



## Srinivas Krishna

# MY NAME IS RAJ

In the project *My Name is Raj* acclaimed film director Srinivas Krishna pays homage to the 1950s Indian cinema icon, Raj Kapoor. Krishna combines a photographic exhibition with film screenings and a participatory installation, creating a layered experience that offers vicarious celebrity moments alongside a deeper anthropological reflection of cinematic history, studio photography and social aspiration in mid-20th century India.

By way of introduction a wall of photographic portraits from mid-20th century India, sourced by Krishna, highlights the artifice employed by both photographer and sitter. Noah Cowan, Artistic Director Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) – Bell Lightbox, suggests these photographs show how in a newly independent India ‘members of the burgeoning Delhi and Bombay middle classes sought to impress friends, potential employers or a possible bride’s parents by having photos taken of themselves garbed as doctors, lawyers or other respected professionals; the photo studio, in effect, becomes a place to assume a new possible persona’.

Krishna recognised that such social conscience informed Raj Kapoor’s films providing as they did an escape into ‘multiple possibilities of being’. His grand and melodramatic stories and romantic tales proved influential to Bollywood. Kapoor has been celebrated for his cinematic inclusiveness and expansiveness and the

impact he had on Indian cinema. Cowan, who programmed a retrospective of Raj Kapoor films for TIFF, has explained that Kapoor

---

digested influences from everywhere, from Hollywood, from Russia, from other cultural ideas in India, really energetically forming a new pathway in terms of how cinema is made and how long films are.

---

In his research, Krishna also astutely observed Raj Kapoor’s cameo roles within his own films and how the director-turned-actor would always declare his name. It proves a clever and insightful cue in the realisation of *My Name is Raj*, where contemporary audiences are encouraged to have their own photograph taken for digital insertion into frames from Raj Kapoor’s films *Awaara* of 1951 and *Shree 420* of 1955.

From a celebrated Canadian filmmaker of Indian heritage – who has been lauded for his first feature *Masala* of 1993 and subsequently a successful and awarded career across the genres of documentary, television and photography – *My Name is Raj* is an especially smart tribute to Bollywood and to Kapoor. It provokes a rich understanding of cinematic history as a legacy to Kapoor and also taps into an enduring global desire to live life differently, especially today in a world where media and notions of celebrity proliferate. Film star cache might still hold its charm yet the concept of celebrity and social stature or fame is rather more deluded or blurred.

Photoshop and social media have shifted image making and distribution, and although digital manipulation is at the heart of *My Name is Raj*, the comprehensiveness of Krishna’s vision ensures fun through education and engagement.

Originally commissioned by Luminato and Toronto International Film Festival, this is first presentation of *My Name is Raj* in Australia.

**Margaret Moore**

---

