



# Recorded Events

## **Title: 2007 Seattle Reads - An evening with Jhumpa Lahiri in conversation with Nancy Pearl**

Speaker 1:

This is the Seattle Public Library podcast of an evening with Jhumpa Lahiri. She spoke May 15th at Seattle's Town Hall in the main event of Seattle Reads, The Namesake. Ms. Lahiri won the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for her debut story collection, Interpreter of Maladies. Her novel, The Namesake, was published in 2003. Both books have been international bestsellers. Jhumpa Lahiri was joined on stage by Seattle librarian, Nancy Pearl.

Nancy Pearl:

What a great audience for you. This is fabulous. So let's just start right at the beginning. Okay. Let's start with Interpreter of Maladies and how you felt winning that Pulitzer for that first collection of short stories.

Jhumpa Lahiri:

Well, I was stunned and that's really putting it mildly. I mean, I really truly was in the dark about even the possibility of my book being given that honor. I'd heard of the Pulitzer Prize and I just thought it was something people like Steinbeck got. And so I certainly didn't think that a first book was even eligible and I was so new to writing and so green sort of in the world of books and publishing and all of that stuff. So it just came out of the sky and I didn't know that I was nominated or whatever the process is. And I think more seasoned writers are more in tune with all of that and they know when it's announced. But I didn't know anything like that. And it was just a very strange experience because I was in my apartment at the time and the phone rang and someone from my publishing company called and it was a very strange day because everybody at the publishing company was somewhere else because they were having some sort of-

Nancy Pearl:

Sales meeting.

Jhumpa Lahiri:

... Sales meeting, something where they all have to go and be somewhere. And so everybody was deserted and I think there was maybe one person manning the phones and she called and she said, "I'm so-and-so, I'm calling from Houghton Mifflin." And I'd never spoken to her before and she said, "I

just wanted to ask you what year were you born?" And I told her, and she said, "I just want to make sure where you were born." And I told her, and I just kept telling her these things and I didn't know why she was asking me, but I didn't really question her because I thought, "Oh, maybe they're just updating their files or something." And then she said, "You don't know why I'm calling you, do you?" And I said, "No." And then she said, "Oh, well, you've just won this prize." And that's how it happened.

And it was really... I mean, my editor didn't call me, the publicist did call me, nobody in the position, I think, to give me this news, gave it to me. It just came from a very odd source. I mean, not to blame her. I mean, she was there and it was what she had to do, but that's how it came to me. I mean, it was just so unexpected. And then I got off the phone and I can't remember who I called first, but it was either my father or my husband at work. And we didn't have a computer at the time and I didn't even know about email or anything. I mean, I was just kind of out of that whole world. And so it wasn't a matter of rushing to the computer and checking something.

And so my husband did that. I told him and he said, "Okay." And then he said, "I'll call you right back." And then I called my father and he's a librarian, but he's also not that savvy with the internet. So he said, "Well, let me get off the phone and I'll ask my friend, Michael, who knows how to do things like Google searches." So then I got off the phone with both of them and I waited for a confirmation because I just didn't believe it. And I thought that the person had gotten it wrong and that it was somebody else and it was a mistake and all of that. So, but then finally it was-

Nancy Pearl:

Confirmed for you.

Jhumpa Lahiri:

... Eventually confirmed and it sort of went from there.

Nancy Pearl:

So all those stories were written in longhand then?

Jhumpa Lahiri:

No, I had a computer. I just didn't have internet.

Nancy Pearl:

Oh, okay.

Jhumpa Lahiri:

I didn't deal with the internet and I still don't have internet on the computer I write on, but now I have email, for example, whereas back then, that wasn't a part of my life.

Nancy Pearl:

So what was the effect... What I think I was getting at with my question was, then what happened when you sat down to do your next writing after that award? Did it freak you out in some way? Did it set up some fences that you then felt you had to leap over?

Jhumpa Lahiri:

Well, I was already working on *The Namesake* and I think that when you're working on something, you feel very... I mean, it's a very humbling experience to write. It's very hard and you're on the ground with it and it's a sort of daily labor. And I think that it was my anchor through all of that, that sort of month of suddenly being in the spotlight for a while and people wanting to interview me and that sort of thing. And it was limited. I mean, it was a finite experience and then life goes on for everybody, fortunately. And I think that act of writing and going to my desk every day, it continues to be a necessary and grounding part of my life. And I don't think that any... I mean, the thing about prizes is they can be very wonderful and very affirming on the one hand, but they don't help you write.

Nothing helps you write apart from your own dedication and determination and need and all of those things kind of coming together and bringing you to your desk every day. And it doesn't matter if you've never won a prize or won every prize in the world, it's still the same experience every day. And I knew that just from writing the handful of stories that were in *Interpreter*, because every time you finish a story and begin a new story, you go back to the bottom of the mountain and you have to go up it again and it doesn't help you to have written... I mean, it does help you in a sense. And certainly, I can say now that I've been writing for some years and so things are more familiar in a way, but it doesn't make it... It's more familiar, but it's not less hard. Does that make sense?

Nancy Pearl:

So when you go back then, when you finish a story or when you finish *The Namesake*, do you ever feel that that... What is the need that you talked about? What is the need for you to write? What does it fulfill for you?

Jhumpa Lahiri:

It's just a need. I can't really explain it. I mean, I need to eat and I know if I don't, I'll die. And I feel sort of the same way about writing, but it's just not physical in the same way, but I feel it that deeply.

Nancy Pearl:

When you think about *The Namesake* or the stories that you're working on now, do you finish one... Do you write the stories separately or are many of them going on at the same time in your head or down on paper?

Jhumpa Lahiri:

Well, when I was writing the stories for *Interpreter*, my life was very different and I was leading a very different sort of life. I was a full-time graduate student and I really didn't have very much time for writing and I certainly didn't think of myself as a writer. And I never thought about the stories ever being a book or anything. I was just sort of doing this very secretly and sporadically and just in a very piecemeal way.

And for me, I was just trying to learn how to write, I think, just really literally learn how to put a story together. And so I wrote them one by one. I really didn't have the option of being able to have things overlap because there wasn't the time or the energy to devote. So those stories were written over a period of about seven or eight years when I had a lot of other things happening, just teaching, taking classes, blah, blah, blah.

But I've just finished another book of stories and that was sort of a different experience because I have come to a point where I can devote more of my life to writing and I can focus on it more. And so I've had some stories that came to me relatively quickly, by which I mean a year or two, and then others that took much, much longer, so four years, five years. And really some characters I've been thinking about for practically a decade at this point, characters I've been curious about and I haven't really understood properly until relatively recently. And then they took the form of... Or were able to form a story.

Nancy Pearl:

When you were thinking about what became *The Namesake*, was it always clear to you that the subject matter was too large to be contained in a short story form?

Jhumpa Lahiri:

I think so. I think, yes. I mean, I had never written a novel before and I was curious about it at that point because I'd spent these seven or eight years writing the stories in *Interpreter* and I noticed that my stories were just getting a little bit messier and longer and kind of gesturing toward what I thought a novel might be. And then I started to sort of pieces of *The Namesake*, the inspiration came in pieces. And when I started to collect those pieces, I really couldn't imagine fitting them into something that I could call a short story or even a long story. And there were many different pieces that were just for a while, kind of like groceries in a bag and they were there and I knew that they would... I wanted them to yield something, but I didn't know what it would be.

One source was the name itself, the name Gogol, which belonged to the friend of a young cousin of mine in Calcutta. And I sort of came across the name and it intrigued me and I thought about it and I wondered about it. And I was inspired by it, but I didn't know to what end, but I knew that I was inspired by it. I also somehow wanted to write about that accident, the train accident, which was based on an actual accident that a cousin of my father's was involved in many years ago and was a story that I had heard as a girl and was very haunted by. So there was that kind of piece. And I mean, I think those were really the two, to be honest, the accident and the name. And I didn't know what to do with them for a while. And then slowly, the accident kind of yielded the name, but the name preceded the accident, and then it became a circle and I was able to start writing the book.

Nancy Pearl:

So all of that was like taking place. I mean, you were like playing with all that in-

Jhumpa Lahiri:

There was a long gestation period for the book. And these things were... I had started thinking about them while I was probably writing some of the stories in Interpreter. So things really start in such kind of tiny ways that you don't even realize until slowly they accrue some sort of meaning and significance.

Nancy Pearl:

Well, what about you as a reader? What's important to you in the books that you read for pleasure and who do you read for pleasure?

Jhumpa Lahiri:

Well, I mean, I read for pleasure... Certainly, I read for pleasure and I read for instruction because I'm a writer. So everything I read, I'm reading... Not everything I read, I read for instruction, but many things I read. Most things I read now, I read... It's the pleasure and the instruction have kind of melded. And so I can't really explain what I'm looking for, but I just know when I find it, that's what it is. I mean, it's sort of like, why are you drawn to certain people in the world? Why do you have certain friends and not others? It's a very instinctive thing. And so I know when I pick up certain books, there's something, there's sort of a deep connection that I make to the language. Generally, language is very important to me and the characters and the sensibility, the sensibility of the writer.

Those things I think really are what will determine whether or not I really want to spend time with the book or not. So some of the writers I read constantly for instruction and pleasure are Chekhov and Joyce and William Trevor and Mavis Gallant and Alice Munro and older writers, more contemporary writers. I mean, there's a mix, but there are writers I'm... Those are some of the writers I turn to all the time.

Nancy Pearl:

You're reading a lot of children's books. I suspected this-

Jhumpa Lahiri:

Yes, a lot of children's books, which are great. I mean, they remind you to keep it simple and stick to the point, and they're just so wonderfully imaginative as well. So I've really been enjoying... And now my son's getting a little bit older, so we just entered the Wonderful World of chapter books and reading Charlotte's Web, [inaudible 00:16:10]... I mean, what a pleasure to go back and read that book after years and years and years of... I mean, it was read to me when I was a child, and the language is extraordinary and teaches me something every time.

Nancy Pearl:

Did you grow up knowing that you wanted to write?

Jhumpa Lahiri:

I don't know. I grew up... I didn't know what I wanted, really. It wasn't a question of want, but I wrote when I was young. I started writing around the time I started learning to read. So by seven or so, I was

writing stories and things I thought I called novels that I wrote as a child, and then I stopped doing that around adolescence. I think that as a child, writing was a refuge for me and was a safe place and was also a social opportunity because oddly, I didn't write very much on my own. I wrote in the company of other children, and we sort of collaborated on these things, and it was really fun. And it was really important to me because I had a very hard time making friends and social connections because I was shy and I just felt uncomfortable and insecure in many ways. And so writing was a way for me to connect to other people.

But then when I was maybe 13, 14, around there, I really stopped writing creatively. And when I think back, I wonder why that was. I mean, and I continued writing and I wrote for my school newspaper. I always loved working with words. And that was always very gratifying to me throughout my life, my childhood, my adolescence, and forward. But I felt very self-conscious about writing more creatively at that time of my life when I was just sort of, I don't know, perhaps too confused or too crippled by some sense of, "Who am I and what would this mean, and all of that.

Nancy Pearl:

It's a difficult age.

Jhumpa Lahiri:

It is for anybody. It's a difficult age and it is a challenging time and your world is opening up and-

Nancy Pearl:

You don't want it to in some ways because it's so scary.

Jhumpa Lahiri:

Yes, yes. So there was a long gap. And then I slowly started up again when I was in my 20s, I mean, late in college. And then by the time I graduated from college, I started to sort of get my toes wet again in terms of writing stories, and then it slowly took over.

Nancy Pearl:

How much of Gogol's experience is drawn in any way from your own experience?

Jhumpa Lahiri:

Well, I think of the whole book in a way as more or less following the contours of my upbringing and my life. And there's certainly many parallels to be drawn between the Ganguli family and my own family. My parents and I came in 1969 to Massachusetts and subsequently moved to a smaller area in New England, in Rhode Island, in our case. And my father is an academic and we grew up in a university setting. And so those things I was really... I drew. I drew from my personal landscape. But I think that when it came to really building the characters in the book, Gogol and the parents and everybody, I was inspired partly by the larger web of Bengali's living in and around New England that formed a kind of world within a world for me and my family.

And I drew from that collective pool in terms of building the characters and then just made stuff up as well to make them who they were. So they weren't based on any one person or even any four people, but little things from here and there, and then some things that were solely invented for the sake of the book. So I feel that sort of the contours are my own, but then the stuff inside is a sort of imagined-

Nancy Pearl:

And very individual.

Jhumpa Lahiri:

Yes.

Nancy Pearl:

Yeah. I know that you've said that you can't consider readers when you're writing, of course, but it must be very gratifying to think that *The Namesake* touched so many people, that those contours that were your contours are also the contours of the experiences for other people.

Jhumpa Lahiri:

It is. And it's something, I think, as a writer, I never expected it and I didn't even work toward it... I didn't work with that end in mind.

Nancy Pearl:

That would have ruined it, I think, if you had thought that.

Jhumpa Lahiri:

Well, I think that's just asking for-

Nancy Pearl:

Trouble.

Jhumpa Lahiri:

... Trouble. I really do. And I think that you just have to obey some guiding light in your own mind and you know what the book you need to write. It strikes me that so much of the book was inspired or tries to kind of capture, preserve experiences both of the parents' generation and the children's generation of a sense of isolation and feeling that no one is with them or understanding what they're experiencing. And that was certainly drawn from my life and feeling that I just couldn't talk to anybody about any of these things. And it was frustrating and it was hard at times.

And I think that to have written a book that sort of grew out of a lot of those feelings of feeling isolated and nobody in the world is going through this. And I think it's also a matter of being young and feeling

that you are alone in the world. And I think as we grow older, we understand that you aren't alone and that there are a lot of people out there who are-

Nancy Pearl:

Going through-

Jhumpa Lahiri:

... Going through a lot of different things and maybe even similar things, but it takes time. And I think that when I grew up, the United States was a different place and it just wasn't the same atmosphere and there wasn't anything remotely resembling the country we live in now in terms of its diversity and its understanding and the presence of different... That many more different cultures. I mean, when I was young, an immigrant meant you came from Europe. Period. And that was it. And that was what we learned about in our history books. And it was because the other groups of people who were coming from places like India and other parts of the world were still in the process of arriving. So now, I imagine, when my children go to school, there might be a chapter in their history books devoted to Indian immigration in the United States, but it certainly wasn't something that I felt that I ever learned in that way. And I think there is a sense of feeling, there's a legitimacy suddenly if time has passed to the point where you are recognized in that way.

Nancy Pearl:

In part of a history.

Jhumpa Lahiri:

And part of a history. And I think part of the anxiety of growing up in a world when that sort of... Your parents are the first people to arrive in a country and the anxiety of never feeling connected to anything in the country that surrounds you, never being connected biologically to anybody, never having a grandmother or grandfather, a sense of your parents having known and lived in a place, there's just that sense of we were the pilgrims and as so many other groups have been and felt. So I was just trying to capture that experience in writing the book. And so, it's extraordinary when I realized that I lived this experience, I wrote the book sort of drawing from a lot of that experience, and then the book goes out into the world and people will say, "I read it and I-

Nancy Pearl:

That was my experience.

Jhumpa Lahiri:

That was my experience, or that was my mother's experience, or that was my grandmother's experience, or simply, that was my experience of moving from San Francisco to New York City. I mean, just something as even within one nation, I mean, you can still... Or even from one part of one state to another. I mean, there's so many variations and grades of the way people move and change through

life and move from one place to another and go through different stages of life. And I think my book is described accurately enough, certainly, as a book about immigrants and all of that.

But to me, that's the life experience. And you don't have to leave your country to understand what that's like. I think that anyone who's born and lives through the years and meets new people and gets married and has children. I mean, these are all things that take us away from what we know and bring us to a new place and then something else becomes familiar and then perhaps we leave that and then we move on to another stage of our lives. So I think that for an immigrant, those things are maybe amplified, but I think for any person, they're relevant.

Nancy Pearl:

In the movie, when Gogol and his family go back to India, in a way they are stateless, they don't fit in in India. And was that your experience as well when you went back?

Jhumpa Lahiri:

Yeah. I mean, I felt it on both sides. I mean, I felt that we didn't belong here and that was very apparent to me in many ways. And then I also felt that certainly... I think especially... I mean, now my parents, we just all went back a few months ago for a visit and my parents have lived outside of India for more than half their lives. So I mean, it's still their home and it will always be their home and it will always fulfill them in a way that no other place will, but they're a bit at sea themselves when they go there and things have changed and things are unrecognizable. But at the same time, I think that what's really quite specific to the experience of being a child of immigrants is that you grow up with these parents who are always looking back, always looking back, always looking back to the roots that they feel severed from, whereas the children grew up without a sense of rootedness at all because they don't feel connected to India.

They're not from there. They've never lived there. They don't miss it or yearn for it. And they don't have the roots here either or it takes more time and effort to feel that sense of rootedness, or at least certainly for me. I mean, it took me 30 plus years to feel that I could say that I'm from this country. And I think that for all of those years that I wasn't able to say it, there were many things that inhibited me. One was a sense of, "Was I betraying my parents by calling myself an American," another was thinking, "Well, people always keep thinking I'm Indian anyway, so it doesn't even matter if I say I'm American," They always say, "Well, but you're Indian." So then I just sort of stopped caring because I felt that I could never satisfy everybody and everybody's expectations.

And it was very grounding, to be honest, to be married and to have my own family and to create that unit of my own. And now I feel that I belong wherever I am in the world with my husband and my two children. And we live in Brooklyn and I feel that's where we are. But it's... I'm almost 40 years old and it took me that long to really get to that place.

Nancy Pearl:

What led me to ask the question was thinking about Gogol's relationship with the sort of Ralph Lauren couple. And that there was nothing beyond the surface I would think that would draw Gogol. I mean, there was nothing that would keep them together. I remember thinking

Jhumpa Lahiri:

I'm sorry, who's the Ralph Lauren couple?

Nancy Pearl:

When Gogol met the young woman who... The very American woman.

Jhumpa Lahiri:

Maxine?

Nancy Pearl:

Yes.

Jhumpa Lahiri:

Oh, okay.

Nancy Pearl:

Yes.

Jhumpa Lahiri:

Okay.

Nancy Pearl:

Yeah. I just think of her as a Ralph Lauren type person.

Jhumpa Lahiri:

Okay. Okay.

Nancy Pearl:

I mean, I think of her as wearing those sweaters that you tie and all of that.

Jhumpa Lahiri:

Okay. Okay.

Nancy Pearl:

I'm sorry if you [inaudible 00:31:08]-

Jhumpa Lahiri:

No, no, that's okay.

Nancy Pearl:

I mean, it seemed to me that there was no hope for them.

Jhumpa Lahiri:

I don't think I agree with you really. I never thought of Maxine as a superficial character. I thought of her as an interesting person and interested in him.

Nancy Pearl:

Well, I don't think she was superficial. I just don't think that she could share those experiences that were so central to him.

Jhumpa Lahiri:

Well, I think that she tried. And I think that there was something... She both tried and didn't try. I mean, I think she was a self-absorbed person, but I don't think she's incapable of caring for him. I think she cared for him very deeply. And I think her family, in a way, embraced him-

Nancy Pearl:

Oh, I think so too.

Jhumpa Lahiri:

... In a way that his family wasn't capable of embracing her or much more freaked out and resistant and cold to her. And I think that her family didn't have those same... They didn't feel threatened by him the way that Gogol's parents felt threatened by her. And I think that when I was writing the story, my sense was that the reason the romance dissolves is the fact that Gogol's father dies and it's such a traumatic episode in his life. And it brings up a lot of issues that Gogol himself has kept very buried in him. And all of that sense of feeling torn and disloyal and turning his back on his parents and also needing them and loving them.

And I think the loss of a parent, needless to say, brings those things up. And I think it was that juncture in his life because I think certainly when one... I mean, I don't know yet because I haven't lost my parents, but I think that that's a point in your life where if you don't have someone in your life who really understands you, it's very hard because your parents are... You come from them. So I think that was why for me, when I was kind of constructing the story, I felt that, "Okay, well, this is the point where the relationship's going to falter and fall apart." But in a way, I thought of her as sort of a nicer person as the woman he ends up marrying, to be honest.

Nancy Pearl:

Oh, no, I agree with you. I felt terrible that romance didn't last because I felt her family in many ways was so welcoming to him and that was something that he needed in his life that he wasn't getting. Let

me ask you one more question and then we can get questions from the audience. The Namesake is written in the present tense from many different points of view. And how did you decide... Was that a conscious decision that you made? Did it start in a different...

Jhumpa Lahiri:

Well, it was unconscious and then it became conscious. When I first started writing the book, it was coming to me in the first person and... I mean in the present tense and I was moving from one character to another, trying to understand them and form links between them, but I was hearing it all in the present tense, but I did question it. And what I ended up doing after the book was almost entirely written was go back and change the entire thing and put it into the simple past just to make sure that it was the right decision for the book because I typically don't write in the present tense. And when I went back and I looked at it, I felt that something had been lost.

And I think that in retrospect, what was lost was that sense of the active present is... To me, that represents so much the experience of a family of arriving and not having anything to draw on because that's the past and what the Ganguli family lacks when they are in this country is a past. I mean, there's a past certainly, but they're cut off from it. And so they are the first set of footprints, and then it goes from there. So then I decided that it really did need to be in the present tense and I kept the book in the present tense.

Nancy Pearl:

But did you ever toy with the idea of telling it just from, say, Gogol's point of view?

Jhumpa Lahiri:

No. No. I mean, to me, I always thought of it as a story about a family and-

Nancy Pearl:

And the generations and-

Jhumpa Lahiri:

Yeah, it's a book to me about parents and children, fundamentally, and what happens from one generation to the next. And I was interested in Gogol, but I was also interested in his parents and I wanted to write about them as well. And so I can't really imagine the book being from just one of their points of view.

Nancy Pearl:

In the stories that you've just finished in this collection of stories, are they stories that are going to be dealing with the same sense of dislocation or are they going to be more diverse than just that? I mean, Interpreter of Maladies was so diverse. There are so many different...

Jhumpa Lahiri:

Well, I think they're just the same... There are characters coming from more or less the same world and background, but I think *The Namesake* deals more overtly with the experience of arriving and settling down, whereas these new stories... And I think *Interpreter* too, but I think these new stories, I mean, I'm just trying to sort of follow a group of characters I have in my head and it's a very loosely defined, fuzzy notion of this group, but I'm just trying to follow them through the years and through the phases of their lives. And so right now, this book that I've just finished is also a lot about parents and children, but it's about children who are adults, that children who are both parents and children. I think another way of putting it is middle age, but that's the place that a lot of these stories are looking at.

Nancy Pearl:

Here's a question. Can you give us a sample of the differences, if any, in the reactions that Indians of your parents' generation and Indians of your generation have to your writing?

Jhumpa Lahiri:

Well, I think with *The Namesake*, because the book sort of straddles the two generations. So there was sort of the parental generation that felt that they understood that element of the story. And then there was the next generation that connected more deeply to that element of the story. But I think that ultimately, what's really been nice and interesting is that someone from the parents' generation will say, "I read your book and I finally understood what my kids were going through," and vice versa. So children will say, "I read this book and I finally started to understand or think about what my parents had gone through." So that's been really nice to hear that it's not just... And I think that's what a book can do. I mean, if you are bringing in different points of view and characters going through different experiences and playing them off one another, and then you see it all in the world of the book and that can be the effect is that you see the interplay in a way that maybe is harder to see in real life.

Nancy Pearl:

How do you know when something you write is done?

Jhumpa Lahiri:

Well, it's a feeling. I mean, it's nice to have an ending, so it's nice to... I mean, I think of everything I write, it's sort of like you go for a swim and you start at one side of the lake and you need to get to the other side. And you know when you're at the other side because you're on solid ground. And I think when you reach the end of the story... when I reach the end of a story, I feel on solid ground again because there isn't that suspension of the world of the story and the creating of it. And so I feel it. It's sort of an instinctive sense. But of course, it's helpful to have a beginning, middle, and end, and to read it over and to maybe show it to one or two people and actually have that confirmed.

And they'll say, "Yes. Actually, there is a beginning, middle, and end," just checking. And then I feel when I feel... I mean, it's a sort of satisfaction thing, when you feel satisfied that everything you've tried to put in is there. I think you have to let it go knowing that... I think I could have worked on everything I've ever written forever and gone crazy and never written another thing. So part of it is just a matter of

surviving as an artist and knowing that if you want to move and grow and learn and do other things in your artistic life, you have to conclude things and start new things.

Nancy Pearl:

Does Gogol still appear to you? I mean, are there things... Do you still have like a dialogue with Gogol?

Jhumpa Lahiri:

No, I don't really think about anything I've written after I've written it. I just shut the door and I work on something else.

Nancy Pearl:

Somebody... This is actually a lovely question. Do you realize how spiritually comforting your writing is?

Jhumpa Lahiri:

No, but thank you.

Nancy Pearl:

So what do you attribute that to?

Jhumpa Lahiri:

I can't say.

Nancy Pearl:

This person wants to know.

Jhumpa Lahiri:


I can't say.

Nancy Pearl:

Okay. There's several questions about how you feel about the movie, and there always are. And how do you feel about the movie?

Jhumpa Lahiri:

I feel... I've been telling this to people for a while now. I feel like a grandmother, and it's a nice feeling, and it's nice to have that. I mean, as a writer, I think we're always hungry to know what other people's experiences are like. And so now with the movie, I feel like I understand what it's like to be a grandparent more keenly than simply hanging out with my mother and father and watching them around my kids, because there is that sense of, "It's not my child, but it came from something I made,"



and I feel a sort of warm, prideful affection for the film. I really do. But I also feel kind of... I don't have that direct link, and I can go to bed at the end of the night and not worry about sending it to college in 20 years.

Nancy Pearl:

Getting it toilet trained and all of that.

Jhumpa Lahiri:

Yes. All of those things.

