

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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Mira Nair (1957 -)

Life

Mira Nair was born in the eastern Indian seaboard state of Orissa (Odisha) and grew up with her two brothers in the state capital of Bhubaneswar. Her father is an officer in the elite Indian Administrative Service, and her mother is a social worker. The family moved to New Delhi when Mira was young. She went to a missionary school in Simla, in the Himalayas, and also to Delhi University, where she studied sociology. She was offered a place at Cambridge University but chose instead to attend Harvard. While at Harvard, and only twenty, she met her first husband, Mitch Epstein. They divorced in 1987, after ten years of marriage. A year later, while doing research in Uganda for a film, she met and then married Mahmood Mamdani, a Ugandan political scientist with an Indian background. Both Mira Nair and her husband teach at Columbia University. They have one child, a son.

Her debut film in 1988, *Salaam Bombay*, was an instant box-office success and won many awards for its realistic depiction of street-children in Bombay. She achieved popular and critical acclaim for two other films (*Monsoon Wedding* in 2001 and *The Namesake* in 2006), although they tell very different stories. Mira Nair has always been a socially committed film-maker. From the profits of *Salaam Bombay*, she set up a charity for poor children in the city, and she also established an annual workshop for young film-makers in Uganda.

Achievements

Salaam Bombay won a string of awards in 1988, including at Cannes, Los Angeles, Montreal and New Delhi. In 1991, *Mississippi Masala* achieved a similar international reputation, winning awards at Venice, Sao Paulo and Tokyo. Her most prestigious achievement was winning the Golden Lion (Best Film) at Venice in 2001 for *Monsoon Wedding*. In 2012, the Indian government awarded her a Padma Bhushan in recognition of her achievements in cinema.

List of films

Queen of Katwe (2016)
The Reluctant Fundamentalist (2012)
Amelia (2009)
The Namesake (2006)
Vanity Fair (2004)
Monsoon Wedding (2001)
Kama Sutra: A Tale of Love (1996)
The Perez Family (1995)
Mississippi Masala (1991)
Salaam Bombay! (1988)