

Crossing Lines – Study Guide

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“Crossing Lines” is about an Indian American woman’s struggle to stay connected to India after the loss of her father. Like most second-generation ethnic Americans, Indira Somani has struggled with identity issues, since her parents migrated to the U.S. in the 1960s. Being born and brought up in the U.S. Indira led an American life, but at home, her world was Indian because of her father’s immense love for India and Indian culture. This film takes you on a journey to India, where Indira visits her father’s extended family for the first time after his death. The film explores how Indira tries to stay connected to Indian culture and her extended family, despite the loss of her father. It is the story of how one daughter pays tribute to her father in all that he’s taught her about India, Indian culture and family.

This film is inter-disciplinary and strategic in addressing societal needs. It has been used as a tool in the classroom across various disciplines to improve the understanding of culture and identity, since it deals with multiple topics including the loss of a parent, the father-daughter relationship, the Indian Diaspora, India, Hinduism and the identity of a single woman. These issues are of particular interest to scholars and students in the fields of Intercultural communication, Women’s and Gender Studies, Sociology, Asian and Asian-American Studies, South Asian Studies, Immigration and generation, Multicultural Studies and Religion.

Preview Questions:

- 1) When you think of “India” what images come to mind? Where do these images come from?
- 2) What do you know about India and how do you know it?
- 3) What do you know about Hinduism?
- 4) What kind of relationship do you have with your father?
- 5) How is your life different from your parents? Do you have opportunities they did not have?
- 6) What cultural values have they passed on to you?
- 7) Have you ever lost a loved one? What has this person passed on to you?

Discussion Questions (after watching the film):

After showing the film, typically begin with the questions:

- 1) What do you think?
- 2) What are the themes that surface after watching the film?

Archive footage

- 1) One feature that distinguishes *Crossing Lines* from other films is the use of archive footage. How does the use of the archive footage help you process and understand the story?
- 2) What does the archive footage do to help you with your understanding of Indira’s dad?

Identity and Culture

At this time you can open the discussion of idea of microcultural groups and the idea of being "in-between." Indira often feels like she's "in-between," what does that mean? This tension is felt and experienced by virtue of Indira's bi-cultural identity. The Diwali vs. Homecoming scene is classic of this tension. The single woman conflict also gives a sense of tension.

- 1) What is the significance of Diwali to Indira?
- 2) What is the significance of Diwali to Indira's father?
- 3) What is the significance of Homecoming to Indira?
- 4) What is the significance of Homecoming to Indira's father?
- 5) What does Indira mean when she says "American world" and "Indian world?"
- 6) What is the struggle Indira's father is having in raising his daughters after adopting a new homeland, the U.S.?
- 7) How does Indira explore her links to India and to her father's history?
- 8) How does Indira find a way to bridge the gap between the American way with the Indian way?

Loss of a parent

- 1) What does Indira realize about herself after her dad dies?
- 2) Do you get a sense that she has some regrets after he died? If so, what do think are her regrets?

Father-daughter relationship

Indira's father's expectation is that she be married. One of the questions to ask is what kind of expectations do Indira's parents have and how do they contrast from Indira's own expectations?

- 1) What is the significance of the father-daughter relationship in this film?
- 2) How do think Indira would feel about her father after he died if she did not have so much turmoil with him in her adolescents?

Customs

- 1) What are some of the non-verbal forms of communication that show respect to elders? For example, note how Indira greets many of the elders, then compare and contrast greetings across cultures. If you have other international students in class, compare greetings across cultures.

Indian Diaspora

- 1) How well do you think Indira understood her culture by the time she was an adult?
- 2) What do you think is missing in her Indian identity when she travels to India?
- 3) What are some scenes that distinguish Indira and make her stand-out as an American?

Hinduism

- 1) What do you think is the significance of the mala (beads Indira was holding when she was praying)?
- 2) What was your understanding of Hinduism before you saw this film?

- 3) How have your impressions about the religion changed?
- 4) If someone says, “Hinduism is a way of life” – what does that mean to you?

Single woman

In India women are expected to be married after a certain age. Indira experiences some apprehension about traveling to her father’s side of the family, since women are married in their early twenties.

- 1) What impression do you think Indira left on her family after visiting them in India?
- 2) How are Indira’s actions in India different from married women of Indian descent, born and brought up in the U.S.?

Closing Question

- 1) After watching the film, what does Indira discover about herself and her connection to India?
- 2) The film ends with this line: “When I think of India, I think of the unconditional love that I have, I think of a very poor country, but not poor in culture, and certainly not poor in family. For once I was seeing India through my eyes, not my parent’s eyes.” Describe in detail what this means.