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Crossing Lines. 31 minutes. 2007. Indira Somani and Leena Jayasawal, directors. New Day Films. 190 Route 17M Suite D, Harriman, NY 10926. <http://www.newday.com>. Purchase: \$199 (institutions, colleges, and universities); rent: \$49.

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Crossing Lines is a documentary by Indira Somani, assistant professor of journalism, made collaboratively with associate professor of film and media arts Leena Jayasawal. The film is based on Somani's auto-ethnographic account of the South Asian diaspora in the United States. Based on an emotional journey to India to primarily connect with her patrilineal Indian roots past her father's death, the film juxtaposes Somani's accounts of her American upbringing in an immigrant family with her travel-based reflections in India. In the process, the film addresses important sociological concepts, including family, immigration, and gender. The film has won a few accolades and has been screened in the United States, India, South Africa, England, Australia, and Canada.

Crossing Lines begins with a clarification of the cinematic purpose. Somani explains her travel plans to India in 2004 after she loses her father to a medical condition. The filmmaker is featured in the documentary and provides a voiceover, which makes the work both human and personal. Through interviews and visual aids, the filmmaker explains her upbringing in the United States as an Indian American who is raised by immigrant parents in the backdrop of the 1970s. Somani reflects on

periods of identity crises typically experienced by children of immigrants as they encounter what are often contradictory cultural values between the host and native cultures. Every era of South Asian immigration is different from the others. Somani's parents immigrated at a time when the influx of immigration from India had just about started. Prior to the inundation of global information technology, in the '60s and '70s, primarily medical and science professionals were attracted to the United States. Communication of immigrants with their families back home was regulated by not-so-modest expenses incurred on international trunk calls. Rather than weekly and daily conversations on telephone, FaceTime, or Skype, or rendezvous with transported regional and Hindi entertainment in the comfort of their living rooms (common among South Asian communities past the 2000s), Indian immigrants in the yesteryears relied primarily on ideological derivatives to recreate their versions of the native culture in the host environment.

Somani explains her very patriarchal and almost totalitarian upbringing—the unexpected rupture to which was brought through her father's death. Growing up, she encountered several boundaries that in many ways were in contrast to her American peers. This created moments of intermittent angst of trying to identify her own place in the American sociocultural arena. Her family retained contact with India by spending vacations in the country. Through these short and long visits growing up, Somani discovered a sense of family, friendships, and culture and religion back in South Asia. She further explores these elements as an independent adult in 2004.

Irrespective of a comparatively regimented and patriarchal upbringing in the States and moments of cultural antagonism experienced during her teenage years, Somani always had a deep attachment with her father and, as her mother testifies, takes largely after his personality. His sudden demise creates a vacuum in her life, which she tries to fill up by embarking on a quest for her roots—this time without parental escort. This sets up the stage for the main content of the documentary.

The filmmaker explains her initial doubts of traveling to India as a single Indian woman to reach out to kin she has not met in a while. In the process, her visits to Bengal (mother's family) and, more importantly, Maharashtra (father's family) are portrayed. She spends more time with her cousins and aunts in Maharashtra and tries to comprehend the sociocultural and economic transition her father went through in order to secure a better life for himself and his

family of procreation. In between these poignant exploits, Somani also explains her father's humble origins and his knack of giving back to his community by endorsing education. The filmmaker largely tries to recreate these experiences in order to keep images of her father, her upbringing, and her heritage alive despite a lapse of time and person. In the end, she leaves India with a sense of both content and agony. The filmmaker's sense of content seems to be associated with a better understanding of the Indian thought process immigrants like her parents brought to the United States, while her agony pertains to the eventual separation from the caregiving and emotional attachment of her Indian family.

The 30-minute length of the documentary facilitates its inclusion into a sociology class lecture of almost any duration (including shorter 50-minute lectures). However, the usage of the film as a teaching device necessitates elucidation of fundamental concepts that have been indirectly referred to in the film (family, gender, and ethnicity) though not adequately elaborated upon. While the documentary introduces ideas of the extended family, differences between first- and second-generation immigration, and gender-based struggles in both cultures, it lacks sociological clarity. Rather, the film can be construed as more of a personal narrative. While touching upon these concepts, the film very quickly transitions from gender to extended family and ethnic variations without adequately dwelling on and exploring these concepts in detail from the Indian perspective. Made primarily from an exploratory journalistic perspective, to the alien audience, much would be left unanswered or is contingent on the instructor's ability to expound upon. However, this is both a limitation and an advantage. The film's understated sociological notions can be realized through in-class discussion of differences in the social fabric between the two countries in terms of family structure or living arrangements, for instance.

Second, the focus on Maharashtra (father's side of the family) in contrast to Bengal (mother's side) clearly sidelines the nuances of regional variations in India. For example, being single and 34 in the Bengali culture might be less perplexing in comparison to parts of north and western India. Somani's parents were from these two very different parts of the country, and her mother traveled for higher education to the United States in the 1960s. That, in itself, was trendsetting for a woman during that time period and yet not adequately emphasized in the film. Gender and ethnic contrasts between Somani's patrilineal and matrilineal origins should not be confused as an overarching Indian experience

and in reality is characterized by very potent regional contrasts.

Third, the documentary focuses largely on the American aspects of Somani's travels. This is not essentially a drawback as it introduces the Western audience to a contrastive social environment. However, it also creates moments of disconnect with her experiences in America and corresponding insights on India, which seemed to be a central motivating factor for her journey. Somani's initial uncertainty about social acceptance of a 30-something single woman in India can be connected with her upbringing in the United States and concurrent cultural expectations about India. However, the film focuses more on the generic structure and daily dynamics of her father's family rather than focusing on how she resolves contradictions of gendered identity upon moving into her father's native social space.

For a class on introduction to sociology, the film can be used to demonstrate lives of Indian Americans. The film can also be used for an undergraduate class on race and ethnicity that focuses on the immigrant experience—it is useful for tracing the cultural journey of a second-generation immigrant and provides students with an overview of the contrastive cultural experience between United States and India. An instructor can potentially draw upon functionalist theories of assimilation in demonstrating how cultural, structural, and psychological assimilation are important in generating social identities of immigrants. Second, whether in a class on family and marriage or introduction to sociology, ideas of extended versus nuclear family, patrilineal inheritance, neolocal versus extended families, and ideas of endogamy versus exogamy can also be explored. Somani's Western life corroborates the typical nuclear, neolocal, and part-patrilineal setup. This is in contrast to her father's traditional extended family structure in India. Her parents' wedding seemed to be endogamous (given their pan-Indian association), but it could also be regarded as exogamous from the Indian perspective (two different regions of the nations). These variations become instrumental in triggering in-class deliberations.

Overall, *Crossing Lines* is a thought-provoking documentary that acquaints the audience with the emotional and social implications of the lives of immigrants in the United States. It should not be treated as a well-rounded educational overview of gender, ethnic, and family-based realities of India. However, it is a helpful tool in educating first-year students with an overview of the disparate and yet analogous cultural expectations that shape and reshape the lives of first- and second-generation immigrants in the United States over their life course.