

Report on Field Visit to CICS, University of the Fraser Valley

May 2014

I was awarded the South Asian Diaspora Fund grant by the Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies, University of Mumbai and the Centre for Indo-Canadian Studies, University of the Fraser Valley, in 2013-14 for my research project on the works of the Indo-Canadian Film maker Deepa Mehta.

My main objective for this project was to focus on the Re-Imaging of the Nation in Mehta's Elements Trilogy, Earth, Fire and Water. The purpose of the field visit to the CICS at the University of the Fraser Valley was to -

1. Contextualize the film maker in her diasporic geopolitical space of Canada
2. To get viewer response from Indo-Canadians on the stance adopted by Mehta in her films
3. To meet Mehta and interview her on the main objectives and metaphors in her films related to re-imagining the nation
4. To share my work and findings on Mehta's films with the faculty, students and Indo-Canadian community members at the UFV

My visit to the CICS even though it was very brief enabled me to interact with the dynamic Director of the Centre, Dr. Satwinder Bains and her committed team of researchers.

I was also able to speak on Mehta's films at the symposium organized by Dr. Bains and interact with the audience after the talk. I was also happy to meet the President of the UFV and realize the extent of his involvement with the CICS and his commitment to research on the Indo-Canadian community.

My visit to Canada coincided with the marking of the centenary of the turning away of the ship Komagata Maru from the shores of Vancouver in May 1914. I was able to attend two very crucial events connected with this –

1. The Conference on the Komagata Maru incident at the University of Victoria, Victoria. This enabled me to understand the deep feelings vis a vis this incident that still runs strongly in the psyches and hearts of Indo-Canadians.
2. The event at the Simon Fraser Centre in Vancouver where academics, politicians and people of the First Nation commemorated this event in a moving ceremony which culminated at the open air commemoration site facing the Burrad Inlet in the Vancouver harbor where the Komagata Maru had been anchored for long months as the battle had raged to keep the Indian immigrants on board out of Canada.

Attendance at these two events was facilitated by Dr. Bains and one of the highlights of the second event was the opportunity I got of being introduced to the British Columbia minister Mr. Mike de Jong

who was instrumental in awarding the B.C. South Asian Diaspora Fund grant to the Mumbai University and of which I was one of the beneficiaries.

While in Victoria I was able to meet two different groups of Indo-Canadians on two different occasions to discuss Mehta's films after initial viewing sessions. These viewer responses from first and second and even earlier generations of Indo-Canadians on Mehta's Elements Trilogy have been absolutely priceless and have been incorporated into my ongoing work on the film-maker.

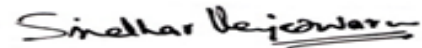
I therefore have been enriched by the field visit to Canada and this has helped me immensely in contextualising Mehta's work in her diasporic space.

Another outcome of this visit is the fact that earlier I had decided to focus mainly on the Elements Trilogy for my project but after meeting Indo-Canadians and having interacted with them I felt impelled to also include other films by Mehta, especially those set in Canada such as Sam and Me, Heaven on Earth and Bollywood/Hollywood. I am also working now on her film version of Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children.

After coming back to India I continued making attempts to meet Mehta on her visits to Mumbai but for reasons best known to her have not been able to meet her. I have now decided that I have sufficient material from audience feedback, my own readings and continuing engagement with her films to complete my project without any further attempts at trying to meet the film maker herself. T

I have also been writing papers and making conference presentations on these films in India and abroad. I have additionally been teaching these films to students at Mumbai University in India and at the University of Muenster in Germany. I have also had the good fortune to have been invited as Visiting Professor at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study in Simla where too I have given lectures on Mehta's films. These courses and lectures have further enhanced my understanding of Mehta's work and are feeding into the book that I am writing on her entire oeuvre.

The book has taken much longer than I had thought it would due to its enlarged scope but is coming along well now and would have been published by now if it were not for the fact that two other book publication deadlines intervened in 2014 and 2015. However, it should be ready for publication by the end of this year, 2016.



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