

Diasporic Constructions of Home and Belonging – Indian Diaspora Centre

University of Mumbai

CoHaB IDC had arranged a screening of the film – *The Namesake* (2006) by Mira Nair, on 23rd November, 2017. The event was a part of academic activities, which the Centre arranges, in order to disseminate and inculcate an interest for Indian Diaspora Studies, in the minds of the students.



The event began with the screening of the film, followed by a discussion, which was led by CoHaB IDC's Research Associate – Akshay Chavan. The discussion focused on Indian diasporic cinema as an *accented cinema*, a cinematic practice, which is specific to diasporic aesthetics, as a form of filmic practice and translation. Students were introduced to the concept of *accented cinema* as put forth by Hamid Naficy, in his book *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (2001). According to Naficy, there is nothing common about exile and diaspora; but, deterritorialized peoples and their films share certain features. It is by no means an

established or cohesive cinema, as it has been in a state of preformation and emergence, in disparate and dispersed locations across the globe. Its social impact extends beyond exilic and diasporic communities, to include the general public as well. The accented cinema thus produced is not because of accented speech of the diegetic characters, but from the displacement of the filmmakers and their artisanal production modes.

These filmmakers make use of spatio-temporal cues, often in the form of chronotopes. “A chronotope, developed by Mikhail Bakhtin as literary term, is a textual union of time and space as it is manifested through objects, persons, or places. The chronotope also marries time and space in a text, through the spatial materialization of historically specific temporality” (Brennan 2011). As a result, chronotopes determine the social and political world through which the events of the text transpire, as well as shape options for narrative and character expression (Brennan 2011).

The discussion also touched upon the issues of identity, spatiality and temporality, and traced the formation of ‘model minority’ of South Asians diasporics, in the USA. The diaspora of modernity (1960s onwards) were made into productive subjects by institutions such as universities, hospitals, corporates, media, etc. A comparative reading of the film and the novel (written by Jhumpa Lahiri) was also done. Nair has made certain changes, in the time-frame and the setting, in the film, when she adapted the novel. It is a bold cinematic move made by Nair, in order to question the blatant racialisation of the Other, in the post 9/11 America and what it means to be an ‘American’.

The students gave interesting inputs throughout the discussion and discussed the problematics of a monolithic nation-state, and who has access to this imagined community. The film screening was well attended by students of the English Department, University of Mumbai and other colleges too.