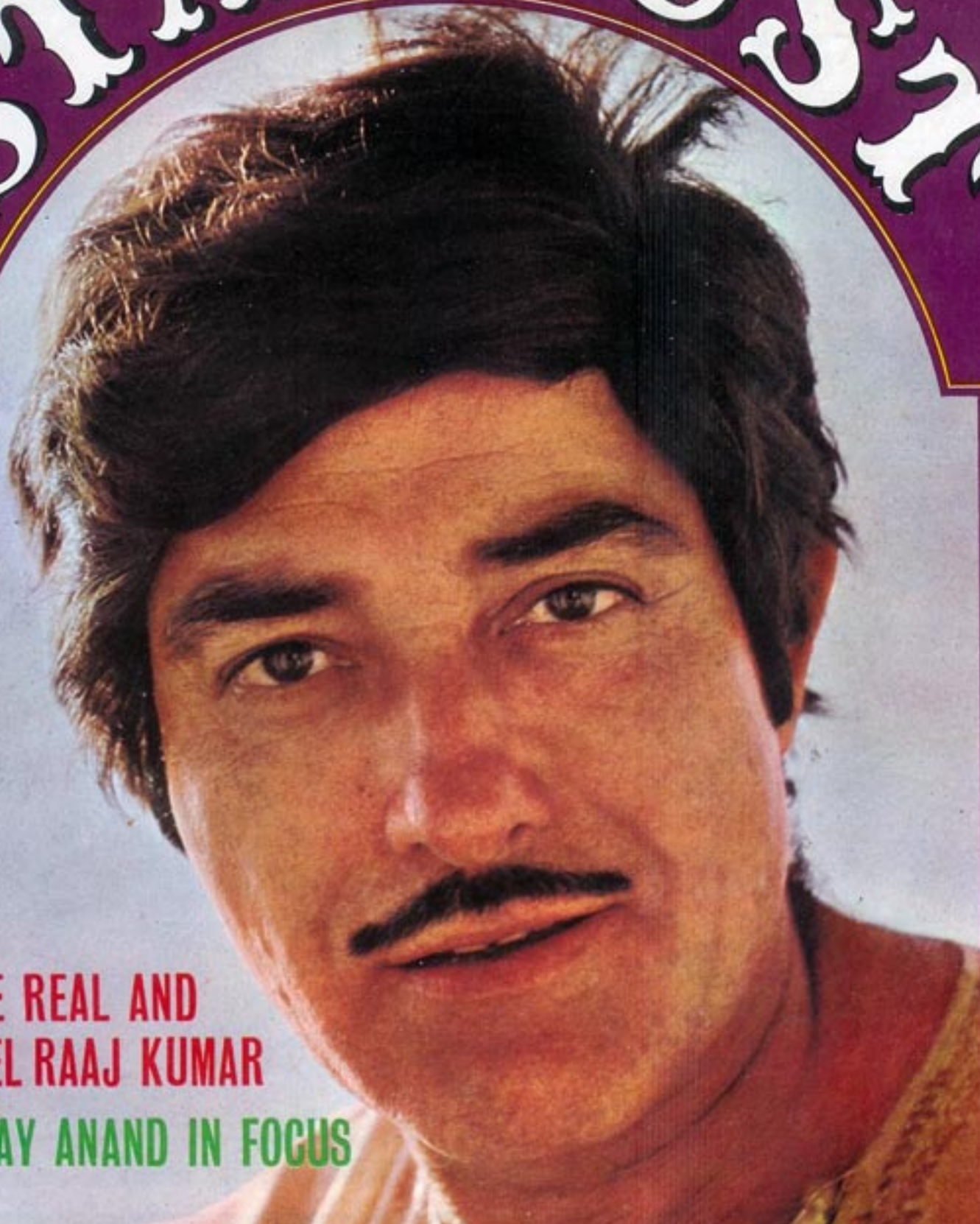


JUNE 1972

Rs. 2/-

# STARDUST



THE REAL AND  
REEL RAAJ KUMAR

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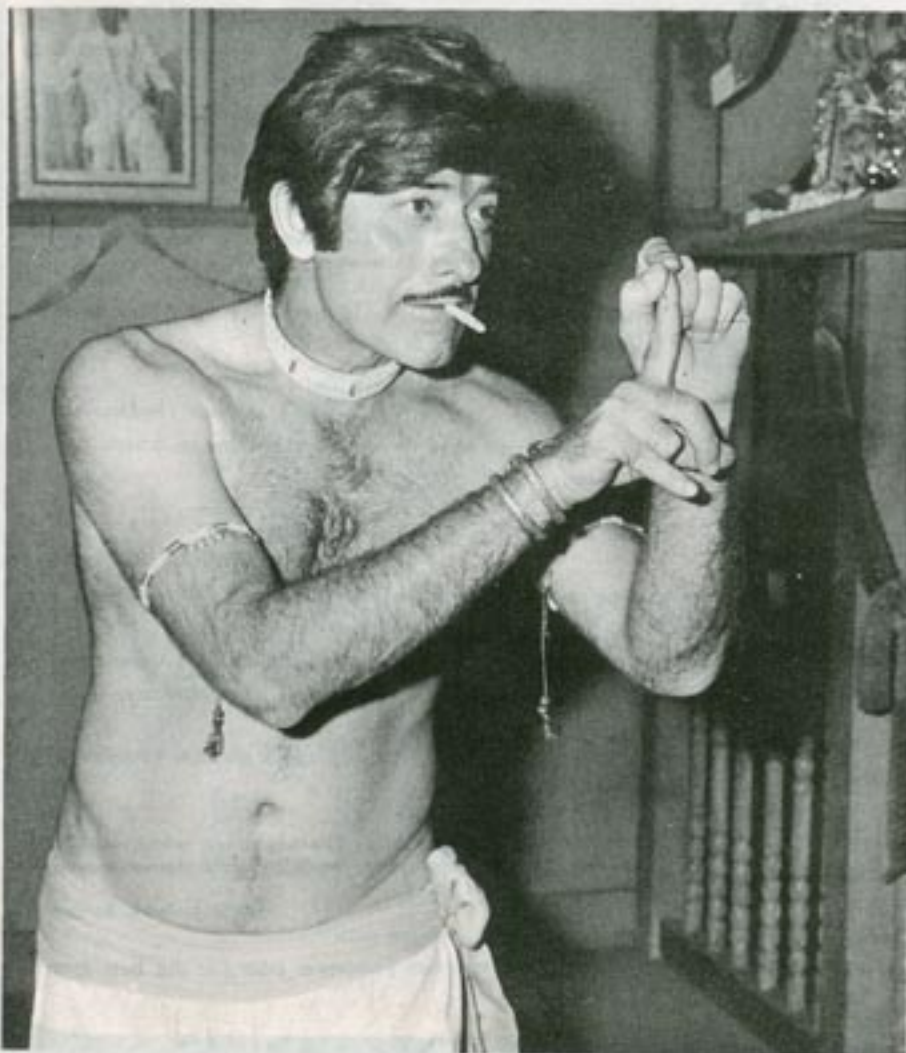


# RAAJ

## WHAT IS HE REALLY LIKE?

A STARDUST INTERVIEW WITH THE 'ECCENTRIC' ANTI-STAR. A MAN WHO HAS BEEN VARIOUSLY DESCRIBED AS COMPLEX, COMPELLING, IMPOSSIBLE AND ENIGMATIC.

### Facts and fingers?



Late one evening, on the tick of the appointed hour, I arrived at Raaj Kumar's Juhu shack called 'The Whispering Windows.' A name as unusual as the shack's owner, I mused, as I stood outside the imposing gate in the darkness. Even as my hand went out to press the

bell, the gate opened noiselessly and a face grinned out at me. In my surprise, I nearly jumped out of my skin.

The servant ushered me in wordlessly. With all the impeccable politeness of the Wodehousian character—Jeeves, he made me comfortable with an iced coke, piped in some light music and disappeared. With a feeling that was a mixture of excitement, awe and suspense I waited for the appearance of the man of whom a know-all in the industry had said, "He's eccentric, he's egotistic, he's an enigma!" Well, puzzles, mysteries, riddles and the like have always interested me. I like solving them. Raaj Kumar, the man, intrigued me and I wanted to figure him out.

I heard footsteps. I held my breath eagerly. It was the secretary (Sigh!). He informed me that Raaj Kumar was on his way to our appointment.

The secretary and I exchanged small talk. Suddenly, he stopped abruptly and jerked his head to one side. "That's him," he muttered. He looked like a faithful dog that cocks up its ears at the first sound of its master's arrival.

We heard the whirr of an engine coming to a halt outside the gate. A dog barked. "That's him," the secretary repeated. I fixed my eyes on the door.

I saw him coming through the garden in the cool of the



# KUMAR

night, leading his dog by its leash. It was a grand entrance—Lal Pathar style.

He smiled crookedly, apologised graciously, lit a pipe and sat down, with Toby, the dog, at his feet. His man Jeeves (but Albert is his name) appeared. Raaj Kumar asked me, "Drink?" "No thank you." "Mind if I have one?" "Not at all", I replied. "Smoke?", he offered a pack of cigarettes. "No, thank you", I shook my head. "Mind if I smoke?" "Go ahead." I found his quixotic etiquette so charming! He kept his pipe aside and lit a cigarette. Albert mixed the usual for his master... Scotch and water. Stretched languidly over the settee Raaj Kumar looked cool, balanced, and poised. The man himself is incredible and indescribable. You can't pin him down with labels, you can't classify him into a kind. Like he himself admitted, "This individual called myself is an undefinable, living, pulsating organism. Its responses and reactions are variable according to the external stimuli." When I smartly took a pot-shot and remarked that I would describe him as an introvert, Raaj Kumar gave me one of his amused smiles, and said, "I've the capacity to be an unbelievable and astonishing extrovert, which has often bewildered and sometimes shocked people." I know of a starlet who'd chanced to see Raaj Kumar "in action" at

a discotheque. The girl was in raptures when she described what she called 'the dual personality of the man'. Ebuilient, witty, he was the gay, dashing cavalier with his old-world charm and manners. Even her escort had commented admiringly. "He's a jolly good fellow."

Yet there are few (a minority really) who don't think that Raaj Kumar is such a jolly good fellow, after all. The last time I'd heard of two brawls in the film circles, Raaj Kumar had figured in both! Heated words were coming to an exchange of blows when peace-makers intervened. Like an onlooker re-

A shot in the dark?

Cover: Rajendra Panchotia





marked, "Raaj Kumar is a damn good talker, but he should talk less!" But there's this one thing about Raaj Kumar. He is outspoken to the point of being tactless while expressing his thoughts to others. This indiscreet trait in him has made him run into a certain amount of criticism and antagonism. But he is not one to lose his equanimity. When he holds that, 'for truth there is no deadline', he doesn't think it necessary to conceal or disguise his opinions. No compromises for him. There's this instance when he told a well-known writer-producer-director "For a communist, you're a great, damn capitalist!" To another, who wanted Raaj Kumar to work gratis on the strength that it was a patriotic film he was making, Raaj Kumar said he would, only if the film-maker agreed to donate all the profits to the nation. The famous film-maker signed another hero in a real hurry. Raaj Kumar laughed, "Now where was the justification, where was the patriotic fervour?" He doesn't see why he should tolerate anything phoney. But it's not in him to bear ill-will for long. "To be forbearing is my moral belief," he said. And when the same producer approached him for his next movie and offered him the hero's role at the actor's price, Raaj Kumar accepted it without any past grudges. "Hate is not part of my nature," he explained.

An extremely articulate conversationalist, he speaks in measured low-key tones. Even on screen, it's his unique style of dialogue delivery that has won him so much approbation. Remember the way he'd come out a front-runner as the suave, bland, 'Raja Saab' in the star studded 'Waqt'? Why, with just a line spoken with his customary nonchalance, he eclipsed

ed all the other characters.

Yes, Raaj Kumar's screen magnetism sparks off the same magic when you meet him in person. His conversation, laced with Shakespearean quotes and a natural coating of good humoured cynicism is both convincing and stimulating. Like when he remarked once, "When one has surplus wealth, man destroys money or money destroys man!" But is he a cynic? "I fail to classify myself in this category. Who is a cynic? A man who willfully, without any rational discourse or argument, refuses to accept the point of view of another man." Now see what I mean when I say that when he speaks, you not only appreciate his words but also remember them. Me? I hung on to every word he uttered! I had

to because he talked so profoundly that missing even a word could disjoin the total meaning of his discourse. He has such a keen intellect that he gives the impression that he has the mental ability to understand what is not obvious to the ordinary individual. Some would call him highbrow, I think he's superior!

Suddenly he tilted his glass and poured some whiskey in his palm. I blinked at him. With tales of his personal eccentricities fresh in my mind, I was just beginning to wonder whether lapping whiskey from the palm was one of his idiosyncrasies, when he bent down and proffered his palm to Toby. But Toby merely sniffed and walked out into the garden for fresh air. Raaj Kumar explain-

Bhai ho to aisa! Raaj Kumar with his pretty sister



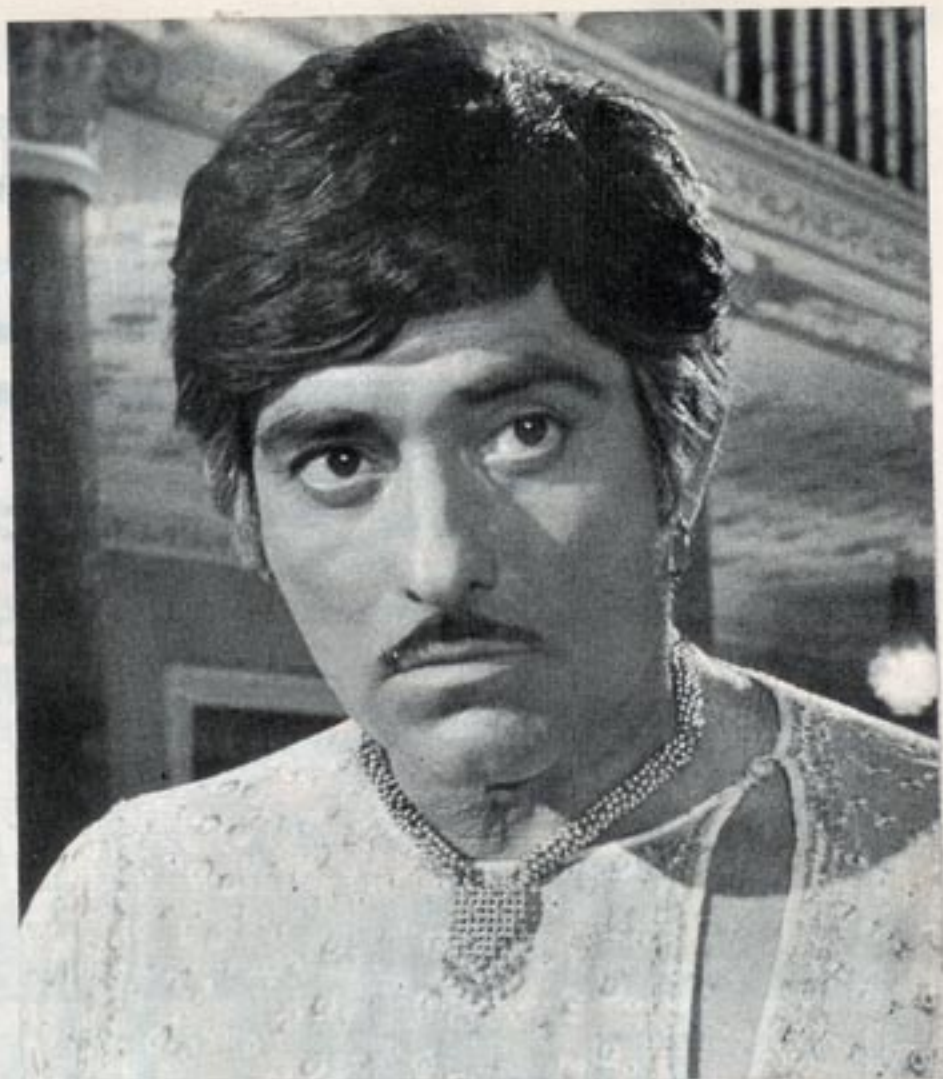


ed mildly, "He's not in the mood!" Then he smiled, "You know he's been wanting a mate for long, but I have refused to get him one."

"Why?" I asked curiously.

"Because then he'll love me less and I am possessive." And so seriously did he say it that I realised he wasn't trying to be funny. It was a matter-of-fact answer.

How much of an eccentric is Raaj Kumar? What makes people call him an eccentric in the first place? There's nothing odd about his behaviour. On the contrary, the general opinion is that he is one of the most well-bred persons in the industry. Men envy his cool and collected veneer, women flip over his sleek savoir-faire and one and all admire his refinement. Why then the charges of eccentricity? "I don't understand the application of the term to me," Raaj Kumar himself wondered quizzically, with a I-care-two-hoots-anyway shrug. Far from being put off, I think he rather enjoys the fact that people believe he's slightly crazy. The thought definitely amuses him. He likes taking people by surprise. He likes doing the unexpected even if it appears incongruous to others. Look at the rare, outlandish and fanciful outfits he's been sporting of late at parties and gatherings, utterly oblivious of popping eyes. At one to-do he appeared suited-booted and with earrings on. Again he has his own brand of humour which not all can appreciate. For a friend's birthday present he chose a crib! On another's jubilee wedding anniversary when most of the guests had turned up with the conventional giant-sized bouquets, Raaj Kumar preferred to give a silver plaque with the following inscription "Batting for 25 years and still going strong".



"Fame takes away as much as it gives!"

He's as unconventional an actor as he's a man. In a way he was the first successful anti-star. Today, of course, we've quite a few younger, non-conformist stars vying for this label. But Raaj Kumar's screen personality has remained as distinctively original as before. If he wished he could get any role he desired but he has his own reasons for accepting those that he does and refusing those that he doesn't. "There's no producer who hasn't come to me but I've worked with only one percent of them." Particularly after Raaj Kumar shot into prominence with his scene-stealing performance in 'Dil Ek Mandir', producers vied between themselves to get him to work for them. And after 'Waqt'

Raaj Kumar became the biggest selling factor in the Hindi film stocks and shares. But he seems unperturbed by his success and fame. "They are intangibles, they cannot be measured." Of the future of his career he says confidently "My career cannot languish, it can only change. I may stop playing the hero's roles and take on character roles but my price, my value, will never diminish."

I asked him to name some of his favourite roles to which he replied honestly, "I have not yet done a role I've disliked." (Most stars would answer this question by naming their hit films as their favourites and only too eagerly attribute their flops to 'poor' roles.) But Raaj Kumar says, "Every role that I've per-



formed has been of my choice. I select only what I like." It is the same in his personal life. "I believe in things I do, I do things I believe in." He's a man who never has moments of self-doubt and one who, on the sheer strength of his self-assurance and self-will can do anything he wants to. Because his belief is that fifty percent of the secret of happiness is **knowing** what one wants and the other fifty percent is **doing** what one really wants. This is the essence of Raaj Kumar's character. I asked him if he ever felt lonely. "I can find companionship in a crowd or in solitude. No, I never feel lonely but there are moments when I want to be alone." At such moments he retreats to this plush, seashore shack. In gay moods he likes company

but he says, "I pick my associates, otherwise socialization would be hypocrisy."

Does he have any unfulfilled dream? "I have never dreamt. At no stage in my life have I felt a sense of unfulfillment. Never have I suffered a feeling of vacuum."

Does he have any particular ambition? "No ambition except the desire to be perfect."

With such a perfectly unusual answer I thought it fitting to conclude my interview. Yet I had been debating all along whether I could take the liberty of bringing up the sacred topic of his marriage. I know it's one of the taboo subjects he has never been keen on making public or on discussing with strangers. But something ventured is something gained. So, quite

timidly I asked whether he has had to make any adjustments between his personal and professional life. "I've always kept them separate therefore the question of adjustments doesn't arise. I've no professional spill-overs into my personal life nor any personal spill-overs into my professional life, though both are parts of the same integrated being." With that rhetoric, I had to be satisfied.

Don't ask me to sum up the man. He's not the sort that can be put in a nut-shell. And while I would not confirm whether he is an eccentric or an egocentric, I'd say he's an enigma alright, a man who is complex and compelling, one who can fearlessly say, "I'm the master of my fate, I'm the captain of my soul," and get away with it! ■

—UMA RAO

Hum sab ek hain! Raaj, Dev and Sunil

