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JOURNEY OF SELF-REALIZATION IN MONICA ALI'S *THE UNTOLD STORY*

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Abstract:

In literature, many aspects of human nature, existence, and survival are explored in rich, symbolic layers. Writers beautifully capture the full range of human emotions-love, hatred, grief, and jealousy-allowing us to see ourselves reflected in their stories. A core theme in many works is the profound struggle to find purpose amid a universe that feels chaotic or indifferent. Literature also helps us understand the intricate laws, ethics, and unwritten cultural rules that shape how societies operate. Monica Ali's *The Untold Story* thoughtfully delves into the nature of celebrity, the meaning of identity, and the journey to discover one's place in the world. Like Diana, the fictional heroine of this novel, who is both an icon and a rebel, she touches countless lives with her openness, sharing her struggles with her marriage and eating disorder, and reaching out in ways no other royal has before. Yet beneath her shining exterior, she faces inner turmoil and is on the edge of disaster.

Keywords: Existence, Human dilemma, rebel, social order, quest

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Monica Ali is widely celebrated for her bright, empathetic, and psychologically nuanced storytelling. She masterfully blends sharp social observations with complex, multi-layered characters, often delving into themes like race, class, immigration, and gender from a heartfelt, domestic perspective. Published in 2011, *The Untold Story* begins with the life of the world's most renowned woman, guiding us through her past and offering a glimpse of her future. The plot is all about the protagonist's struggle for survival by disguising herself and living in a small town as he learns that she will be assassinated.

Diana, the novel's female protagonist, goes through a tough life that often feels like a bit of a joke. Even though millions of fans love her, she still faces heartbreak and betrayal in her personal life. Despite living comfortably, she sometimes feels stuck and lonely. Instead of following tradition, she chooses her own path, which makes it hard for her to find happiness. After a tough time, she takes on a new identity as Lydia and moves to a small American town, where she begins to find a gentle sense of peace. But her calm is threatened by memories of her lost children, who mean more to her than all the glitter and glamour of royalty.

This research article highlights how important our sense of identity and feeling connected with others are in our lives. It shares the story of Lydia, who tries to escape from the paparazzi. The paper examines the novel, exploring themes of self-discovery and meaningful connections. Through Lydia's journey, Monica Ali also offers reflections on Diana's life- especially when Lydia fakes her death to start a fresh life in America with a new false identity. The story gently addresses feelings of normalcy and loneliness, emphasizing the ongoing search for our true selves. As a modern writer, Monica Ali beautifully reminds us of how essential it is to stay true to who we really are.

The Untold Story encourages readers to reflect on the past and envision the future, starting with the life of the world's most famous woman. At a pivotal moment, the story's protagonist, a fictional princess, chooses to orchestrate her own death and begin anew with a false identity, believing that the authorities intend to harm her. After a period of upheaval, Lydia, now called Lydia, moves to a small American town and finds a fragile sense of peace. However, thoughts of her loss- especially her children, who are everything to her- threaten to shatter that calm. After changing her appearance and ten years since her fake death, she finally feels safe, confident her secret is secure. Yet, that sense of security is challenged when she unexpectedly encounters a paparazzo.

The author thoughtfully explores profound choices in her writings. In this novel, she envisions what could have happened if Diana had survived that tragic 1997 car accident. Imagine the real Princess of Wales, Diana Spencer, Lady Di, known for her elegant outfits and glamorous yachting trips, choosing a different path in life, away from the constant glare of the spotlight. What if, instead of her heartbreaking ending, she had found a way to escape the chaos- perhaps slipping away during a dawn swim and being lost to the sharks? That's quite a thought. The story begins in a peaceful American town, where Lydia, as she now prefers to be called, leads a quiet, cozy life surrounded by her dear friends.

At the beginning, three women - a brunette, a blonde, and a redhead - are seen waiting happily for Lydia's arrival at her birthday dinner, set in the charming suburbs of America. The scene feels intriguingly unique, blending clever observations with a dash of bold storytelling that evokes both Jonathan Franzen and Judith Krantz. As we learn more, we find out how everything unfolded. Diana-Lydia, as planned, arrives at a Brazilian beach, where she undergoes cosmetic treatments, including hair coloring, tanning, and a few other transformations. Her decision to leave her sons behind has made her deeply sad, yet she found life in Britain too painful, fearing rejection. Her only support is Lawrence Standing, a loyal private secretary, who helps her through her incredible transformation- becoming a long-haired brunette with a mysterious past as a British divorcee, before she seeks a fresh start in the US, a land known for reinvention. She chooses to settle in Kensington, a quiet, charming town that she finds appealing. There, she trains to become a dog handler at a sanctuary for stray animals.

Lydia has a wonderful partner, Carson, but because of a big secret she's keeping, he isn't allowed any emotional contact. After making a name for himself by photographing Princess Diana, John Grabber Grabowski is now looking for a quiet place to work on his book. Drawn to the name Kensington, he arrives with his telescopic lens, watching the lovely Lydia, who has finally shed her disguise of brown contact lenses. Despite her range of self-adjustments, her striking ultramarine eyes, her cheerful laughter, and her relaxed walks feel surprisingly familiar, like an old friend she keeps running into. Grabber recognizes that face through a familiar lens, easily noticing those expressive eyes and the tiny green circle around the right pupil. It's as if he has uncovered his life's story. The novel offers deep psychological insights that a typical quick read, inspired by similar works, could never match. It is narrated from multiple perspectives-third person, Lydia's letters to Lawrence, and Lawrence's diaries- adding richness to the story. Ali presents Diana as a complex character who hides her true self

behind a mask, only to disappear. Once Grabowski begins his journey, the story adopts a suspenseful, thriller-like feel, with a sense of tension that makes the confusing but sometimes entertaining read quite engaging.

The novel offers insightful, compassionate perspectives and complex, realistic characters. However, its narrative progression feels somewhat unusual. Ali narrates a story about Diana stepping back from the spotlight, yet in a way that allows her to escape the story itself. Notably, Ali never directly mentions Diana by name; instead, the main character is named Lydia Snaresbrook. Lydia is depicted as a deliberately plain woman living in the suburbs, suggesting that Ali aimed to tell the story through a character who embodies simplicity and ordinariness. The intriguing contradictions of a Diana-like figure-vain about her clothes yet fighting landmines, or outgoing yet lonely-are not addressed here. Lydia, in her mid-age, has black hair and resides in Kensington, a charming Midwestern town, which she chose partly as a playful joke.

Ali deliberately keeps the details about Kensington somewhat vague, adding a captivating, mysterious element to her story. Lydia lives in a beautiful, affluent neighborhood, has formed close friendships with Americans, purchased a house with a pool, and works at a kennel- sometimes just for fun, especially when Princess Di is seen happily playing with a Rottweiler! These friends seem lively, fun-loving Americans, perhaps a bit cheesy, but always kind-hearted. Their differences mainly relate to their life stages: one is single and uninterested in children, another is divorced and has kids, and the third is married and has children. It appears he's pursuing a woman named Lydia. Ali hints at a potential for a richer, more engaging story in a few parts. She dedicates several pages to the diaries of Lawrence Standing, a fictional private secretary and advisor who helped Diana fake her death, knew all her plans, and was dying of a brain tumor.

Ali thoughtfully explores the tough question of how Diana could leave her beloved sons behind in England. She suggests that Lydia believed she faced the danger of being harmed or going insane if she remained, and that Lawrence often convinced Lydia she would eventually reunite with her children. While the story highlights some of its own absurdities, it also offers a touching and memorable image from Diana's funeral- a simple card inscribed with just the word Mummy, resting on white flowers over her coffin. This small but powerful detail reminds us, perhaps more than we realize, that Diana, like all icons, was a person first and foremost. The book gently encourages us to remember her humanity beyond the iconic image.

The protagonist of the novel reaches a point where she is overwhelmed by doubt and fear. Believing that the Establishment might be plotting to harm her, she makes the heartfelt decision to take her own life and start anew under a different identity. Diana's life and marriage were like a fairy tale, full of dreams and nightmares. Millions of people loved her, yet she faced heartbreak and betrayal in her personal life. The story revolves around Lydia, who pretended to be dead to travel to America under a false identity. Monica Ali explores her life as an ordinary person, focusing on her emotional experience of loneliness. The search for identity remains the central focus. Monica Ali highlights the need for authenticity as a contemporary writer.

Ali explains that Lawrence encouraged Lydia's belief that she would reunite with her sons someday, while Lydia thought staying would either kill her or drive her mad. The novel somewhat overdoes it to defend Lydia, highlighting how absurd everything is. A very touching and unforgettable part of Diana's funeral in Ali's story is the card with just the word "Mummy" handwritten on it, resting on white flowers over her coffin. For those of us who might view public figures too naively, this note serves as a heartfelt reminder that Diana, like all icons, was also a real person with feelings and lessons to teach. The book seeks to share that meaningful lesson.

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