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Affinity for Nation and culture in Jhumpa Lahiri's 'Namesake'

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ABSTRACT

Jhumpa Lahiri's Pulitzer Prize Winner Novel 'The Namesake' follows the life of Ganguli family, Ashoke and Ashima, after their marriage move to America, where Ashima is not happy from the start.

The culture in which Ashima lived in Culcutta haunts her and she feels homesick under another sky. Her affinity for her nation and culture can be seen in her each and every action. Ashima loves her nation and culture so much that finally she decides to sell her house in America periodically return to her brother's house in Culcutta.

Jhumpa Lahiri's novel 'The Namesake' was first published in 2003. The novel got Pulitzer prize and praised by leading journals and daily's.

The novel reveals the story of an Indian, Bengali family, Ashok and Ashima Ganguli.

Ashok Ganguli, Ashima's husband, decides to move to America immediately after his marriage. Newly married couple move abroad, where Ashok becomes busy with his research and Ashima at home, alone, thinking and remembering her past life in her own nation and culture.

Ashima becomes pregnant and the pregnancy makes her even more homesick. In Indian

culture, pregnant daughter returns to her parents house where she lives in case of her mother, grandmother and sisters. This belief makes Ashima nervous. She thinks to herself -

"In India women go home to their parents to give birth, away from husbands and in-laws and household cases, retreating briefly to childhood when the baby arrives."

Ashima's affinity for culture is at its peak when she decides that her grandmother will select the name for her new born baby. They wait for years and when they learn that the grandmother is no more, still no Bengali name has been given to



the child.

Time to time she receives letters from relatives and learns about ups and downs. It seems that only Ashima's body is in America and her mind is in India, she try to creat her own culture on a different land. The bengoli families they know and their parties on holidays show affinity for culture. Gogal's annaprasan, his rice ceremony is fine example of it. There is no baptism for Bengali babies, no ritualistic naming in the eyes of God. Instead, the first formal ceremony of their lives centers around the consumption of solid food.

Ashima now and then remembers her relatives in India, she fears to receive phone calls at night, she feels that such calls brings badnews, when ashok asks her to receive the call, she hesitate because, she thoughts "who will console her the day her own monther dies, if that news will also come to her in this way, in the middle of the night, wresting her from dreams".

Farm away from her mother land Ashima never feel stable, she become mother, she has her own house, her own family but she is not capable to adjust, after three years, when she hears her mother's voice, she feels so happy and the first question she asks is,

"what time it is there" and the news of her father's death throws her in deep anguish.

Ashima, looses her dearest ones one by one they passed away including Ashoke, at the

same time her own children grows up. Now she feels alone, her son Gogol lives in another city, her daughter Sonali now young, she decides to sell her house and depart to her own nation and culture.

Jhumpa Lahairi's Namesake, express Ashima's affinity for her Nation and culture.

Jhumpa Lahiri's first novel 'The Name-sake' attracted the attention of revelers through out the world. Sunday times commenting on the novel writes.

'Good novelist, like Bengali parents, must make their creations unique, and Lihiri's Central characters are painfully believable.... An extremely good first novel..... making the voyage between two worlds'

These two worlds means India and America. The novel can be studied by various ways. There are themes like self identity, death and cultural shock. Perhaps cultural shock is most dominant theme in the novel.

Ashoke and Ashima a newly married Bengali couple moves America where Ashoke is fellowship received research scholar. Ashima his wife, traditional, brought out in Bengali culture feels unhappy under another sky. American culture i.e. totally new for her. She knows now one there. Perhaps she now and then remembers her crowded family full of relatives in Culcutta.

When she becomes pregnant she wish to go to her parental home. Motherhood in a foreign



land shocks her. Like all Indian married girls she also wish to give birth of her first child under the care of her mother and grandmother. But her husband refuses.

After her delivery, Ashima asks her grandmother to suggest a good name for her first child, since it is tradition in Bengal. However she fails in it, she waits for the letter but having a name, but letter doesn't come. At last as Ashoke names the child "Gogol" and that name continues.

Soon after the birth of child Ashima try to involve in the day to day activities of her child's life and finds enjoyment in this routine. She prefer to cook Indian mammals.

Ashma being Indian knows culture of a house wife well, her house is clean and neat, when she observes neighbour's house, she feels uneasy. But when she becomes a mother she tells her husband,

'I can't do this'. She asks her husband, 'I'm say hurry up and finish your degree'.

'I don't want to raise Gogol alone in this country. It's not right. I want to go back.'

Ashima undergoes a sort of nostalgia. She can not bear the thought to be live alone in America. She wants to return to her won culture.

The Gangulies try to form friendship with other Indian families in the city. They calls each other. Here Ashma try to bring Indian in America through throwing parties on other Indians and try to follow Indian traditions. On Gogol's first 'Anna

Grahan' ceremony, she invites all Indian friends and performs it as per Indian culture.

She continues to follow this habit, even her children get frustrated she continues to refuse American culture.

When her children left home, after her husband's death, she try to accept American culture, but she fails, at last she decides to sell her house and returns to her own culture.

Through out the novel this theme of cultural shock remains dominant. There are plenty of examples that shows that Ashima never settles in mentally in American culture.

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