

Significance of Food and Culinary Practices in relation to Diasporic survival in the Jhumpa Lahiri's novel "The Namesake"

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Abstract

As people and families displace; their cooking, preparing, dining and eating style of specific place also travel with them across country and time modifying according to social and environmental condition. Food gains significance in the Diasporic communities, as for their nostalgia and ties to the homeland. In this paper an attempt is made to trace the interconnectedness of home and food through the study of diasporic novel – The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri. The novel captures each degrees of diasporic Indian family residing in America. Though Ganguli family settled in U.S they always clinged to their Indian roots to recreate their lost homeland- they indulge in homeland foods- gastro nostalgia is created through Bengali dishes they reconnect to their root and culture.

KEYWORDS: culinary practices, roots , gastro-nostalgia, lineage, heritage

Diaspora is defined as dispersion of any people from their original homeland, across geo- temporal distances by displacement and relocation. The issues of human experiences such as identity, culture and dislocation, marginalization, discrimination, homelessness, memory and longing were associated with Diasporic experiences. In the host land Diasporic people adopt various strategies to cope up and survive and food becomes an effective mode to connect the frangible bridge between their past and present. Food metaphors serves as a mark of cultural identity and generational conflict .They have become an off mentioned clichés in post-colonial and diasporic fiction. Food offers temporary sense of solace to those living far from their homeland, and also signifies powerful domestic authority.

In this paper an attempt is made to uncover the interrelation of food and home through Jhumpa Lahiri's diasporic novel Namasake .The author assuredly utilizes food as a metaphor for understanding the experiences of the first and second generation immigrant having divided identity and loyalties in her debut novel Namasake. Food is not a meal for existence; it has emotional and cultural sentiments for Indians. There is a well-built interconnectedness with Food and Diasporas. Food establishes a sentimental homesick feeling in the sense of Diasporas because it is firmly bound with familial genesis, faith and folk tradition of diaspora.

The Namasake is a poignant anecdote of Ashima Badhuria undergraduate student in Calcutta who becomes Ashima Ganguli after her marriage to Ashok Ganguli. They displace home to Boston for Ashok's Ph.D in fiber optics. Ashima feel hassle and home sick specially and emotionally dislocated from her ancestral home and her only source of solace is food. Lahiri pays more attention to the significance of food in diasporic milieu

in this novel. On the very onset of the novel, the pregnant and lonely Ashima is shown making a spicy Indian snack-jhalmuri, using American ingredients; rice crispies and platters peanuts and chopped red onion in a bowl. She adds salt, lemon juice, thin slices of green chilly pepper, wishing there were mustard oil to pour into the mix. The absence of mustard oil reminds her of Calcutta where it was easy to find it. Besides, the mixing of various Indian and American ingredients covertly suggests the mixing of cultures, people and races which give birth to multi culturalism. Immigrant women like Ashima gets satisfaction, consolation and solace from the creative process of cooking.

To minimize her sense of loss Ashima always keep herself affianced in domestic activities especially food preparation of various sorts. The food mediates memory and as an effective signifier it provides an axis for understanding the exploration of cultural roots and inscription of subjectivity. In America Ganguli celebrate Gogol's Annaprasan ceremony Ashima prepares Bengali food to welcome their guests. Though it takes many hours to cook all the dishes Ashima is happy for they are all connected to each other. A sense of home is being recreated through the whole process of cooking, sharing and dining together. Ashima tries to hold on to her Indian culture by recreating homeland foods. Ashima clings on to her ethnic Bengali tradition by preparing payesh on Gogol's birthday.

The novel describes Ashok and Ashima the first generation immigrants adore their Bengali food as a source of familial happiness and comfort but for Gogol and Sonia the second generation immigrants such as it is a persistent source of shame and discomfort. The difference between the culinary taste of Ashok and Ashima and their children Gogol and Sonia clearly reflects how food affects our personality. In the diasporic context we have two variations of food: food of Diaspora and Diasporic food where the former suggests all sorts of food taken by the people while living in diaspora and the latter indicates chiefly towards the indigenous food of diaspora which bears the taste and memory of homeland left behind. In the novel the novelist offers vivid details of food those irresistibly express diverse voices of the immigrants. Lahiri seems to say the mere name of Jhalmuri, dal, kabab tea and samosas is sufficient to present the uniqueness of Indian food with its spicy flavor and when an Indian eats them in America he is immediately reminded of his past and connected to the homeland. But it is not in the case of immigrant children like Gogol and Sonia. The soul food that Mr and Mrs Ganguli relish with great love is disliked by their offspring. The choices of food also act as an effective instrument to trace the collateral development of the character in Diasporic fiction. Lahiri utilizes in a very interesting and convincing manner Bengali food to present Bengali lifestyle. The novel opens and closes with the scene in a kitchen. The food operates as a catalyst for Ashima memories and as a symbol of her desire for homeland.

Ashima's alluring recipes not only bring familial comfort but also strengthen their relationship. By focusing on the variety in the Bengali cuisines, Lahiri in "The Namesake" presents food as an emotional signifier that transcends and transforms several oppositions and harmonize.

The ingredients for Indian recipes are difficult to find in America and therefore sometimes they manage their cooking with the substitutes available. For example while

making the popular Bengali sweet Sandesh; Ashima uses Ricotta cheese in place of yoghurt. She helplessly misses the Indian taste in food which she could not manage to recreate in her own food preparation. In spite of all efforts it is not only the care of one person Ashima but a very common experience which haunts all those who live miles away from their lively home. The exploration of the magical and therapeutic influence of food on immigrants subjectivity has been remarkably detailed on the fictional plane in Jhumpa Lahiri's "The Namesake". As a meaningful literary output the novel reflects upon the Bengali cultural traditions of India in an intimate family garb closely related to social cultural and psychological norms with respect to food.

In conclusion, in this novel Jhumpa's varied use of culinary metaphor of preparation and consumption of food has multiple and complex meanings. We can understand the way that the spicy Indian food pervades every aspect of our lives by deciphering the discourse of food. The spicy Indian food plays a vital role in our cooking which gives immigrants a chance to maintain their Indian cultural and ethnic identity and reluctance towards assimilation in American society. Jhumpa highlights the significance of the food and culinary practices of Indian immigrant women in the Diaspora.

References

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