

Reading Notes for Brick Lane by Monica Ali

1. In the beginning of Monica Ali's novel, *Brick Lane*, we follow the protagonist Nazneen from her rural Bangladeshi village to London where she has gone from teenager to married woman. How does Nazneen cope with the transition? In what small ways does she rebel against her fate?

2. Chapter 2 presents Dr. Azad, the enigmatic doctor who becomes Chanu's unlikely friend. Nazneen is often bewildered by their friendship; what is the tie that binds this odd couple?

3. When Nazneen sees the ice skaters on television, she is immediately captivated. This image is recalled several times throughout the novel, at the end of the book Nazneen is at an ice-skating rink, about to skim the ice for the first time. What does the ice skating symbolize?

4. Nazneen's friend, Razia, thinks marrying for love is romantic but when it comes to her own daughter she says, "Shefali will make a love marriage over my dead body." Why do you think arranged marriages are valued above love marriages? Discuss the advantages of both using examples from the book?

5. Fate is a significant theme in the novel. What role does Fate play in Nazneen's life? Discuss the ideological struggle between Fate and self-determination.

6. In Chapter Three, Mrs. Islam tells a story about female empowerment. She says, "If you think you are powerless, then you are." How has Mrs. Islam's chosen to live her life? Is she powerful? Empowered? Describe Nazneen's process of self-empowerment? How does faith relate to female empowerment?

7. Shahana wears jeans and has a certain independence that Nazneen cannot help but admire. In Chapter 6 Nazneen tries on a pair of Chanu's pants, and asks herself, "where's the harm?" Discuss Nazneen's relationship with Shahana? Do you think Nazneen lives vicariously through her outspoken daughter? Why does Nazneen allow Shahana to kick her?

8. As a Muslim woman, relatively confined to her household quarters, Nazneen has limited contact with men. What is the nature of her relationship with her husband Chanu? With Karim?

9. Considering Nazneen and Karim's faith, how do you account for their relationship? How do you explain their attraction to each other? What compels them to continue their dangerous liaisons? Why do you think Nazneen decides to end it?

10. Discuss the culture clash between the Bangladeshi's and the English, Muslims and Christians, men and women and between the generations.

11. Chanu is a curious character of high-hopes and endless projects that inevitably fizzle. In spite of his education and ambition, why is Chanu unable to rise above his struggling status? Is the racist system of England set against him? Or is he merely more a man of talk rather than action?

12. Razia, a queen of gossip, knows all the intimate details of the community dwellers. Why is she unable to see the signs of drug usage with her son Tariq? Why doesn't Nazneen tell her friend what she suspects?

13. How do you think life would have been for the family had Nazneen decided to return to Bangladesh with Chanu? Do you think Chanu will eventually return to London?

Reading notes quoted from **BookBrowse.com**

The Brick Lane film is in cinemas 16th November, visit www.bricklanemovie.co.uk for more.