

Brick Lane (2007) A loving portrait of a Muslim woman, 14 November 2007

10/10 Author: Olivia Temple from London, England [www.imdb.com/title/tt0940585/usercomments](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0940585/usercomments)

From the opening scene of two young sisters chasing one another through a sunny field in Bangladesh (actually shot in India) to the very last poignant shot of the older sister as a mature woman looking back on her life and forward to the rest of it, I was captivated by this film. The performance of Tannishta Chatterjee as the wife is so touching that it is almost embarrassing to watch her, as if one is a Peeping Tom. Trapped in a tiny flat, and in an arranged marriage, with two teenage daughters, silently bearing the loss of her first born, a son, dreaming of her sister and family in Bangladesh and living for her sister's letters, she is detached from the world outside, alone, isolated - despite being in the midst of the Bengali community in Brick Lane, London. I accompanied her as she went out, crossed the concrete yard, did her shopping, straightened her headscarf, avoiding the white tattooed lady next door and the old Bengali widow, a debt-collector. The claustrophobic flat, piled high with daily necessities, the overwhelming presence of her husband, rather charmingly pompous, and brilliantly played by Satish Kaushik, the two depressed and bored daughters, is tangible, as is her husband's corpulent body when he rolls on top of her with wheezing breath in their depressingly small bed. Longing to earn some money so that she can fulfill her dream of returning home to visit her family, she takes on piece-work, sewing up jeans and glitzy tops, and finds herself attracted to and then having an affair with, the young British Muslim who brings the work every week. Sarah Gavron, the young British director, gets beneath the veil, beneath the skin and into the heart of this woman, delivering a portrait, not of a community, but of self-discovery and ultimately of love equalling the work of Satiyajit Ray. We should look forward to her next feature film. [322]

Annotations: poignant – moving, distressing; Peeping Tom – voyeur;

Assignments: 1. Give a short summary of the *Brick Lane* movie. 2. Work closely on the text to capture the reviewer's evaluation. 3. Point out parallels and differences with respect to *Bend it Like Beckham*.