



T A P E PRESENTS: BUT WHERE ARE YOU REALLY FROM?

The Namesake

Wednesday 14 July's screening will be introduced by three young poets who will explore names as a source of both power and significance.

Mira Nair on 'The Namesake'

How did you get involved in The Namesake?

I read the book by chance on a plane and I recognised a deep sense of loss. I was going to make *Homebody/Kabul* [a Tony Kushner play] – it was financed, cast and written – but I put it aside. I raised the money for *The Namesake* on no script, just on the gift of the gab – 1 million bucks. Then in July 2005 we finished a first draft and by the end of August we were shooting. It was madness, but it was a private little madness. It wasn't like, 'I'm gonna make an epic', more, 'Screw the rest, I'm doing this.' As one Hollywood person said, it's a non-Caucasian film on a Caucasian budget.

What were the main challenges in adapting Jhumpa Lahiri's bestseller?

I grew up in Calcutta so I knew it from the inside – as opposed to Jhumpa, who knew it as a visitor. This gave me a strong idea of how to film the city. Jhumpa felt an amazing sense of security because of the things I said to her: details from her book that prompted more details. She almost became the visitor in my childhood backyard.

The book had enough air in it to be filmed in a certain visual way. The key to making a 30-year saga in two hours is in the transitions. Every moment has to maximise the intention and it's hard to do so without the usual tacky subtitles and voiceovers and crap that I just don't find cinematic. It's the visual/emotional axis I need to nail, and here it was about shooting both locations as if they were one. This is the state of being of an immigrant who looks out of the window and sees the Ganges instead of the Hudson. I needed that motif to propel me into the narrative.

Typical of your insider's insight is the scene where the ashes are scattered while boys play on the beach.

I'm a shameless populist. In India funerals are always moving for exactly this reason – that children will somersault in the same river in which you throw your husband's ashes. And there will be a boatman singing the Baul songs, which I have always loved but which have never found a home in my other movies.

Was there anything in the book that was difficult?

The character of Gogol is a little passive; I was more interested in his parents. We looked at his litany of love affairs and decided to skip his high-school and college days. There are two major relationships: with Maxine, the American girlfriend he lives with, and later with Moushumi, a would-be sophisticate who wants to be French. I thought that was fabulously unpredictable – and yet I've seen her: the slick, re-invented immigrant. I spiced her up a bit with *Bonjour Tristesse* and other things I used to read when I was that pretentious age.

Do you consider the difference in emotional temperature between India and the west when you're making a film like this?

I go for what comes from me, and that is a medley of these temperatures, knowing that in India we go too much into overt melodrama but also that the core of that melodrama is real. With *Salaam Bombay!*, for instance, I wanted to make a film for the street kids who go to the theatre in Bombay for an air-conditioned three hours. I didn't want to make an obscure film that Cannes would have loved and no one in Bombay would have seen.

How do you decide which films to do?

It's not always easy. I can't do full-on bleak and the wonderful thing with *The Namesake* is the rhythm in the audience of belly laughs, then sobs, then laughter again. I thought it was a fluke when I first sat in on an audience but now I've seen it four times and what happens is that the laughter allows the sorrow to be sweeter and the sorrow welcomes the laughter all the more.

The criss-crossing of registers between American action and Indian stillness is very effective.

That's the point really. I love that stillness of our parents' generation. There's nothing else like it, especially in manic America where all of us are constantly checking the phone or the computer. If you have tea with my father-in-law, he will have to talk to you and there's a gravitas and an openness about life – but only when having tea.

Tell me about the film's phrase: 'We all come out of Gogol's overcoat.'

Ashoke believes that the Russian writer Gogol was the precursor of a lot of other stylists such as Chekhov and Dostoevsky, and that therefore we all came out of Gogol's 'The Overcoat'. That's the way Ashoke the intellectual thinks, but Ashoke the father tells his son they are all there because he was saved by Gogol's book in the train crash.

My favourite scene is when Ashoke arrives in the sterile university room and arranges his few possessions.

The sterility of the room is not described in the book. That all-white look came from a terrible image I saw when my mother-in-law was in hospital in New York after an operation. Three days into her recovery she went into a convulsion and there was hardly any care. Finally we convinced them that she needed intensive care and then a battery of nurses came and threw us out of her room. An hour later I was told to go back and lock up and when I walked in it was strewn with tubes and wrappers like a tsunami had struck. I opened her closet and there were her perfect Ferragamo shoes and carefully hung saris and this fragrance – an oasis of calm in the chaos – and I knew in that moment that she would never wear those shoes again. I wouldn't have made this film had I not experienced loss in that primal way.

Interview by Nick James, *Sight & Sound*, April 2007

THE NAMESAKE

Directed by: Mira Nair
©Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corporation,
TCF Hungary Film Rights Exploitation Limited Liability Company
Production Companies: Mirabai Films, Cine Mosaic
Presented by: Fox Searchlight Pictures, Entertainment FARM,
UTV Motion Pictures
Released by: Twentieth Century Fox
Executive Producers: Yasushi Kotani, Taizo Son, Ronnie Screwvala
Produced by: Lydia Dean Pilcher, Mira Nair
Co-producers: Lori Keith Douglas, Yukie Kito, Zarina Screwvala
Indian Unit Line Producer: Anadil Hossain
Associate Producer: Dinaz Stafford
[For] Cine Mosaic: Thomas De Napolì, Ashley Rudden
Production Accountant: Sean Hogan
Unit Production Manager: Lori Keith Douglas
Location Manager: Kellie Morrison
Indian Unit Location Manager: Chandan Das
1st Assistant Director: Michael DeCasper
Script Supervisor: Robyn Aronstam
Casting: Cindy Tolan
Associate Casting: Matt Schreiber
Indian Unit Casting: Tess Joseph
Screenplay by: Sooni Taraporevala
Based on the novel by: Jhumpa Lahiri
Director of Photography: Frederick Elmes
2nd Unit Director of Photography: Jay J. Odedra
Camera Operator: Gerard Sava
Key Grip: Tim Smythe
Indian Unit Key Grip: Ninad Nayampally
Gaffer: Jonathan Lumley
Visual Effects by: Ampersand Company
Editor: Allyson C. Johnson
Assistant Editor: David A. Smith
Production Designer: Stephanie Carroll
Art Director: Suttirat Larlarb
Property Master: Jeff Butcher
Costume Designer: Arjun
Key Make-up Artist: Kelly Gleason
Key Hairstylist: Peg
Titles/Graphics Designed by: Divya Thakur, Design Temple
Music: Nitin Sawhney
Additional Source Music Courtesy of: Killer Tracks
Orchestra Performed by: Philharmonia Orchestra
Leader: Maya Iwabuchi
Flute: K. Srinivasan
Santoor: Ulhas Bapat
Sarangi: Dilshat Khan
Sitar: Niladri Kumar
Swarlin: Rajinder Singh
Tabla: Satyajit Talwalkar
Violin: Deepak Pandit
Female Vocalists: Mitali Bhawmik, Reshmin Chowdhury
Conductor: Stephen Hussey
Sound Mixer: Ed Novick
Boom Operator: Linda Murphy
Re-recording Mixers: Dominick Tavella, Dave Paterson
Supervising Sound Editor: Dave Paterson
Dialogue Editors: Brian Bowles, Mary Ellen Porto
Sound Effects Editor: Damian Volpe
For-Gurus of Cinema with Love & Salaams: Ritwik Ghatak, Satyajit Ray
Indian Unit Stunt Co-ordinator: Allen Amin
Bengali Dialect Coach: Arun Dasgupta

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Cast

Kal Penn (*Gogul Ganguli*)
Tabu (*Ashima*)
Irrfan Khan (*Ashoke Ganguli*)
Jacinda Barrett (*Maxine*)
Zuleika Robinson (*Moushumi Mazumdar*)
Brooke Smith (*Sally*)
Sahira Nair (*Sonia*)
Linus Roache (*Mr Lawson*)
Glenne Headly (*Lydia*)
Amy Wright (*Pam*)
Jagannath Guha (*Ghosh*)
Ruma Guha Thakurta (*Ashoke’s mother*)
Sandip Deb (*music teacher*)
Sukanya (*Rini*)
Tanushree Shankar (*Ashima’s mother*)
Sabyasachi Chakraborty (*Ashima’s father*)
Tamal Ray Choudhury (*Ashoke’s father*)
Dhruv Mookerji (*Rana*)
Supriya Devi (*Ashima’s grandmother*)
Stuart Rudin (*crazy wino*)
Heather MacRae (*Nurse Patty*)
Sumitra, Kanti (*Calcutta house staff*)
Michael Countryman (*Mr Wilcox*)
Kousik Bhowal (*Dr Gupta*)
Rupak Ginn (*uncle*)
Soham Chatterjee (*Gogol, age 4*)
Gargi Mukherjee (*Mira Mashi*)
Pallavi Shah (*Kajol Mashi*)
Jhumpa Lahiri (*Jhumpa Mashi*)
Noor Lahiri Vourvoulis (*baby Sonia*)
Josh Grisetti (*Jerry*)
Kalpen Modi (*Nikhil*)
Justin Rosini (*Marc*)
Dan McCabe (*Bart*)
Bobby Steggert (*Jason*)
B.C. Parikh (*Mr Mazumdar*)
Sibani Biswas (*Mrs Mazumdar*)
Lakhan Das (*Baul singer*)
Kharaj Mukherjee (*Chotu*)
Daniel Gerrol (*Gerald*)
Christie Moreau (*phone operator*)
Jo Yang (*Ms Lu*)
Krishna Dikshit (*funeral priest*)
Kartik Das (*boat man*)
Gary Cowling (*hotel manager*)
Sudipta Bhawmik (*Subroto Mesho*)
Gretchen Egolf (*Astrid*)
Baylen Thomas (*Blake*)
Jeb Brown (*Oliver*)
Jessica Blank (*Edith*)
Mia Yoo (*Viola*)
Benjamin Bauman (*Donald*)
Sebastian Roché (*Pierre*)
Maxmiliano Hernandez (*Ben*)
Partha Chatterjee (*reformed Hindoo*)
Mitali Bhawmik (*singing voice*)

USA/India/Japan 2006©
122 mins

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The Namesake
Wed 14 Jul 17:40 (+ live spoken-word performance); Wed 21 Jul 20:40
What Will People Say (Hva vil folk si) Fri 16 Jul 20:30; Sat 31 Jul 17:30
Binti Mon 19 Jul 20:40
While We Live (Medan vi lever) Tue 20 Jul 20:30
In Conversation with Nikesh Shukla Fri 23 Jul 18:20
Pinky Sat 24 Jul 11:40
Lilting Sat 24 Jul 17:20; Fri 30 Jul 20:40
Head-On (Gegen die Wand) Tue 27 Jul 20:40
Shoot the Messenger + Q&A with director Ngozi Onwurah, hosted by T A P E’s Angela Moneke Thu 29 Jul 17:45
Culture Shock: Short Film Programme + Q&A with UNDR LNDN
Fri 30 Jul 17:40

T A P E was founded in 2015 as a response to the lack of representation on screen. Find out more about this curatorial collective at tapecollective.co.uk