



**EAST WEST UNIVERSITY**

**Tracing Nationalism in Zia Haider Rahman's *In The Light of What We Know* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane***

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**Tracing Nationalism in Zia Haider Rahman's *In The Light of What We Know*  
and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane***

**A Thesis**

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The Department of English  
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By  
Md. Kamruzzaman  
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**In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree  
Of  
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## Declaration

I Md. Kamruzzaman, confirm that the work for the following thesis paper with the title,

Tracing Nationalism in Zia Haider Rahman's *In The Light of What We Know* and Monica Ali's

*Brick Lane*

was solely undertaken by myself and that no help was provided by anyone except the guidance of my supervisor. All sections of the thesis that use quotations and arguments or descriptions by other authors have been acknowledged appropriately and I have maintained all the ethical code and conduct accordance with academic regulations.

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## Certificate of Supervisor

I certify that this thesis, under the title, “Tracing Nationalism in Zia Haider Rahman’s *In The Light of What We Know* and Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*” is supervised by me, Afrin Zeenat, and I hereby declare that this thesis maintains all the requirements as a dissertation for the fulfillment of the degree of Masters in Arts in English Literature.

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## Abstract

Diaspora literature raises issues of immigrant's crisis in a distant land and national value is always a concern of identity and existence. Culture, belongingness, root and mother land are the basis of identity and nationalism is the ideology behind forming those ideas. Rahman and Ali's novels *In The Light of What We Know* and *Brick Lane* significantly contribute to diaspora literature to a great extent. Nationalism is an innate ideology that creates an imaginary world within a world and individuals are attached to the ancestral home land which is the source of their identity. This paper intends to analyze Rahman and Ali's transnational characters as nationalists in various contexts. Though these characters live in a distant land but they always keep good connection with the home land. The first chapter of this paper explores the notion of classical nationalism in *In The Light of What We Know* and *Brick Lane* in light of Anderson's *Imagined Community* where culture and community play a major role of identity. The following chapter will discuss about globalized nationalism called long-distance nationalism where immigrants maintain strong connection and loyalty to the ancestral land by contributing in many ways. The final chapter deals with neo-colonialism in both the texts on the basis of *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* to explore the nationalistic agenda of the neo-colonizer. By analyzing different characters and events, this paper explores the nationalist approach of both the writers in *In The Light of What We Know* and *Brick Lane*.

## Introduction

The twenty first century has modified the definition of many potential ideologies and concepts of politics and human existence. Human belongingness is an important fact of the present globalized world where, its living descendants are fluctuating from one identity to another. The crisis of identity and existence is phenomenally a frustrating and fragmented condition which is the result of globalization. Migration creates a world where immigrants are stuck with a complex system of transnational identity and this issue of transnationalism has become one of the most crucial aspects in the understanding of diaspora culture. With the necessity of being redefined, Classic nationalism has to form different schools considering globalization as a process of blurring boarder. The globalized world creates a more complex identity which means there is no single identity to rely on rather an individual belongs to many different identities and cultures but at the same time everyone preferably imagines to hold one identity over other identities. It can be self-assuring or socially driven identity that matters to an individual with which others recognize as theroot of the person and all these ideologies are constructed through nationalism. Terms like community, culture, root, identity, existence and home are the basic ideas through what nationalism expands its roots. Anderson remarks, " If the nationalist imagining is so concerned, this suggests a strong affinity with religious imaginings. As this affinity is by no means fortuitous, it may be useful to begin a consideration of cultural roots of nationalism with death, the last of a whole gamut of fatalities" (10). Nationalists do not gain the status by fortune rather it is a behavior and an ideology formed out of religious and cultural value. The idea of nationalism gives society an incentive to create a particular sense of community or nation-state out of cultural and racial identity which stands out from other cultures and the people of that particular community are identified according to the feature of those



nationalistic characteristics. People living in the imaginary homeland or abroad are recognized according to their ethnicity. Diaspora literature deals with immigrant's social condition, struggle and crisis in their home land and abroad with different circumstances. Though most of them hold citizenship of the adopted country, but diaspora literature observes immigrant's identity and social status with respect to their country of origin. This paper studies nationalism in Zia Haider Rahman's *In The Light of What We Know* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* to analyze the nationalistic approach of both the writers. To conduct the research, this paper considers three different aspects of nationalism including classical nationalism based on Benedict Anderson's *The Imagined communities*, Nina Glick Schiller's "Long-distance Nationalism" and expansion nationalism based on "Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism" by Kwame Nkrumah. The observation of different character's affinity for homeland, their activity, struggles and crises in these literary pieces are closely analyzed to connect to their nationalist feeling to prove that despite having citizenship of the adopted country, patriotism is never left behind because of motherly affinity towards the homeland.

This paper will explore different aspects of nationalism in these two novels by focusing on Benedict Anderson's *The Imagined Communities* to support the main theoretical idea. This study is intended to find out nationalistic approach in Rahman and Ali's novels to show how community, culture, ethnicity and root shape a nationalistic identity. Lloyd S. Kramer comments that

Nationalism has deep roots, because the people in each specific ethnic or national community learn the stories of a shared past that are "handed down from generation to generation in the form of subjective 'ethnohistory,' which sets limits to current aspirations and perceptions." Smith assumes that this "ethnohistory" or "ethnosymbolic"

memory sets the parameters of national cultures and forces the would-be creators of a national identity to reconstruct the “traditions, customs and institutions of the ethnic community or communities.

So, the tradition and culture is passed down from generation to generation and the tradition or the cultural boundary is made out of that ethno cultural history where people follow the ancestral homeland so that the national identity is reserved whether they live at home or abroad. These novels show the connection towards the homeland while they live in another nation as a citizen. A diaspora community will live and hold a citizenship of their host nation but will always hold responsibility to their ancestral land which they call home. A transnationalist may hold loyalty to both countries equally, but in most of the cases it creates a mixture of identity. Diaspora nationalism is very similar to the agenda of classic nationalism in twenty first century world where people are distanced from their home but will always be in touch with the homeland. Immigrants cannot simply call their host nation ‘home’ and contribute to the homeland when the mother nation demands similar contribution. Characters of these two diaspora novels contribute to their ancestral land in many ways, by contributing money, organizing community, protesting for the rights of a particular community within the country etc. The most cruel and extreme nationalism is implemented by establishing colonies and in the present time neo-colonialism is an example of expansion nationalism in the name of humanitarian aid, which is simply a nationalist agenda of the neo-colonialist. *In The Light of What We Know* describes a lot about Afghan war which was an invasion and *Brick Lane* shows the effects of post 9/11 war which highlights the political unrest in the world politics and in particular communities which protest against the discrimination toward the western Muslim immigrants. Though there are

some differences among the fundamentals of the schools of nationalism but all the aspects are closely connected to the classic nationalism and the system is for the benefit of nation state.

This thesis is divided into three chapters; chapter 1 is “Nationalism in Diaspora Literature: *In The Light of What We Know* and *Brick Lane* Evoke Nationalism among Immigrants.” Nationalism is a very old idea of nation-state where culture and community bring people together to exist as a nation within a nation. The basic understanding of it requires many concepts to be considered. This work will reveal that community, belongingness, culture and many other forms of human existence is somehow triggered by nationalism. This chapter will focus on *The Imagined Community* by Benedict Anderson to help establishing my claim of Nationalistic approach of Rahman’s debut novel *In The Light of What We Know* and Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane*. Initially this part will approach the concept of belongingness and formation of community, where culture plays a major part between these two diaspora novels.

The second chapter “Tracing Long-distance Nationalism in *In The Light of What We Know* and *Brick Lane*” of this thesis analyzes these two texts according to Nina Glick Schiller’s easy “Long-distance Nationalism” to show that Rahman and Ali’s characters are mentally and voluntarily connected to the ancestral land while they are living in their host nation. Despite being distanced from the homeland and living in transnational settings those members serve some responsibility and loyalty to the ancestral home. It will talk about Rahman and Ali’s characters and their diasporic nationalism and will show the contributions they make for the imaginary homeland. In *Brick Lane*, Chanu’s character clarifies the contributions of immigrants to their mother land. On the other hand, Zafar makes people aware of the neo-colonial agenda of western nations. This chapter will also consider transnationalism to study the nature of the characters to show how these characters are connected and devoted to both nations.

The final chapter is “Expansion Nationalism: Neo-colonialism in *In The Light of What We Know and Brick Lane*”. This is the oldest among the schools of nationalism; it started with the establishment of colonies with nationalistic agenda. This chapter focuses on “Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism” by Kwame Nkrumah to show how globalization, cultural hegemony, and humanitarian imperialism serve nationalistic agenda of western world. This chapter also focuses on the post 9/11 state to compare its effects both in the east and west. It discusses two facts one of which is how westerners deal with the land or perhaps more precisely hide their activities with a camouflage like “war on terror”. This includes the establishment of so called NGOs to save the land from rotting. The modern and perhaps a very subtle way of extending colonialism through helping hand like NGOs contribute protecting the neo-colonial agenda. It is the era of globalization where cultural and economic control brings enough profit for certain countries like Britain and America. It is difficult to continue with the old fashioned colonial practice but the benefit can be gained by the newer version of colonialism which is Neo-colonialism. This paper will establish a strong argument that neo-colonialism and nationalism is deeply connected to each other because colonies are established for the benefit of the colonizers.

## Chapter 1

### **Nationalism in Diaspora Literature: *In The Light of What We Know* and *Brick Lane* Evoke Nationalism among Immigrants.**

Nationalism is such a critical concept for understanding our own value. Community, belongingness, culture and many other forms of human existence are somehow triggered by a nationalistic sense. This chapter will focus on *The Imagined Community* by Benedict Anderson to help me establish my claim of the nationalistic approach of Rahman in his debut novel *In The Light of What We Know* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*. The first part of this chapter will analyze some major characters to understand their nationalistic value, formation of community and their feeling to homeland. Initially this part will explore the concept of belongingness and formation of community, where culture plays a major part in these two diaspora novels. *In The Light of What We Know* reveals its theme of exile where Zafar has the feeling of existential crisis and in *Brick Lane*, Nazneen, Karim and Chanu have the same crisis. This chapter deals with the condition of characters in the western and eastern settings where they come up with their view of home and abroad to show how confused they are.

*In The Light of What We Know* is a widely acclaimed work of Rahman, which is an exhilarating story of love, belongingness and war. The narrator is a nearly 40 year old investment banker based in New York whose job is at risk a failed marriage. Zafar, a long lost friend arrives in his West London townhouse. *In The Light of What We Know* takes us on a journey to several places, which are significant to the content of the novel. Zafar travels to a number of places from where he gets different kind of experiences. In the story, Zafar explores the world as we know it. On the other hand, Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* tells a story about a village girl, Nazneen given in

marriage to an immigrant, Chanu, settled in London. The story is about a cross-cultural presentation of the life of immigrants living in London. It explores immigrant lives and their struggles in the distant land, different in culture. Brick Lane is a place in Tower Hamlet where most people are Bangladeshi. Surviving in a transcultural metropolis is not easy and it becomes more complicated after the incident of 9/11 and the great recession.

We have an innate fascination for community, culture and home. People living in a distant land for centuries but it does not make them belong to that land despite having citizenship because s/he is recognized by cultural background and ethnicity. It is not just a feeling of the individual rather the setting and treatment of the society that makes them feel that way. And nationhood is the ideology which harbors all those feelings for which people can even kill anyone for the imaginary homeland. The concept of nationalism is a very critical and an ancient ideology that has created an enormous impact on human lives and even has given birth to imperialism. Rahman puts such an effort to show his characters struggling throughout their lives in a western setting and cultivates a soft corner for the homeland though some of the characters are totally confused about where they belong but it eventually proves that their root has at least something to do with their own existence in this globalized world. Tom Nairn informs us,

Nationalism is the pathology of modern developmental history of as inescapable as neurosis in the individual with much the same essential ambiguity attaching to it a similar built-in capacity for descent into dementia, rooted in the dilemmas of helplessness thrust upon most of the world and largely incurable. (qtd. in Anderson 5)

It is inevitable that an individual will always be dealing with nationalism as it is an innate psychological behavior which cannot be left behind whether s/he acts accordingly or not but his

mind must be conceptualizing the nationalistic sense. It is not necessary to become a hardcore nationalist but some instincts will always be defending the soft corner for the homeland or culture.

*In The Light of What We Know* and *Brick Lane* are two wonderful novels that deliver the message of crises in the lives of all characters in a transnational setting. People from third world country like Bangladesh migrate to the west but are they happy with their financial security only or do they also struggles with their cultural values and belongingness. Rahman has given an astonishing description with deep knowledge and vision where Zafar, the protagonist, living a pathetic life. On the other hand Monica Ali's protagonist Nazneen is dealing with financial crisis, mental suffering, and definitely has trouble fitting into the western society. She is not educated like Zafar but she also feels the same for her homeland. For intellectuals like Zafar, it is easy to describe his dilemma but for Nazneen, it is not easy at all. Though Chanu can understand his own value as he is a self-declared intellectual but he was not in any dilemma like Zafar and Nazneen. Rahman and Ali both have shared the common ground of immigrant's dilemma in their characters who always try to find out their own value in this transnational world where people still seek their own political and existential value. The first chapter of *In the Light of What We Know*, shows Zafar's interest in a map while he was sitting in the narrator's house. Though he surveys other collections but he is stuck looking at an old map of Indian subcontinent under British Raj where he draws his eyes to the north east corner where Bangladesh sits. The narrator says,

Zafar surveyed all this but his eyes settled on the far wall that was covered with my father's collection of old maps, mounted and framed, of the Indian Subcontinent under the British Raj, an area that today stretches from Pakistan across India and Bangladesh.

Zafar drew up to the maps and it was apparent that his focus had fixed on one in particular, a map of the north-east corner of the subcontinent. (5)

This event reminds us of some important facts of divided India, 1947, the partition of India and Pakistan and 1971, when East Pakistan and West Pakistan become separated. Both the events occurred on the basis of religion and language. The map of the Indian subcontinent represents one nation state of India but when the separation took place the Pakistani president took advantage of religion and the common people rallied for partition. It is not only religion but also cultural differences that have helped break this land and obviously the idea of nationalism was rooted among the people of both nations. We can see Muslims have sympathy for Muslims, so despite being geographically distant, Pakistan and Bangladesh had separated from India. The nationalistic agenda has to be fulfilled through religious blindness that people have soft corner for. It is not necessary to know anyone but personally sharing similar cultural and religious beliefs can unite people as it happened in undivided India.

Considering Zafar's feelings for a particular part of the map as just a feeling of belongingness, despite having British citizenship he keeps a good connection with Bangladesh. It is never said throughout the novel that he belongs here but he shows a certain amount of emotion which makes him feel better and becomes nostalgic. The beginning, takes place in the narrator's home in New York where he becomes nostalgic and continues the story of the journey to Bangladesh. This first expression makes it clear that both the narrator and Zafar have good connection and knowledge about homeland and often think about their own roots.

On the other hand, Monica Ali's protagonist, Nazneen struggles in London with her husband Chanu. It is very interesting that the novel titled *Brick Lane* carries a very significant



meaning to the Bengali community in London. The inhabitants of Brick Lane are mostly Bangladeshis, particularly from Sylhet. Anderson points out, people do not need to know each other but they are comfortable with their own culture and concept of community which is raised by nationalistic sense. It is not only Brick Lane but many other places in western countries where Bangladeshi people live in Bengali community so that people can keep in touch with their culture and retain nationalism. In *Brick Lane* Nazneen keeps remembering her childhood and always gives credit to the mother land, the image of Bangladesh. Life in England seems unpleasant while Bangladesh gives her the idea of peace. Ali beautifully describes Nazneen's dream,

She looked out across jade-green rice fields and swam in the cool dark lake. She walked arm-in-arm to school with Hasina, and skipped part of the way and fell and they dusted their knees with their hands and the myna bird called from the trees and the goat fretted...And haven, which was above, was wide and empty and the land stretched out ahead and she could see the very end of it (16).

The dust in Brick Lane is quite unpleasant while in her village dust seems very pleasant and she used to dust her own body out of entertainment. The very understanding of her own belongingness is quite full with happy memories and when the concept of home is there, nothing seems peaceful but homeland. Ali notes, "You see said Chanu when he explained this for the first time most of our people here are Sylhetis. They will stick together because they come from the same district. They know each other from the villages, and they come to Tower Hamlet and they think they are back in the village." (21) Though they are living in London but their feeling is indigenous. It is a nation within a nation. It is human nature to promote their cultural value and to establish own value, there is no better option than creating and enhancing a particular community

within another. It is not necessary to apply one's nationalistic agenda strategically because people more often do it unconsciously and the trigger is always there in our hearts which is called the "pull of the land" which is stronger than the "pull of blood" as it is mentioned by Chanu (24). He even says "Their bodies are here but their hearts are back there" (24). Wherever people live, the homeland always pulls them back. Anderson says that, "Part of the difficulty is that one tends unconsciously to hypothesize the existence of Nationalism-with-big-N (rather than Age-with-capital-A) and then to classify 'it' as an ideology (5)". He also says, ideology always works like a 'religion' and 'kinship' rather than 'liberalism' and 'fascism'. We can say that it is not something to be implemented in people's mind but it naturally comes from the society, community, culture and eventually from the strategic goal of a particular government where education and media help them install the sense of patriotism, even without mentioning the word 'Nationalism'.

In the second chapter of *In the Light of What We Know*, Zafar has a sweet sense of describing Bangladesh but it is interesting that he is confused about his own belongingness and struggling to understand his identity. Zafar, despite having a negative impression, has a peaceful feeling, thinking of his motherland. While he was describing Afghanistan, he proudly praises Bangladesh, particularly Sylhet as 'my beautiful Sylhet'. An interesting fact is that he loves to identify himself as British but the ideology which is rooted in his blood cannot be removed. His root plays an enormously important role in his life and creates a beautiful image of the motherland. The novel carries the theme of exile and Zafar being the person behind the shadowy curtain always comes up with a feeling of exile. Having a British citizenship, he cannot help getting out of that feeling. The other immigrants coming from various parts of the world to live in another country experience similar feelings. For Zafar it is quite hard to find his own

existence, he was born in Bangladesh, raised in Britain by his adopted parents and fathered by a Pakistani which is even unknown to him. So the idea of borders and nationhood becomes a complicated matter for him. Treatment of British community is not much convincing and he cannot fit into the Bangladeshi environment because he is habituated with western life style. It is even more complicated to fit into British society because of his obsession for elites. In every way he feels unsatisfied about his existence and feels he is politically, biologically and culturally exiled from this transcultural world. Rahman informs us that:

Zafar was an exile, a refugee, if not from war, then of war, but also from blood. He was driven, I think, to find a home in the world of books, a world peopled with ideas, whose companionship is offered free and clear, and with the promise that questions would never long be without answers or better questions. (51)

Looking for home is a form of exile which is happening in this present world because of war mongering of superior nations. People like Zafar will never be settled in a particular place or homeland. Society ignores his presence and his existence; even his blood will show the same attitude. As Edward Said states in *Reflections on Exile*, "Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the inhalable rift forced between a human being and a native place between the self and its true home; its essential sadness can never be surmounted"(174). It is the feeling that can only be understood by the person who experienced the pain. And Rahman quotes this in the first chapter of the novel. On the other hand, in *Brick Lane* Chanu took his final decision of returning to Bangladesh leaving his children and wife behind because he feels the pull of the home is stronger than the pull of blood. All these feelings come from the feeling of nationalism and the pull for the imaginary home.

On the contrary, the idea of homeland evokes enormously different and strange feelings for Zafar, as he has suffered in Bangladesh. Though he has described Bangladesh as an experience of horror and pain, may be because of his western life style, he could not fit into the Bangladeshi environment initially but at the end he felt a kind of peace while staying in his birth place. His experience of Britain is not satisfying too because of his ethnicity. It is the writer who has experienced a lot about western living and Zafar is the creation of his subconscious in terms of his feeling of homeland. For technological advancement, western life style is better but in Bangladeshi villages, it is terrifying, there is no electricity, automobiles which is definitely painful for anyone lives in western countries. But something gives a little bit of peace when it is about homeland. And Zafar has the exact feeling for the time spent in Bangladesh when he says that

Those years in Bangladesh were all in all years of tranquility. They did indeed begin with horror and end with pain- I will come to that- but in between they were peaceful years, and there is nothing to say about them except this: Peace, day out, does not make for memories but collapses into a haze of warm feeling like long summers of play and plenty. Yet can there be doubt that peace and stability are what a child needs most? (58)

His way of presenting everything clearly says that the land he is connected with has so much to offer while the country, he is living in cannot provide him solace. The confusion that he has is a transnational dilemma, something he barely understood in his early ages. He was not sure about his identity and came up with a statement that: "I was twelve years old and travelling alone across a country that was neither home nor foreign to me" (59). This is a feeling of the individuals of globalized world where people are not certain of their belongingness, particularly those who are living in a distant place from their motherland. If there was no sense of

nationalism, people would not even think this way. The same confusion is shared by Karim in *Brick Lane*; he has always tried to live like a British. He has even tried to establish his identity as a British but is it possible for him to fit into that definition of a British? Karim considers himself as a British and proudly says, “This is my country” (175), while he was having a conversation with Nazneen. He also proudly points out that he has problem uttering Bangla properly but he can speak English without any hesitation. This is a kind of fantasy that we all have and we pretend to belong somewhere we aspire to belong. Zafar also has the same aspiring fantasy to belong to the elites but it is inevitable that his wish would not be granted. Zafar becomes intimate with Emily, a British elite, so that he can become one of them, but he realizes that he would not become one of them, may be his children might belong to the British aristocracy.

All these fantasies of the immigrant take us to another form of nationalism where they pretend to be loyal to the country of naturalization. It is said that every story has three different versions. Whatever we do or whoever we take side of, carries a meaning. If we say that Zafar and Karim both are nationalists because they have the same feeling for Britain as they belong to Great Britain but both have the pull of the ancestral land, it will not be naïve in a sense, if we try to define these two characters as double Nationalists.

On the contrary, Chanu is somehow a practical nationalist because he thinks differently. According to him, Britain established their colony for the sake of their own financial benefit. They settled in various parts of the world in the name of business but ended up ruling them. For example, the Indian Subcontinent was under British rule for more than two centuries and took money and other property out of the subcontinent for their national benefit. Chanu, practically borrowed that ideology that the immigrants should work in Britain and take out the money as colonialists did before. Chanu points out that “You see when the English went to our country;

they went to make money and the money they made, they took it out of the country. They never left home mentally”(177). It is a lesson for immigrant people not to leave their homeland mentally. Chanu came to Britain to change his fortune but he could not do much for himself and his family. Before him, Nazneen was the one who talked a lot about visiting Bangladesh but could not go because of enough money. So in that capacity both have strong feelings for the homeland where they desire to get back. This event is strongly connected to a capitalistic stigma where people are stuck for their financial condition or it seems like they would get back where they belong. The sense of capitalistic stigma highly contributed to the rise of nationalism. In the third chapter of *Imagined Community* Anderson states that, “The revolutionary vernacularizing thrust of capitalism was given further impetus by three extraneous factors, two of which directly contributed to the rise of national consciousness.”(55) Though it is not necessary to be a nationalist in terms of capitalistic agenda only but the politics became successful through the financial system of capitalism which plays a very important role of turning people into nationalism. Chanu does not consider himself a British, in the same way Rahman’s unnamed narrator denies to identify himself as an American. It somehow brings an issue of family status where both Chanu and narrator have quite a good background, though Chanu is not as wealthy as the Narrator but they share the common ideology about homeland and nationalism.

Nationalism is also connected to religion. A nation always has a national religion, though ironically most of the countries and individuals believe in secularism but it is religion always an issue for nationhood. Anderson says in his book that, “If the nationalist Imagining is so concerned, this suggests a strong affinity with religious imaginings.”(10) The novel *Brick Lane* is mostly set in the aftermath of 9/11 which triggered religious sympathy. Islam was demonized so were the Islamic nations. Muslim people who were living in America, Britain and other parts

of the western countries, predominantly Christians were not treated the same as they were treated before 9/11. Muslims became the national threat for western countries including Britain.

Rhetorically, Christianity became the nation and Islam became its enemy so they always wanted to get rid of Islam and Muslims. 9/11 has shown its worst form for the Muslim immigrants and they denied their connections and faith to Muslim community. The Christian nations become one nation on earth and Muslims were set apart, but still some Muslim communities protested against the demonization of Islam in western world to protect their own existence in distant lands. In *Brick Lane*, Karim was a very devoted British but when the time came he thought he has a responsibility to protect his Muslim community living in London, and supported the Bengal Tigers, a Muslim right organization. Interesting, that most of the members of their community are Bangladeshi immigrants which seems like the organization is connected to nationalistic agenda if we go through the history of the reforming a nation on the basis of its culture and religious view.

The setting of the novel is in Tower Hamlet, which is a vibrant multi-racial community in Brick Lane. It is inevitable that racial discrimination is a very typical condition in London because it cannot be overlooked in such a place. Though Bangladeshis are more accustomed there but they are not the only people in Tower Hamlet. There are white and black people living in the community. Nazneen has white neighbors: "In the flats immediately next door, there were white people" (304). Bangladeshi people meet other race every day when they are going for shopping and other works. The writer quotes "a group of African girls tried on shoes, a white girl stood in front of a mirror turning this way and that" (392-94). When Chanu talks about his plan to take his son back to Dhaka at Dr Azad's home, he refers to Britain as a racist society. Here are his words: "I don't need very much. Just enough for the Dhaka house and some left over for

Ruku's education. I don't want him to rot here with all the skinheads and drunks. I don't want him to grow up in this racist society. I don't want him to talk back to his mother. I want him to respect his father.' and 'The only way is to take him back home.'" (111).

Both the novels share the common ground of the understanding of other race is a problem in the West. It is evidenced that in UK the hate crime on racial basis has risen in 2015-16 by 40%. On August 10, 2016, BBC News reported that in UK migrant citizens are being harassed by white people. When white people oppress immigrants they often utter 'get out of my country'. It was reported that in July more than 3326 hate crimes were reported to police. It is quite clear that the phrase "my country" presents a very extreme nationalistic interest where non-European races are being presented as "other". In the book *Orientalism*, Edward Said has pointed out, "For orientalism was ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the west, "us") and the strange (the orient, the East, "them"). (43). Zafar, Chanu, and Karim are the examples of the treatment of "othering". Is there a connection between nationalism and racism? Throughout the history of mankind, race was a very important principle, especially in the nineteenth century. And nationalism is a loosely constructed ideology allied to racism. George L. Moss, in his article, *Nationalism: Critical Concepts in Political Science* said that, "Racism was never an indispensable element of nationalism." (1382). Racism is an ethno cultural ideology that discriminates people by their culture, color, and national identity. But nationalism is the ideology that breeds racism out of national superiority. British national identity gives English an identity of superior race standing out in the history of mankind. So they treat other immigrants as aliens. Alistair Cormack claims in his article on Brick Lane that nationalism "is particularly of interest as an examination of the double bind that female migrants face, treated as alien by their host nation and as commodities by the men in their own



communities” (700). It is the nationalistic sense that has isolated women from the patriarchal society and definitely this is a kind of racism based on gender. Migrant women are alien in the current nation and recognized as a commodity in their own communities. In *Brick Lane* at the beginning, Nazneen is treated as a prisoner because her husband Chanu, does not allow her to work or socialize outside of the community. Women in that case are not seen as human rather they are seen as property of men and also as different race than men. So in that way racial discrimination is a product of nationalism although it is hard to specify which concept came into play first but it is clear that all these sense work and came as a package.

In short we can say that nationalism is a holistic process of human identity which is a multidimensional concept involving shared communal identification of one’s nation. The concept of nationalism is passed down from generation to generation and work like a biological feature of human existence. In *Brick Lane* Monica Ali’s characters show nostalgia toward Bangladesh where Chanu says that the pull of land is stronger than the pull of the blood. In *The Light of What We Know* and *Brick Lane* deal with the matter of nationalism where community gives a sense of a little homeland within another land. It is also the sense of nationalism that alienates immigrants from the natives. The concept of identity and belongingness are deeply connected to nationalism and racial discrimination is also rooted in Nationalism. Zafar, in *The Light of What We Know*, though considers himself as a British but keeps good connection with Bangladesh and becomes nostalgic when he thinks about his visit. Though most of the characters suffer from existential crisis in this transnational world but they practice their own culture, religion and maintain indigenous traditions. Though immigrants live in a distant land but every one of them are connected to their ancestral land and serve nationalist agenda.

## Chapter 2

### Tracing Long-distance Nationalism in *Brick Lane* and *In The Light of What We Know*

In twenty first century, the concept of nationalism has taken various forms because of the globalized and geopolitical issues where long-distance nationalism or diasporic nationalism becomes one of the most important and focused nationalistic form in diaspora literature. Zia Haider and Monica Ali's novel *In The Light of What We Know* and *Brick Lane* respectively, are very significant examples in forming the idea through different transnational characters, who are equally connected to the ancestral home land and the current home, living as a citizen. Though this requires a very strong connection with the imaginary homeland, even more than the geographical location they are living in, but these long-distance nationalists do not want to get back to the ancestral homeland. Both the novels *In The Light of What We Know* and *Brick Lane* coincidentally share common affinity for Bangladesh, ancestral homeland of most of the characters. This chapter intends to explore the features of long-distance Nationalism considering Nina Glick Schiller's article "Long-distance Nationalism" to show that Rahman and Ali's characters are mentally and voluntarily connected to the ancestral land. Despite being distanced from the homeland, they keep good connection while living in transnational settings. Long-distance nationalists believe that they share some common understanding of classical nationalism such as history, identity and territory but in terms of relationship, long-distance nationalists differ. They hold citizenship in their current living state but the ancestral homeland requires loyalty from them. This chapter will also deal with transnationalism, one of the latest school of nationalism, to get into the core of today's nationalism to show that characters of *In The Light of*

*What We Know* and *Brick Lane* deal with long-distance nationalism while living in multicultural and transnational western setting but in the meantime holding their nationalistic sense.

Transnationalism inevitably creates crisis of identity among immigrants and it is the most confusing theory among the schools of Nationalism, hence we can understand that this is a concept of globalized nationalism which gives us a multicultural identity and even an immigrant may follow the culture of his or her living land but forgetting about the ancestral land and the culture are beyond our imagination. Trace of cultural and national value will never be lost and it will be a concern for the identity and existence of the individual. Diaspora literature always keeps tracking the existence and the belongingness of diaspora community which indicates the deep connection with their imaginary community. In *In The Light of What We Know* is a diasporic journey where the unnamed narrator and Zafar, is lost in his own transcultural existence. Though Zafar being, an English citizen, claims to be an English man, he fails to become a part of the English elites. On the other hand the unnamed narrator never claims to be an American and not even a Pakistani, so his identity is in a condition like a pendulum swinging in a transnational culture. In *Brick Lane* we come up with the same idea of a transnational community, confused with their own identity and suffering from the lack of pure nationalistic sense. One instinct is common among most of the characters in both of these novels, a sense of ancestral homeland to which they need to be loyal, this is one of the most important fact of long-distanced nationalism. Nina Glick Schiller pointes out” that, “Long-distance nationalism is a set of identity claims and practices that connect people living in various geographical locations to a specific territory that they see as their ancestral home.”(570). Identity depends on various factors and the concept of identity comes from a long history of ethnicity, ancestry and race. It is not necessary to maintain the culture and customs of the imaginary land while they are living in a

transnational setting but still any transnational character will definitely be loyal to the ancestral home and will contribute in many different ways, like voting, lobbying, contributing money which are closely connected to the classic notion of nationalism. Schiller said in her essay that, “Actions taken by long-distance nationalists on behalf of this reputed ancestral home may include voting, demonstrating, lobbying, contributing money, creating works of art, fighting, killing and dying. Long-distance nationalism is closely connected to the classic notion of nationalism and the nation-state” (570-571). These are the similar thoughts shared by Anderson who said in his book *Imagined Community* that the part of the national fraternity can “willingly die” (7) for such limited imaginings. If we get back to the history of Bangladesh, the liberation war was terrifying and freedom fighters fought for the nation. People care about their nation more than their lives because of nationalistic sense. Citizens who are living in the land are willing to die for the nation because independence is another form of safety and freedom from other nations and individual who intend to harm the mother land. Loyalty and patriotism unite immigrants for loving the ancestral home. For long-distance nationalists, contributing money and lobbying are the best ways to help the ancestral land. In *In The Light of What We Know*, Mohammad Jalaluddin financially contributes after the American invasion of his mother nation. Though he lives in America and does not need to get back to his country but still, his mother land pulls him to reconstruct the country. Zafar comments that, “Beginning in the autumn of 2001, Afgani-born professionals working in public policy or international development, numbering a few, scattered across the globe, were drawn into the incipient reconstruction efforts after the American invasion of their mother country” (133). They also lobby for the benefit of their mother nation so that the home nation can stand out from the Waste it has become for the neo-colonial greed of West. On the other hand, in *Brick Lane*, Channu’s intention of contributing to

his mother land provides the fact that he is a long-distance nationalist and he thinks as the colonialist thought before like British benefits from Indian subcontinent.

Rahman's novel finds out its journey through Bangladesh, a nation where Zafar was born in the time of Liberation war. Being a war child Zafar suffers a lot about his diaspora nationality too. It is the responsibility toward any migrated individual to stay connected to the imaginary homeland through any kind of contribution and Zafar's journey as a diaspora nationalist is not a significant one but it will definitely help us get into its core. Zafar is a second generation immigrant in England and his parents are mostly loyal to the imaginary homeland. To analyze the diaspora identity where national borders never delimit membership in a national territory, a person may live in a different country and can still be connected with the imaginary homeland. First generation immigrants are naturally connected to the home nation where second generation or later generations are connected through their understanding of root and identity. And a long-distance nationalist may never live in the home nation but it never abrogates the relationship between them. Nina Glick Schiller says that,

National borders are not thought to delimit membership in the nation. The members of the nation may live anywhere around the globe and even hold citizenship in other states. This does not in the view of long distant nationalists, abrogate the relationship between members of the nation and their national homeland (571).

If a member of a nation lives outside the border, she/he does not become an alien because the nation never abrogates the relationship between the members of the nation and their national homeland. The relationship between a nation and the member is like a relationship between mother and son or daughter. Wherever s/he lives, the relationship never ends. Rahman introduces

many characters who are nicely maintaining the connection to their home nations. Zafar, maintains a very good connection with his ancestral land. Though it is really hard for him to identify Bangladesh as his home but his feeling of nostalgia gives us a hint that how much he feels for Bangladesh. Zafar is never disconnected and not even the nation disconnects him from the land. Though his upbringing in a western country has created a lot of complications but it is his transnational identity which affords him to a critical view of his own cultural identity so the connection is often seen as blurred. Bhaba has pointed out that “literature, specifically postcolonial study looks into issue of migration from a critical point of view as opposed to a holistic one. Literature studies the phenomenon of transnationality to give it recognition of the more complex cultural and political boundaries that exist on the cusp of these often opposed political spheres” (173). He also suggests that, “migration, diaspora, displacement, relocation” gives cultural transformation a complex form that shares a transnational dimension” (172). While living in a transnational setting and maintaining ancestral value and culture, inevitably becomes complex for an individual to maintain a pure cultural value. What is politically correct in West, may become politically incorrect in East, So always, there is a political and cultural boundary among westerners and others which cannot be broken. In that case immigrants, living in western countries like Britain and America, have cultural and existential crisis and complexities which neither can be solved nor can be left unsolved.

Colonialism has left us a very complex power nexus where sub-continental people, after the colonialist left, become accustomed with the master and slave relationship as it was in the time of colonialism. The superiority complex has taken root into the heart of the colonized. *In The Light of What We Know*, the author is terrified with the idea of superior ideology, Zafar’s British citizenship and transnational identity has given him a behavioral syndrome called

“Shahib Syndrome” which makes him aspire to belong to British society with elites. David Maine commented on *In The Light of What We Know*,

While living in Pakistan for ten years, I often noted how a certain class of sub-continental man was prone to what I called “sahib syndrome” – the need to sit in a drawing room and pontificate, at length, about this or that issue. Everyone else was expected to listen and agree. I have never met Rahman, and I’m sure he’s a terrific guy, but man, he has a bad case of sahib syndrome.”

As the novel implies, characters are connected to the western culture and believes in western supremacy. Cultural hegemony, crucially brainwashes the mind of colonized and makes us believe that the western culture is the most civilized culture. People from the colonized countries, either living in the mother land or living abroad, accept western culture and try to carry that culture for self-satisfaction. The Sahib syndrome among people living at home or abroad is very common. Zafar finds western culture as the preferred one and follows accordingly, but his Asian ethnicity brings him down to what he really is. He is even ashamed of his parents because of their short comings and cultural difference. The narrator says, “I believe that while he was ashamed of his parents, he was more ashamed of being ashamed” (7). His connection to the home nation is also the same, and that is why he is ashamed of recognizing Bangladesh as his home rather he identifies himself as British. The syndrome was with him when he came to Bangladesh. The smell of the food being cooked was “terrific” and he describes the event as he is a British. Zafar quotes, “The stallholder was frying a mixture of onions and chickpeas with some spices, and the smell was, as Brits would say, terrific. I had eaten nothing more all day than the mango the boy had given me” (81). Despite having Bangladeshi parents, his attitude shows, the arrogance of a British sahib. The attitude of Zafar is more dual nationalist than transnational’s.

Because he has soft corner for his ancestral homeland and in the meantime, he dislikes the culture of the homeland which makes difficult situation for Zafar. On the other hand, the unnamed narrator does not call America as his home. The feeling of transnationality completely rejects a particular identity but transforms them into transnational beings. This sentiment makes a very complex identity in Rahman's unnamed narrator and Zafar. Zafar is connected to his ancestral land but the narrator is not connected and never shows his nationalism. Zafar, has undoubtedly been portrayed as a modern man with dilemmas that are not only irresolvable but also difficult to express or understand. The shifts in narration from Zafar to his unnamed friend reveal Zafar's experiences of transnational dilemma which evokes his dual nationality.

But Ali's protagonist, Nazneen has rather a different feeling about her home land and she expresses her thought about Bangladesh without any hesitation, she imagines getting back to the place where she had her pleasant childhood. There are so many memories which always connect her to the mother land but the only trouble is getting back to Bangladesh requires more money which they do not have. At the beginning of the novel, Nazneen talked a lot about getting back to Bangladesh but eventually she turns to become independent and decides to live in London. Unlike Nazneen, Karim has the same dilemma that Zafar has. His feeling of motherland is tied to Britain rather than Bangladesh and he is ashamed of being Bangladeshi like Zafar. His desire to become pure British is his sahib syndrome which changes after he understood the value of his religion and culture. He turns out as an activist to protect Muslim community in London. Another character, Chanu who thought he will become a big man in London because he has a degree in English literature fails to build his career as he dreams. He praised Britain and British values but later on he becomes more intimate with the feeling of returning to the country



eventually because he feels safe and honored in Bangladesh. The connection between the nation and Ali's characters are not hostile rather a sweet one gives Nazneen a feeling of nostalgia.

The novel is mostly based on Zafar's fluctuating narrations that moves through time, philosophy, mathematics and politics. It is hard to keep track of his narration. He starts talking about maps that brings the subject of nation and colonialism and then shifts to Gödel's theory of philosophical mathematics suggesting that nothing we know is absolute. Everything has its limitations, especially knowledge that sometimes solely relies on the imaginary boundary of territories. The narrative style of Zafar seems to build a connecting route to each of the subjects like politics, mathematics and philosophy. Throughout the novel we can understand his anxiety and his constant feeling of 'exile' from Said's essay and Eliot's poem shows his paranoia about the uncertainty of his place whether he can be considered to be inside or outside the western world. The book starts with an excerpt from Said's *Reflections on Exile* saying,

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievement of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever. (1)

Zafar's experience of the feeling of exile is an healable wound that threatens his existence which Rahman has introduced in the beginning of the novel. Though it is not political but his self and his true home is never found out because of his transnational identity. This is not only

Zafar's self-bestowed identity but also the other immigrants living in the western world. The sadness that is carried by all these diaspora inhabitants can never be comforted but creates a massive effect on the transnational world. In this system of transnational and transcultural community, long-distance nationalism can be the only option to be connected to the ancestral home land. On the other hand, in *Brick Lane*, Karim is the alternative to Zafar who aspires to belong to the British society and recognizes that the British culture and life style is far more superior than any other culture. Similarly, Karim is a second-generation migrant born and brought up in London, though seemingly British, he cannot be seen as rooted in the host nation. If abroad is considered as the antonymic opposite of home then unhome occupies a dislocated space that is in between home and abroad. Though Karim is lost in this transnational world but his eventual action goes in favor of his ancestral and religious belief. Karim's outfit and moral standing was totally different but when he joined the Bengal Tigers he changed overnight. The transformation that he has for the benefit of the Muslim community in London, is influenced by his root and culture. The narrator says, "Karim had a new style. The gold necklace vanished; the jeans, shirts and trainers went as well" (312). While Karim transformed because of protecting the Islamic value, some of the parents told their daughters to leave their headscarf home.

Demonization of Islam at home and abroad by western countries after 9/11, becomes serious and transformed the world in many ways. Long-distance nationalists highlight what is wrong and they even go against their own community to protect the larger picture of the community. In *Brick Lane*, the post 9/11 world becomes vulnerable for Muslims living in western countries, particularly in Britain and America and plenty of organizations were opened for protecting Muslim communities. This part highlights the common benefits for the Bangladeshi immigrants living in Brick Lane, and it considers common descent, blood and the Bengali race. Karim says,

“We are taking a vote. What are we for? We are for Muslim rights and culture. We are not protecting our local ummah and supporting the global ummah” (198). So this proves that the long-distance nationalist always works for the benefit for their own community and the community must share a common descent and race.

Though these characters are living in between the host nation and the imaginary homeland and they claim loyalty from both because they do not understand their own belonging and existence, they live in an utterly confusing state of transnationalism. Schiller has pointed out that, “By knowledgeable estimates tens of millions of people are long-distance nationalist, claiming loyalty to two countries” and “this kind of belonging often exists in the realm of the imagination”(571). There are millions of people like Zafar and Karim in the world, claim to belong to two nations but the terror associated with the loss of the recognizable self becomes dynamic when it leads the individual to build a bridge between the two spaces of the home signified by the private sphere, and abroad signified by the public sphere. The bridging becomes a pragmatic act because home exists as a sublimated presence even in the unhomed space, thereby weakening the intensity of dislocation. Bhabha’s explains that, “This kind of confluence and mingling can be understood as the kind of “unhomely” (13) space that occupies either the uncomfortable position of the private or the public sphere and creates a feeling of exile without being rejected by those nations.

In *Brick Lane*, the Bengali Muslim community lives together in Tower Hamlet and always maintain their own culture. Though other people are also living there but a significant portion of Bangladeshi people are there. Long-distanced nationalists create their own presence in the host nation as a community and keep their national culture in focus. So it is a little Bangladesh in Brick Lane protecting their own national value but at the same time these

immigrants are loyal to the host nation as well. It is often seen that a minor community sticks together for their own protection and cultural values. Schiller points out, “They may instead organize common cultural or social projects that promote the interest of the member of the diasporic population wherever they have settled”(571). So the main purpose is to promote a nationalistic agenda in another nation they call their host nation. This type of community also runs some cultural or social projects that may help the nation or a particular community the home nation has commonality with. Ali’s important character Karim is connected to an organization which is working to protest the western invasion of Afghanistan. They collect funds for helping Afghanistan, a Muslim nation devastated by the neo-colonial agenda of the west. Karim’s ideas about the state of Muslims all over the world rouse in Nazneen a sense of community beyond Towers Hamlet. *Brick Lane* comments on Nazneen saying “She learned about her Muslim brothers and sisters. She discovered Bosnia” (259). She donated money for the children in The Gaza refugee camps. The contribution for the children of Gaza highlights another feature of long-distance nationalism, despite being Bangladeshi immigrant, living in Britain they contributes because of the same religious and continental tie. The community which is to keep the Bangladeshi people and culture protected is beyond Brick Lane. It touches international boundaries.

The idea of ‘common blood’ or common descent are important identical scale for long-distanced nationalism which are also common to the concept of nationalism. The diaspora keeps ties with them in terms of descent and revitalized identities. This concept gives an identity to these transnational citizens according to their race which is believed to be pure. Getting back to home seems like a process of purification. Because the root of the diaspora nationalist depends on his or her home nation. The essay mentions, “To legitimize the connection among the people

who can claim membership in the transnational nation-state, long-distance nationalists often highlight ideas about common descent, blood, and 'radicalized' identities that have long been a part of concepts of national belonging. They claim that people share a common history and political destiny because of "blood ties"(574). So long-distance nationalists focus on their blood connection to find out national belonging and this is the proper way of recognizing people and their root. Zafar's journey to Bangladesh reminds us of his affinity for his root and identity. Zafar goes on saying, was in great tranquility when he was in Bangladesh. On the other hand, Chanu in *Brick Lane* says as a Long-distanced nationalist that pull of the land is stronger than the pull of the blood. Racial understanding comes from nationalistic sense which is constructed on the basis of the root of blood and blood connection comes from a land called home.

Long-distance nationalism is the latest form of nationalism which is the creation of diaspora culture and transnational identity. In the globalized world, people live with the crisis of identity and cultural value but people do not leave their roots completely. The idea of home for immigrants is an idea of great value because it reminds us of our existence and root. People who live in a distant land do not forget about the imaginary home land rather they stay faithful and connected. A long-distance nationalist keep good connection with the ancestral land and contributes to the nation s/he feels as the actual home. *Brick Lane* and *In The Light of What We Know* introduce us to a transnational world where a nationalistic ideology fades away but the relationship to the homeland remains. Characters of Ali and Rahman are truly connected to the imaginary homeland while living abroad and contribute in different ways. The affinity they have for Bangladesh inevitably proves their nationalist contribution to the Bengali race and community. Contributing with money, lobbying, and protecting Bengali community are the basic contributions of the long-distance nationalist in these both novels.

## Chapter 3

### Expansion Nationalism: Neo-colonialism in *In The Light of What We*

#### *Know and Brick Lane*

This chapter explores the basic understanding of neo-colonialism which is a very crucial practice over the century. Neo-colonialism and nationalism are deeply connected to each other. If we try to keep nationalism out of Neo-colonialism, it will be naïve because the idea of colonialism came from the nationalistic agenda with what a nation gets benefit from other nations. It is the era of globalization where cultural and economic control brings enough profit for certain countries. It is difficult to continue with the old fashioned colonial practice but the benefit can be gained by newer versions of colonialism which is Neo-colonialism. This chapter will trace neo-colonialism in both *In The Light of What We Know* and *Brick Lane* and both the writers are from south Asia, presently living in the western world, so in that case these two diaspora writers introduce two protagonists as immigrants. These two literary pieces have neo-colonial effect which is obviously another creation of nationalistic agenda. By exploring various events and characters in these two novels, this chapter will attempt a neo-colonial analysis on the basis of *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* by Kwame Nkrumah to show how globalization, cultural hegemony, and humanitarian imperialism serve nationalistic agenda of America and other imperial powers. Zafar's visit to Afghanistan provides us enough information about various non-government organizations helping afflicted people in the ongoing "war on terror." The given descriptions show us the actual agenda of the war. The post 9/11 world is involved in a massive war which kills hundreds of thousands of innocent people including women and children and termed as collateral damage. Ali's novel tells us about the condition of

post 9/11 Britain where Muslim communities are discriminated and demonized because of their religious view. Both the novels share the common idea of racial discrimination which becomes a national concern for Britain and this is what the neo-colonial world presents others. Rahman scrutinizes the foil of western world through Zafar's narration while he describes Afghanistan. As it focuses on how the globalized geopolitical world implements neo-colonial agenda in Afghanistan to connect with the Nationalistic benefit of western neo-colonizers. It will also analyze how native Afghan's national values are being destroyed in the name of war against terror. On the other hand, *Brick Lane* shares an idea of neo-colonized diasporic immigrants living in Britain and will trace the Neo-colonial element in the novel, which will also be connected to Nationalism.

To define Neo-colonialism, we need to get back to the stage of colonialism, the concept of settling into another land by force. According to the definition of *Oxford Dictionary* Neo-colonialism is, "The policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically." From the European point of view, where each of the three modern day examples find their origin, it was European desire for more wealth which drove the Portuguese, the Spanish, the Dutch, the English, and the French begin the search for colonies whether in the Americas, Africa, or Asia. Colonialism was almost a secondary concern at first. Though the early Portuguese and Spanish explorers were some of the first to see the possibility of what full colonies could do for their mother countries.

Colonialism in the European example was born out of the desire for trade, goods, and resources which eventually led to imperialism, which was the full scale control of non-European lands. So that colonial interest was simply driven out of the nationalistic sense. Europeans, especially the British, French and Germans would believe that their nation has a superior standard on the face

of the world and has full right to rule another land. Nationalism had its root in early European conquest and colonialism. Mrinalini Rajagopalan and Madhuri Shrikant Desai note that,

Nationalist imaginations in both colony and metropole were deeply influenced by these colonial process and categories. Visual cultures first established through the colonial project were reconfigured to support nationalist agendas... Father, the entwined origins of colonialism and nationalism as twin projects of modernity have persisted in the postcolonial condition, as colonial epistemologies consistently frame contemporary imaginations of various national pasts. (6)

Nationalism is the reason behind colonial desire and it is also the reason behind decolonization. When a colonized land starts rejecting the ideas and the teaching of the colonizer's, they must implement their own ideology so that the teaching of nationalism helps save the uniqueness of the culture and the national values rather than colonizers history. Rabindranath Tagore states that: "Europe has her past. Europe's strength therefore lies in her history. We, in India, must make up our minds that cannot borrow other people's history and that if we stifle our own we are committing suicide. When you borrow things that do not belong to your life, they only serve to crush your life" (496). So it is clear that the process of decolonization was another concern of nationalistic agenda. And both the agendas require a sense of political and psychological superiority. Cultural hegemony plays a great role of motivating people accepting western culture as superior but as Tagor implies, India needs its own culture to strengthen the Indian nationalism because nationalism needs a unique culture to establish a new national value which is borrowed from the British.



On the other hand, neo-colonialism is the latest product of colonial and imperial agenda following the foot print of imperial desire. Neo-colonialism is the direct or indirect control of one land by another which is the practice of using [capitalism](#), [globalization](#) and [cultural imperialism](#) to influence a developing country in lieu of direct military control ([imperialism](#)) or indirect political control ([hegemony](#)). Nkrumah notes, "The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside" (3). It is also said that Neo-colonialism is the final stage of imperialism and the most dangerous one. The old fashion colonial rule over another land is not apparently possible because the civilized world powers are conscious about the fact that the world is watching. According to old fashioned colonialism or imperialism, a distant land could be taken over by military power which is now replaced by neo-colonialism. *In The Light of What We Know* describes a lot about the economic system in America and how 9/11 has contributed to the American economy. Zafar notes that, "This stuff is so esoteric that the only people who understand it are in the business. . . Can you imagine the people on a march against finance? The guy on a megaphone shouting: What do we want? And everyone answering: *Specific curbs on short selling in certain circumstances!*" (267). *The economic system has become corrupt in Afghanistan and the devastation of war put people in a dark financial system from where America earns huge amount of money. The agenda that America and other nations have is to uplift the economy of the west. The march against finance in In The Light of What We Know prompts the idea of financial imperialism which Afghani people want to stop. In Joseph O'Neill's Nederland, Hans, the protagonist comments,*

I could take a guess at the oil production capacity of an American-occupied Iraq . . . but I found myself unable to contribute to conversations about the value of international law or the feasibility of producing a dirty bomb. . . Did Iraq have weapons of mass destruction that posed a real threat? I had no idea; and to be truthful, and this touched on my real difficulty, I had little interest. I didn't really care. (156).

After the 9/11 attack, America invaded Iraq claiming that Iraq has weapons of mass destruction so it was a war against the government of Iraq but was it only for the concern of the weapons of mass destructions? The invasion was for controlling the economic system of the country and by controlling the economic system, America gained her nationalistic benefited rather than stopping Iraq from using weapons of mass destruction.

Many argue that globalization is the natural consequence of colonialism and later an imperialistic logic of modernism. The early colonizers established their colonies in the name of business and ended up establishing colonies for their own benefit. Recently, Sandra Lila and Maya Rota have argued that: "globalization is the consequence of the postcolonial movement, therefore the latter is the cultural logic of the former on the basis of their shared common grammar of difference, hybridity, and diasporic movement (5). Globalization is a firmly established movement, which is the result of postcolonial movement. Globalization creates a world of politically accepted imperialism where the global market is controlled by the biggest power. Paul Jay argues that, "I argue that it is a mistake to approach globalization itself as a contemporary phenomenon and that it makes much more sense to take a historical view in which globalization is dated as beginning in at least the sixteenth century and covering a time span that includes the long histories of imperialism, colonization, decolonization, and post-colonialism" (5). So globalizationalization is total package of the concept of imperialism. Rahman's insight to

banking and trading are mysteriously globalized. There are characters like the narrator and Meena whose lives depend on trading. The moves from Zafar's childhood in rural Bangladesh to London and post 9/11 Afghanistan and continually come back to the moral understanding of financialization. Mark Mazower writes,

The UN emerged chiefly as a result of an agreement among the great powers led at that time by Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin. They concluded that the founding of a world organization was in the interests of their respective states. One should ask why they concluded this and then set those reasons alongside the idealism. (2009)

The power and any kind of benefits are for the greatest power on earth. Democratization of the world organization is only for the respective states who can manipulate the system to control other nations economically and systematically which is the neo-colonial agenda of West. In the name of globalization, the west has captured the economic system of developing nations like Afghanistan, Iraq and Bangladesh. In *Brick Lane*, Ali emphasized the garment sector where Hasina works for low payment. Hasina works in a factory where she does not make enough money to pay her rent. She says, "overtime at factory is finished. I think this month I have enough for rent" (127). The economic condition of garments workers is very poor hence they cannot pay house rent, even after the over time. Bangladesh is the second largest garment manufacturing nation and most of the products are made for the western countries. The garment workers live in a very poor condition because the production cost in Bangladesh is the lowest in entire world. Most of the profit goes in the pockets of western companies. So a significant portion of Bangladeshi economy depends on this sector which is controlled by western companies. Nkrumah quotes, "The result of neo-colonialism is that foreign capital is used for the exploitation rather than for the development of this less developed parts of the world. Investment

under neo-colonialism increases rather than decreases the gap between the rich and the poor countries of the world” (4). The companies who are ordering those garments products are getting rich and the workers are getting poor day by day. Though it contributes to the Bangladeshi economy but the damage to the ecosystem and the environment are massive.

The main concern of imperialism is land, which is the only permanent thing to consider and if the land is invaded what is treasured under it will be easily gained. *In The Light of What We Know* introduces us to the Afghan war, the so called “War against Terrorism”. If we look into the Iraq invasion by the world’s most powerful country, America and its allies, the media was roaring about ‘the weapon of mass destruction’ but was it there or was the invasion justifiable? So what was the basic intention behind the propagated idea that made America invade Iraq and kill hundreds of thousands of innocent people out there? Said’s introduction to *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) talks about the effects of imperialism and the extent to which it influences once-colonized nations. The main battle of imperialism is over land” and this was said when he was talking about the nature of colonialism. This is a factual point of our understanding of what is happening in Afghanistan, on the basis of Said’s note we can come up with a descent idea that the contemporary agenda of ‘War against Terror’ is an eye wash and there is a neo-colonial agenda working behind the invasion. The old colonialism of Britain has taken a new form under the shadow of ‘War on Terror’. In American context it was just to give Afghanistan a support for rooting out ‘Taliban’ which was considered as the national threat to America and its allies. John Eparjesi, commenting on Said’s *Orientalism* notes that,

The biggest difference between the British and the American empires stems from the fact that the former was historically centered on India and the Middle East whereas the latter was centered on China, Japan, and Korea. And whereas England’s relationship it its

Orient was expressed in terms of direct colonialism for the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. (19)

The concept of colonization in a global world has taken a new imperialistic shape but the battle is still over the land and resources. However, the process of colonization in Afghanistan has become a gateway of many other opportunities that are complex and difficult to attain. A number of wealthy nations are getting its most benefits and destroying millions of life in the name of establishing peace and installing democratic power in Afghanistan. The dispute between the 'Talibans' and international organizations is not a fight against evil and the establishment of good, rather it is about establishment of western power. Colonel Mushtaq in *In The Light of What We Know* says: "When you play chess, does it matter whether you were black or white in a previous game? In one game, you are white, in another black" (320). Colonialism and Neo-colonialism is like a chess game. And the total system is like the chess game, where colonialism and Neo-colonialism are the two systems that share a common agenda. The basic feature of colonialism is military control over another land where the military rules that country authorized by the colonial government. India was ruled by Britain for more than two decades and India did not have a government of her own. The basic difference between neo-colonialism and colonialism is, in neo-colonialism, the colonized nation has its government with the presence of foreign military. The government of that colonized state is merely a puppet chosen by the invaders.

*Brick Lane* presents the postcolonial diaspora differently, though the novel has no description of the involvement of any character of the novel but a part of the community deals with the problem. Muslim communities in Britain are discriminated because of their religious ethnicity. 9/11 brings a horrendous nightmare for Muslims living in the Middle East and in

Europe. Muslims are judged by the crime of a minority group who terrorize in the name of God. Bengal Tigers are responsible for the protection of Muslim rights in London but the racial discrimination is crossing the limit. The neo-colonial agenda of America affected the entire world where innocent Muslims are victimized by the false acquisition of native European. The Muslim organizations are working for protesting the war on terror. Karim says, "It don't look right, think about it. The American President is preparing his Crusade. And we're preparing for party? It's not on" (311). Karim as an activist of the Bengal Tigers has a responsibility to talk about what is going to happen. He is angry at the other Muslims who are still silent about the American and British action against Iraq. Organizations like Bengal Tigers campaign against the upcoming war that has been declared by American president and Britain agreed to join with America. Here we can see the process of decolonization which comes from the sense of nationalism. Though the war is not against Bangladesh but Bengali communities are fighting for the Muslims. Christians or the European natives are afraid of Muslims, and it inevitably comes from the nationalistic point of view. Chanu, at least after he quits his job, stops speaking of promotions and begins to address such varied issues as the legacy of colonialism, assimilation, and class conflict. Although these speeches are often intelligent and convincing, Ali seems to play them for laughs, when, for instance, Chanu talks about the colonial exploitation of Bengal, he is described somewhat pathetically as "playing to the gallery" and "rehearsing the evening's lesson" (185-6), as if he were an actor reciting a set of lines, not a man justifiably angered by imperialism. Another organization, Lion Heart goes against Muslims and demonizes Islam as a religion of terror. Lion Heart's leaflets comments, "All over the country, our children are taught that Islam is a great religion, but the truth is clear. Islam burns with hatred. It gives birth to evil mass murders abroad. In our towns, it spawns vicious rioters" (339). After 9/11 the hate crime

went up where some organizations willingly flaunt the British community, saying Islam is the religion of war like the Lion Heart's do in *Brick Lane*. British people did not have enough knowledge about Islam before they demonize it. But for all this, media is responsible because it is neo-colonizer's imperialistic agenda to scare native people so that the government can invade another land with public support. Karim comments, "Man, they are going to live to regret it. They don't even know what they are saying. Islam lays down clear rules of engagement for war" (339). Karim defends Islam and talks like a "Jihadist". But before September 11, he was totally a British and partially he was a British nationalist too. But his transformation is impressive after the 9/11. Being a leader of an organization, he even talks about engaging in war because of the neo-colonizers cruelty in Iraq and in Britain. For Muslims every day is a battle in Britain.

On the other hand, *In The Light of What We Know* directly involves in war. And Zafar's insight into the Afghan war brings the light to this novel as the title implies. Neo-colonialism is a diplomatic control over a land invaded by a superior nation. British and French were the colonialist a century ago because of their national greed and glory. And for this century America is the neo-colonialist. Nkrumah points out,

Where neo-colonialism exists the power exercising control is often the state which formerly ruled the territory in question, but this is not necessarily so. For example, in the case of South Vietnam the former imperial power was France, but neo-colonial control of the state has now gone to United States. It is possible that neo-colonial control may be exercised by a consortium of financial interests which are not specifically identifiable with any particular state. (3)

Neo-colonialist exercises their power on once colonized land and Afghanistan is one of them. Expansion of America's neo-colonial territory brings financial benefit and 9/11 was a propaganda for expanding its territory in Middle East, the ocean of oil. Jamie Doward points out in an article in *The Guardian* that, "Economists go further. Many are now quietly suggesting that if 11 September hadn't happened America would not have recovered so quickly from its recession. 'On the one hand, 11 September was the last thing the economy needed, but with hindsight it may well have accelerated the healing process, awful as it was.'" It is clear that the recession of 2000 put American economy in crisis and it had to overcome. If there was no September 11 maybe America would not recover so quickly from the recession. The 9/11 which damaged America's tallest skyscrapers, the World Trade Center, ironically was really a trade center which gave America a trade license to invade Iraq and Afghanistan. Rahman has pointed out with Zafar's voice: "9/11? The financial crisis? External events, events that come out of the blue" (131). Zafar's voice gives us the pure knowledge of US presence on the land and the land is the prime concern of all colonizers. The western world wanted to deal with the land and to do it in a legitimate way, they had to use a camouflage of "war on terror" and secondly, a desire for establishing their presence in the land. Naomi Klein in her essay, "Baghdad Year Zero" writes, "I couldn't help but think about something Senator John McCain had said back in October. Iraq, he said, is 'a huge pot of honey that's attracting a lot of flies.'" This comment of John McCain brings us to the understanding of the agenda of American invasion of Afghanistan. Developing countries like Afghanistan are invaded because of their natural resources and 9/11 had nothing to do with it. It is inconvenient that 9/11 brings American interest to invade Afghanistan and spend billions of dollars for keeping Afghanistan safe from the evil. The US felt a national emergency



to protect its own land and ended up invading Iraq and Afghanistan, is simply a lure to legitimize its national interest of economic and military control over the land.

Invading a country requires a massive amount of information which helps the neo-colonizers to understand the local land and making a fruitful strategy and humanitarian imperialism through foreign NGO's is the easiest way to get what they are desired to get. The western power gets most of the information about third world or developing countries through international NGO's. In *Brick Lane*, Organizations like Lion Heart helps controlling and brain washing the mind of natives so that the government get the support for intervention. Noam Chomsky comments, "Such notions as "humanitarian intervention" and "the responsibility to protect" soon came to be salient features of Western discourse on policy, commonly described as establishing a "new norm" in international affairs"(2). Humanitarian intervention intends to finish inhumanity and takes responsibility to protect the people of an afflicted country like Afghanistan. As America is concerned, they believe it is their responsibility to protect human rights in every corner of the world and with the idea of humanitarian aid they gain knowledge about the nation. *In The Light of What We Know* explores the secret agenda of America as a neo-colonialist. The establishment of AfDARI, a well-funded Australian NGO working in Afghanistan to promote human rights but under the shadow it controls the Afghani president with the help of US and English diplomats. Because, America needs political support of the local government for a long lasting power on the land. This is how the neo-colonialism operates. But neo-colonialism is the worst form of colonialism. Nkrumah notes, "Neo-colonialism is also the worst form of imperialism. For those who practice it, it means power without responsibility and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress" (5). In Afghanistan hundreds of thousands of innocent people are killed in the name of war on terror and termed as collateral

damage. In this globalized world America exploits people for their national benefit. Though they spend billions of dollars to aid victims of the war thorough organizations like AfDARI but the war brings nothing to the people of Afghanistan except destruction and mass killing. Eventually the economic control that America desired for is established by killing millions of people in the name of war on terror.

To conclude, we can say that neo-colonialism is the latest form of imperialism which is the reincarnation of colonial power strategy. Colonialism requires a direct control over economy and land of a nation state but in neo-colonialism, the imperialist indirectly rules over the land and the economy without taking any responsibility and the local government supports the intervention. *In The Light of What We Know* takes us in a journey of a very complex power nexus of west established in Afghanistan. America and its allies invade the land in the name of war on terror and 9/11 massively helps to propagate the war successfully. This novel explores the secret of the national agenda of America. *Brick Lane* shares the post 9/11 Britain where Muslim immigrants are demonized because of a minority group of Muslims attacked the World Trade center. The racial discrimination raises to the top in Britain and organization like Bengal tigers takes stand for protecting Islamic value. The effect of 9/11 shakes the world so badly and the Iraq and Afghan invasion turned into profit making agenda of the western. Neo-colonialism is the worst form of imperialism where colonialist invades without taking any responsibility. AfDARI controls the President of the country directed by American diplomats to gain economic control over Afghanistan for a long standing power. Humanitarian imperialism is just a way of expanding imperial territory which we can emphasize as an expansion nationalism of America in this modern world. So the neo-colonial agenda serves national benefit.

## Conclusion

The world is changing with time, so does its principles. Yesterday's concept is not totally gone but it is modified and fabricated by a new concept with a new mask with the same agenda. Apparently we see changes but nothing changes at all rather something new is added. In the same way classic nationalism is shaped into many globalized forms. It is the transnational world where people get to deal with different sets of identity. Nationalism is an ideology providing a sense of community, culture, and belongingness to recognize the particular identity of particular community. It is the ideology which injects the sense of nation-state, the ideology that makes people kill others for the national benefit. This ideology is constructed out of borderline, religion, race and language. Long-distance nationalism brings about a lot of change in the globalized world and in the theoretical definition of nationalism. People, in the present world are not limited to one nation state rather become transnational beings but connected and loyal to the ancestral land called "home" more than the country they live in. For the benefits of nation states nationalist expand their territory and rule another nation through new agenda like humanitarian aid. The old colonialism was a new mask of imperialism to rule economically and culturally, and the latest form of colonialism changed into neo-colonialism which is even crueler than the colonial predecessor.

*In The Light of What We Know* takes us to a journey through a lot of places and discovers different aspects of transnational characters. It shows a transcultural society and crisis of immigrant's identity. Zafar as a nationalist, holds two sets of feeling for two different nations but belongs nowhere. It is his nationalistic sense, which is supposed to give him an identity but all the way he ends up feeling exiled from both the nations. Despite having said that he is a British, he keeps a deep connection with Bangladesh, his ancestral land which he does not call home at

all. But his parents, as first generation immigrant have no problem calling Bangladesh home. In the same way, in *Brick Lane* Nazneen and Chanu, both strongly express their thoughts about their home land and even talk about getting back while another character Karim is like Zafar always tries to become a British but the society recognizes them as an immigrant.

There is a sharp distinction between Diaspora nationalism and the classic nationalism but both share the common agenda of nationalism. This aspect of nationalism does not require a physical presence of the member but the nation requires contributions from the distant citizen living anywhere in the globe. It doesn't abrogate the connection between members of nations and from the land. Though Zafar identifies himself as British but it does not disconnect him from the land where he feels better and has a sweet memory. He contributes to the land by criticizing the actions of western world. To talk about Afghani official who is contributing to his country while living in America, is also an example of long-distance nationalism. In *Brick Lane* Chanu holds a very nationalistic idea of getting money out of Britain to his homeland is a massive contribution and this is what is being done by most of the immigrant living in west.

Neo-colonialism is the newest form of imperialism driven by the sense of nationalism so that the national agenda can contribute to economy and culture of the colonialist. 9/11 has changed the world like never before. Zafar's journey to Afghanistan puts a light on the dark side of aid organizations like AFDARI. This organization is run by Australian fund to aid afflicted Afghani people but end up helping invaders. America and her allies are ruling Afghanistan in the name of 'war on terror'. But it is just neo-colonial agenda to grab the economy of the country for the nationalistic goal of western countries. The agenda of expansion nationalism affects other people and community living in west which is clearly shown in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*. Out of the immigrant communities different organizations protest discrimination and demonization of

Muslims in London because of the 9/11 attack done by some Muslims. It shows that Muslims are not only united in the foreign land but also maintain unity with other Muslims. So it's all about nationalism that unites us and discriminates simultaneously.

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