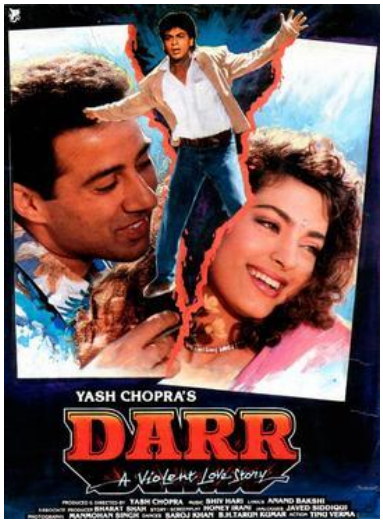
HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Anwesha Maity, PhD.

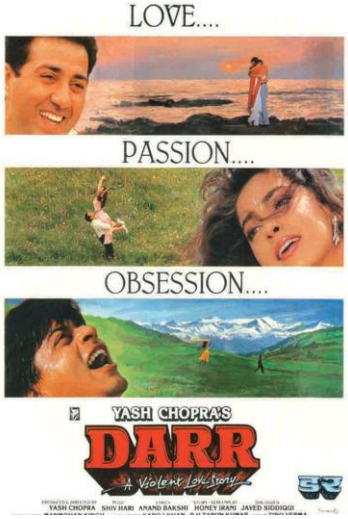
FEAR / *DARR* (1993)

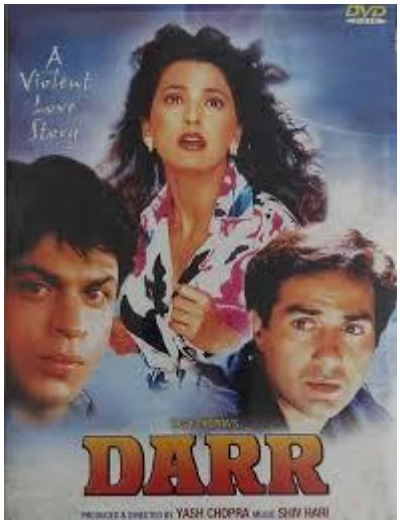
Yash Chopra

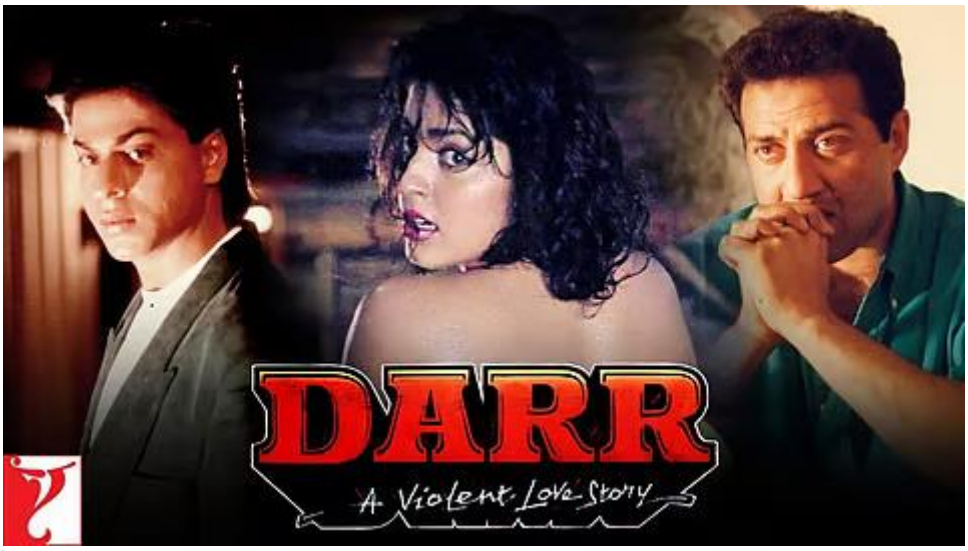
Hindi language

Film link: https://www.febspot.com/video/339973









OVERVIEW

Director Yash Chopra (1932-2012) was one of the most iconic and influential Indian film-makers who worked in the Bollywood film industry based in Mumbai. Chopra initially worked with his elder brother, B.R. Chopra, making hits such as *Dhool Ka Phool* (*Flowers of the Dust*, 1959) and *Waqt* (*Time,* 1965). In 1973, he launched his own production company, Yash Raj Films, which went on to become one of Bollywood's most powerful production houses, with over 80 films to date. Chopra is considered a "King-maker" of Bollywood cinema, having introduced and nurtured the two biggest stars of the industry, Amitabh Bacchhan and Shah Rukh Khan. His most impactful films include romances such as *Kabhi Kabhie* (*Sometimes,* 1976), *Silsila* (*The Affair,* 1981), *Chandni* (*Moonlight,* 1989) and *Veer Zaara* (2004) and action-packed thrillers such as *Deewaar* (*Wall*, 1975) and *Darr* (*Fear*, 1993). Chopra's work is also memorable for featuring visually stunning imagery shot in diverse and exotic locales, such as Switzerland and Kashmir. He is the only filmmaker to have won the Indian National

Film Award for best popular film five times— four times as director and once as producer. He also received a number of Filmfare Awards (given by *Filmfare* magazine), including 12 nominations and 4 wins for best director and 15 nominations and 4 wins for best film. The government of India honoured him with the Dadasaheb Phalke Award for lifetime achievement in cinema in 2001, and in 2005 he received one of India's highest civilian honours, the Padma Bhushan.

Film In *Darr*, his nineteenth movie as director, Chopra flipped the script on his own identity—or at least on audiences' expectations of love stories, with which he remains so intertwined. Chopra's second and last psychological thriller, the film stars established action hero Sunny Deol, rising heroine Juhi Chawla and a relative newcomer with a background in television, Shah Rukh Khan in the lead roles, along with Anupam Kher, Tanvi Azmi, Annu Kapoor, and Dalip Tahil in supporting roles. *Darr* became an unexpected and major commercial success, ranking as the third highest-grossing Hindi film of the year and the highest-grossing Indian film of the year in overseas markets. It received widespread critical acclaim upon release, with high praise for the direction, story, screenplay, soundtrack, cinematography, costumes and performances of the cast. *Darr* won the National Film Award for Best Popular Film Providing Wholesome Entertainment at the 41st National Film Awards. The film received seven nominations at the 39th Filmfare Awards, including Best Director (Chopra) and Best Villain (Khan), and won two awards: Best Comedian (Kher), and Best Cinematography.

Background Chopra had trouble casting both male and female leads for *Darr*. Rishi Kapoor, who had worked with him in *Chandni*, initially offered to play the "villain", but Chopra didn't think he would be a good fit for either of the male lead roles. Aamir Khan, another rising 1990's star and a very versatile actor, initially accepted and later rejected the role. For the heroine, Chopra considered Sridevi, Raveena Tandon and Madhuri Dixit (who would feature in his next film, *Dil to Pagal Hai*) but had trouble with dates and then settled on Juhi Chawla. *Darr* proved to be a milestone for both Chawla and Khan's careers, catapulting them to stardom. The film emerged as Chawla's third consecutive commercial blockbuster success that year, thus solidifying her career as a leading lady in the 1990s, while Shah Rukh Khan's portrayal of an obsessive lover and "anti-hero" was widely applauded by critics and audiences alike. Chopra and Shah Rukh became inseparable after *Darr*; Shah Rukh stars in all three remaining films that Chopra directed before his death. However, the film also caused a long-standing rift between the two male leads, Shah Rukh and Sunny Deol, as the latter alleged a discrepancy between the script as narrated to him and the film as shown; no one could have expected the massive audience support that Shah Rukh's performance got. According to media reports, Sunny didn't speak to Shah Rukh for 15-16 years because of it and they have yet to work on another film project together. Chopra and Sunny Deol did not collaborate again; Chopra also did not repeat actresses in his remaining films.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Lieutenant Sunil Malhotra	Kiran's boyfriend, later husband (Sunny Deol)
Kiran Malhotra	Sunil's girlfriend, later wife (Juhi Chawla)
Rahul Mehra	Kiran's unrequited lover/ stalker (Shah Rukh Khan)
Vijay Awasthi	Kiran's brother (Anupam Kher)
Poonam Awasthi	Vijay's wife, Kiran's sister-in-law (Tanvi Azmi)
Captain Avinash Mehra	Rahul's father, Sunil's superior (Dalip Tahil)
Vikram "Vicky" Oberoi	Rahul's friend (Annu Kapoor)

SYNOPSIS

Rahul, son of a navy admiral Avinash Mehra, is in love with Kiran, who is engaged to one of his father's officers, Sunil. Kiran lives with her older brother, a diehard cricket fan Vijay and his wife Poonam; they couple are constantly bickering. Sunil does not appear to have any family at all. Rahul's always darkened room is decorated with larger-than-life projections of Kiran and he talks about her on the telephone to his mother. However, Rahul's mother is long dead and this is one sign of his mental illness, along with his refusal to acknowledge that Kiran is in love with Sunil and wants to marry him. Kiran does not know it is Rahul who is the stalker who telephones the house, wishes her "Happy Holi", vandalizes their new apartment and terrorizes her in other ways, including three attempts on Sunil's life. She becomes so disturbed that Sunil takes her on an impromptu honeymoon to Switzerland after giving Rahul the slip. In the meantime, Rahul runs into an old friend Vicky, an alcoholic and drug-addict, with whom he had left a box of Kiran's snapshots and unsent love letters. Vicky dies; Rahul stages it as a suicide and pins the stalking on him, which makes Kiran ecstatic.

Rahul also befriends Vijay and finds out Kiran's location, following them to Switzerland. They meet Rahul there and socialise with him, but Sunil grows suspicious. Rahul stabs Sunil severely in a fight, then takes Kiran hostage in a boat on which he has the prepared paraphernalia for their marriage. She rejects him, but just when he is about to force her into the wedding, Sunil reappears to save her. Sunil beats up Rahul and finally shoots him dead. In the end, they joke about Kiran getting another stalker.

SCENES



Opening scene In a beautiful mountain vale, a pretty young woman (Kiran) dressed in Chopra's signature yellow, reads a love letter from her boyfriend Sunil. It suddenly starts raining and she rushes, wet, into a shed, where she begins undressing. The theme song is whistled and she hears a noise. Later, out with her friends, a loudspeaker plays, "I love you Kiran" from a nearby building, segueing into the song, "*Jaadoo teri nazar*" ("Your eyes are magic/ Whether you say yes or no, you are my Kiran") which they take to be her boyfriend Sunil. Kiran runs around trying to find the hidden man playing a guitar. She doesn't find him, and tells her friends that Sunil must be playing a prank on her. They leave on a train. A man says, "I love you KKKKiiran"!

Title and opening credits A voiceover narrator says, "This story has the same intensity as Romeo and Juliet, Heer and Ranjha etc. but it also has something extra, Darr (Fear)". The title song continues as the train travels some picturesque scenery.

Sunil is awarded for his bravery At a Navy base, Sunil gets off a helicopter and drives off in a jeep. He reports to his superior, Avinash, who gives him a hostage rescue operation on a ship. Sunil is airlifted there in full undercover military gear, rides a motorboat, dives and infiltrates the ship alone, where he rescues the hostage girl by silently killing and then shooting a dozen armed terrorists. Sunil and his team are lauded and awarded a month time off.

Kiran gets a nice surprise At a cricket match, Vijay (Kiran's older brother) dressed in the Indian team's uniform, does some impromptu commentary while his wife, Poonam, says that they're getting late to pick up Kiran. On returning home, Kiran is furious that Sunil hasn't come, but he falls on her, rose in mouth, from her closet! She asks him why he didn't meet her in Shimla and he replies that he was never there; why would he who loved to be with her all the time, hide if he were there? She wonders who it was.



Rahul's obsession We now see Shahrukh Khan waking on the ledge of a high-rise, eyes closed, pulling out petals from a flower, counting "she is mine, she isn't mine". He stops at the last petal just before falling to his death, with "she is mine".

A new apartment Sunil brings Kiran to the new apartment that he has bought for them after marriage. She is overjoyed. They sing another superhit song "*Chhota sa ghar hair yeh magar*" ("Our home may be small/ But please choose it"), with lots of costume changes (slinky, monochrome chiffon sarees). He brings her home afterwards and tries to kiss her, but she tricks him.

A stalker Just as she's about to pull out her keys, someone shines a flash light on her and says "I love you Kiran". She is terrified and starts ringing the doorbell frantically. But before they can open, he disappears. Vijay, rushing out bat in hand, says it's an outsider, someone who wants to play in Sunil's place. Kiran hears a mouth organ playing the "You're my Kiran" tune outside her window. Suddenly, someone calls her on the phone! The next morning, they receive some pictures from her trip from Shimla.



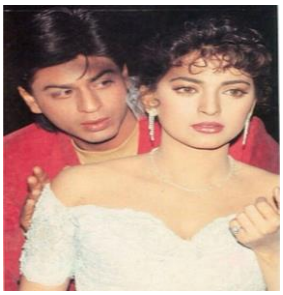
Rahul is mentally ill Elsewhere, Rahul calls his mother and goes on and on her that Kiran is a lovely girl. His room has wall to wall projections of Kiran's snapshots. Suddenly, his father (Avinash, who's also Sunil's superior officer in the navy) steps in. Rahul quickly turns off the projector and says that he's calling his mother. Avinash tells a psychiatrist that Rahul's mother had passed away 18 years ago in a car accident. Rahul is an introverted child and stays in his own world, Avinash reports. The psychiatrist says that he may be holding his father responsible for his mother's death and has many other psychological problems.




Rahul follows Kiran On a larger-than-life projection of Kiran's picture on the wall, Rahul colours her lips in red lipstick. Every day, he stands/ remembers standing at the back of the elevator she rides to school/ work. One day, only two of them end up alone on the elevator. He holds, sniffs and kisses the end of her *dupatta* (long piece of fabric worn, for extra modesty, with *kameez*/ long shirt/dress), but just as he's about to touch her, the door opens and Sunil is there to pick her up.



A terrifying experience Rahul calls Kiran angrily and tells her to stop seeing Sunil and that he will never be able to make her happy. She should live with him, in his arms, because he loves her more than anything. She tells him off and challenges him to change the way she wants to live her life, on her own terms, then hangs up. She's clearly terrified. The phone rings again, echoing throughout the house, but she doesn't pick up. All the phones in the house start ringing discordantly.



Sunil dismisses Kiran's fears Suddenly, Sunil steps in. He was calling and came in when no one answered. He reassures her that a phone is easy enough to take off the hook and she shouldn't be so afraid and jokes to lighten the mood. Later, Poonam tells Sunil and Kiran to get married quickly and that would stop the stalker. Vijay spins tall tales about how he was the most eligible bachelor with stalkers himself before marriage.

Rahul meets Sunil on a ship Rahul strikes up a conversation mentioning their mutual acquaintance, his father. They talk about love and Sunil says that he's getting married. Rahul calls his mother and rails that he won't allow Sunil to snatch Kiran away from him and now has to use harsher tactics to convince Kiran of his love.

Kiran almost drowns While Kiran is swimming, someone pulls her underwater a few times. She is terrified! It turns out to be Sunil. She yells at him and says never to play a prank like that; she thought the stalker was suffocating her. She says she won't live if separated from Sunil. Unbeknownst to them, Rahul watches from above.

Rahul wishes Kiran on her birthday On Kiran's birthday, Vijay, Sunil and Poonam get together for cake on the patio. Suddenly, the lights go out and they all go in to investigate, leaving Kiran in the dark. Suddenly, Rahul comes and kisses her on the cheek, wishes her happy birthday and eats a piece of cake before disappearing again. The "Kiran" song starts playing on a cassette player upstairs. They run upstairs, but no one is there. Vijay tells Sunil they should report it to the police.

A grotesque birthday present Rahul calls to say that Kiran's birthday present is on its way. As Sunil drives away, he realizes that the breaks have been slashed. He crashes into a fence but is unharmed. Rahul imagines Kiran dancing to a rousing instrumental track, with some bits in the rain, in Chopra's signature style.

Sunil sets a trap for the stalker They are anxiously waiting when the phone rings. Sunil encourages Kiran to pick up the phone while Sunil listens on the extension line. Rahul says that she had better get over Sunil otherwise he won't be responsible if anything happens to him. She lies that she won't meet Sunil again and wants to meet him. Rahul sets up a time and place, but doesn't reveal his identity. Vijay and Poonam want the police to be involved. But Sunil says there's no need for an army to kill a rat.

Rahul gives them the slip Kiran waits at the appointed place by the pool while Sunil watches from the hotel. A suspicious man is seen sitting behind her and Rahul is also some distance away. Rahul says in his mind that he had always admired and loved her from their college days. But just as he was walking towards her, he realizes Sunil is watching and doesn't approach Kiran. Later, the police have set up call tracing. Rahul calls and screams at Kiran for lying to him about Sunil. He knows about the call trace too. He says he'll come and play Holi with her the next day. The number is traced, but it's their own upstairs number.



It's Holi!! They have a guest-filled Holi celebration with another superhit song, "*Ang se ang lagana sajan, humein aise rang lagana*" ("Let's embrace and put colour on each other"), with Rahul arriving on the scene playing a *dhol* (large percussion instrument hung around the neck and beaten with sticks) and singing "*Rang Barse*" from *Silsila*. They're all pretty coloured up and unrecognizable by this point. Rahul gets progressively more furious as he watches Sunil and Kiran dance together. After the guests have left, Rahul waits with the music troupe for his payment. When Kiran comes to hand it to them, he says Holi Mubarak (well wishes) and puts a handful of red *gulal* (powder) on her. Sunil hears her scream and chases Rahul. He throws a glass bottle at Rahul, hitting him hard on the back of the neck, but loses him in the crowd of people celebrating Holi on the streets. Suddenly, Rahul comes and says hello, but Sunil brushes him away. At home, wiping his wound, Rahul promises vengeance on Sunil for every drop of blood he has spilled.

A missive in blood The next day, Kiran receives a parcel with a missive written in blood on a white handkerchief. Rahul has written that his stones are awaiting Sunil now for this blood he has spilled. She frantically calls Sunil and then rushes to him. She wants to postpone the wedding for Sunil's safety (she again says that she doesn't mind dying but can't bear to see Sunil hurt) and Sunil again reassures her it will be all right as he isn't a coward and can protect her.



Rahul receives bad news Sunil and Kiran go to invite Captain Avinash and Rahul to the wedding. Rahul tells his father that he knows Kiran. Avinash tells Rahul to find a girl just like Kiran and hands him the invitation card. Taking it to his room, Rahul breaks a few things and starts screaming that Kiran can't become anyone else's, begging at the larger-than-life projections of her pictures on the walls. He says he cannot go on without her love. He has to rescue Kiran from her own folly.

Rahul tries to kill Sunil Kiran, Poonam and Sunil are shopping for wedding jewellery when a ring gets stuck on Sunil's thick finger. They poke fun at him for trying out a women's ring. Just as they are stepping out, Rahul shoots at Sunil (with a gun). Another chase ensures, this time in busy traffic, on a pier and through narrow thoroughfares between buildings. Sunil finally grabs Rahul, but gets hit by a car. He has surgery but takes some time to regain consciousness. Afterwards, Sunil tells Avinash and Rahul that he only regrets not being able to catch the stalker. The police also arrive at the hospital and asks if Sunil had seen the assailant's face. Sunil has only noted the clothes and height, 5' 10". Rahul says he's the same height.

Kiran and Sunil have an impromptu wedding Fearing for his life, Kiran decides to leave. Kiran packs up and waits for a train, but Sunil comes to stop her, all bandaged and bruised. She says she cannot tolerate that he is getting hurt because of him. But Sunil reassures her that he isn't afraid of death and he will protect her against the stalker; he will let her go, but only as his wife, and puts a *sindoor* mark (vermilion used by Hindu women to indicate being married) on her forehead with his blood. Then they have an impromptu ceremony at a temple, with only a priest performing the rituals.



Rahul vows vengeance Rahul cuts out Kiran's name on his chest in front of a mirror, saying that she can only be his. Sunil has deceived her with the wedding rituals; now he will pay for it in blood.

Intermission

Sunil and Kiran move into their new apartment Kiran participates in traditional wedding festivities with singing and dancing. After the wedding, Sunil and Kiran come to the apartment building where police protection has been set up. The policemen take the elevator while Sunil starts carrying her up 50 flights of stairs! In the meantime, Rahul is also prowling there. He damages the elevator mechanism and the elevator falls to the first floor. Sunil, hearing the policemen's screams, runs downstairs. But before he can see if they are all right, he hears Kiran scream from upstairs and runs back up.

The stalker has vandalized the apartment Their new apartment has been vandalized, with "Kiran, Congratulations on your marriage" and "I love you" scrawled in red paint/ blood on the walls. Kiran seems to be out of it and faints. Sunil puts her to bed, alone. Rahul sings the "You're my Kiran" song, back in his room. Kiran wakes up terrified, thinking that the stalker is calling her again. But Sunil had already disconnected the phone line. Kiran begs him, "I don't want to become mad, please save me!"

Sunil fools the stalker Sunil wants to resign from the Navy but Avinash downplays the risk and tells him to be brave; he will extend Sunil's leave of absence. After a light-hearted chat with Vijay and Poonam, Kiran and Sunil head off to their honeymoon from the airport. Rahul arrives and goes inside looking for them but the desk staff aren't allowed to give out the information. Rahul gives a sob story and the desk staff tells Rahul that they are headed to Goa. But at an airport kiosk, Sunil tells Kiran that they're going to Switzerland; the stalker will be misled.

Rahul coincidently meets an old college friend Rahul goes around asking Goa hotels about Sunil and Kiran and obviously the hotel staff aren't happy. At a bar, he suddenly runs into Vicky, an old friend, who's very drunk and also doing cocaine publicly. Vicky asks about Rahul's lady love and says that he's still holding on to all the old letters and other items of hers that Rahul had left with him during their college days. Vicky is terminally ill with liver disease. Rahul is saddened to hear that and has a drink with him.

Kiran and Sunil enjoy their honeymoon Kiran and Sunil prance around in a Swiss valley (and other beautiful locations), singing a romantic duet song on their honeymoon.

Rahul befriends an unsuspecting Vijay At a cricket match, Rahul tries to find out from Vijay where Kiran and Sunil have gone on a honeymoon. Later, he even comes to their home and Vijay tells him about the horrific and tricky stalker; Poonam even puts a curse on the stalker. Vijay and Poonam keep arguing about nothing (that's their love language) and Rahul mediates between them. Sunil has made them promise not to reveal where they have gone for the honeymoon.



Vicky dies Rahul returns home, only to receive news that his friend Vicky is sick. Vicky gives Rahul the box of letters and pictures that was with him and warns Rahul (and the audience) about getting addicted to drink and drugs. He starts spasming horribly and begs Rahul to put him out of his pain. Rahul promises him that his death will not be in vain.

Rahul pins the stalking on Vicky after killing him Later, the police discover Vicky hanging by the neck from a ceiling fan, with Kiran's pictures and unsent love letters to her strewn about. In a suicide note, it was written that after Kiran's marriage with someone else, he (Vicky) didn't want to live.





Rahul finds Kiran's location Rahul again watches a cricket match at home with Vijay and Poonam. The police officer comes and tells them that the stalker has died by suicide. It's the same police officer that was at Sunil's bedside and recognizes Rahul from there. On his way out, Poonam loudly tells Vijay Sunil's hotel phone number, which Rahul overhears.

Kiran role-plays as a "sexy western woman" At the pool, Sunil takes pictures of scantily dressed white girls and that makes Kiran jealous. Later, he watches an English song on TV featuring a scantily dressed woman while eating popcorn. Kiran comes out in a formal suit, hat and tie which she provocatively undresses out of. Sunil tremendously enjoys the performance! Just as they are about to get intimate, the phone rings.

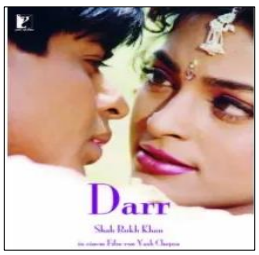


Kiran is overjoyed at the "good news" It's Vijay calling them to let them know that the stalker had died. She's overjoyed and runs to tell Sunil (in the shower) the good news. Sunil doesn't believe it would be so easy. The next morning, they receive a registered post with pictures of Vicky hanging from the fan. Kiran recognizes him from the pictures as a former college classmate who had never spoken to her. The phone rings again, but no one says anything. Of course, Rahul is already there, following them around.

Sunil introduces Rahul to Kiran Sunil and Kiran go shopping and she buys him a paired watch that beeps to alert the other person if they are needed. They go to a masked party where Rahul tries to grab Sunil from behind but Sunil throws him across the room. Sunil introduces him to Kiran and she recognizes him from their college days. They have coffee together and Kiran reveals that Rahul was a "dork" at college and madly in love with a woman but no one knew who it was. Rahul says that she's married and that he plans kill the woman's husband and they all have a laugh. Later, Sunil and Kiran go for dinner and a dance, while Rahul watches from the bar.

Rahul fantasizes about Kiran When Sunil had stepped away, Rahul invites her for a slow dance and almost has a heart attack holding her! The scene segues into another superhit song in the snowy mountains, (again with Juhi Chalwa in some slinky, midriff-baring, weather-inappropriate outfits), "*Tu mere samne*" ("You are in front of me/ I can't decide whether to look at you or love you"). He snaps out of his daydream; still at the bar, watching them dance.





Rahul beats up some catcallers On their way out, some Indian men catcall them about having a threesome (this sort of harassment is more common than you think) and Rahul goes almost crazy beating them up. Later, Sunil asks him why he got so angry and Rahul fumbles for an answer. Sunil says that he also used to get very angry, but not anymore. Sunil goes to grab them some drinks and receives Vijay's call. Sunil tells him about Rahul and is surprised to hear he was with Vijay.

Sunil grows suspicious He gets out a bottle of whiskey, instead of beer. Kiran retires to her room. While trying to get him drunk, Sunil quizzes Rahul about the girl's name. Sunil says that pain shouldn't be hidden but spoken out loud. Rahul tries to defuse the situation with *shayari* (Urdu poetry) when Sunil says that he knew the girl. Rahul confesses that her memories are gifts that will go with him and he cannot share them with anyone, not even the woman. Sunil lets him borrow a guest room in their bungalow for the night, as he was too drunk to return to his own hotel.

Sunil sets another trap for Rahul Sunil sits down to remember all the instances when they crossed paths unexpectedly. He wakes up Kiran and tells her to quietly leave and meet him at the jetty. The next morning, when Rahul wakes up, they are nowhere to be found. He goes looking for them and the phone rings. Vijay and Poonam grow worried that no one was picking up. Rahul runs across the beautiful scenery looking for them.

Sunil beats up Rahul and gets stabbed He finally tires out in the middle of a forest, where Sunil ambushes him, playing the "Kiran" theme on a mouth organ. Sunil starts beating him up and Rahul happily confesses to all his crimes, but doesn't really fight back. He gets all bloody and then begs at Sunil's feet to forgive him as he's already a dead man. Of course, then he takes Sunil's pitiful inattention to stab him in the stomach a few times. Sunil falls down. Rahul checks if he's really dead, apologizes a few times and goes running to find Kiran on a boat anchored at the jetty.



Rahul takes Kiran hostage Kiran is shocked to see him all bloody and Rahul tells her that Sunil is dead. He confesses his love to her with his signature, "I love you KKKKiran". But she faints!! When she comes to, Rahul reminisces about the first time he saw her in college. She is terrified and tries to run away but there is no space on the boat. Rahul shouts that he killed Sunil, plus the policemen and his own friend, just for her. When she keeps asking about Sunil, he slaps her and then begs her to forgive him. She begs him to let her go but he replies that he's given up everything for her.

Rahul wants to marry Kiran right then Rahul asks Kiran to get dressed in his mother's wedding saree and get married to him, alternately begging and yelling. She goes down into the cabin and hears Rahul calling his mother on the phone, saying that they are coming to her soon for her blessings. Kiran is quickly able to steal the cabin keys and locks herself inside. Rahul is furious and puzzled why she is afraid of him when he loves her so much. He keeps calling to her over and over, but she stays in the room.



Kiran tries to buy time After it grows dark, it starts raining heavily. Kiran is still in the room when her paired watch chimes. Rahul is at the door trying to break it down. He is successful and drags her to the deck in the rain. Kiran tries to convince him that their marriage cannot happen and buys time by saying they should have a dream wedding in India or at least wait for the typhoon to stop.

Climax: The "hero" reappears Suddenly, Sunil climbs and jumps up into the boat, a bloody bandage around his midriff. Rahul tells him to keep away, then hits him with an oar, which Sunil easily breaks. Another one-sided fight ensures where Rahul is beaten to a pulp again and body-slammed through glass windows like a rag doll. The boat rocks and bounces and Rahul somehow grabs an axe

and starts swinging at Sunil. Kiran shouts, “Kill him Sunil, kill him”! On hearing those words from the mouth of the woman he loves, Rahul is just stunned and stops fighting back. Sunil keeps beating him up, with pure hatred in his eyes, then finally shoots him three times (each time for an attempt on his own life) while Kiran watches.




Rahul’s last words Gasping for air, Rahul says that his life began and ended with his love for Kiran. He knows he has wronged her, but to begs her to not hate him and forgive him. Then he dies. We can see Kiran’s name, now a scar, on his chest. Sunil and Kiran return to India and Vijay jokes about getting calls from another stalker.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Kiran

Kiran is the first character we see in *Darr,* underscoring her centrality to the narrative even though she herself is not a strong or riveting personality. If anything, Kiran is very much a chirpy girl-next-door with a super-supportive family and her humdrum life charted out in front of her eyes. But things take a terrifying turn!

Vivacious From the opening scene when she runs for shelter from the rain to when she kicks off her shoes in anger or when she does a striptease to pique Sunil’s interest- Kiran is a vivacious, impulsive young woman. This goes well with Juhi Chawla’s image and she portrays that look/ behaviour so convincingly that it’s difficult to imagine another actress in that role.

Weak Unlike her predecessors in Chopra’s oeuvre, Kiran is neither very intelligent nor does she have the mental fortitude of a Rekha (*Ittefaq*, 1969), Sonia (*Daag*, 1973) or a Chandni (1989); but then again, the plot also introduces an element of terror that's unprecedented. Kiran happily leaves the task of unveiling the stalker’s identity to her military boyfriend and for the most part, plays the hapless victim, growing closer and closer to a complete mental breakdown with each of Rahul’s transgressions into her personal and psychic space.

Sacrificing Kiran loves Sunil very much (though their on-screen chemistry is lacklustre) and on several occasions mentions that she would not mind dying but cannot bear to have any harm come to Sunil because of her. After Sunil’s accident when he goes into a coma, she decides to leave town hoping that now the stalker would leave both of them alone.

Selfish Kiran is a character who primarily reacts to situations instead of taking the first step or generating events. As such, within the “normal” psychological profile of such a character, all her reactions are convincing: from her utter terror to her joyfully celebrating the news that the stalker has died by suicide, to some erotic foreplay to redirect her new husband's wandering eye, to cheering for Sunil and telling him to kill Rahul. However, given that Rahul had never so much as lifted a finger to hurt her physically (before meeting on the boat) and that the plot and Shah Rukh’s performance generate so much audience sympathy for Rahul, that it is hard to not see her as selfish. There is certainly something to be said about a person celebrating the death of another, even if they are the worst of enemies!

Rahul

Rahul, the “anti-hero” of the story, is a dishonourable person who breaks the rules of acceptable behaviour both in the society of the story and as a type of character, and yet he is wholly compelling. Obsessed with an idealized vision of Kiran from his college days, he stalks her relentlessly, not recognizing what the real Kiran wants, which is to be left alone. The situation escalates when Sunil attempts to capture and kill him, until he finally meets his end in the name of love.

Obsessed Rahul’s mania takes many forms: he can relax and play with it, but he can also be wound up and pushed over the brink by it. From calling her at odd hours, leaving his signature song playing, to vandalizing her new apartment and trailing her to Switzerland, then finally trying to kill Sunil and marry her by force, he tries (and fails) at gaining her favour. Interestingly, he never tries to harm her directly, in the vein of “if you won’t be mine, you won’t be anyone else’s”.

Intelligent Rahul is extremely intelligent and cunning; while maintaining his highly sociable facade, he easily fools the police on every step of the investigation, from befuddling them after they tap his phone calls to staging Vicky’s death to look like suicide to carefully manipulating Vijay and

Poonam to get the information about Kiran's location.

Charismatic Despite his sociopathic tendencies (or maybe because of it) Rahul is highly sociable and charismatic; wooing strangers to do his bidding easily. A good example is when he finds out that Kiran and Sunil have left for their honeymoon and follows them to the airport, where he gives an elaborate sob story of an orphaned niece to an airline staff to find the information that they've gone to Goa.

Pitiable Certainly the script as we see it on screen loves Rahul, giving him every opportunity to retract, confess, and reform, a pitiable motherless child whose military father doesn't even try to understand him. His signature "K...K...Kkiiran" stammer highlights his vulnerability and obsession, making him both chilling and strangely sympathetic.

Complex Insofar as Rahul's actions are concerned, they also, like his personality, belong squarely in the grey area between legality and illegality; between social permissibility and transgression. He is convinced that only he wants the best for her and everyone else is deceiving her; as such, it stands to reason that anything or anyone that strives to keep him apart from Kiran must be eliminated. Despite that, he can hardly be charged of any crimes, especially in India where laws regarding women's harassment are lax. Many a blank call has led to romance and forcefully intruding upon the heroine's personal space is a common feature of romantic heroes of that era. He attempted to murder Sunil but was unsuccessful; the two policemen in the elevator are never shown to be actually dead; and he may or may not have euthanized Vicky who was literally begging to die- so to all appearances, whatever he may be, murderer he is not.

Sunil

Sunil is the conventional "hero" of the film; a patriotic member of the Navy, a dependable boyfriend and later, protective husband to Kiran, even though their on-screen chemistry is lukewarm at best. The film perhaps intended to portray Sunil as perfect, but in terms of both characterization and performance, it falls short.

Dismissive Sunil is initially dismissive of Kiran's fear about the stalker who was harassing her. He repeatedly tells her not to be afraid and that he will protect her, while repeatedly failing assuage her or keep Rahul away. In fact, he even plays pranks on her, like pulling her into the swimming pool several times, terrifying her. And he continues this dismissive/ borderline bullying behaviour for a while even after she repeatedly requests him not to do that.

Considerate However, once he grasps the seriousness of the threat after Rahul cuts his car breaks, he does graduate to being a considerate and caring boyfriend/ husband to the traumatized Kiran. From major life decision like wanting to quit his job to be with her to a sweet gesture like carrying her up 50 flights of stairs to their new apartment, Sunil shows up for her consistently.

Overconfident As a navy man, Sunil is confident about his intelligence and strength both, but meets his match in the much more intelligent/cunning Rahul. He tries to catch Rahul several times, by setting up a meeting by the pool and chasing him through crowded streets during Holi, but fails every time.

Murderous Sunny Deol is a wooden-faced actor and best known for murderous gazes and incendiary dialogues in his action motives. He steps only a little away from that typecast here and unsurprisingly shines in the action scenes when he's beating up Rahul. He does spill first blood when he injures the fleeing Rahul by throwing a glass bottle, earning Rahul's wrath. Rahul attempts to kill him three times and fails, but the brutality with which he methodically thrashes Rahul and then shoots him reveals, at the very least, that he isn't as "good" a person as everyone would like to believe. Also, what does he do with Rahul's body?

THEMES

SOCIIETY

Family Once again, Chopra presents us with a snapshot of unusual, even dysfunctional, nuclear families that lie at the core of this psychological thriller. Right away, we notice that Kiran, Vijay and Poonam are an unlikely family unit of sister, brother and his wife. We aren't given any details about their parents or how their family arrangement ended up this way. None of them seem particularity emotionally close to each other, though Vijay is protective of Kiran and permissive of her

freedom; Poonam also treats her as a younger sister without any malice whatsoever, a rare occurrence when it comes to the *nanad-bhabi* relationship (sister-in-law and brother's wife) in Indian families generally. Sunil has no family that is mentioned; how and why Kiran and Sunil met, fell in love and gained instant acceptance from Vijay and Poonam remains a mystery. Sunil's lack of family perhaps contributes to his somewhat unbalanced masculinity- where on the one hand, given his military background, he is fearless, cunning and ready to protect his fiancée, he also lacks sensitivity and has quite a "wandering eye" when it comes to other women. And finally, the chasm between Captain Avinash and his son, Rahul, is vast and unfathomable- there are merely 2 or 3 scenes where they appear together on screen, and they are usually talking about Sunil or Kiran. Presumably they live in the same house given Rahul and Kiran are fresh college graduates and Rahul doesn't have a job (though the timeline is inconsistent). Not once does Avinash step into his son's room in his absence, where larger-than-life projections of Kiran's snapshots grace the walls. While Avinash is concerned about Rahul's mental health, he has no idea about how ill his son really is, as Rahul does a very good job of hiding his psychopathic tendencies. Was the lack of fatherly attention/ love/ discipline the root cause of Rahul's mania? The film doesn't provide any answers. Even at the end of the film, Avinash has no clue that his son was the stalker and a danger to his subordinate's life.

Illustrative moment: The enduring familial bond between Kiran, Vijay and Poonam is best seen when Rahul comes to their home and tries to get on their good graces. Vijay tells him about the horrific and tricky stalker, Poonam puts a curse on the stalker that he die horribly and Rahul just laughs and nods along in assent. Despite Rahul's tricky questioning, Vijay and Poonam don't reveal where Kiran and Sunil have gone for the honeymoon, as they made a promise to Sunil to keep that a secret for their safety. But as luck would have it, Rahul overhears that information soon afterwards.

JUSTICE

Justice Chopra' earlier films like *Deewar* (*The Wall*) and *Trishul* (*Trident*) had grappled with the thorny issues of justice and ethics and the relationship between them; even *Daag* (*The Stain*) and *Ittefaq (Coincidences*), the two films closest to *Darr* in terms of characterization and themes, involved the police and judicial system as integral to the settlement of justice. But in *Darr*, Chopra does away with those facades and jumps into the heart of the matter: justice is but the will of the mighty. Rahul, with his mental illness, should ideally have been taken into custody for his crimes (if they were able to prove them, that is) and referred for psychiatric treatment; with his father Avinash's support, maybe he could have recovered from his schizophrenia and his unrequited love towards Kiran. But he is brutally killed by Sunil and meets (presumably) a watery grave somewhere in Switzerland- making *Sunil* the murderer. Did Sunil just dump Rahul's body? Did he go to the police and claim self-defence? Did the Swiss police/ justice system let him off the hook without so much as a "by your leave"? It's remarkable how the film conveniently sidesteps any involvement of the Swiss authorities in the matter, underscoring that the point is in fact not about justice at all, but something else.

Illustrative example: As such, it is not at all coincidental that the two sequences on the boats are paralleled in action. In the first, Sunil the Navy commando boards a ship full of "terrorists" who have taken a girl hostage. Sunil methodically kills or incapacitates a half a dozen "terrorists" and then goes into an outright gunfight, killing most of the remaining men. Apart from underscoring Sunil's prowess, why any "terrorist" organization would spend that much manpower and resources on a single girl remains a mystery, unless of course her father is very rich or very powerful and pulling strings with the military or some such. In the second, Sunil boards the boat commando style, knife in mouth, and again rescues Kiran who was being held hostage, and similarly first beats and incapacitates Rahul the "terrorist" before shooting him dead. So, in the broader scheme of things, it is completely permissible for the "hero" to take the "villain's" life, so long as the rationale involves a threat to a woman's sexual purity and/or life; we see this, retrospectively, in *Daag* (Sunil almost kills Dheeraj for attempting to rape his wife) and *Deewar* (Vijay kills Samant for killing Anita). However, in both these earlier films, the hero-perpetrator pays a price: Sunil from *Daag* is incarcerated and acquitted years later with much difficulty and Vijay from *Deewar* must die. But Sunil from *Darr* goes scot-free!!

Villain *Darr* is notable for shifting the narrative focus to the "villain", Rahul, and making his obsessive perspective central to the story. This approach was groundbreaking for its time and helped make the character an iconic figure in Bollywood history. The threat Chopra extends via Rahul is not merely about what's happening in this film: it's a threat to how narratives work and to what audiences think films will be about. The film plays with the thin line between our regular Bollywood hero who leaves no stone unturned to woo the leading lady and an outright villain who only preys on his victims, like *Daag*'s Dheeraj Kapoor. For instance, Rahul does not kill or rape or mutilate in the name of lust or

greed etc. and his “criminal” activity would hardly be legally so. Besides, many behaviours of the heroes from superhit formulaic romances popular in the 1990’s can be considered no less than outright harassment, especially where the heroine begins the story arc by intensely disliking the hero and being teased, insulted, stalked and pestered by him until some serendipitous event or some positive aspect of the hero’s character makes her fall in love. In that sense, Rahul is not an outlier. The issue of the heroine’s consent, too, is downplayed in this era of Bollywood film, though *Darr* ultimately ends up emphasizing it as the crux of Rahul’s “villainy”- had Kiran accepted his overtures, this would have been an entirely different type of romance. In his mind, Rahul only has absolute adoration towards Kiran and his intention certainly is not to lead her to the brink of mental breakdown with his stalking. A certain amount of empathy naturally develops in the audience for this deprived character and of course Shah Rukh’s performance leaves not a dry eye in the house, especially at the climactic scene when Sunil beats him mercilessly and kills him. In the Indian context rife with women being oppressed in every sphere of society, it is not a coincidence that a character like Rahul would become iconic with the female audience, with his single-minded devotion towards his beloved. Even past thirty years after its release, *Darr* remains upsetting and unsettling in all the right ways.

Illustrative moment: In the climactic scene, Rahul holds Kiran hostage and alternately threatens and begs her to get married to him, promising to visit his mother soon afterwards for her blessings, suggesting the strong possibility of a double suicide to the audience (though it is unclear whether Rahul believes that his mother is dead). Then of course Sunil appears to reclaim his “property” and mercilessly beats Rahul up like a rag doll, body-slamming him though glass windows and so on. Rahul, being physically weaker and smaller than him, hardly has a chance even with his little tricks. But then Kiran shouts, “Kill him Sunil, kill him”! On hearing those words from the mouth of the woman he loves, Rahul is just stunned and stops fighting back. That look on his face at the moment says it all!

PSYCHOLOGY

Fear The film's narration explicitly states that “love” in this story is intertwined with “fear”, creating a constant undercurrent of suspense and terror throughout the narrative. The audience is made to feel fear for the characters as they witness Rahul's chilling and unsettling behaviour. Introduced as a peeping-Tom’s-eye-view of the wet and vulnerable heroine, the unsettling melody of “You’re my Kiran” that will become his calling card, a rustle in the forest, to an arm holding a guitar, we know he’s a threat before we even see him. And when we do first see more than his hand, he is quite literally already on the edge of death, plucking petals in a deadly but childish game of “she loves me, she loves me not” on the edge of a high-rise. The first time we see an identifiable Rahul and Kiran in the same physical space, in the college elevator, in the span of a few seconds he goes from sniffing at her clothes and almost touching her to curling up in a ball in when Sunil appears outside the elevator. He expands, he contracts: just like a beating heart. Chopra grips us with that fear for almost 3 hours straight through, cranking it up constantly until all three lead characters have bubbled over, yanking away the safety blanket of the love story formula and leaving us cheering for a sociopath. It’s possible that not even the expert Chopra could have predicted that relative newcomer Shah Rukh Khan would inhabit Rahul so achingly and so charismatically that audiences couldn’t help but love him. (From “*Darr: Frightfully Great”*, Beth Watkins. culturalgutter.com)

Illustrative moment: A few minutes into the film, Kiran sits on a speeding train that plunges into a dark tunnel and narration booms over the credits. The voice tells us that love can cross into devotion and then obsession, which has been seen in countless other classic stories. But this story is different. “It also has one more element…something which has not featured in any love story so far. Fear.”

Love triangle *Darr* subverts the traditional romantic movie formula by contrasting Rahul's obsessive love with Sunil's more conventional love, creating a dynamic where the lines between a romantic gesture and a criminal act are blurred. Further, their clashing appearance and personalities also present a dilemma for the viewer insofar as who would be a better “match” for the vivacious Kiran. In public, Rahul is highly sociable and well-spoken; in contrast, Sunil is taciturn and to-the-point. In private, Rahul’s phone calls to his mother show just how deeply he loves Kiran and how he wants only the best for her; he is convinced that Sunil is deceiving her and she deserves someone better, i.e. himself. And despite Sunil’s words of enduring commitment and love, he is just…a jerk. A haughty, paternalistic, overconfident jerk, who doesn’t think twice about playing pranks to scare Kiran and dismissing her fears even after he knows she’s being stalked. Besides, established action hero Sunny Deol/Sunil looks more like Juhi Chawla/ Kiran’s uncle at best (there is an 11-year age gap between them). In contrast, the (Rahul) Shah Rukh- Juhi pair, while not as wildly popular as his other

on-screen pairings, would endure the test of time with their youthful looks and sparkling chemistry with films like *Raju Ban Gaya Gentleman* (1992), *Yes Boss* (1997) and *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* (2000) (Juhi and SRK have been close friends and business associates for most of their career so far). In *Darr* the hero still wins, but barely, and significantly here it's not because he has less power or fewer resources than the villain, as is the formula. Quite the opposite: Sunil, the Navy commando who defeats boatloads of terrorists, should have easily defeated the smaller, less experienced, less formally trained, and wildly less healthy Rahul. But he doesn't. Rahul almost wins, even escaping Sunil (in one of Bollywood's best chase scenes), even though no character in the film wants him to. You can almost imagine that if his mother had been alive, she might still blindly be in his corner, in the grand tradition of filmi *maa*s, but he doesn't even have that.

Illustrative moment: On their way out of the bar in Switzerland after Rahul "coincidentally" runs into Kiran and Sunil, some ill-mannered Indian men catcall them about having a three-way relationship. This sort of harassment is quite common- to most sexually frustrated men out and about on India's streets (and an attitude they easily carry abroad), women are just objects. Rahul goes batshit crazy beating one of them up and almost kills him, but Sunil pulls him away. Ideally, as Kiran's wedded husband, the offence should have been far more severe for Sunil, but he downplays (even condones) it and doesn't even use his military background to bring the men to justice. The scene instead underscores Rahul's "unreasonable", "overblown" anger and draws Sunil's suspicion. Later, Rahul tries to defuse the situation with *shayari* (Urdu poetry on love and loss) when Sunil quizzes Rahul about the girl's name; Rahul confesses that her memories are gifts that will go with him and he cannot share them with anyone, not even the woman. There's never any overt suggestion that Rahul is a better romantic choice than Sunil, of course, but it's surprising just how frequently *Darr* depicts Sunil as less than ideal.

Female desire Chopra's last couple of superhit films before *Darr* were undeniably women-centric; they could hardly have been otherwise with the indomitable Sridevi at the helm (*Chandni*, *Lamhe*). Here however, Chopra "wanted a girl who was decorative" and tried to cast a few other actresses (Sridevi, Madhuri Dixit, Raveena Tandon; Sridevi and Madhuri definitely weren't "decorative" even early in their careers!) but couldn't get their dates, so finally settled on Juhi Chawla. Initially the focus was reportedly on Kiran's fear, vulnerability and anguish, which to be fair, Juhi Chawla depicts admirably; however, in pure acting prowess, Shah Rukh Khan's performance trumps the rest. But more interestingly, while there are some instances of Chopra's trademark voyeurism mostly from Rahul's obsessive and altered gaze, one crucial sequence underscores a ground breaking development in the hybridization of female desire in Bollywood film. Insofar as *Darr* symbolically institutes marriage as the counterpoint to raging sexuality and localizes its significance in Sunil, a benign but viable hunk, it also posits Sunil as a much less desirable option to his adversary: the obsessive Rahul. The strong female presence causes the story to be actually about sexuality and strives to go beyond the ritualistic closure symbolized in marriage.

Illustrative moment: On their honeymoon is Switzerland, Sunil keeps taking pictures of some fair-skinned girls at the pool while ignoring his newly wedded wife. While the action of this sequence was likely intended to be comedic, it seems off-color to contemporary audiences (as does the last sequence where Vijay crassly jokes about another stalker). Soon after, we see Sunil watching Kim Basinger's provocative striptease (Adrian Lyne's *9½ Weeks,* 1986) while eating popcorn, with quite a lustful look on his face. In this situation, the newly wedded wife would only have a few options to turn his "wandering eye" back to herself. Kiran takes perhaps the less conventional path, revealing also her own repressed sexual desires- she comes out in a formal male western suit, turns off the television and starts performing a striptease. Of course, she still remains fully clothed (in a black, lacy bodysuit and tights) after the striptease is (strategically) interrupted by Vijay's phone call, just as Sunil was about to haul her to the bedroom.

This was likely one of the first instances in Bollywood cinema where a "respectable" heroine turns the tables in sexual foreplay and makes the hero the focus of her gaze: this sort of striptease/ erotic song-and-dance was more common for "item numbers" by vamps/ bar dancers set in public/ semi-private spaces. It is as if Kiran discovers her own sexual fantasies through Kim and appears to be no less eroticised by Kim's rhythmic gyration. Her very action creates a moment of semantic shift in which the unbridled sexuality of Kim Basinger's performance helps the virtuous wife realize a sudden desire to be similarly expressive, thus divesting (western/ westernized) female sexuality of its dissolute implications.

Juhi's un-wifely performance is central the storyline, as the audience soon realizes, and not a

temporary get-away from it. In fact, the representational attributes of the two strong male leads, played by Sunny Deol and Shah Rukh Khan, derive their oppositional meaning *from* Juhi Chawla and represent two different sides of her penchant. As such, the female viewer of *Darr* will possibly be placed more with the villain than the hero and while, together with the heroine, she may ultimately acquiesce to the eroticism and cultural convention surrounding her "wifey look", in a transgressive move, she may well find furtive, surreptitious pleasure, with/in the "active" Khan, and, she would dance with Juhi to "You can leave your hat on!" (From Purna Chowdhury's "Bollywood Babes: Body And Female Desire...in *Darr*" in *Bollywood and Globalization: Indian Popular Cinema, Nation, and Diaspora*, 2010)

Mental illness The "real" villain in *Darr* is arguably mental illness: the anonymous phone calls and the phone calls to the dead mother are much more disturbing than almost anything seen in contemporary films. Rahul flaunts society's rules but does not own up to the grey morality of his own behaviour patterns and we see his slow spiral down to more and more homicidal *and* self-destructive tendencies. Regardless of the empathy the script and Shah Rukh's performance generate for Rahul, his actions remain a transgression and a highly undesirable mutation, as we have discussed previously.

Darr's representation certainly illuminates the psychological disorders this character was clearly dealing with. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 90 million people in India, or 7.5% of the country's 1.3 billion population, suffer from some form of mental disorder; a very small percentage of that population actually receives/ seeks out any support and services, as seeking treatment of mental illness remains stigmatised in Indian society even today. Films like *Taare Zameen Par*, *Dear Zindagi*, *Tamasha* and *Darr* have delved into dyslexia, depression, body-shaming and other psychological disorders, bridging gaps in awareness and inviting us to reflect on the complexities of mental health, making it more relatable and encouraging open conversations about wellness and support.

But ultimately, did *Darr* fall short by simply reinforcing the glorification of a man struggling with unrequited love? The film marked one of Khan's breakthrough roles and was one of the first major Hindi films to feature a psychiatrist. A stammering loner, Rahul embodies the Bollywood trope of romanticized stalking, famously uttering "Kkkk…Kkiiiran" as he pursues her relentlessly. While the film had the potential to spark conversations about mental health, particularly among young men, it instead reinforced the glorification of obsessive behaviour. Shah Rukh's portrayal of this obsessive anti-hero not only became iconic but also helped popularize a troubling narrative in which women are seen as the driving force behind a man's spiral into madness. Further, Rahul's obsessive stalking of Kiran reveals *both* homicidal and self-destructive tendencies.

Illustrative moment: Films like *Darr* weakened the "normal" association between self-harm and overt mental illness and exposed the vulnerabilities of even conventional, "right-minded" youngsters. An entire generation of Indian tweens and teens grew up watching films like these and internalizing that self-harm was "cool" and an appropriate outlet for mental anguish, especially when it came to romantic (mis)adventures. The scene where Rahul cuts out Kiran's name on his chest with a knife remains one of the most triggering instances of self-harm in Bollywood cinema (and there are many other examples in 1990's and 2000's films). And after he is killed, we can see Kiran's name, now a scar, peeking out though his shirt, a sombre reminder of a life lost to obsession.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1) How does *Darr* deconstruct the figure of the romantic hero through the characters of Rahul and Sunil? Discuss with examples.

2) Kiran is arguably not as captivating as Chopra's previous leading ladies like Chandni and Pooja/Pallavi. Do you agree? Why or why not?

3) Discuss *Darr*'s representation of mental illness and its sociocultural impact.

4) How does *Darr*'s representation of female sexuality challenge the norms of "property/propriety" for 1990's leading ladies in Bollywood?

5) Why do you think Rahul generated such massive audience sympathy? Does he appeal to you from a contemporary perspective?