

By any other name

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



The title of Santha Rama Rau's short story "By Any Other Name" refers to the character of Santha, who is a five and half-year-old Indian girl, which experiences discrimination for the first time while attending an Anglo-Indian school during the time period in which the British ruled India. Her mother had always home-schooled both her and her sister, Premila. When her mother gets ill, because her father is an officer of the civil service, they can attend this Anglo-Indian school for free.

Her mother never wanted to send them to a British school and this is shown when she says "you can bury a dog's tail for seven years, but it still comes out curly, you can take a Britisher away from his home for a lifetime, and he still remains insular." She is expressing you can try to change someone's cultural background, but it won't happen. She was also saying that the British wanted their own customs and were unable to accept or appreciate Indian customs.

On Premila and Santha's first day at the new school, they were told by headmistress their names were too hard for her to pronounce. She gives them the new names of Pamela and Cynthia. Her sister is silent and does not respond to this event, yet Santha says in a tiny voice she accepts the new name probably because she is scared to disagree. Santha believes when she is Cynthia, she does not have care about the day to day activities at school or her actions.

The title "By Any Other Name" refers to Cynthia having to lose her identity and her cultural qualities to be at this school. This is supported by the event from the first day in class when she is asked what her name is and she

replies “ she does not know”. Even though she is very young, she knows her and the other Indian children must sit in the back of the class, because they are different then the British children. Cynthia tries to make friends with some of the dozen other Indian children at school. One of the four Indian children in the back of her class is the girl with braids.

She notices immediately that even though the girl has the Indian jewelry, she wears a cotton dress like the other British to fit in. Also, when Cynthia goes to lunch she finds her sister and they eat traditional food from their lunchbox. Her sister Pamela notices that everyone else eats sandwiches like the British children. When they return home after their first day, Pamela requests they bring sandwiches. Pamela seems to be more at ease in trying to fit in at the school by changing their ways and their names to what is acceptable by the British school.

Cynthia is definitely the character for which the title “ By Any Other Name” is explaining. Cynthia is having a hard time dealing with the fact she is forced to go by another name. She must develop an alter ego to deal with this daily experience. She is also very aware of all the prejudices, which she is experiencing by observing children changing the way that they dress and where they have to sit in class. Also, all Indian children have taken British names. She also notices you cannot become friends with British children.

That is simply out of the question. On the first day she has to take a test, Pamela completely changes her attitude from trying to fit in. She asks why the Indian children’s desks must be separated, but the British children do not have to be kept apart. She is told that “ Indians cheat”. She immediately tells her sister grab your pencils and lets go. They struggle through a long walk

and heat to return home. Santha is so relieved to be home with her mother and her maid. She is so happy to leave the persona of Cynthia behind and become Santha again.