

# REVIEW

## Take One

### Bollywood Bound

2002 86m prod NFB, exp Louise Lore, p Karen King-Chigbo, d Nisha Pahuja, ph Ali Kazimi, ed Steve Weslak, sr P.M. Satheesh, s ed Ed Douglas; with Neeru Bajwa, Ruby Bhatia, Vikram Dhillon, Vekeana Dhillon.

Ruby Bhatia from Ajax, Ontario, is a beautiful and popular host on Star TV, India's largest satellite network. She's also the central focus of this NFB feature documentary about the phenomena of Indian-Canadian youth returning to Bombay hoping for a break in the largest moviemaking centre of the world. Neophyte director Nisha Pahuja, along with experienced cinematographer Ali Kazimi (*Shooting Indians*) follows the former Miss India-Canada of 1993 as she returns home to Ajax after hosting an Indian revue at the Nassau Colosseum in Long Island, New York. As successful as she is in her adopted country, Ruby reflects that she wants to be taken seriously and work for CNN or become the Oprah Winfrey of India. She also articulates the film's central thesis: in Canada she was seen as exotic but not Canadian, only available for bit parts in film and television, which, she felt, was limiting her career options. Ironically, she is hugely successful in India precisely because she is Canadian and not Indian, and her star status is based on her exotic "otherness." Torn between two worlds, she confesses that whatever she is, it's all an act, whether it be the good and dutiful daughter from small-town Ontario or the television diva in India's bustling Bombay – both are parts to be played for the camera.

Pahuja balances her evident success with three other stories of Ruby wannabees. Neeru Bajwa, a high-school drop out from Vancouver, who never felt accepted by her fellow Canadian students, packs her bags and heads for Bombay on the flimsiest promise of a screen test from a producer she has never met. Bajwa, a pretty and accomplished dancer, has had Bollywood dreams since her childhood and is convinced she can be a big star if she can only get that elusive screen test. Vikram Dhillon is a handsome leading-man type with big dreams and an even bigger ego. To help him pursue his single-minded ambition of making it in the movies, his family gave up their fish and chip shop while he and his father spent four years back in India waiting for the big break. Dhillon still seems confident, but he hasn't had much luck and spends most of his time running around Bombay chasing down agents, angling for a reading or an audition. This spoiled young man talks of being a great actor, but in reality only wants to be another vacuous movie star with all the material trappings of success. It's Vekeana, his more practical sister, who manages to secure a job as an VJ on a cable television station, thus providing the money necessary for a life-saving operation required by their mother.

Pahuja mixes these four stories with plenty of outtakes from actual Bollywood films and footage shot on the streets of Bombay. But without a clear throughline, the stories become muddled and it's hard to keep focus on who's who and



Vekeana Dhillon

what's happening in any one particular scene. Cutting back and forth between what a character is saying and footage from an actual film confuses the viewer as to what is real and what is not. Although the cinematography is lush, reflecting expensive location shooting, and the subject matter interesting – even if the subjects themselves seem rather shallow or hopelessly naive – the overall effect is amateurish and the central point is made too early in the film. The rest seems so much clever filler, like the final image of all four on a made-up poster for the film *Bollywood Bound*. The film drags at 86 minutes and becomes repetitious. The actors, apart from the radiant Ruby, are simply not yet ready for prime time.

Paul Townend

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