

*Tribute to Raj Kapoor on His Birth Centenary*

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**The Saga of Raj Kapoor:  
A Tale of Simplicity and Showmanship**



Young Raj Kapoor

**Chapter – I**

The title of 'The Showman' truly suited him, for he embraced it wholeheartedly, nurtured its essence, and relished every moment of its glory. That man was none other than Raj Kapoor.

In this world, most people spend their entire lives searching for the true purpose of their existence, the essence of their responsibilities, and the meaning behind their journey. It is often too late when they realise their life's goal. On the other hand, there are a

rare few who, early on, gain clarity about their purpose, their calling, and the path they are meant to follow. Raj Kapoor belonged to this exceptional league. With unwavering conviction, he approached his illustrious actor-father and humbly declared, *'I want to work in films; this is my goal. Please permit me'*.

Raj Kapoor's timing to express his dreams was extraordinary—right after failing his 10th-grade exams. With no interest in

pursuing a traditional education or becoming a graduate, he believed spending precious years in academics and searching for an uncertain job would be a waste of time. He candidly shared his thoughts with his father, the legendary Prithviraj Kapoor, saying, *‘Instead of spending the next four years studying, only to look for work later, I’d rather dedicate my focus entirely to films.’*



Raj as a Kid

Prithviraj Kapoor, a celebrated actor of his time, listened carefully and permitted his son, albeit with certain conditions. Raj began working as an assistant to Kedar Sharma, agreeing to terms that ensured no special privileges were afforded to him. He was to be treated like any other worker—no salary, no favoritism. His father provided him with only ₹15 per month for personal expenses. Raj would carry his lunchbox from home

daily and head to work at the famous Ranjit Studio!

Even when he moved to Bombay Talkies, the rules remained the same, though he started receiving modest pay. Finally, when he joined Prithvi Theatre, he earned a steady salary of ₹201 per month, a rupee more than the earlier salary.

And thus, this ‘living masterpiece’—Raj Kapoor—was ready to leave his indelible mark on the silver screen, creating timeless cinematic gems that would resonate for generations... “Hum Na Rahenge Tum Na Rahoge Phir Bhi Rahengi Nishaniyan”

The saying *“The cradle holds the first whispers of a child's journey.”* perfectly applies to this eldest son of Prithviraj and Ramabai Kapoor. Even as a baby in his cradle, he seemed destined to become the future ‘Showman.’ The talk of his striking blue eyes was so widespread that family members and even strangers would come just to see him, admire his features, and capture his image in their memories. Even as a child, Raj Kapoor was unknowingly building his fan club, which he led. One would imagine how he would have looked at his Birth Centenary and the celebrations up to his standards! (Not to miss that his grandson Ranbir Kapoor and his assistant on *Bobby* (1973) Rahul Rawail interacted with each other after the screening of *Awaara* (1951) at IFFI 2024 in Goa. This could be seen as a promising leader to RK Birth Centenary year celebrations.)

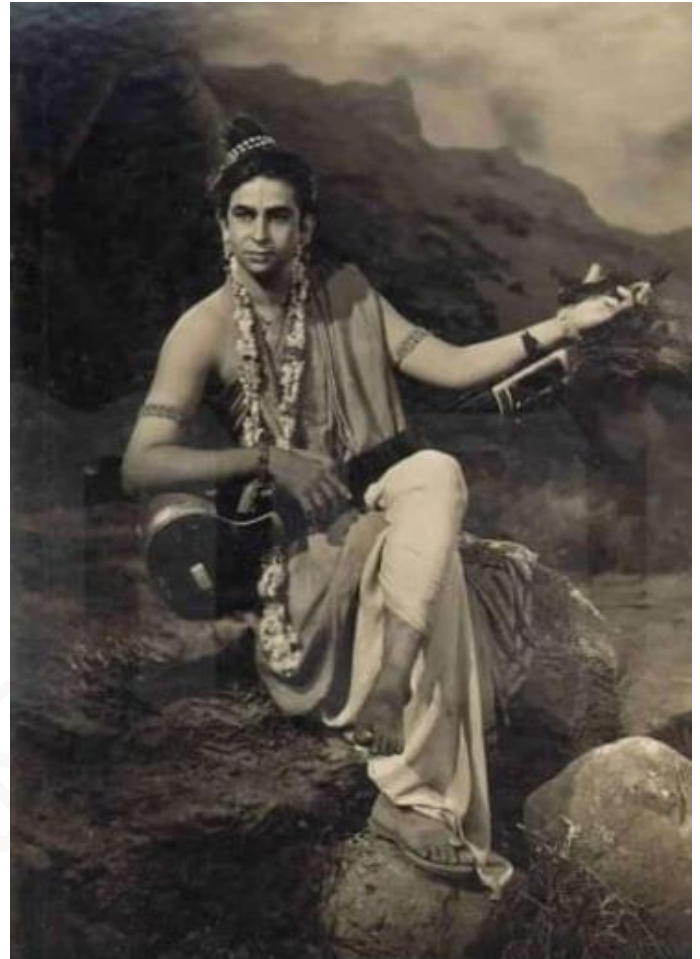
Raj used his enchanting blue eyes to charm shopkeepers to give him free treats as a child. But as he grew older, he found a more purposeful use for this charm. On one such instance during a film shoot in Srinagar, he noticed a fruit vendor sitting idly, his stall

nearly empty of buyers but full of fruits. The vendor seemed to be struggling, and Raj realised his sales weren't picking up. The next day, Raj drove to the vendor's stall, exited his car, and stood before it. As soon as the tourists around saw Raj Kapoor, they rushed over, creating a frenzy outside the stall. In his signature style, Raj ensured everyone bought fruit from the vendor before quietly slipping away, leaving behind a bustling crowd and a grateful fruit vendor.

Raj Kapoor was a passionate artist and a true visionary. While it's undoubtedly true that he was a maverick if we were to rank his roles, he would first and foremost be a producer, then a director, and only in the last place would he be an actor. Many times during his long career, if his films where he is only acting, people would say, "Maybe he is in need of money, or he is making a big-budget film" Everybody knew he was engrossed with the production of the next film. It was in his role as a producer that his true "Showman" spirit emerged, and the world would later recognise him for it, even as it occasionally overlooked the simple man that lay within him. On-screen, glimpses of this ordinary man kept surfacing now and then, but in truth, the simplicity of Raj Kapoor rarely appeared before the public.

When Raj Kapoor realised that his debut film couldn't rely solely on the talents of the two actors, Kamini Kaushal and Nigar, he turned to his producer's instincts. He invested a significant sum ₹40,000 to sign a bigger star than anyone else in his first film, Nargis. That was the moment the film industry realised that Raj Kapoor hadn't just handled the clapboard on the sets of Kedar Sharma; he had absorbed invaluable lessons

in the fine arts of filmmaking. During his time as Kedar Sharma's assistant, he meticulously honed his skills and acquired the nuances of the craft.



Raj Kapoor in *Valmiki*

Raj Kapoor showcased his visionary approach by committing so much time to Nargis in his first film. In *Aag* (1948), Nargis played a role vastly different from any she had played before, marking a new phase in her career and the history of Hindi cinema.

While working under Kedar Sharma, Raj Kapoor spared no effort in learning every aspect of filmmaking. From the intricacies of costume design to music, from acting to cinematography, Raj absorbed it all with his keen blue eyes and sharp perception. On the one hand, he was always ready to do any job and put in the hard work required, while on



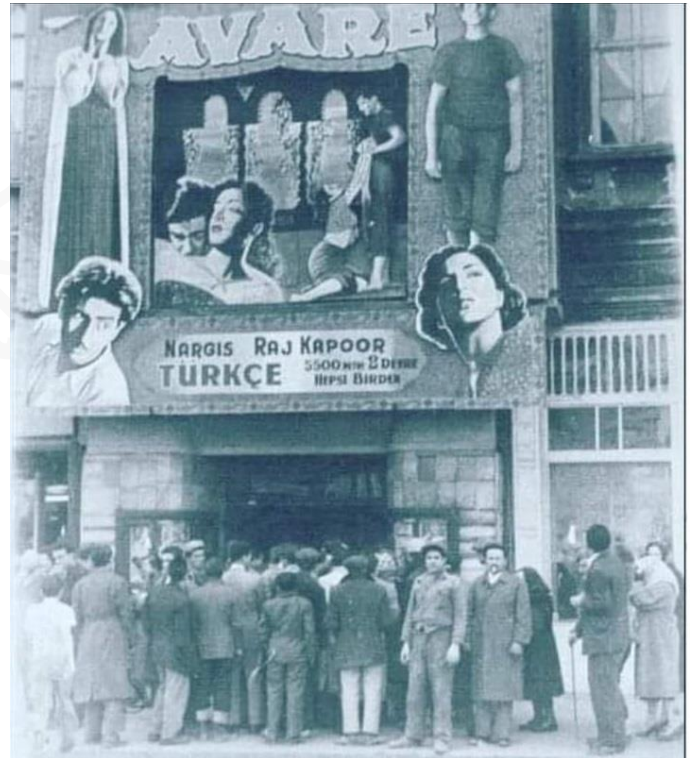
the other, he was already dreaming of the future, envisioning his film creations. However, despite being the grand 'Showman' of Indian cinema throughout his career, Raj Kapoor remained, at his core, a simple, down-to-earth man.

The same Raj Kapoor, who hosted grand parties for guests at national and international film festivals later in his career, was often seen lying on the ground or in a gunny bag in the corner of Ranjit Studio during his initial struggle. Even after he became the 'RK', after a long, exhausting search throughout the studio, he would often be found sharing a humble meal of Bhaji and Bhakri with one of his workers in their modest resting place. Despite the extravagant celebrations of Holi or other festivals, Raj Kapoor would sometimes be found sitting with his security guy, enjoying a bowl of kheer in a small hut. He shared a close bond with his workers, ensuring they never lacked anything, and he carried this same dedication and enthusiasm into making his films.

In his pursuit of perfection, Raj Kapoor did whatever it took to achieve the level of production he envisioned for his films. A striking example is the construction of a massive wall for a scene in *Jagte Raho* (1956) where he needed to climb a pipe to reach a floor. To make the scene as realistic as possible, he oversaw the creation of this wall, even though it caused the film's budget to rise by several lakhs. In another instance, while shooting the song "Dum Bhar Jo Udhar Munh Phere" in *Awara*, he did not hesitate to recreate the seashore inside the studio by bringing in hundreds of trucks full of sand. This devotion to detail and quality mirrored

his love for his workers, often envisioning not just a film set but also a home for his team.

Raj Kapoor's portrayal of the common man was always extraordinary. Films like *Awaara* (1951), *Shree 420* (1955), *Jagte Raho* (1956), *Jis Desh Mein Ganga Behti Hai* (1960), and *Mera Naam Joker* (1970) predominantly featured heroes who embodied the spirit of the ordinary man. These characters, with their many facets, represented ordinary people's dreams, struggles, and aspirations. Through *Awaara* (1951), Raj Kapoor beautifully brought to life the dreams of an ordinary man on screen.



Before Prime Minister Pandit Nehru even visited Russia, the song "Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani" made Raj Kapoor's *Awaara* a beloved figure among the Russians. Pt. Nehru was shocked and surprised when Russians asked him, "Oh, you are from the land of *Awaara*?". In *Barsaat* (1949), Raj found his audience, but in *Awaara* (1951), he found himself on screen. In a way, Raj Kapoor's character Raju, the common man,

became an international celebrity, adored and recognised beyond the borders of India. On a few occasions, it also got home with a huge foreign currency.

What does *Awaara* (1951) represent? It tells us that no one is born a criminal; the circumstances shape a person into one, and society, in turn, rejects them. Raj Kapoor's portrayal of the ordinary man in this film is deeply humanistic, crafted with the compassion and understanding of a true artist. *Awaara* (1951) is layered with meaning, but when Raj Kapoor embodies the "Showman", we genuinely see his brilliance. This happens in those special ten minutes, where he paints the dream of an ordinary man—Raju—through two songs and three massive sets on the screen. This iconic sequence became a legendary moment in Hindi cinema. This dreamlike scene remains unforgettable and untouched to this day, which has beautiful words coming from Raju's dream, "Mujhko Ye Narak Na Chahiye, Mujhko Phool, Mujhko Geet, Mujhko Preet Chahiye... Mujhko Chahiye Bahar"

Onscreen, Raj Kapoor was daring, charismatic, and bold—radiating the colours of romance, challenge, and charm. Yet, he was often seen in simple white clothes, reflecting his grounded nature. He once said, "My first duty is to entertain my audience," yet he was frequently just an ordinary man, humble and unassuming, much like his character Hiran in *Teesri Kasam* (1966).

Raj Kapoor brought Kashmir to Hindi cinema with *Barsaat* (1949), and later, through *Sangam* (1964), he introduced the audience to London, Paris, and Geneva—perfectly embodying the grandeur of the 'Showman' within him. *Sangam* (1964), a film

with two intermissions and four hours, reflects his vision of a grand cinema, a true Showman's masterpiece.

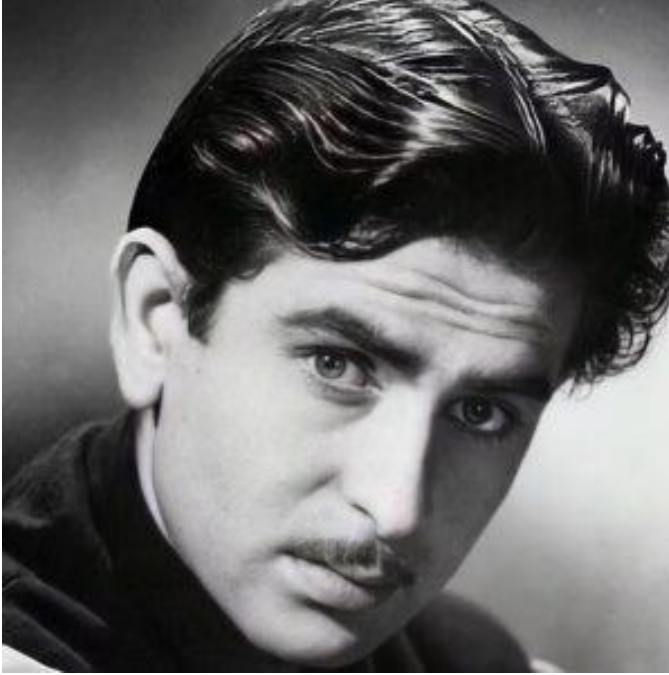


But at the heart of it all was his connection to the common man, his vision of *Mera Naam Joker* (1970), a story of dreams and struggles that were uniquely his own. *Mera Naam Joker* was Raj Kapoor's dream project; it was his entire life. Despite its failure, Raj Kapoor bounced back swiftly with *Bobby* (1973), proving that Romance was his kingdom. He revived his stature and solidified his identity as the embodiment of romance and youthful energy in cinema. With *Bobby* (1973), he stamped his authority on the genre, reinforcing the notion that romance, at its core, was quintessentially Raj Kapoor.

Raj Kapoor, making an aggressive entry into the world of cinema with *Aag* (1948), lived a life where, for over 33 years, he navigated the highs and lows of the film industry while consistently maintaining his image as the "Showman." He was a multifaceted personality, much like a character with many layers, blending simplicity with grandeur.

Raj Kapoor's approach to filmmaking was rooted in a deep understanding of the art. He knew exactly what a film meant, why he was making it, for whom, and the message he wished to convey. Yet, despite knowing all this, he always kept the audience's enjoyment

at the forefront, creating films meant to entertain. His ability to balance his vision and the audience's needs made Raj Kapoor exceptional.



From a young age, the blue-eyed, chubby child—once affectionately known as “the apple” for his round, charming face—was a leader in Showmanship. His life was enriched by numerous moments that elevated

him to great heights. He was a man who could be incredibly simple, yet within the world of cinema, he managed to weave magic and perform feats that were sometimes larger than life. He constantly worked to demonstrate that his films and himself were different from others, often using clever tricks to maintain his unique position in the industry.

On the one hand, Raj Kapoor presented the humble man he portrayed on screen—his ordinary, relatable character—while magnifying this persona with the larger-than-life charisma of the Showman. This contrast in his nature, blending simplicity and grandeur, might be the most distinctive and underappreciated aspect of Raj Kapoor's genius. He was not just a director or an actor; he was a living embodiment of the magic he brought to the screen, both in his on-screen roles and off-screen persona.

***Chapter-II will be published in Next Issue.***

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