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## PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN THE CINEMA OF RAJ KAPOOR: A CASE STUDY OF SATYAM SHIVAM SUNDARAM, PREM ROG AND RAM TERI GANGA MAILI

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### Abstract

*Raj Kapoor has been one of the prominent film-makers of Hindi film industry and his Cinema represents an amalgam of representation of social issues and entertainment. Representation of women in Indian Cinema has been done in various ways. Raj Kapoor has been instrumental in representing women in his Cinema in pivotal roles. Generally, his Cinema boasts of strong characterization of women but certain allegation of depiction of voyeurism has been there on Raj Kapoor. The paper tries to analyse the representation of women in the later phase of his film-making*

**Key words:** *Raj Kapoor, Women, Voyeurism, Cinema, Hindi*

Raj Kapoor, one of the most popular actors, directors and producers in Hindi film industry is arguably a controversial creative genius also. It seems that Raj Kapoor has been tried to understand as a film-maker whose forte was socially-oriented Cinema. He came to be seen as an intellectual film-maker with the success of *Awara* and *Shri 420* which were touted as examples of Indian realist Cinema. This labelling of Raj Kapoor as a realist film-maker, ultimately became the undoing of Raj Kapoor who had always considered himself a romanticist at core and a film-maker who loved to make films for masses. He, in his own words was a pure entertainer who had no ambition to educate the masses. He believed in pure commercial format of Cinema with an inkling of reality and social message here and there. Neither he considered himself as a great film-maker nor the characters, he created in his films, male nor did female have greatness thrust upon them. Raj Kapoor is a film-maker who popularized the concept of a common man in the films, an ever smiling common man who is happy despite of his hardships.

When the question of portraying women in his films, Raj Kapoor had his share of criticism of portraying the women characters in nudity and as the objects of desire. Raj Kapoor has never denied this charge and responded to this charge that he had shunned hypocrisy. His ultimate goal always was to make an entertainer in a typical Raj Kapoor style and portraying the women characters in his movies was just a part of his pattern of film-making. He was more concerned with the final product and to achieve the desired results in a specific film, he resorted to commodifying his women characters also. Raj Kapoor has been a complex character throughout and the women characters created by him for his films have also been complex ones. These characters cannot be defined in any simpler sense. Raj Kapoor, as a person seems to be an amalgam of opposites. His films became immensely popular in Eastern European bloc having communist ideology as the core element of these countries despite the abundant use of Indian Mythological motifs, an appeal to Indian tradition and names associated with Indian mythology in his films. Modernism as well as

traditionality exists simultaneously in his films and this is true of his women characters also. Whatever is the way, women characters have been portrayed in his films, his films can be easily categorised as Nargis phase as well as post-Nargis phase. During Nargis phase of his films under R.K.Studios, it seems that Nargis had dominated the set up with Raj Kapoor just playing his part in the films. Nargis was not only was her co-star in the six films of R.K. banner and in numerous other films outside this banner, she had become his soul mate. People in the decade of fifties had vouched that Raj Kapoor considered Nargis as mother of his films. The characters which came under Nargis's way were in no way, weak characters. Even in pure romantic films like *Barsaat* where Raj Kapoor had nothing to say much except for lilting music, exotic locales and romance to the core, it is the characters played by Nimmi and Nargis which become the back-bone of success of this film. Nargis provided an uninhabited love and passion which had not been seen before. The coyness and '**Sati-Savitri**' image of the heroines was nowhere to be seen in *Barsaat* and this became trend with the films of Raj Kapoor where the women characters did not hide their feelings when portraying a romantic role. *Awara*, though made to establish Raj Kapoor as a progressive film-maker, also had Nargis as *Rita* in her one of the most independently looking role. In *Shri420* Nargis in the role of *Vidya* becomes the inner voice of *Raju* who has taken to wrong means in order to earn money. Even in this film, the Main woman character in form of *Vidya* is not just a prop. She is the alter ego of *Raju*. *Maya* as played by Nadira has been shown as a westernized woman who initiated the entry of *Raju* in the corrupt and greedy world. *Vidya* and *Maya*, the names themselves represent the two opposite ends of the world, one world having a simple life full of education and the other one representing the world full of greed.

Post Nargis phase of films of Raj Kapoor saw the deviation of Raj Kapoor in the manner in which he was portraying the women characters in his films till 1956. Though, he saw commercial success in the post-Nargis phase also but somewhere, the innocent beauty and romanticism got converted into voyeurism, eroticism and a desire to show nudity. It seems that Nargis leaving the banner of R.K.Films shattered the confidence of Raj Kapoor as a film-maker and he was sure that no other heroine could portray the characters as Nargis used to portray in his films. *Jis Desh Mein Ganga Behti Hai* started this trend of portraying women in Raj Kapoor's films where lust dominated the raw passion which was a unique special point of banner of Raj Kapoor earlier. The departure of his muse-*sphurtti* as he called it- co-incided with the time his erotically charged romantic stories acquired their prurient tint, when sex overtook sensuality. According to Madhu Jain (2005), somewhere along the line, the poetic photographer of romance and passion became a peeping Tom of sorts.<sup>1</sup> Padmini an actress from South India in a way started all this for Raj Kapoor in *Jis Desh Mein Ganga Behti Hai*. Though a highly message oriented film of rehabilitation of marginalised elements of society in form of dacoits, Raj Kapoor put all limelight on showing the body of Padmini in the name of cinematic liberty that the daughter of a Dacoit living in the ravines had to be given such costumes as she wore. The famous waterfall scene and the heroines clad in half wet sarees started with this film and the character of *Kammo* somewhere got lost in this process. *Sangam* with Vyjayanti Mala in lead only increased this trend. Jain (2005) opines that Padmini's induction as heroine of R.K. Banner just changed the way women characters were being filmed under the umbrella of banner of Raj Kapoor. Raj Kapoor had taken a journey from

<sup>1</sup>Taken from the book, "The Kapoors, The first family of Indian Cinema" p. 117, by Madhu Jain, 2005, India: Penguin India.

sensuality to sexuality<sup>2</sup>. The camera turns voyeuristic in *Jis Desh Mein Ganga Behti Hai* and the trend continues in *Sangam*, *Mera Naam Joker*, *Bobby*, *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* and *Ram Teri Ganga Maili*. *Prem Rog* is an exception in this later phase of Raj Kapoor as a film-maker. Thematically his last three films, *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*, *Prem Rog* and *Ram Teri Ganga Maili* were close to the films which Raj Kapoor had made during Nargis phase but the style and build up of women characters in the films had taken a turn. The presentation of the ladies in these films were akin to only body show but Raj Kapoor being Raj Kapoor always had a way with the censors and was never taken as a B Grade film-maker. Despite the presentation and characterization of women in his films especially during the later phase, he is hailed as a film-maker who had presented his women characters aesthetically. One reason that Raj Kapoor deviated from his original path of presenting his women characters as aesthetically erotic to sensual and sexed bodies might be that he didn't want to lose his position as ace film-maker whose films were always commercially viable. With the coming of Amitabh Bachchan phenomenon and the trend of violence that had started in the film industry, it had become very difficult to maintain the position of numero uno film-maker and he might have resorted to a different pattern of showing his women characters in the light of this trend. *Ram Teri Ganga Maili* even resisted the newly came trend of video and was a blockbuster. It seems that real turning point in Raj Kapoor's film-making phase came with *Mera Naam Joker* being unsuccessful at the box-office. Here, three films of Raj Kapoor are analysed in the light of characterization of female characters and social issues connected with women. These films are *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*, *Prem Rog* and *Ram Teri Ganga Maili*.

### **SATYAM SHIVAM SUNDARAM (1978)<sup>3</sup>**

**Release Year:** 1978

**Produced by:** Raj Kapoor

**Directed by:** Raj Kapoor

**Starring:** Shashi Kapoor, Zeenat Aman, Padmini Kolhapure and others.

The film produced and directed by Raj Kapoor is as social romantic drama which is based on the premise that spiritual love is truer than physical love. A metaphysical concept of love was present in this film

### **PLOT**

The film opens with the narrator (Raj Kapoor) explaining the meaning of three words, "Satyam", "Shivam" and "Sundaram". The narrator makes the point that beauty is love and devotion and is in the eyes and minds of the beholder. Even a normal stone by the roadside can be converted into a stone of object. The film is basically a story of *Roopa* (Baby Padmini Kolhapure as young *Roopa* and Zeenat Aman as the adult *Roopa*). The narrator says that *Roopa's* life has been full of ill-fortune as her mother died while giving birth to *Roopa*. She is considered unlucky and no one is willing to marry her as her face is also scarred. The film goes into the flashback with Janmashtami celebrations at the temple. The Pundit is called home where he is told that his wife has died after giving birth to a girl child. She is named as *Abhagan* all over the village. Having gone to the temple to celebrate the landlord's son's birthday, questions her father that why her birthday was not celebrated. On pursuing, her

<sup>2</sup>Taken from the book, "The Kapoors, The first family of Indian Cinema" p. 139, by Madhu Jain, 2005, India: Penguin India.

<sup>33</sup> Film's crew details: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satyam\\_Shivam\\_Sundaram\\_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satyam_Shivam_Sundaram_(film))

father agrees to celebrate her birthday and on that day while frying Pooris, her half face is burnt and her father curses her more on this pretext. The transition of *Roopa* into adulthood takes place in the temple itself and she is taunted continuously for being so ugly. *Rajiv* (Shashi Kapoor) arrives in the village. He is an engineer who has come in the village to complete a dam project. He gets introduced to *Roopa* in early morning when she wakes up the whole village with the song. *Rajiv* gets mesmerised by the song and thinks that the bearer of this golden voice must be very beautiful. He has been shown in the film as a character who cannot withstand ugliness in any form. When they meet for the first time, *Roopa* keeps her face half covered. They meet a few times and finally *Rajiv* proposes to *Roopa*. She tries to stop the wedding on the ground that *Rajiv* does not know that she was very ugly but finally she is persuaded by the Panchayat to marry him. *Rajiv* finally comes to know that *Roopa* is not beautiful as he had imagined and she had got a scarred face. *Rajiv* does not want to live with her and believes that she is not that *Roopa* who sings every morning. *Roopa* again meets him covering his face with the veil. *Rajiv* takes her to be the *Roopa* whom he has loved. She tells him not to follow him and promises to meet him every evening. At the waterfall, *Rajiv* tells *Roopa* that he could not love his wife as she was not his *Roopa*. He wants to lift the veil of *Roopa* but she is not ready and tells *Rajiv* that the veil would be lifted automatically if *Rajiv* accepts his wife unconditionally. Meanwhile *Rajiv* while visiting *Roopa's* father comes to know about *Roopa's* pregnancy. He returns from the town and disclaims responsibility for having fathered the child. Finally *Roopa* confronts him after his rejections and warns him of nature's fury which shall destroy everything. The gates of the dam are opened and once again the words *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* resonate through the narrative. Finally, *Rajiv* realises that both, his wife and mistress are same and he was wrong in differentiating the two women. The water gushes over the village and carries *Rajiv* and *Roopa* to an anchorage. *Rajiv* then confesses to *Roopa* that he does not feel cheated at all and his *Roopa* was both beautiful in mind and face. Melodramatic elements mixed with chance elements and mythic icons are in abundance in this film.

#### ANALYSIS OF THE FILM AND THE CHARACTER OF ROOPA:

*Satyam Shivam Sundaram* is a complex film to start with. The theme which Raj Kapoor has tried to tackle in this film contains a lot of mythological elements in it. Even the title indicates towards the fact that the God is the only truth, truth is love and love is sublime. The basic premise of the film that beauty is not only skin deep, is well embedded in Hindu Mythology. Main character, *Roopa* has been modelled upon the mythical figure, *Radha* in the film. *Roopa* and *Rajiv* are akin to *Radha* and *Krishna*. Religious symbols and motifs dominate the spectacle and narrative. This is the only film of Raj Kapoor in which he has tried to mix the element of religion with sensuality. *Roopa* has been shown as the daughter of a priest and thus religion and spiritualism gets attached to this character automatically. Raj Kapoor had been inspired to make this film by the life of Lata Mangeshkar. He even wanted Lata Mangeshkar to act in the film but it could not materialize. Raj Kapoor had publicised making of *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* as the greatest gamble of his creative life. According to him, as quoted in the book written by Prahlad Aggarwal, Making a woman-oriented film showing the metaphysical premise of beauty being associated with soul in the age of violence and sex was a gamble indeed<sup>4</sup> (prahlad Aggarwal). It seems that his intention was good but seeing the trend even he was not convinced fully that his film would be

<sup>4</sup>Taken from the book, "Raj Kapoor, Adhi Haqeeqat Adha Fasana", by Prahlad Aggarwal, 2007, India: RAJKAMAL Prakashan.



commercially viable. This fear converted the character of *Roopa* fully as an object of desire and voyeurism dominated the spectacle. The character of *Roopa* was believable at superficial level only. Zeenat Aman as *Roopa* could not convince the cine-goers that *Rajiv*, without seeing her full face had been attracted to him. The character as created by Raj Kapoor is neither here nor there and oscillates between an ample desire to show her body so as to attract *Rajiv* and on the other side, she talks about embodiment of love akin to Radha and Krishna. The critics say that the most weak point of the film was Zeenat Aman herself whose image in the film industry was that of a glamour girl and even Raj Kapoor could not save himself by showing this glamour in form of *Roopa*<sup>5</sup> (Aggarwal, 2007)). What could have been a memorable character created in Hindi films, *Roopa* became victim of whims and fancies of the director himself. Women characters of Raj Kapoor in the past had been created tastefully and aesthetics was an integral element of representing women characters in the films of Raj Kapoor but the bad representation of sexual orgy in the name of presenting the theme of sublime love killed the character *Roopa*. The issue which Raj Kapoor tried to raise in the film is an important one and many girls especially in Indian society cannot be married on the pretext of their dark colour or some facial deformity only. The theme has got the universal appeal and the film itself and the character of *Roopa* could have achieved a classic connotation only of Raj Kapoor had not resorted to the gimmicks of sex and over-relying on Hindu mythology to make his point.

Then there is a paradox of strange opposition between the two sides of the same woman as represented by the two images of *Roopa* in the film, one as a mistress and lover of *Rajiv* and other as wife. Here *Rajiv* holds a schizophrenic tendency of love and could love and hate the same woman at the same time. It is where the question of perception and reality comes. Often the women characters as represented in the Hindi films are not based on reality. These are the characters which are based on the perception of male characters in the films as well as cine-goers. *Roopa's* characterization also is based on the perception of *Rajiv* and the character that is loved by *Rajiv*, in fact does not exist.

If we consider the stereotypes for the women characters and roles that have been represented over the years in Hindi Cinema then the category in which the character of *Roopa* falls is that of objectification of women. The character of *Roopa* confirms the features associated with the objectification of women.

### **Objectification of Women (Main Points to ponder about)**

Tribal Costume

Rain Dance or Waterfall scene

Framed in sensuous way: wearing a low back blouse so as the body is framed to show back or waist

Appearing in revealing clothes (Exposing large parts of thighs, waist and back)

Another unique point of the character of *Roopa* is that the character is unseen in the film. The character of *Roopa* with whom, *Rajiv* falls in love is not seen by him. This is one of the few rare instances where the role of the main central woman character has been built around the sublime voice. It is the voice in reality which has infatuated *Rajiv*. The face of *Roopa*, he has

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<sup>5</sup>Taken from the book, "Raj Kapoor, Adhi Haqeeqat Adha Fasana", by Prahlad Aggarwal, 2007, India: RAJKAMAL Prakashan

not seen and only has got apperception that the person having such a sublime and ethereal voice has to be beautiful. But perhaps, the director here wanted to compensate the disfigured face of *Roopa* with a voice which is dominating and maintaining space and pacing time. Raj Kapoor, here goes with the concept similar to Biderman's depiction of ritual voice. Going against the concept of showing beautiful faces of Heroines in the Films, Raj Kapoor takes a big bangle in making the voice of the main female character as the cause of attraction and infatuation for his male protagonist. Nowhere in the film, *has Rajiv* been shown being attracted to *Roopa's* body. He just wants to see the face of *Roopa* as he is bewitched by then thought of a beautiful face in possession of heavenly voice. Sometimes, it seems that Raj Kapoor was not worried about who is acting in the film as *Roopa* as for him Lata Mangeshkar's voice was the inspiration and this was the basic premise around which the character of *Roopa* had been modelled. Her morning singing makes the sun rise, enables the morning to form and outlines the path of time. These qualities of *Roopa* become important in the light of the statement that she is not a professional singer. It seems that the director here wants to make a point that she is raw and pure, unexplored by the worldly pulls and these features make her voice sublime. The aspect of purity becomes an integral part of Raj Kapoor's films. In the build up of *Roopa's* character, one can see a concept of seen and unseen going side by side. The objectification of *Roopa's* character seems to be for the gaze of audience and not *Rajiv*.

#### **PREM ROG (1982)<sup>6</sup>**

**Release Year:** 1982

**Produced by:** Raj Kapoor

**Directed by:** Raj Kapoor

**Starring:** Rishi Kapoor, Padmini Kolhapure, Tanuja, Shammi Kapoor, Raza Murad and others

*Prem Rog* is considered a classic work of Raj Kapoor. The film tells the story of a Brahmin orphan boy's love towards a widow who belongs to a higher status. With this film, Raj Kapoor comes back to making social entertainers. The film earned a high critical acclaim and was successful at the box-office<sup>7</sup>.

#### **PLOT**

*Prem Rog* is a love story of *Devdhar* (Rishi Kapoor) and *Manorama* (Padmini Kolhapure) but this love story is indeed with a difference as this is the story of an orphan boy and a widow who belongs to a higher status. *Manorama* is a pampered child who belongs to a household of Thakurs. *Devdhar* is nephew of family priest (Om Prakash) of the Thakurs who is brought up and educated on the charity of the Thakurs. *Manorama* has been shown as a chirpy, innocent good-hearted and stubborn girl whose attitude falls just short of an arrogance. She and *Devdhar* know each other well and their familiarity just fall short of friendship due to their belonging to different classes. *Devdhar's* cousin *Radha* (Kiran Vairale) knows this. In the Thakur household is *Bade Raja Thakur* (Shammi Kapoor), a patriarch sort of figure for whole of the village. *BadiMaa* (Sushma Seth) is traditional woman belonging to this household.

<sup>6</sup>Film's crew details: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prem\\_Rog\\_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prem_Rog_(film))

<sup>7</sup> It has been ranked at no 2 in the box office collection of the Hindi films released in 1982 and earned 6.5 Cr after the release (<http://muvyz.com/boxoffice/byyear/y3/1982>)

*Virendra Vir Singh* (Kulbhushan Kharbanda) and *ChhotiMaa* (Nanda) essays the role of father and mother of *Manorama* respectively. After completing his studies, *Devdhar* comes back from the city. He is invited by *Bade Raja Thakur* to his haveli. He is treated as a member of the Thakur household because of his simpleton nature and because of the fact that his studies were sponsored by *Bade Raja Thakur*. *Manorama* becomes quite friendly with him and her relationship with *Devdhar* is that of innocence. She pulls many pranks on him in her innocence. He starts loving her in his heart but is aware of his class status also. Meanwhile *Devdhar's* cousin gets married to a man who is widower and bald. She accepts her condition as belonging to a poor family readily. She is aware of *Devdhar's* growing attachment to *Manorama* and warns him that this would not lead to anywhere. She tells *Devdhar* not to mistake *Manorama's* "meherbani" for love. But *Devdhar* does not agree to this and plans to visit the Thakur household the next day to ask for *Manorama's* hand for marriage. He goes to the household only to find that *Manorama's* marriage has been fixed with *Narendra Pratap Singh* (VijeyndraGhatge) of Sunerganj. She finds *Manorama* quite happy about this match as for her, marriage is none other than another name for a good life. Her husband gets killed in an accident on the wedding night itself. *Manorama* becomes widow at a young age and her hardships start as a widow. On returning to her parents household, she sees that a custom of cutting her hair is going to follow on the insistence of *Bua Ji* (Leela Mishra) and *BadiMaa*. She does not want to go through this ritual and pleads in front of everyone not to allow this. *Bade Raja Thakur* and *ChhotiMaa* are helpless. Just in time, comes *Manorama's* sister-in-law (*Tanuja*) and takes her to her husband's household. *Manorama* gets attached to *Rattan*, her sister in law's child. One day the sister-in-law goes for a wedding and *Thakur Virendra Pratap Singh* rapes her. When her sister-in-law comes back, she comes to know about whole incident but tells *Manorama* to keep mum and sends *Manorama* to her parent's home. At her parents' home, she is now not allowed to live the life of a carefree lady. She is asked to stay in a room downstairs, sleep with no bedding except a mat and eat sparsely only once a day. *Devdhar* has not forgotten her. He learns of her condition from *Radha* on returning to the village. He is aghast at the treatment being meted out to *Radha* in the name of tradition of widowhood. He comes to *Manorama's* household often and cannot see *Manorama* die a slow death under the traditions and customs. Gradually, *Devdhar* confesses his love for *Manorama* and declares in front of all villagers that he wanted to marry *Manorama*. She considers this act of display of love as a betrayal on the part of *Devdhar*. Slowly her mother makes her aware of her love for *Devdhar*. *Bade Thakur Sahib* and *Manorama's* father are against this scenario and feels that *Manorama* has disgraced the family. *ChhotiMaa* comes out of the Purdah and her inhibition and tells the story of rape of *Manorama* by *Thakur Virendra Pratap Singh*. *Bade Raja Sahib* sees the point and is convinced that *Manorama* is also entitled to all the happiness. He wants *Devdhar* and *Manorama* to elope and marry but *Devdhar* refuses to marry like this and declares that he was fighting a Dharma Yudh. Meanwhile *Manorama's* father and *Virendra Pratap Singh* hatch a plot to kill *Devdhar*. In the climax scene, *Chhote Thakur* is shot by *Virendra Pratap* and *Virendra Pratap* gets killed in the hands of *Bade Thakur*. *Devdhar* marries *Manorama* breaking the old customs and traditions.

#### ANALYSIS OF FILM AND CHARACTER OF 'MANORAMA':

*Prem Rog* is nothing special if we are looking for this film breaking any new ground in the film-making. This becomes unique only due to the treatment given to it by the director. It becomes special only because of a hard hitting message being put through within the parameter of a set formula of Hindi film-making but in Raj Kapoor style of having heavy

and emotional dialogues, visually enriching spectacle, some high-spirited performances and chartbuster music. In the words of Raj Kapoor himself, he returned to making purposeful films with *Prem Rog*. Commenting on the theme of *Prem Rog*, Raj Kapoor has said:

“In today’s society we say one thing and practice another. I wanted to unmask the double standards and hypocrisy of those who lay down the social norms. I’m talking about the decadence of rituals, customs and traditions which have no relevance in our lives now. Norms that permit a widower to marry within four months of his wife’s death, whereas in the name of tradition, a young girl’s mind is conditioned to accept the life of an outcast even though she is a widow for no fault of his own. It is a pity that in an age when there is so much scientific advancement we have to tackle subjects like this, but it is still a gory reality in our society. See how many rapes and dowry deaths we have.”<sup>8</sup>. Pure entertainers with a sprinkle of message to be given without being preachy has been forte of Raj Kapoor’s style of film-making since the days of *Awara* but during the middle phase of his cinematic journey, a deviation from this path is clearly visible. A major reason for this deviation could be the demise of the members of his set-up at R.K.Films. But gradually, he found his feet again and with *Prem Rog*, he started a new chapter under his banner of making purposeful films. The film clearly shows the position of women in Modern India. It may not be the general condition of women everywhere in India but at most of the places even now, the condition of widows is not better that has been shown in the film.

Widow as a specific gender construct in Indian society carries altogether different meaning when compared to the women in rest of the world. In traditional Hindu society, a widow is much more than a woman whose husband has died, certain symbols get attached to a widow and she is supposed to carry these symbols throughout his life. The term has carried with it the suffering and deprivation, in general. There is a specific code of conduct which is prescribed for the widows. This code of conduct works through the food habits and attire of a widow. Raj Kapoor fully uses these symbols of widowhood to the narrative in the film and when conjoined with the spectacle these symbols of widowhood become emotional tools in hands of Raj Kapoor and as a director he fully uses these tools to further his narrative.

Character of ‘MANORAMA’ has been built up on two extremes. Before marriage, *Manorama* has been shown as a pampered and chirpy girl who is born with the golden spoon. She is well ensconced in Thakur household and quite aware of her class and caste status. Her character has not been build up in the mould of a girl who would like to break the societal norms. Like all the women of the Thakur household, she is also supposed to marry in a rich household enjoying all the luxuries of life. She is very much indulged by her family and spoilt by her family. The trait of innocence in *Manorama* has been built up to the extent that she does not understand the meaning of love and Devdhar’s advances towards her. *Radha* and *Manorama* are of the same age group and are childhood friends but *Radha’s* character shows a maturity level not to be seen in *Manorama’s* character till she becomes widow. A subdued arrogance is there in the character of *Manorama*. Opulence, luxury and innocence are the traits around which the character of *Manorama* has been build up by the director. It seems that showing a girl from a middle class urban household could not have brought up

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<sup>8</sup>From the book, “Raj Kapoor’s films, harmony of discourses”, pp. 85, by Wimal Dissanayake and Malti Sahai, 1988, India: Vikas Publishing House.



the extreme sympathy for the character when she becomes widow. The two extremes put together creates a vision and spectacle which engrosses the cine-goers.

Raj Kapoor has always tried to put mythological elements in his films and in *Prem Rog* also, Raj Kapoor has brought up these elements to build up the characters. Again after *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*, he is stuck up of creating this love story on the lines of Radha -Krishna, a platonic type of bonding which goes beyond the worldly desires. An association with Karna's wheel being stuck in the battle of Mahabharata has also been referred to in certain scenes while building up the character of *Manorama*.

When *Virendra Pratap* tries to rape her, while running away *Manorama's* foot is stuck in the glass and she is unable to move and this ultimately becomes the point of her being raped. Then, there is a scene when *Devdhar* pulls out a thorn out of *Manorama's* foot when she is returning from the temple barefoot after attaining widowhood. The scenes are quite symbolic in terms of incorporating traditional mythic elements to *Manorama's* character.

Her character as a widow has been built up using the symbols which have come to be attached with the widows in traditional Hindu society. The scene when *Manorama* is called in the hall for her hair to be cut is a poignant one. The scene becomes an important one as in the first scene itself and in subsequent scenes before marriage, the camera is widely focused on *Manorama's* hair. Hair here becomes the symbol of desire and vitality for *Manorama*. Her character as widow also attains height and a sense of reality when she is shown as sleeping on a single mattress in a corner of a room devoid of any luxuries or even basic things in her room. The way the character of *Manorama* is presented in the first half of the film bears direct anomaly to the character of *Manorama* as a widow. The opulence and luxurious life gets converted to a life of hardships unseen or unheard by her. The director could have taken a lenient or middle path showing the plight of a widow but showing the two extremities is his way of building up the melodramatic elements in his film. An innocent girl who has been grown up in a pampered way for whose happiness whole Thakur household is keen. *Manorama* who is so innocent till the point of her marriage becomes so mature after that incident of her becoming widow. In the feudal society, a woman is just an object of desire and nothing else. Separated from a man, she has got no identity of her own in a feudal society is the question that has been successfully raised in the film through the character of *Manorama* in this film. *Prem Rog* is not only told through the character of *Manorama*, the director here has given small but meaty roles to Nanda and Tanuja also. Nanda in the role of mother of *Manorama* subtly represents the pain through which she is going through. Without going overboard the characters of mother of *Manorama* and wife of *Virendra Pratap* (Tanuja) represents the desire to get free of the feudal mentality and a desire to get out of imprisonment of minds and bodies which are wrapped in fine silks and are bejewelled. Both these characters convey their message through the character of *Manorama* but it is their pain only which they are expressing. A similar sort of characterization had across in Hindi Cinema in form of '*Chhoti Bahu*' in Guru Dutt's '*Sahib Biwi Aur Ghulam*'.

*Prem Rog* is a hard take of Raj Kapoor on the position of women in general actually. The main character shown as a widow just enhances the point of the director which he wants to make. How a woman gets entrapped in the boundaries made by the patriarchal society and how a woman believes these norms to be her destiny is represented through the character of *BadiMaa*. She is good-hearted but helpless in front of societal norms. She has accepted injustice as a societal norm without which society cannot run. She has merged her

personality in the daily religious rituals. She is the one who has pampered *Manorama*, the most but she is the one who is at the forefront in the scene where the elderly ladies want the hair of *Manorama* to be shorn off. Aggarwal (2007) says through this film, Raj Kapoor not only hits at the hypocrisy of the traditional society, he also pinpoints at the helplessness of womenfolk in a traditional patriarchal society.<sup>9</sup>(Prahald Aggarwal, page 211).

In *Prem Rog*, Raj Kapoor has sought to focus attention on a social and cultural issue of great significance. The director has rightly pointed out the negativity of certain traditional beliefs and practices even as he upholds the general tenor and ethos of tradition. In a sense, what he is ultimately saying is that the best way of preserving and utilizing a tradition is to give up its weaker and more harmful elements and cultivate the more positive ones<sup>10</sup>. (Malati Sahai, page 92)

### RAM TERI GANGA MAILI (1985)<sup>11</sup>

**Release Year:** 1985

**Produced by:** Raj Kapoor

**Directed by:** Raj Kapoor

**Starring:** Rajiv Kapoor, Mandakini, Kulbhushan Kharbanda, Raza Murad, Sushma Seth and others

*Ram Teri Ganga Maili* is a Hindi film directed by Raj Kapoor. This one is the last film to be directed by Raj Kapoor. The film is a love story between an urbane man, *Naren* and a girl living in the hills, *Ganga*. Raj Kapoor has used religious and spiritual metaphors to boost the narrative.

### PLOT

The story opens in Calcutta where two politicians are fighting the election; one is simple honest politician who is fighting election on the issue of purifying Ganga. A corrupt politician, *Bhagwat Choudhary* (Raza Murad) is also fighting the election on the question of cleaning Ganga but his intentions are not pure. *Bhagwat Choudhary* is friend of *Jiva Sahai* (Kulbhushan Kharbanda) who is industrialist making money with wrong means and he uses his friendship with politician *Bhagwat Choudhary* to make money. *Bhagwat Choudhary* wins elections with help from *Jiva Sahai*. *Narendra Sahai* or *Naren* is introduced in the film as son of *Jiva Sahai*. He is shown as a follower and avid reader of Swami Vivekananda. His character is least interested in the money matters. *Naren* tells his grandmother that he wanted to find out answers to his questions and inner peace. He goes to a party organized by *Bhagwat Choudhary* where *Radha* (Divya Rana) professes her love for him but for *Naren*, it is just friendship. Witnessing and observing the wrong tasks of his father and *Choudhary*, *Naren* decides to go to Gangotri as a part of the college trip. His grandmother supports his decision supported by his uncle, *Kunj Bihari* (Syed Jaffri). The bus carrying the college party arrives at the hills. Roaming in the hills *Naren* comes in contact with *Ganga* (Mandakini). *Naren* has to go to Gangotri and *Ganga* agrees to guide him on his excursion. He finds *Ganga* both in human form and river form very pure. Meanwhile, *Ganga* has fallen in love with *Naren* who

<sup>9</sup>From the book, "Raj Kapoor: Adhi Haqeeqat Adha Fasana", pp. 211, by Prahald Aggarwal, 2007, India: Rajkamal Prakashan.

<sup>10</sup> From the book, "Raj Kapoor's films, harmony of discourses", pp.92, by Wimal Dissanayake and Malti Sahai, 1988, India: Vikas Publishing House.

<sup>11</sup>Film's crew details: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ram\\_Teri\\_Ganga\\_Maili\\_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ram_Teri_Ganga_Maili_(film))

reciprocates her feelings. As per the tradition of hills, a Swyamvar is organised on the night of full moon where *Mangroo*, the man chosen by Ganga's brother to be his bridegroom is also present there. *Ganga* chooses *Naren* on this occasion to be her bridegroom. *Ganga's* brother dies protecting *Naren* and *Ganga* from *Mangroo* and his goons on their wedding night. *Naren* has to go back to Calcutta now. On reaching Calcutta, he finds that arrangements are being made of his engagement with *Radha*. He tells his grandmother about *Ganga*. On listening to this, his grandmother suffers a heart attack only to regain consciousness for a moment to tell *Naren* that she wanted *Ganga* as her Bahu. *Naren's* father holds him responsible for the death of his mother. *Naren* goes into the seclusion.

Meanwhile, *Ganga* comes to know about the forthcoming engagement of *Radha* and *Naren* from *Radha's* letter. *Naren's* mother tells him to leave for the hills. He is confiscated in his home till the culmination of marriage of *Radha* and *Naren*. On the insistence of *Naren*, *Kunj Bihari* leaves for the hills to bring back *Ganga*. She has given birth to the son of *Naren* and on hearing the contents of the letter from the postman, she just wants to hand over her son to *Naren*. She leaves for Calcutta with her son. *Kunj Bihari* misses *Ganga* at the bus stop. Persuaded by his sister, he tells *Naren* that *Ganga* had gone mad and dis-appeared from the village. On the way to Calcutta, ordeal of *Ganga* starts in a real way. At Hardwar on feeling trapped, she spends the night at the Ghats. Next morning, she asks a Pandit to show her the way to the station but he tries to rape her. She again escapes somehow and the Police buy her ticket to Calcutta. A passenger *Mani Lal* (Krishan Dhawan) posing as a blind man persuades *Ganga* to accept the life of a brothel where she would be safe. *Ganga* is chosen to entertain *Bhagwat Choudhary* on his visit to Benares. Here, he is confronted by *Ganga*. Choudhary takes her with him to Calcutta to amuse him. He wants to share *Ganga* with *Jiva Sahai*. When *Jiva Sahai* sees her, he immediately recognises her as the girl whom *Naren* wanted to marry as he had seen *Ganga's* photographs. He tells *Bhagwat Choudhary* about *Ganga* and wants Choudhary to send *Ganga* back to Benares. *Mani Lal* has got a change of heart now and he brings *Kunj Bihari* to *Ganga*.

*Naren* who is ignorant of *Ganga's* whereabouts is compelled by his mother to marriage with *Radha*. *Kunj Bihari* brings *Ganga* to the wedding of *Naren* and *Radha* to dance and sing. *Naren* lifts the veil of the singer and realizes that it was *Ganga*. *Naren* accepts both *Ganga* and their child. In the climax scene, *Bhagwat Choudhary* has a policeman shoot at *Ganga*. *Naren* attacks *Bhagwat Choudhary*. *Naren* and *Ganga* are shown leaving the scene with their child.

#### ANALYSIS OF THE FILM AND CHARACTER 'GANGA'

After making *Prem Rog*, Raj Kapoor went back to his forte of making entertainers by mixing mythology, spiritualism and elements of commercial appeal which includes showing his heroines in a manner to pander to the voyeuristic instincts and inclinations of the audiences. As done previously in *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*, the film is having a love story as its backdrop but with highly spiritual overtones. By choosing the river Ganga as the pivotal point and drawing the parallel with *Ganga*, the vulnerable woman from hills, Raj Kapoor is able to capture the imagination of the audience in the right earnest. The similarity of *Ganga* being polluted and *Ganga* being exploited has been rightly intermixed in the narrative and spectacle of Gangotri and hills add to the narrative and compliments the story. Sahai (1988) opines that Raj Kapoor has tried to project a moral vision which he feels is of deep relevance

to modern society.<sup>12</sup> What makes an interesting feature of the film that in the earlier films of Raj Kapoor, there was just a splash of spirituality and reference to mythology here and there but in *Ram Teri Ganga Maili* a continuous thread to harmonize the discourses of passion and spirituality is visible throughout the film. Shooting the film at locales like Rishikesh, Haridwar, Gangotri, Benares and Gangasagar adds to this spirituality.

Commenting on the film, Raj Kapoor remarked that he wanted to focus attention on the rapidly changing values in society, the changing morality, loss of spirituality and socio-economic corruption. It is his belief that a rapid decline in spirituality, which according to him, is the real source of Indian culture becoming a disintegrating and disruptive force. The film deals with the twin evils of social corruption and moral decadence. According to Malati Sahai and Wimal Dissanayake (1988), the film seems to pose a number of different questions. When Ganga is pure, can she be polluted? Is this pollution only superficial or is it fundamental? Does she retain after being polluted, her purifying capabilities? Where does the essence of our traditional culture lie and can its values withstand the processes of challenges of time? Through a consideration of these questions, what is being suggested is that just as the soul is more precious than the body, so also is the essence of our cultural values more precious than changing social phenomenon?<sup>13</sup> This film rightly points out the hypocrisy which the elements of religion have brought in Indian society.

Another mythological trait that is to be found in the film is comes as a Mahabharata motif: that of a human prince's union with a river Goddess (as in King Shantanu's marriage to Ganga incarnate). The film also indicates towards the divine origin of Ganges and then meandering through various regions to reach Ganga Sagar. On the way, the river gets polluted in the way *Ganga* gets exploited on its way from Gangotri to Calcutta. Motifs from the story of Radha-Krishna and Meera are also thrown in.

*Ram Teri Ganga Maili* is the Hindi film which is fully women oriented. An important issue of exploitation of women is the central theme of this film. In the words of Raj Kapoor, to portray *Ganga* in the naivety and purity, he wanted a pristine face to act in this film. Mandakini was chosen to portray the character of *Ganga*. According to Raj Kapoor, 'Ganga the pure, Ganga the virgin, Ganga the Himalayan beauty, Ganga the faithful. The word Ganga has so many meanings that any girl who had never been seen before and could not be identified with anything else. And that is how I got this new girl Mandakini, who looked like *Ganga* and who *Ganga* became. Although there was tremendous criticism of the so called nudity, and the scantily dressed *Ganga*, it was the faith in the purity of the *Ganga* (the river) which sustained the faith in the innocence of *Ganga* (the character in the film). That is what held on and despite all the criticism, the Ganga still runs and flows'<sup>14</sup>. It seems that Raj Kapoor never wanted her heroine to act in this film. For him, rawness of her purity was more important and this he tries to maintain in the film. For him, innocence of his heroine was of utmost importance as the film is journey of an innocent girl from the hills to Calcutta in the same manner as River Ganga flows. It is human follies that has polluted the river and exploited the woman. Hindi film industry is witness to many women oriented films

<sup>12</sup>From the book, "Raj Kapoor's films, harmony of discourses", pp.98, by Wimal Dissanayake and Malti Sahai, 1988, India: Vikas Publishing House.

<sup>13</sup> From the book, "Raj Kapoor's films, harmony of discourses", pp.92, by Wimal Dissanayake and Malti Sahai, 1988, India: Vikas Publishing House.

<sup>14</sup> From the book, "Raj Kapoor speaks", pp. 85, by Ritu Nanda, 2002, India: Penguin.



specifically in the golden decade of fifties but this was happening for the first time that a parallel way of pollution of river and exploitation of women had been shown. Raj Kapoor's films are not visual scenarios where silence dominates. His narrative is backed by eye-catching spectacle, emotional dialogues and firebrand performances from his artists. *Ram Teri Ganga Maili* scores on all these fronts.

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