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Dev Anand: The Original Rebel Hero of the Indian Cinema

Sharaf REHMAN¹

Abstract

In literature, and to a certain extent, in films, a hero is larger than life human with extraordinary powers and a kind heart. An anti-hero too has supernatural powers, but his motives can be suspect. The films in the late 1930s and early 1940s introduced a hero that was trying to make good, however, his past was less than perfect, and his actions to justify the end results were less than heroic. This kind of hero -a rebel hero - was self-centered and often driven by worldly gains, revenge, or lust. James Cagney, John Garfield, and Humphrey Bogart exemplified the rebel hero in the American cinema. James Mason portrayed similar characters in the British films of the same era. Among the three Indian screen legends of the 1950s and 1960s – Dilip Kumar, Raj Kapoor, and Dev Anand – Dilip Kumar and Raj Kapoor were always the all-good heroes. Dev Anand was more daring in his choice of roles and often portrayed characters that were involved with crime, gambling, and gangsters. Using contextual analysis, this paper traces the development of the rebel hero phenomenon and Dev Anand as one of the first rebel heroes of the Indian cinema.

Keywords: Heroes in literature, *film noir*, rebel hero, Indian cinema, John Garfield, Dev Anand.

1. Heroes in Literature

In the classical approach to the structure of dramatic writing, Aristotle placed supreme importance on the plot; characters were secondary to the storyline “The plot, then, is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy; Character holds the second place”. A great deal has been devoted to the analysis of and types of plots (Brockett 1987, 45). For nearly two thousand years, the position of the plot remained unchallenged until the dramatists of the late 19th century, e.g., Henrik Ibsen and Anton Chekhov who wrote tragedies that relied on their characters rather than their plots. The 20th century saw a departure from Aristotle’s position when playwrights and screenwriters developed their material based on strong characters rather than the circumstances of the plots that determined the destinies of the characters.

With a new emphasis on character, the spotlight shifted from the types of conflicts to the types of characters – mainly the types of heroes. The popularity of film noir of the late 1930s turned the conventions of storytelling upside down. *Film noir* relied on narration by the main

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character, glamorously photographed leading ladies, low-key high-contrast night scenes, a seductive femme fatale, and a leading man who was less than a perfect hero or a gentleman. In *film noir*, trust and honesty were rare. No one could be trusted, and betrayal and seduction were the common currency. Protagonists, antagonists, heroines, and the vamps were all engulfed in darkness. No one was above suspicion, and everyone was anxious, restless, and cautious. The masculinity of the hero rested on shaky grounds and was easily derailed by someone pretending to a damsel in distress (Nichols, 2010: 250). Unlike the traditional hero who stood for justice and was receptive to love, the heroes of noir films were driven by greed, self-interest, and used women for their pleasure and purpose.

Film noir gave rise to a new kind of a hero – the rebel hero – an anti-hero but someone that could be reformed and set on the right path. Unlike the classical, virtuous, and lawful heroes such as John Wayne and Gary Cooper, the rebel hero was not always brave, selfless, upright or unyielding. This new breed of heroes, that primarily came into being with the types of characters that were often played by actors such as James Cagney, Humphrey Bogart, and Robert Mitchum² brought to screen. This band of unruly characters was led by one of the early method actors of cinema – John Garfield, and maverick film directors – Nicholas Ray³ (Eisenschitz, 1990), and Michael Curtiz⁴ (Robinson, 1993; Rode, 2017).

A rebel hero differs from the epic heroes or the tragic heroes in several aspects.

A rebel hero, unlike James Bond, is not willing to confront the danger fearlessly. He is reluctant and unwilling. Unlike a classical hero such as King Arthur, the rebel hero is selfish and unwilling to risk his life the sake of others. Unlike an all-good, and always-good hero, a rebel hero has a history of not always having been on the right side of the law. He is less than perfect and has faults like ordinary people. He is a lonely person filled with self-pity and self-doubt. He neither trusts others nor cares much for the well-being of others around him. If necessary, unlike the traditional heroes, to save his own life he will readily sacrifice another person. Nor would he hesitate to court another man's wife. He has no scruples. One is never certain of his background or his motives. He is cynical and trusts no one and is ready to break the law for his personal gratifications.

1.2. John Garfield

² Film critic, Roger Ebert called Robert Mitchum “the soul of *film noir*.”

³ Some noteworthy films by Nicholas Ray include: *They Live by Night* (1947), *In a Lonely Place* (1950), *Johnny Guitar* (1954), and *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955).

⁴ Michael Curtiz's film most relevant to the theme of this paper include *Casablanca* (1942), and *Mildred Pierce* (1945).

John Garfield (1913-1952) was the embodiment of such a character in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946), *Body and Soul* (1947), *He Ran All the Way* (1951) and many other films. Garfield studied acting under Lee Strasberg and Stella Adler in the New York theatre. He was among the first to bring to the screen the method acting associated with actors such as Marlon Brando, James Dean, and Lee J. Cobb, and directors like Elia Kazan to the postwar American cinema.

In *Dust Be My Destiny* (1939) as Joe Bell, a convict about to be released, John Garfield tells the warden: *I'm sorry I was chump enough to think that cops would believe a nobody like me when I told them I was only trying to help a guy who was shot. I should have kept my nose out of trouble. Don't worry, warden, I'm wised up now. Cause no matter what happens, or who gets hurt, from now on, Joe Bell runs the other way.*

A little later in the film Joe Bell tells his companions: *Nobody gives guys like us a break.*

When falsely accused of murder, his wife asks him, *"What're you going to do?"*

He tells her, *"What do you mean what I'm gonna? What I've done when in a spot. Run."*

In another early film, Garfield as a boxer, comments, *"Nobody has got friends."*

His manager/promoter protests, *"What do you mean 'nobody has got friends'? Aren't I your friend?"*

Garfield: *"You're my friend for 50 %, you're my friend."*

In a 1946 film, *Nobody Lives Forever*, Garfield as a con man warns his leading lady: *I don't want to get rough with you unless I have to!*

In the same film, he admits: *People like me don't change.*

Body and Soul (1947), considered as one of the best boxing films, offers a few examples of characteristics common in the rebel heroes.

A social worker tries to help Garfield's mother. Garfield yells at the social worker: *"We don't want any help. Tell them we're dead. We don't want any help."*

Garfield (as Charlie Davis) tells his friend/manager to get him booked for a fight he can throw and make some money. Anna Davis, his mother, disapproves.

Anna Davis: *I forbid, I forbid. Better buy a gun and shoot yourself.*

Charlie Davis responds: *You need MONEY to buy a gun!*

At the close of *Body and Soul* (1947) after Garfield as Charlie Davis, goes against the 'fix' of the boxing match, he tells his promoter:

Charlie Davis: *Get yourself a new boy. I retire.*

Roberts, the promoter: *What makes you think you can get away with this?*

Charlie Davis: *What are you gonna do? Kill me? Everybody dies.*

Garfield died in 1952 at a young age of 39. Since his films have not been widely circulated, he has remained somewhat unrecognized and underrated by the moviegoers of the past sixty years. Consequently, Garfield is not as well-known as a rebel hero as, for instance, Humphrey Bogart playing Rick Blaine in *Casablanca* (1942) ⁵.

The police inspector Renault (Claude Raine): “*I have often speculated on why you don’t return to America. Did you abscond with the church funds? Did you run off with a senator’s wife? I like to think you killed a man. It’s the romantic in me.*”

Blaine responds: *It was a combination of all three.*

Blaine as being elusive is demonstrated when an officer of the Third Reich asks, “*What is your nationality?*”

“*I’m a drunkard.*” Blaine answers.

On his being self-centered and selfish, Blaine has this to say: *I stick my neck out for nobody,*” and later, “*I’m the only cause I’m interested in.*”

His self-pity is evident when a young Bulgarian refugee, who is willing to sleep with the police inspector to secure exit visas for herself and her husband, asks Blaine: *Oh, Monsieur, you are a man. If someone loved you very much so that your happiness was the only thing she wanted in the whole world, but she did a bad thing to make certain of it, could you forgive her?*

Blaine replies: *Nobody ever loved me so much.*

When his old flame, Ilsa Lund (Ingrid Bergman) pulls a gun on him, he moves a step closer to her and says, “*Go ahead and shoot. You’ll be doing me a favor.*”

2. Rebel Heroes of Indian Cinema

Indian cinema has had its share of *film noir* and rebel heroes. A cycle of popular Hindi *noir* films, almost all set in contemporary Bombay (now Mumbai), regularly featured many of the characteristic elements of Hollywood *film noir*, including heroes (most consistently embodied throughout the period by the suave star Dev Anand) who skirted the border of legal and illegal activity. Like their counterparts in American *film noir*, these men were streetwise and confidentially negotiate swanky nightclubs featuring alluring femmes fatales (often explicitly Westernized through signifiers such as clothing, and smoking,) as well as the semi-illicit temptations of alcohol and gambling. (Creekmur, 2014).

However, long before there was Nana Patekar – the ‘*ever-agitated man*’, or Amitabh Bachchan as the ‘*angry young man*’ or Dharmendra as the ‘*garam*’ (hot) leading man, there was Dev

⁵ All dialogue from *Casablanca* (1942) is from the film’s script that is available from <http://www.vincasa.com/casabla.pdf>

Anand, an actor equally successful as a romantic leading man as well as the rebel hero of the Golden Age of the Indian cinema – 1940s-1960s (Rajadhyaksha & Willemen, 1999; Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2004). The triumvirate that dominated the Hindi screen in those decades consisted of three megastars – Dilip Kumar (1922-), Raj Kapoor (1924-1988), and Dev Anand (1923-2011).

Dilip Kumar played the tragic hero who sacrificed his own love and (often) his life for the happiness of the women he loved. Kumar’s audience did not expect him to compromise his principals or ever do anything unethical. In an early film, *Aan – Pride* - (1952) he kidnaps the woman he loves. It turns out she loved him too. In *Amar -The Immortal* - (1954), he takes advantage of a poor girl, repents and punishes himself. In *Ganga Jamuna*⁶ (1960), he plays a simple-minded dacoit (Ganga) who pays for his ill-doings with his life at the hands of his brother, Jamuna (Nasir Khan). Between 1944 and 1998 (the years while Kumar was active, he appeared in 65 films and set the standard for a tragic hero and a self-destructing protagonist.

Raj Kapoor cultivated an image similar to that of Charlie Chaplin and often played a naïve and a poor man who was always honest. He acted in nearly 70 films and there was never any doubt about Kapoor’s motives or intentions. In this regard, both Kumar and Kapoor were classical heroes. Dev Anand took chances with his image and career. According to Ravi Shanker Kapoor (2019), Anand carved a distinct place by “playing the role of a delinquent — as a pickpocket, a dacoit, a black-marketer, a smuggler, a crook, a gambler”. However, Anand was always a gentleman. And when he was not, as in *House No. 44* (1955), he aspired to become one. As a romantic lead, Dev Anand was, stylish, elegant, handsome, and gentlemanly. The tilted head, a cigarette hanging delectably between his lips, the saucy dialogues which only Dev Anand could speak, the smile only he could smile” (Kapoor, 2019). Over a period of 65 years, Anand appeared in 114 films.

Den Anand was born in Gurdaspur (India) in 1923. He attended the Government College in Lahore (now in Pakistan) and earned a B.A. in English Literature. He moved to Bombay (now Mumbai) in the early 1940s. Bombay was, and to a certain degree still remains, the film capital of India. In 1946, Anand was cast in a film about Hindu-Muslim unity – *Hum Eh Hain* (We are One). While shooting the film, Anand befriended the film’s choreographer – Guru Dutt. Anand and Dutt made a pact: if Dutt were to direct a film he’d cast Anand as the lead, and if Anand got to produce a film, he’d have Dutt direct the picture (Bali, 1999). Because of his looks and figure, Dev Anand was often referred to as Gregory Peck of the Indian cinema.

⁶ *Ganga* is the Hindi word for the river Ganjis and *Jamuna* is the second big river in India. In the movie, *Ganga Jamuna* (1960), the two brothers were names Ganga and Jamuna.

2.1.Dev Anand

After having acted in half-a-dozen films, and with the success of his 1948 film, *Ziddi* (The stubborn) Dev Anand launched his own production company – Navketan Films in 1949. The first venture was released in 1949. The film was titled, *Afsar* (Officer) – an adaptation of Nikolai Gogol's *The Government Inspector General*. *Afsar* (1949) was directed by Anand's elder brother, Chetan Anand. For the next project, *Baazi* (Gamble), Anand brought Guru Dutt to direct. *Baazi* (1951) was Guru Dutt's directorial debut and beginning of the Dev Anand as a rebel hero. As Jain (2012: 104) observed: "Not as sexily cynical as Robert Mitchum or sourly charismatic as Humphrey Bogart, Dev Anand managed to be 'dark enough' to make many of the desi (local) noirs he acted in work."

The film was inspired by the American film, *Gilda* (1946) featuring Glen Ford and Rita Hayworth. Just as Johnny Farrell (Glen Ford) was caught cheating in *Gilda*, Madan (Dev Anand) is caught cheating in *Baazi*. Madan is unemployed and is living in a shanty with his younger sister who is suffering from tuberculosis. In need of money and unable to find work, he takes a job at a nightclub where he gambles with the customers and cheats to win for the club owner.

A dancer at the club falls for him. Madan is tempted, but his attention is diverted to a young idealist doctor, Rajni (Kalpana Kartik) who opens a hospital in his neighborhood and treats the poor people for free. Rajni treats Madan's sister. Rajni and Madan fall in love. The dancer at the club does not like that fact that Madan has become romantically involved with Rajni. Rajni's father (K.N. Singh) disapproves of the friendship as he sees Madan as a petty criminal. The father arranges for an assassin to kill Madan. The dancer at the club steps in and takes the bullet that was intended for Madan. She dies. Madan is arrested for her murder. An investigator sets a trap and gets Rajni's father to admit that he hired the assassin. Rajni's father is sent to prison for conspiring to murder. Madan is sentenced for three years in prison for gambling. Once released from prison, Madan is united with Rajni. As a likable scoundrel in *Baazi*, Indian *film noir* found its rebel hero.

In the same year, 1951, when *Baazi* became a hit, Dev Anand's romantic film *Aaram* – Comfort, was equally successful. The following year, Guru Dutt directed Anand again in a crime drama – *Jaal* -The Net. Anand, like Tony, plays a heartless gold smuggler who is ready to sell a village girl, Maria (Geeta Bali) to a pair of Arab human traffickers. While in *Baazi* (1951), Madan was drawn into gambling and crime to raise money for his sick sister, there is no such motive for Tony's all-bad character. At the end of the film, Maria convinces him that

he should give himself up to the police, pay for his crimes, and when he is released from the prison, she'd be waiting for him. Tony surrenders to the police. *Jaal* was loosely based on an Italian film, *Bitter Rice* (1949) that was directed by Giuseppe De Santis

Jaal cemented Guru Dutt's position among the top directors in India and established Anand's style of rapid dialogue delivery – something that has been imitated frequently, but none has been able to match Anand's charm, his smile, and his song-like speech pattern. *Jaal* (1952) was a huge success. In the same year, Anand had two romantic films, *Tamasha* (Game), a comedy, and *Aandhiyan* (Cruel Winds).

Following the paths of a romantic hero as well as a rebel hero, Anand scored another big hit in 1955 with *House No. 44*. As Ashok, a penniless and homeless, he sleeps on the footpaths and picks pockets. When the rightful owner of a wallet confronts him, Ashok says, “*Here's your wallet. Count your money. It's all there except one bill that I gave to my partner to buy food. If you want to report it to the police, a plainclothes detective is right there. Go ahead.*”

The owner of the wallet asks: *What do you do?*

Ashok replies, “*Nothing. Everything. Money makes one do anything.*”

And when he needs money, he turns an informer and turns in a man who had once helped him.

Near the end of the film, Ashok faces the revolver of the leader of the gangsters who threatens to kill him. The self-destructive Ashok declares: “*You can't frighten me with death. The life that you have allowed me so far is not living but dying. I have escaped that life and will escape it again. Dying at your hands will be like getting a life.*”

During a career that spanned six decades, Anand appeared in 114 films. He produced 35 movies and directed 19. He also wrote scripts for 13 of his films.

Indian films made during the 1940s, 1950s, and the 1960s included songs and dance sequences. Indian *noir* was no different. However, the lyrics in the *noir* films emphasized the self-pity, the isolation, and distrust.

Every time I sigh

It's a tsunami

You see it all

And pretends not to see (*Kaala Bazaar* -Black Market)

There may have been some

Who received love in return for their love,

Whenever I sought happiness
I received garlands of thorns. (*Pyasa* – The Thirsty)

Sometimes I laugh at myself
Sometimes at my circumstances.

Why do I continue to love?

Who for?

Questions like these make me cry. (*Hum Dono* -Two of Us)

The dance sequences, especially those in the night clubs featuring the seductive women trying to persuade the leading men into the lure of gambling, alcohol, sex, and crime depicted the entrapment of the leading men. In *Baazi* (1951), the dancing girl throws a net around the leading man and as she circles around him, she traps him in her net. The lyrics of the song are:

Why be bashful?

Why worry?

King of my heart,

Come closer to me.

The exhibit below lists Dev Anand’s movies that dealt with crime, the underworld, and the *noir* side of Bombay and Anand as an individual (like millions of other homeless and faceless in the metropolitan cities) is almost-lost-in-the-crowd.

EXHIBIT I – Selected Bibliography of Dev Anand

Year	Title	Dev Anand as	
1951	<i>Baazi</i> (Gamble)	Actor, Producer	
1952	<i>Jaal</i> (The Trap)	Actor	Inspired by an Italian film <i>Bitter Rice</i> (1942)
1955	<i>House No. 44</i>	Actor, Producer	
1956	<i>Pocket Maar</i> (Pickpocket)	Actor	
1956	<i>C.I.D.</i>	Actor	
1957	<i>Dushman</i> (Enemy)	Actor	

1957	<i>Barish</i> (Rain)	Actor	Based on the American film <i>On the Waterfront</i> (1952)
1958	<i>Kala Pani</i> (Life Imprisonment)	Actor, Producer	Filmfare Award – Best Actor
1960.	<i>Kala Bazar</i> (<i>Black Market</i>)	Actor, Producer	
1960	<i>Jaali Note</i> (Counterfeit Money)	Actor	
1960	<i>Bombay ka Baboo</i> (Gentleman from Bombay)	Actor	
1962	<i>Baat Ek Raat Ki</i> (Tale of One Night)	Actor	
1965	<i>Guide</i>	Actor, Producer	Filmfare Award – Best Film; National Film Award – Best Film; nominated for the Best Foreign-language Film at the Academy Awards.
1967	<i>Jewel Thief</i>	Actor, Producer	
1970	<i>The Evil Within</i>	Actor	
1970	<i>Johny Mera Nam</i> (My Name is Johny)		
1971	<i>Gambler</i>	Actor	
1973	<i>Shareef Budmaash</i> (An Honest Scoundrel)	Actor, Producer	
1973	<i>Chhupa Rustam</i> (Dark Horse)	Actor	
1973	<i>Joshila</i> (Spirited)	Actor	
1974	<i>Amir Garib</i> (The Rich and the Poor)	Actor	
1975	<i>Warrant</i>	Actor	
1976	<i>Bullet</i>	Actor	

1978	<i>Des Pardes</i> (Home and Abroad)	Actor, Producer, Writer, Director	
1980	<i>Lootmaar</i> (Looting)	Actor	
1991	<i>Sau Crore</i> (100 Million)	Actor, Producer, Writer, Director	
1994	<i>Gangster</i>	Actor, Producer, Writer, Director	
1996	<i>Return of the Jewel Thief</i>	Actor	
2011	<i>Chargesheet</i>	Actor, Producer, Writer, Director	

3. Conclusions

Long after Mitchum, Bogart, and Garfield were gone, the American cinema continued to produce the rebel heroes in the form of Clint Eastwood, Jack Nicholson, Denzel Washington, and Leonardo DiCaprio. Similarly, the Indian cinema has also produced some megastars since the 1980s that have successfully played both sides of the street. The two most prominent names in the Indian cinema since the 1980s are – Dharmendra and Amitabh Bachchan. Both delivered hit films as romantic leads as well as playing the characters involved with the underworld. The three men that have led the Indian film industry during the past 20 years are Salman Khan, Aamir Khan, and Shah Rukh Khan. These three have also demonstrated that they are capable of playing the lovers as well as the shady characters. The purpose of this paper is not to undermine the talent and ability of the actors of the younger generation. Nor it is to suggest that one actor is better than another. It is, instead, to set the record straight that there was one actor, Dev Anand, who dared to take chances; he succeeded, and others followed in his path. Needless to say, some of the younger actors are better trained, have access to more recent technology to assist in their work, and have been financially more successful than Dev Anand. Into his late 80s, Dev Anand continued to make films. Soon as he completed one project, he moved on to the next. When he was hired as an actor, he entertained his audience. When he produced and directed, he was also a thinly disguised reformist. The Indian film industry is also indebted to Anand as a mentor of new talent. There is a long list of performers, directors, musicians, and technicians that got their initial start in Anand's films.

Anand never lost sight of his responsibility to his audience. In one of his last interviews, he summed up his role as an entertainer with these words: "A star should never show himself as old in a film. He should not use a stick or have white hair or be stooped. It is not fair to those

who come to see him on screen. He should always remain a star” (Jain, 2012; 101). On the passing of Dev Anand, a film director and a scholar of Indian cinema, Karan Bali, wrote: “Of course, we are all mortal but if there’s one person whose passing away one is actually unable to take at all, it is Dev Anand. He was so full of living life to its fullest – the man was life itself.... no one can believe he’s really gone... like Alfred Lord Tennyson’s *brook*, men may come and men may go but Dev Saab would go on forever! (Bali, 2012). Despite Anand’s bad-boy portrayals in dozens of films, he remains one of the most loved and admired actors of Indian cinema. Dev Anand’s physical resemblance to Gregory Peck did not end with their looks. Like Peck, Dev Anand was and still is equally admired as an idol by men and women.

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