

GALAXY

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Vol. 3, Issue-II (March 2014)



Editor-In-Chief: Dr. Vishwanath Bite



Managing Editor: Madhuri Bite

Theme of Evolution: Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*

Farah Afrin

Research Scholar
Department of English
Lucknow University
Uttar Pradesh

Change is the law of life. A person goes through different stages of life, and at every stage there is transformation in the personality of the person. This new individual is entirely different from the previous one. For this change, different circumstances and events are responsible. Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* are two texts of feminism in which we find the theme of evolution among the life of the characters like Celie and Nazneen who, happened to highlight the oppression of women in universal phenomenon irrespective of caste, creed, culture and nation. My paper is an attempt to study these two characters and see how their personality is evolved because of the different circumstances of life.

Nazneen and Celie both belong to different culture, religion and nation, but they both are women, the weaker sex. They both belong to that gender which is always identified with the man. Therefore, they both are identified by their respective husband Chanu and Albert. Clara Nubile writes: "In childhood a women should be under her father's control, in youth under her husband's and when her husband is dead under her sons. She should not have independence" (1).

Nazneen, who is just sixteen years old is married to Chanu aged forty years. It a case of mismatch marriage. This decision is taken by her father after her elder sister Hasina elopes with nephew of the saw mill owner. As passivity is expected from young girls at the time of marriage, Nazneen accepts this match made by her father. There is no resistance on her part. She reaches England with her husband. Here she has everything. She has well-furnished house, food to eat and above all an educated husband. A husband who is the identity of a women. Monica Ali writes in her book: "Its lucky for you that you married an educated man. That was a stroke of luck"(39). By reminding Nazneen of this fact of an educated husband Chanu very cleverly suppresses her. He always boasts of himself. She is alone here. There is no one to share her feelings. Chanu on the other hand shares his experiences with her, but does not listen to her thoughts. Therefore, her thoughts keep returning to Gouripur. But somehow she gives consolation to herself by seeing such good furniture in her house. Ali writes, "nobody in Gouripur had anything like it. He had made good marriage for her"(12).

Nazneen's age is sixteen years. She is not very mature. She is not able to identify the hidden patriarchal face of Chanu. She is hurt after listening such comments from her husband such as "she is an unspoilt girl from village"(14). She is not able to understand the deeper meaning of these remarks. But she is pained and feels sad. Men always want woman to be a good worker. Chanu is satisfied that she is a good worker. She cuts his corn. She cooks, cleans and looks after house. Their relationship is mechanical and not passionate. It is indoctrinated to her from childhood that women should be obedient to their husbands. She has this false notion that by accepting Chanu, she has done something great. He should be indebted to her. A kind of compromise starts between them. She compromises more than her husband because, it is always the woman who compromises in a marriage. In her loneliness,

she has her sister's letters to read. She worries about her. Chanu never tries to explore her mind. She comes in contact of Razia and Mrs. Islam. Chanu doesn't like Nazneen to mix up with these women, because these women are not passive and docile like her. If she mixes with them, her eyes will be opened and then he will not be able to dominate her. Isolation starts gripping her. Her mind starts diverting from household work to learn something. She knows only two words of English, sorry and thank you. When she expresses her desire to learn English Chanu says "Where is the need anyway?"(30). Devon Campbell-Hall writes: "Upon migration to Britain, these women found themselves unaccountable to anyone but their husbands and the Law of the land itself" (233).

With the passage of time Nazneen's character begins to evolve. Her metamorphosis starts. She is introduced to other Bengali girls by Razia. She does not mention this to Chanu. Her eyes are opened. She looks around the world. She has an image of girl who was skating. She wants to be like that girl. But all these desires are suppressed. When she asks permission from Chanu to go for the English classes with Razia he says "you are going to be mother. Babies have to be fed" (75). Apart from mother, wife and daughter man does not want any other identity for a woman. He tries to fit Nazneen into the conventional role of woman set up by the society. Devon Campbell-Hall writes: "The migrant woman (Nazneen) portrayed in this novel rebel against a traditional map of marriage and domestic stables...." (229).

Grim realities of life slowly and slowly dawns upon her. She realizes that her Abba has just got rid of her. At other moment she thinks that, what were the choices available for her? How can she say this for her Abba? A woman's choice is always limited. In some corner of her mind she wants freedom. Freedom to learn English, freedom for ice-skating. Her first son Raquib dies. Then she gives birth to two daughters i.e. Shahana and Bibi. She comes in contact of Kareem. Her desire for learning is appreciated by Kareem. He gives her Bengali newsletters to read. Chanu as a contrast has never given her anything to read. He only talks of his bookish things and promotion. He has crushed her desire to learn English. He is always engrossed in his work, and never cares what is her opinion. Karim listens to her. He tells her something of Egypt. Whenever she comments on something, he encourages her by saying "yeah man you are right" (280). Chanu always gives importance to his view point. He has a dominating nature. She realizes that she can also be right. Her view point is not wrong. She realizes her own identity which is rendered negligible by Chanu. Karim also realizes, how much work she does. He passes comments like "You are always working"(279). So, Nazneen comes close to him. The comments, the appreciation which she expects from Chanu comes from Karim, Devon Campbell-Hall writes:

Monica Ali arguably conveys an inherent rebelliousness within her representation of Nazneen Ahmad. Nazneen is portrayed as destabilizing the static binaries of margin and centre by subverting the expectations of both their families and communities. (231)

Shahana and Bibi becomes her supporter. Shahana is of rebellious nature. She rebels against the patriarchal nature of Chanu. She knows that her mother has a desire for skating. She asks her whether she has been in love with Chanu. Nazneen answers her daughter by saying that her mother does not have emotional relationship with her father. For Karim, Nazneen is the real thing while for Chanu she is an unspoilt girl. Devon Campbell-Hall writes: "The boring labour she (Nazneen) initially takes on out of economic necessity soon becomes her form of subversive rebellion, as she embarks on a passionate affair with the forbidden delivery man, Karim" (235).

Now, Nazneen is no more the submissive wife. She starts taking her own decision. She starts earning. She has the support of her two daughters. She starts resisting the decision of Chanu. When Chanu asks Shahana and Bibi to recite poems, she says that it is time for them to go to bed. Chanu makes a decision of returning to Bangladesh. Shahana is not ready. Nazneen is first a mother. Being a mother changes everything. She takes decision to leave Karim and to live with her daughter alone in Bangladesh. Resisting, questioning, self awareness starts. With the passage of time Chanu also changes. He accepts that he has not been a perfect husband. He returns to Bangladesh and Nazneen is left with her two daughters and Razia. Now her mind is free. Her view expands. Thereader meets a different, changed Nazneen. She knows how to manipulate, how to resist, how to make space for herself. This Nazneen is free from all the patriarchal notions of Chanu. She is free to dance, does whatever she likes. At one point of time she wanted to wear skirt and top. One thing that is most important is that, now her life is her own. She has got the control over her life. She is confident. Her daughter gives her skates and boots and says, "This is England, you can do whatever you like" (541).

The Color Purple by Alice Walker narrates the story of Celie. She is raped by her step-father and then married to Albert. Albert wants to marry Nettie, but her father gives him Celie. The decision of marriage is taken by her father. Celie lacks confidence. She is submissive, docile and passive. Her selfhood is crushed. She becomes silent. This notion that nobody loves her leads to internalization of the fact that she cannot be loved by anyone. Her father while giving her to Albert tells him that she is able to work like man. After coming to Albert, she gets the same treatment. He has brought her to look after his children, to satisfy his bodily needs. She is beaten by him which further shatters her self-confidence. Shug Avery is the lover of Albert. One thing Celie has in mind "She like queen to me" (22). She thinks that she is ugly, while Shug is beautiful. Alice Walker writes: "It is a simple story, almost one location, one person's life; one person's point of view; one woman's evolution" (*The Same River Twice* 177).

Celie wants to be like Shug Avery in order to be loved. Nettie is her only companion. When Nettie leaves, she is alone, no one to share her thoughts with. When Nettie asks her to resist these oppressive tendencies of Albert, she says she cannot do so. She needs that much from life that is necessary for the survival. "I said to myself, Celie you are tree" (23). Harpo her step-son expects the same passive behaviour from his wife Sophia. Sophia is not passive and docile like Celie. She is aggressive. Rashmi Gaur writes: "Celie's relationship with Sophia, Harpo's wife and her step daughter in law her first acquaintance with what changes autonomous selfhood can bring about in a women's life" (34).

Sophia and Celie become friends. Then comes Shug Avery, who opens the eyes of Celie. She helps her in finding the letter of her sister Nettie. Nettie is the one person whom she loves. Shug asks everything about Nettie. At least someone is there to ask about her sister. A sister who was so close to her and now there is no contact with her. Shug helps her in searching the letters of Nettie which are hidden by Albert. Her eyes are opened. Questions start taking shape in her mind. She is hurt also. Celie says "and she was the only person love me in the world" (207). She reads the letters and she comes to know, why Nettie left Albert. Nettie left because Albert tried to get physical with her. One thing that is the biggest happening of her life was written in the letters. Her children are alive. Olivia and Adam are alive. Now Celie is full of thoughts of revenge. She wants to kill Albert. But Shug is there to stop her. She also comes to know about the universal oppression of women. How women in Olinka are suppressed. All these things open her eyes. Her horizons are widened. She comes

to know that Pa is not her real Pa. Shug is always there to support her. She even questions her Pa also. All these traits were previously absent in her. Alice Walker writes:

Very important to Celie's transformation are two women from whom she learn quite a bit and draws support for her eventual step out in the world: Shug Avery and Sophia. Celie's relationship to Shug was central to her transformation. Yet, it was through getting to know Shug that Celie came alive. And Sophia, with her determination not to be humbled by any of the men in her life or by white society either was in a way everything that Celie wasn't. By interacting with Sophia, Celie first had her eyes opened to the fact that her lot in life was not all a woman could hope for. (*TheSameRiverTwice* 194)

Shug announces that she will take Celie to Memphis. Albert was not ready for that. He does not want her to go out of his control. There, she answers back to him. She pours out all her revenge. She says that he took away her sister. She without any hesitation tells him about her children and informs him that her children will be coming to live with her. She speaks out her humiliation in front of everybody. As a typical man Albert tries to break the unity between the two women by saying that she can only work as a Shug's cook. She has no abilities but she answers back "I am pore, I am black, I may be ugly and can't cook but I am here"(214). Shug helps her in becoming independent financially. She boosts her self-confidence. Rashmi Gaur writes: "Shug is everything, Celie always wanted to be. She is confident, sexy, assured and glamorous"(35).

Celie gets herself- respect back with the help from Shug. She herself says "I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends"(222). Shug also dedicates a song to her. She feels as if she also has some importance. She can also be loved. She comes out of her cocoon and sees a new world waiting outside for her. And this world has no place for people like Albert. She gets comments on her good looking. "How good you look"(225). She starts ignoring Mr. Or Albert. This brings a change in Albert. Now Celie has everything. She has money, love, respect, identity. Alice Walker writes:

If and when Celie rises to her rightful, earned place in a society across the planet, the world will be different place. The power of the Color Purple derives from its depiction of Celie going from just trying to survive in "her place in society" to a rebellious and absolute refusal to be treated this way. Who can forget the power of the dinner scene where Celie announces she is leaving Mister? There is a rage that comes pouring out as well as the defiance and assuredness of a woman that is clear on what she wants.... Throughout the story Celie is grappling with degrading brutality and the self doubts and feelings of worthlessness that this degrading brutality and the self doubts and feelings of worthlessness that this treatment engenders for women of all nationalities. (*TheSameRiverTwice* 194)

Both Nazneen and Celie are identified by their work. Chanu gives remark that she is a good worker. Celie's step-father tells Albert that she can work like a man. Both of them are good for working at home, looking after children. With the help of support from others a change takes place in both of them. Karim calls Nazneen a real thing. These comments fills her with happiness. Happiness of oneself being so special. Celie also gets this feeling of recognition when a song is dedicated to her by Shug. Celie and Nazneen start working and become financially independent Nazneen has this image of ice-skating girl and Celie has

image of Shug. They both take big decision of their life. Though Celie and Nazneen are from different backgrounds, but their evolution have some parallel strains, which I have discussed in my paper. Becoming financially independent is the biggest achievement of both of them. They can live alone and make their own identity in the world. They realize their importance as an individual.

Works Cited:

- Ali, Monica, *Brick Lane*. Great Britain: Scribner, 2003. Print.
- Gaur, Rashmi. *Women's Writing: Some Facets*. New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2003. Print.
- Hall, Devon Campbell "Subversive Migrant Labour in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*." *Nation in Imagination*. Ed. C. Vijayasree et. al. Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2007. Print.
- Nubile, Clara. *The Danger of Gender: Caste, class and Gender in Contemporary Indian Women's Writing*. New Delhi. Sarup and Sons, 2003. Print.
- Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*, New York: Pocket Books, 1982. Print.
- The Same River Twice: Honoring the Difficult*. London: Phoenix, 2005. Print.