

PRESS RELEASE

*A notable short film on Kamahl a modern Australian Life in Australia
Against All Odds*



DIRECTED BY
IQBAL RIZVI

PRODUCED BY
RAJIV CHAUDHRI

SCREENPLAY BY
BRIAN STODDART

Against all odds

The Kamahl Story focussing on his journey of overcoming challenges

Kandiah Kamalesvaran's story is a touchstone to the evolution of multicultural Australia with all its strengths and challenges.

Born in 1930s British Malaya, he grew up in Kuala Lumpur's Brickfields section, the heartland of the country's Indian and Sri Lankan Tamil community that sprang from the indentured labour system underpinning the rubber, sugar and palm oil industries.

In 1953, at the height of the Communist "emergency", his family pooled resources to send him to Adelaide, an early version starter in what became a major Malaysian international student flow to Australia. Born into a musical family, he was more interested in singing than studying, so became a feature in the city's restaurants and halls as he adapted to language, food, dress, lifestyle, attitudes and prejudices.

An early break had him heard by newspaper baron Rupert Murdoch who arranged a gig for him at the Australia Hotel in Sydney, and that set the life story in motion.

It also began the cultural story. By then, Australia's postwar migration rush was dominated by southern Europeans, the country still in thrall to a White Australia Policy that had kept Asians and people of colour out since 1901 and survived until 1973.

When Kandiah Kamalesvaran arrived in Australia, then, "Asians" accounted for approximately 0.21% of the total population – he was in a distinct and noticeable minority that has since grown to around 18%.

He was soon in demand, though, but his name was "impossible" so he came up with "Kamal" – the classic Australian trick of shortening a name into less challenging form. But with that inevitably pronounced as "camel," he introduced the 'h' and Kamahl it was.

From that point, Kamahl's story has mirrored that of Asian migrants to Australia as a whole, and the evolution of multicultural Australia itself – the balance between opportunity and challenge, the search for belonging, the need for inclusion, the striving for equality and recognition, and the need to be more than the "Other."

This film produced by Rajiv Chaudhri, directed by Iqbaal Rizzvi and written by Brian Stoddart traces the highs and lows experienced by Kamahl over seventy years, and sets them in that broader story to help explain the changing of Australia.

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