

Reflections on Raj Kapoor

by Kamla Mankekar

In terms of box office earnings, Raj Kapoor's films were the most successful of the times. Nevertheless, he would always remember and narrate his humble beginnings in the industry and the years of hard work he put in to reach the top.

Raj launched himself in his career in cinema in a low position and did not mind even having to sweep floors or shift furniture on the sets. For nearly a decade he was a clapper boy, trolley puller and errand runner, all rolled into one. But he utilised the period to learn the art of film making by watching directors, actors, make-up men, art directors and cameramen. He taught himself the technique of editing, the play of light and shadows and the effects of sound and music.

The legendary Raj-Nargis duo

Raj Kapoor believed that people identified themselves with the characters he created on the screen, characters that he drew from the everyday life. "As people write diaries, I write screenplays," he once stated. A stray incident, a chance remark, a flash of colour, an unusual sound... all got embedded in his mind and at some later time when the occasion offered itself, they got incorporated in his films.

The themes of Raj Kapoor's films were based on his interpretation of the world as he saw it as well as an ideal world that he dreamt of. He said his relationships — lived through his films and experienced love, romance, rejection — through them.

At the same time, to earn some extra money, he occasionally sought bit roles in films. A chance encounter with Kidar Sharma landed him the lead role in *Neel Kamal*. It was break he hardly needed, and the money he earned from the film, besides some other assignments, helped him launch his own production company in 1947.

R K Films' maiden venture, *Aag* (1948) saw the debut of Nargis as Raj's heroine. Money was scarce those days and he had to borrow from his cook to feed his unit. But the film, when released, set a new



trend of social romanticism in Indian cinema. A year later came *Barsaat* — a film woven around the story of young love which established Raj Kapoor as a sensitive film maker in full control over the medium. After two years, in 1951, came *Awara* — a landmark in Indian film making — it went on to make history beyond the national frontiers. The much-loved tramp — a take-off from the Charlie Chaplin persona — was introduced in *Awara* and repeated through several other films later.

According to Raj Kapoor, his was "a cinema born in an age of idealism" — the post-independence period enthus-

ing people to build a new India of their dreams. Thus, all his early films had a social purpose, even though they were made with an eye on the box-office. His overriding anxiety was to entertain first.

As an artiste, Raj Kapoor had his own fixations and one of these was his so-called "preoccupation" with the female anatomy. Barring probably Nargis, all his heroines had to undergo a certain degree of exposure for the benefit of the camera, often in shots with suggestive angles.

This unconventional approach attracted a great deal of criticism but Raj justified it by insisting that he was "a worshipper of feminine beauty".

He saw no vulgarity in the projection of the female form on screen or in nudity, per se. Occasional reports of his dalliances with his leading ladies made Raj Kapoor an "eternal lover" in the eyes of his fans. The most celebrated of these affairs was his romance with Nargis, his favourite heroine for more than a decade.

In a widely televised interview, Raj narrated his first meeting with Nargis: "I had gone to ask her to act in *Aag*. She was cooking, and as she answered the doorbell with flour stained hands, she pushed back her hair falling over her eyes. Her innocence and good looks dazzled me. It was love at first sight. I recreated that scene later with Dimple Kapadia and Rishi Kapoor in *Bobby*."

Long after their association, Raj Kapoor used to talk about the beauty, grace and sensitivity of Nargis: "She could generate in a person a certain spiritual power that could vitalise him to work and achieve anything!" Raj had also developed lasting relationships with his cinematographer Radhu Karmakar, playback singers Mukesh and Lata Mangeshkar, lyricist Shailendra, music composers Shankar-Jaikishan and story writer K A Abbas.

"Films are my life, my benediction, the very breath of my soul," said Raj Kapoor in his later years. "I have achieved what I wanted, to be nearer to the people and to dwell in their hearts."

Such statements were not without basis. For even 40 years after he had made *Awara*, truck drivers on the China-Tibet road were known to ask Indian travellers if they had seen the film and to sing its theme song. — PTI Feature

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Viewing Video

by Lenin Gani

GETTING Even With Dad is distinctly different from Macaulay Culkin's previous box office hit *Home Alone I & II*. Culkin plays the son of a reformed ex-convict (Ted Danson) who arrives unexpectedly one day at Danson's doorstep. Danson after serving time in prison works at a small pastry shop but he wants to change his miserable existence for a better one by stealing a set of valuable coins with the help of his friends. At the beginning Culkin is unaware what his father has done. But after stumbling upon some vital clues he uncovers the plot and decides to hide the coins. He then blackmails his father into spending a day visiting places (park, museum etc). Because Culkin wants Danson to make up for three years without a mother who died of cancer while Danson was in jail. Reluctantly, he complies with Culkin's demand otherwise Culkin won't give the location where the coins are. Gradually, however, as time passes by Danson's affection for Culkin grows stronger. And the

crunch comes when Danson has to make a choice between either the coins or Culkin. Danson is swayed by the adage 'Affection blinds reason' and so like the copybook fairy tale endings the two live together happily ever after.

How much trouble can a baby be? Not much I suppose. Wrong. The three stooges in *Baby's Day Out* certainly won't agree. This 1-1/2 hour classic slapstick follows the hilarious adventures of an abducted baby boy and his three kidnappers who demand a ransom of five million dollars from his wealthy parents. After escaping, our little hero decides to have some fun of his own by travelling on a bus and visiting a zoo where he befriends a gorilla. This gorilla incidentally saves him from the clutches of the kidnappers. In fact, each time the abductors can grab him the baby manages to slip through their fingers. I wouldn't be surprised if there was a second part in future.

Although *Brahama* is the only Hindi arrival this week, it's nice to see a selection of Bangla movies from Calcutta.

ENGLISH

NAME	TYPE	CAST
1. Getting Even With Dad	(Comedy)	Maculay Culkin/Ted Danson
2. Baby's Day Out	(Comedy)	Joe Mantegna/Laura Flynn Boyle/Joe Pantoliano
3. Flight From Hell	(Thriller)	Robert Loggia/Scott Bakula
4. The Broken Chain	(Action)	Erik Schweig/Pierce Brosnan
5. Dead On	(Rom/Thriller)	Matt McCoy/Tracy Scoggins
6. Chasers	(Comedy)	Tom Berenger/Eleniak
7. Clifford	(Comedy)	Martin Short/Charles Brodin/Mary Steenburgen
8. Hard Truth	(Action)	Erick Robert
9. Wrestle Fest '94	(Wrestling)	
10. Bret Hitman Hart	(Wrestling)	

HINDI

NAME	TYPE	CAST
1. Brahama Di: Subash Mus	(Rom)	Govinda/Ayesha Jhulka/Madhoo/Prem
2. Film Fair Collection Vol-17	(Hits from Mohra, 1942 A Chand Ka Tudka, Vijaypath)	

BANGLA

NAME	TYPE	CAST
1. Dushor Ghodhuly	(Social)	Pransanjit/Koyal
2. Bidrohini	(Social)	Tapas Pal/Indrani Haldar/Satabdi
3. Danga	(Social)	Chiranjeev/Sucharita

Source: Film Fair Video and other clubs.

Odyssey under the Seize of Siren

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(though) not ad hoc, to create a standard for Bengali literature and culture; the hills appealed more to him, than the pyramids.

Yet, imitators have only imitated. The educated next generation bred under the "shades of the Grey" could not go beyond Tagore. Despite all their efforts, they (the men like Buddho Dev Bose Bishnu Dey, Jibananda, Sharatchandra, Tarashankar and so on; while Manik Bondapaddhay magnified the lanterns on the Padma in his "Padma Nadir Majhi" only to calm the anxiety of Tagore's query, who detected the absence of Bangladesh in Bengali literature, which was at best a "college literature", but "where is the college itself?" rotated around his elliptical orbit. Yet, from the same cohort, Nazrul enlightened himself by the luminous path of Tagore, as he wrote condoling the death of Tagore: *Akasher Rabi kemone ashilo Banglar kunregare?* (How did

the 'Prince of sky' came down to the hut of Bengal?). The apparent reason is: the standard of the original mind goes directly, to nature, without intermediaries. In the words of Leonardo, "The painters would produce pictures of little merit if they take the works of others as their standard, but if they apply themselves to learn from the objects of nature they will produce good results." This we see was the case with the painters who came after the time of the Romans, for they continually imitated each other, and from age to age, their art steadily declined... it is safer to go direct to the works of nature than to those which have been imitated from her originals with great determination and thereby to acquire a bad method. And the colonial educators delight their courteous heart by the calling: Come some music, come the recorder.

Until then, on our educational institutions which breed unemployment, risking enor-

mous burden of national debt, inspired by the "banana backbone of the nation", one sore note would perhaps continue to slash its tongue for blood: "Their own bodies shall be made the tomb and the means of transit of all the living bodies which they have slain." (A Florentine maxim from Leonardo on the "cruelty of man).

Therefore, the policy-makers must notice the crisis in education, within its very system: estranged from nature, piling the books only to be swarmed by the book-worms of imitators. And to live up to the youth, to save the young price Hamlet, the prince of philosophical speculators — "the model of youth and the delight of the world", as rejoiced

Goethe — from his tragedy, now as aforesaid the maxim of the great Bengali poet is mine: "The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures. It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves

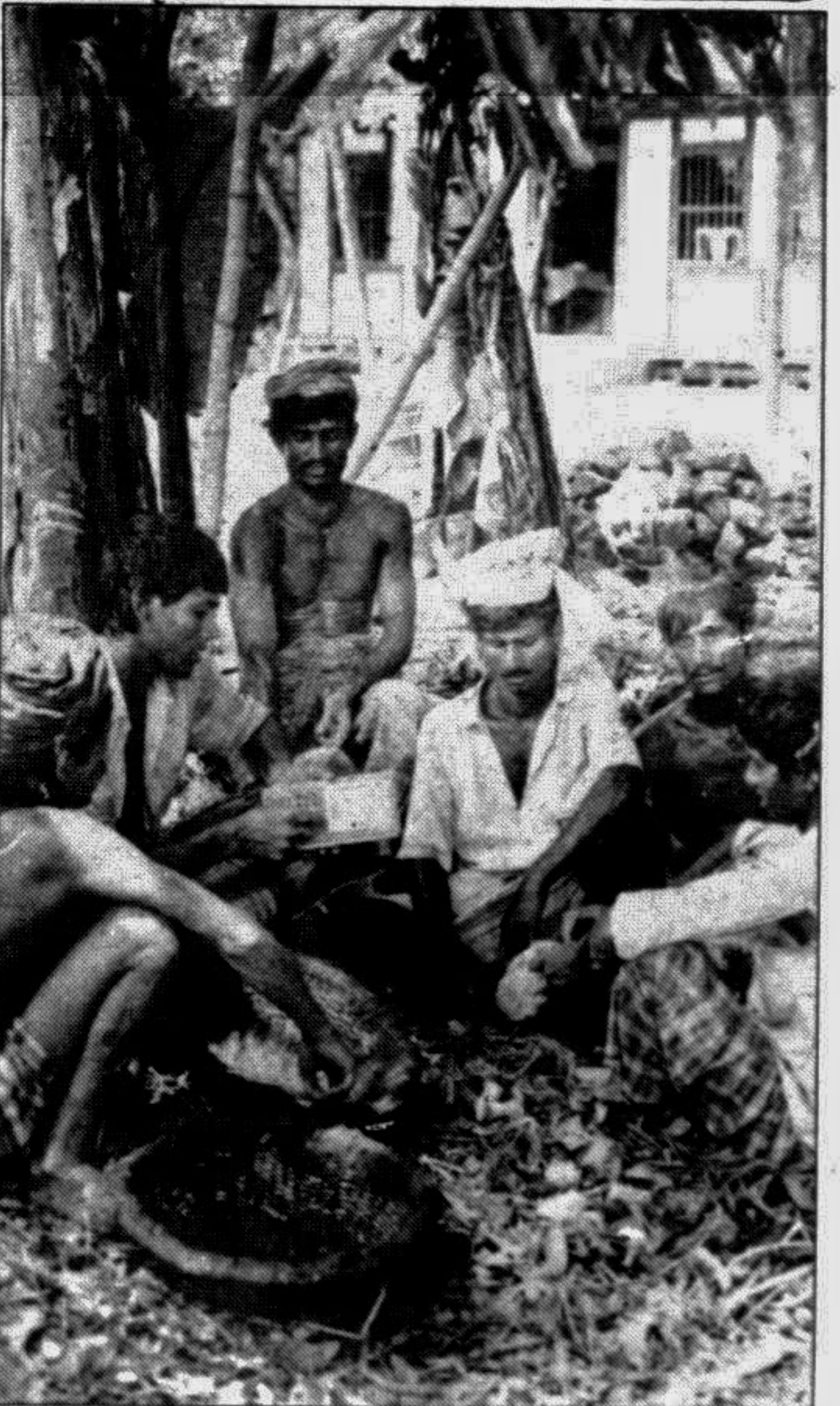
and flowers. It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean-cradle of birth and of death, in ebb and in flow. I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life. And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment". The silence in campus, has probably favoured us to listen the Siren that virtually deafened Odyssey.

It's Now Time to Work Outdoors

A Photo Feature by A K M Mohsin



As the rains of monsoon start to gradually cease after almost a six-month wet-season spell, they come out in hundreds, at the call of the hiring construction contractors, to work in the fields — cutting and carrying earth from one site to another, to build the base of houses or roads, to the benefit of the nation at large. And all this they do just for a pittance — working all day under the sun, taking only a short respite often under the shade of tree on the site and once cooking their own meal also on the site. To them, the day-labourers, work is more urgent than ease.



Freedom Fighters

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regrettable that might be, they at least deserve not to be discriminated against in their service career whatsoever and not deprived of their honour and social recognition as freedom-fighters. At this moment, it is imperative that the freedom-fighters remain steered in their resolve to keep aloft the ideals which galvanized the entire nation to fight for the liberation of their homeland, and win the hearts of the people, to introspect on the role of the freedom-fighters in the context of our nationhood.

It is obvious that so long the debts, to whom it is due, is not cleared, a kind of imbalance shall continue to haunt the society. To remove this contention is indeed a moral obligation of all citizens irrespective of political affiliation.

It is a historic truth that unless the freedom-fighters under the Mujibnagar government had taken arms as one body to fight the Pakistani occupation forces — then on a rampage of mass killing — the war would not have ended in liberation. Again, barring the freedom fighters' all-important

role, it was next to impossible in those days without them to run the government at Mujibnagar, its radio station, Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, to handle the diplomatic responsibilities, and crucially, to conduct the liberation war by the government in exile. Consequently, the emergence of Bangladesh as a sovereign nation in the world map would have remained a dream.

In every country, the freedom-fighters are held high in social esteem and given national honour, and also supported with financial and other benefits all their lives. For reasons not known, this aspect has largely gone by default in our country. Surely, it is never too late to rectify the wrongs. In immediate terms, the grievances of the Mujibnagar officers and employees and freedom-fighters should justifiably be met. As honest and law-abiding officers and employees, their allegiance to the government is beyond question and unswerving. It now devolves on the authorities to see that the freedom-fighters can continue to serve the cause of the country with the same zeal and dedication that once crowned them with victory in the liberation war.

Astonishing Museum

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Flat areas were made of cardboard, rugged terrain was carved out of solid pieces and everything was sprinkled with a mixture of sand and powdered stone.

Houses, public buildings and works of civil engineering were delicately carved and painted in detail. Water courses, lakes and the sea were painted in oil paints in different blues and greens, depending on the depth and the current. Trees and hedgerows were made of silk woven over wires. Meadows and fields of crops were also made of silk which was finely shredded and mixed with sand.

Fortunately, the future of the collection has now been ensured as a big relief map museum is being created, in the same place.

Today, a temporary gallery holds exhibitions on themes and, every year, about 200,000 visitors go there to admire these treasures of accuracy which not only evoke the history of military architecture but also that of town and country planning. They provide an instant three-dimensional snapshot of a town and its surrounding countryside before the industrial era and the grouping together of land and before the development of the suburbs: Perpignan in 1686, Saint-Tropaz in 1716, Antibes in 1747, Brest and its combination of farmland and woodlands in 1811, Metz in 1825, Strasbourg in 1830, as well as Antwerp-Corfu, Rome, Suez, etc.

The new museum is to open in 1994 for an Alice in Wonderland style of guided tour.

— L'Actualite En France