

## Portrayal of women in Bimal Roy's Cinema: A case study of Do Bigha Zameen, Sujata, and Bandini

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### ABSTRACT

In 1913, first feature film was made in India and since that year, Hindi Cinema has come a long way in the representation of the characters, style and pattern of film-making. There have been many genres of film-making in India within the popular commercial format. Women characters have been represented in many ways in Hindi Cinema. Since the advent of Cinema in India, a lot of changes have been witnessed in the representation of women characters. In this paper, the study focuses on analysing the portrayal of women characters in the three very popular films (Do Bigha Zameen, Sujata, and Bandini) of Bimal Roy. Bimal Roy has been hailed as a sensitive film-maker renowned for his socially oriented Cinema and portrayal of strong women characters, giving these characters a sublime touch of his own. Women characters in the Cinema of Bimal Roy have got an independent identity of her own.

### 1. Introduction to Indian Cinema

Cinema has been one of the most powerful inventions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Out of all the art forms, Cinema is relatively new one but its reach has made this medium as a very powerful one. The art of Cinema is an all-encompassing one which includes the audio as well as video tools to entertain as well as to spread some message through this medium. The visual images have enthralled one and all since the production of the first feature film in the world, *the story of the Kelly Gang* in 1906. India was not to be lagged behind and it was soon in 1913 that Govindraj Dunderaj Phalke made first silent Indian film, *Raja Harishchandra*. The film enthralled Indian audience very much and thus started the Indian dream factory of creating Cinema. In the future, India was to become the highest producing films in the world in many languages prevalent in India but it is Hindi Cinema mainly, which is known as mainstream Cinema with which a majority of audience identify themselves.

Various genres and styles of film-making emerged in Indian Cinema in the times to come within the broader pattern of film-making which is known in common parlance as the formula of commercial film-making. Indian film industry, especially Hindi film industry has got a distinct style of film-making based upon Nine Rasas as suggested by Bharata's *Natyashastra*. Another unique point of Indian Cinema is its dependence on two epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata mainly for various ideas to be filmed. The victory of good over evil has been a common theme of Hindi Cinema. This theme has been in accordance with the theme of victory of morally upright people over immoral people as suggested in our classic literature.

The silent era dominated the decade of 1930's with *Raja Harishchandra* (1913), *Mohini Bhasmasur* (1913), *Satyavan Savitri* (1914), *Lanka Dahan* (1917), *Nala Damayanti* (1921) and *Maya Bazaar* (1923) being some of

the important silent era films. Talkies succeeded this silent era. With the advent of talkies came the importance of dialogues, dances, songs and the importance of spectacle. 1940's saw the making of mythological as well as the advent of social Cinema in Indian film industry. V. Shantaram<sup>1</sup> can be rightly hailed as the pioneer of socially relevant Cinema in Marathi and Hindi Cinema. After V. Shantaram, the baton of socially relevant Cinema was rightly passed on to the likes of Mehboob Khan, Raj Kapoor, Guru Dutt and Bimal Roy. The period of 1940's and 1950's was the golden age of Cinema in this respect. This period of socially relevant Cinema gave way to the style of Cinema known as escapist Cinema based upon catering to the escapist fantasies of the audience using the songs and dances in picturesque locations as a tool. 1960's was the era when the representation of women took a downward trend in the sense that a majority of women characters became just a prop in the film whose work was to arrest the gaze of the audience. The 1970's saw the anti-establishment Cinema and the creation of angry young man image in form of Amitabh Bachchan. The decade of 1970's also saw the emergence of parallel Cinema movement<sup>2</sup> in India and the directors like Shyam Benegal, Govind Nihalani, Sai Paranjpe, Mrinal Sen and Syed Mirza making Cinema which was hailed as representative Cinema from India in the festival circuit but this Cinema more or less failed to connect with Indian masses. The contemporary times, with the coming of Multiplexes in the urban centres, is witnessing a trend of

<sup>1</sup>V. Shantaram, the famous film-maker, before making films in Hindi, was a big name in the realm of Marathi Cinema. He started his career at Kolhapur in the film company of Babu Rao Painter and later on established his own banner, Prabhat Film Company and then Rajkamal Kalamandir.

<sup>2</sup>Parallel Cinema was born in Bengal in the decade of 50's. Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak were pioneers of such a kind of Cinema. From Bengal the new wave or parallel cinema movement spread its wings to Hindi film industry. Shyam Benegal, Mrinal Sen, Govind Nihalani, Sai Paranjpe and Kumar Shahani are prominent names associated with parallel cinema movement.

making independent Cinema with the backing of corporate houses.

## 2. Women in Hindi Cinema

From the point of starting of Cinema, women have been assigned different types of roles and this is true in case of Hindi Cinema also. How women have been represented in Hindi Cinema is a question which cannot be answered in a simple manner. Representation of characters played by female actors cannot be seen in an isolated way. The characterization and representation have changed continuously in tandem with the changes in the social, political and economic structure of India. It is very rare that women have been assigned a powerful and central role in a Hindi film. The structure and pattern of Hindi film are such that it is made within a set formula irrespective of the genre of the film. With the coming of new wave cinema movement in India, this pattern was shaken a bit and film-makers came out of the mould of distinct characteristics of a hero, a heroine, a villain and a comedian which had become a routine formula of Hindi films. Women have been represented as docile figures as well as strong characters, hapless courtesans as well as progressive working ladies, victims of violence as well as arbitrators of violence but generally it has not been seen in Hindi film industry that the women characters in the Hindi films are able to portray themselves in such a way so as to carry the film on their shoulders. Songs and dance sequences in Hindi films have also given a distinct identity to the women characters in Hindi Cinema. Songs and dance sequences have been back-bone of Hindi Cinema and have acted as the mainstay of a majority of Hindi films. While portraying various mannerisms through lip-syncing of songs and various forms of dances, women play a role mainly to attract her male counterparts on screen as well as attract the cine-goer who feels an intimate bonding with the female character on screen. This role could not have been played by the male actors. This type of characterization has been explained by John Berger (1972) when he said that in terms of representation men act and women appear; that men are controllers of the gaze and women are the objects of gaze. This theory can be applied while explaining the traits of Hindi Cinema.

“Men act, women appear. Men look at women; women watch themselves being looked at.”

The quote very well explains the position of women in Hindi Cinema irrespective of the decade of film-making. In Hindi Cinema, women often have been relegated to a secondary position in a majority of the films.

This has been true for film per film until the advent 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some of the films in the recent past have redefined the roles as portrayed by the female actors. The characters have come out to be strong ones. She could be now a shrewd politician, a bold sex worker, a clever entrepreneur or an assertive single individual. But this does not mean that all of the films which are being made now depend on strong women characterization. Now is the phase of experimentation in making of Hindi Cinema overall in the treatment of the story, music, screenplay, acting, sound design so the characters which are being carved out for women also fall under this gambit.

As Indian society is mainly patriarchal set-up, the same patriarchal theory also applies to the setup of Hindi films also where passive roles have been assigned to women in general. The stories played out on screen are stories of men and their conflicts, their aspirations, their dreams, their values, their revenge and their ideas where women act mostly as props. Their existence in most of the Hindi films especially in pre-liberalization and globalization phase of an economy is in relation to their male counterparts only as a wife, as a lover, as a mother or as a sister. Independent identity of women has been sacrificed to save the image of her male counterparts whose roles more or less have been stereotyped and cine-goers expect these actors to act in a specific way, in a style that has been nurtured gradually. Women more or less (exceptions are there) have been presented as an object of desire devoid of any independent identity. Exhibition of eroticism has been the main purpose of actors portraying female characters. Even the publicity material like posters have stressed upon displaying the female characters in such a way that the gaze of the spectator on this poster compels him to come to the auditorium and thus increase the footfalls. As film medium is basically a visual spectacle, film-maker always stresses upon increasing the grandeur of this spectacle by various means in a typical Hindi film. Women characters provide a better visual spectacle through their make-up, costumes, mannerisms and body appeal. Visual spectacle, when mixed with the sound in form of songs and background music, is what the final product looks like and such a spectacle helps in attracting the spectators. But such a visual spectacle is only one aspect of film-making and sometimes when lacking in content, such films fail to connect with the spectators. Normally the roles portrayed by the actors portraying female characters have been modelled upon the traditional mythological characters, Sita and Savitri and even a slight deviation from these role models are considered as immoral. Hindi film industry is the platform where very few women are behind the camera. In comparison to male counter-parts, women in this industry have been largely working as actors and playback singers since the inception of Hindi film industry though a trend has been witnessed in recent past where women have excelled as choreographers also. Nandakumar (2011) writes that it can be presumed in such a scenario that in Hindi films, issues connected with women and women-centric stories would be very less and a certain gender bias is visible in this regard in Hindi films. Gokulsing and Dissanayake (2016) contend that Women have been assigned the stereotypical roles of the mother (a representation of the power, Shakti) and a typical wife (based upon the mythological character Sita representing the sacrificing nature and extreme devotion towards her husband). Apart from these stereotypical roles, the character of courtesan becomes important in Hindi films especially in the decades of fifties and sixties. Such a character is brought alive on the screen by the directors as the victims of circumstances. It was in the decade of fifties that social issues concerning women were taken by the film-makers to be explored in Hindi Cinema but these instances are also very few. Normally the film-maker did not want to be preachy as films are basically a medium for entertainment and whatever message is being put forward has to be caged within a set parameter of film-making especially Hindi films. The main focus always remained on having actors who were billed as

stars, had some commercial and magnetic appeal among the masses, melodious music and hummable lyrics, the typical length of Hindi film (2.5 hours -3 hours) and melodrama. Within these parameters only, message-oriented films were being made. Historical and cultural background of the film-maker, grooming of that film-maker in a specific school of film-making, influence of Hollywood and other schools of film-making (Japanese, Korean, Iranian, Italian), political ideology of that film-maker and the inputs of his team did influence the way some of the film-makers made their films and tried to put forward the any social message across the screen. Bimal Roy, Guru Dutt, Mehboob Khan and Raj Kapoor have worked in this direction and have presented some of the strong women characters of Hindi Cinema and have represented women-centric issues on the celluloid but even these film-makers could not break shackles of conventional style of making Hindi films and did not break any new ground in terms of film-making. Hindi films made by these film-makers were different in the aspect only that these film-makers had something to convey to the spectators and they conveyed it and presented their viewpoint on celluloid in an auteur style. The aesthetic appeal of Hindi films made by these film-makers separated these film-makers from others.

### 3. Bimal Roy- An introduction and legacy

Bimal Roy was born on July 12, 1909, in Sulapur, Dhaka which is now part of Bangladesh. His father was a landlord but after the death of his father, he was thrown away from his estate. Young and penniless Bimal Roy came to Calcutta in search of work. He entered the film industry as an apprentice to the ace cinematographer, Nitin Bose who was at that time with New Theatres Pvt Ltd<sup>3</sup>. After working with Nitin Bose for a few years, Bimal Roy worked with New Theatres Pvt Ltd, Calcutta only as the studio's main cinematographer. He was at the helm of affairs in the Cinematography department from 1934 to 1944 at this prestigious studio handling eighteen feature films in total. Out of these feature films as a cinematographer, Bimal Roy got a lot of appreciation for his work in films like *Devdas*(1936), *Grihadah* (1936), *Mukti*(1937), and *Humrahi*(1944). While analyzing the work of Bimal Roy as the cinematographer, B.K.Karanjia had observed: 'After a period of apprenticeship under Nitin Bose, a Dacca-born cinematographer, Bimal Roy was put at the helm in *DakuMansoor* (1934). A string of films followed, including *Devdas*, *Manzil*, and *Maya*. But it was the evocative outdoor camera work for Barua's *Mukti* that made Bimal Roy a star.' In 1944, started the career of Bimal Roy as a director of feature films with the feature film, *UdayerPathey* (1944) in the Bengali language which was remade as *Humrahi* (1944) in the Hindi language. When 'UdayerPathey' came out of the stable of New Theatres Pvt Ltd, Bimal Roy was not a known entity at the studios. He was only recognized as the cinematographer working in this studio. But this film 'UdayerPathey' and its Hindi version 'Humrahi' took the nation by storm and paved the way for a new path in Indian Cinema which had not experimented till now with the nationalistic and anti-British genre in a dirt way.

<sup>3</sup> New Theatres Pvt Ltd was the studio established by B.N.Sircar in Calcutta in 1931. Along with Bombay Talkies, another prominent studio engaged in film-making in Bombay, New Theatres Pvt Ltd was instrumental in making careers of many personalities associated with Indian Cinema.

These films helped Indian cinema to come out of shadows of the genre of stunt films and mythological which had been dominating the Indian film scenario till now. Amit Bose (2009) states that he must have gone to the famous Chitra Cinema in Hatibagan, Calcutta to watch *UdayerPathey* at least hundred times. Mr.B.N.Sircar had been apprehensive about the success of *UdayerPathey* and many staffers at New Theatres had dissuaded Mr.Sircar not to go forward with this film but its huge success annulled all the fears and in fact motivated him to produce its Hindi version as well. The film also paved a new path for Bimal Roy who in the times to come was to become a film-maker having a social responsibility in whose films women were not to only prop albeit very strong characters were assigned to the women in his films. These women-issue oriented films were tackled in a directorial way which as typical of Bimal Roy, as discussed later in this paper.

Women characters in Bimal Roy's cinema are presented have been presented in a manner which is sublime to the core and romanticism is at the core of presentation of these characters. Romanticism, yes, but not eroticism has been the main feature of how women have been presented in the Cinema of Bimal Roy. Romance can be male-centric which tends to present the woman as beloved seen through the male eyes only and thus women tend to become a commodity sometimes and an object of voyeurism as has happened in Hindi Cinema most of the times. Maithili Rao (2009) observes that, Roy's depiction of romance is not male-centric and places the woman always in the heart of the narrative of the film whether it is *Sujata*, *Bandini*, *Madhumati* or *Devdas*. Often, the women characters in the cinema of Bimal Roy are strong and share a platonic bonding with the male characters. The women in Bimal Roy's films had an identity of their own. Their stature was impeachable and was emotionally independent. The women in the films of Bimal Roy had created an aura of their own and were instrumental in bringing life to the cinema of Bimal Roy. Three films (*Do BighaZameen*, *Sujata*, and *Bandini*) of Bimal Roy have been chosen to analyze the women characters.

### 4. Do BighaZameen

*Do BighaZameen* (1953) is a masterpiece directed by Bimal Roy which won critical acclaim as well as international awards. The film is the first one from the film industry to win the prestigious award at Karlovy Vary international film festival. The film is a visual document having socialistic overtone inspired by Italian neo-realistic cinema.

It is the story of *ShambhuMahato* (BalrajSahni) who lives in a small village which had been shown as hit by famine but after many years rain finally comes in the area. Shambhu only owns two Bighas of land for his livelihood. *Thakur Harnam Singh* (Murad) has got some plans to build an industry in the village on his land but one hurdle is that *Shambhu's* land also comes under the area where he plans to build this industry. *Thakur* is sure that *Shambhu* shall sell his land to him but it does not materialize. Then *Thakur HarnamSingh* orders *Shambhu* to clear his debt which he has taken so many times in the past or be ready for the auctioning of his land. Only one day is given to *Shambhu* for this deal. *Shambhu* and his son, *Kanhaiya* (Rattan Kumar) finds out that debt amounts up to 65

Rupees and next day they arrange the money by selling of jewellery of *Parvati* (Nirupa Roy) and other household items to clear the debt but when they go to *Thakur's* house they find that due to forgery the amount has been escalated up to 235 Rupees. *Shambhu* is helpless in these circumstances and pleads in front of *Thakur Harnam Singh* to be judicious. The case now becomes subjudice but *Shambhu* loses the case. The court orders him to pay this amount within three months. *Shambhu* has got no other means to raise this amount. One of his friends tells him to go to Calcutta where there shall be many opportunities to earn the amount. *Shambhu's* reluctant initially but agrees to see his condition. His wife *Parvati* does not want *Shambhu* to go to the big city as she fears that *Shambhu* would not be able to earn much and city life is harsh but agrees finally. *Shambhu's* son *Kanhaiya* also goes with him to Calcutta to help his father. The city life is too harsh for the father-son duo where *Shambhu* initially works as a coolie and then become a rickshaw-puller with the help of an old rickshaw-puller (Nazir Hussain). *Kanhaiya* works as a shoe-shine boy and befriends *Lalu Ustad* (Jagdeep). Despite the hard work being done by the father-son duo in the city, misery falls upon them in the form of the accident of *Shambhu* and he is unable to ply his Rickshaw after this accident. *Kanhaiya* resorts to pick-pocketing in order to earn quick money. *Shambhu* comes to know about this and disapproves of the act of *Kanhaiya*. Meanwhile, in the village, *Parvati* and *Shambhu's* father is living a miserable life. *Parvati* works at a construction site where she comes to know about *Shambhu's* accident. She also comes to Calcutta but where a man tries to molest her. She runs away from there. Fate helps in the family reunion but all the savings of *Shambhu* and *Kanhaiya* are now spent on saving *Parvati* who had met with an accident while fleeing from his tormentor.

Back in the village, the land is auctioned now and the process has begun to construct a factory there. *Shambhu* is not able to save his land. He along with his family comes back to his village only to see his land being sold out. The film ends with *Shambhu* and his family moving away from his land.

## 5. Highlighting the character of Parvati (Nirupa Roy) in the movie

Though the Hindi feature film, *Do Bigha Zameen* is the story of trials and tribulations of a poor farmer, *Shambhu* who goes through many adversities to save his land, this film also portrays many other issues like the nature of agriculture, subsistence form of farming, rural-urban migration, land reforms and democracy, one should not forget that without *Parvati's* character, *Shambhu's* character just become helpless. Bimal Roy has not treated the character of *Parvati* just as a prop, sitting doing her household chores. Patriarchal society has been shown in the film but not a rigid one. *Parvati*, the main central female character in this film is a partner in the decision making the process as shown in the film at various intervals. Nowhere Bimal Roy has tried to show the character of *Parvati* as a subdued one. She has been personified in the film as 'shakti', the power and inspiration behind *Shambhu*. Though in Hindi films, the character of the mother has been synonymous with the personification of shakti and the character of the wife is done as 'Sati-Savitri' but as the role of mother is absent in this film, *Parvati* has been shown as both

'shakti' and 'Sati-Savitri'. This is one of the rare instances in Hindi film industry to build the women characters like this. Realism is the style and thought to work on making this film and *Parvati's* character has been built in that mold only.

In theory, in Hindu society, the wife is taken to be as 'Ardhangini' as an equal partner but practically the condition of women takes another route of subjugation in the society and most of the film-makers also have turned the women characters into the objects of desire. Bimal Roy has established the strength and equality of character of *Parvati* in the early scenes of the film only where she is equally worried about the rain as the survival of her family depends upon the rain. She is an equal partner in the agricultural pursuits of her husband as well as running her household efficiently. Her character is not uni-dimensional. It is multi-dimensional and every aspect of being a woman has been highlighted by Bimal Roy in this film be it the caring mother to *Kanhaiya*, devoted wife to *Shambhu*, dutiful daughter-in-law to *Gangu*, or as an equal partner in the agricultural pursuits.

Often, the concept of migration is associated with the men folk only who migrate to urban areas in search of a livelihood. A few Hindi films have been made taking the migration issue as the basic premise. *Gaman and Rihaae* are notable among them. In *Rihaae*, women, characters have been shown asserting their desires in the absence of men folk but that is the desire emanating more from bodily needs. *Gaman*<sup>4</sup> has also focussed on the trial and tribulations of the migrated men folk working in Bombay as Taxi-Drivers. But in such a scenario, one tends to forget that real sacrifice is done in the case of migration by the women folk. In *Do Bigha Zameen* also, *Shambhu* travels to Calcutta only as she knows and believes in the strength of *Parvati* who has stayed behind. *Parvati* has been shown as pregnant still she shows a strong character in participating and sharing the turbulence of *Shambhu* as she has been shown as a participating character, not as a submissive character. The character of *Parvati* is slowly built up by Bimal Roy. Early coyness of *Parvati* is transformed into the strength gradually as the story unfolds. *Do Bigha Zameen* is a realistic film made under the constraint of commercial aspects. It is neither a sad film nor a film made under parallel cinema movement, according to Lord Meghnad Desai (2009). The film was made to be seen by the masses and the intellectuals alone. The perfectionist in Bimal Roy motivated him to cast Balraj Sahni and Nirupa Roy in the roles of Main protagonists. Balraj Sahni was told to pull rickshaw in real on the roads of Calcutta for a few months before the filming of the scenes and similarly to give a realistic touch to the role of Nirupa Roy, she was told to wear used clothes and these clothes were not allowed to be washed so as to give a real touch.

### Sujata

*Sujata* (1959) is a classic Hindi feature film made by Bimal Roy. The film basically is a love story between a Brahmin young man and an untouchable girl. The film was based on a short story of the same name by Subodh Ghosh and touched the issue of untouchability in a sensitive way. The film was

<sup>4</sup> Released in 1978, *Gaman* is considered to be a cult film based upon the issue of migration. Made by Muzaffar Ali, the film portrayed the lives of migrant labour force in the city of Bombay.

official Indian entry to the international film festival at Cannes in 1960.

The story of the film begins when *UpendraNathChoudhary* (Tarun Bose) and his wife, *Charu* (Sulochana) are preparing to celebrate the first birthday of their daughter, *Rama*. Three men come to the house carrying a baby with them. They request *UpendraNath* to take the baby into his custody as her parents have died in an epidemic. *UpendraNath* tells them to hand over the baby to someone from the village only but the men said that it could not be done as the female infant belongs to an untouchable family. They request the elderly *Choudhary* to take care of the infant until the time her foster parents are found. Eventually, the baby finds shelter in the Choudhary household. They hand over the baby to Ayah and she is taken well care of in a room adjoining to Choudhary household. Gradually *Choudhary* gets attached to the little baby and also gets a name from *UpendraNath*, *Sujata* (of good caste). *BuaJi* (LalitaPawar) comes to stay with the Choudhary family and in a case of mistaken identity, takes *Sujata* as *Rama* but finding out the truth that an untouchable girl is staying with the households, she scolds *UpendraNath* but without success. A *Pundit* (AsitSen) is also accompanying *BuaJi* and he also admonishes *Charu* and *UpendraNath*. *Charu's* mind is slowly poisoned against *Sujata* as the scenario builds up. Meanwhile, the villagers have found a foster father for *Sujata* but seeing him as a drunken man who wanted to take *Sujata* for money only, *UpendraNath* shoos him away. Meanwhile, *Sujata* grows in the household while *Upendra* gets transferred often. *Sujata* and *Rama* (Shashikala) have become fastest of friends and share a very good bonding. *Sujata* considers her as the daughter of Choudhary household. *Upendra* slowly breaks all the norms of a Brahmin household and mixes up well with *Sujata* despite her being untouchable. Gradually *Charu* is drifting away from *Sujata*. One day *Sujata* comes to know that she is the daughter of neither household nor any close relative. She isn't even of their caste, but an untouchable. The truth hits hard *Sujata* and she wanders off to riverside ghat to commit suicide. This is the place which *UpendraNath* likes very much. Here the plaque on the statue of Mahatma Gandhi that suicide was a crime desists *Sujata* from this path. Meanwhile *BuaJi's* grandson, *Adhir* (Sunil Dutt) has fallen for *Sujata*. He is in deep love with *Sujata* whereas *BuaJi* and *Charu* want to materialize marriage of *Adhir* and *Rama*. *Adhir* is adamant about marrying *Sujata* and is thrown out of the house of *BuaJi*. In the coming scenes, *Charu* is shown as the ill that needs the blood transfusion and *Sujata* donates blood to *Charu* to save her life (only melodramatic event). This strengthens the bond between *Charu* and *Sujata* and she relents to the demand of marrying *Sujata* with *Adhir*.

## 6. Highlighting the character of Sujata as created by Bimal Roy

This is one of those Hindi films which have been under-discussed and under-analyzed. Bimal Roy's style of filming is not to create a make-believe world but a believer-believe world where the characters are not larger than life and are just as humane as the human beings present in the real world. Bimal Roy never creates enough drama through heavy dialogues mouthed in a particular style by a particular actor. A narrative in the films of Bimal Roy comes alive through conversational style using a more common day language.

*Sujata* belongs to this specific directorial style of Bimal Roy. One of the foremost features of presenting *Sujata* is the physical isolation in which she has been represented in the film. As the film is based upon the issue of untouchability and 'untouchable' in this film is a female protagonist, who has been taken care of in Brahmin household, the circumstances demanded the 'untouchable' character to remain true to the character in the historical perspective and not to get gelled well into the household but at the same time not to remain as aloof as to put the Choudhary household in a negative light. A balance was needed in the film to show a certain level of physical distance of *Sujata* from other high caste characters of the film and thus a physical distance had been maintained throughout the film. From the first moment of *Sujata's* introduction in the film as an infant, the director has clearly stated his intention. The workers who bring the baby to the household of *UpendraNath* are shown at a clearer distance away from the party going on in the household. *Sujata's* first introduction as an adult human being also indicates towards an identity of an outsider as well as a sort of physical distance. She is being shown as drying clothes outside whereas *Rama*, on the other hand, is introduced as playing the piano in a big hall. Here also, a distance is conveyed clearly to the cine-goers. One can clearly observe that the happiest moments of *Sujata* are the moments spent outside her house doing those chores which require an outside space. Maitreyee Mishra and Manisha Mishra (2012) states that thus, the director has clearly tried to establish a dichotomy between the two main female characters, *Rama* and *Sujata* as well as between the Brahmanical household and *Sujata*, the outsider. *Sujata* in isolation has been shown in many scenes of the film. A very poignant scene showing the isolation and physical distance of *Sujata* from the household, comes in the initial stages of the film only when *Charu* is singing a lullaby to *Rama* in close proximity and her heart longs to sing lullaby to *Sujata* also and we see that she goes up to the window through which she observes *Sujata* lying in another room on the cot and continues her lullaby. Here, the inner conflict is shown between the traditionalist idea and the modernist progressive idea.

Another unique point of Bimal Roy's Cinema as the use of silence as speech. As vouched by many persons in the film industry, Bimal Roy himself was a man of very few words and his personal nature reflected in the films that he directed. In the absence of heavy-mouthed dialogues spoken in the Parsee style that was the forte of the day, Bimal Roy wanted his actors to express themselves more through their eyes and hand-feet movement. *Sujata* has got many such moments where such a ploy has been used by Bimal Roy. The character that *Sujata* is envisaged by Bimal Roy is highly diminutive and subtle by nature. This character is build up slowly in the film by Bimal Roy using the technique of silence. Going overboard and making loud films was not the forte of Bimal Roy. Nutan, who essayed the role of *Sujata* herself vouches for the fact that Bimal Roy believed in the spontaneity of the performance and she was also made to act in a similar way. He believed that too many rehearsals mar the performance of an actor and somewhere while portraying a sensitive character, plasticity comes in the performance of an actor. According to Nutan, the brilliant cinematography in the absence of heavy dialogues helped the character build up in the films of Bimal Roy.

Naseeruddin Shah, while commenting on *Sujata* takes it as a searing indictment of upper-class hypocrisy and Nutan while portraying the character of *Sujata* appears to him as a real person, devastatingly desirable and attainable. According to him, the character of *Sujata* was drawn with accuracy and depth rare in our scripts today and her perfect poise and earthiness completed the picture; it was only perhaps repeated viewing of the film that made her technique apparent. Similarly, Nabendu Ghosh, in a write up on Bimal Roy (2009) states that Once, a driver of a famous film producer-director, who already seen the film twice demanded passes of film *Sujata* running to silver jubilee house at Opera House in Bombay. When asked for, "Why he wanted to watch the film for the third time"? The driver answered, "Saab, *Sujata* dekhnne se dilko thandak pahunchtai". This word 'thandak' sums up the style of Bimal Roy School of film-making.

Another feature of 'Sujata' is the way Mahatma Gandhi and other historical figures have been shown in giving inspiration and motivation to the main character. The historical figures have been used as metaphors in the film. The issue of untouchability and other women issues had always been part of Mahatma Gandhi's idea of the freedom movement. To make the issue of untouchability more appealing to the audience, the nationalistic icons appear a few times in the film. Roy's films always have been carrying political overtones, sometimes heavy and sometimes as understated. In *Sujata* also, the director seems to be appealing against the untouchability through nationalistic icons, Mahatma Gandhi and to a lesser extent, Rabindra Nath Tagore. By staging a play by Tagore in the film itself, a case is made against untouchability and this point is shared by *Adhir* with *Sujata* during one poignant moment in the film. He also tells a story about Gandhi Ji adopting an untouchable girl. When *Sujata* learns that she is untouchable, she leaves the Choudhary household and lands beside a mural of Gandhi Ji, Patrick Colm Hogan (2009) contends. Thus an attempt has been made here to associate and join the main female character of the film with the national icons so as to provide her vulnerability, a moral strength that could have come only through the figure of Mahatma Gandhi as a modern-day saint who had worked a lot in the direction of women emancipation.

*Sujata* is one of the most beautiful romanticist sagas to be unfolded on celluloid conveying a strong social message of removing untouchability and emancipation of women in a much-understated way, typical of Bimal Roy.

### **Bandini**

*Bandini*, based on a Bengali novel, Tamasi by Jarasandha<sup>5</sup>, is a classic Hindi feature film by Bimal Roy telling the story of a woman prisoner, Kalyani. Starring Nutan, Ashok Kumar, and Dharmendra in the stellar roles, the film was declared as a semi-hit in 1963.

Hindi feature film, *Bandini* is set in a prison in around 1934 in pre-independence India. The female protagonist, *Kalyani* (Nutan) is serving the jail sentence (life imprisonment) for murdering her lover's wife. The motive of the crime of *Kalyani*

we come to know in the flashback. *Kalyani* falls in love with *Bikash* (Ashok Kumar) in his village. *Bikash* is a freedom fighter who one day leaves her village, never to come back. *Kalyani* and her father are treated by the village society harshly. *Kalyani* decides to leave the village. She reaches the city and decides to work as a caretaker of a mentally unstable woman who turns out to be the wife of *Bikash*. *Kalyani* poisons her considering herself as the tormentor of her life and the cause of her miseries. She confesses to her crime and is awarded the life sentence. In the jail premises, *Deven* (Dharmendra), the jail doctor falls in love with her. His gestures and small considerations for *Kalyani* hints at his love for her. *Kalyani* does not reciprocate this love and thus *Deven* also starts staying away from *Kalyani*. At the end of the film, *Kalyani* sees *Bikash* at a ship harbor and her heart again longs for her lost love. *Bikash* is not well and *Kalyani* decides to take care of ill *Bikash* instead of reciprocating love of *Deven*, thus justifying the title of the film, *Bandini*.

### **7. Analysis of 'Bandini' and the character of Bandini.**

*Bandini* is that rare female-oriented Hindi feature film which is regarded as the crowning glory of Bimal Roy. The film is last directorial venture of Bimal Roy and some critics have called this film as the complete film of Bimal Roy. The film is a very good example of narrative overpowering the melodrama aspect of Indian style of film-making. Like all other films, even this film is not made out of a set pattern of film-making which had become staple in Hindi film industry but the challenge would lie with the film-makers to do something new and unconventional using the conventional way of film-making. It is in this aspect that Bimal Roy has always scored over others. 1963 was the year when the escapist formula of film-making to connect the cine-goers with the dreamy state of mind and breezy romantic musicals had started playing in the minds of the cine-goers. In such a scenario, *Bandini* did not do bad and was at number ten in the list of highest grossing Hindi films of that year but it was rave reviews and critical acclaim, National award and film fare awards that saved the day for the film.

*Bandini* is such a strong character created by Bimal Roy which can frighten a man as the strength of this character has come out from the depths and the inner core of *Kalyani*'s heart. Without being verbose and loud, the silence of *Kalyani* and herself imposed exile in the jail has given an iron will to the character. Nutan, in an interview, has mentioned the character of *Kalyani* as her best role ever. There are certain traits of this character *Kalyani* which have made this character as a memorable one.

'Guilt' is one emotion with which, one can identify *Kalyani*. This is that one rare Hindi film where 'Guilt' has found expression through a female protagonist. 'Guilt' is that wonderful trait of a human being which can come out in the foreground only if a human being is pure to the core. *Kalyani* is not remorseful for killing the wife of *Bikash* but the purity of her heart has pushed her to bear guilt as the main emotion in the film. In the coming years, a certain sense of 'Guilt' found its powerful expression in the character of *Vijay* in *Kala Patthar*. The role was essayed by Amitabh Bachchan and his brooding image and to help the persons in distress in the area of coal mines was not something to have come out of the sense of selflessness, it was a by-product of 'Guilt' syndrome. Similarly,

<sup>5</sup>Jarasandha is pen name of Charu Chandra Chakraborty, a former jail superintendent on the experience of which he wrote many stories and one of these stories became the base for the film *Bandini*

*Kalyani* is seeing always helping her fellow inmates in the jail but is reclusive when she is not in helping mode. She has volunteered to take care of a fellow inmate suffering from Tuberculosis. Somewhere, her soul is not able to bear the sense of guilt and this 'guilt' is responsible to push *Kalyani* to a self-destructive mode. According to Maithili Rao (2009), *Kalyani* suffers from a double guilt syndrome. Firstly, she is haunted by the guilt of disgracing her upright father. Her guilt arises out of the way she has defied the society's norms. Her second bout of guilt comes out after murdering the wife of *Bikash*. This incident just adds to the already present guilt in *Kalyani's* heart. After *Sujata*, once again, Bimal Roy has molded his female protagonist in '*Bandini*' as an outsider, her silence once again overpowering the spoken words. Roy's female characters come true to the couplet, '*Bazaar se Guzrahun Kharidar Nahin Hun*'.

Devotion, unending and selfless devotion is another trait of *Kalyani*. Her love for *Bikash* is utterly devotional. For her, he is her lord and her love for him is more of spiritual and platonic, it seems. Blind faith and love characterize *Kalyani's* devotional traits towards *Bikash*. Lyrics of the song, '*Jogi, jab se Tu Aaya mere dware*' indicates towards the feeling of *Kalyani* towards *Bikash* where she is clearly referring *Bikash* as a Jogi, the saint. Even during the scene where *Bikash* is taken by the Police, *Kalyani* touches his feet showing the trait of unending devotion towards him. Bimal Roy, resorting to *Kalyani* going back to *Bikash* instead of *Deven* again shows her unflinching faith and devotion towards *Bikash*. Seeing through the eyes of modern feminist filmmakers, the moves of *Kalyani* seem to be regressive and weak. But perhaps *Kalyani* knows that her love for *Bikash* falls short of his love for the nation and here, knowing this well she turns herself into a sacrificial mold. She has got a well-etched motive to do this. Bhawna Somayya considers this film of Bimal Roy as the darkest one full of gloom. According to her, she has failed to understand why *Kalyani* has chosen *Bikash* over *Deven*, illness over health, an old man over a young suitor. Perhaps, the answer lays in the fact that Bimal Roy, except for Hindi feature film *Madhumati* has never played to the gallery and has remained true to his

conviction in his every directorial venture. The way, the character of *Kalyani* has been built up in the film; her emotional strength has been shown to come out of her sense of guilt as well as her unending love for *Bikash*. If Roy had taken the other way out of happy ending with *Deven* and *Kalyani* together, then the purpose of platonic bonding between *Kalyani* and *Bikash* would not have materialized. The title *Bandini* would have lost its justification. *Bandini* is not only the prisoner in the worldly sense albeit she is the prisoner of her mind also. In '*Kalyani*', Bimal Roy has carved a highly complex female character in Hindi film industry.

In a nutshell, it can be said that the women characters in films of Bimal Roy had an independent identity of their own. They were not merely props. They were independent emotionally yet rooted in the simple division of society known as family. The subtle direction of Bimal Roy gave light feather touches to all the women characters.

## 8. Conclusion:

Bimal Roy has been a rare film-maker who has tried to combine artistic elements of Cinematic appeal with the commercialization aspect of Cinema with a sensitivity seen in a very few film-makers. Bimal Roy can be hailed as the harbinger of Cinema of middle path who paved the way for many film-makers of his own kind. He has tackled mainly social issues in his films and when the question of portraying women in Indian Cinema comes, characterization of women in his Cinema find a niche place. His women characters are neither loud nor they are represented in a voyeuristic style. His characters are very close to the real life. His women characters are not regressive. *Kalyani* in *Bandini* knows her mind and is adamant to go with the man whom she had loved despite the opportunity to start a new life with *Dr. Devendra*. Her revenge by killing the wife of *Bikash* also shows her mind not faltering when she has thought about a certain action to be taken. *Sujata*, being as untouchable shows certain vulnerability but is strong inwards. One can see an image of restraint while observing the women characters of Bimal Roy.

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