

Focus on Film

Documentary

# Shalom Bollywood

Monday, May 13, 2019 @ 4:00 p.m.

**Director: Danny Ben-Moshe, 2017 Australia**  
**Running time: 76 minutes, English**

When Indian cinema began over a 100 years ago, it was taboo for Hindu and Muslim women to perform in public. So, who were those stars lighting up the silver screen in that era?

This new documentary, *Shalom Bollywood: The Untold Story of Indian Cinema* reveals that Indian Jewish women took on those female lead roles, which they dominated for decades. Who knew that Jewish actresses dominated Indian movies for the first decades of its 100-year history?

This unlikely story of the 2,000-year-old Indian Jewish community and its formative place in shaping one of the world's largest film industries recounts how, in the silent era, Hindu and Muslim women in India refused to appear in the new medium of movies and as a consequence female roles were played by men. This unhappy state of affairs was ingeniously remedied by women from India's small Jewish community who faced no great cultural taboos about performing in public. Products of the Baghdadi Jewish and India's Bene Israel

communities, these women rose from obscurity to become national celebrities.

This lively, audience-friendly documentary, directed by one of Australia's leading documentary filmmakers, Danny Ben-Moshe, focuses on the lives of five great Jewish actors who performed under exotic pseudonyms. One of them, Esther Abraham, known as Pramila, became the first Miss India in 1947.

Infused with music and dancing, the film uses archival footage, animation, and interviews with descendants of the actors. One of the film's main themes, in fact, is India's cultural diversity and the lack of anti-Semitism the stars encountered. Following its world premiere at Mumbai, it is already booked for command performances at Indian and Jewish-themed festivals worldwide.

***Reviewed by Jose and Noemi Mirkin  
(with excerpts from India West and  
The Hollywood Reporter)***

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