

*Women
Discourse*
in 21st Century

Anglophone Fiction



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11. Anita Desai's <i>Cry the Peacock</i> : A Catastrophic Revelation of Disillusionment and Defeat Dr. Suneeta Upadhyay	102
12. Elements of Diaspora in Bharti Mukherji's <i>Desirable Daughters</i> Dr. Sonia Jayant	111
13. Deconstructing the Women on Fringes in Anita Desai's Breakthrough Work <i>In Custody</i> Dr Nemika	118
14. Tradition, Rebellion, Struggle and Search for Space by Women of Three Generations in <i>Difficult Daughters</i> Dr. Subhra Rajput	125
15. Limning of Women in the Fiction of Shashi Deshpande Manjeeta Gahlout and Dr. Shivali Singh	130
16. Monica Ali's <i>Brick Lane</i>: A Narrative of Identity Creation Dr. Monika Jaiswal	140
<i>Index</i>	157

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CHAPTER 16

Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*: A Narrative of Identity Creation

Dr. Monika Jaiswal

What could not be changed must be borne. And since nothing could be changed, everything had to be borne. This principle ruled her life. It was mantra, fettle, and challenge. So that, at the age of thirty-four, after she had been given three children and had one taken away, when she had a futile husband and had been fated a young and demanding lover, when for the first time she could not wait for the future to be revealed but had to make it for herself, she was as startled by her own agency as an infant who waves a clenched fist and strikes itself upon the eye. (Monica Ali, 5)

Monica Ali's evocative tale of diasporic migration, *Brick Lane* (2003), can be read as a narrative of identity creation, where its protagonist, Nazneen, travels from a state of mute acceptance of fate, to tentative but irrevocable, individual agency. In this chapter I will argue that *Brick Lane* demonstrates the idea that while women are often unwilling and unhappy subjects of migration, in fact it is this wrench of uprooting that enables them to renegotiate boundaries and create new and independent identities.

Brick Lane orbits around the experiences of a group of women with Nazneen as the core. Nazneen is a rural girl from Bangladesh who is projected into a life in London through an arranged marriage with a man much older than herself. Here she brings up her daughters and here she finds a community of friends, who like her are uneasy immigrants. They too respond to their isolation with gradually dawning individualism and learn to choose and live their own conceptions of their lives. Nazneen's route, through much of the novel, is one of 'disconnection,' borne primarily of the disorienting loss of her village, her sister, her family, and her

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