KAPOOR, Raj (December 14, 1924 – June 2, 1988)

Raj Kapoor was a famous Indian film star, director and producer. Belonging to one of Bollywood‘s filmmaking dynasties, he started his career in his father’s film studio as a child actor (or clapper boy – the sources vary in this point). Founding R.K. Films in 1948, Kapoor came into his own in the 1950s and 1960s, becoming a representative figure in Hindi Popular Cinema of the early Neruvian post-war/liberation decades. Kapoor’s films clearly owe a great debt to Classical Hollywood studio filmmaking, best exemplified by the actor’s tramp character appearing most famously in *Awara* (1951), *Shri 420* (1955) and *Jagte Raho* (1956, directed by Amit Maitra and Sombhu Mitra). At the same time, there are traces of Italian neo-realist aesthetics, probably thanks to Kapoor’s association with the left-leaning IPTA (Indian People’s Theatre Association) and his regular collaboration with IPTA members such as scriptwriter K.A. Abbas. Especially with *Awara*, Kapoor received international recognition in the USSR, Middle East and communist China. The contradictory aesthetic programmes create tensions in Kapoor’s work as director which are typical of figures regarded as (popular) forerunners of the ‘New Cinema Movement’. These therefore bring into focus the problem of defining the ‘classical’ as a point of reference and departure for a specifically modernist Indian cinema. Later work such as *Sangam* (1964), *Bobby* (1973) and *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* (1978) tends to be more sexually explicit and sensational, which led to repeated comparisons with Cecil B. DeMille.

References and further reading:

Chatterjee, G. (2003) *Awara*, New Delhi: Penguin.

Desser, D. (2009) “Shree 420”, *The Cinema of India*, ed. Lalitha Gopalan, London: Wallflower, 96-105.

Dissanayake, W.; Sahai, M. (1988) *Raj Kapoor’s films, harmony of discourses*, New Delhi: Vikas.

Kavoori, A.P. (2009) “Singing of a (New) Nation: The Early Films of Raj Kapoor”, *The Logics of Globalization*, Lanham: Lexington, 27-54.

Rajadhyaksha, A.; Willemen, P. (1999) *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema. New revised edition*, London: BFI, 119-120.

Sahai, M. (1987) “Raj Kapoor and the Indianization of Charlie Chaplin”, *East-West Journal* 2 (1): 62-76.

Vasudevan, R. (1989) “The Melodramatic Mode and the Commercial Hindi Cinema: Notes on Film History, Narrative and Performance in the 1950s”, *Screen* 30 (3): 29-50.

List of works:

Awara (1951)

Shri 420 (1955)

Jagte Raho (1956, Amit Maitra and Sombhu Mitra)

Sangam (1964)

Bobby (1973, director only)

Satyam Shivam Sundaram (1978, director only)

Aag (1948)

Andaz (1949, Meboob Khan)

Boot Polish (1954, Prakash Arora)

Jis Desh Mein Ganga Behti Hai (1960, Radhu Karmakar)

Teesri Kasam (1966, Basu Bhattacharya)

Mera Naam Joker (1970)

Stefan Borsos

University of Cologne, Cologne