

Breaking Borders: Navigating Gender Norms and Realities in Ali's *Brick Lane* and
Desai's *Fasting Feasting*

By

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts in English

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

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2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I/We have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Approval

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Abstract

Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* are contemporary novels representing the condition of South Asian women both as insiders and as outsiders. As South Asian women writers, both of the novels are influenced by the author's experiences. These novels have been studied under postcolonial narratives and feminist standpoints. Even so, this paper aims to critically analyze South Asian Women's narratives navigating traditional gender norms, societal expectations, and the impact of culture on women both as insiders and outsiders. Through an in-depth examination of the characters, the research highlights the way characters respond to their gender discrimination pointing to the broader questions of whether the concept of gender is constructed or inherent. Moreover, the study mentions the double alienation and examines the formation of a male hierarchy within the household proving that domestic spaces work as constraint as well as empowerment for women referring to the practice of agency and resistance. Despite the settings, the characters' resistance led them to create their own identity in a new nation forming a sense of transnational identity. A comparison has been made focusing on the themes of agency, resistance, and transnational identity whether the characters accept the assimilation or form a new space of hybridity referring to Homi K. Bhabha's Third Space. Furthermore, a parallel comparison has been shown between the two novels and the experience of the character's dreams longing for a sense of belonging under the lens of the American Dream, in Ali's *Brick Lane* and Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*.

Keywords: South Asian Literature, Gender representation, Women, Patriarchy, Subjugation, Agency, Resistance, Identity, Transnational Identity, Interconnectedness, Third Space, Parallelism, American Dream.

Dedication

I am dedicating this to my family who supported me despite their difficulties. Dedicating this to Fariha, who has come this far. To the unsure journey of mine, this is our achievement.

To Farhan, Fairouz and my Faryat.

&

Ammu, Abbu, this is yours :-)

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Introduction

Literature often carried the understanding of the fundamental needs of society, playing a significant role in bringing forward the injustice around the world through literary creations. In literature, the narratives of a nation often act as compressed versions of a broader literary aspect. The Literature of South Asia reflects the historical experiences of people of Asia for centuries, owing to their vast geography and the history of trade and conquests. It reflects the customs, traditions, struggles, politics, conquerors, and even their philosophy in life to provide a better understanding of Asian culture. Although both East and South Asia have twice the population of Europe bearing deeper and more diverse cultural histories, studies from such literature are often dismissed either due to the misperception of the Asian continent or using the excuse of space of excess, insignificant, exotic, etc. (Thornber). From historical standpoint, South Asian literature in the past has often been Westernized and looked down on giving importance to the Westernization of education. For instance, Thomas Babington Macaulay in his “Minute on Education” states that I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia” (Macaulay 3). He also shares, “It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England” (Macaulay 3). According to him western literature and science were much more superior. And this context shows the assertion that South Asian Literature has been Westernized. However, the literature in South Asia carries the history of diverse cultures, and languages of different regions, offering people's reality into fiction allegorically, whether in their native language or using the Occidental language.

South Asian Literature, covers the diverse themes encompassing the liberation of the nations, the legacies of colonization, familial relationships, gender dynamics, feminist discourse, racial segregation, love, and many other aspects. The distinct storytelling tradition goes beyond the contemporary era. What sets South Asian literature different is the creation of philosophical and contemplative pieces that reflect the traditional expression and cultural identity varying from region to region. The variation of perception and portraying an ordinary piece in an extraordinary manner is what makes the South Asian narrative exceptional. In terms of South Asia, the comprehensive study of colonialism and nationalism are major aspects that play a pivotal role in contemporary South Asian literature.

South Asian Women's narratives played a pivotal role in challenging and subverting such works. The study of South Asian Women's Narratives gained prominence within the broader field of Postcolonial Literature, diasporic and feminist studies. South Asian women writers like Monica Ali and Anita Desai, exceptionally share SA women in real and present them in their fictional writing. For a long time, women in literature or academia often have been portrayed by male writers, creating a submissive docile profile of women, in which women in real life tried to fit themselves. For instance, in *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie portrayed his female characters as submissive when it comes to male characters. When Mumtaz, Saleem's mother marries Ahmed Sinai, she is given a new identity by Sinai. Initially, Mumtaz accepted her new identity without hesitating as if she had nothing to say. Similarly, Saleem also gave Parvati a new identity, Laylah, which is meaningful to him not to her. Such concepts are visible in our male-ruling society, where a male can provide a new identity to a female for any cause and the female accepts it as an accomplishment of fulfilling a man's duty.

Said in his *Orientalism* points out such conditions, as depictions of women as passive objects of male desire. Similar to Said's discourse of orientalism where he discusses the distorted creation of third-world countries through the lens of First World countries, such construction contributes to the concept of "Self v/s Others" within gender stereotypes. From a South Asian perspective, writers such as Ali and Desai not only delve into the condition of women in South Asian regions but also look into the double marginalization they have experienced inside or outside the borders. Yet, the issues are often viewed as exotic and from a Westernized perspective. Moreover, *Brick Lane* and *Fasting, Feasting* both go beyond the borders highlighting the exile discrimination where gender segregation is doubled due to the immigrant environment.

Diaspora Literature is another significant aspect to be studied through the novels *Brick Lane* and *Fasting, Feasting*. Diaspora literature refers to the exploration of identity, migration experience, and cultural displacement of the dispersed communities, who either migrated due to historical events or were forced to leave their homeland. Within the realm of post-colonial studies, diaspora has been characterized as cultural affiliations by the dispersed community. This genre of literature examines and challenges the complexities faced by individuals living far away from their host land. Furthermore, diaspora literature delves into the experience and the ways those individuals navigate their cultural practices and hybrid identities in a foreign land. Most South Asian Women's narratives often contain stories from the experience of their life or the history of their particular region or nation. Adding to that, the literature of partition created by Bengali or Indian women writers often portrays the condition of women during the "stormy episode of Indian history" where the traces of women struggling from the impact of partition can be found" (Banerjee 46). In terms of *Brick Lane* and *Fasting, Feasting* the very impact of

diaspora on the psychological and physical impact of diaspora becomes clearer during the process of transformation of the characters. Some of the characters could redefine their identities while others led to the misery of identity crisis. Although Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* is a true diasporic novel, *Fasting, Feasting* by Desai portrays a portion of the diaspora. However, both of the novels have underlying similarities, containing different forms of subjugation and isolation, that characters from Third-world countries experience in First-world countries. Countering that, the new settings in the novels also give a strong sense of redefining identity in a foreign land just to lose their sense of belonging which is their root.

South Asian diasporic novels also reveal geographical diversity. As the diasporic novels represent the human condition in different lands or travel, they also expose the expansion of urban spaces from the rural side. Looking into *Brick Lane* and *Fasting, Feasting*, the authors portray the state of the diasporic self which is torn between the "reality of a place and its fantasized images" which can be compared to Rushdie's *Imaginary Homelands* (Lauret 199). Additionally, both of the novels portray the rural-urban transition power and its impact on the characters' identity-building. Although they portrayed the condition of the characters in both home land and new land, I believe it also sheds light on the hope that the settings give them a chance to build their own space. The transition of geography itself works as an agency for the characters to redefine their identity. Moreover, the significance of the desire for their ethnic roots and culture was visible within the urban space, however, it was something they wanted but did not actually work for.

The literary works of Monica Ali and Anita Desai, two prominent female writers from South Asia, evoked enthusiastic responses from many writers and critics, whether it's from

inside their homeland or outside. The main aspect of their novels often concerns the female condition in familial relationships or even in society, the physical and psychological impact of racism and patriarchy, the condition of the immigrant people, etc. They dive into the deepest psyche of humans to fathom the mysteries, turmoil, and chaos of the mind. The novels *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali and *Fasting Feasting* by Anita Desai, offer rich women narratives that explore complexities of gender roles in a society to explain cultural identity and immigrant experience. Both novels are often studied from post-colonial and contemporary perspectives and represent multicolored images of the profound minds of women's personalities. As Ali focused on the challenges faced by Bangladeshi women living in London, Desai delved into the inclusionary and exclusionary concepts of gender in traditional Indian families. Both of the authors portrayed a powerful allegory of underlying colonial ideology through their writing. Even if the novels show the detailed experience of the women within the Third World countries, I argue that different forms of oppression have been practiced, especially on the female characters, whether it is in their patriarchal society or outside the borders. The system is obvious in First World countries as well which expands to ethnic segregations. However, both of the novels subconsciously show us women's response to the ruling and the use of geographical settings as an agency against their oppression. Moreover, I argue that the process of male dichotomy starts from the common households and thus domestic spaces can work as a constraint and as empowerment for women, establishing their identities.

The Two Novels:***Brick Lane* by Monica Ali (2003)**

The first novel, *Brick Lane* was written by Monica Ali, who has a Bangladeshi father and a British mother. The novel was published in 2003, and significantly nominated for the Man Booker Prize. It follows the life of an eighteen-year female immigrant Nazneen, who was married to an older man named Chanu. Ali's *Brick Lane* is considered to be an awakening novel by many critics. The novel represents the condition of South Asian women while highlighting the cultural clashes due to immigration as well as religion. It also includes segregation due to religion by portraying the aftermath of the 9/11 incident. As *Brick Lane* was published right after the 9/11 incident, it contains the discrimination and xenophobic perspective in the British Bangladeshi community. The novel explores the themes of self-actualization and political awakenings in the Tower of Hamlets in London. In the novel, Nazneen has complex relationships with people around her, particularly with her husband and two daughters. Nazneen goes through the complexities of diasporic experience as an individual self in an alienated land while struggling with the position as a woman in a foreign land. The novel delves into the experience of Bengali immigrants in London, while highlighting the segregation due to patriarchy in both the Eastern and Western world. It received a bunch of positive responses due to its mixture of imagination and real settings making it a realistic immigrant fiction. However, it received backlash from its very own community she writes about, the British Bangladeshi Muslim community in Tower of Hamlets.

***Fasting, Feasting* by Anita Desai (1999)**

The novel *Fasting, Feasting* by Anita Desai (1999) was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1999 and primarily centers around two siblings, Uma and her brother Arun, within an Indian family. The novel deals with the experience of Uma struggling with traditions gender norms and social constraints as Arun faces a sense of isolation where he has to struggle with his freedom of choice. Desai as a Postcolonial writer profoundly portrays the diasporic experiences through religious practices, customs, social manners, etc. by using the character, Arun. She skillfully uses Uma and Arun to examine the position of women in a patriarchal society. However, unlike others, Desai also juxtaposed Arun's struggle in a male-dominated society as well. Other than this, the novel involves MamaPapa the unnamed character who is indivisible, among whom Mama is selfish and Papa wants to control everything such as guarding the telephone thinking someone might use it. Through these Desai explores the cultural clashes between India and America while highlighting the impact of the societal norms and expectations of the older generations on individual lives. Through Uma and Arun, Desai emphasizes both Indian traditional values and Western freedom. The title of the novel itself represents the condition that Uma symbolizes 'Fasting' as she has been restrained by gender segregation and 'Feasting' symbolizes Arun who went to study in America hoping to get rid of societal expectations. The novel was instantly liked by people due to its theological insight hidden inside.

The novels *Brick Lane* by Monica Ali and *Fasting, Feasting* by Anita Desai both delve into the issues of gender representation and postcolonial diasporic discourse. Both of the post-colonial writers provide a comprehensive exploration of the South Asian female experience in both their homeland and foreign land. The narratives offer insights into the lives of South Asian

women and their journey from multifaceted identities to cultural and societal challenges. The thesis examines the influence of geographical transition on South Asian women's narratives indicating the author's real-life experience, stating that the issues portrayed in the novels are beyond fictional. Within this paper, research has been conducted on the works of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Anita Desai's *Fasting, Feasting* examining the condition of South Asian Women in different geographical settings and their experience of facing gender norms in male ruling society. The paper also highlights the portrayal of both men and women and the internalized patriarchy from generation to generation in South Asian women's narratives through Ali and Desai's, *Brick Lane* and *Fasting, Feasting* respectively. Moreover, a thorough analysis has been done to explore the conflicting identities due to cultural dislocation caused by exile leading to form a new transnational identity. A new form of identity that serves as both liberty and losing the sense of belonging contributes to the formation of a new space. Last but not least the thesis argues that an underlying parallel comparison is visible highlighting the condition and symbols used to portray the realities and tension between First and Third world countries, through the novels *Brick Lane* and *Fasting, Feasting*.

Chapter 1: Ali and Desai's perspective and voice in geographical transition

The concept of diaspora is formed when a group of people moves from their homeland to another place due to historical, cultural, etc. reasons. The diasporic community often holds a unique space connecting their homeland or their own culture to one or more cultures' practice traditions forming a new space. South Asian diaspora is one of the largest diaspora communities known to move across the globe due to migratory movements during colonial or post-colonial times. Although literary narratives on the South Asian diaspora are not insufficient, the representation of the diasporic experience of the South Asian diaspora through the authors who authentically experienced such situations is yet to be portrayed.

Ali's experience inspiring *Brick Lane*

To begin with, Ali was born in Dhaka and later moved to Britain at the age of three. Ethnically, Ali's father is a Bengali and her mother is English. Ali studied politics, philosophy, and economics at the University of Oxford. Her debut novel *Brick Lane* (2003), made waves in British Bengali Literature. As much fame and appreciation, it received for its complex narrative style and highlighting several universal themes in a book, it also received harsh criticism that affected Ali's life as a writer. Some of her other books are *Alentejo Blue* (2006), *In the Kitchen* (2009), and *Untold Story* (2011). Ali's writing style is written in a real setting with fictional stories. However, they carry underlying issues such as political or societal injustice from around the world.

For her debut novel *Brick Lane* (2003) Ali faced a wave of criticism from both parts of the world. It was suggested that Ali might be influenced by Said's Postcolonial Criticism. Said in

his work *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) exposes the dynamics of control over the colonized people and the forms of control exercised by the empire and imperialism. From his standpoint, Ali might be a colonial product, as she has her higher education in Britain, was born into a Bengali community, and seems to be more influenced by British Western culture than by her Bengali roots. However, in my opinion, *Brick Lane* serves a much different view of the Bengali community in terms of universal issues. *Brick Lane* is mostly claimed to be a realistic immigrant fiction that highlights the gender issues, and immigration issues of Third World countries in the West. Unfortunately, even if it got recognition in the West, the very own community of *Brick Lane* received negative criticism about it. As shared by Ali in an interview with *The Guardian* a well-known British newspaper, the source of *Brick Lane* was not having a sense of home, which is the primary feeling shared by the protagonist of the novel Nazneen. Ali herself shares that she felt like a fish out of water while studying at Oxford (Ali). Ali shares her story of the inspiration for *Brick Lane* with *The Guardian*. Within the article in *The Guardian*, she shares that amid the civil war as flights out of Dhaka were halted, Ali's mother took Ali and her brother to the airport for two weeks continuously, unsure of when the flights will resume. Sometimes her mother would want to face the Pak tanks, however, it gave her strength that across the world there would be a place she could call home. In her article in 2003, she shared disappointment, about London not being a home for them, as Ali's father receives a letter stating "I want to come back now. I want to come back to Dhaka with the children" (Ali). The sense of being called the place home was not the one Ali's mother dreamt of, as there was no one in London to meet them. After that Ali's father escaped and joined his wife in the UK, hoping that one day they would return when things get back to normal. After that, they started the lifestyle of living in London. The notion of

“going home” sounded philosophical to Ali as her father stated, “I just got stuck here, that's all” (Ali). The sense of “going home syndrome” became mythical to them.

In another interview with Jack in *The Guardian*, when Ali was asked, if she turned her life into a book, she argued that she did not live the life of Nazneen and grew up in a small village in Bangladesh. However, as a reader after reading the novel as well as observing Ali's view on her roots, it can be explained that if not fully but a portion of Nazneen's life was influenced by the author's life. The sense of home, the struggle of being an exile in a First World country, etc. even if it is not a clear parallel, the “reverberation” is evident (Ali). Again, the portrayal of the young radical Karim, who was born in Britain and never went to Bangladesh fights for Bangladeshis against race discrimination. It suggests a view of Ali towards her roots, that is without growing up within the Bengalis yet writing or being the voice for them.

Indicating that Ali shares with Jack in *The Guardian*, that the periphery is important to her as she could divide her book's inquiries into two sections (Ali). In this case, the periphery works as a concept or perspective that is useful to the speaker from different angles according to their understanding. It may not be a central discussion rather the ideas and viewpoints are core to the speaker's discussion. As a result, Ali herself wrote an article for *The Guardian* about the often-asked questions, to talk more about “them” where Ali says she feels like her brown skin works as a dominant signifier” (Ali). Another one is the questions such as “What gives you the right to write about us when you are one of them” (Ali). Here the use of “you”, “us”, and “them” clearly suggests the underlying Eurocentric view of the Third World. In this case, due to her novel Ali, severely faces a lost sense of belonging. On one side she is forced to stick with her identity as a Third World women writer, on another side due to her limited exposure to her roots

she is questioned, about what she knows about the culture of a Third World country, accusing her of being a First World citizen. As a result, the novel *Brick Lane* brought an intense alienation to Ali and a sense of home. Moreover, due to such questions Ali also shares that if a male author writes about a female character, he does not face questions or a white person when he portrays a black person. However, when an exiled woman writer is writing about her roots, a part of her community, or the female characters and mothers in her novel, she is being questioned about what she knows about someplace where she does not truly belong.

Adding to that, according to *The Guardian* after the release of *Brick Lane*, it was condemned by the residents of East London claiming that the representation of the Muslim population living in Tower Hamlets, in the novel, is “insulting and shameful” (Jack). To its severity, a local organization, the Greater Sylhet Welfare and Development Council, a UK-based charity organization that serves the British Bangladeshi community, wrote an eighteen-page letter to Ali, expressing their objections. Their main objection was the depiction of Muslim women living in Brick Lane. The novel's theme is the struggle of Muslim immigrant women in London, facing the double alienation of their male-dominated community as well as from the prejudices of society, while trying to redefine their identity, the main issue of their anger. What is most absurd is that the objections made were mostly by men. Ironically, this particular reaction from the community makes Ali's *Brick Lane* much more realistic about women's condition both in their homeland and host land. In 2003, the GSWCD said in a statement to the press that white people would believe that, “[all] Bengalis are uneducated and cannot read” (Craig). However, Ali portrayed a certain part of a community that does not represent the community as a whole. Additionally, the representation carries much deeper woven issues about South Asian exile as

well as highlights the slavery of black people other than portraying a community where the author did not live.

When asked about if Brick Lane's success was too much for her to handle, Ali replied that it was fine but it took her away too much from her home, more than she wanted. She also added that she didn't acknowledge the impact it had and she thought she could cope with everything. However, later on, in a podcast interview on BBC, Ali admits that it had a downward spiral impact on her to the point of thinking of quitting her writing career and starting as a scriptwriter for T.V. Therefore, it is evident that the transition in geographical setting and writing influenced by the transition has cost Ali her sense of belonging. As influenced by the transition, she tried to highlight the struggles of her people on both sides of the world. In order to portray the Muslim women in exile, she has proved Homi K. Bhabha's concept of Third Space which is a new space created far from home (first space) and not belonging to the host space (second space), a Third Space.

Desai's perception on writing *Fasting, Feasting*

Anita Desai, born to a German mother and a Bengali father, knows the German, Hindi, and English languages. However, in an interview Desai shares that she does not have much memory of German, rather she would hear stories from her father. She grew up in the village of Missouri in India. She was a young girl when the partition took place. Additionally, she writes a portion of that part of her life, her home, neighborhood, and time in her novel *Clear Light of Day*. She is best known for her distinguished contemporary fiction. She is renowned as an Indian English women novelist, who presented her native Indian tradition through the English language, to give the Third World countries a voice of their own rather than having a Eurocentric view.

Some of her writings include *Clear Light of Day*, *Cry*, *The Peacock*, *Bye-Bye Blackbird*, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* *Journey to Ithaca*, *Fasting*, *Feasting*, etc.

Many of her novels were shortlisted for the Booker Prize. Her tenth novel *Fasting, Feasting* was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1999. That time *Disgrace* by J.M. Coetzee won the prize twice for the first time. Later a controversy was created when Gerald Kaufman one of the judges was “intimidated that there was a gender divide amongst the judges”. To clarify, more statements were revealed that *Fasting, Feasting* would have won the runner-up, if there had been a prize for that. Desai herself in a discussion with Levy, stated that her novels “aren't intended as a reflection of Indian society, politics or character” (Desai). As the clarity of the statement, Desai shares in “The Artist of Disappearance at Sydney Writers' Festival” that she is afraid of being labeled and boxed into a category as it might restrict one's movement or free will to write. She also adds that her being an Indian and living in a foreign land has no consequence. However, what is important is that the use of experience a person has gained and that is what one presents to the readers, shares Desai.

Although Desai's novels highlight the marginalization and oppression of women, her approach does not directly point to the feminist view. Most of her novels portray the family as a feminist subject subversively, and there are lots of conflicts and chaos within her writings. Similarly, in *Fasting, Feasting*, she skillfully portrays the issue of deprivation and abundance through the human psyche. Not only that her novel shows the psyche of female subjectivity in an Indian family as well as in American culture. Her *Fasting, Feasting* did not only portray the female part but also the male psyche, in terms of feeling the sense of abundance. In an interview with Deborah Levy, Desai shares that she tried to portray the male characters as the center of the

novels, yet she always went back to the women's world. Moreover, she shared that in *Custody*, she tried to write through male voices, “Of course, there have to be women even if we don't see them, they got to be there behind the door. And if we listen, we will hear them shrieking and banging on the door, extremely bad-tempered and nasty”. In this case, Desai asks, “Why are all women character’s nasty” (Desai). On that, she states, “That's what ‘they’ asked for”. In a sense it is true, that's what they asked for, a bad-tempered woman. Because if a “woman” not only women if a human were always being oppressed, ignored and always been controlled without any voice of their own, at some point they will start shouting and banging on the door.

Through *Fasting, Feasting*, Desai deliberately portrays the larger picture of the human condition in abundance. This time in this novel, her characters were not confined within the borders but rather portrayed two different cultures and different senses of abundance whether it is from family, nation, or gender. Desai herself shares in an interview in 2008, that she seemed not to address larger questions of the world around her. Adding to that, Levy in the interview asked how Desai intervenes in the spaces in her novel. To that question Desai in 2008 shares that for her, it's always the space that makes her write and like the novel. It is always space that lets her start the novel. She shares how she wants to populate the space, whom she would meet in that space, how she would leave that space, what impact that space has left on her, and how each of the stories is placed in specific areas (Desai). Similarly, the writing of *Fasting, Feasting* starts from India where Desai finds a sense of belonging. After that, moving to America she took the risk of portraying Arun in a different culture. That is how Desai’s sense of space and transition from the rural side of India to suburban Massachusetts, where she became a professor of writing in the United States, has influenced her novel *Fasting, Feasting* portraying gender, family, and culture in transition.

Similar to one another, Ali's experience in transition as well as Desai's living experience has influenced their portrayal of the characters in the novels. Although none of them agreed with the authenticity of the novels, but their very own lived experience shows that the condition of the characters is based on realities rather than fictional. In this case, the struggle and chaos shown through the characters whether it is gender discrimination, cultural dislocation, or chaos in households the backdrop is based on reality.

Chapter 2: Research Questions, Rationale, Method and Theories, and Literature Review

Research Questions

The primary texts used in the research are *Brick Lane* and *Fasting, Feasting*. Based on which my research questions are

- a. To what extent, do the female characters in *Brick Lane* and *Fasting, Feasting*, navigate their experiences of gender subjugation across diverse settings, and does their reaction work as a resilience to it?
- b. Does the domestic space work as a constraint and empowerment for the female characters and to what extent does the agency and resistance contribute to gender partition and influencing the female character's identity amidst the societal expectations?
- c. How do the characters navigate their encounters with transnational identity? Does that lead them towards hybridization or position them within the framework of Homi K. Bhabha's concept of Third Space in multicultural settings?

Rationale

Monia Ali for her novel *Brick Lane* was harshly criticized by her very own community living in London stating that, the presentation of the Muslim women is, "insulting and shameful" also claimed the book was only hyped to validate the space of *Brick Lane* for the Bengali community. On the other hand, for *Fasting, Feasting*, Desai tried to portray two different cultures and the sense of deprivation. Unlike Monica Ali, Desai indirectly shows the condition of women through silence. These aspects of the novels captured my attention along with the geographical setting that is Third World country v/s First World country.

Therefore, in this paper, I intend to provide a critical analysis of both of the novels based on the character's gender and their condition with the intention of exhibiting a comparison in terms of the female character's response to their condition. I want to counter the criticism that, Ali's portrayal of women in *Brick Lane* is not insulting rather it is the modern condition of our society. On the other hand, I want to demonstrate a comparison with *Fasting, Feasting* showing a parallelism from different settings. For that, I have used the concept of transnational identity and the hybridization concept of Homi K. Bhabha and her Third Space. Lastly, I have used the concept of the American dream to compare Chanu and Arun from the novels.

Theories and Methodology

The research employs a qualitative critical analysis that draws upon several secondary resources consisting of different articles, journals, newspapers, and interviews. In order to gain knowledge and support on the research materials and sources that have been used from the library. Again, the study employs a close textual analysis to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research questions. Moreover, philosophical ideas such as Transnational identity, and Homi K. Bhabha's concept of Third Space, have been used in order to analyze the characters' identity in the primary texts, referring to the formation of new identity in a new space. Other than that, the concept of the American Dream by James Truslow Adams has been used to contrast the characters' dreams in both novels.

Literature Review:

Literature has always been a mirror reflection of human lives that has played a significant role in awakening against injustice. However, literature has also been dominated by Western canons for a long time. Canonization in literature refers to literary works or pieces that denote works recognized by critics and scholars giving respect and importance to the origin and culture (Roy 7). However, canonization for a long time has been dominated by the dominant ideology of the colonizers. Even though America has its own culture, practices, and customs it took them a while to separate themselves from British canonization and expand their literature in the modern world (Roy 7). Similarly, even South Asian literature has been dominated for a long time and has always been studied through a Eurocentric perspective.

During the reign of British colonialism South Asia especially today's countries labeled as Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, struggled and suffered to locate their cultural identity in literature as the colonizers had severe influence on the education of these regions. The colonizers often had an inexplicable psychological and moral effect on the colonized countries not only destroying people but also their cultures. They often conveyed the message of the “White man’s burden” that the colonized and non-European countries needed to be saved from their own culture because it was distorted and uncivilized. This subjugation and oppression have been continued for centuries leading to a significant part of South Asian literature being studied. However, using English as a common language in order to represent the culture to a foreign world surely took time. In Bangladesh prominent figures such as Ram Mohan Ray, were visionaries and believed that in order to share early India’s history on the global stage, adaptation of English as a language was necessary. Initially, prominent poets such as Michael Madhusudan

Datta experimented and expanded their narrative verses by adapting to the English style. Eventually, English Literary activity such as translating literary pieces into English, during the independence movement led to new aspects and showed the storm globally. Rabindranath Tagore, an extensive Bengali writer, translated his works into English. Accordingly, women poets such as Razia Khan, Toru Dutt, and Sarojini Naidu are some of the first-generation prominent figures who expanded their writings in English.

Language is considered one of the most classical weapons for women to express their experience and view of the world's patriarchy. In a world of constant polarization of gender assigning each sex to its proper "domain" language in the literary field has been an escape where women can dominate against the "masculine ruling class". From the Victorian era when women's narratives were mostly about love, imagination, goodness, morality, and virtues, etc. to nineteenth-century women's narratives involving the themes of women empowerment, education, and challenging traditional gender roles, the narratives of women have paved their path to free themselves from the chain of patriarchy. A notable change in women's literature has been observed in the Twentieth century. Although women's narratives encapsulated their thinking, cultures, imagination, tales of male dichotomy, and the struggle to break the old tyrannical norms, their narratives emancipated new expressions of women's lives. The contemporary women's narratives in the literature contain the understanding of their inner thoughts, their emotions, understanding of the significance of female identity and freedom, self-assertion, and autonomy. For instance, Tahmina Anam's, *A Golden Age* (2007) highlights the marginalization of women established from generation to generation in a male-dominated society. In addition, the protagonist Rehana, a widowed single mother with no financial stability, struggles to overcome the stereotypical societal obstacles that claim that a man is required in a stable family

while working on her self-actualization. Anam's *A Golden Age* (2007) is a great example of women's narratives that distinguishes itself from the "Eurocentric" or Western view of feminism. Apart from that in Kamila Shamsie's *Salt and Saffron* (2000), she portrayed Aliya and Mariam, who stand against the traditional belief of hierarchy in a Pakistani household that claims that a woman has to be obedient to a man.

The history of the emergence of South Asian women writers is difficult to trace due to the diverse traditional and cultural background from which the writings appeared. In "Introduction-Voices of Their Own: South Asian Women's Writing, Sandten and Uniyal share that South Asian Women writers presented writings such as autobiographical, poetry, songs, short stories, novels, critical texts, etc. challenging the social norms. South Asian female writers shared their perspectives on defining gender, tradition, identity, work, and family reflecting the cultural features of pre-colonial, colonial South Asia, Indian Independence, and the partition of India (Sandten and Uniyal, 1). According to the authors, it emphasizes the transformation of South Asian female writers who played a significant role in shaping and evolving the Indian feminist approach. Notably, the changes occurred due to the diaspora working as a plethora in the expansion of writing for women writers within and outside the South Asian context.

Before that in South Asia, the majority of pre-colonial texts were written by men. The portrayal of women and the experience of being a woman was also narrated by the male authors. In this case, the late exposure to education of women in South Asia is a major factor to be blamed. Within the patriarchal structure, they were denied off their education which is a fundamental human right, limiting their sense of autonomy. Wollstonecraft, in her, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), criticizes the traditional domination of men for restraining

women from their educational rights. She argued that the limited education that was given to women were just an excuse and mostly focused on superficial teachings. For example: they were taught the importance of being beautiful to get married and their only destination is getting married off to a good suitor and that is their happy ending. On the other hand, men were educated in intellectual and practical pursuits such as being analytical, creative, etc. Similarly, Chatterjee in his, “The Nationalist Resolution of the Women’s Question” criticizes Bhudev Mukhopadhyay who in his *Paribarik Prabandha* viewed westernized women as a threat to the traditional institute of home. Additionally, he addresses the fear of the arising of ‘New Women’ in India. In this case, as women were labeled to stay within the domestic arena, a group of women who were influenced by Western practices and went against traditional gender norms was called ‘New women’. Upon whom, Mukhopadhyay claims that women should preserve their homes but their education is retaining them from such training in household skills.

It was prominent writers such as Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain, who wrote about child marriage, challenged the male-centric society highlighting the importance of women's education, and valuing the rights and status of women in male-dominated societies. Apart from these, they wrote about the post-colonial as well as nationalist sentiments experienced in gender segregation and the social class system. These aspects and challenges were the root of the rise of new women in South Asia. During the twentieth century, women writers' narratives contained a more critical and extensive study of women's rights in society. Twentieth-century South Asian women's narratives often highlight the resistance to colonialism while exploring the complexities of post-colonial identities. Additionally, the feminist discourse expanded to examine the complexities of gender roles in different sectors. At that time, with the increased global migration and diaspora South Asian women's narratives explored the experience of South Asian communities inside and

outside their homeland. During that time the study of feminist discourse expanded to analyze the physical and psychological impact of immigrants both male and female addressing the issues of identity crisis, the feeling of displacement, cultural adaptation, etc.

Adding to that, in our dominant culture, feminist critics and theorists such as Gayatri Spivak voice the marginalized groups who were silenced. As an American professor and a Bengali exile, Spivak often finds herself in a marginally awkward guest position. She sometimes realizes that she is a Third-World Woman and her position as a successful American academician has been taken for granted (Ambesange 341). In her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak voices the questions and challenges of Subaltern groups. In her essay, she condemned the dominance and the harm done to the women of the Third World countries and non-Europeans. Meanwhile, she criticizes Western critics such as Marx, Derrida, Foucault for their distorted representation of the subalterns as well as accusing them of being involved in capitalism and imperialism in the long run (Ambesange 341). Additionally, she denounces the Eurocentric view of the West and highlights that knowledge is a product of the West that is altered and delivered to Third World countries. Therefore, Spivak in her essay exposes the questions of the subaltern and shares that it is an irony that subalterns have awakened their consciousness as they speak for themselves and their rights. From Spivak’s standpoint, Ali and Desai are women writers from Third-World countries who skillfully cover the subaltern issue in their fictional form of writing. As women narrators in exile, their writings contain underlying struggles from gender, economic, and ethnic discrimination in different space settings. Particularly, Ali’s *Brick Lane* attempts to give voice to the subalterns from different aspects such as immigration, a minority within a minority, subjugation of gender within gender, etc. On the

other hand, Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*, gives a spectacular view of the subalterns, portraying their struggle within the borders as well as outside the borders.

Millett in her "Sexual Politics" defines sexual politics as the process where the ruling sex seeks to maintain control over the subordinate sex. And such politics is evident when, Sharma, in the article titled, "Feminism in the Novels of Anita Desai", discusses how Desai portrays the feminist issue and perspective in her *Fasting, Feasting*. Sharma highlights feminism as a movement or ideology that seeks liberty for women from oppression in a male-dominated society, it also outlines different types of feminism such as liberal, Marxist, radical, and Postcolonial as well as their solutions to women's issues. Sharma also points out several Indian women writers such as Nayantara Sahgal, Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande, and Arundhati Roy, who portrayed the realities of Indian women in detail through fiction and nonfiction (Sharma 1086). In addition, Sharma addresses the tradition of Indian women who break through the dark web of male dichotomy as "New Indian Woman" just to end up serving the male authorities in a more improved manner, such as being an educated wife and mother (Sharma 1086). Such a tendency is evident in the portrayal of Aruna, Uma's younger sister in Desai's *Fasting, Feasting*. Aruna broke through her family's female objectivity through marriage and ended up following the societal male roles in a modern way. Additionally, the universal term "femaleness is constructed" which is sought in the dominant mode of ideology (Sharma 1084). Sharma highlights that Desai critically attempts to build her female characters by incorporating female issues in a generally sensible way. Other than viewing them as "pathetic conditions of Indian women", Desai emerged through the "pathos, ethos of Indian social life and shared the pain and agony of Indian women", encouraging her to struggle for her self-identity (Sharma 1088). Therefore, Sharma suggests that Desai's novels create a balance of her female

characters portraying the submissive character as challenging and conflicting with their personal and social lives, showing the need for a balanced relationship between men and women.

In the article titled, “Diasporic Identity and Female Subjectivity in Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*”, Devi highlights the condition of women in Ali’s *Brick Lane* explaining that Nazneen “internalizes obedience and passivity” since the beginning (450). However, the author overshadowed the agency and resistance Nazneen holds within her and is subconsciously active. Devi also exposes that Nazneen as a woman has been facing double oppression in the English notion. As we know, Nazneen the language barrier worsens her situation in the Western world, it also makes her feel isolated and gives us a claustrophobic sense trapping her within the four walls of domesticity (Devi 450). Devi highlights how Ali presents an “alternate view of the Western way of life as she got assimilated into this culture and gives freedom to women to nurture one’s choice and realize one’s personal growth” (451). However, Nazneen did not accept the assimilation rather she held on to her ethnicity living in the First World country, which can be seen through her having Bengali food.

Similar to Devi, Ludmila Volná in her article titled “Anita Desai’ *Fasting, Feasting* and the Condition of Women” critically analyses, Desai’s novel *Fasting, Feasting* from a cultural standpoint, portraying both male and female challenges faced inside and outside of India. As her article title suggests, Volná delves into examining women's condition, suggesting that the novel involves food and hunger as a symbolic framework representing literal meaning. Apart from this, Volná also highlights the use of Hindu imagery, where the sun and fire symbolize aggressive patriarchal power and water signifying women’s condition and suggesting a pathway for women to liberation. Within her article, she argues that the protagonist Uma in the end was able to

“achieve recognition” of her condition but not the liberation at all, which I believe is the opposite. Although Uma was restrained from her liberty by her family, but her not being submissive and her silence is what gave her the recognition. Again, Volná suggests that though Uma the central character was in progress in her journey of recognition of her situation the path to emancipation remains elusive. The only salvation Volná concludes with is the recognition that both male and female efforts can unleash them from the oppression of the patriarchal system.

On the other hand, Arikan agrees the issue of immigrant women facing “double alienation is common, one for being an immigrant and another for being a woman. Arikan analyses the protagonists of *Brick Lane* Nazneen as the representative of immigrant women in British culture. Within his study, Arikan explains that although Marx relates the term alienation from the capitalist view, Arikan relates it in a broader sense where people lose interest in society, and in cultural values. He states that the dimension of alienation is inseparable from the psychological aspect of human beings as both sociological and psychic entities. Initially, Arikan perceives alienation from the immigrant identity, viewing the experience of social and individual identity crisis in Nazneen. Acknowledging that, Olivia Espin shares that immigrants face several challenges including disparities between two cultures. The sentiments and experience of detachment stemming from the inability to effectively navigate life in a new culture and the strain of a new society easily affect the self-esteem of the immigrants negatively leaving them with a sense of alienation. Adding to that, Arikan analyses the cause of alienation which is viewing the immigrants as peasants, inferior or lower-class people. At one point even the character Chanu, Nazneen’s Husband claims that their life in London is a tragedy and the possession of colonialism continues but in a different form, imposing the feeling of an outcast on them.

Apart from this, after the novel *Brick Lane* was published in 2003 a film was conducted in 2007. Similar to the novel the film received a lot of attention more like a negative criticism stating that the representation of the Bengali Immigrant community within the novel is insulting. Alexander examines the narratives of *Brick Lane* from its past present and future explaining the connection of personal and histories of migration in shaping an ethnic space in British land. The article “Making Bengali Brick Lane: Claiming and Contesting Space in East London” discusses the compiled interviews from 2008 that started surrounding the film adaptation of the novel *Brick Lane* (Alexander 202). Alexander discusses the significance of *Brick Lane* as a symbolic space for the British Bangladeshi community while highlighting that the space's history and multi-culture shape the identity of an ethnic community. According to him, *Brick Lane* is often positioned as “representative of both success and failures of British multiculturalism, particularly linked to ideas of ethnic segregation, regio-cultural difference, poverty, and threat” (Alexander 203). Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* is most known for exploring the complexities of post-colonial effects. Off which, one of the major aspects of post-colonial studies is migration. Migration has taken place since the early times due to war, famine, colonization, etc. In modern days, such migration takes place due to financial needs, education, lifestyle, etc. Most of the diasporic people suffer from “common trauma from their homeland” and are often forced to leave their host land and live in another nation (Alexander 203). To protect their cultural identity and traditional practices, diasporic people are often isolated from society. Ali, in her novel, portrays such a theme of alienation of the Bengali community in *Brick Lane* in London. Ali claims her *Brick Lane* is an immigrant fiction. Also added that she never lived a life like Nazneen in a small village in Bangladesh. However, the “going home syndrome” as the character Chanu, is a major area that portrays Ali’s life (Ali). Her statements in the interview are quite contradictory as she

claims that the book portrays a portion of her life rather than the whole migration experience. It can be said that *Brick Lane* is a realist immigrant fiction.

Similarly, Chauhan in her article emphasizes the plurality of “Homeland and Identity” in *Fasting, Feasting* is very much applicable not only outside India within the diasporas but also inside India involving the multifaceted ethnic and cultural identity (Chauhan 74). Additionally, this plurality should be understood closely relating to people with a particular ethnicity with a sense of belonging. According to Chauhan, people are closely related to where they come from, and their identity is connected to their imagination and a strong desire to hold on to the cultural values of their homeland. Hence the feeling of exclusion stays in a foreign space that is different from our own culture. Chauhan in her article analyses that despite being distraught at home, Arun still starts to miss his home leaving for Massachusetts in an American suburb (74). The author addresses the destruction of multiculturalism, identity, and belonging due to globalization making everything more similar (Chauhan 74). Countering that, Desai highlights that the issue is not only occurring outside India but also within India. Through the siblings' stories, Desai subtly portrays the challenges of the difference in culture between India and America fairly. In addition, Chauhan relates Desai’s portrayal of belonging to Salman Rushdie’s *Imaginary Homelands* where she explores the complex ideas of identity, homeland, and multiculturalism. Initially, it argues that the sense of identity is not only felt by the immigrant people living outside the nation but also by the people who move within the country such as moving to urban cities from rural areas due to workforce or pursuit of comfort (Chauhan 78). In this case, it can be observed that both Chanu and Arun struggle with the sense of identity and belonging by moving to a foreign space. However due to their need for freedom and livelihood to survive they had to move, just to end up missing their sense of identity.

Expanding from that, Devi in her analysis of *Brick Lane* from the diasporic aspect and the subjugation of females, explains that Ali in her novel examines the double oppression suffered by the lower-class people of third-world immigrants and questions the socio-cultural conflicts between East and West traditions” (Devi 449). Apart from the struggle of Nazneen Devi also focuses on the aspect that Ali not only tries to expose certain racism and identity conflicts faced by Bangladeshi immigrants in London but also brings references to the segregation faced by third-world countries such as black immigrants. Such exploitation can be found through the character Chanu, who was ambitious and confident about his education while stepping into London thinking that he could be successful only by “moving to Western countries” (Devi 449). However, his situation in the novel reveals the subjugating tendency of the West towards the East. In their case, not only their cultural identity or being a third-world immigrant led them to face segregation but also the discrimination against religion that as Islamophobia or xenophobia had a severe impact on their lives as immigrants in the Western world.

The agency in terms of women's empowerment defines the ability to act upon one's goal transcending the mere actions of observations. The meaning, purpose, and motivation that individuals invest in what they do, are often referred to as a “sense of agency” (Kabeer 438). Looking at South Asian culture it can be observed that in most households there are hierarchy in the process of “decision-making agency” (Kabeer 438). Such agency works as a process of creating a male hierarchy adding to women’s subjugation. Yousef analyzed the novel from the cultural identity aspect interpreting the Bhabhian theories emphasizing that Bangladeshi immigrants such as Nazneen struggle to realize their sense of their own identity in their different ways. Yousef states that, in *Brick Lane*, the concept of forming a hybrid identity is not limited to individuals only; rather it embraces a group or collective identity of Bangladeshis in the

community. In this case, Bhabha approaches the concept of space of identity from a broader aspect that is the Third Space. The expanding space constantly incorporates the “other” while reconstructing the boundaries concerning the space, history, and cultural identities (Yousef 79). Critics such as Said agree with Bhabha's belief that the connection between space and people is not intrinsically established, rather it is constructed or reconstructed from the complexity of multifaceted social relations and in their interaction with one another in everyday discourses as well as from the experiences of displacement, emigration, and exile (Yousef 75). For instance, the protagonist Nazneen is torn between two distinct cultures, as she arrives in London, she learns about privacy and loneliness, then while living in London as an immigrant Muslim woman she discovers a new form of community' Her quest for self-awareness and discovery leads to “spiritual awakening” enabling her to stand and survive on her own (Yousef 76). From the Bhabhian standpoint, she not only adopts a hybrid identity but also forms or forges a new identity that is distinct from both the colonizers and the “Other” (Yousef 76). The presence of “metropolitan culture and authority remains ambivalent and invisible whereas Nazneen produces a new form of identity that is not given or handed to her rather it is situational. In this context, Yousef argues that *Brick Lane* surely offers an essentialist understanding of the relationship among people, identity, and place by its use of a fictional story and characters of Bengali immigrants living in London exposed to various cultures and places.

In *Fasting, Feasting* the character Arun is analyzed from the Bhabhian standpoint of ‘third space’; it can be observed that he also adapted to his new form of identity in America. As an immigrant, he is constantly scorned by Melanie, who is an American girl. According to Gasper, Arun goes through the phases of being an immigrant in America. The experience of diaspora can be examined through his development of emotions. Gasper shares that Arun's first

phase was being nostalgic for home and missing the sense of freedom he thought he would have as well as the sense of Indianness. Thus, Arun feels that his identity is lost in Massachusetts. Again, in the second phase, Arun tries to adapt to his American life even if it costs him his preference. For example, he follows Mrs. Patton while buying canned food considering their nutritional value rather than considering the prices, which is new for him (Gasper 85). Besides, when Arun is given a pack of red meat to grill by Mr. Patton, he leaves it in the kitchen showing the struggle of adapting to the new environment. This view eventually leads him to feel the sense of an immigrant. Other than that, Gasper highlights the treatment of Melanie towards Arun reflecting the challenges and resentments an immigrant has to face. Eventually, Arun was pushed to create a new form of identity with a mixed culture that is getting a better opportunity in America to live yet rooting back to the culture and Indianness which according to Bhabha is known as 'third space'. Initially, Gasper praises Desai and presents Arun's loyalty to his past and his attachment to his new life (86).

In Nayar's analysis of diasporic fiction specifically examining the spaces and geographies of Asian ghettos in Western metropolises like London or America, it becomes difficult to delineate the borders between the homeland and the new cultural context, such as the USA or England. Nayar argues that Monica Ali's novel can be studied from a "doubly palimpsest" view (Nayar 208). The term palimpsest refers to the piece of writing on which the original text has been affected, however, the traces of the original remain. Initially, Nayar suggests that the Asian ghetto depicted in metropolitan London creates two effects on the novel. The first level of palimpsest fiction is the inscription of the original London with an original Asia. This effect involves the physical and cultural elements of the Asian ghetto such as "shops, language, and people" (Nayar 208). Within this level, there exists a home space that portrays the

reproduction of the character's original homeland and serves as a way of maintaining the connection to their roots in a new metropolitan setting. Apart from this Nayar suggests the second level of the palimpsest effect is that reproduces the Asia ghetto involving “images, practices, and structures from a foreign space” (Nayar 208). Here the foreign space acts as a new tool of inscription, redrawing the lines of Asian identity. From which Nayar states that a hybrid space of “Englished” Asia can be found. Such a hybrid nature of space serves as a palimpsest, revealing both “alien and home alternately” to the extent that it becomes difficult to distinguish between the original cultural identity and the assimilated identity (Nayar 208).

Ali and Desai both perform the intensification presence of the concept of multi-facility identity crisis message in a nation’s lack of gender spontaneity. Besides both of the authors draw attention to different voice session views competing with one another trying to highlight the underlying influence of colonizers and various issues including gender representation allegorically. Moreover, most of the authors explored the issues of gender segregation that is both physical and psychological, while promoting the inner concept of self-versus others affecting identity crisis, etc. The internalization is present not only in Third-World countries but also in First-World country systems whether it is true religious practices cultural norms or even class systems.

Chapter 3: Condition of Women in *Brick Lane* and *Fasting, Feasting*

According to the focus of my research, this chapter discusses the aspect of gender in *Brick Lane* and *Fasting, Feasting*. In both of the novels, gender segregation is visible through the female characters, whereas some underlying discrimination in terms of male characters is also highlighted in the novels. The primary argument of this chapter is to critically analyze female characters and their representation as gender. Additionally, some of the characters within the novels have different experiences in different geographical settings. Interestingly the place creates a parallelism within First World and Third World countries which are Bangladesh to London in *Brick Lane*, India to America in *Fasting, Feasting*. How does the condition of gender representation vary in different spaces? Do they vary or the stereotypes are similar in every part of the world? How do the characters of the novels react to such concepts of discrimination?

To answer this question, there is another issue that can be addressed such as the big question of, whether is gender socially constructed or inherent. In this case, my view is that the concept of gender is constructed. Biologically it is proven that the organs and chromosomes of the human body decide its sex, but does not indicate any role of gender that should be labeled based on the sex. For example, the females always have to be docile and soft, whereas the males have to be masculine and aggressive. This is one of the examples that labels the roles of sex, which is societal. In *Brick Lane*, the character named Razia can be a great example of it. Ali portrays Razia with mannish “large bony shoulders” on whom Saari was never right, rather “too bunched” (Ali 59). According to Nazneen, Razia is less feminine and would look better in overalls that matched “her big shoes” (Ali 60). Similar to Razia Iqbal, within this chapter,

selected female and male characters from the novel with strong appearances are analyzed based on their roots and conditions in family and society.

Rupban a woman of endurance

The beginning of the novel itself presents gender discrimination through Nazneen's mother Rupban, when she decides to leave her daughter upon fate. This single portion of the novel itself represents the internalized oppression of women within the women community, in a patriarchal society. However, struggling on her own, Nazneen survived even though everyone around her thought she would. The beginning of the novel itself portrays the whole novel metaphorically indicating that even though women are being subjugated in a male dictatorial society, they can turn around their fate by realizing their self-identity.

In the novel *Brick Lane*, Ali portrays Rupban as a woman of endurance. As the novel is written in the late sixties the discrimination of gender was practiced far more extreme than now and the major medium was either through religion or societal norms. To begin with, we observe that Rupban strongly believes in God and his will, and in her life, there was no concept of free will. This is evident when Rupban says to her sister Mumtaz "We will suffer in silence...In silence" (Ali 133). This line itself indicates the psychological subjugation that has been built for a long time in Rupban's mind. In her novel Ali writes, "We are just women. What can we do?" (Ali 134). These lines suggest the submissive mind state of women who have already submitted to the male dichotomy, referring to themselves as "women". This expression also indicates that being a woman in this world has already decided their position as a "second sex". Moreover, Ali says, "They know it. That's why they act as they do. God has made the world this way... What can we do?" (Ali 134). This specific line contains the perspective of controlling men that

suggests the ruling male society already knows that they are controlling the women in the name of religion, culture, politics, and class system. Then again, Rupban thinks that for God women are not valuable as she says, “If God wanted us to ask questions, he would have made us men” (Ali 103). This suggests that if they were created as men their questions would be valid.

However, the irony is that we know that discrimination is socially constructed and God loves His people and does not discriminate on gender. Moreover, in Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain’s *Sultana’s Dream*, it is evident that a utopian world was ruled by women. Where the rulers and workers were women and the men were responsible for household work. In that case, it would be the same for those men wanting to be women. Thus, Rupban’s wish is just based on her situation which is believed to be the creation of society and Rupban psychologically and physically has been affected by it.

After a long time of struggling in her married life, Rupban finally decides to stand against her injustice. Her submissive view of her life does not go well as she decides to commit suicide. Throughout the novel, it is observed that Rupban comes from a pro-Muslim community, and committing suicide is forbidden in the religion. However, this time Rupban chooses to break through that. Although at the beginning of the novel, it was not confirmed that she committed suicide eventually it was Hasina who revealed that her mother committed suicide in her best sari. In the novel, Mumtaz seems to know that Rupban willingly killed herself, but she denies it all the time asking questions such as, why she would wear the best Sari that day. Although, in the novel, it was not directly stated why Rupban committed suicide. However, all the points indicated that she was trapped and depressed as she always seemed to weep or cry. Other than this, her unfaithful husband Hamid was also exposed for his affair with other women. He was angry at his daughter Hasina for eloping, an absurdity when he was involved in a vicious act of affair.

Despite being a religious woman where such action is prohibited, Rupban still chose suicide as her only escape or the only way to protest and break free from such domination. However, she tried to keep it secret from her family and daughters, as they might think she was too weak to choose that path. Even so, her action has major significance in both the daughters' lives because Hasina already knew the truth at the age of twelve. On the other hand, Nazneen got to know about this at the age of thirty-four.

Nazneen as an immigrant woman

Nazneen grew up in a Muslim community believing in predetermination or fate influenced people's lives. This is strongly visible in the beginning of the novel where Rupban chooses to leave Nazneen upon her fate. Instead of providing any treatment, Rupban chose to leave Nazneen on her own saying "We must not stand in the way of Fate. My child must not waste any energy fighting against Fate. That way she will be stronger" (Ali 13). This dramatic birth of Nazneen is a significant scene that gives us a glimpse of Nazneen's whole life at the beginning of the novel. For Rupban leaving Nazneen at her birth might seem like following fate but for Nazneen it is the opposite. Since the beginning, she seems to be fighting against her faith. In an interview, Ali shares that the central desire of Nazneen is to know what she can control in her life rather than to accept things as it is (Lauret 210). Influenced by her mother Nazneen always stayed an obedient child in the family. Her primary mantra of life became "What could not be changed must be borne. And since nothing could be changed, everything had to be borne" (Ali 15). She believed that she had to be like her Amma, who endured everything in silence. This was her life until her father decided to marry her off to a forty-year-old man named Chanu. The husband was chosen by her father and Nazneen passively conceals the decision saying, "Abba, it

is good that you have chosen my husband. I hope I can be a good wife, like Amma” (Ali 16). This statement shows the influence of her surroundings, primarily her mother who passed her mind state to Nazneen knowingly or unknowingly. The impact of Gouripur taught Nazneen always to be obedient and unassertive. As long as she can be a good wife and good mother, which only indicates being submissive, she will passively accept fate. Eventually, she was married off to Chanu in London.

Nazneen’s life in Brick Lane in London was no better than her previous life. Although the transition has given her a choice to redefine her identity, the first few months in Brick Lane were challenging for her due to her race and ethnicity. Moreover, as a woman in exile, the challenge was doubled. In London, Nazneen found herself always within the four walls feeling a sense of loneliness. According to Nazneen, she felt depressed, and “What she misses the most is the people” (Lauret 210). The new culture is deprived of the familiar language, people, community, etc. giving her a sense of loneliness and depression. However, as influenced by her mother, she believes in fate and convinces her to wait and watch what happens. Her situation in Brick Lane was no better than Gouripur. As Nazneen is not familiar with the new environment, Chanu is the head of the home and makes decisions on her behalf as well. Of Course, it is evident that he would take her decision either way. Additionally, Nazneen in the novel is often seen cutting “dead corns off” Chanu’s nails, cutting his hair, and plucking his nose hair every six months. Also, Chanu says, “Better smarten me up a bit” which only suggests that he treats Nazneen to fulfill his desire (Ali 475). It also reflects a subtle expression of power dynamics within the marital life. Additionally, Chanu often shares different news, stories, and excerpts as he reads papers and books, in English, also knows that Nazneen does not know English. Then he tries to translate them, of which the results are merely shown. Apart from that, as Nazneen tries

to take English lessons Chanu refuses indirectly. However, Nazneen never stood up for herself. Other than this Nazneen seldom goes out as Chanu keeps her confined saying, “Why should you go out?” (Ali 55). Upon which her responses were silence and continuing to do her chores, continuing to razor the dead flesh, etc. Her view is that “Chanu had not beaten her yet. He showed no signs of wanting to beat her. In fact, he was kind and gentle” (Ali 22). However, Nazneen soon wanted to see the future fast. The place, the community, Razia, and Mrs. Islam had created a subtle impact on her mind. For which Nazneen, finally decides against her fate when Raqib her son becomes sick and is taken to the hospital. Unlike Rupban, Nazneen willingly did everything she could other than leaving Raqib to fate. From this, Nazneen’s curiosity to participate in London’s culture began to spark.

Hasina Resisting her Fate

As much as submissive Nazneen was, Hasina was the opposite of her. Since the beginning Hasina was a beautiful girl, who always chose a different path than Nazneen and their Amma. In response to Rupban’s view on life, Hasina believes that “If you ask for nothing, you might get nothing!” (Ali 133). She believes she should not suffer in her life. As a result, at a young age, she ran away with her lover. However, her resistance against fate caused her to struggle alone when she visited Dhaka. Additionally, her husband used to beat her which for a long time Hasina endured silently and finally decided to leave him. Living in a village surrounded by people Hasina had to make decisions on her own for her own in Dhaka. The beauty upon which she always had compliments became unpleasant for her to look at as she was frequently used by men. Even when Hasina was trying to create a new identity for herself, she was stopped by men. “Pretty girl, eh? You boys! Have to get a little practice before marriage, eh?”

He laughed” (Ali 213). These lines suggest the view some men have over men and how Hasina is discriminated against due to her sex. Moreover, at this point, Hasina’s life view of purity being in the mind has lost its comfort in her. Whether it is Gouripur or in Dhaka, whether it is by following fate or working against it, discrimination and subjugation were in every system in the male-ruling society.

Uma’s condition in her family and Aruna being submissive

In *Fasting, Feasting*, the discrimination in gender starts from their very own family. Similar to *Brick Lane*, in *Fasting, Feasting*, Mama’s view on life is endurance. As Desai writes, “Mama and Papa as MamaPapa or PapaMama. It was hard to believe they had ever been separate existences, that they had been separate entities and not MamaPapa in one breath” (Desai 2). This suggests that their existence is not individual. Desai fixed their roles as parents, “Papa’s chosen role was scowling, Mama’s scolding. Since every adult had to have a role, and these were their parents’, the children did not question their choices” (Desai 23). Moreover, Uma’s Mama was often seen preparing fruits or lemonade for Papa. When the fruits are not given in order Papa will not touch and only Mama knows what to give him first. In this case, the oranges have to be peeled for him. This was the very condition in Uma’s family. The condition of Mama shifted from Papa’s “helpmeet to his consort” when Mama gave birth to Arun, a boy (Desai 31). The submissive nature is visible when Desai writes, “He had not only made her his wife, he had made her the mother of his son. What honor” (Desai 31). This particular line portrays the importance of a son in a woman's life, that carries her to a certain status in society. Apart from this, when Mama was pregnant and sick as society looked at it as a shameful act, Papa convinced himself despite the rumors and the shame saying that he has two daughters and he needs a son. As long

as a son is born humiliation is nothing for them. On the other hand, PapaMama sees Uma's education as nothing beneficial for her life.

“Girls have to learn these things too, you know,” says Mama only to pass down her way of passive life in Uma (Desai 28). The marginalization has been passed down from her to her two daughters Uma and Aruna. At a very young age, Uma loved to study but she never received good marks in her exams, yet she wanted to continue her study. Being resistant to it, Uma attempted to run away from home and went to St. Mary's School and asked for help from Mother Agnes, however, she refused to help her. Eventually, Mama explained to Uma that babies need attention. As a sister, she should help Mama with that. In response to that, Uma says that Ayah has always been taking care of her and Aruna as babies and Mama says “We can't leave the baby to the servant... and it is quite different now” (Desai 30). It shows the negligence of being born as a girl and the difference in being born as a boy. This a vivid indication that male presence in society, for women nothing more than just an excuse to control them. Uma lost her right to study to take care of her brother. Even she declined her Mama to do the schoolwork, saying that doing the school work would do nothing good and, better stay at home and take care of Arun. Moreover, Papa in the novel has received the best possible education from the family whereas Mama does not. Similarly, Papa does not care about his daughter's education but wants the best for his son. Besides, in a patriarchal society, the decision-making process has always been male-centric. Uma's objection and sayings have no value. Moreover, every time Uma tries to protest against something, her Mama snaps at her or scolds her. This is clear evidence of how domination and subjugation are not only done by the men but also the women in society. Even so Uma most of the time tried to resist whether in silence or through listening to her own words. In the novel, Uma is shown as less pretty and flirtatious compared to her sister Arun. As a result,

MamaPapa had to struggle to find a husband for Uma. After a few failed marriages, Uma was left on her own at home taking care of them. At one event Uma was offered to work with Dr. Dutt but MamaPapa refuses and makes an excuse of being Uma as a sick person. The oppression is evident when PapaMama does not allow her to work under Dr. Dutt instead they inform Dr. Dutt that Mama needs Uma to take care of her. Mama said that she was ill, which was a lie and also said for Uma that, "As long as we are here to provide for her, she will never need to go to work" (Desai 62). Other than this, they always despise the free life, Mira Masi and Dr. Dutta had.

On the other hand, Uma's sister Aruna chooses to live her life in contrast to Uma by following what has society already planned for her. Aruna was described as beautiful and had no interest in anything related to school. At first, she was kind to Uma but growing up, she always made fun of her for getting rejected by men. In contrast, Aruna had the luxury of choosing her husband from her Papa's given options. As an obedient child-like Nazneen, Aruna gets married to Arvind, a handsome, wealthy man, and moves to Bombay. From a small town in India to Bombay, Aruna tries to live a Westernized life. While visiting her family on occasion, she often criticized her family for having no sense of fashion. Moreover, Aruna tried to be a perfectionist to the point that she scolded Arvind for splitting his shirt. Aruna had built a life for herself in Bombay free from her family but it only cost her to give up on her peace of mind. Rather than being a free soul, she became the other version that is the "New Women" who is still objected to by society but in a new improved manner. Being a perfect wife and living a lifestyle like people do in Bombay is what became important for Aruna.

The female characters in *Brick Lane* and *Fasting, Feasting* undergo the pervasive influence of male dichotomy, dictating their roles and expectations in society. The multidimensional nature of the female characters portrays that the experiences of women within a patriarchal system are of different kinds. However, the subjugation of women is still there whether it is in their homeland or in different geographical settings. Again, the system of subjectivity also differs. On one side, Ruban chose endurance while internalizing the oppression, on the other side Nazneen chose to overcome that. Other than that Hasina has shown resistance to discrimination since her childhood. As she knows her mother committed suicide, her view on life is pure and completely different from Nazneen's. Then again, Uma's marginalization of education and Aruna's being submissive had different reactions to one another. The stories of these female characters also illustrate their response to it. From choosing to give up on life to rebel against family and society, the novel advocates for societal transformation allowing women to have their own identities

Chapter 4: Agency, Resistance, Transnational Identity Formation, and Third Space

“Men like to be proved right. We must go out of our way to show them how right they are”

—Monica Ali (89)

In the previous chapter, we observed the diversity of oppression and subjugation faced by the female characters, whose response to segregation works as a resistance. However, the response is not enough for them to gain their self-assertion or self-actualization. In order to dismantle such a system, women must stand for their own identity, showing men how right they are. For example, Nazneen, using red chilies in Chanu’s sandwich, going out of *Brick Lane* for the first, etc. which starts with tiny rebels and later turns into her agency for resistance. Adding to that, this chapter explores how the characters negotiate with the agency while using it as a weapon in order to understand their identity. The chapter analyses the concept of interconnectedness contributing to the understanding of the character’s transnational identity. Initially, the study also argues that by rejecting the assimilation, the characters form a new meeting point for diverse cultures altogether, cultivating the formation of new identities mixed with other cultures.

Decision-making as an agency

Women are not given the same right to participate in decision-making processes. On the other hand, the responsibility of decision-making in certain reserved areas makes men the head of households whereas other responsibilities are assigned to women by their “capacity” of being a wife, mother, daughter, etc. (Kabeer 438). To be more specific, for a mother raising the kids, taking care of their medical issues, deciding the consumption of food in the house, etc. are assigned to a mother. In contrast, the major decisions such as caring about education, marriage,

and economic transactions tend to be male-centric (Kabeer 438). Such decision-making agencies are unequal between men and women in many households in South Asia. From that standpoint, if we examine the novels, in *Brick Lane*, it was Nazneen's father's decision in her marriage where he chose Chanu for her and Nazneen passively agreed with the decision.

Moreover, it was Chanu who used to decide what to eat and how their children should select in terms of education. As an example of food, Chanu even decides how the pieces of meat should be cut. Similar to *Brick Lane*, in *Fasting, Feasting*, although PapaMama always seems to be one, it is Papa who decides everything in the household and Mama simply agrees to it, feeling a sense of accomplishment by fulfilling her duty as a wife. From choosing what to eat, where to go, to whom to marry, Papa is the one who makes decisions in everything related to the household. Papa also decides if the women in the household are becoming stiff by staying all day at home and decides that they should go for a walk in the park. Besides that, during pregnancy, despite having complications and Mama being severely ill, it was Papa who wanted to have the child as it was a "son". Additionally, Uma had to stop pursuing her education whereas Papa himself is highly educated and ensures Arun's education, a degree Arun must achieve from outside the nation. Again, in Aruna's marriage, the prospective husbands were chosen by Papa, from whom Aruna had to choose for herself. These examples of decision-making as agency might seem usual in a South Asian household however it carries an underlying sense of inequality where the power between men and women is distributed unequally. Moreover, the process of male hierarchy hence created from the households, where the males decide and the female knows and agree to that decision. Therefore, this male ruling system of agency as decision-making within the household has a major effect on the rising male dichotomy in society.

Resistance as Agency

Although agency is perceived as a process of making decisions on societal subjects it also negotiates with issues of resistance, deceiving, or thinking in depth. Agency refers to an individual's ability to make choices that affect their own life whether towards their goal or even on the opposite side. For example, in *Brick Lane*, Ali uses the geographical setting as the agency for Nazneen to reevaluate her identity. Nazneen's business venture starting from her home becomes a means of financial independence for her. This entrepreneurial aspiration shows her big step towards taking control of the financial situation. Again, hiding money from sewing, to send back to her sister is the agency of resistance, that Nazneen acts against Chanu and other generalized societal norms. Again, Nazneen's agency of resistance starts, when she goes out of Tower Hamlets without her husband's supervision. The feeling of "leaf shake of fear– or was its excitement? – passed through her legs (Ali 70). But they were not aware of her. They knew that she existed... but unless she did something, waved a gun, halted the traffic, they would not see her" is what brought joy to Nazneen's sense of female autonomy (Ali 40). Besides, a minor action against her husband that has not been held as a crime, has strengthened her confidence. Apart from this, when Raqib was ill, she went against fate, unlike her mother. It shows the little activities as the agency for Nazneen getting out of her restricted or confined mind state and working towards her anonymity. Eventually, attempts to take English lessons with Razia, declined by Chanu saying that she is a mother and she has a lot to do, shows the agency of decision-making in Nazneen's life (Ali 99). Initially, Nazneen achieved the right to participate in taking. Little steps but working towards her goals. Here another important figure in Nazneen's life is Razia from whom she perceives the nature of resilience. Razia's search for self-anonymity starts when she finally decides not to wear a Sari as "she was tired of taking little bird steps" (Ali

124). Nazneen's one of the major resistances against her marriage was the act of double in having both marriage and an affair. Ali played double in this case, first portraying Nazneen as submissive in her marriage also going against it and having an affair with Karim. It suggests the underlying meaning of using the affair as an agency of resistance against marital societal norms.

Apart from that the downfall of patriarchy in the setting of Tower of Hamlets was evident when the girls in burka raised their voices and corrected the question of addressing the audience as "brother and sisters" rather than only "brothers" (Ali 202). Chanu often wanted to go back to Dhaka and by going back to Dhaka Nazneen would have been able to meet his sister but at the end of the novel, Nazneen decided to create her own identity, she chose to stay in Brick Lane. For Shahana and Bibi, Dhaka was not their home rather Brick Lane is. In the end, Nazneen stays in Brick Lane working with Razia in sewing and Ali explores "the promising freedom" when Nazneen decides to leave her boyfriend Karim whereas Chanu returns to Bangladesh (Jahan 380). In forming a new identity, Nazneen used her agency of resistance in the transgression of traditional norms and fulfilling her dream (Jahan 380). Her resistance to the societal expectations and duties imposed by her family and society shows her agency in questioning and working towards redefining her role as a mother and woman. She was shown enjoying her ice skating, which she always dreamed about while watching the T.V. whereas her daughters help her to fulfill her dream.

Similar to Nazneen, Uma's resistance is of a different type. In *Fasting, Fasting*, Uma lacks agency due to her restrictions within the family, whereas Arun achieves temporary agency in his life. Most of Indian society requires the male figure to support their voice or make decisions on behalf of women. Whether she is a wife or daughter, a woman has to share half of

her identity presented by a man. The only plausible way for women, for their voice to be granted is to share whether it is a father, a husband, or a son, women's identity seems to require an extension from male figures to validate women's identity (Baldellou 110). In the case of Uma who is a daughter and could become a wife and a mother due to her failed marriage, for the family she seems to be an ill-fated girl. On the other hand, Uma learns to use her silence as an extension of her not being able to become a wife and a mother to her advantage (Baldellou 108). Her silence becomes a symbol of repression and her weapon. From the very beginning though, Uma tried to validate her voice but at times she would rather "mutter under her breath" (Desai 5). Moreover, Uma restrained herself from responding to Mama, when she was scolding her for not knowing to cook. This suggests that Uma's silence is not because she remains but because she has often been ignored (Baldellou 111). However, within this silence, she found her own identity. Although she was confined and restricted in a household based on a male-dominated society, her not being able to be married as her PapaMama wanted and remaining in the home without anyone caring about her feelings is what became her identity in resistance to subjectivity. By the time she realizes that her sister Aruna and her brother Arun are not happy in their lives as well. No matter how free they seem, Aruna is confined to the lifestyle of a perfectionist and Arun living in Massachusetts starts longing for his home. Apart from Uma and Arun, characters Mira Masi, and Dr. Dutta are the two significant characters who have no boundaries set up by any male. They are often criticized by Uma's family for doing whatever they want. Mira Masi gained her anonymity when she became a widow. On the other hand, Dr. Dutta found her freedom by being a doctor in her life (Özsun). Additionally, in the novel, Papa despises both of the characters, saying that they are a danger to their family. In contrast, Uma

often created a new world in her imagination with the words and stories Mira Masi told her. She also hoped to build her own identity when Dr. Dutt offered her work.

Transnational Identities and Third Space

To begin with, the idea of transnational identity refers to the sense of belonging that goes beyond the boundaries of a particular nation or culture. The formation of transnational identity emerges when an individual develops connections and a sense of affiliation with that transcends the limitations of a specific cultural identity. In this case, migration is a significant factor in creating the interconnections between different cultures. On the other hand, the transnational identity often leads individuals to establish a hybrid identity that Homi K. Bhabha referred to as the “Third Space”. The concept of third space developed by Bhabha refers to the hybridization of different cultural identities that emerge from the interconnectedness between different cultures. Bhabha explains hybridity as a “liminal or in-between space, where the ‘cutting edge of translation and negotiations’ occurs” (Yousef 73). Third space is a transcendent concept that is constantly expanding to include the “other”, thus enabling the contestation and negotiation of boundaries and cultural identities (Yousef 74). The idea of a “Third Space” represents the fusion of the first and second space and highlights the unique set of identity factors. If we analyze both of the novels *Brick Lane* and *Fasting, Feasting* from both Transnational identities to forming a Third space, reconstruction of interconnectedness is evident. Nazneen's journey from Gouripur to Brick Lane in London highlights her transnational identity. In the novel, Nazneen's interactions with the diverse community of Brick Lane known as Banglatown reflect the blending of different cultural elements within her identity.

Nazneen's identity in multicultural settings develops an identity that connects both her old and new identity. At first when Nazneen came to London away from people she found loneliness and then she learned about privacy through her actions. After a long journey from being submissive to finding her own new community, Nazneen's development has been picturized. She used to rely on her mother's beliefs has learned to respond to more aspects of life in her new settings. Initially, the immigrant experience exposed Nazneen to adapt to a hybrid cultural identity. For her, the multicultural setting of Brick Lane where people try to maintain an English identity as well as reminisce about their Bengali roots, makes her surrounding a third space where various cultures intersect. Moreover, trying to improve her English which is not her language, going out of Brick Lane, the outer world, is the evidence of her transnational identity. Additionally, Nazneen often watched ice skating on the T.V. where she felt the girl happy with a piece of jewelry. At the end of the novel, Nazneen is seen to participate in ice skating in her Sari. This is a specific indication of what Homi K. Bhabha referred to as "Third Space". The hybridization of cultures emphasizes how Nazneen has grappled with different cultures to her own new identity. Apart from this, deciding to stay at Brick Lane rather than going back to Bangladesh is her new form of identity where she is neither from Bangladesh nor from London. Instead, she holds a new identity that goes beyond one boundary. Along with that, Nazneen's identity has created a new form of hybridity where it is "neither to the Colonizer (the host culture) nor to the Other (the Bengali culture) with the presence of metropolitan culture and no longer immediately visible" (Yousef 76). Rather than investigating the idea of colonizers and the colonized, the aspect focuses more on the interconnectedness between two different cultures and different settings through a woman in exile.

On the other hand, the novel *Fasting, Feasting* portrays a family straddling between Indian and Western influences. In the novel, Arun's shift from India to the suburb of Massachusetts illustrates the interconnectedness between two different cultures and the formation of a transnational identity. The diasporic experiences in Desai's novel show the sense of deprivation of their own culture. Through the character Arun, Desai portrays two different families and cultures. One is his own family in India and the other one is his host family, Mr. Patton's house. In India, we observe Arun that his life is controlled by his MamaPapa. In contrast, in America, he thought he would finally achieve the very freedom he wanted, although he achieved the freedom, it became difficult for him to practice it in a new land. Throughout the novel, Arun is mostly involved in his thoughts rather than acting which increases his difficulty in America where people are less thoughtful and act more. "It was the first time in his life away from home, away from MamaPapa, his sisters, the neighborhood of old bungalows, dusty gardens and straggling hedges where he had grown up, the only town he had ever known" (Desai 74). A life where Papa used to decide for his life now has turned into "a room on the fifth floor of a fourteen-storey block in which a silent student from Louisiana will always smoke cigarettes. His room is neatly decorated by graffiti. On Friday nights, students throw empty beer bottles out of the windows (Desai 73). They hear loud music to pass their night. It seems totally another civilization for Arun" (Desai 73). The description views the sense of loneliness Arun faces in the new land. According to him, he had at last "experienced the total freedom of anonymity, the total absence of relations, of demands, needs, requests, ties, responsibilities, commitments" (Desai 74). In his room, Arun found absolute freedom without anyone telling him what to do and what not to. However, he has lost the familiarity of the way and it made him feel lonely, giving him the sense of a completely new world. At first, Arun feels a sense of nostalgia, going far away

from home and living in a new land. The new land, the luxurious houses, the neighborhood, and its people looked fancy to him. A land full of chaos where no houses were filled with happy families. The family Arun lives with Gradually Arun tries to adjust to the new lifestyle.

The transnational identity is highlighted through the comparison of Uma and Arun. Uma is confined in her family but manages to escape and experience freedom through her periodic fits and fainting which expresses her resistance in silence against her family. On the other hand, Arun, as the only son sent to America, experiences more pain. While living with the Patton family, Arun experiences the “consumerist land of plenty” that is completely different from his own family (Poon 35). In India Arun and America ‘Ahroon’, in terms of food has adapted to different types of diets. In India, Arun is resilient to any type of meat or eggs. For example, in the novel, “as soon as the boiled egg in a cup or the bowl of broth appeared, he clenched his teeth and turned away, pretending to be engrossed in play from which no one could distract him” (Desai 13). From this Arun’s family came to realize that he is a vegetarian. On the other hand, in Mr. Patton’s family, Arun tried to adapt to their lifestyle by trying to adapt to their food habit. Thus, his attempt to adapt to the American lifestyle shows the complexities of negotiating identity in a new culture. However, eventually, it was evident that Arun lived in an in-between realm, neither fully assimilated into American culture nor strictly adhering to his Indian roots. His explanation of the fact that he is a vegetarian, rather than eating tomatoes and lettuce given by Mrs. Patton, trying to cook, creates a space of his own in a different lifestyle. When Arun gives away the brown shawl and “arranges it carefully around” Mrs. Patton's shoulder, that is evidence of Arun belonging to none of the cultures as well as both of the cultures creating a separate space for himself, a Third Space (Desai 97).

To conclude the characters in the novel *Brick Lane* and *Fasting, Feasting*, operate through the traditional gender expectations within the South Asian household contributing to a continuation of the gender stereotypes. Moreover, the decision-making agency within the households of the novels shows the formation of male ruling society starting from the household. Opposing that agency, the characters in the novel operate the agency of resistance in order to counter the norms. Whether through silence or rebelling the characters finally reached their understanding of their identity moving forward to form a new identity. Hence, it is evident that domestic spaces are used both as a constraint and empowerment when it comes to women. Whether through Nazneen working from home and Uma using silence as resilience at home, they move a step forward to form their own spaces. Furthermore, the characters are not confined within the domestic spaces, whether it is Nazneen or Arun, their identity transcends cultural and national borders. Finally, forming a new identity that is from neither here nor there rather a new space within a multicultural setting contributing to a Third Space.

Chapter 5: The parallel comparison within *Brick Lane* and *Fasting Feasting*

Last but not least, both Ali and Desai provide a vivid underlying parallelism, which undoubtedly shows the real-world condition between First and Third World countries. Initially, the parallelism shows the authenticity of the novel which is labeled as fiction. Although the authors denied the perspective that their novel portrays any community, the deeper the analysis is done more on the underlying picture is examined showing that the novels carry the tension between two worlds. Whether it is the use of the settings, or the use of food, or even human experience, the condition of Third World country immigrants in First World countries portrays segregation as well as seeks validity under Western conditions.

The title of the novels

The portrayal of the Bengali Muslim community living in East London feels genuine when the title itself is the protagonist of the book. As real as the title *Brick Lane* is, it gives the readers a sense of truth in the story. Although Ali suggests that fiction should be read as a fictional novel not sociologically, the readers who have never been to the East part of London would believe what the novel holds in it. Also, as real as the title is the reader would like as it shows a glimpse of what it might be like to live in a Bengali community living in Britain. According to the news reporter Jack states in *The Guardian*, for readers as *Brick Lane* exists that would only indicate, that the reality of the novel heightened as the reality of the novel.

One of the most interesting perspectives in Desai's novel *Fasting, Feasting* is the title itself. The difference in title is obvious where it metaphorically portrays the two cultures, one is Indian and the other is American culture. What makes the title interesting is the difference in

perspective. The Indian culture is known for its religious, cultural “long-standing custom” of ‘Fasting’ and on the other hand the American culture, the country of lavishness, sumptuousness ‘Feasting’. Not only this the title also portrays the condition of Uma in Indian culture and Arun in American culture. However, both of them are entrapped in the oppressive familial bonds just in the different Urban milieus. Adding to that, the title might be associated with food as the book often gives us incidents related to food. For example, Papa always wants lemonade for him to be ready, Uma goes for a walk and looks at the delicious street snacks that bring water to her mouth but she cannot have them. On the other hand, Arun is an American host family where Mr. Patton always buys meat whether anyone in the family can eat it or not. Similar to Mr. Patton, Arun’s Papa also wanted to feed Arun stating that he is a boy he needs meat to get physical strength and as a sign of wealth and progress. To their irony, Arun turns out to be a vegetarian. Apart from that, the portrayal of food is metaphoric in the novel, as both fasting and feasting are extremes, Uma and Arun are both experiencing the extremes from physics to family connection and link to food. Both of them assume that the feast of food and fast from food will free their souls.

Culture in Parallelism- From Bangladesh to London & From India to America

The different cultural parallelism in both of the novels is what makes them interesting. On one side, *Brick Lane* carries the culture and society from Bangladesh to London through Nazneen. On the other hand, *Fasting, Feasting* carries the culture from India to the United States. An intense representation of First World countries v/s Third World countries. In *Brick Lane*, Nazneen always seems to remember and nostalgic about her homeland, where “you can spread your soul over a paddy field, you can whisper to a mango tree, you can feel the earth beneath your toes and know that this is the place, the place where it begins and ends”(Ali 112). It

gives Nazneen a sense of belonging. In terms of portraying *Brick Lane*, she says, “What can you tell to a pile of bricks? The bricks will not be moved” (Ali 112). Apart from this, the habit of gossiping carried from Bangladesh to London is also visible. “We love to gossip. This is the Bangla sport” (Ali 165). Furthermore, the parallelism is more evident in the contrast between the second generation, Shahana and Bibi, daughters of Nazneen. Among whom Shahana is very rebellious and critical of the Bengali culture, which Chanu wants to impose on her, whereas Bibi is always more open to Bengali culture than English. Adding to that both of them express themselves in different ways, Shahana through her anger and Bibi through her hunger, which creates a parallelism within two cultures living together as well as within Nazneen and her mother Rupban.

On the other hand, in *Fasting, Feasting*, both Arun’s family in India and Mr. Patton's family in America have two different cultures. The contrast is visible even in the title of the novel, *Fasting, Feasting*. Again, through the presentation of gender, and food the difference in the culture is visible. In India, Uma is deprived of validation and attention whereas Arun in America finds his freedom cannot practice it. In terms of Papa, he always wants his family to fulfill his needs whereas Mama finds peace in fulfilling the tasks given by him. In this case, in India, the family is more controlled by Papa, whereas in America we see the family to be more liberated. However, Arun realizes that Mr. Patton's family is no different than his own family. Arun escaped one household and “stumbled into what was like a plastic representation of what he had known at home; not the real thing” (Desai 79). As much as Papa is unaware of his family's needs, Mr. Patton also has no idea about his wife and daughter's condition. In contrast to India, in America they do not have their meal together, rather everyone has their meal when they feel like it.

Chanu and Arun and their much like the American Dream

Chanu in *Brick Lane* was always proud of his degree in English Literature. Upon arriving on Brick Lane, he dreamed about having “to join the Civil Service and become Private Secretary to the Prime Minister” (Ali 40). His dream was to be successful in London. He also tried to maintain the lifestyle of Brick Lane, as he “liked to keep the television glowing in the evenings, like a fire in the corner of the room” (Ali 42). Although sometimes he used to stir by pressing buttons most of the time, he ignored it (Ali 42). Apart from this he also went to a pub with his boss just to get a promotion. On the other hand, Arun, not very likely Chanu, goes to Massachusetts to pursue his academic career. Although not by his wish but Papa’s, Arun looked forward to his new freedom in a new land. In search for his new identity Arun “was too engrossed in the brochures and booklets sent him by the university, trying to picture himself on that strange campus” (Desai). Not likely an American Dream for Arun, but he tries to adjust to the American lifestyle while staying with Mr. Patton.

To conclude, the juxtaposition within both of the novels offers a captivating exploration of the cultural reflection, family relationship and individual aspirations connected but in a distinct manner. Starting from the titles giving authenticity to the narratives to the parallelism of living in Third World country to First World country, the novels portray the complexities of culture and persuasion of dreams. Through Chanu and Arun, the immigrant dream and persuasion of freedom in the First World countries sheds light on the American dream. Therefore, despite being distinct in settings the novels create a strange parallelism that contributes to the complex interplay of culture, tradition and expectation between Third and First World countries.

Conclusion

The novels *Brick Lane* and *Fasting, Feasting* explores the universal challenges faced by South Asian female characters across time and space. The characters struggle against societal norms, expectations, discrimination, and subjugation residing within the male dichotomy, whether inside the borders or outside. Ali and Desai are two prominent South Asian writers who represented their culture and ethnic roots within the English world. Both authors take inspiration from their own experiences in life. Their novels, *Brick Lane* and *Fasting, Feasting*, despite being fictional novels, carries underlying message about the chaos of society. Whether suffering in silence or rebelling against domination, both of the novels present different female characters and their stories of subjugation which is either physical or psychological. Moreover, the novels provide a nuanced examination of the women's experience and their response to such subjugation which is either internalized through generation or developed in pursuit of self-actualization. However, both of the novels portray the development of the characters through resistance towards identity formation. Initially, the difference in settings provides a sense of autonomy for them. Whether in a domestic space or geographical space, women were constrained and that space also creates an autonomy for them. Within the novels, the journey from homeland to outside the borders of gender discrimination as well as cultural dislocation is real. Last but not least, the formation of transnational identity and the rejection of assimilation shows that even in a hybrid setting the characters always hold on to their sense of belonging creating a Third Space for both genders, which is complete. The cultural parallelism in both novels from Bangladesh to London and India to the US, contributes to the authenticity of the novels exploring the complex identity and immigrant experience.

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