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My father-in-law used to call Shashi Uncle “taxi” back then,’ Neetu Singh Kapoor says. ‘*Ki kisi ko bhi apni gaadi main bitha leta hai!*’ (‘He’d seat anyone and everyone in his car.’)

Neetu speaks figuratively, of course. Raj Kapoor used the word ‘taxi’ to describe his brother when he was desperately trying to get dates from Shashi Kapoor for *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*—a film that ostensibly explores the distinction between physical and spiritual love, but, in fact, represents Raj’s love for the singer, Lata Mangeshkar. While actors were queuing up to play the lead role in the film, Raj strongly felt only Shashi could play his younger self in this somewhat autobiographical tale. So he looked at his brother’s schedule and coolly appropriated all the dates he had given other filmmakers. ‘He also insisted that on the days I was to shoot with him, I wouldn’t shoot with anyone else,’ Shashi tells film critic, Deepa Gahlot. ‘To accommodate Rajji, I had to work round the clock, doing four to five shifts a day, sleeping in a car.’ His frenetic lifestyle, which made a car his semi-permanent address, led to the nickname, ‘taxi’.

But ‘taxi’ came to become Shashi’s moniker for other reasons, too. Author Bunny Reuben suggests that both Shashi and Zeenat Aman (Shashi’s co-star in *Satyam Shivam Sundaram*) were subject to Raj’s tongue-lashing when he learnt of their shooting calendars. ‘You people aren’t stars,’ Raj scolded. ‘You are all taxis. Someone puts your meter down—you go there! Then someone else puts your meter down—and you go there. Two hours here...two hours elsewhere. Taxis! That’s what you artists have become.’

The pain of his older brother and father-figure publicly admonishing him stayed with Shashi for many years. ‘That hurt him,’ Madhu Jain says. ‘He was very sensitive, he would never forget anybody who said anything about him, especially if it was Raj Kapoor.’

All the same, there was little Shashi could do to change his film schedule. The late 1970s—the decade that would define Shashi’s career in India—would see the actor taking on a mindboggling number of projects, hopping from studio to studio and playing a range of characters. In fact, Samir Ganguli, who directed the star in *Sharmilee*, says that the shift system in Hindi cinema started because of Shashi. ‘[He] was one of the busiest actors in those days,’ he contends.

Despite an overfull diary, Shashi never let his directors down. Samir states, '[He was] absolutely punctual. At times, because of his hectic schedules, he would get delayed, but none of us would really mind because we knew that once he arrived on the sets, he would never hesitate to deliver what was required of him.'

But Shashi's chock-full roster came with a definite drawback—one that Neetu, who acted in ten films with the star, got to witness first-hand. 'I was very young and I joined the industry at a phase when we did really bad movies together,' she says. 'We would do three shifts. I didn't know *main kiska* character *kar rahi hoon*, *kya kar rahi hoon*. (I didn't know what character I was playing, what I was doing.) Shashi Uncle also would come to the sets and ask, "*Haan kya linein hai?*" ("So what are the lines?")'

A harried Shashi, who could barely keep pace with his film commitments, found it near-impossible to stay abreast of plots or characters. Sanjna Kapoor remembers learning of this during long family drives from South Bombay to Juhu to visit Prithviraj Kapoor. 'When Papaji was alive—and every Sunday we'd go to see him, if my dad was in town—I would ask my father to narrate the story of a film he was acting in. And he would make it up. He had no idea. He had absolutely no clue!'