation of their home cultures.

Migration displaces and dislocates people, and it is "a process of displacement and disjunction that does not totalize experience" (Bhabha 1994, 5). The sense of displacement creates an idea called hybridity through cross-cultural encounters. Hybridity is a state when a person stands between two cultural spaces and it introduces a third space, the interstitial space or liminal space. In different socio-cultural situations, culture is an important factor in shaping one's identity and hybrid identity accepts or rejects contradictions of different cultures. Diversity forms hybrid identity and fixity which is a dangerous tenant for identity. Cultural hybridity brings together contradictory ideas, practices, and discourses and it is formed or reformed by intercultural relations through the processes of assimilation and adaptation.

In the diaspora, Indian and Bangladeshi women interact with various communities and fight against societal inequalities. The marginalised positions of women, cruel attitudes of patriarchal

mindsets and otherness become a part of diasporic hegemonies. Diasporic feminism conceptualises women's identities on the basis of hegemonies regarding caste, class, ethnicity, nationality, and gender. The relation between the power structure and oppression and struggles of diasporic women are the manifestation of the subalternisation of diasporic females. Diasporic feminism gives a critical lens through which female identity and experiences within diasporic societies are analysed. It challenges the traditional feminist paradigms and highlights the complex identity which negotiates within the context of migration and cultural displacement. It gives a comprehensive idea of women's diverse experiences and challenges in a globalised world. There is a distinction between Western and Third World women; in comparison to South Asian women, Western women engage themselves more in productive activities and try to preserve freedom and equality.

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF NASRIN'S "FRENCH LOVER" AND ALI'S "BRICK LANE"

Ali earns critical acclaim for addressing Bangladeshi immigrant women's identity, whereas Nasrin – for depicting an Indian immigrant woman's identity. Both deal with female identities and their struggle in diaspora societies. Nasrin's Nilanjana is a Bengali Hindu woman from Kolkata, and Ali's Nazneen is a Bangladeshi Bengali Muslim woman from Mymensingh. Although these two diasporic women are from two countries, their crises are the same in diaspora locations. They are torn apart by two countries, two cultures, their past and present scenarios, and two identities. The novel "French Lover" is set in Paris, whereas "Brick Lane" is set in the Tower Hamlets in London. Nilanjana and Nazneen grapple with cultural anxieties and quest for new identities in diaspora societies. The narratives of their identity crises and the formation of identities in diasporic locations reveal the tendency of preserving cultures and mingling with multiple cultures.

Nilanjana's husband is Kishanlal and Nazneen's husband is Chanu; both of them preserve patriarchy and they do not like the involvement of their wives in any productive activities outside home. They choose wives from *desh* (homeland) so that they can maintain *deshi* (home) culture and Chanu's wife "[...] embodies the authenticity (the real thing) of the homeland and its natural beauty and purity (unspoiled, from the village)" (Liao 2013, 119).

Immigrant men consider *deshi* girls as unspoiled, because in Bengali culture, girls normally cannot mix with other men freely.

Nilanjana and Nazneen's new journeys to the new lands lead them into perpetual displacement. They are considered as third world women and constantly struggle to reconstruct their identities, "[...] 'third-world women' as a homogeneous 'powerless' group often located as implicit victims of particular cultural and socio-economic systems" (Mohanty 1988, 66). Women of third-world countries are treated as powerless, inferior, marginal, and subordinate both at home and outside. Mohanty also states:

The distinction between western feminist representation of women in the third world, and western feminist self-presentation is a distinction of the same order as that made by some Marxists between the 'maintenance' function of the housewife and the real 'productive' role of wage-labour, or the characterization by developmentalists of the third world as being engaged in the lesser production of 'raw materials' in contrast to the 'real' productive activity of the first world. (Ibid., 65)

In Bangladeshi and Indian Bengali patriarchal culture, arranged marriage is usual and husbands want to impose power on wives. Kishanlal and Chanu transplant and maintain *deshi* gender roles after marriage.

Nasrin and Ali show double marginalization of Nilanjana and Nazneen. Nilanjana migrates to Paris "with a smudged bindi on her forehead and sindoor smeared in her hair" (Nasrin 2002, 1) wearing a red sari after marriage. Patriarchy is a social system where men are considered superior and they control women in such a way that in India the patriarchal word *swami* [husband] means "owner" and *kannyadan* means "handing over the responsibilities of a daughter to the groom". Nasrin writes that Nilanjana's "[l]ife would pass between one hotel and the other" (Ibid., 2). Marriage changes her living place, not her identity. Kishanlal, her husband, treats her as his property and he appreciates her Indian identity and behaviour like traditional Indian women.

Ali shows that Nazneen's father makes the decision of his daughter's marriage and chooses an older man Chanu as a husband. Nazneen says, "Abba, it is good that you have chosen my husband. I hope I can be a good wife, like Amma" (Ali 2003,

12). Nazneen accepts the decision of her *abba* [father], and she would like to become a good wife like her *amma* [mother]. Most of the women from Bangladesh obey their parents, eventually accepting their parents' decisions regarding marriage:

In rural areas in Bangladesh, generally bride's opinions are not taken seriously. In arranged marriages in Bangladesh, immigrant brides and grooms are the most desirable on the marriage market, because Bangladeshis who live in the Western world are considered to have a higher social status. (Chowdhury 2018, 5)

In Bangladesh, parents choose grooms, who are citizens of Western countries for a better life for their daughters and their higher status. Nazneen considers her mother as "a long-suffering saint" (Ali 2003, 64), because Bangladeshi gender norms are set in her mind in such a way that she likes to become a submissive wife like her mother. Marriage cannot change her identity; it leads her from one suffocating situation to another. In "Transplanted Gender Norms and Their Limits in Monica Ali's 'Brick Lane'," Hasan states: "In London, Nazneen faces the same patriarchy that has stronghold in Bangladesh and is relegated to the sphere of domestic, private life of an immigrant ghetto" (Hasan 2021, 207). Nazneen faces patriarchy at home, and later understands her subjugated situation.

Women and patriarchal socio-cultural settings of the diaspora are reflected in the writings of diasporic women writers:

[...] women's writings not only focus on domestic patriarchal issues of women in societies but in a larger context the predicament of women in socio-political and economic circumstances in the public sphere. The diasporic women's writings belong to two worlds of settlement and have tried to reveal different sorts of universal experiences in diasporic location. (Pawar 2019, 7)

Like other diasporic women writers, Nasrin and Ali focus on female identity and their involvement in domestic spheres. Women face patriarchal issues, displacement, isolation, etc. Bangladeshi male immigrants practise masculinist authority at home in the diaspora as Chanu preserves patriarchy imposing power over Nazneen, "In Bangladesh, patriarchy describes a distribution of power and resources within families such that men maintain power and control of resources, and women are powerless and dependent

on men" (Hossen 2020, 51). In Bangladeshi culture, women are treated as inferior, dependent, and powerless and men control women and all resources.

Indian and Bangladeshi diasporic women mostly practise *deshi* culture which upholds traditions; and the traditional cultural heritage leads Nilanjana and Nazneen to another oppressed situation. Traditionally a woman has a father's house, husband's house and son's house and they do not have houses of their own. In "The Doll's House" Nora tells Helmer, "[...] our home has never been anything other than a play-house. I have been your doll-wife here, just as at home I was Daddy's doll-child" (Ibsen 2016, 233). Ibsen shows that a woman in a patriarchal society is treated like a doll in the house which is considered as a playhouse.

Unlike other Indian women, Nilanjana has a premarital sexual relationship with a high-caste Brahmin named Sushanta and this kind of relationship is considered illicit in Indian culture. As Kishanlal lives in Paris, "Nila had her share of dreams about hard life sustained only in love. Perhaps every Bengali was born with that desire" (Nasrin 2002, 19). Like some Bengali women, Nilanjana dreams of going abroad after marriage, but Kishanlal marries her just to maintain a family. Though Kishanlal and Nilanjana are from India, their cultures are different as Nilanjana is a Bengali and Kishanlal is a Panjabi.

Women in diaspora societies preserve strong traditional values and social stigma and they also try to adopt and emerge as separate identities. Nazneen is from a conservative family and "Both Karim's and Chanu's views of Nazneen as the embodiment of authentic Bangladeshi identity illustrate their desire for patriarchal identity and control" (Liao 2013, 120). Bangladeshi diasporic men marry Bangladeshi women to control them; and when they feel isolated and culturally dislocated, domestic spheres become comfortable zones to apply power. Feeling threatened by losing authority, Chanu applied power over Nazneen.

Nilanjana feels her husband's luxurious house as a cage and she is treated as a housekeeper and sex object. She has to do all household chores as Kishan makes it clear that her real job is to do all the domestic work. He states, "Just look at all the dirty dishes of last night – they're still lying there" (Ali 2002, 23), and he shows his sense of possessiveness telling "[...] my wife here is quite beauty [...]. After all, she is my bride" (Ali 2002, 19). Staying in France for a long time, he could not change his mind. Just like the Duke of Robert Browning's poem, "My Last Duchess", Kishanlal treats Nilanjana as an object and he likes to impose power over

Nilanjana who “cleaned the house diligently, watered the plants and cooked” (Nasrin 2002, 57) and spends her leisure time reading books.

Ali also presents Nazneen’s everyday life revolving only around the family. She feels “trapped in this body, inside this room, inside this flat, inside this concrete slab of entombed humanity” (Ali 2002, 61). Chanu does not change with time and place and Nazneen battles with social constraints as patriarchy is a social system in which men are considered superior by definition. Patriarchy is a blind belief. In our society, “Men have more control of the ideology, resources, and authority in our lives than women” (Hossen 2020, 52). Women’s lives are controlled by men and patriarchal norms of Bangladesh normally accept domestic violence. Ali shows that Nazneen cleans, cooks, and washes, the image which draws “[...] attention to the everyday life of a group of female immigrants whose world revolves around family and the home” (Poon 2009, 429). Bangladeshi women immigrants remain busy with household work to please their husbands. The categories of their unpaid work are “(1) housework; (2) mother-work; and (3) wife-work” (Chowdhury 2009, 613). Women do housework and activities of childbearing remaining busy to satisfy their husbands sexually.

As Bengali brides, firstly, Nilanjana and Nazneen do not get any scope to know anything about their life partners before their marriage. Ali shows that Nazneen is grateful to Chanu who is “[a]t least forty years old. He had a face like a frog. They would marry and he would take her back to England with him. She looked across the fields, glittering green and gold in the brief evening light” (Ali 2003, 17). Age and physical appearance do not matter to Nazneen’s parents and Nazneen goes abroad with a glorious dream. Nasrin focuses on Nilanjana’s marginalization when she goes out of the airport with “red silk sari, the sindoor on her forehead and hair, gold ornaments, the blue passport and the loose currency” (Nasrin 2002, 9). Nilanjana’s dress shows her Indian identity and she faces subjugation.

Nilanjana and Nazneen cross borders, but they ultimately do not enjoy liberty. Nila says, “This is my first time outside the country. Although there were no oceans to cross, I feel I’ve crossed the seven seas to get here. It’s a whole new world, totally strange” (Nasrin 2002, 28). Nila finds France totally strange and she feels, “[...] very lonely the whole day. If I had their phone numbers, I could have talked to them [...]” (Nasrin 2002, 29). She is eager to talk with people to overcome loneliness; she wants to see Paris.

But Kishanlal thinks that she will get enough time throughout her life to see Paris. Nilanjana wanders aimlessly and forgets that “[...] she had to go back home, forget that she had just one identity – that she was Mrs Lal, Mrs Kishanlal” (Nasrin 2002, 67). When she travels along the roads of France, she forgets her identity as a wife and migrant.

Nilanjana and Nazneen are in-between cultures and patriarchal norms and their sense of in-betweenness challenges the traditional understanding as “Differences of gender, ‘race’, class, religion and language (as well as generational differences) make diaspora spaces dynamic and shifting, open to repeated construction and reconstruction” (MacLeod 2007, 207). The problems and the possibilities of different genders give changing spaces for the construction and reconstruction of identity. Nasrin and Ali show how culture affects immigrants’ lives and helps to form a new identity and get a space: “Nazneen’s predicament concerns her existence within the brick complex of apartments. Her domestic space epitomizes the isolation and seclusion that Bangladeshi women immigrants experience in a transplanted culture of patriarchy” (Hasan 2021, 210). Nazneen feels isolated and her desires of learning English and ice skating seem absurd to Chanu. Nila wants freedom, but Kishan devalues her quality as he states, “She might as well become a professor of Bengali in Sorbonne. It’s not that easy. I had to wait for twelve years before I could open a restaurant” (Nasrin 2002, 74). Though Nilanjana is educated, Kishan belittles her and thinks that she will not be able to do anything in France.

Nilanjana and Nazneen know that the English language is essential for communication in different countries of the world. They face a crisis for their language inefficiencies as Nilanjana finds that French people prefer the French language and they intentionally use their mother tongue everywhere. Chaitali, another female immigrant, says, “Of course, they know English; but they won’t speak it” (Nasrin 2002, 11). So, Nilanjana learns French from Alliance Française to get space in France, but her space is liminal there. Staying in France she feels more comfortable speaking Bengali. This tendency may be set before the key issues of postcolonial theory, which focuses on the concept of colonial encounters as European culture dominates and treats the Orient as a sort of degenerative culture. Ali’s Nazneen does not know how to speak English. She can say only two words (“sorry” and “thank you”) in English and she “had spoken, in English, to a stranger, and she had been understood and acknowledged. It was very little. But

it was something" (Ali 2003, 48). Nazneen learns some words to interact with foreigners. Nilanjana and Nazneen's dresses represent Bengali identity as well.

Indian and Bangladeshi men and women wear different dresses as "Saris, salwars and slippers were for women and dhotis, shirts, T-shirts, trousers, ties, socks and shoes were for men [...]. In this country men and women wore the same kind of clothes and it was hard to tell the difference" (Nasrin 2002, 51). Nilanjana observes that there is a distinction between male and female in India regarding dress and the same difference is not visible in France. When she starts to wear Western dress, her husband tells her "wear a sari and jewellery" (Ibid., 14), which reflects his patriarchal mindset. Ali shows that Nazneen's encounter with white Londoners is limited, but when she wears a traditional dress for going outside, she finds the difference between the English women's dress and hers. She feels alienated when she goes to Bishopsgate wearing a *sari*. Ali mentions, "Nazneen, hobbling and halting, began to be aware of herself. Without a coat, without a suit, without a white face, without a destination" (Ali 2003, 45). Nazneen feels herself an alien in the new culture.

Nilanjana and Nazneen also prefer Bengali food as the Bengalis from both India and Bangladesh are food lovers. Nasrin writes that as Kishanlal is Punjabi, Nilanjana could not eat Indian Bengali food at home. As a Bengali, she likes to eat rice and fish, but her husband eats roti and vegetables. When she eats *daaler bara*, *shukto*, *posto*, *begun bhaja*, *kopi bhaja*, *choto macher chorchori*, *ruji macher paturi*, *shorshe yilish*, *chingri malaikari*, chicken curry and lamb curry in Chaitali's place, she feels very happy. Moreover, she goes to restaurants to have tea. She likes to drink at least two cups of tea every morning and her husband does not. Kishanlal states, "Two kinds of habits in the same house are definitely a problem" (Nasrin 2002, 24). This indicates his patriarchal mentality. Nilanjana adapts to French culture by eating French food. Diasporic cultural identity is not a finished product; it flourishes by differences. In "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Hall states, "Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (Hall 120). Culture is a matter of interaction and change. Diasporic generations constantly change their cultural identity through adaptation and assimilation. In "Brick Lane" as both Nazneen and Chanu are from Bangladesh, their food habits are the same. Nazneen prepares lamb curry with tomatoes and new potatoes, chicken, vegetable dishes, rice,

kebabs, lentils, fish curry, and she makes tea at home. Chanu buys vegetables, pumpkin, gourd, spinach, okra, aubergine, spices, rice, lentils, *roshmalai*, sticky brown *gulabjam*, and *jelabee*.

Nilanjana and Nazneen's journey of self-discovery psychologically prepares them to survive on their own. They show resistance against patriarchal diasporic hegemonies in diasporic male communities. Bengali men in India and Bangladesh feel that women should not have any choice and they have to adjust with their husbands. Bengali culture does not allow women to do anything freely:

Traditionally women in Bengal, as elsewhere in much of South Asia at the time, had little choice in their experiences as women but to accept the traditional patriarchal roles of mother, daughter, wife, or any social roles limited to the home sphere [...]. (Harrington 2013, 5)

In "French Lover", Nilanjana is not economically free and she raises voice and tells Kishanlal:

You should have married a dumb girl who'd silently do the housework and never protest at anything, who doesn't have a soul to call her own and cannot read or write, who didn't have her wits about her and didn't dream a single dream. (Nasrin 2002, 56)

Nilanjana changes and plays the role of a modern woman. Giving importance to her individuality, she makes it clear that she is not like traditional women who silently tolerate all kinds of oppression. Kishanlal scolds, "You'll have to depend on me all your life – you have no other choice" (Ibid.). The traditional concept of Indian patriarchal society enforces Kishanlal to treat Nilanjana as inferior.

In "Brick Lane", Chanu considers Nazneen's opinions as unimportant and he treats her negatively. Nazneen still tells her daughter, Shahana, "Your father is a good man. I was lucky in my marriage [...]. When you are older, you will understand all these things. About a husband and wife" (Ali 2003, 251). In Bengali culture, women love their families and they show devotion to their husbands. Despite some or many mistakes, they appreciate their husbands in front of their children. Bangladeshi Bengali women are like Indian women who are "ready to do the best for her family [...]" as a selfless woman" (Kaushik 2007, 237). Bengali women are

the preservers of their culture and they selflessly work for their family and children.

Nilanjana interacts with the Western culture and makes a relationship with Danielle, a French lesbian feminist who introduces her to a group of middle-class European feminist women in Paris. She gains freedom as a new woman after engaging in lesbian relationships. They converse:

So what are your plans? Are you going back?

Nilanjana asks 'where'? Where else? To your land?

Do I have a land of my own? If your own land spells shelter, security, peace and joy, India is not my land.

Danielle said, 'then stay here. Didn't you once say everyone has two motherlands, one of his own and the other France?'

Do women ever have a land of their own or a motherland? I do not think so. (Nasrin 2002, 291–292)

Nasrin demonstrates that a woman has no land of her own and must struggle to find her place in a patriarchal setting. She does not dream of a utopian land for women as Nilanjana disconnects herself from home and feels displaced in her husband's house. Her journey to freedom starts when she goes to Danielle's place to live. She realizes, "Life isn't easy in this foreign country" (Ibid., 79) and feels an identity crisis when she observes that French boys and girls place more importance on their choices. Her idea of life changes and she begins to adopt French culture by trying to eat spaghetti with a fork, though it slips away, and wearing Western clothes. Sometimes her Bengali habits interfere and she drinks water instead of wine during the meal. The narrator comments, "In this city, she noticed, it was wrong not to drink; people thought you were uncultured and uncivilized" (Ibid., 84). She goes to a cafe and disco and drinks wine and her hybrid identity reflects her acceptance of Western culture. Ali shows that Nazneen keeps a familial bond with her sister, Hasina, and frequently writes to her. She likes Karim, but she cannot make the adverse decision of leaving her husband's house thinking about the future of her two daughters, Shahana and Bibi.

Motherhood is a very important part of Bengali women, and sometimes motherhood becomes a weapon of oppression in patriarchy. Nilanjana does not want to be a mother and therefore has an abortion. She wants to own a house and has a sexual relationship with Benoit after leaving her husband's house. She passes time visiting different places, eating, and spending money.

She lavishly spends money that she gets from her mother. Nilanjana feels that her job is more important than becoming a mother. Motherhood gives a sense of ambition to Nazneen, who like a Bangladeshi mother, sacrifices everything for her children.

In "Brick Lane", Nazneen is treated as a backdated woman by Chanu. After facing a lot of obstacles in her personal life she searches for a new identity. Ali shows a change of consciousness in terms of personal fulfillment and sexual awareness. She is inhumanly treated by her husband at home as Kamala Das, an Indian poet, treats her husband's house as an old playhouse, "The Old Playhouse":

You planned to tame a swallow, to hold her
In the long summer of your love so that she would forget
Not the raw seasons alone, and the homes left behind, but
Also her nature, the urge to fly, and the endless
Pathways of the sky. (Das 1993, line 1–5)

Das shows that men in a patriarchal society want to tame women so that they can get all kinds of comforts from them. Ali portrays Bangladeshi gender norms in the diaspora society. Chanu denies Nazneen's choices and wants to restore Bengali culture in diaspora society. Diasporic patriarchy focuses on the traditional (home culture) socio-cultural restrictions for women to control them.

Nazneen breaks tradition and resists asserting herself and shifting away from her Bangladeshi feminine identity. She makes an extra-marital relation with Karim and a sexual relationship with him. She prefers freedom and chooses public spheres instead of domestic surroundings. So, "Nazneen's feminist bildungsroman – her arrival at self-definition through her journey from Bangladeshi patriarchy to its transplanted form in the diaspora and her eventual defiance of its domestic gender norms" (Hasan 2021, 217). Nazneen gets freedom from traditional Bangladeshi gender norms and adopts new culture.

In "French Lover", Kishanlal wants to tame Nilanjana, who renounces traditions and becomes a new woman. She values her sexual autonomy in her relationship with Benoit, who shows his broadmindedness by introducing her to the street cafes and art galleries in Paris. She learns French manners from Danielle and thinks, "In this land, everyone was the same. Some had better jobs and some didn't, but everyone had their human dignity. Nilanjana thought to herself; that is how it should be" (Nasrin 2002, 86). In Bengali culture, people make distinctions between two classes and

they do not respect others' dignity. Nilanjana wants respect and makes a passionate relationship denying the subjugated situation at home. She starts discovering her own identity adopting French culture, but sometimes she eats Bengali food, invites Bengalis to her home, and speaks Bengali. She has relationships with a lesbian Danielle and Benoit, but her experience is that Frenchmen are also manly, selfish, and egoistic. There is a combination of traditional values and Western ideals in her, and her thoughts show oppositional powers of Eastern and Western cultures as in "The Ballad of East and West", Kipling states, "East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet" (Kipling 2012, 6766,). The cultural and geographical division between the Eastern and the Western cultures cannot be united. Nilanjana faces a diverse nature of cultures after cross-cultural exchanges. She also comes to know that French lovers commit suicide when they do not have lovers. They suffer from loneliness and think about the joyless life of the next few months. It seems strange to Nilanjana that French people go to psychiatrists to cure their sorrow. She experiences an in-between situation when she has a relationship with Danielle and Benoit. Nasrin writes about the different feelings Nilanjana and Danielle have about their relatives. Nilanjana becomes emotional hearing the news of her mother's illness, and she decides to go to Kolkata to see her mother. Danielle considers it peculiar and screams, "La familia, la familia!" (Nasrin 2002, 121), because he does not see strong familial bonds in France. Nilanjana does not feel free in a relationship with a French lover and becomes selfish. She sometimes wants to be transformed into a Western woman, but sometimes behaves like traditional women and cannot tolerate Benoit's wife, Pascale and child.

Diasporic women cry for the broken memories of home, and when Nilanjana visits Kolkata, she searches for old memories, seeing many changes. She feels sad seeing her mother's loneliness, and no one in the family thinks about her sacrifice. Her father and brother place more importance on their work than on her mother. She becomes sad after her mother's death. Avoiding Indian culture, she adopts liberal socio-cultural aspects. She considers France to be more developed, cultured, civilized, and rich, and she always tries to fill the gap between her homeland and her host country.

Ali shows that Nazneen becomes isolated and develops relations with Karim. Their emotional relationship challenges the orthodox male-dominated society. Karim opens her eyes about injustice and racial tension. She has misconceptions about Western life and she encounters hostile surroundings in England. She

becomes frustrated with Chanu and his indecisiveness. Nazneen is like a “moth surrounded by a shell of fate, religious hypocrisy and male dominated society” (Das 2015, 3). Her struggle for a new identity is reflected as she talks about the clash between Western values and the Bangladeshi Bengali culture. After adopting Western cultures, Nazneen freely pursued for emotional gratification with Karim at home.

Nasrin and Ali not only show double marginalization of diasporic women, but also provide their voices of resistance and condemnation to male-dominated society. They face gender discrimination and “In diasporic places women have not only faced discrimination or differentiation as migrant women but also as religion, linguistic group, caste and sect” (Brah 2001, 39). A new way of thinking from a feminist perspective emerges in the diaspora and encourages women to speak up and resist stereotyped and traditional social structures.

When diasporic women face problems socially, politically and economically in patriarchal settings, they start working in different fields and raise their voices against patriarchy. Though breaking relations with husband brings shame in the Bengali family, Nilanjana denies domestic life and leaves home, and Nazneen struggles to live in England without Chanu. Nilanjana becomes desperate to come out of boredom and depression in her husband’s house. Ali shows that though beating is common in the Muslim diasporic community, Chanu never beats Nazneen. Like her *amma* [mother] Nazneen sacrifices herself and wants nothing from her life. Her traditional attitudes change and she strives to become financially secure.

TRANSFORMATION OF FEMALE IDENTITIES IN THE DIASPORA SOCIETY

The sense of freedom helps Nilanjana and Nazneen to form hybrid identities: “[h]ybrid identities are never total and complete in themselves [...] they remain perpetually in motion, pursuing errant and unpredictable routes, open to change and reinscription” (McLeod 2007, 219). They dream of exercising freedom in the Western countries as women’s rights are noticeable in the West. Western notions of modernity establish women’s rights in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Generally, Western women are liberated in comparison to the countries of the East. Indian and Bangladeshi women think about achieving equality and freedom

and they also struggle for space in their host country to form new identities.

Nilanjana decides to get a job and live alone, and she liberates herself from the Indian-bound traditional rule. But her assessment of France is that as follows:

Tell me, is there a good place on this earth? Where would you say there is total safety? There is poverty, sorrow and superstition there, as it is here. This country has racism, so does India. Women are raped in Calcutta, and it's the same here. (Nasrin 2002, 293)

She realizes that females are either sexualised or racialised everywhere and they have no place of their own. Her decision to separate from Kishanlal and her refusal of Benoit's proposal of settlement help to discover her self-identity. Nasrin wants to show that society will never give freedom to women; the sense of freedom should come from the mind of a woman.

Nazneen experiences cultural adaptation as she acculturates and blends her Bangladeshi cultural practices with London's way of life. She does ice skating in a sari as "Challenging gender conventions, Nazneen becomes a figure of adaptive hybridity in London while Chanu ends up feeling dislocated in both London and Dhaka, lost in unfulfilled desires in both host-land and old homeland" (Friedman 2021, 235). Immigrants encounter multiple cultures and must adapt to and assimilate into them. Ali's Nazneen tries to form a new identity by working for herself and her children and living in England. She moves freely in the outside world in order to integrate. When she thinks about her children, she denies Chanu's decision to return to Bangladesh and decides to live in London. Moreover, she does not want to face the patriarchal socio-cultural codes of Bangladesh. After her husband's departure for Bangladesh, she realises her new identity and finds a sense of independence and freedom. She integrates with Western culture and becomes Westernised by wearing *sari* while skating. It indicates her choice of staying with both cultures and showing individuality and freedom.

As economic freedom gives power and freedom to women, Nilanjana decides to search for a job to become economically sound. She expresses her desire for a new independent identity as she writes to her mother, Molina, "If I had money, Ma, I'd have lived happily. My own money, Ma. Without your own money you have to obey the person who has money for all your life" (Nasrin

2002, 68). She wants money from her mother and does not want to depend on her husband.

Nilanjana and Nazneen become independent and demonstrate bravery giving importance to their choices. Diasporic women face conservatism and their lives change under the influence of modern thought. Stuart Hall states that cultural identity “is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’”. It belongs to the future as much as to the past” (Hall 1997, 112). Nilanjana and Nazneen confront various problems in their new countries, but they also proclaim their identities. They emerge as independent women as a result of their encounters with different people and diverse cultures. Their identity is defined by language, culture, and nationality, and it changes through acculturation. Nilanjana achieves an individual identity that she cannot share with anyone and Nazneen’s identity is shared with her daughters Shahana and Bibi.

CONCLUSION

Diasporic feminism celebrates the resistance of women in diaspora societies. The voices of Bangladeshi female diasporic writers, such as Nasrin and Ali, deal with sociological, historical, cultural, philosophical and diasporic feminine subjects. They express the role and position of Nilanjana and Nazneen, who are in-between cultures, cry for identity formation, can speak, raise their voices, and show resistance in diasporic societies. Hall rightly remarks:

Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. (Hall 1997, 110)

Identity is a matter of formation and reformation as Nilanjana and Nazneen achieve self-identity and create a position for them in their new home in the diaspora. Women in the diaspora are not fully influenced by the culture of their homeland; they do not completely proceed with the host culture either. They form different identities through acculturation, adaptation, and rejection. Nazneen and Nilanjana are torn in-between traditional values and Western ideals. “Challenging gender conventions, Nazneen becomes a figure of adapting hybridity in London”

(Friedman 2021, 235) and Nilanjana “stands on the threshold of two homelands, physically and metaphorically: between the land of origin and the land of residence, between the metaphorical spaces of two different colours, nationalities and religions” (Gupta 2019, 98). They are oppressed and exploited; but they get new life for their interaction with modern and progressive cultural values. The feminist voices of Nasrin and Ali portray Nilanjana and Nazneen who leave the South Asian traditional domestic rules of patriarchy, choose free lives, and form new identities in the diaspora societies.

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