

## **CHAPTER- II**

# **FOLK ELEMENTS IN THE NOVELS OF JHUMPA LAHIRI**

## 2.1 FOLKLORE:

Folklore is the expressive body of culture shared by a particular group of people which includes traditional beliefs, customs, popular myths passed from one generation to another. It is a combination of two words- 'folk' and 'lar'. The word 'folk' refers to a community of people and 'lar' refers to knowledge.

R.M. Dorson cited that Folklore reveals people's ideas and ideals, hopes, fears, aspirations and superstitions. It is the development of people's social, emotional and cultural life, an index to their ethnical, aesthetic norms and sense of value (Dorson, R.M. 1972).

Folklore promotes cultural unity and national integration despite of diverse linguistic, religious and regional background. There are four broad sectors of folklore according to R.M. Dorson (Dorson, R.M. 1972). These are-

### I. Verbal arts or oral literature:

It refers to the orally transmitted art form or literature. It includes- folk songs, myths, legends, folk tales, proverbs, riddles, ballads, folk speeches, folk prose narratives, poetry and sayings.

### II. Social Folk Customs:

The social folk custom includes the various festivals, fairs, rituals, rites and customs. Indian social folk customs have special reference in these two novels.

### III. Material culture:

It encompasses folk arts and crafts, folk toys, folk costumes, dress pattern, food recipes, jewellery, folk architecture, house types and folk painting

#### IV. **Performing folk arts:**

This branch of folklore includes the traditional music, drama and dance passed on the succeeding generations as a cultural heritage.

Jhumpa Lahiri mostly discusses about material culture, social folk customs and oral literature in her novels- 'The Lowland' and 'The Namesake'.

## **2.2 Social Folk Customs:**

This branch of folklore plays a vital role in the society. The emphasis is on the socio-cultural aspects of a group interaction. The folk tradition of a particular community is the integral part of the social structure as it holds the society in a cohesive bond of togetherness. It shapes beliefs, customs, rituals and festivals celebrated by the community.

The significance of these customs or rituals have remarkable impact on the socio-cultural and religious life of a particular community. Such as- customs, prayers and rituals of birth, marriage, death and festivals. These indigenous means of prayers, rituals or customs related to various occasions or activities which reflect the exclusive world view of a particular community.

Some of the mostly celebrated social folk customs are-

- **Folk Religion:**

It refers to certain ethnic or regional religious beliefs or customs. The maintenance of the religious practices of various indigenous groups is essential. These possessions of the indigenous groups are unique and requisite representing the regional variation as well.

- **Beliefs and superstitions:**

There are beliefs and superstitions prevalent in every society assumed as concept of causations. According to various regional or traditional belief, practices, customs or rites, an object or action influence certain events as its consequence.

- Rites and rituals:

It refers to sacred and customary ways of performing activities of a particular community. It relates those religious practices and life cycle rites. It includes rites associated with birth, death and marriage.

- Festivals and ceremonies:

An event of community celebration which endorses certain unique aspects of that community and its traditions. All communities celebrate various types of festivals and ceremonies. It gives a platform to showcase the cultural heritage. Festivals play a significant role in the life of a community. It intrigues a social, cultural or geographical belonging. It is an attempt to develop unity in the complexity of a diversified setting. It also enhance the ethnic identity.

Jhumpa Lahiri demonstrated various aspects of social folk customs in her novels. Festivals along with rites & rituals, beliefs & superstitions are also discussed. The contrasting interpretations of different social folk customs from India and America are represented in 'The Lowland' & 'The Namesake'.

### **2.2.1 Festivals:**

Jhumpa Lahiri mentions about Durga Puja in most of her books. She refers it as 'Durga Pujo' in Bengali. This is one of the widely celebrated festival of India. It is mostly popular among the Hindu Bengali community. This festival marks the battle of goddess Durga with the

demon Mahishasura. According to the mythology, the demon meditated to Brahma for immortality. Brahma granted his wish with a condition. The condition was that he can only die by the hands of a woman. He started a war against the gods because he believed that no woman could be powerful enough to kill him and won the war. The Goddess Durga is created to defeat Mahishasura by combining the energies of three Gods (Shiva, Brahma and Vishnu). Her victory is celebrated enthusiastically all over India. The statues are hosted by the pandals and temples are decorated. Along with the goddess Durga, other major deities of Hinduism are also featured such as Lakshmi (goddess of wealth, prosperity), Saraswati (goddess of knowledge, love, beauty and music), Ganesha (god of good beginnings) and Kartikeya (god of war). The people gather to worship the goddess. It is a social and public event featuring the religious rituals.

<sup>1</sup>Durga puja is the greatest festival of the Bengali community. Immense fanfare and celebration takes place during the ten days celebration of this festival. The goddess Durga is represented with ten hands and each hand holds a weapon. The goddess symbolizes the divine force which protects the devotees against evil. It is celebrated in the month of September or October. The main festival takes place after seven days. The festival last for ten days, however the main ritual is only for the last four days. Each day of Durga Puja has a special significance. But the preparation for it begin months before the festival.

This is the biggest and most widely celebrated festival of Kolkata. The city is decorated with festive lights and pandals are organised to hoist the beautiful sculptures. Priests play songs as well as recitation of mantras on the loudspeakers. The roads are overcrowded with devotees

---

<sup>1</sup> Rajan Singh Jolly. (2012, March 27). Navratri Durga Puja: The Nine Nights of the Worship of Goddess Durga. Retrieved from

<https://holidappy.com/holidays/Navratri-The-Nine-Day-Indian-Festival-Of-Worship-Of-Goddess-Durga>

and pandal-hoppers on the auspicious days which creates a chaotic traffic condition. Shops, eateries, restaurants and fairs are set up and cultural programmes are held. The festival develop unity, love and passion among the members of the community. It is a major social and public event in eastern and north eastern states of India, where it dominates the religious life.

It is evident in Jhumpa's books that she is also fond of the festival. As she belongs to the Bengali community, her ardent love for the festival is clearly shown. In most of her books, the characters are found to be miserable in abroad during the season of this festival. Their incapability to reach their respective family in Calcutta brings them discontentment. Calcutta is popularly known for its arrangements during this festivals. The city witnesses the extravagant celebration of this festival. Temples and mandaps are decorated with lights and crafts. Her novels like 'The Namesake' and 'The Lowland' include the reference of this festival.



2

Figure 2: Durga Idol

2

Retrieved from: <https://goo.gl/images/rsES7C>

### **The Namesake:**

Ashima regrets to visit Calcutta after Durga Pujo in December. She compares Durga Pujo and Christmas to demonstrate her landlady about the worth of it. As her landlady is from Cambridge, she might not understand about it. Therefore she explains that going home after Durga Pujo is just like going home after Christmas.

Ashima teaches Gogol to memorize the names of the dieties adorning the ten-handed goddess Durga during pujo. Saraswati and Kartik to her left. Lakshmi and Ganesh to her right. Saraswati with her swan is the goddess of knowledge, art and music. Kartik with his peacock is the god of war. Lakshmi with her owl is the goddess of wealth, prosperity and fortune. Ganesh with his mouse is the god of wisdom. Ganesh is always honoured at the start of rites and ceremonies.

Jhumpa also writes about the tradition of exchanging gifts among each other during this festival. On the occasion of Durga Pujo, the elders often offer money or gifts. In this novel, the character Ashoke buys books of new authors Graham Greene and Somerset Maugham purchased from the 'pujo money'. This pujo money refers to the money received as the token of love during Durga Pujo from the elders of the family.

It was Durga Pujo, the city's most anticipated days. The stores, the sidewalks, were overflowing. At the ends of certain alleys, or in gaps among the buildings, she saw the pandals. Durga armed with her weapons, flanked by her four children, depicted and worshipped in so many versions. Made of plaster, made of clay. She was resplendent, formidable. A lion helped to conquer the demon at her feet. She was a daughter visiting her family, the city, transforming it for a time.

As the members of the Bengali community celebrates the festival enthusiastically, Jhumpa mentions how the second generation of the migrated couple still receives wishes of the festival. It shows the importance of the festival celebrated in Calcutta.

### **The Lowland:**

The novels narrates about various festivals celebrated at different seasons in India. As mentioned in the novel, 'effigies of Durga came in autumn and Saraswati in winter'. These effigies are made of clay. Musical instruments like 'dhak' were beaten and 'trumpets' are played to welcome the effigies. The worshippers gather from different parts of the state in these festivals. The festivals end with the effigies being carried away on the back of the trucks to be immersed in the river.

Jhumpa contrast the image of mourning and celebration. The days of worship and celebration across the city is contrasted with the days of mourning and seclusion inside Udayan's house. Durga Pujo was celebrated for ten days. The days of Pujo arrived and began to pass: Shashthi, Saptami, Ashtami, Navami and ends with Dashami. These are Bengali numerical numbers for each days. The end of the Puja resembles the return of Durga to Shiva. The effigies were taken from the small pandals in the neighbourhood to the river to be immersed. The effigies are taken away by trucks and people lined up on the roads or sidewalks for a final glimpse. The goddess is accompanied to the river where she is immersed. The devotees chanted, 'she will come back, she will return to us', as they marched and bade her another year's farewell.

Subhash travels back to the memory lane of India in Rhode Island. During his third autumn in Rhode Island, he thought of Durga Pujo coming again to Calcutta. "He thought of the



Mahalaya playing on All India Radio. People woke up in darkness to listen to the oratorio as light crept into the sky, invoking Durga as she descended to earth with her four children. Every year at this time, Hindu Bengalis believed, she came to stay with her father, Himalaya. For the days of Pujo, she relinquished her husband, Shiva, before returning once more to married life. The hymns recounted the story of Durga being formed, and the weapons that were provided for each of her ten arms: sword and shield, bow and arrow. Axe, mace, conch shell, and discus. Indra's thunderbolt, Shiva's trident. A flaming dart, a garland of snakes." (The Namesake: P 99).

The festivals of India are celebrated very enthusiastically. As Mahalaya is the first day of Puja, people wake up at dawn and prepare for the day. Subhash is nostalgic about the ceremonial celebrations of this festival in Calcutta.

### **Diwali:**

Diwali is the festival of lights. It marks the victory of good over evil. Indians light clay lamps and candles outside their homes to signify the inner light that shields from spiritual darkness. It is celebrated during October-November. It is celebrated for mostly three days.

- It is auspicious to clean the house and shop for gold and kitchen utensils on the first day.
- The second day is celebrated by decorating the houses with lights, candles, clay lamps and rangoli. Rangoli is a design patterns created on the floor with coloured powders or sand.
- People gather for worshipping the goddess of wealth Lakshmi on the third day. After the prayers, the community members feast and celebrate by lighting fireworks.

The Indian families of America often gather to organise the ethnic festivals. In the novel, 'The Lowland', Subhash saw Gauri mixing with the other women in a dinner party. He overheard them talking about recipes and organizing a Diwali festival on campus in Rhode Island.

## Saraswati Puja:

### The Lowland

In the month of February after their first marriage anniversary, Udayan arranged a tutoring job in Jadavpur for Gauri. There she saw effigies of Saraswati stood on the street corners, students offered textbooks at her feet. The kokils began to sing wistful and yearning songs.

Saraswati puja is mostly held in January or February. It is celebrated to honour the goddess of knowledge and wisdom. Students offer flowers and incense sticks and pray.

### 2.2.2 Marriage:

Every culture has its own set of rites and rituals for marriages as well as other occasions. It embodies the beautiful blend of traditions and colours. The rich spiritual significance of Bengali wedding is the elaborate amalgamation of rituals. It is filled with colours and merriment.



*Figure 3: Marriage rituals*

## **The Namesake:**

1. The ritual of Aadan pradan is stated in the novel. Ashima prepares herself as a man was waiting to see her. “She braided her hair, wiped away the kohl that had smudged below her eyes, patted some Cuticura powder. She wore parrot green sari. Their parents did the talking about the arrangements of their marriage. She had learned his name after the betrothal. Two weeks after the betrothal, she was adorned by her friends and relatives hovering around her. Her lips were darkened, her brow and cheeks dotted with sandalwood paste, her hair wound up, bound with flowers, held in place by a hundred wire pins. She draped her head with a scarlet netting. Her neck was covered by necklaces and chokers. She also wore bracelets. It is similar to the Sankha Porana ritual where seven married women make the bride wear bangles. At the designated hour the ritual of saat paak is performed. The bride sat on a piri decorated by her father which was hoisted five feet off the ground, carried out to meet the groom in the mandap. She had hidden her face with a heart-shaped betel leaf until she had circled him seven times.” (The Namesake: P 7,9)

Ashima got ready for her wedding. The wedding rituals followed the Bengali culture. The families of both the sides arranged the ceremonial customs. The bride and groom performed accordingly. It took place in Calcutta.

2. “Ashoke stood behind Ashima at their wedding encircling her waist and peering over her shoulder as they poured puffed rice into a fire.” (The Namesake: P 9)

This is a ritual performed by the bride and groom. The significance of this ritual is highlighted as Ashoke thought of the moments he shared with her. As his wedding rituals are witness of his vows to stand by her in sickness or health.

3. “Gogol and Moushumi got married in New Jersey. Their parents insisted on having Bengali wedding. Gogol wore a parchment-coloured Punjabi top, a pre-pleated dhoti with a drawstring waist, a pair of nagrai slippers with curling toes. Moushumi wore sari and twenty pounds of gold. She wore eleven necklaces and two paisleys have been painted in red and white on her cheeks. There is an hour long watered down Hindu ceremony on a platform covered with sheets. The couple sit cross legged, first

opposite each other, then side by side. Their hands wrapped up together in a checkered cloth. This ritual is known as Sampradan in which the couple sit at the altar as an elder member of the bride's family gives the bride's hand in to the groom's hand. Then the priest recites Vedic chants when their hands are tied with a sacred thread. Shenai music plays on a boom box. There were rituals of throwing flowers in a small brass urn. They sat beside a priest. Offerings are made to pictures of their grandparents and his father, rice poured into a pyre. The groom applies vermilion on the bride's hair parting. This marks the end of the ceremony." (The Namesake: P 219)

This Bengali wedding took place in America. The families of bride and groom tried to retain their culture. They organised a wedding in a hotel with Bengali traditions and customs. Though Gogol and Moushumi would have wanted a simple wedding just like their American friends. They didn't object just for the sake of their parents' happiness. As a second generation immigrant they are mystified about their identity. They try to fit in the new milieu but also retain the authenticity of their parents' roots.

### **The Lowland:**

1. Marriage is socially and ritually organised union of bride and groom. There are three types of marriages discussed in the novel- eloping, love and arrange marriage. Gauri and Udayan eloped. Narasimhan and Kate had love marriage. But arrange marriage is mostly anticipated in India.
2. "Gauri's mother-in-law asked to perform a few abbreviated rituals in honour to welcome her. She blew her conch shell, then putting tuberose garlands around their necks. The end of Gauri's sari was draped over her head in a gesture of propriety. Her mother-in-law's head was draped also. A woven tray was raised toward Gauri's head, her chest and her belly. A tray heaped with auspicious items with fruit. Gauri was presented with a box, opened to show the necklace in-side. On the tray was a pot of vermilion powder. Her mother-in-law instructed Udayan to apply it to the parting of her hair. Taking Gauri's left hand, she slid an iron bangle over her wrist. Her in-laws placed their hands in a gesture of blessing over her head. Gauri bowed down to take the dust from their feet. The courtyard had been decorated with patterns. There were two stunted banana trees, one on either side of the door. Inside there was a pan of milk, tinted with red. She was told to dip her feet into the red liquid, then walk up the staircase. The steps had been covered loosely with a white sari, like a thin slippery

carpet laid over the treads. Every few steps there was an overturned clay cup she had to crush, bearing down with all her strength. This was the first thing asked of her, to mark her passage into Udayan's home.” (The Lowland: P 353)

These are the few rituals Gauri's in laws performed in her arrival. Her mother in law welcomed her as a newlywed bride with Bengali tradition. She also offered her jewellery.

3. Gauri's second marriage to Subhash is considered unchaste. Her relatives and in-laws deemed them because they expected her to honour Udayan's memory. In India, widows are generally expected to live a miserable life.

4. “Bela on her visit to India noticed certain buildings decorated, standing out from the rest. Though it was August they were draped with Christmas lights, their facades disguised behind colourful cloths. A thin red carpet was spread over the entrance, ushering in guests. Music was playing, people in fancy clothes were walking in.” (The Lowland: P 249,250)

Bela witnessed a wedding held in Calcutta. Subhash clarified her about the wedding traditions of Calcutta. He told her that the groom would step out of a car covered with flowers and the bride was waiting for him inside for their wedding.



*Figure 4: Bengali marriage Rituals*

### 2.2.3 Death Rituals:

The death rites are celebrated among all the communities. It has a significance in the society which honours the dead.

#### The Lowland:

- Gauri observes the momentous streams of vehicles, political processions, government parades and visiting dignitaries from her balcony. The corpses of renowned poets and writers are concealed by flowers as honour. The dead bodies are draped with flowers and hoisted on the shoulders of his comrades. They are carried out of the enclave into the next world to shouts of 'hari bol'.
- "After Udayan's death, his family had to follow certain rules for ten days. His wife didn't wash her clothes or wear slippers or comb her hair."  
 "The vermillion was washed clean from her hair, iron bangle removed from her wrist. The absence of these ornaments marked her as a widow. She was twenty-three years old. After eleven days, the final rites are performed by a priest who prepared the ceremonial meal. She performed the rites of the ceremony with bare wrists." (The Lowland: P 129, 130)

A widow in Hindu tradition should remove all ornaments and colourful clothes. She should wear white sari which would mark her as a widow. Udayan's portrait was framed with glass and wreathed with tuberose. The family members and party members came to pay their respects in the funeral. The particular dishes that he loved are made in his honour. As a widow Gauri had to give up colourful clothes, fish and meat for the rest of her life just like the other widows of the family. The novel shows two widows- Gauri and Bijoli. Both wore the colourless fabric as a widow. These are certain customs of widows in Calcutta. Subhash opposed it and found it demeaning. He married Gauri to offer her a new life.

- Bijoli collects flowers in a small brass urn from the courtyard to offer in the memorial tablet of Udayan. She washes the memorial tablet and replaces the flowers every day. She sprinkles the flowers with water to keep them moist. The neighbourhood children found her appearance ghostly. It marks a tribute to the death.

- “Subhash sat for a ceremony to honour his father, who died a few months before. A priest tended a small fire that burned in the centre of the room. Fruit was heaped beside it on brass plates and trays. Two large photos of Udayan and his father was propped against the wall on the floor. Incense burned in front of these pictures, fragrant white flowers draped like thick necklaces in front of the glass. Before the ceremony a barber came to the house and shaved her father’s head and face in the courtyard, turning his face strange and small. The nails of Bela’s fingers and toes were pared off with a blade.” (The Lowland: P 234)

These are the death rituals performed in the honour of Subhash’s father. Shaving hair and cutting nails are the part of rituals to mark as the sacrifice for the death of beloved ones.

### **The Namesake:**

Ashima recalls the memories of her grandmother as a shrunken women in widow’s white born in the previous century. According to Indian customs, the widows wear white sari and remove all the ornaments. Ashima refuses to picture her mother after her father’s death. She can’t bear that her mother’s vermilion is erased and her brother’s hair is shaved according to the rituals of mourning. It was a Bengali son’s duty to shave his head in the wake of a parent’s death. Even Ashoke shaved his head when he received the news of his parent’s death in Pemberton Road.

The burning ghats are forbidden in Calcutta. As it is Hindu tradition of burning the dead bodies, Ashima saw her parents’ bodies swallowed by flames.

Another instance of Ashoke’s death is mentioned. Ashima shampooed the vermilion from her part. She took off her wedding bracelets. For ten days following her husband’s death, she and her children ate mourner’s diet, forgoing meat and fish. They eat plainly prepared rice, dal and vegetables. This meal seems to comfort them because it is the only time in the day that they are alone, isolated, as a family to partake the meal. The enforced absence of certain foods on their plates conjuring his father’s presence somehow. There are visitors everywhere with flowers and calls to pay their condolence. The eleventh day is marked as the end of the mourning period. Friends and family are invited in this religious ceremony which is conducted on the floor in one corner of the living room. A priest asked Gogol to sit in front of

a picture of his father and chants verses in Sanskrit. An elaborate meal is prepared as his father liked with extra potatoes and fresh coriander leaves, fish and meat bought at Chinatown and Haymarket. The friends his parents have collected for almost thirty years attended the ceremony to pay their respects for the last time to the departed soul.

## 2.2.4 Birth Rituals:

A new born baby brings the most exciting universal human experiences. Family and friends gather to honour and welcome the new born baby. The most important birth rituals of Bengali community in Calcutta are- Naming Ceremony and Rice Ceremony.

### The Namesake:

In India, women go home to their parents to give birth. They try to retreat briefly their childhood when the baby arrives, away from husbands and in-laws and household cares.

- **Naming Ceremony-** Generally elders of a family choose the names of babies. The Ganguli couple decided to let Ashima's grandmother name the child. She was thrilled at the prospect of naming the family's first sahib. There is a practice of Bengali nomenclature which endows two names to every single person. A pet name- *daknam* and a good name- *bhalonaam*. Pet names are a persistent remnant of childhood, a reminder that life is not always so serious, so formal, so complicated. These are the names by which they are known and adored in their respective families. Every pet name is paired with a good name for identification in the outside world. Good names tend to represent dignified and enlightened qualities. Pet names are silly, ironic and never recorded officially.
- **Rice Ceremony-** Ashima and Ashoke organised the rice ceremony when Gogol was just six months old. It is known as *Annaprasan* in Bengali. "The first formal ceremony of their lives is the consumption of solid food. Dilip Nandi, one of Ashoke's friend, played the part of Ashima's brother, to hold the child and feed him rice, the Bengali staff of life, for the very first time. Gogol is dressed as an infant Bengali groom, in a pale yellow pajama-punjabi from his grandmother in Calcutta. The fragrance of cumin seeds, sent in the package along with the pajamas, lingers in



the weave. A headpiece that Ashima cut out of paper, decorated with pieces of aluminium foil, is tied around Gogol's head with string. He wears a thin fourteen-karat gold chain around his neck. His tiny forehead has been decorated with considerable struggle with sandalwood paste to form six miniature beige moons floating above his brows. His eyes have been darkened with a touch of kohl. He fidgets in the lap of his honorary uncle, who sits on a bedcover on the floor, surrounded by guests in front and behind and beside him. The food is arranged in ten separate bowls. Ashima regrets that the plate on which the rice is heaped is melamine, not silver or brass or at the very least stainless-steel. The final bowl contains payesh, a warm rice pudding Ashima will prepare for him to eat on each of his birthdays as a child, as an adult even, alongside a slice of bakery cake. Ashima and Ashoke wore traditional attires in the event. They also organised Indian foods for their guest, mostly Bengali. Food items such as biryani, the carp in yogurt sauce, the dal, the six different vegetable dishes Ashima had spent the past week preparing. The ceremony is meant to introduce Gogol to a lifetime of consumption, a meal to inaugurate the tens of thousands of unremembered meals to come. A handful of women ululate as the proceedings begin. A conch shell is repeatedly tapped and passed around. Blades of grass and a pradeep's slim, steady flame are held to Gogol's head. Ashima's eyes fill with tears as Gogol's mouth eagerly invites the spoon. He takes payesh three times. The final ritual of the ceremony is to predict his future path in life, Gogol is offered a plate holding a clump of cold Cambridge soil dug up from the backyard, a ballpoint pen, and a dollar bill, to see if he will be a landowner, scholar, or businessman. But Gogol touches nothing. He began to cry as a six month is forced to confront his destiny." (The Namesake: P 40)

The tradition of rice ceremony is popular in India. As rice is the staple food of Calcutta, the child is introduced to this meal on an auspicious day. It is celebrated with family. The child tastes different dishes on this day. Games are also played such as predicting the future of the child. The naming and rice ceremony plays are essential birth rituals celebrated by the family. The elders of the family perform the necessary rituals here.



Figure 5: Annaprashan

## 2.3 Beliefs, superstitions, myths and rituals:

The following features related to belief, superstitions, myths and rituals are seen:

### The Namesake:

- “Ashima never utters her husband’s name when she calls out to him. She never thinks of his name when she thinks of him, even though she knows perfectly well what it is. She refuses to utter his first name for propriety’s sake. She has adopted his surname but a husband’s name is something intimate. Bengali wives are not supposed to do it. Instead she utters the interrogative that has come to replace it, ‘Are you listening to me?’ ” (The Namesake: P2)

In India, a wife never utters her husband’s name. It is believed that it reduces her husband’s life span. The husbands are considered as God so, it is forbidden to utter God’s name.

- Conch shells are blown in the evening to signal the hour for prayer. It is considered as sacred. It is blown to ward off evil. Conch shells are considered auspicious. It is blown during the prayers.

- Ashoke's mother gave up meat on Wednesday. They believed that this sacrifice can help him recover soon. They prayed each day for it. It is believed that fasting and giving up non veg foods can help in certain accomplishments.
- Ashima's parent cautioned her not to eat beef. Hinduism worship cows and is forbidden to eat.
- It is customary rituals to take the dust of elder's feet to their head. Elders bless for good fortune or luck. There are instances where most of the characters such as Ashima, Gogol, Ashoke and Moushumi also bends down to touch the dust of her grandmother's feet to her head.
- Ashima is upset that Gogol was taken to a field trip to burning ghats in America. In Calcutta the burning ghats are the most forbidden of places.
- Ashima ties red threads for good luck to a marble lattice screen in Salim Chishti's tomb located at the sandstone city Fatehpur Sikri.
- Bengali offer amounts as one hundred and one dollars or two hundreds and one dollars because it is considered inauspicious to give round figures.
- Subhash's father often read the Mahabharata in Bengali translation. Losing himself in familiar tales, in ancient conflicts that had not afflicted them.

## **The Lowland**

- Bodhi tree is mentioned where one can achieve enlightenment. The Bodhi tree represents the path to enlightenment. Siddhartha meditated beneath it to attain enlightenment. It means the wisdom tree. It has aesthetic significance. Meditators are often attracted by the sages of Bodh Gaya.
- Daughters joined their in-laws and sons stayed at home after they are married. Generations didn't separate in India as they did in America. The different cultural aspects of both the places are presented in the novel.
- The lighter shades of colours are considered appropriate for widows in India. The widows of India are forbidden to have a colourful life. They are supposed to mourn for lifetime.

- The river Ganges is considered holy. According to Hinduism, the river is sacred and personified as the goddess Ganga. The devotees bathe in the river to wash away all their sins and facilitates Moksha (liberation from the cycle of life and death). The water of the river considered very pure. Hindus believe that they garner good luck if they bathe or drink its water. The ashes of the deceased are spread on the river to improve their karma which may allow them to achieve salvation faster.
- Conch shells are blown to signal the start of the evening to ward off evils. It is blown during the prayers. Conch shells are mentioned in both the novels of Jhumpa Lahiri.
- The rickshaw slowed down when it approached the mosque on the corner. It is a way of offering respect.
- Bela on her visit to India tried to adopt the Indian culture. She tried to eat rice and lentils with her fingers.
- Ashima taught Sanskrit to a brother and sister in Jadavpur. She read lines from the Upanishads, the Rig Veda. The ancient teachings, the sacred texts she'd first studied with her grandfather. '*Atma devanam, bhuvanasya garbho*'. Spirits of the gods, seed of all the worlds.

Beliefs, superstitions and myths are significant aspects of cultural heritage of a community. Jhumpa portrays her character's consciousness of their cultural inheritance even in abroad. Their effort to cultural adherence is notable.

## 2.3 Material Culture:

This branch of folklore refers to the skills, techniques, methods, formulas and recipes associated with the traditional materials transmitted from one generation to another. The aesthetic value of the material culture such as- art, craft, designs of folk architecture have social importance. It includes all the physical objects and resources of cultural heritage- tools, weapons, utensils, jewellery, historical sculptures, art, buildings, monuments, clothes, paintings and any other culturally significant objects. Traditional aspects have social, historical and geographical significance.

Some of the items of material culture are:

- Handicrafts:

It encompasses artistic items manufactured as a form of indigenous culture. It expresses cultural identity and shared community values. It is made up of – metal, clay, wood, cloth.

- Jewellery:

Ornaments are very popular among the folks. It is made up of gold, silver. There are bangles, necklace, earrings etc.

- Idols/ Statues carving:

Skilful artisans make images of gods, animals and other objects.

- Architecture of houses:

The architecture of houses also reflect the unique designs of each community. It also varies according to the geographical region.

- Folk toys:

Toys are made up of clay, pith, wooden and bamboo. The art of carving it is confined among the ethnic group.

- Folk paintings:

Folk paintings preserve the important aspects of a community. It is the integral part of cultural heritage.

- Food recipes:

The food habits differ among various community groups. It mostly holds the aesthetic values of the social and geographical aspects. Different staple foods, beverages and drinks are unique possessions of an ethnic group.

- Traditional costumes:

The vibrant attires exhibit wonderful cultures and traditions of the people of a community.

Material culture reflects traditional and cultural art form of diverse community – tribal, geographical, ethnic, occupational, religious. Jhumpa Lahiri uses the artistic nature of material culture in her novels to express the identity of Indian culture.



*Figure 6: conch shell blown by a woman*

## The Namesake:

- The lead character Ashima is found to crave for a snack sold on Calcutta sidewalks and on railway platforms throughout India. The snack is the mixer of rice krispies, planter peanuts, chopped red onion, salt, lemon juice, green chili pepper and mustard oil. She has been consuming this concoction throughout her pregnancy. Lahiri depicts the Indian food recipes in her novels.
- Ashima always wear Sari which is a traditional costume of Calcutta. She also wears the cavalcade of matrimonial bracelets on both her arms, bangles. These matrimonial bracelets are made up of iron, gold, coral and conch.
- As the staple food of Calcutta is rice, Ashima prepares rice at dinner for Ashoke. Another dishes mentioned in the novel are- luchis, thick chana dal, spongy roshogollas, aloo dum, chicken biriyani. Gogol narrates his experiences in India to his American friend. He tells her about the food served on the trains. Rotis with slightly sour dal and thick vegetable cutlets served with bread and butter.
- Jhumpa provides a vivid description of the food served in the utensils. Gogol describes how tea is served in clay cups from giant aluminium kettles on the trains of India. There are other folk tools mentioned in the novel such as conch shell.

- The characters of the novels are fond of Indian material culture. Such as Lydia, Maxine, Gerald and Gogol. Lydia mentions about Indian carpets and miniatures. Maxine refers about a class taken on Buddhist stupas. Gogol explains about the beauty of Victorian architecture of Calcutta and Gerald also discusses about the palace of Udaipur built on a lake.
- The Ganguli's are stunned by the beautiful architecture during their visit to India. "For two days they wander around the marble mausoleum that glows grey and yellow and pink and orange depending on the light. They admire its perfect symmetry and pose for photographs beneath the minarets from which tourists used to leap to their deaths. Their second day at the Taj Gogol attempts to sketch the dome and a portion of the façade, but the building's grace eludes him and he throws the attempt away. Instead, he immerses himself in the guidebook, studying the history of Mughal architecture, learning the succession of emperor's names: Babur, Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb. At Agra Fort he and his family look through the window of the room where Shah Jahan was imprisoned by his own son. At Sikandra, Akbar's tomb, they gaze at gilded frescoes in the entryway, chipped, ransacked, burned, the gems gouged out with penknives, graffiti etched into the stone. At Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar's abandoned sandstone city, they wander among courtyards and cloisters as parrots and hawks fly overhead, and in Salim Chishti's tomb Ashima ties red threads for good luck to a marble lattice screen." (The Namesake: P 85)

The marvellous architectures of Indian palaces are described in the novel. The characters were stunned in their visit to India. The stories related to this beautiful palaces haunted them at night. The Taj Mahal is one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The beauty of the palace built by Shah Jahan for his wife Mumtaz is mentioned in it. The king also cut the thumbs off the masons who built the palace so that they could not build it again. It is the symbol of love.

### **The Lowland:**

- The novel refers to the traditional method of farming. The use of plough and bullock.
- The iron bangles worn by married women. Gauri had to remove it after Udayan's death. It marked her as a widow.

- Garlands of tuberose on Udayan's portrait was propped against the wall for the death rituals.
- The traditional attires of both male and female are mentioned. Such as- sari, kurta, Punjabi sleeves, lungi. The novel also explores other cultural costumes such as cotton caps worn by a Kashmiri shopkeeper. Subhash bought woollen shawls from him.
- The Indian recipes such as dals and vegetables, rice, lentils, samosas are mentioned.
- The clay cups are one of the most popular pottery works in India. Tea or yogurt can be served in it. The roadside stalls mostly use it to serve the customers. The novel uses the frame of Indian streets where the broken clay cups lay in which roadside tea and sweetened yogurt were once served.

The use of material culture in the study of literature explores the utilitarian and aesthetic value. The interpretation of material culture is a significant reconstruction of human past. It is the way in which a community maintains balance with its habitat by construction shelter, preparing food, manufacturing clothes and other necessary items.

## **2.4 Performing arts**

It is an expressive form of art. Jhumpa also mentions about the performing art forms in her novels. It is the expression of culture through various art forms. She uses the Indian art form in her novel "The Namesake". Performing arts include- dance, songs, paintings etc. Certain songs or dance forms of a culture may involve the expression of particular customary aspects of a community.

### **The Namesake**

"They make a point of driving into Cambridge with the children when the Apu Trilogy plays at the Orson Welles, or when there is a Kathakali dance performance or a sitar recital at Memorial Hall" (The Namesake: P 65)

Ashima and Ashoke tried to imbibe the Indian sentiments in their children. As an Indian immigrant parents, they try hard to engage Gogol and Sonia with their cultural heritage. They send him to take lessons on Bengali language and culture every other Saturday.