

Jen Barr
EAD 860
Unit 5 Assignment

In the film *The Namesake*, Ashima learns about American culture by participating in it in her daily life. However, she doesn't become fully immersed in it, or change who she is at the core, because she has already developed a strong Indian identity. Ashima learns how to be a wife and mother, how to deal with the death of a husband, and how to live on her own. These are typical experiences for many women, but Ashima must do them in the context of an Indian woman living in the American culture of the United States.

Mary Catherine Bateson described identity within multiculturalism as the starting point for knowing oneself and stated that it is often ethnocentric and sometimes separatist. Ashima has a strong Indian identity before moving to the US with her new husband. This is evidenced throughout her life, as she maintains Indian customs and traditions in both small and large ways. She continues to wear traditional dress and mourns her father and husband according to Indian customs. She lives in an Indian community within her neighborhood and does not move until she decides to return to India after the death of her husband.

Ashima does participate in American society, though, even while retaining her identity. Her children attend public schools and she attempts to give her son, Gogol, a more suitable name when he begins kindergarten. Bateson stated that understanding grows in repeated participation. She noted that learners can participate without knowing all the rules of the culture. Both of these are true in Ashima's situation. She doesn't actively embrace or seem to want to learn about American culture, but by virtue of daily participation in it, understands it. When she first moves to the US, she doesn't want to have anything to do with the new way of life and would prefer to hand on to her Indian lifestyle. Over time, and through participation, she changes a bit. She comes to accept that her children are the opposite – they are American children who have learned Indian culture. She even accepts her daughter's non-Indian husband and the impending divorce of her son from his Indian wife.

In the end, Ashima begins what is probably her most difficult learning experience. She must learn to live on her own after her husband dies. Ashima decides that she will spend half the year in India and the other half in the US. Her decision to live in the US is probably based mostly on the fact that her children are there, but perhaps she formed the pattern of cultural style described by Bateson as a combination of two different cultures. We know that she has accepted her children's Americanized ways and above all wants them to be happy. She goes to India to learn to sing for no other reason than because she has always wanted to. She may have learned to enjoy American culture, as well, as she has chosen to keep it as part of her newer, multicultural identity.