

Tribute: Raj Kapoor Birth Centenary

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The Saga of Raj Kapoor: *Aag* and *Barsaat*, Hand in Hand?



Chapter-II

You should always attend his first works if you must study a filmmaker. So true, whosoever has said it. In the case of Raj Kapoor, it's his first works that need to be seen closely, observed and studied as it's not just the first film but both the films, first and second, that came hand in hand with highly contradicting titles *Aag* (1948) and *Barsaat* (1949)!

It was a houseful show, and the atmosphere was electrifying, with a sense of excitement and unfamiliar enthusiasm among everyone present, a rarely experienced feeling. Many senior citizens were confident they could watch the movie but wondered if

they could sit in one place for that long now. The cool, new-age youngsters were anxious about whether they could enjoy a black-and-white film. Their doubts and excitement were more than satisfied by the black-and-white film titled *Barsaat* (1949), Produced and directed by Raj Kapoor, the blue-eyed dreamer, the eldest son of Prithviraj Kapoor. But this is not his first film; it is his second under the banner of RK Films.

Last year, i.e. on April 22, 2024, *Barsaat* completed 75 years. To commemorate this platinum jubilee, a special screening was organised in Delhi. Even after so many years, the audience experienced the

freshness and musical brilliance of the film firsthand. Clapping, whistling, and returning with hearts filled with joy, the audience cherished the moments of *Barsaat*. Witnessing that, anyone could easily imagine and exclaim, ‘The same will happen even after 100 years!’

What was so special about Raj Kapoor’s *Barsaat*? What made *Barsaat* a milestone in the journey of Indian, and especially Hindi, cinema? There are numerous answers to these questions. Over the years, *Barsaat* has given audiences a lot and has been cherished by Indian movie lovers. *Barsaat* unknowingly created many new equations. The iconic pair of ‘Raj Kapoor and Nargis’ was formed because of *Barsaat*, but beyond that, much more happened whose effects were seen at the time and continued to resonate for years. *Barsaat* brought together an unforgettable team, established a confident producer, and continuously touched the hearts of cinema lovers year after year; *Barsaat* became immortal.

Barsaat was Raj Kapoor’s second film as a producer and director. To understand *Barsaat*, we must go back to the flashback of Raj Kapoor’s early days and the history of his first film, *Aag* (1948). Discussing *Barsaat* is incomplete without discussing *Aag* because the reasons are equally important and interesting. Around 1944, to continue his father's legacy, the great actor Prithviraj Kapoor, Ranbir Raj started his apprenticeship at ‘Bombay Talkies.’ While learning the ropes under Amia Chakravarty, he also got the chance to work as an assistant to Kedar

Sharma, who later cast the young Raj in the lead role of *Neel Kamal* (1947).

(Before this, he had acted alongside Kamini Kaushal in *Jail Yatra* (1947), directed by Gajanan Jagirdar, but that film was released later. Technically, ‘Jail Yatra’ was Raj Kapoor’s first film as a lead actor.)



With the confidence that he could be a director and take on lead roles, Raj Kapoor decided to produce his first film in 1948. Having gained various small but significant experiences while working as an assistant director,

Raj Kapoor established his film production company at just 24. He named it and effectively, ‘R. K. Films.’

Raj Kapoor’s first film, *Aag*, was released in 1948 but did not achieve the expected results; it remained merely Raj Kapoor’s debut film. Senior actresses were cast in the movie, and their names were listed prominently in the credits. The first name was Nargis, followed by Kamini Kaushal (listed together on screen), and then Nigar. Nargis was significantly more experienced than Raj Kapoor. In *Barsaat*, *Nargis’s* name appeared on screen before Raj Kapoor’s.

Nargis’s leading role in *Barsaat* was a harbinger of her success in the coming years. Born as Fatima Rashid to Abdul Rashid and Jaddanbai Hussain, Nargis debuted at six as Baby Nargis in the film *Talash-e-Haq* (1935). By age 14, she had acted before Motilal in Mehboob Khan’s *Taqdeer* (1943). Shortly afterwards, she appeared in *Humayun* (1945) alongside Ashok Kumar, and soon, her name became associated with success in Hindi cinema, particularly with stars like Dilip

Kumar. In *Aag* (1948), she worked with Raj Kapoor for the first time. Between *Aag* and *Barsaat*, Mehboob Khan's *Andaz* came along, featuring the Dilip Kumar-Raj Kapoor pair with Nargis. *Andaz* was a huge success that year, giving *Barsaat* tough competition. Interestingly, while Nargis and Raj Kapoor became iconic, Mehboob Khan made Nargis the pole star with *Mother India* (1957), giving her lasting immortality. There was undoubtedly a special bond between Mehboob Khan and Nargis. She met Sunil Dutt on Khan's set, who later changed her life. Despite not creating a special film specifically for Nargis, Raj Kapoor showed great respect by placing her name in the credits before his own, acknowledging her seniority. While Nargis's role in *Aag* was not particularly significant, in *Barsaat*, she was given a more prominent role than Raj Kapoor in terms of the part she played and her overall stature.

Among the other actors in *Barsaat* was Premnath, who also appeared in *Aag* but had a more significant, impactful role in *Barsaat*. The most experienced actor was K. N. Singh, who had appeared in about 35 films before *Barsaat*, including a role in Dilip Kumar's *Jwar Bhata* (1944).

The story of *Barsaat* is quite simple. It revolves around two friends, Pran and Gopal. Pran, played by Raj Kapoor, has complete faith in love, while Gopal, portrayed by Premnath, is sceptical and firmly believes in the idea of "what's done is done." While Gopal is waiting for something, a girl is waiting with all her heart, risking everything. Her life is on the line. Her first song, "Raste par hoon aas lagaye aane wale aaja," clearly

depicts her role. She is Nila, played by Nimmi.



Raj Kapoor seems to have had a special affection for "Nimmi." It's worth pondering whether it was because he repeatedly said "Nimmi, Nimmi" in *Aag* or liked the name. In *Aag*, the name "Nimmi" is uttered hundreds of times. Raj's childhood friend was Nimmi, who later called Kamini Kaushal by the same name. Finally, an hour and fifteen minutes into the film, when Nargis makes her entry, she too is referred to as Nimmi. Throughout the film, he narrates his life story to his wife, and at the end, when the story concludes, his wife, played by Nigar, tells him, "You haven't recognised me; I am your childhood friend Nimmi." Whether she speaks the truth from the heart or tries to cheer up a husband who cried on their wedding night is still a question. The impact of "Nimmi" on Raj Kapoor was so significant that he decided to feature Nimmi's debut in his next film, *Barsaat*.



During the shooting of Mehboob Khan's *Andaz* (1949), a shy young lady

frequently visited the set. She had an air of modesty and purity in her demeanour, a far cry from the usual film industry pretences. Raj Kapoor was impressed by her and offered her a role in his next film. The young woman, thrilled by the opportunity, accepted the offer. Although Mehboob Khan's *Andaz* was a hit and *Aag* wasn't a major success, it had undoubtedly garnered attention. The name of the girl making her debut in Raj Kapoor's second film, *Barsaat*, was Nawab Bano. However, Raj Kapoor changed her name to Nimmi, thus allowing her to enter *Barsaat* under a new screen name.



In the film, while she sings, "Jiya beqaraar hai chhayi bahar hai, aaja more balma tera intezaar hai," Raj Kapoor skillfully positions her with her back to the camera. After the song's opening line, he turns her towards the audience. The introduction of Nimmi is with utmost tradition: starting with a wide shot, moving to a close-up, and finally, an extreme close-up.

Raj Kapoor was known for his audacity and daring nature. He didn't shy away from showing half of his face burned in the first scene of his debut film *Aag*. This level of confidence was evident in his work. If he hadn't been so bold, he wouldn't have decided to introduce Nimmi in *Barsaat* through the second song, "Jiya beqaraar hai," and left the first song, "Hawa mein udta jaaye mora laal

dupatta malmal ka," to Bimla Kumari. Raj Kapoor demonstrated great creativity in this choice. In the film, the first song, "Hawa mein udta jaaye," builds anticipation about whether it will feature Nargis or the debutante Nimmi. A girl appears in the refrain, but her identity remains unclear. When the antara (second part) begins, a girl holding a red dupatta appears, and it is Bimla Kumari. However, she doesn't appear again in the film except in the follow-up scene after the song.

Who is Bimla Kumari? She made her film debut in 1936 with the film *Baghi Sipahi* and then appeared in several minor roles in movies like *Milap* (1937), *Double Cross* (1938), *Zambo Ka Beta* (1939), *Prem Nagar* (1940), *Jhooti Sharm* (1940), *Gorilla* (1953), and *Do Ustad* (1959). Although she didn't receive major roles, she made a notable appearance in the first song of *Barsaat*. Additionally, she appeared in two other significant and beautifully composed songs: one in *Albela* (1951), "Dheere se aaja ri akhiyon mein nindiya aaja ri aaja," alongside Master Bhagwan, and the other in *Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam* (1962), a mujra song, "Meri jaan o meri jaan achha nahi itna seetam," with Rehman. These three significant songs highlight Bimla Kumari's acting skills in varied roles.

Raj Kapoor is one of the few crucial names taken concerning being a leading director for his work on song picturisation. RK's songs have remained memorable not just for their music but also for their visual appeal. This excellence is prominently evident in *Barsaat*.

The song 'Jiya Bekaraar Hai' filmed on Nimmi shows a sense of optimism. As the song ends, Nimmi sings 'Aaja More Balma

Tera Intezaar Hai', and we see Premnath's car approaching. The song's refrain shows Nimmi's face lighting up with a smile and hope in her eyes. In contrast, the song 'Barsaat Mein Tumse Mile Hum Sajjan Humse Mile Tum Barsaat Mein' doesn't end on the refrain, and the song's sense of incompleteness is evident. It ends with the words 'Mil na Sake Hai Mil na Sake Hum', and we see Premnath's car going away in this scene.

Raj Kapoor used the exact words towards the end of the film, with Lata Mangeshkar's voice gently delivering the words 'Barsaat Mein'. In front of Neela's burning pyre, Gopal looks up towards the sky, and the film concludes. The 'Premnagar Mein' song highlights Neela's (Nimmi's) pain.

On the other hand, Nargis's songs like 'O O O Mujhe Kisi Se Pyar Ho Gaya' and 'Meri Aankhon Mein Bas Gaya Koi Re' display a sense of completion. Even though 'Ab Mera Kaun Sahara' feels melancholic, Raj Kapoor's appearance at the end answers who her support (Sahara) is.

Raj Kapoor constantly reminds us of the journey of the two main characters in the film and their destinies. His mastery is also evident in the picturisation. For instance, the song 'Barsaat Mein Humse Mile Tum' starts with a chorus, which gradually fades out, leaving only Lata Mangeshkar's voice. This depicts Neela's loneliness. On-screen, when Gopal and Pran leave, Neela runs after Gopal reaches his feet and holds them. Climbing up to him is almost like a test of her love.

Meanwhile, the people in her village happily dance, but Neela has become separated. This is why the chorus fades out. This is a superb example of Raj Kapoor's visual craftsmanship.

Consider another example: When Pran first meets Reshma, she slips and falls from a bamboo ladder into the water. Pran rescues her from the water. Later, when Nargis (Reshma) sings 'Mujhe Kisi Se Pyar Ho Gaya', the song starts with Raj Kapoor's violin. He is standing on the upper platform, and once again, Reshma climbs the ladder, but now Pran is there to help her. The film shows how the journey of the two characters has progressed since the beginning and subtly portrays how their love relationship will develop.



In 'Patli Kamar Hai', while Gopal enjoys the item song in the club, Neela suffers from separation. The bold and carefree music of 'Patli Kamar Hai Tirchi Nazar Hai' contrasts with Neela's sorrowful song 'Aaja Mere Man chahe Balam Aaja Tere Aankhon Mein Ghar Hai'. The song successfully creates two moods on screen and in the audience's minds. The fusion of 'Tirchi Nazar' and 'Aankhon Mein Ghar' is excellent. The song also represents a perfect example of parallel editing. The movie makes remarkable use of the camera and black-and-white film. The song 'Main Zindagi Mein Har Dum Rota Hi Raha Hoon' stands out for its remarkable use of large windows from various angles. Jal Mistry's work in this regard is notable and should be acknowledged. *Barsaat* was also his first film. Raj and Jal shot some parts of

Barsaat in Kashmir, marking it as possibly the first film in Kashmir.

One must say that the film *Barsaat*, written by Ramanand Sagar (His first film as a writer), has benefited cinema lovers in many ways. *Barsaat* did excellent business at the box office, providing RK Films with stability and playing a crucial role in establishing RK Films' studio. It cemented the legendary pairing of Raj Kapoor and Nargis, making their duo immortal. This film gave RK Studio its world-famous logo, depicting Raj holding a violin in his left hand, Nargis leaning on his right hand, and her back arched in a romantic pose. Many have claimed that this logo is based on a popular scene of Raj and Nargis from *Barsaat*; however, the reality is hidden in a publicity photo shoot of *Barsaat*.

Barsaat also gave Raj Kapoor the confidence to create his audience. He followed in his father's footsteps by winning the prestigious Dadasaheb Phalke Award, further elevating his career. From his very first film, Raj Kapoor kept his father's memory alive. The film *Aag* begins with a fire altar where two hands offer wood sticks, and in *Barsaat*, we see Prithviraj Kapoor praying before the Shiva lingam. Raj Kapoor, who chose to enter cinema inspired by his father, Prithviraj Kapoor, included his father's image at the beginning of every RK film. We can say that Raj Kapoor made arrangements in *Barsaat* to ensure that future generations of film lovers would remember his father.

While showing the contrasting forms of fire and rain in his films, Raj Kapoor used *Barsaat* to highlight the distinction between love and desire. At one point, Gopal says that love is a lie, while in another scene, Pran tells Reshma, "Love is not something that can be explained, Reshma; it can only be felt!"

Raj Kapoor, who named his first film *Aag* and immediately followed it with *Barsaat*, is a rare artist. RK went on to make many more films, and through these films, Raj Kapoor continued to portray different shades of love. His movies were so acclaimed that the RK brand was established, and not only in India but also abroad, audiences began eagerly awaiting and loving his films. Given the response to the 75th anniversary of *Barsaat*, it is inevitable that the musical charm of *Barsaat* will remain alive and unforgettable in the hearts of the audience! The team formed for *Barsaat*, the musical charm creators Shankar, Jaikishan, Shailendra, and Hasrat, worked together to deliver one hit song after another for RK. Until 1971, this quartet kept RK's fame soaring. Not to miss that *Barsaat* was Lata Mangeshkar's first RK film. *Barsaat* marked the beginning of RK's musical journey. These strong pillars of RK went on to create history and make a mark not only on Indian but also on international cinema. This magnificent team will be discussed in the following article on Tribute to RK in his birth centenary!
(Image Courtesy: Shemaroo)

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