

18th Annual Secret House Wine & Blues Festival

Sunday August 24th
“Northwest Harmonica Championship”

1:30
for sign-ups call 541.337.5553
or email hankshreve@gmail.com

4:00 Bill Rhoades
5:30 Fiona Boyes with Hank Shreve
6:45 Henry Cooper
8:00 Lloyd Jones Struggle

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Nazneen (Tannishtha Chatterjee) is unhappy with her arranged marriage in *Brick Lane*



An Unquiet Mind

An adaptation of Monica Ali's novel

BRICK LANE: Directed by Sarah Gavron. Written by Abi Morgan and Laura Jones, based on the novel by Monica Ali. Cinematography, Robbie Ryan. Music, Jocelyn Pook. Starring Tannishtha Chatterjee, Satish Kaushik and Christopher Simpson. Sonly Pictures Classics, 2007. PG-13. 102 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

Considering the skill with which Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane* evokes the scope of the immigrant experience, one would expect any adaptation to reveal a high degree of compression. While the story at the heart of *Brick Lane* is simple — Nazneen, a Bangladeshi girl, is sent to East London to marry a man she's never met — the emotions at the heart of the story are not, requiring careful, exacting depictions to make them felt. Ali's novel, so closely observant of the tension between duty and passion, feels bigger and more populated than it is. The film version, by contrast, feels smaller than it should, so much does it concentrate on the wildly reserved Nazneen, whose motto is to endure all and desire nothing. The result is a capable but ordinary film that overly compresses the details which made the source material so great.

Nazneen (Tannishtha Chatterjee), now 33, is unhappily married to Chanu (Satish Kaushik), a water buffalo of a husband who can't hold down a job. A Bangladeshi Willy Loman, a smiling idealist who's an abject failure, Chanu is the kind of man who says “soap is the future” and means it. In a film so emphatically about the trials of its heroine, Chanu is both the pleasant surprise of *Brick Lane* and an indication of the film's biggest weakness: Chanu is the only rounded character in *Brick Lane* — Kaushik is one of India's great comic actors — and he's arguably the only interesting character until the arrival of hunky Karim (Christopher Simpson). Karim, a handsome Muslim who's becoming more radicalized each day, awakens in Nazneen a sense of possibility she hasn't felt since she was a girl.

Nazneen's rediscovery of her innocence — although I'm not sure it's fair to call

an affair innocent — would be more interesting if she didn't spend most of her time dreaming about her childhood. In fact, *Brick Lane* goes out of its way to emphasize how much Nazneen's mind is an unquiet place, a place that's constantly reaching back to Bangladesh despite being trapped in post-9/11 London. Via gauzy, slow-motion flashbacks to her girlhood, we learn that Nazneen lives in the past to escape the present, keeping *Brick Lane* on a continual intravenous drip of nostalgia. Again and again, Nazneen transports us out of the narrative and therefore out of touch with the film's dramatic tension. It's a convincing film from the standpoint of plot and incident, but emotionally the film is dull and ordinary, mirroring Nazneen's demeanor throughout.

Nazneen's struggle between family and self needs to carry the film. It can't.

For as lush as *Brick Lane* is in flashbacks, it's flimsy in the present. London's Brick Lane district, a haven for immigrants for 400 years, is softened by cinematographer Robbie Ryan, taking the edge out of a film that desperately needs one. Chanu's role, while memorable, isn't nearly as prominent as Nazneen's, the result being that her internalized struggle between family and self needs to carry the film. It can't. As for their two daughters (Naeema Begum and Lana Rahman), they occasionally show signs of life, but for the most part, the girls are just passing through. *Brick Lane*, for a film about being far away from home, is merely comfortable rather than exciting, pedestrian where it should be strident and in general makes a much lighter impression than it could.

EW

Brick Lane opens Friday, July 25, at the Bijou.

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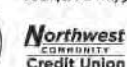
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