

DEBATING CULTURAL IDENTITY : SPACES OF NEGOTIATION IN MONICA ALI'S SELECT NOVELS.**¹Satish Kumar, ² Dr. Shilpa Shukla**

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Abstract:

Untold Story explores the concepts of identity, the nature of celebrity, and locating oneself in the world. The imaginary protagonist of this book is an iconoclast, just like Diana. By disclosing the specifics of her difficult marriage and eating disorder and by reaching out like no other royal before her, she touches millions of lives and hearts worldwide. She is, however, disturbed and in danger of losing everything. Will the curse of celebrity be too severe for her to ever find happiness and peace? What if Princess Diana had survived? A combination of a nightmare and a fairy tale, Diana's life and marriage were. A million people adored her, yet in her private life, she experienced betrayal, grief, and rejection. As she battled to make a meaningful career out of serving the poor and destitute, she was surrounded by flash and glamour and the media's unwavering attention. In what path would her life have gone if she had survived? And how may she have grown into her thirties and beyond? Lydia, an Englishwoman, lives in a little, unremarkable town somewhere in the American Midwest. She has a group of friends: one owns a fashion business, another sells properties, and another is a harried stay-at-home mother. Lydia works at an animal shelter and swims in the mornings. Her lover, who adores her, fears she would not reveal herself to him.

Monica Ali, one of today's most creative and daring writers, has imagined a different path for Diana in her breathtaking new novel, Untold Story. Diana's life and marriage were a mix of fairy tale and nightmare. She was adored by millions, but she faced rejection, heartbreak, and treachery. Surrounded by beauty and splendour, as well as continual media attention, she strove to carve out a meaningful position for herself in assisting the needy and downtrodden. The tensions and constraints of her situation fuelled her increasingly reckless behaviour, while her stature and connection to her audience grew steadily. If Diana had lived, would she have ever found peace and happiness, or would the curse of celebrity have been too powerful?

Keywords: Identity , Individuality, love, fate, death, Regeneration, Apologia.

Introduction:

Ali's book Untold Story explores the possibility that Princess Diana could have faked her own death after surviving a car accident in Paris in 1997. With some plastic surgery, darker hair, and a new name. Lydia Diana, played by Ali, abandons her children in search of a new beginning in the evocatively named Midwestern American town of Kensington. Ali tells NPR's Renee

Montagne that Lydia quickly adjusts to small-town American life following a tumultuous post-escape time. According to Ali, Lydia misses her family the most from her previous life. Lydia mourns the loss of her family, yet there are times when the less desirable aspects of her previous existence return to her. Lydia, who has worn jeans for years, tries on a ball gown in one scene. Lydia can still view herself as a photographer would see her, which speaks to the effects of living in the spotlight and being hounded by photographers. Lydia's secret is jeopardised when one of her primary tormentors unexpectedly appears in Kensington. The Untold Story tells the story of what may have happened if Princess Diana had survived. Yes, the true Princess of Wales, Diana Spencer, Lady Di; she of pie-crust collars and St Tropez boats; she of the heir, spare, and landmines. What if, instead of dying in a car accident in 1997, Britain's Queen of Hearts, who had been hounded by the press and royals into panda-eyed madness, couldn't take it any more and disappeared on a dawn swim, allegedly drowned and devoured by sharks. Let us presume. Let the previously undisclosed narrative begin.

The story begins in a little American town where Lydia, as she is now called, has a calm life with her close friends. The scene opens up instantly, showing us three women a brunette, a blonde, and a redhead waiting for Lydia to arrive for her birthday dinner in the well-known suburbs of America. Thus far, so bizarre. It reads like a cross between Jonathan Franzen and Judith Krantz the trashiest of notions cloaked in astute observation. Then, we find out exactly how this occurred. As scheduled, Diana-Lydia washes up on a beach in Brazil, where she was taken off for cosmetic surgery, hair colouring, tanning, and vowel roughening. Although she is deeply and permanently upset that she left her sons behind, she finds life in Blighty to be unbearable due to her belief that she would be abandoned. She finds sanctuary in the US, the country of reinvention, with the help of her devoted private secretary, Lawrence Standing, her lone collaborator, who helps her through her metamorphosis into a long-haired brunette with glottal stops and an unclear past as a British divorcee. She ends up working as a dog handler at a shelter for stray dogs after settling on Kensington, a sleepy townlet whose name appeals to her. I see, Monica. Indeed. Because of the huge secret that Lydia has been keeping hidden from him, Carson, her nice lover, is never allowed to have emotional contact with her.

With her international dialogue, Ali is overdoing the "dang"s and "kind of schlubby"s, showing signs of discomfort. Has any American added the definite article to "Lincoln Centre" since when? However, there's something charming about Lydia's bond with these ladies, the impoverished Diana in their fraternal company. But this peaceful, hard-won state is poised to collapse. A shady paparazzo appears in view. John "Grabber" Grabowski is looking for a quiet place to write on a book after dedicating his entire early career to photographing one Princess of Wales. Idly attracted to the name Kensington as well, he arrives with his telescopic lens and a fancy eye for a gorgeous woman. Soon, he is leering at the attractive Lydia from the area, who has stopped bothering to wear her brown contact lenses. Even with her "repertoire of self-adjustments," there's something uncannily familiar about her laugh, her saunter, and her ultramarine eyes. Grabber is too familiar with that face at the end of a lens to avoid focussing on

those eyes, which have a unique little green circle surrounding the right pupil. He's stumbled onto his life's narrative. The novel exhibits psychological nuance that the potboiler it is modelled after could never have, and it is told in the third person as well as through Lydia's letters to Lawrence and Lawrence's diaries. Diana is portrayed by Ali as a complicated figure who must conceal herself behind her own mask in order to vanish. The tale takes on a thriller-like character once Grabowski sets out on his quest, with anxiety driving what is fundamentally a confusing but sporadically enjoyable read.

This is the theory that Monica Ali presents in her latest work, "Untold Story," which is a potboiler. Given the much-discussed release of the book in Britain just weeks before Diana's son William's wedding, when interest in the royal family was reaching new heights, Ms. Ali, who was named by Granta in 2003 as one of Britain's 20 best young novelists and whose first novel, "Brick Lane," was on the shortlist for the prestigious Man Booker Prize, seems to be embarking on an incredibly high-concept, low-brow endeavour. The book is a significant divergence from the themes explored in Ali's previous works, "Brick Lane" and "In the Kitchen," which both painted pictures of a gritty, multicultural London populated by young aspirants and suffering immigrants. However, by transforming Diana into Lydia, a British expat who is holed up in a small American town, Ali is able to revisit her favourite fish-out-of-water premise while addressing some of the same identity and exile issues that drove her earlier work.

The reader discovers that Lydia, the erstwhile princess, had become so desperate and tormented through the journal entries of her loyal private secretary, Lawrence, that Lawrence, worried for Lydia's mental health, volunteered to assist her in pulling off her disappearing act. She pretended to be dead, leaving her two young sons behind forever as the wife of a British monarch, in order to escape a life that was becoming more and more unbearable. In every other way, it's very evident who Ali is writing about, even though Diana is never given a name. Although the concept may appear somewhat implausible, the way it is executed is frequently captivating and insightful, albeit not particularly sharp. The logistics of a princess disguising herself and the difficulty of acclimating to a life that is anything but ordinary for her have been considered by Ali. Conveniently, her princess survives the Paris disaster only to "drown" while swimming alone. The majority of the novel consists of third-person sections laced with the journal entries of Lawrence Standing, the princess's former personal secretary and the only person who is aware of the truth, and a handful of Lydia's letters. Intriguingly, Ali's portrayal of Lawrence's connection with the woman who is, in many respects, the core of his universe is centred around their near-obsession with one another, as well as his acquiescence in her "little plan" execution. She also discusses the media's complicated role in all of this, as it both guarantees she won't see her kids again and lets her follow their lives from a distance.

Other places When a stereotypically shady paparazzo threatens Lydia's new existence towards the conclusion of the book, Ali feels uncomfortable with certain aspects of American speech, and this shift in tone is handled less skilfully. The novel is more interesting when it is observational, when Ali is subtly examining the idea of exile and beginning anew, setting her

princess in a recognisable American suburb where she is at last able to find peace. In fact, the writing actually becomes less engaging the more it is paced like a thriller. When someone chose to create a novel about what would have occurred if Diana, Princess of Wales, had not died in a car accident instead of about “brown people,” Brick Lane author Monica Ali said it seemed like a “obliteration of the self.” According to the novelist, she experienced depression after receiving “bafflement” for her 2011 book *Untold Story*. She said to *The Big Issue*, “I think I was really naïve in thinking that, as a white male writer, I could write about anything I wanted.” Of Bangladeshi and English descent, Ali first came to the attention of the public in 2003 with her debut book *Brick Lane*, which described the immigrant community of east London and was shortlisted for the Booker Prize.

After a ten-year lapse during which Ali claimed to have had a disastrous loss of confidence, her fourth and most latest book, *Love Marriage*, was published. She said, “I stopped writing ten years ago,” to the magazine. After that, I became depressed. It started a negative spiral because my ability to write decreased due to the depression. I started to lose confidence. After *Brick Lane* was published, Ali claimed that writing about so many different topics perplexed readers. The reply was incomprehension. Regarding *Untold Story*, a reviewer once referred to it as “a curious marriage of author and subject matter.” People would enquire, “Are you attempting to avoid something?” It seemed to me that the underlying question they were asking was, “Are you trying to avoid brown people?” Do you intend to reject your ethnicity? Said Ali. I know that made some people confused, but I was born in Dhaka, but I’ve lived here my entire life. My father is Bengali, and my mother is White. I believed that I was being completely authentic. She continued, “It’s taken me a lot of therapy to realise that, for me, that reaction felt like a kind of self-obliteration.”

Conclusion:

The present study delves into the significance of identity and the notion of unity in an individual’s existence. Of the writers nominated for the 2003 Man Booker Prize, Monica Ali was the most well-known. She became well-known after publishing her debut book, *Brick Lane*. She most recently published a book in 2011, titled *Untold Story*. Lydia is the protagonist of the novel, and she attempts to flee the paparazzi site. This paper’s major goal is to examine the themes of self-discovery and single Dom in Monica Ali’s *Untold Story*, a book written by British-Bangladeshi author. Through Lydia, Monica Ali depicts Diana’s life in her own words. The protagonist of the story is Lydia, who impersonated a deceased person and immigrated to America under a false identity. Monica Ali highlights the emotional experience of the lonely person while she examines herself as a regular person. The primary theme is still the search for identity. As a writer from today, Monica Ali emphasises the value of being authentic.

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