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## INTERGENERATIONAL CONFLICT IN MONICA ALI'S BRICK LANE

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**Abstract:**

*First generation immigrants carry the baggage of customs and traditions along with them in the host country which often become hindrance in their integration in the new surroundings. Whereas the second generation immigrants consider the new land their own and find little or no difficulty in assimilation and acculturation. The second generation immigrants try to assimilate into the host culture.*

**KEY WORDS:**

Intergenerational Conflict , *Ali's Brick Lane* , behaviour , communication .

**INTRODUCTION**

Intergenerational conflict is the major issue confronted by the first generation immigrants and their children. When immigrants enter in a new land, many changes took place. The changes occur at the level of language, behaviour, culture, values and others. The second generation becomes involved in the new country and new culture more easily than their parents. The second generation has fewer occasions to learn about their native culture, traditions and customs. They feel easier in new land. They feel more at home 'here' than 'there'. Whereas their parents don't feel that comfortable 'here' and want their children to follow them and this situation give rise to inter-generational conflict. These conflicts make family communication difficult and they are unable to understand each other views. First generation immigrants give precedence to their culture and want to retain their ethnicity. According to Julios, such problems are common in homes with second-generation UK-born immigrants. Because the values, languages, cultural traditions, religions and ethnic identities at home and at school are so dissimilar, the children easily acquire dual identities and question who they are and who they want to be (12-13), 'By being brought up in a bicultural and bilingual environment, second generation UK-born immigrants are torn apart between simultaneous but incompatible desires, realities and drives' (13).

First generation immigrants are fragmented and share an in-between space between two nations, languages and two or more homes.

**Conflict in the novel**

Chanu, the first generation immigrant suffers from going home syndrome. Chanu is unable to unhitch his ties with his homeland. Although he has come to England on his own choice but his inherent and inveterate attachment for his homeland gives rise to many clashes, issues and conflicts. He always tries to create a mythical homeland at his home and expect his daughters to adhere to the customs and traditions of their native land in London. These situations and imposed grafting give rise to inter-generational conflict. Immigrant's children see the native country through the eyes of their parents and they don't have any formal knowledge about their heritage and then it becomes difficult for them to talk about the concepts and issues regarding their native land. They try to control their children by strict parenting styles as is done by Chanu

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with his daughters.

In *Brick Lane* we see the clash of culture, difficulty in assimilation and most importantly the intergenerational conflict, the tangled ties between the first and second generation. The first generation immigrants always have the fear of losing their identity; hence they hesitate to intermingle with the new land culture and they also try to impose their native culture, morals and decorum on their children.

Monica Ali's, *Brick Lane* (2003), moves around Nazneen, a Bangladeshi woman who migrates to London after her marriage with a middle aged man Chanu. It is an alliance arranged by her father. Nazneen is unable to speak English and hence unable to socialize in the new environment. She remains confined in her apartment and is bound to her husband. Nazneen gave birth to a son, Raqib, who dies in infancy. Later, she gives birth to two daughters, Shahana and Bibi. She keeps in touch with her sister Hasina in Bangladesh through letters. Chanu who is expecting promotion does not get and becomes unemployed. He takes the job of Taxi driver; meanwhile Nazneen starts doing sewing job at home, and she comes in contact with Karim. She develops an affair with Karim. Chanu's dream of succeeding in London fades and he feels the 'threat' of assimilation in his daughters therefore he decides to go back to Dhaka with his family. Nazneen and her daughters refuse to go with him to Dhaka and Chanu returns alone.

Chanu doesn't want to bring up his daughters in London. Chanu and Nazneen are the first generation immigrants and Shahana and Bibi belong to the second generation and they face problems due to cultural clash and which gives rise to intergenerational conflicts. Shahana is assimilated in British culture and consider it as her own. She opposes her father's views from the beginning. She is not ready to accept Bangladesh as her native country which often results in a conflict with her father.

Shahana is divided and torn into two, she is taught English at school but her father does not allow her to speak English at home. He asks her to speak their native language. But like all second generation immigrants she likes the 'host land' culture and wants to move like them.

When the immigrants join another nation and culture, they bring with them certain aspects of the native culture like language, traditions, customs and behaviour. It is not easy for them to break the ties their culture. The first generation immigrants try hard to fit into the new culture but they often fail to assimilate and unable to acculturate fully. One can see and feel the difference in attitude of the first and second generation towards the issues of identity and belonging.

Shahana and Razia's son, Tariq, both are divided between two different cultures, they are unable to understand, what should they choose or where should they belong, whether they should follow Bengali culture or the British culture. This confusion leads to further conflicts.

A second generation children brought up in the 'host land' sees him as 'being one of them'. This is what happened with Tariq and Shahana. They are born and brought in England and they have never been to native land. They feel as if they are British.

Children become more involved in the new culture more quickly and easily as they attend school and come in contact with others while their parents do not feel sufficient comfort with the new language and culture.

They identify more strongly with the host culture than did their parents. The acculturation process of parents and children often polarizes the family and contributes problems resulting from a clash of cultures.

The first generation immigrants have been seen as carriers of the culture in a new society and they try to maintain traditional practices whereas the younger generation identify with western values that allow them greater freedom. These differences cause conflict within the family.

Chanu tries to show that Bangladesh has a history and hence its culture is very wide. He told his daughters that once it was called the Paradise of Nations. As he explains to his daughters,

"In the sixteenth century, Bengal was called the Paradise of Nations. Do they teach these things in the schools here? Does Shahana know about the Paradise of Nations? All she knows about is flood and famine. . . . If you have history you have pride" (185).

But his daughter particularly Shahana is not ready to acclimatize with the history, culture and tradition of Bangladesh. This lack of her interest makes Chanu worried.

The conflict between them becomes worse and fierce when he tries to impose his views, Bengali culture on her and she always riposte him back by saying, "I didn't ask to be born here" (181). Shahana is not as passionate as Chanu about Bengali culture. She tries to justify her position by saying that if she is born here, she will follow the customs and traditions of 'here'; she is not born here by her own choice. She is not familiar with Bengali culture; hence it is very difficult for her to follow that. Chanu thinks that Shahana has repugnance and disinclination to Bangladesh because of what they are taught in school. He often says, "No. This is not what they teach. All flood here and famine there and taking up collection tins" (186).

The second generation gets easily attracted to 'host country' and their way of life changes, which creates lots of conflicts in two generations. The second generation immigrants live a life very different from

#### INTERGENERATIONAL CONFLICT IN MONICA ALI'S *BRICK LANE*

that of the first generation. Chanu is still living in two cultures, his identity is in flux, he does not want to give up his older identity. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin write,

“Post-colonial culture is inevitably a hybridized phenomenon involving a dialectical relationship between the grafted European cultural systems and an indigenous ontology, with its impulse to create or recreate an independent local identity” (195).

On the other hand his daughter is unable to relate to her Bangladeshi identity. She is a typical second generation immigrant.

Shahana did not want to listen to Bengali classical music. Her written Bengali was shocking. She wanted to wear jeans .she hated her kameez and spoiled her entire wardrobe by pouring paint on them . . . When Bangladesh was mentioned she pulled a face. She did not know and would not learn that Tagore was more than a poet and Nobel laureate, and no less the true father of her nation. . . . Shahana did not want to go back home. (180)

Chanu, thus, always has this fear in mind that daughters will totally give up their native identity as they grow older, so he decides to move back to Bangladesh before it's too late. To justify his views about his return he says:

I'm talking about the clash between Western values and our own. I'm talking about the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve one's identity and heritage. I'm talking about children who don't know what their identity is. I'm talking about the feelings of alienation engendered by a society where racism is prevalent (113).

#### **He says that this place is not suitable for his daughters. As he comments:**

“It's so ingrained in the fabric of society. Back home, if you drink you risk being an outcast. In London, if you don't drink you risk the same thing. That's when it becomes dangerous, and when they start so young they can easily end up alcoholic” (110).

Shahana straight away opposes her father's views and considers London as her home and she is not ready to accept Bangladesh as her home which results in conflict with her father, “There was always this tension between them. They could never get over their disappointments” (193).

She always tells her mother, “What do I care? I hate him. I hate him” (194). This shows that she has no respect and love towards her father. On her father's decision to go back to Bangladesh, she is not ready and to show her anger against his decision she ran from home when they were about to leave.

The second generation immigrants get easily attracted to 'host land' way of life and they try to move like them which create conflict between two generations. The first generation immigrants often complaints about the younger ones life styles and says, “. . .the young ones would do anything. If they lit a cigarette in the street and they saw an elder coming, they did not bother to hide it. They walked with their girlfriends. They even kissed, in the street, in front of an elder” (312). Dr. Azad also comments about the second generation and says,

“[N]ow our children are copying what they see here, going to the pub, to nightclubs. Or drinking at home in their bedrooms where their parents think they are perfectly safe. The problem is our community is not properly educated about these things” (31).

There is a difference in the views of the first and second generation and how they se and lead life. The parents live a very different life from that of the children. The parents force the children to follow the norms of the native land while on the other hand the identity of the children's is formed according to the 'host land' culture. When the children do not come up to the terms of their parents the conflict rises.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Thus from the above discussion we can conclude that the conflicts between children and parents characterize the novel. Intergenerational conflicts arise when the immigrant's parents disapprove their children's adoption of westernized values and culture. So, the conflict between the first and second generation becomes by no means inevitable. One can very easily feel and see the difference in the attitude and behaviour of the first and second generation immigrants.

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