

# SHALOM BOLLYWOOD

## LOGLINE

SHALOM BOLLYWOOD: THE UNTOLD STORY OF INDIAN CINEMA tells the unlikely story of the 2000-year-old Indian Jewish community and its formative place in shaping the world's largest film industry.

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

SHALOM BOLLYWOOD reveals the unlikely story of the 2000-year-old Indian Jewish community and its formative place in shaping the world's largest film industry. When Indian cinema began 100 years ago it was taboo for Hindu and Islamic women to perform on screen, so Indian Jewish women took on female lead roles, which they dominated for decades. The film focuses on the lives of five of the great Jewish actors. Infused with music and dancing, the cheekily told documentary unabashedly oozes Bollywood as it uses film motifs to drive the narrative.

## LONG SYNOPSIS

SHALOM BOLLYWOOD: THE UNTOLD STORY OF INDIAN CINEMA is a feature length documentary celebrating the all singing, all dancing history of the world's largest film industry. It reveals the unlikely story of the 2000-year-old Indian Jewish community and its formative place in shaping the world's largest film industry.

When Indian cinema began 100 years ago it was taboo for Hindu and Islamic women to perform on screen, so Indian Jewish women took on female lead roles, which they then dominated for decades. However, because of their stage names people thought they were Muslims or Christians. Until now....

SHALOM BOLLYWOOD is a story told in a cheeky tone in a unique way. As a film about film, the documentary uses film motifs to drive its narrative as a stylistic part of the storytelling. For example, film archive is placed in old Indian style cinemas, there are animated storyboards, and the film is formally structured in three acts.

The documentary unabashedly oozes Bollywood as it makes the most of its Bollywood theme: the music rarely stops, and the archive shows Bollywood for all its splendor and glory, or kitsch and stereotypes depending on your perspective. From the origins of Indian cinema to the present, this is an epic tale, and guided by mellifluous narration, its intelligently told infused with lots of humour.

SHALOM BOLLYWOOD tells its tale through the lives of nice Jewish girls who became icons at the heart of Indian cinema from the turn of the 20th century to the present day. From the 1920s silent era we meet Sulochana (aka Ruby Myers), arguably the greatest ever female superstar of Indian cinema. In the 1930s there was Miss Rose (aka Rose Ezra) the Queen of the Bollywood's racy party scene, and in the 1940s Pramila (aka Esther Abraham) who became the country's first Miss India. Then, in the 1950s and 1960s golden era of Indian cinema, the quintessential Bollywood vamp Nadira (aka Farhat Ezekiel). All these actresses were household names in India and beyond.

While the Jewish stars are now deceased, they appear in the film through archive interview (Pramila only), through their films which are used as if it is home video, through animation of their stills, in specifically created storyboards, and with verbatim quotes read by actors as if in the first-person voice of the Jewish stars. Montage sequences from the Jewish stars' films provide a rare opportunity for viewers to familiarise themselves with their films.

In addition to extensive use of film archive and master, the film includes a treasure trove of never before seen stills from the personal collections of the now deceased Jewish stars. It includes information from unpublished autobiographies that have never been made public, and includes rare remastered films not seen for decades.

While a predominantly historical story, SHALOM BOLLYWOOD provides great access to Bollywood today as we see descendants of the Jewish stars who work in Indian cinema on film sets, in edit suites and at film launches. They include Bollywood editor Rachel Reuben and scriptwriter/actor Haider Ali, the respective granddaughter and son of Jewish cinematic legends Rose and Pramila. The film explores intergenerational themes of legacy. Rachel and Haider have a primary role in guiding us through the Jewish Bollywood story. Interviewees also include Bollywood A-lister Rishi Kapoor who personally knew and acted with some of the Jewish greats.

The film has uplifting and moving moments as we follow the high and lows in the careers and personal lives of the great Jewish stars. We see the often-tumultuous lives, the romance, the peaks and troughs, the parties, the fortunes made and lost, and the challenges they face as youth gives way to age. Once their renowned beauty fades, so did their careers: some emigrated, while others ended their days in loneliness and poverty.

The film also shines a light on the Jewish identity of the Jewish stars and its place in the wider cultural mix that is India. The film takes viewers on a journey into Jewish India and Indian society, the former is told in a specific sequence and the latter with colourful montages of the diverse Indian landscapes at key moments in the storytelling. SHALOM BOLLYWOOD is also a story of interfaith harmony and coexistence as we see how Jews, Hindus, Muslims and others coexisted and shared a common love of filmmaking – a poignant tale of coexistence.

SHALOM BOLLYWOOD - a documentary about kosher papadams, over the top costumes, religious co-existence, the odd elephant, big screen romance and 12 million cinema tickets.