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CHANUS RETURN: RECLAMATION OF BENGALI IDENTITY

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This thesis is dedicated to my family, friends and students who have been so encouraging over the years, and most to all to my savior Jesus Christ whose grace is sufficient for me.

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MAMTA ROY

ABSTRACT

Immigrant identity and acculturation has been a topic of significant debate in the twentieth century. Coming to the host nation, and getting integrated into the mainstream culture is a process which holds different meanings for different immigrants. On the one hand they leave the security of the homeland for an insecure future, on the other hand, the non-acceptance and discrimination of the host nation makes their integration a difficult process. Above all, they too want to live in the comfort zone of their homeland identity thus making integration impossibility. Going home syndrome and a deep rooted love for the motherland Bangladesh is an integral part of Chanu's immigrant identity. He comes to Great Britain with the dreams of achieving considerable success, primarily as a civil servant, (tied to his colonial identity), and after that going back to Bangladesh. He is unable to fulfill this dream because of his own inadequacies, and hence accepts the job of a council clerk. Inability to get a promotion in his job makes him question the possible discrimination at work. The more he stays on in Britain the more certain he is of his return. His inability to adapt to the host culture, gradual marginalization and an inherent love for his homeland makes him take the ultimate step of going back. He redeems the promise he made to himself and in a way redeems himself.

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CHAPTER I
GOING HOME SYNDROME

Brick Lane, the debut novel written by Monica Ali, is open to various readings and interpretations. Some critics consider Brick Lane a documentation of the life of Nazneen, a young Bangladeshi bride who is transported from a small village in Bangladesh to the life of Tower Hamlets in London, and how she as an immigrant is exposed to the multi ethnic life of East London; an exposure that makes her aware of who she is, and what she wants from life. Ali's work has also been compared with other British writers who have written about the experiences of South Asian migrants, such as Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kuereshi. However, interestingly enough, Ali's novel is not merely a story of an immigrant experience, but touches upon a host of issues that are a part of the immigrant experiences such as ethnic migrancy, hybridity, multiculturalism, integration, transnationalism, geographical displacement, the going home syndrome and so forth. Critic John Marx looks at Brick Lane as a novel that, "presents globalization of labor as a family affair" (16) with both Nazneen and Hasina working in the garment business, even though living in London and Dhaka respectively. As Naila Kabeer writes, "In Bangladesh, a country with strong norms of purdah . . . women appear to have abandoned old norms in response to new opportunities. . . . By contrast, in Britain, Bangladeshi women were largely found working from home, in apparent conformity with purdah norms" (7). In this

context, the novel is looked upon as a work that documents the International global economy and women as an integral part of that system irrespective of the International divide. Alistair Cormack sees Brick Lane, as a document about migration in the framework of postcolonial subject. He writes, "Monica Ali's 2003 novel of Bangladeshi immigrants in London, Brick Lane . . . is a realistic narrative with a postcolonial story, it offers an excellent opportunity to examine the relationship between the formal strategies of mimetic fiction and the historical contexts of multiculturalism and immigration"(695). Jane Hiddleton, in her article, "Shapes and Shadows: Unveiling the Immigrant in Monica Ali's Brick Lane" on the other hand, focuses more on the life of the Bangladeshi in the Tower Hamlets. In Hiddleton's opinion, Ali's novel "sets itself up as a fresh look behind the closed doors of a segregated community positioned at the center of the British capital" (58). Hiddleton reinforces the fact that, "Ali boldly looks behind the walls of an area thought to be populated by migrants, living at once inside and outside British society, and whose cultural practices continue to provoke bafflement and alarm" (58-59). Such a reading of the novel points to two areas of Immigrant identity: firstly that the immigrant is a living presence in the host nation, and secondly, an immigrant is a faceless outsider who lives at the periphery of acceptance. Hiddleton pointedly interprets Brick Lane in terms of unveiling the lives of the Bangladeshi immigrant community who seemingly have not been integrated, and exist at the periphery of British society, but she also contends with the fact that, "Ali's text is split, then, by this contradiction between the hope for revelation on the one hand, and knowledge of impossibility of any complete unveiling on the other" (59). In her opinion, Ali definitely starts with the intention of unveiling, but somehow the process of unveiling is very subtle. The possible impossibility of unveiling that Hiddleton hints is the lack of reaching out both on the part of the immigrant and the host nation. Each of the above mentioned critics take on a different perspective and reading of the text in terms of immigrant experience and

acculturation, but invariably their point of focus in all the interpretations is the adaptation and self actualization of Nazneen, and the other female characters in the novel such as Mrs. Azad, Mrs. Islam, or Razia. I would however, like to interpret the novel from the perspective of Chanu's immigrant identity, and his consequent return to Bangladesh.

The "going home syndrome" as Dr. Azad calls it affects the immigrant intermittently, but very few immigrants give in to it. The call of the motherland or the home country is very strong, especially when as Chanu says, "these people never really leave home. Their bodies are here, but their hearts are back home" (32). When Chanu talks of these people, he refers to the immigrants who come as laborers or semi-skilled workers to Britain, and he considers himself a class above them. Little realizing that he is also one of them. The desire to go back is something that immigrants from the lowest social strata to the middle strata, have in common, and also affects the ones who have done well, such as, Dr. Azad. Even though coming to Britain was Chanu's personal choice, he still yearns to go back; something that people of South Asian countries tend to do to quite an extent, as Sandhya Shukla points out:

As Peoples from South Asian countries move around the world, they carry a repertoire of images and experiences from the past and present that meet alternative narration production in new places of settlement. Post colonialism, racial and ethnic formation and globalization might be seen as three kinds of structuring narratives with which South Asian Diasporas come into to contact and are shaped by. (553)

Chanu is also one of those immigrants who carry within himself a repertoire of images and experiences from the past, so he has to listen to his inner self and reclaim his roots. Is he an immigrant who has not been able to integrate successfully in the host nation, and after a series

of failures thinks the best course of action would be to go back to Bangladesh? Chanu, and immigrants like him are the so called first generation immigrants, who suffer from the going home syndrome, even though their migration is a conscious choice they made. These first generation immigrants are unable to sever their ties with their homeland. This deep rooted attachment for the homeland gives rise to many other issues and conflicts, and comes in the way of integration with the host nation. Firstly, they always create a mythical homeland at home, and expect their children to abide by the traditions and mores of this imaginary homeland. This imposed grafting of the homeland, gives rise to inter-generational conflict between first generation immigrants, and their children. Secondly, some of the first generation immigrants don't even try to assimilate or integrate into the host culture because at the back of their minds they know that one day they will return back. If going back is the aim then why make the effort?

Thirdly, the situation becomes more difficult as the immigrants are not welcome and accepted into the host culture on the basis of their strangeness or difference in terms of ethnicity, skin color, language, culture and traditions. Hiddleston comments on the Bangladeshi characters in Brick Lane, "whose cultural practices continue to provoke bafflement and alarm" (58-59). This sort of bafflement and alarm on the part of the host nation raises questions regarding the acceptability in the mind of the immigrant, especially those again as Hiddleston points, ". . . living at once within and outside British Society" (58). Geographically these immigrants live in the heart of London, and are a part of the British society, but are they really an integral part of this society? An immigrant is unsure about what future awaits in the host nation, on the one hand, and on the other hand the unwelcome attitude and hostility make integration a difficult process. After having faced all the challenges that an immigrant faces

within and without, Chanu may have decided he should live life on his own terms, instead of doling out a meaningless existence in a society he would never be able to become integrated in wholly, a society where he will forever be a foreigner. He may have also felt, living in London would mean living in a third space; a space or state that is neither within nor outside of the British Society. This sort of ambivalence would mean living an invisible meaningless existence. All of these and many more reasons make the hold of the going home syndrome so strong that Chanu leaves his wife and daughters in Britain, and proceeds to Bangladesh.

It is very apparent that people from the third world countries migrate to the first world countries, for better prospects. What is it that influences people from so called third world countries to at times make the conscious choice to retain their ingrained homeland identity and return back home? Going back from a so called first world country to a so called third world country would be considered regressive. Chanu's choice is in complete contradiction to what people aspire for all their lives as has been aptly written about by Sankara Krishna, "The media is full of stories about the desperate efforts of would be migrants from the third world to gain entry into the first world, be it in ramshackle boats over dangerous seas, on foot across desert . . . or as stowaways in International Airlines" (8). Why does Chanu make this choice when, on a day to day level, the 1st world western countries offer better facilities, and better life prospects than the Third World non-western countries?

In her study of Bengali elders in England, Kate Gardener also makes a similar point. She points to the security that Britain offers to the first generation immigrants; who because of this security are often never able to leave Britain for their home country, though they are constantly haunted by the so called "myth of return" (160). Interviewing Bangladeshis, who had come to Bangladesh during the 1960s and 1970s at St. Hilda's East Community Center in London, Gardener reports:

All the elders we interviewed were dependent upon the welfare state for housing and other benefits . . . this plus the availability of free medical care in Britain has led many to express complicated feelings about returning to desh. Whilst majority dream of return, for practical reasons this is often not possible . . . the economic insecurity of Bangladesh, plus the cost of medical care often means there is little choice between London and desh. (171)

Most of the elders have, “always imagined Bangladesh as the place they would eventually retire to and be buried in” (173), but the lack of facilities and an uncertain future deters them from taking this plunge. In making the choice of going back, Chanu is ready to give up the security of a first World country, and face an uncertain future. Is the pull of ingrained homeland identity a natural result of failure to integrate in the host culture or does it go beyond that and touch everyone? The longing for homeland is so strong a tie that it is quintessentially embedded in many British writers of Asian origin. Writers such as V.S. Naipaul, Hanif Kuereshi, Farrukh Dhondy, and Salman Rushdie have all attained significant socio-economic success and status in the western world, but they still have strong ties to what they often define as their core, their home or country of birth as so aptly described by Salman Rushdie, “Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; other times, we fall between two stools However ambiguous and shifting this ground maybe it is not a infertile territory for a writer to occupy” (18). This plurality is what first generation immigrants face even though he or she may come with dreams of success like Chanu does. Not only a first generation immigrant such as Chanu, but even a second generation immigrant feels this plurality as Monica Ali refers to in her essay, “Where I’m Coming From” in which she among other things discusses

what went into the writing of her novel, and describes the mythical quality of the going home syndrome, and how it affected her father:

When people ask me now about my novel, the first question they ask is, “What inspired you to write this?” I cite a number of factors. My experience, for instance, of conflict between first generation, and second generation immigrants. The stories that our father used to tell us about village life. . . . But the only thing that interests me in this analysis is the impulse to create her, and that brings me back to the Dhaka balcony: my inherited memory, my internalized folklore that tells me that life hangs by a thread. (1)

Ali came to England at the age of three, but as a second generation immigrant, she is still irrevocably connected to Bangladesh because of her inherited memory, and more so by the fact that she had internalized the folklore of Bengal, instilled by her father. Her father created awareness about Bengali life and culture by relating stories about Bengali village life. Chanu is not portraiture of her father, but some interesting similarities between her father and Chanu can be identified, especially in terms of love for Bengali history and culture as Ali further elaborates on in her essay:

My father escaped from East Pakistan (Bangladesh), over the border to India . . . When things got sorted out, we would go back .His children settled in school, we stopped speaking to him in Bengali and then we stopped even understanding. The new status quo was accepted. Sounding philosophical my father would say, “I just got stuck here, that’s all.” And home, because it could never be reached, became mythical: Tagore’s golden Bengal, a teasing counterpoint to our drab northern mill town lives. (2)

Unlike Chanu, Ali's father never went back to Bangladesh, but he continued to construct a mythical golden Bengal of Tagore, the seeds of which he was able to plant in the minds of his children (quite like Chanu did with Shahana and Bibi), which served Ali as inherited memory, and internalized folklore from which her debut novel was born.

Ali's father had returned to Bangladesh with an English wife after studying in England, and had stayed there for 6 years, before fleeing to England because of political prosecution. He had fled from Bangladesh to Britain for the safety of the family, but had always planned to return. Ali knew that the love of motherland had beckoned her father when he had gone to settle in Bangladesh for the first time. He wanted to go back again, but had stayed on because of family responsibilities. It rings of something similar to Chanu's return? Definitely, it was the love of the motherland. Just as Chanu made the choice of going back, in a similar way Ali's father had also returned to Bangladesh after completing his studies in Britain. He came back to England because of political prosecution. She also knew, if her father had not been forced out of Bangladesh, he would have stayed there. Even though he continued staying in England, he had a feeling that he just got, 'stuck here'; to some extent like Chanu, who though had come to Britain, but had always envisioned a day he would go back, after attaining considerable success.

CHAPTER II

CHANU'S DREAMS

Chanu had come to Britain with the same dreams as many first generation immigrants; dreams of a better future. The so called geographical displacement is in Chanu's case, however more of a personal choice rather than a compulsive choice as in the case of many asylum seekers, political refugees or people suffering from prosecution of any kind. The comprehensive study conducted by Kate Gardener of the first generation Bengali immigrants in the 1960s indicates the type of Bengali immigrants that came to Britain:

Arriving as young men in the post war period most lived and worked in the northern cities such as Birmingham and Oldham, finding employment in heavy industry. Some went directly to London, working in the garment trade as pressers and tailor . . . this was a period of unremittingly hard work. (162)

Unlike most of the immigrants that came to London in the 1960s, Chanu was a university graduate from Dhaka University, a fact that he was proud of, and made public at every given opportunity, be it to his wife or even his friend Dr. Azad. He was one of the few men who were educated or belonged to a better class socially in Bangladesh. So, when he came to

Britain, he assumed that his chances of upward mobility and socio-economic status would be much higher than all the other fellow Bangladeshis, as he is a graduate. He resents being confused with all the other Bangladeshis unskilled or semi skilled workers whom he rather disparagingly describes, “These people here did not know the difference between me, who stepped out of an airplane with a degree certificate, and the peasants who jumped off the boat possessing only the lice on their heads. What can you do?” (34). He thought there would be no discrimination in the job market as he had a degree from a Bangladeshi University. This confidence was also echoed in Churchill’s speech on Race Relations Bill (1976) wherein he praises the wonderful way in which the British people, “. . . have accepted . . . the influx of alien culture . . . into their midst without open conflict or prejudice” (36). But this picture of tolerance he paints is far removed from reality, as Zig Layton-Henry points out rather emphatically, “. . . black immigrants faced discrimination at the employment sector not only from employers, but also from local work groups and trade union branches, which tried to exclude them from certain occupations or confine them to the lowest grades. . .” (37). Chanu, like many of the immigrants of the former colonies in the Caribbean, Africa and the Indian sub-continent were attracted to England because, after all, it was Great Britain the (Mother Country). The first generation immigrants of that time unconsciously retained their colonial identity, thereby looking up to Great Britain not only as the powerful center of the Empire, but also as a land where they would flourish. At this time (1950s and 1960s), Britain was undergoing economic expansion. This economic expansion, assured a lot of job openings, and hence a better standard of living for people of the so called Third World. But, the reality was different as Ashley Dawson points out:

For despite the powerful fiction of British subject hood, which suggested that all the members of the Empire were equal in the eyes of the reigning king or queen, imperial

power, was based on the firm distinction between colonial metropolis and colonized periphery. Subject hood and citizenship were distinct categories. (4)

The idea that all were equal in the eyes of the Empire was a myth; the colonized periphery would always be at the periphery. Dawson further elaborates it by commenting on this rhetoric of equality and ethics of enlightenment that the Empire always stood for, “According to colonial ideology, Britain originated democracy, the rule of law and the Ethics of good sportsmanship”(2). In the case of Chanu, he had always thought he would flourish in England as he was sufficiently educated, little realizing, his abilities (graduate degree) would not only have to undergo a transformation to a great extent to be able to adapt in the host country, but he would also come face to face with racial discrimination in the host country. Dominic Head gives an insightful reading of the immigrant situation:

The migrant identities that are fictionalized in post war writings are often embattled and vulnerable. This is sometimes due to the transitional nature of twentieth century postcolonial expression, where postcolonial identity is properly conceived as process rather than arrival, but the evocation of vulnerability has just frequently to do with the inhospitable nature of the British and especially English society, often portrayed as unsympathetic to the goals of the living, interactive multiculturalism. (156)

Immigrants like Chanu, and many others had to suffer discrimination, and were a vulnerable and embattled lot, partly because of the inhospitable nature of the British, not yet open to the idea of an interactive multiculturalism; a multiculturalism wherein people on both the sides of the fence try to interact with each other for a socially positive cohesive relationship. On the one hand, they faced the inhospitable hosts, and on the other hand, of their own choice,

the immigrants, were also not open to the idea of integration, as they were still tied to their desh identity, even though they are aware of the transnational aspect of their identity. Chanu knew, to be able to achieve success in the host nation, he should not stay in the process zones of identity, but should arrive and integrate, if he aspires for success in the host nation. Chanu though dreams of success, keeps clinging to his desh identity, and is always looking back, to the extent that even though he lives bodily in Britain, he thinks and acts like a Bangladeshi. This sort of complexity and duality in terms of identity, achievement, and integration undermines all his efforts of success and erodes his self esteem too.

Not only does he suffer from discrimination as an immigrant, but discrimination at the job market too, where his education or degree would have no accreditation in the British system, even though the South Asian Universities were replicas of the Universities in Britain, and were founded by the British Imperial Educational system. Had he been uneducated or an unskilled laborer, his integration would have been easier, as he would have been satisfied with any type of jobs offered. For example, in the case of Nazneen, Razia and Mrs. Azad who did not have to measure their success in terms of their educational qualifications.

The first setback that Chanu must have faced would be related to the fact that his degree was not accepted as a consequence of which he tried to get another bachelors degree from the Open University. He talks about this to Nazneen, as if trying to assure himself that getting British degrees would make him a potentially good candidate for any job and he says, "That is what I am studying in the sub-section on Race, Ethnicity, and Identity. It is a part of the Sociology module. Of course when I have my Open University degree, then nobody can question my credentials" (38). Chanu has dreams of success, and plans too about it, but somehow success eludes him because he does not plan keeping his abilities in mind. His hurried attempts at

getting a degree from an Open University in Britain are one such example. As Nazneen sums up his inability to deliver in these words, “His energy went into niyyah-the making of intention, and here he was advanced and skilful, but the delivery let him down” (181). Chanu feels a sort of urgency, because he had deemed success in Britain in terms of joining the coveted Civil Services, and attaining success in terms of his unconscious colonial identity. He talks or reminisces about what dreams he had come to England with to his friend Dr. Azad, and feels a sort of sense of failure when he relates all this:

I have been in this country for sixteen years. Nearly half of my life ...when I came I was a young man, I had ambitions. Big dreams. When I got off the aero plane I had my degree and a few pounds in my pocket. I thought there would be a red carpet laid for me. I was going to join the Civil Service and become Private Secretary to the Prime Minister. (34)

Chanu thought getting a job in the British Civil Service would be his way of achieving success in the British system, but this concept of success may have been unconsciously tied to his colonial identity deeply embedded in him, though he came to England in the Post Colonial era. He envisages success in terms of the colonial system. He cannot look beyond the system that has shaped his being. Chanu still lives in the period which Franz Fanon coins colonization of the psyche in terms of still seeking the stamp of approval through colonial identity; an identity that cannot detach itself from colonial ties because of years of seeing oneself as one with the empire. Chanu, even though, living in the post colonial era could not shake off what is known as the first stage of the colonized persona; the stage of assimilation with the colonizer, wherein the colonized tries hard to be the perfect replicas of the colonizer. Frantz Fanon outlines in his tripartite schema, the first level of colonial assimilation wherein the colonized tries to assimilate with the colonizer, but in that process suffers from the colonization of the psyche (feelings of

inferiority and social invisibility), and consequently questions his identity within the aping framework. Chanu even though at times repudiated any good that could have come from the British colonization, but whenever he wanted reaffirmation he sought validation from the colonial standards which he considers are supposedly superior standards. In one breath, he would condemn colonization, and in another breath he would seek approval from the colonizer, as if the approval from the colonizer had great value.

For example, while relating to his daughters the history of Bengal Chanu would quote what Sir Warren Hastings, (First Governor General of Bengal and founder of Asiatic Society of India, 1773-1785) had to say about Bengali's with ample pride:

Do you know what Warren Hastings said about our people? He purred and exercised his face as he prepared the quotation, "They are gentle, benevolent" . . . So many good qualities he finds. In short, he finds us "as exempt from the worst properties of human passion as any people on the face of the earth". 'He waved the book in triumph. 'Do you think they teach this in the English Schools?' (186)

He quoted Sir Warren Hastings to impress his daughters that a great Governor General of the British Empire made this comment as if Warren Hastings certification and stamp of approval is what makes the Bengalis gentle and benevolent. One could detect the strains colonized psyche in Chanu's identity, especially when he seeks approval of the colonizer to bolster his self esteem. Even though he seeks approval and validation from the colonizer, but then at times wants to shake off that claim and stamp of approval. This relates to Frantz Fanon's idea of reconstitution of identity through the reclamation of local cultural traditions. This reclamation and reconstitution of identity, is an on-going process in Chanu, especially when he

always goes back in history (16th century), when Bengal was called the paradise of nations as if he needs constant re affirmation that he belonged to a place that had rich cultural and historical heritage. Reconstitution of identity, in the post colonial context could be seen in the light of what a country and its people were, before they were colonized. For Chanu, on the personal front, it would mean decolonization of the colonized psyche. Before colonization, it was the Europeans, Chanu laments who came to seek permission from the Nawab of Bengal, for starting a small business as East India Company. As he explains to his daughters, “In the sixteenth century, Bengal was called the Paradise of Nations. Do they teach these things in the schools here? Does Shahana know about the Paradise of Nations? All she knows about is flood and famine. . . . If you have history you have pride” (185). Chanu’s historical knowledge and perspective make him proactive in the reclamation of his homeland identity all the more, when his plans of integrating in terms of getting good jobs did not materialize. Not only that, he was worried about the lack of interest that the second generation (Shahana) showed in getting acquainted with the culture and history of Bengal. The inter generational conflict became more intense when Chanu imposes his Bengali values and culture on Shahana who always retorts back , “I never asked to be born here” (181) implying if she is born in Britain, she is British. The more Shahana persists in her protests about the imposition of the Bengali culture, the more persistent Chanu gets in his imposition, thus alienating his daughter not only from himself, but from Bengali culture as well. His inability to understand why Shahana does not like imbibing Bengali traditions, in place of British culture and traditions, shows that he has a limited focus; a focus or a lens that wants to perceive meaningful living only through a Bangladeshi lens.

He is sure Shahana has an aversion to Bangladesh because of what they are taught in school. He says, “No. This is not what they teach. All flood here and famine there and taking up

collection tins” (186). The thought that Bangladesh was depicted as a famine ridden country in the British school text books, was despicable to Chanu, because it affirmed what Said says about the appropriation of the East by the West in terms of representation. Though Chanu lives in the third space, as far as his identity is concerned, but one thing that is a constant, in all the stages of identity, is his love for Bangladesh. At times he is an immigrant who wants success in the host nation, and at other times he retreats into his colonial identity when he seeks approval according to colonial systems such as his entering the civil services. But, most of the times, Chanu is a sojourner who though has come to Britain as an immigrant, wants to go back home. Chanu gets lost in all these multiple identities, but there is one aspect of his identity that remains constant, and that is his love for his roots never does he waver in that respect.

Whatever were his plans of success in Britain, but the epitome of success in terms of life time achievement was always seen in the context of going back as a successful man, and educating his children with an awareness and knowledge about the glorious history of Bangladesh. Every evening, he would practice singing the national anthem with his daughters, and the he would start lecturing them about the how European nations would queue up to trade with Bengal the ‘Paradise of Nations’ as they were the makers of the finest muslin cotton and damask in the world. Reconstitution of identity can again be seen in terms of reclamation of cultural traditions and history, and also, when he thinks about the economic exploitation of the British Empire in Bengal. Chanu interprets and explains history for the benefit of his daughters and Dr. Azad:

You see, to go forward you must first look back. We are taking some stock of the glorious British Empire. When I was in school, do you know what we learned? The English gave us railways. As if we should get down on our knees for this.’ He appealed

now to his public. 'Do you think they would have brought the railway if they did not want to sell their steel locomotives? Do you think they brought us railways from the goodness of their hearts? We needed irrigation system not trains. (249)

Chanu understands, and articulates all these systems of colonial exploitation, but deep down it has not yet sunk into his inner most self that he is no longer living in the colonial past. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin write, "Post-colonial culture is inevitably a hybridized phenomenon involving a dialectical relationship between the grafted European cultural systems and an indigenous ontology, with its impulse to create or recreate an independent local identity" (195). Chanu is still in the phase of in-betweenness; wherein his independent identity is still in process, so he still lives between the grafted European cultural systems. Chanu, a product of the postcolonial era, always subconsciously adheres to the fact that the British culture and literature is highly superior; surprisingly, this thought is deeply ingrained in his psyche and it keeps surfacing again time and again. In fact after being fed up of taking courses from the Open University Chanu says, " 'I am fed up with the open University' said Chanu, (as if he had read her thoughts) . . . "They send you so much rubbish to read. I am returning to my first love.' He held up his book. 'English Literature at its finest. You've heard of William Shakespeare. Yes, even a girl from Gouripur has heard of Shakespeare' " (91).

Chanu's colonized identity still was so much steeped into the colonial frame work during this part of his life that he believed in its superiority undoubtedly. We could explain this in light of Homi Bhabha's concept of in-between. In this state of in-betweenness the colonized feels at times trying to identify with the colonizer, and at times repulsed by the colonizer which symbolizes an ongoing colonial presence. Bhabha uses Derrida's concept of "repetition" to explain the European attempts to replicate their social structures as well as cultural values in the

colony. As he argues in his keynote essay, 'Of Mimicry and Man' in The Location of Culture (1985), the colonial system required that the colonized aspire to remake themselves in the image of the European. The colonized were not in reality white, so there was always a "slippage" or "hybridization" of some kind, quite contrary to what the colonizer wanted the colonized to be.

Chanu is a product of such in-between-ness in terms of identity, because he at times wants to be a British Civil servant, a counterpart of the British 'burra sahib' that symbolized the executive power of the Empire, and at other times wants to cling to his Bengali identity, and talks of Bengal as 'Paradise of Nations.' When he plans to return back to Bangladesh he wants as he explains to Nazneen, "Yes, it is an emotional thing. Do you know what I have been thinking? I could a job at Dhaka University. Teaching- sociology or philosophy or English Literature" (256). Ironically, even when planning to go back to Bangladesh, he wants to teach English Literature. Even the job he selects is colonial in terms that he wants to replicate the educational system he so strongly disapproves.

In the Asian subcontinent, in the colonial period and even today, the epitome of success is the entry or selection in the Civil Services. In both cases, Civil Services stand for a positive image of power that is challenged by none. Preference was given to the graduates who did well in the written exam, and were from Oxford a Cambridge Universities. In his paper on Indian Civil Services Bradford Spangenberg comments about the expectation of the Civil Services as:

The more discriminating spokesman –those mostly concerned with the competition— including Civil Service Commissioners, The India Office, and viceroys, "saw a close connection between the scholar and the gentleman," and considered it mandatory that

the non-aristocratic candidates should have achieved social elevation through some university training, preferably at Oxford or Cambridge, although London University and Scottish Degrees seem to have been acceptable. (344)

Chanu always wanted to be considered a scholar, and a gentleman in the eyes of others, and was undoubtedly a man with a literary bent of mind. It was a link between the colonizers, and colonized for the smooth functioning of the British Empire. The British Empire could be successful in India because of the sheer presence of the Civil servants such as Ronny Heaslop in A Passage to India, who pleads with his mother not to mix socially with the Indians because of his complacent imperial assumption that the British were the ruling class and ruled India, for India's good. He says, "We are out here to do justice and keep the peace . . . India is not a drawing room . . . we are not pleasant in India, and we don't intend to be pleasant" (50). Chanu also wanted to associate with people who did important things or held important positions. The concept of ruling a country for its own good was a justifiable reason to rule a colony. The civil services was a class apart from the common herd, as they had finesse and class, something that Chanu chased all his life.

In this respect Chanu was still tied to his colonial identity because he aspired for a role similar to that of the colonizer. He was class conscious to the effect that he did not want to be grouped with the illiterate types or the less respectable types, and in this way tried to mimic the apparent superiority of the colonizer unconsciously. If he made it to the civil services list, he would be in the ruling elite; a class that in Chanu's eyes commanded respect and ensured a high status. Chanu wanted to belong to this elite class, and this induction would mean success or integration in terms of his immigrant identity. Chanu sees this as an epitome of success because he was a product of the British educational system that the British Empire had devised for its

colonies. The inception of Civil Services, and education was rooted in the Mutiny of 1857, (First War of Independence), after which the British had to start a system wherein they would not only educate the Indians so that they could take up the subordinate services (helping the British Civil Servants with the tiresome work associated with being clerks or babus), but it was also seen in the light of English education in India as Tricia Doyle points out, “In the post mutiny era there was a fresh impetus toward western style of education as a means of control. This went hand in hand with widespread condemnation of traditional Indian beliefs which conflicted with the rationalist point of view” (2). Three universities in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras were opened with this in mind so that they could churn out men who were as Lord Macaulay in his infamous minutes (1935) wrote: “A class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern—a class of persons Indian in blood and color, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” (32). The education system would be British not only to awe the colonized regarding the superiority of their system, but also to create a section of Indians who would reflect the British colonial identity minus the essence.

According to Said, Orientalism was a Western style for dominating, and having authority over the Orient. In putting forth this idea, Said reiterates Foucault’s idea that power operates through systems of knowledge (information gathering, cataloguing and so forth) applied to the ways in which authority was exercised and administered in the colonial world. According to Said natives were ruled in part through being represented in censuses, newspapers, sociological studies, and the law as weak willed; people so inferior that needed to be ruled or governed by someone who would not only rule, but bring enlightenment. While planning of the Educational system for India, and consequently the administrative services that Chanu aspired to enter, Lord Macaulay had declared that Orient’s literary production did not

amount to the cultural worth of a single shelf of European Literature. By imposing such a colonial education it was not surprising, therefore, that European texts become important signifiers of cultural value. Gauri Viswanathan's study of the education system in Imperial India is shown as a means through which the colonizers attempted to inculcate the superiority of their culture and literature. The success of this policy or educational systems was the creation of people like Chanu who considered the British literature and services superior. Even though Chanu takes pride in Bengali literature and culture, still Chanu's literary roots lay in the foundational British education of the colonized.

Sure enough, Chanu had come to Britain as an immigrant and had dreamt of entering the British Civil Services which would not only validate his immigrant identity, but also be a validation in the modern British masculinity, as civil servants are men who hold positions of power both home and abroad, and he does perceive it as a way and a means of integrating into the system. He wants to integrate with the host culture, on his own terms, which if not attainable, makes him even more alienated and isolated. On one level, he wants to integrate into the mainstream British society on his own terms (by being a British Civil Servant), but on the other core level, he wants to retain his South Asian/Bangladeshi immigrant identity. Chanu lives in a world of conflicting in-between ness, which makes his integration impossible. The dream of being a civil servant is also tied to Chanu's self esteem; deep inside Chanu wants to be seen as an upwardly mobile intellectual. He takes a lot of trouble in cultivating the friendship of Dr. Azad because in his opinion Dr. Azad is an intellectual. He often comments at their friendship and their need for companionship with these words, "We intellectuals must stick together" (35). Chanu somehow craves respectability, and intellectuality in terms of social relationships. He invites Dr. Azad for meals in his house, and when Dr. Azad does not reciprocate in the same way

he feels very hurt. He airs his opinions about the lack of invitation in these words, "He . . . reads my books. God alone knows where else he finds any intellectual stimulation, any companion of the intellect. Shall I ask him when we will be going to his house? . . . He never considers me a part of his circle." (89). Chanu feels that he does not belong to Dr. Azad's elevated social circle, and hence not inducted into it, because after all, he is just a council clerk, and so is socially inferior to him. Chanu never weighs success in terms of how much money a person makes, but whether or not that person is educated or well read. Anyone who does not have these two is not worth cultivating friendship with. In this respect Chanu has set tight boundaries, in terms of social relationships, even within his own community. He wants to interact with the ones, who he thinks, are educated. It is this narrow or limited vision, which somehow makes it difficult for him to integrate not only with the people of the host nation, but people of the Bangladeshi community who reside in the Tower Hamlets, too.

Chanu's response to people, and his inability for social networking makes him live in a self made shell, where entry is allowed only to the people who he thinks are worthy of cultivating a relationship. When Nazneen befriends Razia, Chanu has a word or two to say about Razia and her husband, "Razia, on the other hand, I would not call a respectable type. But her background? Her husband does some menial job. He is uneducated. He is probably illiterate. Perhaps he can write his name." (83). Chanu's inability to see individuals beyond the framework of formal education makes him a snob. In much the same way, as the British Educational system disqualifies Chanu's Bangladeshi degree, Chanu is unable to accept, and be friends, with people who lack formal education. Chanu may feel he is discriminated against, in the host nation, but ironically Chanu is also guilty of similar behavior. Chanu's inability to form relationships outside his family and Dr. Azad can be seen as one of the reasons as to why Chanu feels isolated. His

going home syndrome is inadvertently tied to his policy of social segregation. Should an immigrant then make an out and out effort to assimilate in the host nation?

CHAPTER THREE

IMMIGRANT ACCULTRATION

Emigrating from one country to another has historically been an ongoing process for centuries as we have seen in the case of countries such as the United States, Canada and Australia which have all experienced huge waves of immigration. These nations are largely made up of immigrants. Immigrants today, however Ingleby points out are the ones who “encounter centuries old civilizations and even more importantly, they remain in minority. On the whole they form a diaspora, that is to say they retain strong ties with their place of origin” (1). The immigrants of the earlier centuries, made a fresh move once and for all when they migrated and settled in the host nation. The distances made it impossible for them to go back to their land of origin even for a visit, and they were met with little resistance from the original people of the land, so their adaptation was easier. They did not have to face traditionally established cultures, and remain in the periphery of a given society just because they belonged to a different country or race. But the challenges faced by an immigrant to countries that have traditionally established cultures like Britain are of a complex kind wherein integration is more of a challenge. In the present globalized world harnessed by ever changing technology, an immigrant has access to his place of birth anytime, when and as his finances and time allow him

or her. This transnational open door always encourages an immigrant to return to his country of birth. Chanu could always visit his homeland, he could always come back, but what is it that impelled him to choose take a road of reverse migration—to make a journey to his roots?

Chanu suffers from the going home syndrome of the first generation immigrant, but in the novel we do find other first generation immigrants who have managed to identify, and assimilate with the host culture. Some of the first generation immigrants such Mrs. Azad go to the extent of trying to completely identifying, and assimilating with the host culture as they want to fit in, and be accepted in the host culture easily. They feel that they have to make it at any cost so that they appear less foreign. Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi, who have gone through similar processes, have in their novels both touched upon the way first generation immigrants go through the process of assimilation sometimes to the extent of losing their identity (original home, desh identity) In Kureishi's Black Album, one of the characters, Shahid, at the beginning of the novel, has firmly identified with the British national identity, and has lived in England all his life. He does not like to be called a "Paki", (a derogatory name given by British racists to British born Pakistanis coined as "Paki bashing") and even to be seen in the host country Britain as a Paki. To assimilate with the host country and become one with them he even longs to join the racist National Front. Saladin Chamcha, of the The Satanic Verses reacts similarly as Shahid in regards to assimilation. Saladin faced racism as a school boy. He uses the same strategy of assimilation to cope with feelings of alienation and self-loathing. In his great desire for assimilation with the host culture, he is ready to repudiate his Indian heritage. In both these cases, they were ready to give up their homeland identity completely to get acceptance or to live within the mainstream British society. Studies in the social psychology of identity pertaining to psychological consequences of identifications with ethnic out-groups and in-

groups somewhat explain such behavior. For example high achieving ethnic or racial individuals develop a race less persona, but often, at the cost of interpersonal conflict and ambivalence within their in-group according to a research in ethnic & racial identity according to Fordham & Ogbu (1986). This may have a negative impact in their in-group, and unacceptability both in the in-group, and the out-group, as in the case of Saladin and Shahid. But, even this attempt to sever South Asian roots, does not ensure that both Shahid and Saladin would be accepted as British. On the one hand, they are not accepted by the host nation, given racial names, on the other hand their own immigrant community considers them hybrid clowns wearing the garb of West, and trying to ape them, thus living in a third space of a fluid identity. The self constructed identity, of trying to appear like an Englishman, does not necessarily give a first generation immigrant entry into the mainstream culture of the host country. Complete assimilation as in the above mentioned cases, is then not something that assures acceptance. So is Chanu's decision to go back is a wise one, or the only choice open for an immigrant? What is the paradigm or model of acculturation which would ensure acceptance or success in a host nation for a first generation immigrant?

Cross cultural psychologists' studying immigrant identity, acculturation and adaptation have made insightful studies in this realm. I would like to apply the model of acculturation put forward by Berry and Sam regarding, non-adaption/integration in the host culture. The model of Acculturation strategies suggested by Berry and Sam (1987) is quite well defined. They, in their model of acculturation suggest a fourfold classification which included assimilation, integration, separation and marginalization. Assimilation refers to the process when "an immigrant decides not to maintain his or her cultural or ethnic identity, in his or her interaction with the host country" (118). When an immigrant "expresses an interest in maintaining strong ties in their

everyday life with both their ethnic/cultural group as well as with their dominant/host group, then he or she is following the integration strategy”(118).When an immigrant “places a strong value on holding on their own original culture” (119) they are pursuing a separation strategy. The fourth strategy defined as marginalization refers to the individuals who, “lose cultural and psychological contact with both their traditional culture and larger society” (119). Although, Chanu wants to integrate, the obstacles that he faces seem to drive him towards separation to quite an extent.

The first instance where Chanu feels let down is related to his efforts to enter the civil service as that was what he had dreamt about. In case of the promotion to council clerk post there may have been some racial discrimination, but in his actualization of the dream of being a Civil Servant there could possibly be no chances of discrimination at all, because even the British Whites have to go through a very stringent Civil Service Exam. Chanu, with his bookish knowledge, and a string of motley assorted degrees, was no candidate for the Civil Service in Britain. In this context success was not within his grasp, as he did not have the competence for it. He did deserve the promotion he talks about, and maybe further promotions as a Head-Clerk or the Superintendent, but not anything more than that. As Alistair Cormack sums up very aptly in these words, “He consistently expresses a desire to return, not prepared to admit his discrepancy between his fantasies, built on institutionalized version of Bangladeshi identity” (702-703). In Chanu’s case there is always a discrepancy in what he aspires to achieve, and what he is capable of achieving. The desire to return to Bangladesh was tied to success, but when success eluded him because of his failed plans, Chanu was disillusioned. The more the distance between perceived success, and the success in hand, the more is his sense of separation and marginalization. He is unable to become a civil servant, and the fact that he does not get a

promotion deflates and defeats him. Chanu does feel the discrimination very strongly, and he does understand the dynamics of how racial prejudices and fears are fanned when he says:

You see... it is the white underclass, like Wilkie, who are most afraid of people like me. To him, and people like him, we are the only thing standing in the way of them sliding totally to the bottom of the pile. . . .That is why you get the phenomena of the National Front. They can play on the fears to create racial tensions and give these people a superiority complex. (38)

When Chanu talks of these people as not knowing or underestimating his capacities, he also refers to the prevalent air of non- acceptance of the immigrants, stirred by Powell's (20th April, 1968) famous River of Blood speech, which gained tremendous publicity and public support. It not only brought into light the hostility of Powell, but fuelled the fire of anti-immigrant resentment. At a time like this when immigrants were not at all accepted, being able to consider Great Britain their home, and to be able to assimilate would have been rather difficult. The impact of this speech has been very well commented by Zig Layton Henry, ". . . his apocalyptic river of blood speech made him a national figure overnight . . . However its reception in the media made it a cataclysmic event in the remorseless process by which the race issue has been politicized in Britain" (80).Immigrants like Chanu may have felt that hostility of the people around him, as immigrants of that period were considered a threat to British national identity and culture. The politicization of the race issue definitely made the life of the immigrants difficult. Chanu addresses the British system as these people, and he in a way thinks he did not succeed as per his dreams due to the fact that the British system treats all immigrants educated/uneducated in the same way. In some ways Chanu is right because he did understand and speak English, and could probably have done better in his job, had he been given the

desired promotion. The possible injustice in terms of job placement and the dreams that go with it must have been one of the reasons of Chanu's disillusionment. As it is, an immigrant already feels alienation in terms of acceptance in the host nation, which is so different from his own, but discrimination makes him feel his non-acceptance acutely. There are instances of discrimination against Chanu in his promotion as a council clerk to a certain extent, as we find a very marked reference of this in, 'The Politics of Immigration', where it is written:

In the interviews with different ethnic groups Daniel found that 45% West Indians claimed personal experience of discrimination as did 34% of Pakistanis and 35% of Indians. Among the Cypriots only 6% did so. . . Surprisingly, discrimination was the highest against those with the best knowledge of the English language, and the most qualifications –presumably, because they were competing for the better jobs. (47)

The employers claimed that they did not give better jobs to the immigrants because of their lack of ability, but the situational tests proved that these excuses given by employers were inaccurate, and that there was a lot of blatant racial discrimination as per jobs in Britain. The immigrants were given jobs only when suitable white workers were not available. The above mentioned reference is from a study carried out by the Department of Political and Economic Planning (PEP) in 1966-67. The results of this sort of study which was later published in a book form as Racial Discrimination in England, mirrors the feelings that Chanu has when he talks of his promotion, "Of course, it's not been announced yet. Other people have applied .But after my years of service . . . Do you know, in six years I have not been late on one single day! . . . Some of my colleagues are very unhealthy, always going off sick with this or that . . ." (33).Not only was Chanu very regular and punctual, a sign of dependability in the work sphere, he may have also been a good worker in the capacity he works, but is not sure if he would get the promotion. He

always talks about Wilkie, his white competitor as less qualified, as he has only 'two O' Levels' and his work ethics are also not praiseworthy, as he comes at least half an hour late from lunch to work every day. Not only that, Wilkie uses the boss' phone without his permission. All this hints at possible discrimination that takes place in Britain, as even after being a potentially good candidate, he is not sure that he would get the promotion.

Frustration builds up in Chanu, and he vents out his dissatisfaction as he says, "But I did not come here for money? Was I starving in Dhaka? I was not. Do they enquire about my diplomas? He gestured to the wall, where various framed certificates were displayed. This question raised by Chanu speaks of the frustration of an immigrant on two grounds. Firstly, an immigrant goes through the process of inadequacy as his degrees are not considered equivalent, and thus they can't compete for the best possible jobs. Secondly, this non-acceptance leads to feelings of inadequacy in terms of fulfillment of what dreams an immigrant comes with. Chanu was not starving in Bangladesh, and it is obvious that he was making a decent living. But when his promotion is due he talks, eats and breathes promotion. Chanu is thrilled with the news that he is going to be a father, and connects it to his promotion in a very touching way, "Now I have to get the promotion, they can't keep delaying. I will tell them, I will tell Mr. Dalloway, "Look here, I am about to have a son. I am going to be a father. Give me a proper job, fit for a real man, a father" (52). Chanu wants a proper job fit for a man; a job in which he will redeem himself in terms of being a successful provider and bread winner in a country that he has settled in, and he thinks he will be able to compete with the British men on an equal footing in the job dynamics, which would not only validate his masculine identity on a personal level, but also make him think he is a successful first generation immigrant too ,and that is why he keeps talking about it all the time.

In the first place success and money comes to those immigrants who are enterprising businessmen. Had Chanu invested some capital on business he could have gone home a successful man. He neither gets money nor social status, and he ends up being a taxi-driver. The other Bangladeshis, and Asians who had enterprisingly tried their luck in business, were very successful and hence integrated with the host nation. Though they were uneducated, they minted money by opening restaurants selling authentic curries that are a rage in Britain.

According to "International Journal of Heritage Studies" Brick Lane is:

Brick Lane is best known to Londoners as the home of balti houses and 24 hour bagel shops but it is also the economic social and cultural hub of the Bengali community and for the last 30 years become the unofficial capital of the British Bengali people. This colorful and varied street extends from Osborn Street to the South, which continues to house the Jewish --and Bengali run cloth manufacturing industry, through the Bengali retail, cultural and restaurant area in the centre. (87)

Chanu did understand the dynamics of business, when he tells Nazneen that all restaurants displayed statues of Hindu Gods and Goddesses not because the hotel owners were Hindus, but because the clients were predominantly white and the restaurants displaying these statues were considered more authentic. He adds on, "Not Hindus. Marketing. The biggest God of all" (446). Chanu understood all he talked about so eloquently, but failed in his execution. In between all the plans that he made Chanu failed to implement them as Nazneen notes, "No the degree would never be finished. The promotion would never be won. The job would never be resigned. . . . The house in Dhaka would never be built. The jute business would never be started" (92). The string of nevers in Chanu's list kept on adding, and led to his alienation and separation all the more. Secondly, success comes to people who are skilled like plumbers,

mechanics, electricians or the people who are educated like doctors, engineers, computer experts and so forth. Chanu fits into none of these categories, so he feels all the more alienated.

In a highly complex globalized, transnational, and technologically advanced age, success would mean having those skills that are in high demand in a particular society so that an individual (in this case an immigrant) does not go through refusals or face redundancy in terms of the job market. In this respect Nazneen, though illiterate manages to start a tailoring business as she has a skill that is always in demand. In the British social system, as anywhere in the world, success is linked to economic power that a man yields, and that decides his social status too. On both these grounds, Chanu cannot be called a success.

True, he is a bread winner, but a bread winner who can only provide 'bread' and not enough butter and jam. He is not upwardly mobile as when the novel begins he is in the lower middle class, and later on even goes to a level wherein he is a taxi-driver who earns very little, to the extent that a large part of his income goes towards fines, so much so that it is Nazneen's income that sustains the family. Is his masculine identity as the breadwinner threatened by this downward trend in his income? Is this also connected to the fact that he may still reclaim his sense of worth and identity by being successful in Bangladesh that he goes back? Not being able to get the promotion is one issue, but having to depend on a woman for sustenance is another issue that may have been difficult for Chanu to take. He does not show his irritation in any way. In the worst case scenario Asian men like Razia's husband tend to be abusive when they lose their jobs, or earn less than their wives. Chanu is a stark contrast to Razia's husband who does not give her enough money to run the house, or even to spend on the children. When she wants to work for generating income for her family he refuses permission, instead locks her up in the house, while he is at work. The fear of gossip in this mini Bangladesh discourages women to take

any action on their own points to the narrow isolated existence of these immigrants live. Razia confides in Nazneen about her husband's attitude and probable action towards her if she tries getting a job, "If I get a job he will kill me . . . just one slit across here. That's the sort of man he is . . . The children ask for things. . . . but my husband will come to the sewing factory and slaughter me like a lamb" (123).

Chanu is an amiable man, who in the initial period of their marriage did not allow his wife to go out alone, not because he did not trust her, but because other people (fellow Bangladeshis) in the Estate may talk. Bangladeshis like others other South Asians are tied to a psyche as to what others would think about them. For example Dr. Azad does not invite Chanu to his house because his wife smokes and drinks openly which is quite a taboo in the South Asian context. Chanu had evolved a lot, maybe because of economic necessity, or may be seeing things around him. In this respect he opens up to the ideas as his western masculine counterpart has done. He comes to the level of understanding that "women entering the work force" is the demand or need of the day, something a man has to accept in the modern world. The masculinity to which he has evolved is to some extent in tune with the contemporary masculinity or multiple masculinities, wherein men are not threatened by the presence of women in the world of work, and where men see women not as owners but as partners. In this sense Chanu has evolved from being a patriarchal husband to an enlightened one. Chanu had integrated on the level of positive and proactive thought systems of the west, wherein women were not mere commodities to be locked in the house, but living beings, who needed breathing space in terms of freedom to work. He not only encourages Nazneen to start taking the tailoring consignments, but also encourages her to start her business in partnership with Razia. Even though he goes back to Bangladesh he does not force her to accompany him.

When Chanu resigns from his council clerk job he was confident that he would be able to get a good job soon enough, but all his efforts did not yield any fruit. He gets job offers that he thinks are below his dignity. For example he was offered a job of washing dishes in a restaurant which makes him depressed. Inability to find a suitable job made him immobilized. He just stayed in bed reading his books. He wanted to start a briefcase business but when met with failure to implement his scheme withdrew within himself as Nazneen worries, "Finally he lay on the bed and began a monotonous grumbling. Then he took out his certificates and spread them around and looked at them day after day. . . . He stopped eating. . . .When he stopped reading, Nazneen was overpowered with worry. (204)The cause of worry was genuine because come what may, reading was always Chanu's first love. Though Chanu lost interest in many things after he lost his job, but when he lost interest in books things seemed serious.

Not only does Chanu feel marginalized as far as his job prospects were concerned, but he is unsure of himself as a husband too. Nazneen's affair with Karim, does not threaten the marriage, but definitely changes the basic dynamics of their marriage. Chanu is aware that of the relationship, but does nothing to stop it or even protest about it. This sort of acceptance of the affair or the feigned ignorance makes one wonder as to why Chanu accept this status quo? Chanu assuredly did know about his wife's affair, but he turns a blind eye to it. Was it because he knew she was young, and this was natural. Or the failure to be a bread winner made him accept this infidelity. He possibly, would have thought in Nazneen's case, it would be a passing fancy, and die a natural death with the passage of time. Or maybe he was so depressed, and had come to the stage of complete marginalization, that nothing mattered to him. Everything was at this stage meaningless to him. Had he reached a stage of numbness, that an individual feels when he suffers from alienation in terms of not being able to get a job or fulfill any of his

dreams and plans? Whatever the reasons he starts focusing on going home all the more. He puts all his energies in the going home project.

CHAPTER IV

RECLAMATION OF HOMELAND IDENTITY

His decision to go back to his homeland was always a part of his immigrant identity, but it solidifies at a time in his life circle when he is unable to integrate. Interestingly enough, Chanu comes with dreams of a bright future in Britain, but their interaction with the mainstream culture or host country from the very beginning is at the minimal level. He does not interact with the British people socially, and even when he wants to marry he goes to Bangladesh. He and his wife Nazneen, live in the Tower Hamlets, and are in no way upwardly mobile. Considered as the poorest and socially deprived boroughs in London, facing high unemployment, the predominantly Bangladeshi and South Asian immigrants that have settled here depend upon the council for housing. Chanu, since he stepped in London has continued to live there as he can identify with the locality as an immigrant junction or a mini-Bangladesh, where he feels secure, but then in this very security, is tied the fact that he wants limited interaction with the host culture. This sort of separation strategy goes a long way in feeding the going home syndrome. Not only does he live in that area, but he also makes sure that he and his wife interact with only Bangladeshis. His sense of self and even self esteem is tied down to Bangladeshi identity. Tajfel & Turner point out, "The social identity theory focuses on the extent

to while individuals identify themselves in terms of group memberships. The central tenet of identity theory is that individuals define their identities along two dimensions: social, defined by membership in different social groups; and personal, the idiosyncratic attributes that distinguish one individual from another” (369). Deaux (1993) interprets it a little differently. She lays more stress on the social aspect of personality saying that, “social identities provide status and enhance (or not) self esteem. Because people are motivated to evaluate themselves positively, they tend to evaluate positively to those groups they belong, and to discriminate against groups they perceive to pose a threat to their social identity” (212). Added to this is a study made by Phinney (1991) wherein she studied relationships between ethnic identity, and self -esteem. She is of the opinion that a strong ethnic identity, when accompanied by some adaptation to the mainstream, is related to high self esteem. Chanu lay a lot emphasis on the social aspect of his personality that is Asian and Bangladeshi, and that is why both in his inner and outer spaces, he does not allow the mainstream culture to filter.

Even though geographically located in London his racial, cultural and ethnic identity, both socially and psychologically is located in the group he identifies with. (Bangladeshi identity) He does not even try to adapt to his host culture minimally. As he does not get a promotion, his self esteem is affected resulting in his pre mature resignation from the job. Inability to find a better job is yet another rebuff to his self esteem. As his self esteem goes down so does his level of adaptation to the extent that there comes a stage when he is no longer an earning member, till he accepts the job of a taxi-driver.

Nazneen, on the other hand is tempted to talk to the only white lady, the tattoo lady on the block, but never do we find in Chanu a desire to even have even basic social interaction with the British. They remain cloistered into their small world whose interactions shape their vision.

Both Chanu and his family were merely a visible presence. Chanu worked with the British, but that too only as long as he was with them in the office, after which they retreated into their own worlds. In this respect till he worked in the council clerk position he followed the separation strategy, wherein an immigrant keeps as much interaction or contact as is necessary in the work sphere. This sort of separation leads to marginalization even more because an immigrant fails to interact with the people of the host nation.

On the other hand people like Mrs. Azad had managed very well within the British social system. Mrs. Azad had assimilated to an extent that she had started wearing skirts, cut her streaked hair short, smoked cigarettes and drank beer, and did so with no pretensions at all. It did not bother her about what other Bangladeshi immigrants would think of her. Mrs. Azad has a very valid reason to assimilate with the host culture, as she thinks assimilation is a must for success. Mrs. Azad's acculturation is the kind of assimilation, wherein she wants to be one with the mainstream British identity, instead of clinging on to a Bangladeshi immigrant identity. As she says very pertinently that the immigrants want the host culture to change for them, but would not change themselves to adapt to the host culture. Is this change an outer change in nature or is it something that is a requirement for immigrants who assimilate? Is this mimicry essential to survive or is it a positive proactive step to be one with the mainstream culture?

Dr. Azad is still governed by the Bangladeshi back home social mores, so when his daughter asks for money to go to the pub in front of Nazneen and Chanu, he feels deeply mortified. Chanu feels this embarrassment too, and makes a comment about the immigrant tragedy, which makes Mrs. Azad retort back, and she speaks her mind regarding immigrant issues. Chanu talks about the clash of cultures, and that the clash is between the western cultures and the Eastern Cultures. He speaks his opinion rather emphatically, "I am talking about

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

These lines, sum up, to a great extent, Chanu's inner most feelings. The need to integrate is a need that every immigrant understands to some extent, when he or she comes to a host country. The clash of cultures that Chanu is talking about here is not only non acceptance of the culture of the West/Britain by the immigrant, but also the non acceptance on the part of the British or the host nation of the immigrant. The feeling of alienation is also two faced like Janus; on one level an immigrant feels a loss of being away or being cut off from the homeland, and on the other hand he always remains an outsider or the hyphenated presence as Bangladeshi British. Then the second challenge Chanu talks about is the need to preserve one's own identity and heritage. Why is there a strong need to preserve one's homeland identity? Will staying in Britain mean losing one's self and assimilating into the mainstream?

Mrs. Azad's perception is a very different one, as she represents those first generation immigrants as per the acculturation paradigm of Berry that has assimilated into the mainstream culture. Mrs. Azad thinks that the Western way of life gives a sense of freedom for individual growth and choice that Bangladesh does not especially in the case of women. She raises another pertinent question; if people want to live in the mode of a Bangladeshi identity, why do they migrate at all? She does not see anything bad in her daughter frequenting the disco, and neither is she apologetic about it, perhaps to the dismay of both, Dr. Azad and Chanu. She is sure of her choices and she knows what she wants from life. She expresses her choices very emphatically, so that her perception of assimilation is clear to all. She says:

I work with white girls and I am just one of them . . . Some women spend ten, twenty years here and they sit in the kitchen grinding spices all day and learn only two words of English . . . They go around covered from head to toe, in their walking prisons, and when someone calls to them in the street they get upset. The society is racist. . . . Everything should change for them. They don't have to change one thing .That', she said, stabbing the air,' is the tragedy. (114)

Mrs. Azad enjoys the relative freedom of the west where women can live their lives on their own terms as against the women in Bangladesh who live under the patriarchal system. Mrs. Azad raises another pertinent question regarding integration; she questions the attitude of the immigrants who come to a new country and culture expecting everything, and everyone to change according to their liking, without making any effort to integrate on their own.

The same issues were raised by Home Secretary Blunkett's "British test" for immigrants after the racial riots in Bradford and Oldham. In a white paper, issued for immigrants according to "The Independent" Blunkett outlines plans to go through a light touch naturalization programs including obtaining a "modest grasp of English. . . so they can feel and become more English" (1). He further explains as to why this is important by saying, "We have norms of acceptability and those who come to our homes-for that is what it is - should accept these norms" (1). It is very clear from Blunkett's white paper for immigrants, that immigrants should also consider England their home, and try to integrate by at least accepting some norms like speaking English and so forth. Expecting immigrants to learn, and speak in English is not aimed at making the immigrants inadequate or looking down at them, but is an attempt to make the immigrants realize that speaking English would ensure better social interaction and cohesion.

The host nation strives for integration because that is the only resolution for racial tensions and trouble in a multi-ethnic society.

Blunkett's white paper addresses the same issues that Mrs. Azad raises about Bengali women being in England for twenty years, and not speaking a word of English. This test is not an imposition of any sort by the British government, but an attempt on the part of the government to integrate all the different ethnic groups in Britain on certain common grounds, so that the deep seated racial prejudices are faced head on, by creating far greater social cohesion.

The greater tragedy, according to Mrs. Azad is lack of initiative on the part of the immigrants towards integration into the mainstream culture. She justifies her stance by saying, "Assimilation this, alienation that! Let me tell you a few simple facts. Fact: we live in a Western society. Fact: our children will act more and more as Westerners. Fact: That's no bad thing. My daughter is free to come and go" (113). Considering natural assimilation as a clash of cultures as in Shahana's case is being obtuse to social reality. Shahana cannot relate to her Bangladeshi identity. Understandably, Shahana is a typical second generation child who does not share the passion that Chanu has for Bangladesh:

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

Chanu is very worried that his daughters are being brought in a culture which would negate their Bangladeshi identity, and that is why before this catastrophe happens he wants to take his daughters back to Bangladesh. He has the fear that living longer in Britain would perhaps make them like Mrs. Azad, or the likes of her, who have in the opinion of Chanu given up their ethnic and cultural identity.

Chanu awakens to the reality that he has been a failure on all counts, and in nearly all the areas of life. In his career he goes spiraling down from being a council clerk to a taxi driver; as a provider, he fails as he earns equivalent to what he pays in fines; as a husband he turns a blind eye to his wife's affair and finally his hopes of inculcating Bangali traditions in his children are also met with failure. Chanu's decision to migrate or return back to Bangladesh was a process that sees the light of the day in stages. He is an immigrant who thinks after attaining success he will go back to his native place (desh). So, he still lives by the norms, traditions, culture and values of his homeland (desh), though he continues to live in the land of adoption. The first generation immigrants all share a common memory myth, of the homeland with them as an active presence. They are tied to the homeland to such an extent that they according to Jonathan Ingleby are, "strangers", "a perpetual minority" (2) in the host nation. Chanu stands for all the above mentioned categories, along with an added dimension very few immigrants possess; he is steeped in his own culture and history, not only steeped, he takes pride in it, and is convinced of the superiority and greatness, of the Bengali culture before colonization. To him the most terrible thing that could happen to an individual is the loss of pride (187). The pride that he is talking about here, is the pride that is again tied to one's ethnic, racial and cultural identity; a pride that Sir Walter Scott wrote about in the poem, "My Native Land"

Breathes there a man with a soul so dead.

Who ne'er to himself hath said,
This is my land--My native land.
Whose heart hath ne'er within him bur'ed,
As home his footsteps he hath turned. From wandering on a foreign strand!

This love of the motherland/homeland is not evident in Chanu only, it can be seen in Karim too, though he is a second generation immigrant. In Nazneen, Karim had seen the essential Bengali womanhood, which he finds so fascinating and attractive. He had never been to Bangladesh all his life, as he was born and bred in Britain, but even as a second generation immigrant, he had an image of a girl/woman that reflected Bengali womanhood and ideal femininity. Nazneen for him is, "How did Karim see her? The real thing, he said. A Bengali wife. A Bengali mother. An idea of home. An idea of himself that he found in her" (454). The above quoted lines do give a deep understanding of Bengali way of looking at their homeland (desh). Karim, a second generation immigrant, speaks broken Bengali, but his deepest romantic longings and desires have Bengali roots. Towards the end he also goes to Bangladesh to connect to his roots.

First generation immigrants may settle down anywhere, but they always have a deep craving for their roots. This also explains or ties down the fact as to why Chanu wants to go to Bangladesh, even after living in Britain for more than twenty years. Chanu, is still tied to his homeland because in his mind he never left it. It always remained a living presence and was at the core of his being; a core he always dreamt of returning back. As Tinaz Parvi writes:

. . . in the case of Bangladesh, national identity appeared to be defined primarily by the ethnic ties shared by the Bengali people , the Bengali "nation"—ties that included their

language, history, culture and homeland—and that composed their perception of themselves as a distinct ethnic group. (108)

The Bengali people are defined, first and foremost by the use Bengali language as their mother tongue, while geographically they may come from “The People’s Republic of Bangladesh” or the Indian province of Bengal (formerly West Bengal). Bangladesh is perhaps the only country that chose Bengali language and culture over religion in their separation from Pakistan in 1971. The Bengali people (both from India and Bangladesh) as a race are very proud of their language, cultural heritage, films, music, muslin, fine arts and so forth. It is a pride of a very healthy kind, because it’s not an ostentatious pride. We can see this love of Bangladesh so alive even in the immigrants that have made Britain their home, by assimilating with the British culture, and British national identity to quite an extent.

As per the social inclusion goals, “to acknowledge, respect and celebrate the cultural diversity of England’s heritage in all its activities” (75) the British Government did try to make its diverse multi-ethnic people integrate. After entering this charmed circle of inclusion, these successful Bangladeshi businessmen have been able to persuade the English Heritage Society to include their areas under the “Statement of Inclusion Goals-July -2000” under the slogan of Tony Blair of, “Cool Britannia” instead of “Rule Britannia”. They have been so successful in their endeavors that their area near Brick Lane has been named “Bangla-Town”, and their street furniture is painted green and red in the colors of the National Flag of Bangladesh. Chanu could also be like the other Bangladeshis, who have not only settled in Britain but have made their presence felt in Britain. Why could Chanu not be a part of the statement of Inclusion? A circle of inclusion which makes Tony Blair say very proudly, “We have fine traditions of tolerance,

openness. . ." (215). Why could he not identify with the British national identity that promotes or enlightened inclusion, and multi-cultural ethnicity

Chanu, also in his innermost being carries the pride of his desh with him. He loved Bengal, and what it stood for since times immemorial. It was a love rooted in the concept of the golden Bengal of Tagore, history, culture, arts and so forth. He always told his daughters, and Nazneen about the place Bengal merited during its golden period. He speaks about the Bengal in the 16th Century, and to this effect, he wants to instill the pride of their Bengali roots and culture into his daughters, "If you have a history, you see, you have pride. The whole world was going to Bengal to do trade. Sixteenth Century and Seventeenth century. Dhaka was the home of textiles. Who invented all this muslin and damask and every damn thing? It was us. All the Dutch and Portuguese and French and British queuing up to buy" (185).

Chanu was always disturbed in the way Bangladesh is depicted in the media. The media exposed only poverty, floods and famines in Bangladesh. He questions, if ever the students in the British schools were taught that there was a time when the Europeans queued to trade with Bengal? What Chanu wanted to say was something that reflects what Said has to say about the interpretation of history of the East, by the West that always showed the superiority of the West over the East, as they were the ones who wrote history. According to occidentalists, the orientals had no history or culture independent of their colonial masters. They were backward and unaware of their own history. Creating an image of the Orient, and a body of knowledge about the Orient, and subjecting it to systematic study became the prototype for taking control over the Orient. Chanu wanted to make his daughters aware of their history and heritage, and that golden Bengal that he talked of was not a mere fantasy, but was a famous historical entity,

and had a history to boast of. Whatever his other faults were, Chanu had an in depth, and accurate knowledge of the history of his people, the Bengalis

In fact the recorded history of Bengal goes back to the Fourth Century. But the present world sees Bangladesh as a land that is flooded every year, and as one of the poorest Third world countries. This is what bothers Chanu who still lives in the glorious past of Bengal. He wants to reinforce the fact that there was a time when Bengal was a significant global presence, in terms of cotton textiles. The famed fine Dhaka muslin saree, merchants said could pass through a ring. He feels sad that his children are ignorant about their rich heritage. Chanu is one of those first generation of immigrants, who have never bothered to think themselves as British in any way except the job sphere, and that is why they never even tried to assimilate with the British culture, or even mix up with the people of other nationalities. As Katy Gardener points out from her interviews of first generation Bangladeshi immigrants in the book, Question of Identity:

It would be frivolous to argue that young Bengali men in this period navigated multiple and hybrid identities in the same way as their offspring today. What I do contend, however, is the notion that during this period their identities were stable, or that they saw themselves solely and simply as 'Bangladeshis abroad' (167)

Chanu belonged to that set of men who had integrated in the British system only as much was required to be able to make do. We can however claim that he belonged to those immigrants who were hit by the Going Home syndrome Dr. Azad talks about. The immigrants who never made Britain their home; though they lived here physically their souls were always back home. Chanu carries with him a repertoire of images of Bangladeshi golden past, but unlike

the Dr. and Mrs. Azad or Mrs. Islam, does not mix the past with his present British identity of an immigrant, and that is why he cannot navigate the British terrain smoothly and successfully. He in his quest for the golden Bengal of the 16th century forgets that he inhabits the 20th century world.

His love of Bengal is tied to the reclamation of that Bengali identity, lost due to colonization to the British, after the Battle of Buxar, in 1765. He in his own way wants to reclaim that Bengali identity which is connected to his pride, and self worth in terms of the pre-colonial identity. Chanu talked of Bengal not only as a enlightened state Sonar Bangla, that lost its pride because of colonization, but at times it is also tied his own loss of pride with it ; loss of pride in terms of losing his first job, and then ending up being a taxi driver. He says:

And when the British took control, this is what gave them strength to take all India . . .

During the Eighteenth century—this part of the country was wealthy. It was educated-it provided—we provided—one third revenues of Britain’s Indian Empire . . . he rubbed the edge of the cushions and he looked at the wall, at the place where his certificates had hung in the old flat . . . ‘A loss of pride, ’he said, talking to the wall, is a terrible thing.’

(187)

Pride in their culture, race is an essential aspect of Bengali identity. Even today Bengalis (both from India and Bangladesh) take a lot of pride in Rabindranath Tagore who was awarded a Nobel Prize in Literature, but more so, because he returned to the British Empire the title of ‘Sir’ bestowed on him by the British Crown, in protest against the Jhallianwala Baugh (massacre) Tragedy (1919). To return the knighthood back to the Empire was not an easy step, but Rabindernath Tagore believed in the rightness of his cause and human dignity. He could not

accept knighthood from the colonizers after the massacre that became one of the very crucial turning points in the history of the freedom movement. Non acceptance of the title meant taking a stand against the colonizer and disclaiming colonial power. Chanu, as a regular practice, asks his daughters to recite the national song of Bangladesh written by Rabindernath Tagore. He feels that Tagore truly was the greatest literary figure who took a stand against colonial domination.

So, even as he is about to step out of his house to go to Bangladesh, Chanu asks his daughters to be good girls, obey their mother, study hard and read Gitanjali written by Tagore. Like Ali's father, Chanu wants to instill in his daughters love of the Bengali culture, art, music, poetry literature, history and so forth, speak of his love for Sonar Bengal. It is only something that one feels passionately about, can one give up things that one is not passionate about. Chanu must really have strong feelings for his country because he gave up all other plans (like business plans and so forth), but never did he even contemplate about giving up the plan of going back. Chanu had decided he would go back as a successful man as he says towards the end, "All these years I dreamed of going home a Big Man. Only now, when it's nearly finished for me, I realized what is important" (477). His dreams of being a big man had crashed, but Chanu knew, if he did not go back now, he would never be able to go back.

Chanu appears to be a failure, and an indecisive man in many ways, and many issues in life, but his step towards going back shows Chanu in a different light; he validates his selfhood in terms of solidity of purpose, by not giving up on his decision, even though his wife and daughters don't go with him. Chanu redeems himself and his homeland identity by going back. When Chanu had come to Britain, he thought his success would mean on the colonial context as Ms. Lousie Bennett's poem, "Colonization in Reverse" meant to the Caribbean migrants. By

being successful on the British grounds, and on their terms would be a very important step towards reclamation of the Bengali identity, as well as going back with economic success would prove the ability to be able to negotiate the modern multiple masculinities and immigrant dream of success, in a successful way. Something he had always planned as he says very pointedly, "You see when the English went into our country, they did not go to stay. They went to make money, and the money they made, they took it out of the country. They never left home. Just taking money out. And that is what I am doing now" (214). He failed to be a successful immigrant in the given terms, but he did not want to fail as a Bengali, reclaiming his homeland identity. From the very beginning, he announces to Dr. Azad that he had made two promises to himself, "And I made two promises to myself. I will be a success, come what may. That's promise number one. Number two I will go back home. When I am a success. And I will honor these promises" (35). Chanu was in no way a success, according to the above given reasons, as on the first count he had failed, but Chanu had the firm conviction that returning home would surely mean reclamation of his homeland identity; a self that would be deeply rooted in the Bengali culture, could be reclaimed through a successfully run soap making business or some other venture in a Bengali set up. He could build up his male as bread winner image that he had lost in Britain. His inability to integrate to the demands of the modern British society made Chanu turn back towards his desh, as if his repatriation would be in a way reclamation of his Bangladeshi identity lost during colonization, in the process of reverse colonization as an immigrant. His ability to take this step showed his preference for the land of his birth; a land where many immigrants want to die and be buried.

Chanu talks of loss of pride, in terms of the colonization of Bengalis of the Sonar or Golden Bengal as a terrible thing. On personal grounds, he also suffered a loss of pride on many

fronts. He could not redeem the first promise he made to himself of being successful, but he could at least redeem the second promise he made to himself and that is, "Number two I will go back home...And I will honor these promises..." (35). Earlier on in the novel Chanu left all his projects and plans unfinished, which made Nazneen comment, "He flogged enthusiastically but without talent. His energy went into Niyyah-the making of intention-and here he was advanced and skilful, but the delivery let him down (181). In one respect the delivery of Niyyah, did not let him down. Once and for all Chanu took the step of returning back to his country, and reclaiming his identity; an identity that was at the core of his being. By going back he redeemed himself, for he walked the talk.

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