

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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YAHUDI / Jew (1954)

Bimal Roy

OVERVIEW

Auteur Bimal Roy (1909-1966) is an acclaimed Indian filmmaker who grew up in present-day Bangladesh and moved to the state of Bengal in India after independence from Britain. He is the director of award-winning films such as *Two Acres of Land*, *Parineeta*, and *Bandini*. Although he leans towards themes of social realism in his films, he displays his ability to expand and adapt to different genres in *Jew (Yahudi)*.

Film *Jew (Yahudi)* is a Hindi-language Bollywood film addressing the persecution of Jews in Rome. Unlike the other films directed by Bimal Roy, *Jew* is a costumed period drama. It is based on an Urdu-language play, *The Jew's Daughter (Yahudi Ki Ladiki)*, written by Agha Hashar Kashmiri in 1913. Bimal Roy's adaptation is not the first screen adaptation of the play. Nonetheless, his star cast, consisting of stalwart actors such as Dilip Kumar (Marcus), Meena Kumari (Hannah/Lydia), and Sohrab Modi (Ezra), assured public attention and enjoyed profitable success at the box office when the film was released.

Background While the film features songs with social messages that aid plot development, there are songs intended for entertainment in this film. These songs feature a wide cast of singers, dancers, and musicians in bright glittery costumes. As such, both Roman royalty and Jewish commoners enjoy extensive access to performances by dancing girls. Bimal Roy faithfully captures the notion of live entertainment in historical times when television and radio technology were unknown. Simultaneously, he used these interludes to blend eastern and western entertainment styles. The dancing girls and dance routines convey the distinct style of Indian Bollywood movies, signaled by their vibrant costumes and whirling dance moves.

CHARACTERS

Ezra	Elijah's father, a Jewish jeweler
Elijah	Ezra's son, sentenced to death by Brutus
Emmanuel	Elijah's caretaker
Hannah/Lydia	Ezra's daughter Hannah, who was originally Brutus' daughter Lydia
Ruth	Hannah's maidservant
Brutus	the Roman governor, who hates Jews and oppresses them
Emperor	The emperor of Rome
Marcus/Monshija	The emperor's son; a prince and future emperor
Octavia	Brutus' niece; betrothed to Marcus
Antonio	Octavia's brother

SYNOPSIS

Ezra and his young son Elijah are Jews living in Rome at a time when Jews were persecuted minorities. An altercation with Governor Brutus results in Elijah's death. In retaliation, Ezra kidnaps Brutus' daughter Lydia, who then becomes Ezra's daughter, Hannah. Years later, Ezra returns as a prosperous jeweler with his now grown-up daughter, Hannah. When Rome's heir apparent, Prince Marcus, suffers a carriage accident, Hannah helps him without knowing who he really is. Unable to forget Hannah, Marcus dresses up as a Jew named Monshija and gets acquainted with Ezra and Hannah. The arrival of the Roman emperor, Marcus' father, poses obstacles to the budding love between Hannah and Monshija. The emperor urges Marcus to marry soon and start learning statecraft. Marcus feels torn between his duty to Rome and his secret love for Hannah. When Ezra discovers that Monshija is a Roman, he forbids marriage between him and Hannah. At Marcus and Octavia's wedding, Hannah realizes that Monshija is Prince Marcus. Unwilling to let Monshija escape the punishment for his deception, she demands justice from the Roman emperor for a Roman crime of breaking a marital promise. When Marcus admits to the

crime, the emperor forces Brutus to sentence Marcus to die. Unable to watch her lover die, Hannah retracts her accusation. Governor Brutus revokes Marcus' death sentence but refuses to exonerate Hannah and Ezra. Knowing that they are Jews, he sentences them to die in a vat of boiling oil for the crime of spreading false information about Roman royalty. Marcus blinds himself in order that he not see his lover's death. Before the sentence is carried out, Ezra reveals the truth that Hannah is Lydia, Brutus' long-lost daughter. A shocked Hannah escapes and runs into Marcus. The two reconcile and decide to run away to a future where their love is powerful enough to overcome religious differences.

PLOT

Father and son Ezra is a jeweler and an adoring father. His son, Elijah, loves to play in the streets. Amidst his play, Elijah accidentally wounds the Roman governor Brutus. As a Roman who supports the persecution of Jews, Brutus takes the opportunity to attack the Jews. He sentences Elijah to be thrown to the lions.



Elijah's death Before the sentence is carried out, Ezra begs for mercy from Brutus. Ezra entreats Brutus' daughter, Lydia, to intercede with her father for Elijah. Moved by Lydia's request, Brutus agrees to free Elijah but secretly signals to carry out his original order. Accordingly, Elijah is thrown to the lions and killed.



Lydia becomes Hannah That evening, Ezra's manservant, Emmanuel, kidnaps Brutus' daughter Lydia in revenge. Hearing Lydia's frightened, "Papa!" Ezra decides to spare her life and adopt her as his own daughter. He declares, "I have found my Elijah again." Brutus orders the Roman guards to find the missing Lydia and authorizes them to punish and oppress Jews. Ezra chooses to leave the town to escape Roman persecution and prevent Lydia from being discovered.



Ezra's daughter Hannah Ezra and his now grown-up daughter return after many years. Ezra has gotten older and more prosperous over the years. Hannah is a beautiful and kind young woman who adores her father, Ezra. She calls him her father and does not remember that her birth father is Brutus.



ROMAN MARCUS LIVES AMONG JEWS

Accidental meeting Prince Marcus, the heir apparent to Rome's throne, is a dashing young man who enjoys horse carriage racing. During one such race, he suffers an accident and falls to the side of the road. When Hannah happens on the scene, she is unwilling to walk past without caring for the injured man, despite realizing that he is a Roman. Marcus recovers from his accident but appears to be absent-minded. He shows no interest in his betrothed, Princess Octavia. Marcus meets her attempts to engage him in a conversation and cheer him up with invitations to upcoming social gatherings with indifference. She notices Marcus' reticence and orders her brother Antonio to find out what is bothering Marcus.



Marcus rescues Hannah Marcus cannot forget the young Jewish woman who cared for him. He dresses up as a Jew, escapes the palace to the Jewish quarter, and tries to meet her again. Marcus spots her in the middle of an altercation with a Roman guard. In the ensuing sword fight, Marcus triumphs and rescues her. She extends gratitude towards him and introduces herself as Hannah.



Marcus becomes Monshija Hannah invites her rescuer to visit her home and meet her father, Ezra. When Ezra thanks Marcus, he brushes it off, saying, "It is the duty of one Jew to help another Jew." He introduces himself as Monshija, a jeweler from Alexandria. When Monshija asks Ezra to take him on as an apprentice, Ezra insists on treating Monshija as a son. Over regular visits, Marcus, dressed as Monshija, becomes a familiar figure in Ezra's household. Romance blossoms between Monshija and Hannah. She falls deeply in love with Monshija and sings a song about her feelings Her maidservants join her in singing and celebrate the happiness of their love.



Hannah learns the truth that Monshija is not a Jew. At a Jewish feast that Monshija is roped into attending, Hannah observes him secretly discarding a ceremonial piece of bread that signifies one's belonging and commitment to the Jewish faith and community. Soon after, an uncomfortable Monshija slips away from the feast. Hannah follows and questions him. Instead of answering immediately, Monshija begs Hannah to meet him at night. When Hannah manages to sneak out to meet him, she asks her burning question: "Are you a Jew or a Roman?" He answers cryptically, saying that his answer would unleash hatred between them. In desperation, she begs him to confirm that he is not a Roman. Unable to lie any longer, Monshija admits to Hannah that he is a Roman. Ezra, who had followed behind Hannah, overhears the truth. Hannah cries bitterly about the injustice of Monshija's lies and her impossible love. However, Monshija refuses to apologize for his deception. Instead, he begs Hannah to accept his sincere heart and not stumble at his Roman identity. Unwilling to let him go, she agrees to run away with him.



Ezra learns the truth that Monshija is not a Jew. Angered by the truth, Ezra aims a knife at Monshija. Hannah intervenes and begs her father to put the weapon down. Meanwhile, Monshija entreats Ezra to look past his religious zeal and empathize with love. Reluctantly, Ezra agrees to permit Monshija and Hannah's marriage on the condition that Monshija embraces Judaism. When Monshija refuses, Ezra orders him to leave and never return.



MARCUS RETURNS TO ROMANS

The Emperor arrives The emperor of Rome, Marcus' father, arrives to check on his son. He hopes to see Marcus and Octavia married soon. When he meets Marcus, he reminds him of his duties to Rome and his upcoming nuptials.



Mounting pressures As Marcus walks down the aisle with statues of Roman forefathers on either side, he hears them ordering him to abide by his duties to his ancestors and discard his love for a Jewish woman. His father arrives on the scene and impatiently informs him that his engagement with Octavia and their marriage will be announced to the public on the morrow.



LOVERS' SEPARATION AND SUFFERING

Marcus suffers The pain of Hannah's choice causes Marcus to drown his sorrows in alcohol. Knowing the source of his pain, Octavia reasons that his duty to Rome as prince and heir apparent must come before his personal desires and happiness. Despite the riches and unlimited power, Marcus feels trapped in his role as the future Roman emperor. Instead, he longs for the freedom and simplicity of life with his love, Hannah.



Hannah suffers Meanwhile, Hannah sits by the pond in her backyard and tearfully sings about her lost love and heartbreak. Seeing Hannah's tears, Ezra comforts her by saying that the Roman does not deserve her tears. He urges her to use courage to overcome sorrow.



Hannah accuses Marcus Standing among the assembled public at Marcus and Octavia's wedding, Hannah finally realizes that Monshija is Prince Marcus and is outraged by his deception. Disrupting the marriage ceremony, Hannah demands justice according to Roman law for her broken betrothal. Shocking everyone, she identifies Marcus as the perpetrator. Despite Brutus' attempts to dismiss the case of a lowly Jewess, the emperor insists on conducting a fair trial. When questioned by the emperor, Marcus admits to everything.



Hannah retracts her accusation to save Marcus. That night, Octavia visits Hannah secretly and informs her that Marcus has been sentenced to die for his crimes. She begs Hannah to withdraw her case and save Marcus. Unwilling to cause Marcus' death, Hannah agrees and drops her charges against him.



Punishment for Hannah and Ezra. Brutus declares Marcus not guilty. However, for the crime of wrongly accusing and maligning the Roman royal family, Brutus sentences Hannah and Ezra to death in a vat of boiling oil. When Marcus attempts to intercede on their behalf, Brutus orders Marcus to witness their death.



Brutis learns the truth about his daughter When the prisoners, Hannah and Ezra, are brought out, Ezra begs Brutus to let Hannah go. Brutus scathingly replies that he would pardon both if they would renounce their Jewish faith and embrace the Roman faith. Ezra rejects Brutus' offer and expresses disgust at Brutus' corruption and hatred towards Jews. He wishes to bring Brutus to his knees and have him experience the same misery he has imposed on Jewish subjects. Ezra mentions Brutus' long-lost daughter, Lydia, claiming to know her whereabouts. Finally, proud Brutus falls to his knees and begs Ezra to tell him where Lydia is. Laughing in the face of Brutus' pleas, Ezra asks why he should show mercy to unjust Romans who have never been merciful or kind towards Jews. Finally, Ezra offers to reveal Lydia's whereabouts on the condition that Hannah would be killed immediately after his answer. In desperation, Brutus readily agrees. However, when Ezra reveals Hannah to be Lydia, Brutus changes his mind and is unwilling to carry out the death sentence. Although Ezra laughs in Brutus' face, mocking his corrupt and unjust practices, the mounting distress ultimately causes Ezra's death.



Marcus becomes blind

The barbaric death sentence awaiting Hannah and Ezra drives Marcus to seek his own death. When Marcus begs for poison from Antonio, he refuses to allow Marcus' suicide. In desperation, Marcus blinds himself to make it impossible to see his lover's death. The now-blinded Marcus begs Antonio for one last meeting with Hannah.

**Lovers are reunited**

Shocked by Ezra's death and the truth about her birth father, Hannah runs out in panic. By chance, Marcus stumbles into her path. Hannah realizes that Marcus has blinded himself. Pained by Marcus' actions that prove his ultimate sincerity, Hannah begs him to take her back. They see the new dawn and walk towards it, to a fresh start without hatred and hypocrisy.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Ezra Ezra is a Jewish merchant and a devoted father. His unbiased care and affection are evident in his upbringing of Hannah, originally a Roman and Ezra's enemy's daughter. Despite living through the Roman persecution of the Jews, he is unafraid to express his Jewish faith and follow religious customs openly. His sense of right and wrong are rooted in his Jewish faith. He often advises those around him to show mercy because God is watching from above.

Merciful Ezra demonstrates mercy when he refuses to take revenge on Brutus's daughter, Lydia. Despite Brutus' hateful act of sentencing Ezra's son Elijah to be thrown to the lions, he rejects Emmanuel's revenge plot on Lydia's life. In other words, he refuses to avenge his son's death by killing Lydia. Instead, Ezra adopts Lydia as his own child and brings her up lovingly. The close relationship between Ezra and Hannah shows that he never held Hannah responsible for her father's wrongdoings.

Unforgiving As a god-fearing Jew, Ezra's sense of right and wrong could not accept the Romans' oppression of Jews. He believed that all are equally deserving of mercy and kindness. Although Ezra is capable of mercy, he can never let go of the injustices he suffered as a Jew, especially at the hands of Brutus. Poisoned by Brutus' cruelty, he could not accept Marcus' Roman identity. Therefore, Ezra fails to see Marcus' sincerity towards Hannah. He causes the lovers to break apart because he is unwilling to give Marcus a chance to prove himself.

Brutus Brutus is the local Roman governor whose administration is defined by his persecution of Jews. He fails his subjects in ensuring justice and fairness to all. He earns the hatred of his Jewish subjects by punishing them with disproportionately heavy punishments. Brutus' daughter, Lydia, is the only redeeming aspect of his character. Only Lydia has access to his kind and warm qualities. When he loses Lydia, his bias causes him to suspect the Jews. Consequently, he authorizes heavier sanctions on the Jews to appease his loss.

Hateful The brunt of Brutus' hatred is evident in his dealings with Ezra. When Brutus sentences Ezra's son to death, Ezra begs Brutus to spare Elijah's life. Although he acts mercifully on the outside, he tricks Ezra and carries out the death sentence by killing Elijah.

Tyrant As the highest local authority, Brutus never hesitates to use his authority to oppress his subjects. His biased attitude towards the Jews enables the Roman guards to follow his example in needlessly persecuting Jews. Brutus' tyranny is especially evident in cases involving both Jews and Romans. For example, when Prince Marcus admits to Hannah's accusations, Brutus tries to twist the law in Marcus' favor and throw out Hannah's accusations just because Marcus is a Roman and Hannah is a Jewess.

Prince Marcus As the heir apparent to the Roman throne, Marcus is forced to reckon with the pressure of a political career for which he has been groomed since childhood. As a result, he longs for the freedom of a common man. After Marcus becomes Monshija and gets close to Hannah, he experiences a slice of the life he really wants. Therefore, he does not hesitate to grab when the opportunity presents itself at the film's end.

Sincere Prince Marcus expresses sincerity in his love for Hannah. When Hannah brings charges against Marcus in front of Brutus and the emperor, he does not use his privilege as Roman royalty to escape the charges and the rightful punishment. Despite Marcus' unhappiness regarding the future planned for him, he tries his best to be respectful and obedient to his father's wishes.

Purposeful Prince Marcus is a decisive man who stands by his choices and does not hesitate, even in the face of threats. When Ezra discovers the truth regarding Marcus' Roman identity and threatens him at knife-point, Marcus does not hesitate to stand by his beliefs. He boldly declares his Roman identity and believes that his love for Hannah is strong enough to overcome their religious differences.

Hannah/Lydia As a child, Lydia was the only person who could elicit mercy and goodness from her father, Brutus. She retains the same noble character as Hannah, Ezra's Jewish daughter. She falls in love with Marcus because of his courage and passion for life.

Humble Despite being a wealthy jeweller's daughter with many maidservants waiting on her, Hannah remains gentle and humble throughout the film. She is respectful towards Ezra and cares deeply about his opinions. When she spots an injured Marcus on the road, she goes to help him despite knowing that he is Roman.

Brave Although Hannah experiences moments of uncertainty, she acts bravely in the face of cruelty and does not back down. When Hannah realizes that Monshija is Prince Marcus at his wedding with princess Octavia, she does not hesitate to call out his unprincipled behavior and demand justice. At the film's end, she boldly chooses to run away with Marcus and start life anew for the sake of their abiding love.

The Roman Emperor The Roman emperor is Marcus' father and is constantly conscious of his duties and responsibilities to his subjects. However, his interactions with Marcus are stilted and lack father-son warmth because he demands absolute obedience from his son like he would expect of any other subject in his realm.

Impartial The emperor's most distinct quality is his ability to be impartial toward all his subjects, even his own son, Marcus. In fact, Marcus is held to higher standards because he is the emperor's son. After Marcus meets Hannah, he appears distracted and irresponsible because he constantly juggles his dual identities as Prince Marcus and Monshija, a Jew. The emperor notes Marcus' apathy and orders him to take his duties and responsibilities seriously. When Hannah brings charges against Marcus, he strives to uphold justice for her, despite her being a Jew and his son a prince.

Octavia Octavia is Brutus' niece. Since childhood she has been groomed to become a royal lady who would marry Marcus and become the empress of Rome. She faithfully follows her assigned role and tries her best to convince Marcus to do the same.

Dutiful Octavia's life is tied to three powerful men in the story: Marcus, Brutus, and the Roman emperor. Despite the pressure of responsibilities thrust on her shoulders, she never loses her sense of duty. She is invested in her role as the future empress of Rome and tries her best to be accommodating to Marcus, even when he breaks her heart by being dismissive and unfaithful.

THEMES

Religious persecution The religious difference between Romans and Jews plays a central role in the film's plot development. The film brings attention to the waves of anti-semitic movements in different places and historical eras. Although the story unfolds in Rome, the story acknowledges the Jewish migrants who had sailed to India in previous centuries to evade religious persecution in other lands. Furthermore, the on-screen representation of religious persecution is a nod to the long-existing Hindu-Muslim clashes in India.

Roman oppression of the Jews strains the groups' interaction. Roman guards take liberties with Jewish shopkeepers in the Jewish quarters and do not hesitate to use force to oppress their victims. As the Jews are powerless, they resort to snide comments and underhanded methods to retaliate against the Romans. After Brutus' daughter, Lydia, goes missing, he vents his anger by persecuting the entire Jewish community. The song "What life is this" (Yeh Duniya Yeh Duniya), sung by Ezra, describes scenes from the resulting hard times experienced by the Jews. Furthermore, the enmity between Brutus and Ezra is an offshoot of their religious differences. Ultimately, it harms their loved ones and perpetuates the cycle of hatred.

Loyalty The religious differences between the Romans and Jews place obligations on individual members of the two communities and take a toll on Marcus and Hannah's love. When their families discover their love, they use degrees of gentle prodding and force to dissuade them

against the union. As a result, Marcus and Hannah feel conflicted about their loyalties. Marcus feels the pull of his duty to Rome, his father, and Octavia (his betrothed) working against his sincere love for Hannah. Likewise, Hannah feels the pull of her Jewish upbringing and her love for her father working against her pure love for Marcus. Romantic love and family loyalty take mutually exclusive sides in this film. While loyalty demands abandoning love, love demands abandoning one's loyalty to the state, community, and family. Unsurprisingly, Hannah's and Marcus's initial reaction is to choose their family and community loyalties over each other. Unfortunately, the choice leaves them miserable and results in disastrous consequences for each. Subsequently, and in the film's final scene, they choose love and escape to a faraway land.

Romantic Love The romantic love between Marcus and Hannah becomes an impossible tragic love because of the enmity between the Romans and the Jews. Nevertheless, the resulting love symbolizes resilience and hope amidst the horror of religious persecution. Since both sides oppose Marcus and Hannah's mutual love, undue pressure is placed on the young people to defend their love against their friends, family, and the community's collective hypocrisy and hatred. Ultimately, the triumph of Marcus and Hannah's romantic love allows the heartbreaking story to have a cathartic ending, hinting good tidings in the future.

Fatherly Love The film pays homage to fatherly love through two loving yet fiercely protective fathers: Brutus and Ezra. The absence of mothers emphasizes the fathers' presence and impact on their children's lives. As an autocratic leader, Brutus is seen as a tyrant by all, especially the Jews. The only exception to Brutus' brutality is his treatment of his daughter, Lydia. He expresses his love by being fiercely protective of her. On the other hand, Ezra also expresses fierce love toward his son, Elijah, and then toward his adopted daughter, Hannah. When Brutus sentences Elijah to death, Ezra does not hesitate to beg on his knees for mercy. Similarly, when he realizes that Hannah is heartbroken by Marcus' deception, he takes a knife to Marcus' throat. Only Hannah's intercession saves Marcus' life.

Justice / Punishment The Romans' religious persecution of the Jews corroded the judicial system, making the Jews vulnerable to excessive criminal charges and heavy punishments. The film's opening scene, which shows Elijah's tragic death in the jaws of lions for the crime of throwing stones, demonstrates this unfairness. Likewise, when Hannah drops the charges brought against Marcus, Brutus remains adamant about punishing her and Ezra. He uses the opportunity to put the Jews in their place and establish Roman overlordship. Accordingly, he sentences them to death in vats of boiling oil for the crime of maligning the royal family's name and honor.

Duty All the characters in the film carry a strong sense of duty. Marcus' firm sense of duty to Rome clashes with his desire for a simple life with the love. Marcus' inner conflict adversely affects Octavia because of their betrothal. Octavia chooses to fulfill her duty to Rome by marrying Marcus and becoming empress. She is forced to sacrifice her need for a loving and devoted husband because of her duty to Rome. Like Marcus, Hannah also experiences an inner conflict because she falls in love with a Roman. When Marcus and Ezra demand that she make a choice between the two, she chooses Ezra out of a sense of duty to her parent. She placed the duties of a daughter and a faithful Jew above her personal happiness.

Revenge The enmity between Brutus and Ezra sets off a cycle of endless revenge-seeking. When Brutus orders the death of Ezra's son for the crime of throwing stones, Ezra retaliates by kidnapping Brutus' daughter. Although Ezra genuinely cares for Brutus' daughter and brings her up with care and love, he cannot fully let go of the past and Brutus' cruelty. Therefore, when Ezra's and Hannah's death sentence is about to be carried out, Ezra reveals the truth that Hannah is Lydia, Brutus' long-lost daughter. He dares Brutus to uphold justice fairly and carry out Hannah's death sentence, despite knowing she is Lydia. Forcing Brutus to kill his own offspring knowingly is Ezra's ultimate revenge on Brutus.

Fate The film's plot explores the role of fate in human lives. From their first accidental meeting, Hannah and Marcus' romance is a fateful one. Like Romeo and Juliet in Shakespeare's play, Marcus and Hannah's love is an impossible love that continually faces challenges

because of their identities as Roman and Jew. Consequently, Marcus' hidden identity becomes harder to maintain. When Octavia's carriage suffers a mishap in the Jewish quarters, she is forced to seek help at Ezra's house. Despite Marcus' efforts to hide his Roman identity, Octavia's arrival almost blows his hidden identity. Likewise, Brutus' evil schemes backfire, despite his best efforts to harm Jews and favor the Romans. Brutus almost sentences his own daughter to death because of mistaken identity.

Appearance vs. Reality / Disguise

Deliberate and unconscious disguises greatly impact the film's plot development. After kidnapping and adopting Brutus' daughter, Ezra renames her Hannah and never tells the truth about her parentage. Consequently, a daughter from a Roman royal family grows up as a Jew. When the truth is revealed, the plot turns chaotic. Brutus suffers the horror of knowing that he almost killed his own daughter, and Hannah flees the scene in sorrow and distress. Although Marcus deliberately chose his disguise as Monshija, the unveiling moment is equally dramatic. Ezra threatens to kill Marcus for deceiving them. When Hannah calls out Marcus as Monshija in the presence of the Roman emperor, a great shock goes through the crowd. A Roman stooping to become a Jew is scandalous.