

Welcome Speech by Chintan Parikh
A Different Evening : October 18, 2018.

Sushri Nanditaji, Prof. Pankaj Chandra - Vice Chancellor of Ahmedabad University, the trustees and the members of the Core Working Group of Niranjana Bhagat Memorial Trust, all the members present here from Ahmedabad University campus and all the invitees,

It is a matter of great pleasure to welcome you all to this inaugural function of A Different Evening : an international film club, in memory of the eminent Gujarati poet and distinguished critic of world literature Prof. Niranjana Bhagat, who passed away in February, 2018. Shri Niranjana Bhai, was an avid film watcher with a keen and sensitive eye for the art in the film. He considered film as a complex medium with vast possibilities of effective and incisive expression and at the same time a medium for deep internalized experience for the audience. During his last years of life, he cherished this experience by watching such internationally acclaimed movies, once in a week.

As an appropriate tribute, Niranjana Bhagat Memorial Trust, established in his memory by his family and friends from different walks of life, conceptualized this idea of an international film club to encourage and cultivate appreciation and critical evaluation of films among the film lovers of this city, especially the younger generation of the college students.

To inaugurate and launch this international film club, present among us is renowned director and actor Ms. Nandita Das. When she was told about this function, she agreed to be with us, sparing her valuable time from her extremely hectic international tours. I believe tomorrow again she is flying to Mauritius to receive one more award. Our heartiest thanks to her for agreeing to deliver the inaugural address.

The name Nandita Das needs no introduction. Nandita Das has acted in more than 40 feature films in 10 different languages. She made her directorial debut with *Firaaq*, in 2008, that won many accolades and appreciation, both in India and abroad. She was on the jury of the Cannes Film Festival twice (2005 and 2013). She has travelled to more than 50 festivals and won more than 20 national and international awards. In 2009, she appeared on the postal stamp of France. Perhaps the first and only female actor from India to be recognized by France in this way. In 2011 she received one of the nation's highest civilian awards from the Government of France, Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters.

She has a Master's degree in Social Work and is a strong advocate for issues of social justice and human rights. Nandita's second directorial venture, Manto, based on the life and works of Saadat Hasan Manto, had its world premiere at the Cannes Film Festival in 2018. We can say that Nandita partly belongs to Gujarat, as her mother Varshaben, daughter of Gujarati writer Sopan and granddaughter of Late Shri Amrutlal Sheth of Janmabhoomi Trust, is Gujarati. For your information, Nandita speaks Gujarati fluently.

Now something about this film club. It is believed that no Film can replace a novel or a poem. But I also believe that no novel or a short story or a poem can replace the audio-visual experience of a good film. What kind of films should be screened here? We believe that it does not matter whether the film has won an Oscar or not. Whether it is Black and White or coloured. Whether it is from Japan, India, Iran or USA. However, it is essential that the film screened here, has to be an interesting film for the audience so that as said earlier, it leaves a feeling of deep internalized experience after watching it. The film screened here, should leave a definitive imprint on your mind, that perhaps you would be happy to carry home as a take-away souvenir of this different evening.

In this competitive urban life, we all have our routine evenings. However, once in a fortnight, watching a beautiful film in this auditorium, can we not experience a different evening? For answering this question, we have named this film club as A Different Evening. I am sure this different evening will be one of the tools to filter out the required ambrosia that we have been searching for in our routine lives.

We are planning to screen 25 films in a year in private viewings in this auditorium for our members. Once in a fortnight. Occasionally, we will also have lectures and critical evaluation of specific films by renowned film appreciation experts, film directors and actors. The annual subscription for 25 films for a couple is Rs. 1200 and for a single person is Rs. 800. When you go out of the auditorium after the film, you can fill up the form and apply for the annual membership of the club. You can apply online or even by simply writing an e-mail. Those details are also given on the application form.

This is not applicable to the students, and the staff and the faculty families of Ahmedabad University, since they can become members as communicated separately by the university at a very concessional rate.

Now, something in brief about today's film. "Cry, the beloved country" is a wonderful film. It was released in 1995, when its director Darrel Roodt was only 32 years old. It is based on a famous novel written in 1948 by Alan Paton. It is a deeply moving story of the Zulu pastor Stephen Kumalo and his son, Absalom. South African church minister Steven Kumalo is summoned from his village to Johannesburg. There he finds that his son Absalom has been jailed in connection with a robbery in which a white man was killed. The father of the white man, James Jarvis, is a supporter of apartheid. When they encounter each other, both the fathers, Kumalo and Jarvis come to unexpected realizations not only about their sons, but about the nature of their own humanity.

These two men are brought together in the worst of circumstances and that is when the true character of the man is revealed. Each sentence in the film, spoken by both the fathers, one a white man and the other a black African, comes out as if we are listening to lines of an articulated poem. Remarkable for its lyricism, unforgettable for its characters and incidences, Cry, the Beloved Country is a classic work of love and hope, courage and endurance, born of the dignity of man. I am sure all of you will enjoy this excellent film.

I am very thankful to Vice Chancellor Shri Pankaj Chandra for allowing the screening of all the films of this club during the year in this auditorium without any charge. This is to encourage the objective of film appreciation among the students and the film lovers of the city at large. I am also very thankful to his team, starting with Registrar Shri B M Shah, Prof Vaibhav Kadia, Prof. Sanjay Chaudhari, Prof Chirag Trivedi and other administrative staff and the enthusiastic students who have volunteered to take this club to the students community and who have given their whole hearted support to this initiative and have accommodated our various requests at the last hour to make this event successful. Once again, I thank, Nanditaji to be with us today and now request Shri Pankaj Chandra, Vice Chancellor of Ahmedabad University to say a few words of encouragement before Nanditaji delivers her inaugural address.