

**A STUDY ON THE STRATEGIES AND STAGES OF ACCULTURATION
ADAPTED BY THE MIGRANTS IN THE NOVEL “BRICK LANE” BY MONICA
ALI**

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Abstract

Monica Ali, a Bangladeshi born British author is a first-generation diasporic writer who voices out the cultural conflicts and the challenges faced by the migrants in the foreign land through her works. Her 2013 novel *Brick Lane* is one such novel that deals with cultural challenges faced by a Bangladeshi family in England. Culture defines an individual and a group of individuals defines a culture. In this way, culture and humans cannot be separated as it is deeply rooted in everyone's identity and behaviour. With the changes in geographical location adaptation and adjustment to the new cultural practices in the host land is a very difficult task for the migrants. When an individual or a community comes to adapt and adjust to the new cultural values of the foreign land the process of acculturation takes place. It can be either a conscious or unconscious processes. The characters in the above-mentioned novel struggle hard to amalgamate with the new culture which in turn creates a psychological impact on them. This proposed paper aims to analyse different stages and strategies of

acculturation followed by the migrant characters to adapt and adjust to the new dominant culture in the host society by applying certain concepts propounded by theorists.

Keywords: Cultural conflicts, diasporic elements, geographical space, acculturation stages, strategies to adapt.

1. Introduction

Culture is the identity of an individual and the self that moulds a person in one's life. Every culture is unique and it has its impact on the individual. In this world of diverse cultures adapting to the new culture becomes a huge struggle for anyone. As *Diaspora* is defined as the dispersion of a person or a group of people from their homeland, the major conflict which they encounter in the foreign land is their adaptation to the new culture. There are several reasons for the migration of people such as social, political, economical, and religious reasons. The

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condition of their survival in an unknown country depends upon the condition on which they migrated and the duration of the period of their stay in that country. The terms like immigration, emigration, exile, and expatriates are all interlinked with diasporic literature. The factors like language, dress, and socio-cultural environment deepen the problem of nation and identity once the migration takes place. When these factors of various cultures amalgamate acculturation process occurs through different stages and strategies. The migrants face geographical differences concerning cultural practices. These differences have their effect on both the first generation and the second-generation immigrants.

In the novel *Brick Lane*, the diasporic writer Monica Ali vividly explains the migrant life of a Bangladeshi family in the dominant land of England. All the characters in the novel acculturate to the dominant culture by following certain strategies and stages of adaptation. This research paper examines the characters' acculturation with the assistance of the acculturation model developed by John Widdup Berry a Canadian psychologist. According to his model, there are four acculturation strategies that every migrant adheres to

merge with the host culture. They are Integration, separation, assimilation, and marginalization. When it comes to stages of adaptation the researcher applied the concept of the U-Curve theory of adjustment as proposed by Norwegian sociologist Sverre Lysgaard. This concept says four non-linear stages ultimately lead to the adaptation of the host culture. Everyone doesn't need to stick to a particular strategy and stage to adapt and adjust to the host culture rather it depends upon the individual.

2. Acculturation Strategies

Nazneen and her husband Chanu are the major characters in the novel *Brick Lane*. They move from their native land Bangladesh to England to earn their bread. Being from a traditional Bangladeshi community they both suffer initially to live in those new circumstances of different cultural practices. Later they blend themselves to adjust and adapt to the host culture by following certain strategies. Several minor characters also choose a particular way to live in that host society. Acculturation is the cultural bridge between the native and host country. It influences at the individual level and a group level. The following figure clearly explains the four-fold acculturation model by Berry.

ACCULTURATION MODEL

| | Identification with Heritage Culture High | Identification with Heritage Culture Low |
|---|--|---|
| Identification with New Culture High | INTEGRATION | ASSIMILATION |
| Identification with New Culture Low | SEPARATION | MARGINALIZATION |

Figure 1

Integration is one of the acculturation strategies in which an individual in a foreign land, seek to identify them with both their heritage and native culture along with their new and alienated

culture. They create contact with the society and circumstances of the foreign values and beliefs so that their behaviour is balanced by both the cultures. Chanu though lived in London before his

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marriage, still finds it difficult to adapt to the host culture. He is a pure traditional Bangladeshi who always sticks to the cultural behaviours of his own country. He is a man who follows the strategy of integration. He lives in London to get a respectable job as he mastered English Literature. He often quotes from the works of English authors to substantiate his views. In his home he always speaks Bengali with his family. He always talks about the *"tragedies of the immigrants"* from his own experiences of adapting to new a culture. This is seen as an example of how he balances both the cultures for his existence in London and also to show his respect for his native culture. The following words of Chanu, "I don't stop you from doing anything. I am westernized now" (36) is the reply to his wife when she asked him to allow her to go out. Though he became westernized he does not allow her wife to wander in the streets of London that would bring a bad name to him. So he is part western and partly eastern in his behaviours. He is a character who wishes not to give up his culture completely but also to be recognized in the foreign host society. "The pull of the land is stronger even than the pull of blood" (25). This line shows his dilemma between the native culture and host culture. As he states that the pull of the land is stronger, at the end of the novel, he returns to his own country Bangladesh.

In the strategy of cultural assimilation, an individual or group of people wish to be identified only with their host culture and not with their native cultural values. They ignore their native customs and traditions and give importance to their foreign values. In the novel, the second-generation children of the Bangladeshi community in London assimilate with the host culture. Though their roots were in Bangladesh, they always prefer to follow the practices of the dominant culture. Shahana, the elder daughter of Chanu and Nazneen rejects everything that is of Bengali origin. *"I didn't ask to be born here"* (135). This word shows the attitude of Shahana which is against her native cultural behaviour. She embraces the host culture. She is not like her mother of politeness and humbles rather she is very brave and she dares to open her heart and mind to ask whatever she wants. The way of dressing and food that she prefers is always the western style. This creates a culture clash within their family as her parents still respect their Bangladeshi culture. So it is visible from those second-generation characters that they aim to be identified with their host culture, not their native beliefs.

An individual or group of people, who aim to follow the acculturation strategy of separation, seek to value their own native culture as superior and important and not their new culture and practices. Chanu, for example always

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narrates the history of Bangladesh and its culture and tradition to his daughters.

“If you have a history, you see, you have a pride. The whole world was going to Bengal to do trade. Sixteenth century and seventeenth century Dhaka was the home of textiles. Who invented all this muslin and damask and every damn thing? It was us. All the Dutch and Portuguese and French and British queuing up to buy... It was stable. It was educated. It provided- we provided- one-third of the revenues of Britain’s Indian Empire” (139).

But they always stand against the culture of Bangladesh which creates disgusting and sullen feelings in the mind of Chanu. “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” (92). He is very much worried about his own culture because he feels that would be spoiled by the western values.

Marginalisation is another way of acculturation strategy in which an individual or a group follows either their own culture or their dominant host culture. They feel that they are not comfortable with both the culture in a foreign land. So they are not identified with their root culture or the new culture. 'Marginalisation' in particular, may be viewed as a conceptually problematic orientation, as it has been defined as an

orientation where an individual does not want to participate in either national or ethnic culture and is argued to be related to more psychological and adaptation problems (Berry, 2001). When a person follows the strategy of marginalization to acculturate they are not identified with either the home culture or the host culture. If they embrace marginalization strategy, they are not oppressed in the society rather they are identified with their own unique culture.

By analysing the novel *Brick Lane* with the four-fold model of acculturation, it is evident from the above analysis that each individual acculturates with the host culture by following different acculturation strategies.

3. Stages of Acculturation

3.1 U Curve Theory of Adjustment:

The U Curve theory of adjustment was initially introduced by Norwegian sociologist Sverre Lysgaard in 1955. This model was further developed by many other scholars. This theory is related to how the immigrants or the sojourners adjust and adapt to the host cultures through different stages. According to Lysgaard, four non-linear stages ultimately lead to the adaptation of the host culture. Lysgaard hypothesized that “the cultural adjustment as a process over time follows U shaped curve.” The following figure shows the U curve model proposed by Lysgaard.

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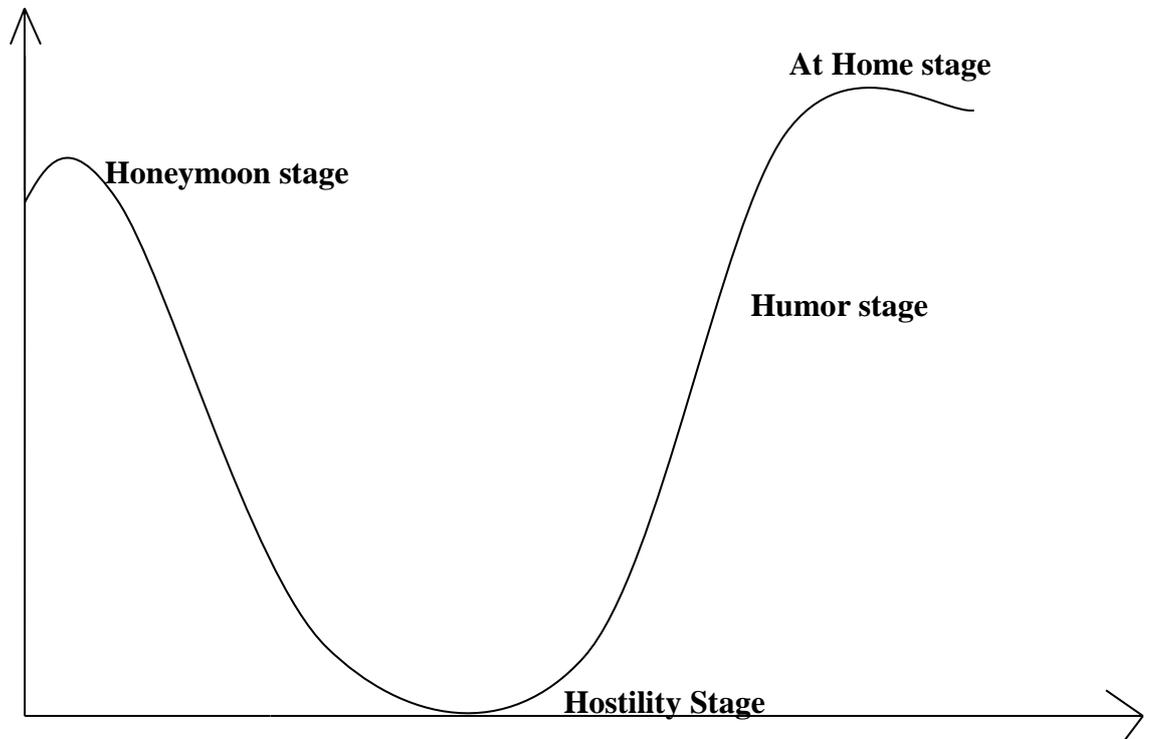


Figure 2

Sverre Lysgaard proposed the U-curve theory which is a process of acculturation or how they merge with the host culture gradually crossing several phases. This theory includes four stages of the acculturation process namely Honeymoon stage, Hostility stage, Humor stage, and At home stage. The theorist says that the migrants or the sojourners adapt and follow the host or dominant culture completely only after crossing these four above stages. All these four phases include both the mother culture and the unknown culture. It is impossible that a person from one culture can be easily and suddenly merge

with the new culture. The time taken to adjust to the new culture differs from one person to another. It may be weeks, months, and sometimes a year. Some people find the cultural differences interesting and stimulating so they adjust to the new culture easily. Whereas some other people experience discomfort and confusion when they adapt to alien cultures. Adapting to another culture is a process that is a psychological and sociological action. The following figure shows the process of adjustment to the new culture.

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Honeymoon stage is the first phase of cultural adjustment in the U-curve theory. It is a stage full of positive energy and excitement. A person who is new to the culture feels overwhelmingly positive and enthusiastically approaches the situations in the new circumstances. In this stage, one interestingly observes and familiarise the new culture. Here the immigrants develop a first social contact with the host society. Nazneen is also a kind of person who struggles initially to cope with the new culture but she enters her first phase when she gets into London Street for the first time. Her first experience in the city motivates her to anticipate what to come in her future.

Hostility stage is the second stage of facing cultural shock and adjusting to that culture. At this stage, the immigrants become resentful of the new culture. The new behaviours and cultural practices develop unhappiness in the minds of immigrants. They feel alienated in the new society. The kind of excitement and curiosity the immigrants underwent during the first stage of cultural adjustment turns into aversion towards the host culture. Nazneen stepped into the second stage of a culture shock when she encountered the adamant behaviour of Razia's son and daughter. They nagged their mother to get them the same football that their white classmates own. This kind of adamant behaviour is not experienced by her in Gouripur. Now she experiences the shock of how the cultural

displacement transforms a person's behaviour that spoils the native culture of that person. This made her feel unhappy towards the host culture. She also worries the majority culture would spoil her root culture. The hostility stage is the download slope of the curve theory that creates frustration in the host culture.

Humor phase is the third stage where the adjustment to the host culture begins. In this stage, the minority community gradually adjust to unfamiliar practices. They develop a network of relationships with the minority community. Only at this stage transition happens and they begin to acclimatize with the new culture. Nazneen's reaches her humor stage when she stepped into the streets of London alone. In the Muslim community, women are not allowed to go out freely. But as she is in a society of complete freedom she can act against the practices of her religion. This is the first scene of Nazneen's adjustment to the new culture. Though she knows only two words of thank you and sorry in English, she conversed in English with the white stranger in the unknown and unfamiliar geographical space. When she started adjusting to the foreign culture, she transformed herself into a free and independent woman by adjusting to the new culture.

The final stage is the At Home stage of adapting the new culture as proposed by Lysgaard in his U-curve

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theory of cultural adjustment. Adapting to an unfamiliar culture is spatial and temporal. At this stage, the immigrants or the minority community completely adapt to the new culture. Though there are cultural differences between the host and native culture, the immigrants adapt to them without any discomfort. The acceptance of the dominant culture doesn't mean that the home culture is neglected. Adapting to the new culture is the survival strategy. Sometimes this stage is also skipped thereby adjusting to the host culture prevails a long time and the at home stage is not reached. Nazneen is a character who skips this stage of adaptation. This is evident from the way she acts towards her second-generation daughters in London. They always wish to follow the practices of western culture. But she is against their desires and condemns their hostile attitude towards their own home culture. At the end of the novel, though she was admired by the western culture she doesn't return to her home country with her husband Chanu. Rather she adjusted to the host culture to explore her self of identity.

The U-curve theory of cultural adjustment is a step by step cultural transition of an individual from one stage to another till adapting to the host culture. Cultural adjustment and adaptation don't happen suddenly. It is a timely action. It involves the social and psychological balance of experiencing the new culture.

4. Conclusion

Culture is unique to each community and it includes food, costumes, religion, language, etc. Any migrated individual should be psychologically fit to acclimatize with the new culture. The time to stick with the host culture depends upon the individual. Mrs. Azad is another character who prefers the practices of the western style. She adapts herself to the new culture thereby she smokes, drinks wears short skirts which are against the Bengali culture. Though the western country dominates the minority community some characters acculturate with them for their survival in the foreign land.

In postcolonial society, cultural diversity is inevitable and the colonization of the west over the east has its effect in all aspects. The first world's dominance over the second and the third world countries are economically, culturally, and politically strong. Immigrants face huge struggles in first world countries such as the linguistic barriers, cultural barriers, etc. Language is the mode of communication in any space. Unfamiliarity with the dominant language in the foreign land leads to isolation and alienation of the minority community. Nazneen feels isolated because of her unfamiliarity with the English language. Adjustments and adaptation to the unfamiliar society are necessary for the survival of humans.

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So, later she linguistically acclimatizes with the western language for her survival.

Immigrants' tragedies in foreign land are initially hard to adapt. Later the society transforms them to follow the dominant culture. Though they are in another country, the bond with their home country always haunts them and they long to return to their native country. The nostalgic memories are the medium through which the immigrants are connected with their native roots. Geographical space can transform the individual culturally. The novel *Brick*

Lane by Monica Ali stands as the best example for the theme of diasporic elements and acculturation.

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