



Resilience and Resistance: Rethinking Gender in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*

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Abstract

This paper analyzes Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* with particular emphasis on Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity and Kimberle Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality. Focusing on Nazneen's transformation from passivity to agency, it demonstrates how intersectional forces of gender, migration, and culture shape her gender performances. The research embarks on a quest to decipher traditional roles assigned to women by societal and cultural norms. The research digs deeply into the strenuous struggles of the protagonist in reshaping their identities while showcasing resilience against socioeconomic challenges and societal patriarchy. The study analyzes the coping mechanisms of the protagonist and other female characters against this oppression through the lens of intersectionality. It shows their journey from tradition to transformation against the backdrop of intersection of different factors such as class, gender, relational status, social and cultural norms. Additionally, it also highlights the consequences the protagonist has to face after reflecting performativity failure. The research is based on qualitative analysis which aids in developing a thorough understanding of the novel. To decode multifaceted text in this qualitative study, intersectional analysis is used and it acts as a founding stone for understanding how multiple social identities intersect and affect women's experiences and performances of their gender.

Keywords: Gender, Patriarchy, Resistance, Culture difference, Freedom, Gender performativity, Female agency.

Introduction

The purpose of executing the research is to investigate the complex relationship among gender performativity, normativity and intersectionality within the pages of Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane* (2003). Monica Ali's debut novel *Brick Lane* has received significant scholarly attention for its portrayal of Bangladeshi immigrant life in London and its exploration of female subjectivity under patriarchal and cultural constraints. The novel traces the journey of Nazneen, who arrives in Britain as a young bride and undergoes a gradual transformation from submission to resilience. Through her struggles with gender norms, cultural expectations, and economic hardships, *Brick Lane* foregrounds critical questions about the construction of gender identity, female agency, and the intersections of gender with class and migration.

The following research is carried out to unveil the process of construction, deconstruction and negotiation of gender identities against the backdrop of



different factors of identity especially socio-economic realities, relational status and class distinctions in the chosen novel. *Brick Lane* showcases the themes of female agency, gender and empowerment, reshaping identities, family and relationships, intersectionality and socio economic resilience. It is the story of gender performances and performativity failure exhibited by a fatalist woman Nazneen who hails from a family of Bangladesh. From the very first day of her life, she is urged to believe that everything happens for a reason, and she does not have to defy fate even if something hazardous happens to her. Brought up among people with these conventional ideas, she affirms everything, opted for her by her patriarchal father, even marries a man who is twice of her age by considering it her ultimate fate. A fresh phase unfolds in her life when she migrates with her husband to abroad and embraces motherhood of two girls. However, with the passage of time, she craves for the true love and care which is not provided by her husband. Due to the lack of husband's affection, she turns towards extramarital affair in search of genuine love and care. Events unfold in a different way, when characters especially female empowered characters consisting of her unyielding daughters, nonconformist neighbors and insurgent sister around her propel her to believe that her fate is connected to her own decisions and she can transform it by changing her life's decisions. A girl who has never gone against her fate, starts wondering about the ways to transform it by refraining herself from those gender roles which has made her vulnerable in front of men for so many years. At the same time, she faces a lot of monetary challenges, immigrant issues and many other intricacies, however all of these afflictions do not make her weak anymore. The research has a purpose to portray that word women have different categories and it is impossible to find a common denominator in all of them. Therefore, the following methodology for analysis is helpful in finding out the ways in which female protagonist and other female characters from different backgrounds, having distinct socio economic hurdles carve out their way to realization of their self-worth.

This research studies data through the choice of gender performativity theory as a theoretical framework. Gender performativity theory, is proposed by Judith Butler (1990) in her famous work *Gender Trouble*. To give direction to the study it has been incorporated as a major theoretical framework. Gender performativity theory declares that gender does not any have any innate or biological identity attached to it, rather it is an act or performance given by an individual. Most of the time the individual is a woman especially an oppressed woman of the patriarchal society and these gender performances are repeated multiple times until they become the identity of the subjugated women all over the world.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality further enriches this analysis by illuminating how Nazneen's gender identity cannot be understood in isolation from her other positionalities. As an immigrant, wife, mother, and economically dependent woman, Nazneen experiences multilayered oppression that intensifies her struggles. Intersectionality highlights the compounded impact of these overlapping identities, situating Nazneen's subjection within broader structures of classism, racism, and patriarchy.

Research Objectives

The aim of this study is to investigate the intersection of different factors such as



class, culture, socioeconomic issues, relational status with gender in reshaping characters, experiences and choices of the female protagonist in *Brick Lane*.

Another objective of the study is to analyze the narrative of self-discovery by investigating moments of transformation in the characters' lives, highlighting key events that redefine their gender identity.

Research Questions

How do moments of self-discovery and transformation shape Nazneen's evolving gender identity and reflect the theme of gender performativity?

To what extent do gender, culture, marital status, and power dynamics intersect in shaping Nazneen's identity, and what consequences follow her performativity failure?

Significance of Study

The research deciphers assigned and performative socio-cultural gender roles which are most of the time limiting and oppressive for women all around the globe. Through the inspiring lives of both the protagonist and other female characters from the selected work, the research, challenges conventional gender performances which can potentially inspire world change. As focus of the research is on intersectionality within the realm of gender performativity hence, it clearly portrays the trials and tribulations faced by those women who are at the intersection of multiple identities. The research can amplify the voices of those women who are marginalized not just because of their gender identity, yet also because of the above aforementioned identity factors, which can help those marginalized women in fostering empathy and understanding towards them in public.

The research also showcases the influential role of literature in shaping and reflecting social norms which are prevalent in patriarchal societies. It demonstrates the role of English literature as a catalyst for personal and societal change. Furthermore, the research illustrates that the characters in fiction can serve as inspirational figures for those readers who are seeking to navigate and resist oppressive gender norms.

Literature Review

Brick Lane is mostly analyzed from postcolonial point of view as the novel deals with difficulties faced by an immigrant Bangladeshi woman, but the novel's feminist perspective cannot be overlooked as women in text play crucial role in feminine resilience. Many scholars have explored Ali's portrayal of female subjectivity in patriarchal and immigrant spaces. Ali's female characters, particularly Nazneen and Hasina, embody different forms of gender performance shaped by cultural and socio-political forces. As noted by Ponzanesi (2004), Ali exposes the intersectional struggle of South Asian Muslim women in Britain, trapped between traditional expectations and Western liberal ideals. The character of Nazneen evolves from passive submission to quiet but firm self-determination, illustrating Butler's (1990) theory of gender as a performative act shaped by resistance and repetition.

Ana-Blanca Ciocoi-Pop (2019) interprets *Brick Lane* as a narrative of women's resilience, emphasizing the strength and autonomy women develop while navigating intersecting systems of patriarchal oppression and racial



marginalization. Her reading, positions the protagonist, Nazneen, as a figure of quiet but firm resistance who gradually asserts control over her life, reflecting broader themes of female empowerment in diasporic contexts.

Arefin and Naz (2022) adopt a postcolonial feminist lens to analyze Nazneen's journey, drawing on the works of Simone de Beauvoir and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Their study highlights how Nazneen's character is emblematic of a "double colonization" process, where she is oppressed both by colonial, postcolonial systems and patriarchal structures within her own community. They argue that her eventual assertion of independence signifies a rupture with traditional expectations, symbolizing a move toward feminist self-realization.

Ehtesham and Khadija (2022) focus on themes of resistance and identity assertion, particularly in relation to sexual violence and patriarchal control. Their comparative approach positions *Brick Lane* within a broader canon of literature exploring Muslim woman's lived experiences and their struggle for agency within and beyond traditional roles.

Ali's feminist vision is neither purely Western nor uniformly radical rather, it reflects a spectrum of women's responses to patriarchal norms. As Bhambra (2007) suggests, *Brick Lane* challenges monolithic understandings of feminism by situating women's agency within localized, culturally specific contexts. Similarly, Grewal (2009) emphasizes the significance of friendship and female solidarity in Ali's novels as an alternative to heteronormative dependency, an idea reflected in Nazneen's relationship with Razia, which culminates in mutual empowerment.

Ali's work also invites critique. Saha (2013) argues that *Brick Lane* has been commodified within Western publishing markets that demand a specific portrayal of South Asian femininity, one marked by victimhood and eventual emancipation in alignment with Western feminist tropes. This highlights the precarious position of diasporic writers navigating authenticity and marketability. Brah (2005), in her work on diasporic identities, offers a foundational lens for understanding the dislocation experienced by Nazneen. She argues that diaspora is not merely a spatial displacement but a complex matrix of cultural, emotional, and gendered negotiation. Applying this to *Brick Lane*, Nazneen's journey from silent obedience to self-assertion reflects how gendered identities are continuously restructured within the diasporic condition.

Hussain (2005) further interrogates this complexity by analyzing *Brick Lane* through a feminist-cultural lens, contending that the novel stages an internal conflict between traditional South Asian femininity and Western feminist aspirations. Hussain claims that Nazneen's transformation embodies a hybrid identity where neither submission nor rebellion is complete but negotiated through lived experience. The tension between agency and duty is most vividly portrayed in the contrasting choices of women such as Hasina, who pursues love at great personal cost, and Razia, who adopts pragmatic strategies for survival.

James (2007) brings an intersectional perspective to Ali's work, asserting that gender in *Brick Lane* cannot be fully understood without also attending to race, class, and immigration status. This approach proves vital in examining why Nazneen's transformation is slower than Razia's. Nazneen's role as a homemaker restricts her physical mobility and access to community knowledge. Meanwhile,



Razia's economic participation equips her with tools for resistance. James (2007) contends that Ali resists simple narratives of empowerment, instead choose to explore the limits and possibilities of subjecthood under intersecting oppressions. Similarly, Mandhana (2010) emphasizes that Nazneen's ultimate act of rejecting both Karim and Chanu is not merely personal but political. Her refusal to define herself through a man becomes a symbolic gesture of resistance. Mandhana highlights how Ali crafts a form of "quiet feminism" that operates within, rather than in opposition to domestic roles, a theme that aligns with Judith Butler's (1990) notion of performativity, where repetition of roles can also be subversive if redefined through self-awareness.

In contemporary literature on normativity and resilience aspects of gender performativity, there have been various studies which explore the relationship between gender and society, yet, the less explored area in the field is the collaboration of gender performances with intersectionality. While the existing discussions on gender performativity reveals a significant research gap in the same dimension, the following research aims to fill the void by analyzing the deep impacts of intersectionality on gender performances of the main female characters from chosen work.

The research analyzes all kind of strategies employed by the female protagonist in her transition from submission to rebellion. One unexplored aspect is disruptive narratives. The research seeks to investigate the techniques employed by the authors to challenge stereotypes and provide fresh perspectives on gender. By addressing the perceived research gaps, the research aims to propel the field towards a more comprehensive understanding of impacts of different identity factors such as class, relational status, migration issues, socioeconomic challenges on conventional performances of gender.

Research Methodology

The research is analytical and is based on qualitative analysis which aids in developing a thorough understanding of the novel. To decode multifaceted text in this qualitative study, intersectional analysis and resilience theory is employed. Intersectional analysis acts as a founding stone for understanding how multiple social identities intersect and affect women's experiences and performances of their gender. Textual examination of *Brick Lane* is conducted to explore the moments from the life of the protagonist, Nazneen where class, socioeconomic identities, relational status and gender performances intersect. The analysis centers on Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* as a primary text. Passages highlighting Nazneen's obedience, moments of self-discovery, and eventual resistance are examined to trace her gendered subjectivity. Secondary characters for instance Hasina, Razia, and Shahana are also given attention whose experiences offer comparative insights into female agency and resilience. The study situates these textual readings within the chosen theoretical frameworks, connecting literary representation with feminist, intersectional, and post-structuralist concepts.

In literary research, the primary text serves as the central source of data. In this study, *Brick Lane* is the principal text, chosen for its complex portrayal of a Bangladeshi immigrant woman negotiating gender, culture, and resilience in a diasporic setting. The novel was selected because it directly engages with themes central to Butler's theory of performativity, Crenshaw's intersectionality, and resilience studies. The process of data collection involved a close reading of the



text with attention to narrative structure, character development, and thematic motifs. Key passages depicting gender performance, performativity failure, and moments of transformation were marked and categorized. Special focus was placed on the protagonist, Nazneen, but other female figures such as Hasina, and Razia were also included in order to examine contrasts and intersections in female subjectivities. Secondary data was collected from scholarly books, journal articles, essays, and critical works on gender theory, feminism, intersectionality, and postcolonial literature. These sources not only provide theoretical grounding but also serve to validate and enrich the interpretations derived from the primary text.

The analysis proceeded in multiple stages. First, thematic coding was used to identify recurrent motifs within the text such as submission, resilience, performativity failure, economic struggle, and cultural negotiation. These codes were then organized into broader categories linked to the research questions for instance, themes of gender performance shaped by patriarchy, intersections of class, culture, and relational status with gender and narrative moments of transformation and resilience. A close textual examination of *Brick Lane* is conducted to point out the moments from the life of the female protagonist where class, socioeconomic identities, relational status and gender performances intersect. In depth, character profile of chief female character, Nazneen from *Brick Lane* is created, highlighting her evolution from normativity to resilience and from gender performance to performativity failure. The rationale behind choosing this character as a center of analysis is that she fully portrays the traits of oppressed women who are at intersection of different identity factors and address research questions fully. However, other female figures from selected work are also closely examined in order to find the impacts of intersectionality on minorities and their influence on main female figure. Key aspects of protagonist's identities, behaviors and experiences are closely analyzed to lay the foundation for a thorough analysis to show the full fledged journey in which main female characters navigate and evolve in relation to gender performativity and intersectionality. The character profile is helpful in tracking the character's uneven path towards maturation and self-realization

Secondly, these themes were interpreted through the lens of gender performativity theory, intersectional analysis, and resilience studies. Butler's notion of performativity was used to deconstruct how Nazneen's identity is shaped and reshaped by repeated social performances, while Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality illuminated how her experiences are compounded by multiple axes of oppression. The theory of resilience was then employed to analyze her transformation from passivity to self-assertion. Background circumstances of the female protagonist, her detrimental socioeconomic situations which leads her to the path of progression, effects of intersectionality on her experiences, stimulus which compels her to assert her autonomy, moments of realization of self-worth, impacts of her evolution on her surroundings, and her life after resilience are detected. Finally, interpretations were cross referenced with secondary criticism to ensure alignment with, or critical departure from, existing scholarly debates. This triangulation strengthened the validity of findings by situating them within broader academic discourse.



Theoretical Framework

Judith Butler has written a seminal work *Gender Trouble* in 1990 in which she has first introduced the central idea of theory of gender performativity. The central notion of performativity theory is that gender is not exactly what a person is, neither it describes what a person possesses. Butler states while illustrating the performative aspect of gender roles, “The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body” (p. xv). The following statement of Butler portrays that gender is not an innate identity of a person, rather it is constructed through repeated gender performances. Butler further introduces the idea of normativity in her theory in which she states that these gender performances are manifested according to the expectations of society and culture. She mentions, “Gender reality is created through sustained social performances...” (p.192). It is evident from the viewpoint of Butler that after all, the reality of gender lies in its construction. Another significant component of the theory illustrated by Butler in her various works is fluidity or instability of gender based performances that have been useful in executing the research. According to the above mentioned notion of Butler, gender performance does not remain same over the time, it can be altered in the form of performativity failure. According to the following statement of Butler, it is safe to say that reality of gender performances differs from person to person, time to time, class to class and culture to culture. Gender performativity theory draws its inspiration from French postmodern philosophy. In literary analysis, gender performativity offers a concrete lens to deconstruct characters and narratives, revealing that gender roles are not fixed, rather they are enacted. Its significance lies in dismantling the binary notions of gender in literature while opening avenues for more creative and different interpretation.

Discussion and Analysis

The protagonist of the selected work shows resilience through her adaptation to displacement, her social networks and her journey from isolated woman to independent woman. Nazneen migrates from rural Bangladesh to London in an arranged marriage. She accepts her circumstances initially. Her passive mindset was shaped by fatalism “what could not be changed must be borne”. However, she learns to navigate British bureaucracy, shops in markets, and raises her daughters in a hybrid cultural environment. Nazneen shows resilience in building relationships slowly as at first Nazneen builds relationship with a fellow Bangladeshi woman Razia who becomes her informal mentor and helps her gain confidence and financial independence doing sewing work. While Nazneen’s resilience unfolds gradually within the domestic and emotional boundaries of her immigrant household, Hasina and Razia present alternative and contrasting models of resilience shaped by their specific socio-cultural circumstances. Hasina’s letters from Dhaka reveal a life marked by instability, abuse, and systemic gender violence. Her resilience is reactive and she survives by navigating shifting relationships with men, relying on temporary protections within a deeply patriarchal society. Though her choices may seem impulsive or self-destructive, they reflect a form of resilience that is situational, improvisational, and shaped by her immediate socio-economic constraints. Razia, on the other hand, offers a more direct and assertive model of resistance. Unlike



Nazneen, Razia adapts quickly to life in London, cutting her hair, dressing in Western clothes, and prioritizing her children's independence. Her resilience is proactive and she does not wait for permission to change, but reshapes her environment according to her needs. These contrasting portrayals highlight how resilience is not a fixed trait but an intersectional process, contingent on access to resources, cultural pressures, and individual temperament.

Construction of Gender Identities

In *Brick Lane*, Nazneen's early life is shaped by the cultural belief in fate. Her mother's advice to "accept what is written" encapsulates the notion of normativity, whereby women are constructed as passive, obedient, and self-sacrificing. Butler's theory of gender performativity helps to interpret this phase of Nazneen's life as a performance of patriarchal expectations rather than an expression of natural femininity. Domestic duties, silence in decision making, and unquestioned obedience to her husband Chanu become repetitive acts that construct her as the "ideal Bengali wife." Lorber's (1991) conception of gender as a social institution reinforces this reading, showing how daily practices sustain women's subordination. Nazneen's early subjectivity exemplifies subjection, as defined by Butler that she becomes a "subject" through submission to cultural and patriarchal power. Her identity is formed within these discourses of control, illustrating how gender is socially constructed through both familial and communal pressures.

Nazneen as the protagonist of *Brick Lane* embodies the complexities of a woman molded by fatalism and patriarchal expectations. Her mother Rupban is portrayed as a stereotypical traditional woman who survives by resigning to fate, believing that everything that happens is God's will. She constantly repeats to her daughters that "If God wanted us to ask questions, he would have made us men" (p. 82). This statement epitomizes gender performativity in Butler's sense, where gender identity is not inherent but reproduced through continuous acts and lessons passed down across generations (p. 195). Rupban's silence and surrender became her defining features, which she transmits to Nazneen, shaping her into a passive woman who accepts her father's decision of marrying Chanu without resistance. Hasina, however, disrupts this chain of gender performances. By eloping with her lover, she illustrates Butler's claim that despite cultural constructions, the subject retains the capacity for agency (p. 195). Her refusal to abide by patriarchal dictates highlights that gender roles are not fixed but open to contestation. Thus, the juxtaposition of Rupban's fatalism and Hasina's defiance sets the framework for understanding Nazneen's own gradual transformation.

Patriarchal dynamics of Nazneen's culture is further shown by the extreme reaction of her father on Hasina's running away from home. Hasina's elopement becomes gallows for Nazneen as she becomes the victim of her father's rage. Despite his own history of infidelity and cheating on his innocent wife, their father tries to impose his extreme decisions over Nazneen as a compensation for Hasina's freedom. His reaction illustrates double standards in gender relations within their culture where men's sins are forgiven while women are heavily punished. He himself is not a perfect husband or a perfect father, however he wants his control over women of his family. To safeguard the so called honor of her father and revise the lesson of leaving everything to fate,



Nazneen conciliates to every decision made for her by her dominating father (p. 17-18). Nazneen is forced to grapple with the aftermath of Hasina's bold decisions. Nazneen's marriage to Chanu brings her into a relationship defined by toxic masculinity and patriarchal control.

Chanu embodies the authority of male centered culture, dictating her choices from the clothes she wears to the language she speaks. Here, Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality is crucial. Nazneen's experiences are not shaped by gender alone but intersect with her marital status, immigrant identity, and linguistic barriers. Her inability to speak English confines her further, as Chanu ridicules her for wanting to learn, insisting, "Where is the need of education for you anyway?" (p. 39). This denial illustrates Butler's idea of normativity as a form of hidden violence, where cultural norms appear natural but work to restrict women's autonomy. Chanu's desperate desire to subjugate Nazneen suggests an unequal power dynamic shaped by societal norms and male oriented cultures within the relationship of a man and woman. Whenever they meet someone from Chanu's social circle, Chanu is eager to speak on Nazneen's behalf, treating her like a deaf and mute person who cannot even introduce herself, if they are shopping somewhere, he compels Nazneen to choose her outfits according to her husband's choice, if she is pronouncing English words in wrong ways, he humiliates her by boasting off his own knowledge and he even dictates her whom to be friend with and whom she should avoid. Whenever she takes permission of him to go outside for a walk, he condemns her that when she would roam on streets, people will notice her and he will look like a fool. These words uttered by his mouth reflects the mindset of a typical patriarchal man who considers that women's actions are directly proportional to men's reputation. His behavior reinforces the idea of normativity in which he enforces traditional gender roles by controlling each and every aspect of his wife's life. In Nazneen's case, the intersection of patriarchal marriage and immigrant displacement produces layered oppression.

Women are never seen as an individual person, rather they are defined always in relation to the others. In the very early days of their marriage, Nazneen by chance, hears Chanu calling his friend or relative and telling them about her that she is an unspoiled girl from rural areas, although she is not that much beautiful yet she is not considered ugly, her hips are somewhat narrow, however, wide enough to carry children (p. 25). Chanu's characterization and objectification of Nazneen clearly depicts deeply embedded gender norms within their cultural context, where women are idealized for their chastity and beauty, particularly if they hail from rural areas which are untouched by modern influences. Portrayal of Nazneen as an unspoiled rural girl depicts traditional expectations of femininity, and Chanu's words about her body reduces the status of Nazneen to a vessel of procreation, supporting traditional gender roles where women are considered only a body to carry children. Butler (1993) argues in her work, "Identifying with a gender under contemporary regimes of power involves identifying with a set of norms that are and are not realizable..." (p. 126). It means that certain gender norms are favored in patriarchal societies and in order to flourish in male centered community, it is expected from individuals to conform to these norms as it is portrayed in afore mentioned Butler's statement and Chanu's conversation with his relative, where Nazneen's desirability is calculated wholly by her capability to give birth to his offspring. The following



conversation demonstrates cultural norms where women are seen only as mothers and caregivers rather than focusing on their individuality. Chanu's brutal words are portraying that women from rural areas are somewhat dumb enough to play their gender roles accordingly and are unable to question the authority of their male counterparts.

Nazneen already suffers from the pressure which is created through intersection of gender, marital status and immigrant identities, another factor of economic crisis becomes a new addition to her trials. Chanu starts grappling with failed expectations in London because of his joblessness, then she gets to know that Chanu has plunged the family into debts which he is unable to pay (p. 201). Therefore, Chanu's solution comes up in form of a hand sewing machine gifted to Nazneen on her birthday and he sets up Nazneen up to work as a seamstress (p. 193). Whenever she tries to sleep, horrible dreams regarding his debts start haunting her and she with same devotion, starts stitching again (p. 21). The following narrative unveils the intersection of gender, economic issues and marital status of Nazneen, adding a weight of responsibilities to her shoulders. Traditional gender roles dictate Nazneen's obligation to sustain her household despite of her husband's inability to contribute to financial responsibilities. Although he is the one who in debt, still she feels it as her responsibility to pay off his debts. It is another drawback of gender roles that division of labor is unequal in most of the cases. Women are demanded to put an extra effort while they are paid least. Intersection of gender, cultural norms, class, financial issues, immigrant identity, marital status create a form of depression which compels her to crave for love and affection.

Bornstein (1994) mentions that gender roles are combination of different factors which teaches a person how to look desirable in front of society (p. 26). Similarly, Nazneen is also performing gender roles by suppressing her desires to be gladly accepted by her culture and society. In patriarchal societies, most of the times, women continue practicing suffocating gender roles to get a certificate of appreciation from their society. Nazneen's problems are aggravated with her pregnancy, although pregnancy for her is already unbearable for her at such a young age, moreover, Chanu's weird attitude adds to her afflictions. Baby makes her to go through some extra painful experiences as he takes over her bladder (p. 61). Woolf points out these trials and tribulations faced by women in their pregnancy and even after pregnancy, "Making a fortune and bearing thirteen children-no human being could stand it. Consider the facts we said. First there are nine months before the baby is born...After the baby is fed, there are certainly five years in playing with the baby..." (p. 15). Woolf's words unveil the multifaceted challenges that accompany the journey of motherhood. Reproduction system of women is biological which means giving birth is an innate trait of women however, raising child is not a biological trait of women, it is a social construct which can also be men's duty.

Deconstruction and Performativity Failure

Nazneen's trajectory shifts as she begins to resist the expectations imposed upon her. Butler describes performativity failure as the disruption of repeated gender performances, which exposes gender's artificiality. Beneath Nazneen's obedient personality, there lies a simmering discontent with her suffocating gender roles imposed on her by societal norms. Butler illustrates the following



discontentment with gender acts in her work, "...possibility of a failure to repeat, a de formity or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction (p. 192). The following notion of Butler indicates that there is a possibility of showing resistance against conventional gender performances which lies under the multiple layers of obedience in Nazneen. Her refusal to conform is pretty prominent through various acts of performativity failure evident in different incidences. For an instance, when Chanu denies the permission to go to college, she stops praying for Chanu's promotion, chops fiery red d chilies in his lunch box, pairs his unwashed socks, does not fold his trousers (p. 65). She further steps out of her house without Chanu's permission and roams around London in ecstatic pleasure, the whole experience boosts her confidence, she feels that she should tell her husband that now everything is possible for her (p. 64-65). Her happiness in coming out of house and to taste her freedom proves that somewhat she is tired of her stereotypical gender roles which have limited her agency. Nazneen's monotonous life is filled with desires and joys by the arrival of Karim who is a young Bangladeshi milkman (p. 211). His charm which melts Nazneen is his calm and kind nature unlike Chanu. He excites her, stirring the feeling of love and liberation (p. 245). Unlike Chanu who tries to jeer at her every conversation, Karim gives Nazneen a sense of validation. Whenever she says somethings, he listens attentively and makes her feel that she 48 has said something weighty and valuable (p. 264). Deeply attracted towards Karim's magical personality and pleasant conduct, Nazneen finds herself in an extra marital affair with him. Despite the risks and consequences, she still is willing to take a risk for some moments of freedom. Beauvoir (2011) states the condition of Nazneen in her work that when women embrace their strength rather than their vulnerability, love for her will be a source of happiness rather than peril as it does for man (p. 724-725). As per Beauvoir's words, for Nazneen, Karim is an escape from her tiring gender performances and responsibilities defined by her patriarchal society, that is why she feel comfort in his company. In *Brick Lane*, Nazneen's affair with Karim marks the first rupture in her prescribed role. While the relationship is not ultimately liberating, it represents her attempt to step outside the submissive identity constructed for her.

Her decisive moment of deconstruction comes with the refusal to return to Bangladesh with Chanu. This act symbolizes a rejection of patriarchal control and fatalism. By choosing to remain in London with her daughters, Nazneen undermines the narrative of the obedient wife and embraces the possibility of self-determination. This performativity failure destabilizes the gender binary and reveals the constructed nature of her previous identity.

The feeling of rebellion, Nazneen is experiencing is explained by Butler, "But inherent to any performance is a compulsion to acquit oneself and so prior to any performance is an compulsion to acquit on anxiety and a knowingness which becomes articulate and animating only on the occasion of the reprimand" (p. 119). The feeling manifests that wish to change her destiny is trying to take over her mind while her gender performances are constraining the desire.

Female Agency and Motherhood

Motherhood becomes central to Nazneen's journey. Initially, her maternal role reflects cultural expectations of obedience and sacrifice. Her first child's cries



make her feel valued, aligning with Beauvoir's claim that motherhood gratifies women by returning the love they invest (p. 571). Yet, the death of her child destabilizes her sense of self, awakening in her the realization that she, too, desires autonomy. She starts imagining that if she had known what would happen to her in her marriage, she would have run away like Hasina (p. 103). By imagining an alternate scenario where she follows her sister's footsteps and escapes her gendered responsibilities, Nazneen grapples with feelings of discontent and frustration in her current performativity of gender roles. Her desire of escaping from her loveless marriage reflects her desire for autonomy and agency, as well as a recognition of the limitations imposed by the patriarchal structures of society.

Nazneen becomes mother of two girls Shahana and Bibi who turn out to be totally distinct personalities from their fatalist mother. Her daughters, especially Shahana, reshape her understanding of motherhood. Shahana's rebellion nature keep refusing traditional dress and declaring "It is my body" (p. 294). It embodies a radical rejection of patriarchal control. By rejecting her father's attempts to impose traditional gender roles and cultural expectations on her, Shahana challenges normative notions of femininity and cultural identity. Her refusal to abide by the cruel societal norms reflects a resistance to the oppressive gender acts that strives to restrict her agency as a woman. Shahana's assertion of her Western identity and rejection of her Bangladeshi roots portrays the complexities of intersectional axis of identity and the ways in which individuals navigate multiple layers of cultural and gendered expectations. She does not let her gender to be a reason of her subjugation and fights against intersection of her gender, culture and power dynamics. Nazneen cannot go against her husband's command because this is what her culture and society demands from her, however, Shahana as a product of Western culture does everything what she wants which proves the fluidity of gender from culture to culture. When her father compels her to wear traditional Bangladeshi dress rather than jeans, she spoils her entire wardrobe by spilling paint on it (p. 182). Her rebellion serves as a powerful illustration of the resilience inherent in challenging gender norms and cultural identities that seek to constrain and control women's lives. Through Shahana, Nazneen realizes that resilience is not merely endurance but active resistance. This reflects Lorde's notion of motherhood as a source of strength rather than submission, where maternal care becomes a political act of protection and agency. By choosing to remain in London for the sake of her daughters' future, Nazneen redefines motherhood as a space of resilience and empowerment.

Nazneen's transformation is also shaped by women around her. Razia's pragmatic defiance, Hasina's survival amidst abuse, and even stories of women like Shahnaz and Aleya in Hasina's letters offer Nazneen alternative models of resilience. Razia, who boldly declares that "the community will not feed her or buy footballs for her son" (p. 99), exemplifies resistance to societal norms and inspires Nazneen to take ownership of her choices. Butler emphasizes that performativity contains the possibility of "failure to repeat" (p. 192). Nazneen enacts this failure in small rebellions like pairing Chanu's socks wrongly, stepping out without permission, or ceasing to pray for his promotion (p. 65). These acts, though subtle, destabilize the ritual of obedience that once defined her. Her affair with Karim, though problematic, further reflects her desire to



break free from patriarchal constraints and experience self-validation outside of her suffocating marriage.

Ultimately, Nazneen evolves from passive endurance to active resilience. She rejects both Chanu's authority and Karim's romantic promises, telling Karim directly that she does not want to marry him (p. 453). This refusal marks a decisive moment where she asserts her independence beyond male validation. Her journey aligns with Michael Ungar's definition of resilience as the ability to navigate and negotiate resources within cultural contexts. Nazneen's resilience is not dramatic rebellion but quiet endurance transformed into agency. By the end, she is no longer bound by fatalism or patriarchal dictates.

In the culminating scene both Bibi and Shahana give their mother a manifestation of her long held dream which she yearned for. She sees a huge white circle in front of her, she wears her boots and in jeans she starts racing on her two legs (p. 494). The following particular scene becomes a metaphorical representation of Nazneen's agency which is limitless just like the circular rank. Her capability to race on two legs portrays Butler's idea of fluidity of gender roles that gender identity is fluid and can be changed as per person's autonomy.

Thus, *Brick Lane* illustrates Butler's claim that gender is not innate but performed, while also extending this insight through intersectionality. Nazneen's journey destabilizes essentialist constructions of femininity, showing how identities can be constructed, disrupted, and renegotiated. At the same time, Ali situates this transformation within the realities of immigrant life, where oppression is not singular but layered, and where resilience becomes both a form of adaptation and a declaration of agency.

Conclusion

The following study highlights the effects of gender performances on the life of female protagonist Nazneen from selected novel. It becomes evident that the results of gender performativity are multifaceted affecting female protagonist in many ways as she is crippled by these gender based performances according to her cultural standards. The research has summarized the heavy influences of different identity factors in shaping gender identities of not only protagonist of the chosen work, also the characters around her. In Nazneen's story, her male centered culture, her conventional gender performances, her immigrant identity, her marital status as well as economic status play a significant role in snatching her agency and autonomy. These identity factors add to the trials and afflictions of Nazneen.

Furthermore, the study has portrayed the distinct paths of self-discovery taken by the female protagonist, elucidating her transformative movement which compels her towards a deeper understanding of agenda hidden behind her continuous gender performances. The study has showcased the strategies of resilience depicted by Nazneen in face of societal pressure. Nazneen uses extra marital affair as an escape from responsibilities of her gender, however, after knowing what has really happened to her mother who has taught her the lessons of believing in fate, her way of thinking alters. She then decides her own fate by taking decisions of her life by her own. In patriarchal societies, showing resilience towards gender performances is equal to challenging traditional norms and expectations imposed on a woman by her culture, therefore, it has never been an easy task for women. The resistance against gender performances can



lead to various forms of punishment, exclusion or marginalization. Despite the potential risks, and cruel consequences, the brave woman Nazneen choose the path of performativity failure towards their independence. However, life takes different routes towards same destination. When Nazneen decides to fight against her servitude, she is supported by many other female characters around her. Even her misogynist husband in the end supports her decision to be an independent woman.

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