

Depictions of the Bollywood Romantic Hero: Shah Rukh Khan's Rajs and Rahuls

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Introduction

Often dubbed the King of Romance, Shah Rukh Khan (SRK) is famously known for having played multiple times a Bollywood romantic hero named Raj or Rahul. In fact, the directors who made more than one SRK's Raj and Rahul movies, either consistently use the same character's name or alternate from one movie to the next (cf. table below). Since, according to structuralist character theory, a proper name sums up all the traits of a given character (Barthes 95), it can be hypothesised that the choice of the character's name is foregrounded, especially taking into account these movies' popularity. In this respect, this study focuses on how the portrayal of SRK's Rajs and Rahuls differs.

Director	Movies	
Aditya Chopra (also writer)	<i>Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge</i> [1995, 4 th] <i>Mohabbatein</i> [2000, 21 st] <i>Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi</i> [2008, 48 th]	
Yash Chopra	<i>Darr</i> [1993, 40 th] <i>Dil To Pagal Hai</i> [1997, 18 th , story by Yash Chopra & dialogues by Aditya Chopra]	
Karan Johar (also writer)	<i>Kuch Kuch Hota Hai</i> [1998, 8 th] <i>Kabhi Kushi Kabhie Gham</i> [2000, 15 th]	
Aziz Mirza (also writer)	<i>Raju Ban Gaya Gentleman</i> [1992, NA] <i>Chalte Chalte</i> [2003, 206 th]	<i>Yes Boss</i> [1994, 189 th]
Rohit Shetty (screenplay by Yunus Sajawal, Farhad Samji & Sajid)	<i>Dilwale</i> [2015, 262 nd]	<i>Chennai Express</i> [2013, 23 th]

Raj (light blue) and Rahul (dark blue) movies classified by director along with their date of release and current Bollywood all-time grossing rank (source: Box Office India).

Raj, the Big-Hearted

"Dilwale" often translated as big-hearted or brave-hearted summarises in one word all Rajs. If in *Raja Ban Gaya Gentleman*, Raj Mathur battles for justice, from *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge (DDLJ)* onwards, the Rajs fight for love, winning everybody's hearts only with their sincerity and courage. They literally sweep the heroine off her feet with their grand love gestures, which always culminates in a signature scene: the hero stands, full of trust, with his arms wide open, silently inviting the heroine who then, runs uninhibitedly towards him and ends in his protective embrace.



Raj Malhotra opening his arms to Simran in *DDLJ* (left) and Rahul Mehra carving Kiran's name on his chest in *Darr* (right).

Rahul, the Flawed Hero

First popularised by *Darr*'s unhinged, stammering stalker, the name Rahul is nowadays associated with charm and eloquence. Unlike Raj, Rahul epitomises the flawed hero: a mere human who is very proud, makes wrong choices and even never verbalises his love. Besides, he often owes his happy ending to serendipity (a tragic death, the timely help of his lover's fiancé...). Thus, the Rahuls reinforce two popular beliefs:

- true love does not need words, as it can be seen in the eyes, the mirrors of the soul;
- fate is decided by God and is out of one's hands.



Raj (Surinder) voicing his distress over his wife never loving him back to a mannequin dressed as Surinder.

The Meta Raj

In *Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi*, SRK plays Surinder Sahni, a moustached average salaryman who disguises himself into Raj Kapoor to get closer to his wife, Taani. A larger than life character, Raj reflects Surinder's preconceived ideas of Bollywood romantic heroes named Raj/Rahul and of the hero his wife yearns for. However, if that alter ego succeeds in befriending Taani, making her smile and believing in love again, their relationship has always been doomed since Raj will never be more than an illusion. In the end, simply by staying true to himself, Surinder conquers his wife's heart.

Conclusion

SRK's Rajs and Rahuls exemplify two types of Bollywood heroes: the victorious fighter and the anti-hero (Kumar, 2017). It would be interesting, in future studies, to see how much they have influenced not only SRK's other romantic characters but also subsequent Bollywood significant romantic heroes.

Works Cited

- Barthes, Roland. *S/Z*. Translated by Richard Miller, Hill and Wang, 1974.
- Kumar, Satendra. "Hero." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 40, n°2, 2017, pp. 327-329.