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EN 2302

Level III English, Fall 2010

School of Teacher Education

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**The Awakening of Nazneen' Independent  
Consciousness in *Brick Lane***

*Brick Lane* is Monica Ali's first and successful novel. Ali was born in Bangladesh and grew up in England. This novel is about a Bangladeshi woman's growth in England. The main character Nazneen, changes from submissiveness to independence. It is a woman's way of having her own destiny in her own hands.

This essay aims to analyze the novel *Brick Lane* from the perspective of feminist. The essay explores the process of Nazneen's independence to show that the third-world women should take control of their own fate. The novel will be analyzed by the theory of feminist criticism. "Feminist criticism is a political act whose aim is not simply to interpret the world but to change it by changing the consciousness of those who read and their relation to what they read" (Lombardi,2000). On one hand, it means that this essay shows how the main character struggles on her way to independence and gets rid of her sad fate. On the other hand, female issue will be the main point of this essay. During Nazneen's life in London, she experiences two kinds of love and the death of her son. She is affected by her sister and her elder daughter. She makes a good friend, Razia, and gets influenced by her. All these factors contribute to Nazneen's independence. This essay is composed by analyzing these four aspects. It will analyze the background of the characters in this novel first. Background, which makes Nazneen struggle during her growth, forms what Nazneen is and how she should be when she is born. The process of Nazneen's struggling signifies the awakness of her independent consciousness.

This novel is about a Bangladeshi woman who lives in London. A Muslim woman with traditional thoughts confronts a new environment in western country and is influenced by the new environment. One of the most obvious differences between the third-world countries and the western countries is women's status. Janet Momsen points out: "For all societies, the common denominator of gender is female subordination. For women of the contemporary Third world the effects of patriarchal attitudes are exacerbated by economic

crisis and the legacy of imperialism”(Momsen,1996). Gender issues and women’s independence are the problems for many years: “Clearly female and male roles are neither equal nor fixed. They differ from place and this spatial variation is most marked in the Third World”(Momsen, 1996). Especially, the condition of women becomes a more urgent issue in the Third-World. Bahri also claims that “there are no women in the third world”(Bahri,2004). This sentence directly reflects that women in the third-world are not regarded as the “women” we normally think. While, “third-world women are considered ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc”(Bahri,2004). Nazneen grows up in Bangla and is deeply affected by those traditional concepts. It is normal that the Third-world women are not treated equally with men. She has no consciousness of freedom, so she accepts her life instead of changing it and fighting for her equality with man.

The fact is that substantial numbers of young Muslim women are virtually enslaved in Britain; they grow up in what can only be called a totalitarian environment. I know this from what my patients have told me. They are not allowed out of the house except under escort, and sometimes not even then; they are allowed no mail or use of the telephone; they are not allowed to contradict a male member of the household, and are automatically subject to his wishes; it is regarded as quite legitimate to beat them if they disobey in the slightest. Their brothers are often quite willing to attack anyone who speaks to the women in any informal context. They are forced to wear modes of dress that they do not wish to wear. Their schooling is quite often deliberately interrupted, so that they are not infected by Western ideas of personal liberty; ambitious for a career, they are kept at home as prisoners and domestic slaves.( Dalrymple,2005)

This shows the low status of Muslim Women. Take Nazneen for example, she is subordinate to men in almost all aspects of her life. She grows up in Bangladesh and the social environment lets her know “the fact” that “it is customary or cultural practice” (Dalrymple,2005). Nazneen is obedient to her father before she gets married and she is obedient to her husband after she gets married. She is supposed to be a good daughter and a good wife. She cannot have a job outside and she is not allowed to have any contact with the outside world. However, Nazneen lives in London with her husband since her marriage. The western idea of personal liberty has an great impact on the old traditional ideas of women’s status. The impact lets Nazneen confuse and doubt about her former life, struggle on her way to independence.

“As Ruth Anna Putnam has also rightfully noted for many women throughout the world, the real struggle is for freedom from religion, not tolerance of it. The feminist response within the human rights community has been that the only solution is to demand women’s treatment as equals as a basic human right”(Cornell,1998). It shows that the religion limits women’s mind and makes their society status low. Nazneen has no right in her life, and she is regarded as a “good worker”(22) by her husband. This is unequal. However, Nazneen thinks it is her duty and her fate. She is just like a prisoner, being controlled both physically and mentally. Thus, it is necessary for a woman to have the consciousness of freedom, free of mind, and then there is possible to gain independence.

Nazneen’s principle of life is that “since nothing could be changed, everything had to be borne and fate will decide everything in the end, whatever route you follow”(14). Her principle of life makes a good interpretation to women’s obedience. She considers everything she suffers as her fate and bears everything. Therefore, she does not even have the awareness of self-determining which means making choice for her life by herself and pursuing what she wants. She lives a negative life without meaning.

Nazneen grows up in Bangladesh. She is deeply injected with those traditional concepts. Her mother who believes in fate has a great effect on her. For this reason, Nazneen is deeply influenced by the thought of fate. In her life, she suffers from the death of her mother and her son, and she almost dies as well. When she is in London, she suffers from the lackluster marriage and the tough life. There is no love in her marriage and no passion in life. She misses her sister very much and always worries about her life, but she cannot go back to see Hasina or take her sister to London. She suffers from the feeling of missing Hasina and bears it. Nazneen thinks that it is her fate so that she bears everything in life. Not until she meets the fated lover does she changes her fate finally. She is always haunted by the question

that whether we can change our fate or just to follow our fate. Finally, she changes her fate as her wish and realizes that it is her who can create her own future.

As a Bangladeshi woman who immigrates to England, Nazneen's life in London is tough. She has no friends and cannot speak English in the early years. Before Nazneen gets completely independent, her sister and her elder daughter affect her, who are different from Nazneen. Her sister, Hasina, is a kind of spiritual sustenance of her life. Nazneen always writes letters to Hasina and knows about her life. Nazneen always worries about Hasina because she thinks that Hasina kicks against fate. Hasina chooses her own life by herself, not by others. She elopes with a man. In the letters, Hasina tells Nazneen about her happiness. However, Nazneen's marriage is arranged by her father. She starts to imagine what it would be like to fall in love and wants to have a taste of love. At the same time, Nazneen begins to think about fate. She wonders whether it is Hasina's fate to elope with a man or Hasina goes against her fate.

Nazneen admires Hasina's experiences of feelings of love. However, Hasina tells Nazneen that she gets beaten by her husband, and her life in Dhaka after she runs away from her husband. Hasina is always brave that she runs away from their home, their father, and runs away from her husband. Life seems tough enough for Hasina when she is in Dhaka all by herself. But she depends on herself, no matter what kind of job she has. Nazneen admires Hasina once again because Hasina relies on herself. Then Nazneen begins to think about independence for the first time: "Whenever she got a letter from Hasina, for the next couple of days she imagined herself an independent woman too"(93). Later, she even thinks that she may run away like Hasina. Nazneen thinks about running away, which goes against her fate for the first time. She has contradictory thinking that she wants to have a different life but does not know how: "Sometimes she wanted to get up and run. Most of the time she did not want to run, but neither did she want to sit still. How difficult it was, this business of

sitting still. But there was nothing really to complain of”(102). She feels that she must do something instead of accepting everything that life gives to her.

It is only an idea but she has not taken action yet, which means a kind of growth to Nazneen. It is obvious that her mind is not calm any more. Hasina tells Nazneen that she gets stronger gradually. Nazneen thinks that she is born to wait and suffer. However, Hasina tells Nazneen that “I am not waiting around suffering around”(159). Hasina firmly expresses that she does not want to wait for everything. Hasina has a strong and firm courage to change the fate of being a woman in the third-world.

Compared with Hasina, Nazneen’s elder daughter, Shahana, is also a brave girl and affects Nazneen to a certain degree. She is born and grows up in London and receives a western education. Shahana also affects Nazneen in independence. Shahana dares to speak out what she thinks in her heart. She always shouts against her father and yells at home: “I didn’t ask to be born here”(181). Thinking about her own childhood, Nazneen never imagines herself to act like Shahana. Shahana is a rebellious girl. When Nazneen talks with her, her eyes, mouth, nose pinch up. She seems impatient, and shouts out that she hates her father. Shahana wants to get a tattoo and asks for lip ring. She says “it is my body”(292). Shahana’s concept affects Nazneen, even though she is only a child, her consciousness seems more independent than Nazneen’s.

Shahana asks her mother “Are you in love with him?”(303) She is so direct and explicit when talking about love and worries. Nazneen does not know whether she is wiser than her daughter. She just answers that Chanu is a good man and she is lucky in her marriage. She knows that the love between herself and Chanu is not the love Shahana refers to. She loves Karim but she dares not to admit it and pursue it. So, she feels proud of Shahana. Shahana is strongly against her father when he decides to take his family back to Bangladesh. She is brave to speak out what she wants. She tells her parents that she is going to run away. she

insists that she does not want to go back to Bangladesh. Even though her opinion seems insignificant to her parents, she makes effort for what she wants. She tells her mother and father again and again that she wants to stay in London. Even though Nazneen does not want to back to Bangladesh neither, she chooses to wait and see, and keeps silent.

However, she has been affected slightly and her independent consciousness is awakening. Nazneen thinks that god will decide everything but she also knows that she must do something for the girls. Shahana always asks her mother if she wants to go. Every time when Nazneen is asked this question, she is entangled with those choices, staying in London or going back to Bangladesh. During all her marriage years, she is used to keeping silent, and she never expresses herself. Meanwhile, Chanu does not consider her opinion. She would like to wait for her fate which God gives her. She knows that fate will decide everything for her to keep silent. She tells the story of *How You Were Left to Your Fate* to her daughters. There is no doubt that she is deeply affected by her principle of life. However, to some degree, she becomes contradictory. For one moment she feels flushed with power that she has to make it right for the girls. Once, Nazneen has a feeling that Shahana looks like Hasina. The two are brave enough to say no to what they dislike and are not afraid to be themselves.

On the other hand, the death of her mother and her son and the experience of almost dying at a young age make Nazneen begin to think about fate. From a young age, Nazneen believes that her mother is a natural saint. When she is a child, she suffers an illness and almost dies. Her mother does not bring her to a hospital. She believes in fate and she waits to see what fate will do to her daughter. Fortunately, Nazneen is alive and she knows the story of *How You Were Left to Your Fate*. Thus, Nazneen deeply believes that it is her fate to be alive. She accepts the grace of god.

However, many years later, when Nazneen is a mother, she faces the death of her son. She takes her son to the hospital when she finds the baby is ill. Nazneen gives thanks to God

and she thinks that it is God alone who saves the baby. She thinks about “all that she had done for Raqib was nothing. God decided. She thought about How You Were Left to Your Fate. See! It made no difference. Amma did nothing to save her. And she lived”(135). However, the baby dies. This time, Nazneen gets lost in the belief of fate. She is enraged about fate for losing her baby. She knows that if she does not bring the baby to hospital at once, he would have already died. She begins to think about that she cannot leave her fate be decided by others anymore. Fortunately, she does not choose to do nothing and let fate decide everything this time. However, Nazneen’s mother does nothing and Nazneen is alive, whereas Nazneen does what she could do but the baby dies. She doubts about fate again.

Nazneen’s mother teaches Nazneen to believe in fate, and Nazneen keeps her mother’s words in her heart. When Nazneen feels sad during her early years in London, she thinks about her mother’s words: “Just wait and see, that’s all we can do. How often she had heard those words. Amma always wiped away her tears with those words”(46). Her mother’s words seem like a pain-killer that can ease her pain from life, making her know that the essential of life is wait and see. Meanwhile, her mother’s death lets Nazneen know that life is unpredictable and beyond control. Thus, Nazneen always accepts her life and she knows that it is her fate. She never doubts it before.

However, Nazneen knows the truth of her mother’s death many years later. Her father has an relationship with another woman, and always beats his wife. Thus, her mother gives up bearing life and decides to end her life. Hashmi claims that “ Most Bangladeshi women have no protection against domestic violence. As the police generally view domestic violence as ‘a non-criminal, marital and social problem and not as a law and order issue’, a large number of women commit suicide out of desperation”(Hashmi, 1999). Nazneen’ mother is an example of women who cannot stand suffering in life and commits suicide. However, Nazneen is told that her mother is “naturally a saint”(15) and she is affected by her mother to

have a belief in fate and form her principle of life. She begins to get confused and shocked about her belief and principle of life. It is her mother who teaches her to bear everything in life and accept one's own fate. However, her mother does not bear life any more but chooses to end her life. Nazneen wonders the meaning of bearing life and believing in fate. In the end of the novel, she finally realizes that her mother's choice is a kind of fighting with fate. Her mother's death is not decided by fate but by herself and she finally controls her own life by herself. The death of her son and her mother make Nazneen doubt about fate and her principle of life.

The crucial factors that lead her to independence are her marriage and her lover. Nazneen marries to Chanu when she is eighteen. Her father chooses the man for her, and she does not even meet Chanu before they get married. At that time, Nazneen accepts her father's choice and thinks it is her fate to marry to this man. She says to her father: "Abba, it is good that you have chosen my husband. I hope I can be a good wife, like Amma"(16). Nazneen even does not have the thought of saying no to her father at that time. What is in her mind is "Men, doing whatever they could in this world"(17). It shows that men and women have very unequal status in Bangladesh. There is an article about gender equality in Bangladesh points out: "Bangladesh is a highly patriarchal society and gender discrimination is present at all community levels. Women are dependent on men throughout their lives, from father through husbands to sons"(Lombardi,2000). So, what women can do in the society is limited. Worden and Heitzman point out: "Most women's lives remained centered on their traditional roles, and they had limited access to markets, productive services, education, health care, and local government"(Heitzman&Worden,1989). The traditional role of women means that they are subordinated to men and inferior to men. However, it seems that their fate is determined by men. Chanu brings her to London after they get married. It is a change in Nazneen's life and it is the first step for her to be an independent woman.

In the beginning, there is no love between Nazneen and her husband, but she attempts to be a good wife. Every day she does the same housework, cleaning and cooking and washing. She has no friends and cannot speak fluent English. Her life is as bland as the boiled water. She thinks that Chanu is in love with her and she tries her best to be a good wife. But then she happens to hear what Chanu says to his friend and understands his actual feelings for her. He marries Nazneen just because that “a blind uncle is better than no uncle”(23). It means that any wife is better than no wife. To Chanu, Nazneen has no meaning except she is a worker. Nazneen realizes that there is no love between her and her husband. Her marriage exists without love and she admires Hasina to experience the feeling of love.

She even thinks about her mother’s death and wonders whether death will be another fate to her. She hears that a woman commits suicide by jumping out of the window. Then Nazneen imagines what thoughts come to the woman’s mind when she is falling down. She seems to have a new understanding of life and begins to have a new self, a new Nazneen.

When she does the housework as usual, she is the old Nazneen. When she sits to watch ice-skating on the television, she becomes the new Nazneen. Ice-skating lets her feel something special. She feels she is “no longer a collection of the hopes, random thoughts, petty anxieties and selfish wants that made her”.(41) Nazneen watches ice-skating on the television for the first time and then it impresses her very much. She has her own understanding of ice-skating. When she watches ice-skating for the first time on television, she is moved and amazed by it. The beautiful scene makes a deep impression on her and she starts to like watching ice-skating on TV. Man and woman are perfectly matched. The woman looks so triumphant and the man protects her from falling down. She is attracted by the relationship between the man and woman.

The new Nazneen exists with ice-skating and the old Nazneen is going on facing her life. Years go by, she adapts to her life and gets used to Chanu. She knows that Chanu is a

good man. She tells herself her father does not choose a bad man for her. She can love him. Nazneen understands what Chanu is after many years marriage life and begins to love him. However, Nazneen is not satisfied with being ignored. Chanu is nice but he does not respect Nazneen. He does not agree to Nazneen learning English. He does not consider Nazneen's thoughts. He does not like Nazneen's friends. For Chanu, Nazneen's life is just for serving him and their children.

On the other hand, what makes Nazneen become stronger is that she has a futile husband. On her way to become psychologically independent, she first gets financial independence. For independent women, financial independence is the basic requirement. And then a woman can live a life without relying on anybody.

In the novel, it takes a long time for Nazneen to get financial independence. Nazneen has thought that, as a woman, she does not need a job. Nevertheless, the burden of life makes her change her mind. Chanu cannot feed the family. For this reason, Nazneen has to think about money. Since their marriage, they live in a small apartment on Brick Lane. Chanu goes out working to feed the family. He is an educated man, but he cannot find a good position in London even though he has lived in London for decades. In the end, he loses his job and decides to bring his family back to Bangladesh. He cannot find a job for a long time and he even has debts. Under the burden of life, Nazneen begins to think about work and money: "Some of the women are doing sewing at home, said Nazneen. Razia can get work for me"(184). Nazneen thinks that she can make money for the family if she has a job. In the end, Chanu shows no sign of getting a job and he buys Nazneen a sewing machine. Since then Nazneen works hard at home. She needs money and spends most of her time sewing. She not only needs money to feed the family, but also wants to have her own money to send to Hasina. On the other hand, she has to pay the debts for her husband. Nazneen feeds the family and

pays the debts through her job. In this way, Nazneen begins her way to financial independence.

The key factor which contributes to Nazneen's independence is Karim, with whom she falls in love. Because of her sewing job, Nazneen meets Karim. He is a passionate man, and he grows up in London and speaks fluent English. His language, his character, and the way he treats her all attract Nazneen. Unlike Chanu, Karim treats Nazneen in a different way. He talks with Nazneen and he gives Nazneen something to read. He shares what he knows with Nazneen. This is the first time she is treated with respect. Nazneen's fated love promotes her final independence.

Karim invites her to the meeting for all Muslims. In the meeting, Nazneen feels her importance for the first time, and realizes that her decision can change something. Nazneen has the right to vote in the Bangladeshi meeting. Because of her voting, Karim wins the chairman of the meeting. At the same time, she feels satisfactory of having changed something she wants:

‘Karim and the Questioner stood for Chairman. It was close. Nine votes for the Questioner and ten for Karim. I have given him victory, thought Nazneen. She felt it a momentous thing. By raising her hand, or not raising it, she could alter the course of events, of affairs in the world of which she knew nothing’ (242).

This is a new kind of feeling to her, and it is obvious that she is affected. This is her first attempt to change something and rely on herself. She feels good to change something which is important to the one she loves. It is she who changes the result of the voting and helps Karim to win the chairman. Even though she has no idea about the voting. She realizes that if she wants to change something, the first step is making up her mind to try it. She is never having the right of voting. Afary points out: “In Bangladesh most women are excluded from the lives of the community, excluded from all decision making in their community”(Afary,2004). It shows that most women are stripped of their rights in many aspects of the society. They are told to believe in fate and have no sense of awareness of their right. Until now, Nazneen

gradually realizes that she can have the same rights with men, and changes something as long as she wants to try.

Karim's appearance brings Nazneen's life many new feelings and experiences, such as falling in love. She is just like a young girl who falls in love for the first time. Everything related to Karim makes her feel happy and excited. Life becomes full of passion and happiness. When Nazneen is doing her sewing job, Karim often asks her to stop working and talks with him. He takes away all the buttons to stop her working. His action seems like kind of male chauvinism, but it attracts Nazneen. She feels "an electric current run from her nipples to her big toes." (261). She thinks that it is enough for her to listen. However, Karim lets her know she is expected to talk with him. Moreover, Karim lets her feel that she has said something significant, as if she has "stated a new truth" (262). Nazneen never gets encouragement from Chanu. However, Karim lets her know that she has the ability of saying something useful and right.

Gradually, she falls into contradiction and the feeling for Karim gives her much suffering. She needs to take a deep breath because she wants to "shout-something urgent, some matter of life or death-but the breath and the shout got stuck. They would never come out" (273). She knows what she wants to say is important, which may change her whole life. However, no matter how much she wants to express, she stops. Nazneen has reserved her feeling for many years and feels oppressive. There are many thoughts in her heart, which she wants to express. However, she cannot and dares not. She desires to change herself and her former life. The more she wants to change, the more she suffers. What she can do is to bear everything.

Nazneen feels contradictory in her love affair. On one hand, she has never felt so happy since she comes to London. It is the situation that her heart has frozen since she gets married. Karim brings her life hope and passion. Nazneen cannot help laughing all the time

and is in a good mood. Love makes her animated and her life seems easier than before. On the other hand, she never feels so helpless and contradictory. When she falls in love with Karim and sleeps with him, she betrays her husband and her marriage. As a married woman, she has done something forbidden that she has never thought she would do. She knows it is totally wrong, but she cannot stop herself:

‘He was the first man to see her naked. It made her sick with shame. It made her sick with desire. They committed a crime. It was a crime and the sentence was death. In between his arms, she took her pleasure desperately, as if the executioner waited behind the door... Though they began with a gentle embrace, tenderness could not satisfy her, nor could she stand it, and into her recklessness she drew him like a moth to a flame’ (299).

Nazneen knows that she has done something against her fate, and it is wrong. On one hand, she always dares not to do something against her principle of life. However, as a married woman, she betrays her marriage. Esposito and DeLong-Bas points out “Cheating is immaturity, dishonor, instability, disloyalty, in short, not to be content with what Allah has given and ingratitude. That attribute does not fit a spouse and a mature Muslim; therefore, the Quran prohibited it” (Esposito & DeLong-Bas). Nazneen believes in Allah and Quran. On the other hand, she has done something against her belief. Her life is out of her control. She feels it is like a crime but she does not want to stop it, moreover, she desires to do it. She just likes a moth to a flame, small and powerless when facing Karim, facing her fate.

As a woman, Nazneen is supposed to be a good daughter, a good wife and a good mother. Her life and fate is decided by her father and her husband. She submits to her father and her husband. All is decided by man and what Nazneen can do is accepting everything. It is also a common phenomenon in the third-world. Nazneen does not know how to deal with it. When her son is alive, she thinks that the baby’s life is more real and more valuable to her than her own. For women, the meaning of their life is to serve husband and children. This time, she still wants to give in to fate and not to herself. Sometimes she even hopes Chanu will find out everything. She never thinks that she will face such a situation. She feels

nauseous and tired. She is afraid of what will happen all the time. While, Nazneen prefers that everything to be found out by others passively than admits what she has done bravely.

Nazneen goes to the crossroad of her life. Karim wants to marry her. She needs to make a choice for her life, which she has never done before. Should she go back to Bangladesh with her husband, or marry to Karim. Because of Karim, Nazneen falls in love for the first time. Love makes her begin to have a desire of pursuing what she wants. She believes that falling in love with Karim also is her fate. She accepts everything that happens in her life. Finally, she still needs to make a choice. Once in the Muslim meeting, Karim is in front of her on the stage and Chanu is sitting next to her. Facing the situation, she suddenly realizes something that “She gave herself a little hug and smothered a smile on her shoulder. She considered how much of her life, how much time, how much energy, she had spent trying not to care, trying to accept. Do you see me now, she said to Amma, do you see how I accept it all?”(354) Her mother teaches her to accept everything because it is women’s fate. Nazneen does what her mother says. At last, she has accepted everything, then what she could do? There is no opportunity to accept any more. Just like her mother chooses to die in the end. This is life.

Women’s fate is suppressed by those traditional concepts that women are born to bear life in low status. They are locked into this way of thinking. Not until they get rid of these old concepts can women be independent and control their own fate. Nazneen gradually has a new understanding of the principle of her life. In the end, she neither chooses to go back to Bangladesh with her husband, nor accepts Karim’s proposal. This is the ending of the story: a woman relies on herself and chooses a life without men. Women are free to choose what they want, without relying on anyone else.

Razia, Nazneen’s friend, is a good example that woman relies on herself. Razia’s life is tough but she is strong to stand it. She also affects Nazneen’s independence. She is

Nazneen's first friend during her life in London. Compared to Nazneen, Razia's life is more difficult and rougher. Her husband dies at work. Then the burden of life is on the shoulders of Razia. Her son takes drugs. He steals money from her purse and everything valuable from their home. Razia always thinks about work, while in Nazneen's mind, she thinks it is unnecessary for a woman to work if she has a husband or a father. After Razia's husband dies, the first thing she thinks about is having a job. When a woman has a job and relies on herself, she is not afraid of losing what she depends on, such as husband or father.

Ali does not describe how sad Razia is. On the contrary, she becomes more independent: "she can get a job now"(139). She has to bring her children up all by herself. She lives an independent life though life is hard and she becomes a western woman: "Since gaining her British passport she had acquired a sweatshirt with a large Union Jack printed on the front, and in a favourite combination paired it with brown elastic-waisted trousers"(188). After Razia's husband's death, life seems more difficult but she tries her best to adapt to a new life. She also goes to college to learn English. Razia's life seems more real than Nazneen's. Razia relies on herself and does her best to make money for her children.

At the end of the novel, Nazneen chooses to stay in London with her two daughters. The new life of Nazneen is just like Razia's life. Moreover, it is Razia who helps Nazneen to get a job. Her experience shows Nazneen that woman must rely on herself even if she has her father or husband. Since Nazneen is married, what she does everyday is cleaning, cooking and washing. She never thinks about fulfilling her own needs.

*Brick Lane* is a novel about women. Ali not only creates characters who are on the way to independence, but also many characters who are in tragedy. Nazneen hears many women's tragedies from Hasina, which makes her realize that women will always get suppressed and suffer in their whole life until they have the consciousness of independence, that is are willing to get rid of the life relying on men.

In this novel, even though the main character goes on the way to independence and it is obvious that women's independence is the main trend. However, there are still many women in low status. Nazneen knows from Hasina's letters that a woman sells her land in order to send her son to Singapore. But her son does not have the ability to get the land back many years later. A woman works hard abroad and sends the saved money home. When she gets back home many years later, her husband has spent all the money and she even has to pay a debt for her husband. A woman has the ability to make money and has financial independence. However, she is still subordinated to man. Her mind is locked by certain concept. Jawad and Benn claim that:

‘Some Muslim women experience double oppression from the culture of their community as well as the culture of their religion...our parents' traditional attitudes...their cultural values, their family honour, their stubbornness to let go of the traditions. If a girl stands up for her rights, she brings shame on the family. These old fashioned ideas are what oppress Muslim girls’ (Jawad&Benn,2003).

It means that the old fashioned ideas restrain many women's mind. They are born with the cultural values and family honour. Thus, they reconcile to their lives. Just like Nazneen, she is infused with the concept of fate from her childhood. So she never thinks about trying to change her life, not to speak of depending on herself. She is told to believe in fate which makes her become numb. In this way, because of the old traditional ideas, they are hard to get free in mind and be independence.

As long as women do not have the consciousness of independence, they will be dominated by men and have a sad fate. Hasina's friend Monju, a poor woman, gets harm from her family: “Brother and sister hold tight and husband pour acid over head face and body. All over is infection on body and smell make it difficult for people to go near”(270). The woman is not even treated as a human being, not to speak of being equal with men.

Nazneen is doubting and confused for a long time. Her heart is like a inflated balloon, which is about to burst. There are so many words she wants to say and so many

things she wants to do. But she chooses to keep them in the deep of her heart. She even thinks that “For a glorious moment it was clear that clothes, not fate, made her life. And if the moment had lasted she would have ripped the sari off and torn it shreds”(278). She just gets a little shaken by this kind of thoughts and she seems to be restrained by something, just like she feels it is the sari that makes her life.

Many Muslim women are not free to dress how they like and they have formed a custom that they have to wear sari and hijab. “The hijab(often translated as “veil”) is the form of scarf or hair covering commonly worn by Muslim women”(Godlas,2002). This shows women’s low status. The clothes present Muslim women and “It has always been seen by the western feminism as oppressive and as a symbol of a Muslim woman’s subservience to men”(Godlas,2002). To a certain degree, sari presents a kind of fetter for Nazneen. When she is a child, sari is a part of her. Just like her principle of life, her understanding of women’s status in her country, and so on, form Nazneen’s conception of life. It seems that there is a rule in Nazneen’s mind, which teaches her what she can do and what she cannot do. As if Nazneen is locked in this kind of consciousness that formed since her childhood.

Finally, the balloon in her heart bursts. And she breaks the rule in her mind. She becomes brave and dares to say something in her heart. She dares to say no to wrongs. Mrs Islam comes again and again to ask her to pay for Chanu’s debts. Nazneen compromises many times even though she has paid what they owe. And finally she is brave enough to fight for her rights. Nazneen also teaches her children that they should show respect to their father which she never does before, and she even tells Chanu not to do something. She has changed a lot from before and begins to be brave and firm in mind.

At the end of the story, Nazneen chooses to depend on herself and stays in London with her daughters. She plays outside on the ice with her daughters and Razia, full of happiness. Nazneen likes watching ice-skating on television, and now Nazneen plays “ice-

skating” in her own way: “She raced on, on two legs”(492). Now, she is an independent woman, and she totally gets rid of her former life. She begins to live on her own. It is a start of her new life, with happiness and freedom. Razia says in the end: “This is England, you can do whatever you like”(492). Now they are free of mind, they are free to do what they want.

Nazneen dares to make a choice and gains the meaning of her life. She holds a principle of life which makes her have a passive life. However, Nazneen grows in those years in London, and gradually she has a new understanding of the principle of her life. Her mother teaches her passively accept whatever life brings. Finally, she realizes that life is not merely bearing everything and she has the power to have her fate in her own hands. She has to bear a lot in life, such as the tough life in London, the lackluster marriage with Chanu, the longing for her sister, and so on. Meanwhile, there are many things in life that she needs to pursue and this is the meaning of life. Nazneen finally has the consciousness of pursuing what she wants, such as love, and a life in which she no longer subordinated to man, and a new life with her daughters in London. This is life: bearing and pursuing.

In summary, this essay analyzes those factors which contribute Nazneen’s independence. Her family members, her lover and her friend play an important role in Nazneen’s change. She has struggled a long time to get rid of the bind of her principle of life. On the other hand, Ali also reveals those women who are still suffering in life and submit themselves to men. The miserable stories about women impact Nazneen and make her realize she has to control her own life. As an immigrant in Britain facing a tough life, a submissive woman becomes a brave and mature, and strong-minded woman.

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