

**SILENCE AS A RHETORICAL TACTIC: A CRITICAL STUDY ON MONICA ALI'S  
*BRICK LANE***

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**Abstract**

Third-world women's lives and identities have long been determined by their silence. It is taken into account while characterising their marginalisation and fragility. Silence can be taken both as strength and weakness. This paper aims to explore the extend to which silence has been used as a power and not a necessarily a sign of passivity or helplessness. *Brick Lane* (2003) brings up modern contexts where topics like multiculturalism, migration, and silence are examined. In the perspective of postcolonial feminism, this paper aims to analyse the many strategies employed by Monica Ali to portray various forms of silence. The primary goal is to identify the many types of silence shown in the story and how they affect the identities of female migrant Muslims. It looks into how being silent affects how women identify themselves. This paper explores muslim migration in the context of the Modern English novel. The novel explores many situations where remaining silent is viewed as a sign of weakness. It also talks about a type of silence that is thought to empower feminine identity. In light of Postcolonial Feminism, it is concluded that Monica Ali's In order to provide readers with a more accurate and useful grasp of the concept of feminine stillness in both its active and passive manifestations, *Brick Lane* should be rewritten.

**Key Words:** Silence, Muslim migrant, identity.

There have long been negative stereotypes of women from developing nations in the West. This stereotype encompasses a variety of traits, including passivity, ignorance, marginalisation, disregard, and, most notably, silence. This can be witnessed in the third-world literature which has begun to examine how women's silence has come to define their identities. However, silence is not always viewed negatively in some cultures, such as Islamic culture, and in many situations, it is the best course of action. Writers from the postcolonial era choose to approach this topic in various ways based on their individual experiences. Some of those authors have a propensity to invent loud characters in order to rebel against the stillness that is required of them. In other words, they consider silence to be passivity and do not think it belongs to the female identity. Others view this matter in a different way, and they claim that this belief is a key aspect of who they are. The silence, however, is an act of insubordination, a deliberate action, and a decision made by these postcolonial feminists. They show their female characters as having the immense fortitude and wisdom required to choose silence.

The purpose of this article is to talk about how the female character in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* is affected by the idea of feminine silence. The women in this story never speak aloud, either voluntarily or unavoidably, to communicate their opinions and thoughts. This paper aims upward to identify the many types of silence that have various effects on the identities of

women. The significance of quiet in strengthening or weakening women is undisputed in this narrative. Although it is generally believed that silence is a sign of weakness, this study will also demonstrate how powerful silence can be. Author Monica Ali, a Bengali-Muslim explores many feminine expressions of silence in British Bengali communities in her novel *Brick Lane*. It demonstrates how closely related the author's Silence creations are to the changes in the female identity. Because of this, depending on the circumstances, silence can be seen favourably or poorly. In order to understand how silence should be understood in these circumstances, the memoir analyses them.

Two forms of oppression - colonialism and male dominance were imposed on women in the third world. Despite the fact that colonialism is no longer practised, masculine ignorance and patriarchal oppression still exist. In this case, Postcolonial Feminism shows how Westerners and men in the third world still have stereotypes about third-world women. Ironically, postcolonial thinkers abuse their women while criticising the cultural despotism brought on by the west.

In response to both feminism and colonialism, Postcolonial Feminism, also known as Third World Feminism, was born. It critiqued the way they disregarded the unique oppression that women in developing countries face. As observed by researchers, You-me Park and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan

“It is incorrect to think of postcolonial feminism as solely a subset of postcolonial studies or as a distinct subset of feminism. Instead, it is an action that is changing the organisational frameworks of feminist and postcolonial studies. In the many contexts of women's lives, their subjectivities, work, sexuality, and rights, postcolonial feminism explores and examines the linkages of colonialism and neo-colonialism with gender, nation, class, race, and sexualities (53)”.

Women are told that their identity can only truly be reflected in their silence. One shouldn't speak up in front of a man. She is expected to make her voice heard as a lady. This makes silence a wholly feminine custom that marginalises and oppresses women. As a result, the females' quiet becomes a form of repression and reduces her to nothing more than an object.

Monica Ali clearly distinguishes between the women's invisibility in *Brick Lane*. Especially, when the characters speak out loud and when they are silent. Even though each female character has a unique background, it is obvious that they are all frequently brought together by the characterization of silence. Ali makes an effort to demonstrate how Nazneen and the other female characters' silences differ from one another and are based on various circumstances. She also implies that women have no other option except to remain silent. As a result, it cannot be regarded as an act of free will but rather as a duty from which one cannot escape.

When women speak of being silenced, they don't mean that they are incapable of adequately speaking a language,” writes Mary Eagleton in her text *Working with Feminist Criticism*. “Rather, they are referring to social and cultural pressures that undermine their confidence and make them reluctant about speaking.”(16). Thus, remaining silent becomes more than just a choice to keep quiet; it also becomes a form of pressure that devalues one's own abilities and eventually renders one incapable of speaking, even when one wishes to do so. Spivak claimed that this was evidence of Nazneen's inferior status. In her view, that after learning about the history of the Sati Laws in India, it is challenging for a woman from the Third World or a

subaltern group to have a voice. This explains why they haven't said anything in a very long time since "one never encounters the testimony of the women's voice consciousness." (93).

Nazneen's narration is accompanied the entire time by her voice, confidence, and weakness. Nazneen frequently runs with English girls when walking along *Brick Lane*. Through their eyes, Nazneen tries to convey her own feelings: "She gave Nazneen a ready friendliness in her eyes and a half-smile on her lips, but nothing happened...] a Blankness only used for well-known objects, such as furniture or brown women who wore saris and raised their families while obeying their husbands" (325). Despite the fact that Nazneen has been a resident of London for a number of years, she continues to make herself always "the other". Chanu refers to Nazneen as a product and claims that she is truly authentic. She has no choice but to remain how she is, which is unfortunate. Spivak addresses Nazneen's incapacity to talk or comment on her invisibility as a woman rather than an object in her essay. The question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" "The subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow if, in the context of colonial production, the Subaltern has no history and cannot speak" (32).

According to Chanu, Nazneen is the right pick because she is described as a product and is the actual deal. Ali emphasises the word "what" in her reference to her by italicising it. Sadly, she accepts her situation because she has no other option. "The "subaltern" as a female is even more profoundly shrouded in shadow if, within the framework of colonial production, the subaltern has no past and cannot speak" (32). Spivak writes in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" as a result of Nazneen's inability to talk or make a comment regarding her invisibility as a woman as opposed to an object. Spivak asserts that women serving as subalterns are, "a population that has no voice and will never be able to speak out against any injustice done to them. The historical records of the subaltern insurgency and colonial archives' ideological construction of gender, which "keeps the male dominant," have produced this as the end consequence" (288).

Because Nazneen is "quiet" and always fits the concept of a silent, ideal object to own, she poses risks to her physical health. Nazneen described her feelings as being "trapped inside this body, inside this room, inside this flat, inside this concrete slab of entombed humanity" (76). In addition to having an illicit relationship with Karim, Nazneen is ill. She has nightmares about her mother, who attempts to make her feel guilty and take her away (322). She can no longer bear this since she is unhappy, exhausted, and depressed. This nervous fatigue makes it incredibly evident how silence has a negative impact on one's identity. Car-west Jonathan provides the following example of the harmful effects of silence: It is now visible why developing an identity in the manner mentioned above may be significant. Additionally, it is clear why the literary text should provide such a strong foundation for the study of this type of identity (80).

It seems reasonable that the self will exhibit some of the traits of the narrative text if, as has been suggested, it is a form of storytelling. Take into account the subsequent: A work wants to be read, was written for reading, and, in some ways, was created exclusively for reading. Like the ego, the text depends on its own articulation (83).

The method used by the oppressor against the oppressed is always silence. It should be noted, though, that not all men silence women; occasionally, stronger females also try to do so. The way Mrs. Islam behaves and thinks makes this extremely evident in the story. Men and women cannot disagree with her since she is the last authority in this community. She has spent more

than 30 years in London, suggesting that she may no longer be a national of the erstwhile colonial state.

Although Mrs. Islam tries to portray the opposite, she has fully integrated into the British community. The manner Mrs. Islam constantly visiting Nazneen is a clear indication of her authoritarian tendencies. Following the birth of Raqib, the community's lady begins to exert more control over Nazneen, particularly regarding how she ought to act towards her new-born (85). She is told to cease Nazneen, who is mute, comes and spends time with Raqib: "Nazneen had come to detest these visits. Mrs. Islam had not yet implemented all of her recommendations, despite Raqib being five months old (83).

It is strange that, despite being Nazneen's child, she is unable to determine with whom he should remain. The mother tries to make Mrs. Islam feel unwelcome by taking her child with her while she makes tea for the visitor to signify that she no longer wants the child to be with her. Despite this, Mrs. Islam begs to take the infant with her because she doesn't give a damn. This time, Nazneen expresses her opposition to the woman's claim that "He's staying here with her" for the first time in speech (88). Mrs. Islam "looked at the woman" at this point. Her appearance was strange. In astonishment, her brows moved slightly closer together. Nazneen first noticed how dark they were, unaffected by the white that had seeped out of her hair (88). "Nazneen shook," the narrator writes, "but the warmth of Raqib's body against her breast fuelled her resolve. He is a guest here. She trembles because speaking up causes her to act aggressively and express her true point of view for the first time. Mrs. Islam has left the house without getting permission to do so as a result of the last reaction.

Instead of focusing on Nazneen's voiced reactions to her boyfriend and her culture, Monica Ali concentrates on her behaviours and psychology throughout the book. In order to provide the reader access to Nazneen's silent, covert thoughts and replies, Ali blends the third-person narrator voice with Nazneen's inner speech. Similar to Nazneen's silent revolution and defiance against social standards, Nazneen expresses her feelings via deeds rather than words. In light of the fact that she hardly ever communicates her opinions, which would reveal her genuine stances in various situations, only the reader may know what she intends to accomplish. She frequently senses rejection of a number of requests, which makes her upset and unhappy, but she remains silent.

Instead of focusing on Nazneen's spoken statements about her relationship with her boyfriend and her culture, Monica Ali focuses on her behaviour and psychology throughout the book. The reader can access Nazneen's silent, hidden thoughts and reactions in Ali's novel through a combination of third-person narration and inner monologue. In a same manner, Nazneen expresses her feelings by deeds rather than words, much like her silent uprising and defiance of convention. Due to her infrequent expression of her opinions, which reveal her genuine positions in many situations, only the reader can predict what she will do as a result. She frequently senses rejection of a number of things and feels frustrated and upset, but she remains silent. Despite this, she observes and reacts in silence, a process known as "the internal monologue". The Merriam Webster Dictionary describes an internal monologue as a literary composition composed in the form of a soliloquy, which is a protracted speech that a character in a literary work delivers to an audience and that divulges the character's thoughts. The character's identity and cognition are significantly influenced by verbal thinking.

The need for Nazneen to embrace a British way of life is non-existent. In actuality, she finds the woman to be unattractive and believes that her actions are improper and disrespectful. The western mentality is being explicitly rejected by this. The doctor's wife's identity begins to be lively enough to allow her to decide whether or not to copy others, like Chanu does, as shown by Nazneen's reaction. When the doctor's wife is fully absorbed into British society, she becomes a British woman. Keeping her opinions to herself, Nazneen decides to remain mute. Silence is frequently viewed as being in opposition to speech, this is what Minh-ha contends in her book *When the Moon Waxes Red Repers* "Silence hasn't been explored very much as a will to say nothing or to unsay something" (151).

Additionally, she is talking to Mrs. Azad while ignoring her by focusing on her son Raqib. After some time, Chanu and Mrs. Azad share a cup of beer, and Nazneen expresses her unhappiness with her husband's conduct: "my husband doesn't offer up prayers... and he is currently consuming booze. He might be eating pigs tomorrow" (85). It is evident that Nazneen transcends religious and racial divides, something that many others have not accomplished. The tattooist and Bengali culture are compared by Nazneen to one another. Due of her thin build, she suspects the tattoo artist is unemployed. In her home country of Bangladesh, thin people are poor and fat people are wealthy; yet, in her current country of residence, Britain, everything is the complete opposite because the tattoo lady is thin despite being well off. Nazneen might think that prosperity in her home nation is based on one's external look, whereas wealth in London may not be defined by one's appearance. Nazneen starts to feel more secure as a result of this silent connection. She continues to make eye contact with the tourists and their "impressive camera" while she looks at them. Nazneen "tweaked" her head covering. She was aware that she was being observed. Every action she took and every decision she made since her birth was documented. She occasionally believed she caught them out of the corner of her eye (254). Nazneen feels that she is being observed from all sides even when tourists are looking at her (254). The fact that those visitors are snapping pictures of her doesn't make her feel irate or disturbed. This prompts her to consider a number of things and brings to mind the angles that are always observing her activity. Nazneen is being critical of her interactions with Karim, her unfavourable treatment of her husband, and probably even her disregard for her religion. Her self-assurance and consciousness are at their best during this time of silence pondering, and her identity gains in power. After receiving a letter from Hasina, Nazneen begins to wonder what it's like to be independent: " She imagined herself an independent woman for the next few days" (66). These inaudible thoughts, even if they only exist in Nazneen's mind, are a crucial part of what makes her who she is . In one of her interviews, Minh-ha Trinh explains this: " these never serve as mere props for a narrative or a message; they are always quiet. They operate according to their own set of meanings, objectives, and rhythms in the world" (86). This shows that Nazneen's quiet has an important function that must be used. Her internal dialogue helps her feel confident and secure, allowing her to lead the independent life she wants. Nazneen aspires to defy fate; she wants to leave the house and travel to experience something new like Hasina. She no longer believes everything is predetermined by fate as a result of her quiet observations of life, and she is starting to realise for the first time that she has the ability to design her own life. She is unsure, though, because "God didn't give her anything else to do. She occasionally wanted to stand up and leave.

As a representation of the emergence of her identity, Nazneen makes the first alteration to her appearance in silence. In that “glorious moment,” it became abundantly evident that her existence was not defined by fate but rather by her attire. She would have torn the sari to pieces if the situation had persisted, according to (148). This suggests that she is moving towards a new stage of identity development. Nazneen chooses to alter her attitudes and habits before making a similar decision to alter her appearance. Due to her attire, she believes that she no longer has control over her life’s course due to fate. According to Davies “the body appears as a location of both routine actions of compliance and resistance.” (12). Nazneen then conveys the impression that she will undoubtedly change her clothes as Mrs. Azad and Razia have. One may conclude that both of the last two personalities had lost their native identities because they had thoroughly merged into British society while ignoring their own traditions. Nazneen does not, however, abandon her sari at the conclusion of the story in a symbolic act of self-acquisition and liberation.

Literature on migration typically describes the political and social context of postcolonial migrants' Western-based experiences. The most powerful image that conveys the migrant’s ideas and feelings to the entire world is created by combining fact and fantasy. In this genre of writing, the immigrant character faces a variety of difficulties, including racism, issues with marginalisation, assimilation, integration, and being thrust into a foreign cultural environment. Due to this, authors who use stereotypes as a central issue in their writing have drawn increasing attention in the field of migrant literature. In general, these authors have seen or experienced such instances of stereotyping.

It is innovative and completely disregarded by Ali's detractors that writers often use silence as a tool to strengthen one aspect of the female identity while weakening another. However, Ali's narrative allows for various viewpoints and interpretations. Most of them correctly put their attention on *Brick Lane*'s oppression and marginalisation of women. Both concentrating on Ali's use and highlighting how silence affects identity are essential. This idea has thus been the primary subject of this text. This study has made the case that silence can take many different forms and affect women’s identities in a variety of ways. Additionally, it is demonstrated that depending on the context in which they appear, these forms can either be positive or negative. These silences have been viewed as key elements in displaying or depicting the female identity as being strengthened or weakened. Silence, however, cannot and will not exist in the absence of voice. Because of this, it is reasonable to conclude that speaking and not speaking run parallel throughout this book.

Silence may take on several forms and may have various effects on a woman's identity. It is demonstrated that depending on the context in which they appear, these forms can either be positive or negative. These moments of quiet have been viewed as essential components for exhibiting or portraying the female identity as being enhanced or weakened. But without a voice, silence is impossible and impossible to exist. One might legitimately contend that this book draws comparisons between speaking and silently reading. Women’s oppression by silence has been demonstrated. They have been unable to obtain what they required due to it. In order to lessen their identities, other characters also employ it as a weapon. As a result, female characters who speak up are able to put a stop to this oppression; otherwise, they would have remained in a state of subalternity.

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