

## GOOD STORY ATTRACTS CROWDS TO DO BIGHA ZAMIN!

The poor success and popularity of *Do Bigha Zamin* conclusively prove our oft repeated argument that it is the story that succeeds at the box-office and not the so-called stars. *Do Bigha Zamin* has no stars in it. The leading artistes, with the exception of Balraj Sahni, are all third rate players and even Balraj Sahni from whom we had expected a better performance, has given a poor one.

As the story deals mainly with the vicissitudes in the life of a *kisan*, the picture has neither expensive sets nor glittering costumes to dazzle the audience. The remarkable popularity of the picture, even without expensive sets and glittering costumes proves once again that people want a human story, with a soul in it and do not very much care for the dazzling atmosphere framing it. Bombay's idiotic producers waste a fortune on the frame and neglect the painting inside. And that is the difference between Bombay and Bengal.

### MISSES EMOTIONS

*Do Bigha Zamin* is a good picture but it misses being great because it is poorly directed. The best thing about this picture is its intensely human theme. With the exception of the last coincidental sequence in which Sambhu meets his wife after the motor accident—a permissible stretch of the dramatic license—all the situations are natural and true to life. We congratulate Salil Choudhury for tearing a page from life and partly

commend the work of Hrishikesh Mukherjee in building up a motion picture that could have become a classic of the screen if only Bimal Roy had stretched his imagination a bit and not forgotten the emphasis which the emotional situations badly needed.

*Film India*  
September, 1953

### OUTSTANDING FIGURE

A remarkable movie epoch ends with Bimal Roy, who was an Institution by himself. The new year has taken toll of an outstanding film-maker in the Indian motion picture industry, who also earned name and fame abroad. The late Mr. Roy, besides his outstanding talent as a cinematographer and unlimited imagination as a director, possessed the infallible logic of a great thinker and the revolutionary passion of a reformer, whose fruition one finds in most of his films, including *Do Bigha Zamin*, *Hamrahi*, *Parineeta*, *Sujata*, and *Bandini*. In all these he gave expression to the advanced social thought of the times, portraying the subtlest human emotions truly, vividly and poetically. In his last production, *Bandini*, he showed how the national movement affected the life of a village girl, and how the central character in the picture was not only a prisoner in a jail but also a prisoner of life.

*Screen*  
14th January, 1979

## A BLEMISHLESS PRODUCTION

by *Radhamohan Bhattacharya*

To those who have been asking to see a truly representative Indian film *Do Bigha Zamin*, produced and directed by Bimal Roy at Bombay from Salil Chaudhuri's story is a delightful answer. It is the story of a poor unlettered peasant and his family of four. Father and son come to Calcutta and turn rickshaw-puller and shoe-shine to earn to save their little patch of land from auction. The wife follows her husband to the city and meets with a fatal accident. Broken in heart and limb, unable to scrape up the requisite money, the man comes back to his village only to see his land fenced in to make room for a factory.

Nobody would claim that this is much of a story. Nevertheless as a picture of life in the raw it does one's heart good to see the film. Of lily-fingered men and women in studio make-up and trumped up finery there is none. All the characters are as real and down to earth as could be. The superb acting of Balraj Sahni is at once an inspiration and despair to most others. To it, Nirupa Roy, Rattan Kumar the shoe-shine boy and the rest play up with credit. Even the baby in arms seems to have got into the spirit of the thing. This and the exterior scenes both rural and urban are shown to best advantage by the sensitive photography of Kamal Bose, and of course the director can legitimately feel proud of his over-all supervision. Music by the author himself, except for some hybrid patches, is well above the average. The lullaby ought to make a hit.

The inordinate length of the Community songs, guffaws in a moffussil court during an ordinary rent suit

trial and the absence of any reaction on his neighbours when Shambhu goes away to Calcutta are three weak spots in an otherwise blemishless production.

With suitable sub-titles and some clipping one can confidently expect a wide and appreciative audience outside India for a picture like this."

*The Statesman*

17th June, 1953



## SYMBOLS OF THEIR TIMES

by *Rinki Bhattacharya*

Bimal Roy's directorial career dates back to pre-independent India. His debut, the bilingual *Hamrahi* (1943/44), was one of the first films to have offered the profile of a fire-brand nationalist 'hero'.

The male protagonist — a journalist named Anup — is perhaps the only exception to the filmmaker's choice of non-heroic images found in later works.

Anup's character won the heart of the nation. In this strident, posturing anti-establishment hero, young men of that era found a role model. Anup, by the way, refuses to spell out his last name. When summoned for a job, he insists he be called "Anup *Lekhak*". To the surprised interviewer Anup retorts:

“Why not *Lekhak*? When you accept *Ghatak*’ or *Pathak*, why not *Lekhak*?”

Hamrahi’s runaway success was due to audaciously written lines such as this. One record company brought out the entire dialogue track, which became extremely popular. Displaying a confrontationalist stance against the British rulers, against caste, class and creed — Anup ‘*Lekhak*’ stole the limelight from other heroes of his time.

Few other films in Roy’s 20-year career have such a consciously chiselled ‘hero’ — one who was also a medium of nationalist messages for viewers. Anandbabu — in *Madhumati* — is a hero too: in a more familiar, idyllic setting of the mainstream romantic genre, where a city *babu* falls for a rustic belle. Towards the film’s concluding phase, Anand’s character meanders close to the most popular hero of celluloid — the doomed Devdas.

“Devdas is a symbol of his times”, explains writer/director Nabendu Ghose, for long Roy’s scriptwriter. “Men of the 19th or early 20th century did not revolt. They became a ‘Devdas’ instead.

“The choice of making *Devdas* was itself a statement from Bimalda. He was aware of a society where men did not stand up for their convictions. Did you know that many years after creating *Devdas*, Saratbabu publicly regretted having done so? By then, the Devdas cult was made.”

Ghose said Bimal Roy had the unique ability to turn ‘melodramas’ into dramas, and that his characterisation was dictated by a fine feeling for cinematic aesthetics.

An example is Shambhu — from Roy’s best known work,

the Cannes winner *Do Bigha Zamin*. A peasant about to be dispossessed of his land, Shambhu is not drawn as an uncouth farm hand. Instead, he emerges as a sensitive husband and a caring father. Played with rare aplomb by Balraj Sahni—the portrait of Shambhu appears too sophisticated for his socio-cultural milieu. However, the film was hailed the world over as India’s neo-realistic classic, on par with De Sica’s *Bicycle Thief*, and the liberal, cultured ethos of Bimal Roy left its mark on most of his celluloid creations.

This is true of his villains too, and there were many. In almost every film, Roy ridiculed the Zamindar class — to which he himself belonged — in almost an indictment ritual. However, his villains did not smack their lips or play the typical film baddie. In other words, they did not ‘misbehave’.

The most unusual hero we got from Roy was in *Parakh*, the film inspired by a short Mark Twain story, and in which the good are rewarded, the bad exposed.

Its main protagonist is a good samaritan in the guise of a village postman. Sir J.C Bose (Motilal) sends a huge draft of Rs.500,000 to this unknown village, with the footnote that only the most honest man may claim it. The large sum tempts the corrupt *panchayat*, and every dishonest man makes a bid for the money. Motilal’s effortless performance is the major attraction in this adroit piece of political cinema.

Roy’s heroes in the films after *Hamrahi* display deplorable weakness. Like *Devdas*, Shekhar (*Parineeta*), Bikash (*Bandini*) and Adhir (*Sujata*)—the last to a lesser degree—are indecisive and lacking in grit, determination, and the will to confront society. And yet, these men have an enduring appeal.

Comments filmmaker Bimal Dutta, once in Roy's unit: "In many of the fifties' romantic novels Bimalda chose, you will find the men are weak. Women have always suffered when men refused responsibility; were unable to decide.

"I would say *Devdas* is not so much his story, as it is Parvati's. An amazing woman, Parvati defies social norms by falling in love. One night she walks into Devdas' room, asking him to marry her, accept her openly. It is Parvati taking these initiatives. She risks her honour, her reputation...Devdas' only concern is: 'Did anyone see you come into the room?'"

It is the same with *Madhumati*—a tribal girl, uneducated, and yet gutsy," says Dutta. "And then *Bandini* too. It is Bimalda's heroines who are 'heroic'.

"He absorbed literature into cinema. Only *Udayar Pathy* (Hamrahi) written as a film, offers a 'heroic' image. This coincided ideally with our special history, the emergence of the educated middle-class.

"A character like Anup then was important. He was a hero we could worship, in a sense, men of that generation were passing through cultural anxieties. His male protagonists reflect that angst. Bimal Roy's heroes therefore, are symbols of social change."

Occasionally, one comes across the odd rebel in Roy's films. The Jail doctor (*Bandini*) who wants to marry Kalyani, serving a life sentence for first degree murder. Or Adhir, who is determined to marry the Harijan, Sujata.

If Bimal Roy's male protagonists symbolise the turbulent moral social cultural crises of that era, that unresolved inner

struggle—his female protagonists stand out as brilliant example of emotional integrity.

Roy was fascinated by women's emancipation, and his concern went beyond it. It is in his works, more than any others of that period, that we have a veritable portrait gallery of female protagonists. Biraj, Parvati, Chandramukhi, Madhumati, Kalyani, Sujata — understated studies of extremely spirited women. Whose profound compassion, and commitment stand out to any as truly memorable example of humanism in cinema.