



The Outsiders: Women As Social Outcasts In Bimal Roy's Films

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Abstract

Bimal Roy, one of India's most revered directors, left behind films that featured female protagonists who were not pushed to the back as secondary characters, but took centre stage. Starting from his 1953 Hindi film *Parineeta*, the critically acclaimed *Biraj Bahu* (1954), the immensely popular *Madhumati* (1955) to *Bandini* (1963), Roy's central characters were women.

Roy's version of *Devdas*, too, focuses on the two women that are bound to the love of the namesake, Devdas. While Devdas becomes the doomed hero, Paro the woman he loves and Chandramukhi, the courtesan who is in love with him turn out to be the ones making their own choices. Several of Roy's female protagonists are social outcasts, spurned by society; whether it is Chandramukhi in *Devdas*; Sujata, the Dalit girl raised by a Brahmin family in the film *Sujata* or Kalyani in *Bandini*- the woman who does the unthinkable both in real life as well as in cinematic spaces.

This paper focuses on three such women from three of Roy's in the 1950s and 1960s: *Devdas* (1955), *Sujata* (1959) and *Bandini* (1963). Using semiotic tools, including narrative, music, dialogue, cinematography and characterisation, the paper studies the representation of women in Bimal Roy's films while paying particular attention to the women who can be seen as social outcasts.

Keywords: Indian cinema, Bimal Roy, women in cinema, *Bandini*, *Devdas* (1955), *Sujata*, semiotics

INTRODUCTION

Bimal Roy was one of India's most revered directors. Having started his career in films as a cameraman, Roy's directorial debut was the Bengali film *Udayar Pathey* (Towards the Light, 1944), remade in Hindi as *Hamrahi* (1945). Roy is reputed to have addressed many social issues in his films, which have ranged from criticisms of the feudal system, caste prejudices and women's place in society. Roy adapted three of the famous Bengali writer, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's novels into films, namely *Parineeta* (The Fiancee, 1953), *Biraj Bahu* (1954) and *Devdas* (1955).

Biraj Bahu "continued *Parineeta*'s effort to transplant themes from Bengali reform literature into the Hindi cinema" (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, 1999). Roy's 1953 film *Do Bigha Zameen* (Two Acres of Land), won the International Prize at Cannes Film Festival and is an early neo-realist attempt through its portrayal of a small farmer and his struggles against feudal society and a rapidly industrialising India. Satyajit Ray considered Bimal Roy's *Do Bigha Zameen* to be a "landmark" and said that it "encouraged him" in proceeding with his debut masterpiece, *Pather Panchali* (Song of the Road, 1955) (Robinson, 1989).

Between 1952 and by the time of his death in 1966, Bimal Roy had concentrated several of his films on women and his films dealt with issues concerning them. *Parineeta* [The Fiancee] (1953) was centred on the story of Lalita, while the tragedy *Biraj Bahu* (1954) it is about a woman whose faithfulness is questioned by her own husband and is eventually told by her husband to leave his house. Barring *Devdas* in 1955, Roy's films all focused on women, though many have argued that *Devdas* itself is essentially about Parvati, the childhood love interest of the film's namesake Devdas. *Madhumati* (1958), *Yahudi* (The Jew, 1958), *Sujata* (The Well-born, 1959), *Parakh* (1960) and Roy's last film *Bandini* (The Imprisoned, 1963) all tell the stories of different women. Of these, *Sujata* and *Bandini* focus on two unlikely protagonists, the *Harijan*¹/Dalit namesake Sujata and the murder-committing Kalyani, respectively.

Devdas, based on Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's novel of the same, was remade by Roy in 1955, close to twenty years after he had worked as a cameraman for P. C. Barua's 1936 version of the film, as the story was close to his heart (Bhattacharya, 1994). Bimal Roy's *Devdas*, Rajadhyaksha and Willemen (1999) suggest, is "presented as a formal/technical representation of the famous legend, allowing for an extensive use of deep focus and naturalist underacting from both Dilip Kumar and Motilal." Mishra (2002) believes that *Devdas* (1955) shows Bimal Roy's "cinematic fidelity to the earlier text [P. C. Barua's *Devdas*, for which Roy himself was cameraman] verges on adulation: after all the film is dedicated to both P. C. Barua and K. L. Saigal." In Roy's *Devdas*, as in the original story, Devdas, the protagonist is unable to marry Parvati against his parents' wishes and societal pressures. While Parvati accepts marriage to an old man, Devdas withers away in alcohol, his only company being the courtesan Chandramukhi. Chandramukhi falls in love with Devdas, who cannot love her in return.

Sujata (1959) is the story of an orphaned *Achut* (Untouchable) girl, raised by Brahmin parents who are never unable to entirely accept her as their own daughter due to her "lowly" birth. Sujata ends up craving for their love and to be identified as their daughter and not "like their daughter." She grows up, scarcely educated by her family. Adhir, a young Brahmin man, who was supposed to marry her foster sister, instead falls in love with Sujata, despite knowing her caste. Where inter-caste marriages were taboo in India then (they still are a major issue even today), the film deals with an important social issue. Rajadhyaksha and Willemen (1999) state that "unfortunately, the weak Adhir has to bear the burden of being the only representative of the progressive forces ranged against oppressive tradition."

Bimal Roy's last film, *Bandini* (The Imprisoned, 1963) is the story of Kalyani, a woman who falls in love with a freedom fighter and later, upon discovering that the latter's marriage has ruined her and her father's life, escapes to the city only to end up in a miserable job, and upon the news of her father's death she murders her lover's wife. She is imprisoned for murder and "appears determined to serve her full sentence, resisting the kind overtures of the prison doctor" (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen, 1999). Vijay Mishra (2002) says that the film "acts as a moral reminder of the need of sacrifice in the wake of the Indo-China War." Rajadhyaksha and Willemen (1999) state that the film "suggests a straight line between terrorism and patricide" and that the film remains "the only consistent expression in Indian film of female guilt."

¹ *Harijan* translates to "Children of God" and was a term used by India's Mahatma Gandhi to refer to the Untouchables, the lowest in the Hindu caste ladder.



This paper focuses on the female protagonists in Bimal Roy's *Devdas* (1955), *Sujata* (1959) and *Bandini* (1963). Given the understanding of women's roles in mainstream Indian society and perceptions of gender in Indian cinema, we argue that Roy's films present some interesting digressions from the norm. Upon a closer look, it appears that both literally and figuratively, many of Roy's women were social outcasts. This paper focuses on the above three films, and specifically three female characters who were clearly social outsiders: Chandramukhi, the courtesan in *Devdas*, Kalyani, the protagonist who kills her lover's wife in *Bandini* and Sujata, the Untouchable protagonist in *Sujata* (1959). This paper uses semiotic tools, including music and dialogue analysis, characterisation and cinematography to study the representation of women in Bimal Roy's films. We first draw from some brief discourses on women in India and women in Indian cinema.

WOMEN IN CINEMA

Hinduism's views on women are generally polarised in nature, with some sources comparing the woman to the *Sudra* (lowest Hindu caste) and other rare sources uplifting women's positions and identities to those of a goddess. Women are seen to be both physically and emotionally weak, and their inferiority to men is stressed in several Hindu scriptures. Hindu Aryan society, patriarchal in nature, assumed women to be subservient to men; the 200 BC lawgiver Manu stating that women must always be under the control of a man, firstly under the guardianship of the father, then the husband and after the husband's death the woman's sons.

The distinction between the moral and immoral woman are therefore stark: the moral woman is self-effacing, self-sacrificing, soft-spoken, limits herself to the house, is obedient and worships her husband as if he were god even if he were "vicious and void of any merit" (Altekar, 1999). The immoral woman is none of those- she is outspoken and is not self-sacrificing. The *Manusmriti* regards the nature of women with suspicion, stating "it is the nature of women to seduce men in this world" and that they can reduce even "the learned man...to...a slave of desire and anger." The codes for the 'good' woman were clearly one who married and entered her husband's household to provide him with a male heir, a morbid reminder of why Hindu women remained submissive through centuries, internalising their self-worth.

If social stratification in the form of the caste system denigrated the lower castes, specifically the *Sudras*, considered to be the lowest in the caste ladder and the Untouchables, then the conditions for Untouchable women were even more stringent. *Manusmriti* stresses that there can be no marriages between a *Sudra* woman and a higher caste man, stating that "twice-born men, who in their folly wed wives of the low (*Sudra*) caste, soon degrade their children to the state of *Sudras*" and therefore "he who weds a *Sudra* woman becomes an outcast."

If the ideal 'good' woman was the silent, self-sacrificing married woman, bound to a lifetime of service to her husband and his family, without meeting with other men or construing her own needs, then the 'bad' and the immoral woman was the prostitute, limited to the figurative outskirts of society.

Historically speaking, the origin of prostitution in India may have been for a number of reasons. Bhattacharji (1999) states that "either because they could not find suitable husbands, or because of early widowhood, unsatisfactory married life or other social pressures, especially if they had been violated, abducted or forcibly enjoyed and so denied an honourable status in society, or had been given away as gifts in religious or secular - such women were frequently forced to take up prostitution as a profession."

In ancient India prostitution became a social institution by the later Vedic age (eight or seventh century BC), a period which marked the decline of women's statuses, with loss of "social mobility" having become the man's "ward, possession, object of enjoyment" (Bhattacharji, 1999). Bhattacharji (1999) points out that girls were given away as "sacrificial fees to officiating priests;" such girls eventually ended up socially ostracised and with no other option but to take up prostitution.

Bhattacharji (1999) cites the *Manusamhita* which states that "the sacrament of marriage is to a female what initiation with the sacred thread is to a male," a "series of neat equations that deprive the woman of education, dooming her to household chores only, especially service of her husband and in-laws, but also thereby indirectly doom her to the loss of her husband's attention." With decline in women's education in the early centuries AD, the "unaccomplished wife at home" did not attract men, who instead "cared for cultured female company" and hence the brothels, where courtesans were well-versed in the arts, flourished (Bhattacharji, 1999).

The other category of the woman who is removed from society is the *jogan* (woman saint). Wadley (1977) observes that "although both male and female yogis are sanctioned by various textual traditions they are removed from family ties and considered outside of the caste system and outside of society and its structure."

WOMEN IN INDIAN CINEMA

Indian cinema is in no ways separated from society. Its discourses have continually reflected societal norms and deeply-held beliefs regarding gender roles. A woman's space in early Indian cinema, reflected notions of women's roles in Hindu society. Many film makers have tried to show women in dimensions not explored earlier.

The woman as an oppressed figure does appear in many forms in Indian cinematic history. *Achut Kanya* (The Untouchable Girl, 1935) was the one of the early attempts at a filmic caste discourse, with an Untouchable girl falling in love with a Brahmin boy. V. Shantaram's *Duniya Na Mane* (1937) challenges the traditional status bestowed on women and upheld by cinema in general.

Singh (2007) observes, "the portrayal of a woman even in subtle ways, usually presents her as the guardian of culture and religion or embodiment of purity and spiritual power, yet constantly requiring the protection of man as her lord and master." This element of purity is long held within the realm of Indian cinema. The "ideal wife must be sexually pure and the epitome of sexual fidelity" (Gokulsing and Dissanayake, 1998). The figure of Sita from the Indian epic *Ramayana*, who despite the years of separation from her husband, Rama remains devoted to him and passes safely through the purity test of fire, then forms the "symbol of the devoted wife...the ideal towards which all women should strive" (Wadley, 1977). Women who have committed sati are also revered and "acclaimed as goddesses and honoured with shrines and rituals" (Wadley, 1977).

Cinema too, has long held these values. In Mehboob Khan's *Mother India* (1957), for instance, Radha's total devotion to her husband, even after he abandons her is well-understood within the context of Indian society, and she is therefore, as a character revered. Butalia (1984) argues that cinematic treatment of women is paradoxical, where reverence given to the mother is considered the most sacred and a "mother's strength and power in the household is seen as absolute." Wadley (1977) believes that the wife dominates Hindu thought more than the mother, though it is the mother who is worshipped as a goddess.

Datta (2000) says, "women do not inhabit a space of the state as home, women rather inhabit a space of their family as home, a space of much more local relations." This is true of most cinematic spaces, which place the woman in a secondary position in the context of the state. In Indian cinema, Gokulsing and Dissanayake (1998) observe, "a woman who "chooses to identify herself with modernity", however, despite Indian



cinema's acceleration of modernity in India, "is almost always portrayed as decadent and punished for it". 'Bad women' apart from "being modern are often single, sometimes widowed" (Butalia, 1984). Butalia (1984) points out, such bad women "may be westernised (synonymous with being fast and 'loose'; independent (a male preserve); aggressive (male quality) and they may even smoke and drink." These women, dressed in western clothes will "reform their ways" if they "suffer a change", thus becoming sari-clad and covering their heads (Butalia, 1984).

Butalia (1984) provides the example of the film *Insaaf Ka Tarazu* (Scales of Justice) in which Bharti, a modern woman in Bombay who works as a model and supports her younger sister, is raped and takes the rapist to court. Whereas the film appears to address the problem of rape, it "insidiously manages to project Bharti in a bad light because of her lifestyle, her way of dressing (and) her profession" (Butalia, 1984).

The following sections attempt to look at Bimal Roy's films within the context of women who are social outcasts or outsiders in society. We look at devotional or spiritual love as an embodiment of the *jogan* (female saint) image; the *jogan* herself being outside society. We also look at the paradox of the insider-outsider woman (married versus not-married); physical distance as a figurative distance in Roy's film; and the image of the city as the creation of the outsider.

DEVOTIONAL LOVE IN *DEVIDAS*

Bimal Roy makes several references to the devotional love Paro and Chandramukhi have for Devdas. Paro, having known Devdas for all her life, is aware that she cannot think of anyone else as her husband. But as fate would have it, Devdas's inability to stand up for himself results in her marriage to someone else. However, that does not stop Paro's love for Devdas. On the other hand, Chandramukhi, who has constantly caught the attention of so many men, cannot see past her love for Devdas. Arora (1995) believes that "Chandramukhi falls in love with Devdas precisely because she idealizes his chastity." Chandramukhi therefore hopes that by giving up her lifestyle and profession as a prostitute she would "become acceptable to Devdas" (Arora, 1995).

Roy uses many symbols to show the devotional aspect in both Paro and Chandramukhi's love. Though most love stories deal with worldly love, which culminates in marriage and union, Devdas is a doomed love story and its female characters are spiritually attached to their lover. Their devotional attachment to the man they love results in their 'removal' from ordinary society.

In a way, both women in *Devdas* transcend boundaries to embrace their love in a spiritual manner. They renounce their material possessions and adornments in the pursuit of platonic love. This is very much like some female saints in Hinduism, who said that "worldly marriages represent both the lure and the bondage of the world, while their relationship with God (sometimes spoken of as a spiritual marriage) represents a renunciation of the world and traditional roles" (Kinsley, 1981).

During their first meeting as adults, Paro lights a 'diya' or a lamp, something that Hindus do while performing prayers. In Hindu households "a traditional oil lamp is lit daily before the altar of the Lord" (Chary, 2009). Immediately after that, Devdas is shown from his feet upwards, elevating his status from mere mortal to spiritual lover. Vasudevan (2010) applies the concept of *darshan* to this scene, where the "lighting of the devotional lamp and the extra-diegetic sound of the kirtan and conch shells underline the devotional nature of the woman's relationship to the male image." Vasudevan (2010, p 117) observes:

"This setting of certain limiting coordinates for the woman's look also significantly institutes a division between the incipient formation of a new domesticity and the wider external world: Devdas' enshrinement in the doorway converts the public space beyond the door into his domain, restricting the woman to domestic space."

Chandramukhi's love for Devdas is also devotional. She is slowly seen stripping herself of elegance to be more 'revered' by Devdas. In the process, she sells her courtesan clothes and jewellery only to wear a simple saree and free herself from any extravagance. In a way, this transformation is much like that of Paro, who abandons the "customary ornaments of a married woman" (Wilkinson-Weber, 2010) after she is forced to wed a rich but much older man. Having found true platonic love, Chandramukhi decides to go to the village and help in the service of the needy. This is unlike the traditional married woman, who is expected to stick to the household and her family. However, having been a social outcast previously, Chandramukhi remains independent and her charity work is an extension of her 'removal from society'. She serves society by being on its fringes, in a secluded village hut.

Chandramukhi sacrifices her material life in the pursuit of a saintly one, devoted to the service of others. Though both extremes of courtesan and sainthood are not considered to be a part of traditional society, saints are revered by those who are a part of society, but courtesans are loathed. Thus Chandramukhi moves from a person loathed in society and not a part of it, to someone revered by society, but still not a part of it.

Let us take the example of the scene where Devdas, comes to meet Chandramukhi at her *kothal* (brothel/dancing house) after his father's death. Chandramukhi is seen dressed in simple clothes, covering her head and wearing little jewellery, causing Devdas not to recognise her immediately. Devdas looks around her *kotha* and observes that the place has changed. The extra-diegetic sound of the *kirtan* (prayer instruments) are heard. The *kotha* itself has converted into a place of worship. Chandramukhi's falling in love with Devdas, again devotional love, makes her give up her profession as a courtesan.

As she is speaking her external and internal change, there is a cutaway shot of a place of worship and we see incense burning in front of the idol of Radha-Krishna. Her devotion itself is alight. She tells Devdas that she has become self-respecting after he told her "they" (the courtesans) bear so much and have so much patience.

A close up of Chandramukhi's gentle and loving face is juxtaposed with the image of a burning *diya* (devotional flame/lamp). Again, she touches Devdas's feet before he leaves, another symbol of (Godly) devotion.

The film stresses on the two women (one respected, the other a prostitute and therefore despised) being mirror images of the other. Arora (1995) observes that in every film version of *Devdas* "physical resemblances between the actresses playing the role" of Parvati and Chandramukhi "are unmistakable." Not only, do they look similar, but at several points in several points of the film, they resemble the other, their identities merging. In the song sequence "Manzil ki chah mein," while Mohammed Rafi's extra-diegetic voice provides a commentary, Paro and Chandramukhi cross paths. Paro is returning, in a palanquin, from Devdas's house in search for him, and Chandramukhi, who has moved to the village and has not received a letter from Devdas, walks to Devdas's village hoping to get some news of him. In this sequence, Rafi's voice sings:

Somewhere there is the harsh sun, somewhere there is shade

Both women are inherently being compared, one (Chandramukhi) is on foot, walking past the streams under the strong sun, and the other (Paro) is being carried in a palanquin, protected by its shade.



In another scene, Paro's husband asks her why she does not wear any jewellery and is dressed in simple clothes, to which she says that she does not like jewellery. This scene cuts to Chandramukhi putting on some jewellery, back in her *kotha* and in her previous avatar. Diegetic sounds of dance music in nearby *kothas* can be heard.

Chandramukhi picks Devdas up from the gutter and brings him home. He does not, however, in a severely drunken state, recognise her. As he is leaving, she sings:

That which you will accept, how do I get that charm,

As they part, a diegetic song (sung by another prostitute) is heard: "he will not return again, how much ever I call to him."

Valicha (1988) likens Parbati to Meerabai (in the Radha-Krishna-Meerabai allegory) as she "submissively" accepts marriage with another person, whereas Chandramukhi, "who responds to (Devdas's) moods and also to his singing" is symbolic of Radha's "unrequited love." A closer look at the two women, however, not only highlights their similarities, but also their interchanging roles. The child Parbati listens to the two performers sing of the love of Radha and Krishna. Parbati herself, like the Radha in the song, is entangled in that web of love for Devdas and pines away due to their separation. Indeed both Devdas and Parbati share the love, and for this reason, Parbati is like Radha. Upon her marriage, though, Parbati becomes more of the Meerabai image- still in love with her God, Devdas. She embodies both the Radha (by being the object of Krishna's affection) and the Meerabai image in the film (by abandoning the marital roles assigned to her). Chandramukhi, on the other hand, is not Devdas's love, though like Meerabai, her love is also not required. However, she too embodies both the Radha and Meerabai image. For one, she cares for him when he is ill. During the last part of the film, when he stays at her place, she is physically present to nurse him, much like a *dasi* (female servant), perhaps a moment in the film where she embodies the Radha image. For the rest of the film, she is the self-sacrificing, world-denying Meerabai.

Before Devdas leaves to travel through India, Chandramukhi touches his feet, an act that symbolises her reverence and complete devotion for him. She also calls him "Devta", which is coincidentally what Paro had done in the past.

While Chandramukhi abandons her profession as a courtesan brought upon her by society, to ironically become more acceptable in society, Paro gets married (an act that is given importance by society) to move into a more simple existence, looking like what her husband refers to as the appearance of a 'jogan' (or saint). In Hinduism, saints are those who have moved away from marital bliss into a life of solitude and introspection. They are those who have abandoned "a settled family life and the traditional work of one's class or caste in favour of a homeless, wandering existence." Therefore Parbati's transformation from a more traditional young unwed woman to that of an untraditional married woman stripped of any adornment reflects her move from societal convention to societal defiance. The *jogan* image is reiterated throughout the film and both Parbati and Chandramukhi are referred to being dressed as a *jogan*.

DEVOTIONAL LOVE IN BANDINI

In *Bandini*, Kalyani's love for Bikas can also be said to be devotional. Kalyani goes to deliver a secret letter to Bikas on the pretext of picking prayer flowers. The first person she sees after her flower-picking is Bikas, her spiritual lover. It is almost as if she has picked flowers and soon after that she is blessed with the appearance of her 'Lord'.

In the song 'Jogi jab se tu aaya mere dwaare', Kalyani likens Bikas to a 'jogi' or saint. Fully aware of the fact that Bikas's first love is his service to the nation, Kalyani compares him to selfless saints who have sacrificed their material lives and loves in the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment.

Kalyani's reverence for Bikas is so pronounced that she finds herself drawn to him in spite of various warnings by the villagers. Before Bikas is taken away by the police after promising marriage to Kalyani, Kalyani stops him for a second, stoops down, and touches his feet.

Kalyani's final decision of returning to Bikas also stems partly from this devotion. After she runs to the sailing ship in the last scene, she falls at Bikas's feet again, expressing her complete devotion to him.

MARRIAGE AND IMPRISONMENT

In both *Devdas* and *Bandini*, parallels are drawn between marriage and imprisonment.

In the song 'Ab ke bars bhej bhैया ko babul', a song revealing a young bride's socially imposed estrangement from her own family, perfectly mirrors the isolation and imprisonment of prison inmates:

When spring arrives, send brother to come and fetch me, father,

When my childhood friends return, give them the message I had sent.

The prison inmate who sings the words works away at a grinding stone, a symbol associated with one of the common household chores of a married woman. However, the woman is not in her marital home, but in prison, an image that emphasises the comparison between marriage and bondage.

Though in the song the bride asks her father to send her brother so she can see him, the prisoners face a very similar situation where they cannot meet their families. This song likens marriage to imprisonment with its rigid rules and societal expectations.

My eyes swell up with tears, when I remember the days of my childhood,

Ruthless youth snatched away my toys and stole my dolls.

The married girl (and the prisoners in turn), yearn for the freedom of childhood. Bimal Roy cuts away from the inmate singing, to Kalyani looking above the boundary wall, thirsting for freedom. The subsequent shots act as a montage, with images of a woman sitting near a tree with sadness in her eyes, and two women standing in a prison room, looking outdoors.

Father, you cherished me above all others,

So how did I then become a stranger to you?

In Hindu custom, women are forced leave to the house of their husband and in-laws, facing estrangement from their own families, thus becoming outsiders or 'paraya' to their own parents. Similarly, prisoners are forced into estrangement, away from their own families, which makes them outcasts to those they love the most.

Kalyani shows her disregard for these societal rules when her brother dies, and she understands that she is the only emotional support her father has. Once when her father tells her that the villagers are discussing that Kalyani should be married off and made 'paraya', Kalyani says that she will not marry but study. She even asks her father if he would have worried so much had she been a boy.



Kalyani voices a similar opinion when Bikas visits her house and her father tells her to bring some sweets for him. Kalyani jokingly asks her father if cooking for men is the only thing women are expected to do. She asks the same question to Bikas, who replies with a rather ambiguous answer.

This image of marriage and bondage being similar to one another is also reinforced when Kalyani is released from jail and is expected to marry Deven. Just before Kalyani walks out of prison, the kindly jailor who had helped in her release tells her that though she is now leaving jail, she will forever be imprisoned in her marital household.

Due to such a strong parallel being drawn between marriage and imprisonment, perhaps Kalyani chooses to sacrifice a life of marital 'bliss' in order to return to her freedom fighter ex-lover. She chooses her own freedom over the rules of society. Her impulsive last-minute decision shows her indifference toward social obligations and expectations.

In *Devdas*, the case of Parbati is worth noting. Here, marriage becomes a societal obligation that Parbati cannot escape; yet she largely avoids its entrapment. After her marriage, she fulfils her household duties but says that she does that only because she is a 'dasi' or a slave. Thus Parbati compares her marriage, which is loveless and material, to slavery.

However, unlike the ever-faithful Hindu wife who does not know any other love than that for her husband, Parbati does not forget her devotion to Devdas. Her husband is only her worldly soul mate, but Devdas is her perennial spiritual companion, and she never forgets that. Parbati's inner conflict with her normal married life causes her to become a simple *jiyogan*, donating generously to villagers and showing indifference towards material possessions such as jewellery.

When Devdas's father dies and Parbati is in the village, she enters Devdas's room in a similar manner she had done when she revealed her love for him before marriage. Here she expresses her love again, not in a way that would make her unfaithful to her husband, but in the manner of a Meera-Sri Krishna metaphor.

During this short meeting, Parbati calls Devdas her 'Devta' again, saying that she feels suffocated and would fulfil her life's purpose if she could take care of him. She also tells him to come to her house so that she can look after him. Devdas promises that he will definitely come to her house, once before he dies. Despite Parbati's marriage to another man, her unwavering love for Devdas is evident in her 'suffocation' as a result of not being able to take care of him. The burden of not marrying Devdas makes Parbati feel strangled and imprisoned.

When Parbati says that her union is not fixed with Devdas and she will ask him about it, her friend is taken aback and asks her if she will not be ashamed to ask Devdas if he will marry her.

In traditional Hindu society, women will not dare to ask such a question to their fiancés or even their husbands, as it is considered shameful. However, Parbati asks the quintessential question that confirms her spiritual bond with Devdas, a bond that joins them by souls, not by body. She asks her friend why she would feel ashamed to ask her husband such a question. "You are my friend and you are my own, but is Devdas a stranger to me?" she asks. Parbati further goes on to conclude that her friend does not know the real meaning of marriage. She says "He is my husband, who is all my modesty and shame. How can I be ashamed in front of him?"

In spite of Parbati's relentless love for Devdas, which causes her to rush outside in the second last scene where Devdas lies dying, her societal apathy is punished as the gates close in upon her, forbidding the last reunion with her spiritual beloved. Thus with the closing of the gates, Parbati, who was once free from the bonds of societal expectations, becomes a prisoner of her love for Devdas by not being permitted to see him by her worldly marital family. Coincidentally, Chandramukhi's position as a social outcast puts her outside the domains of marital bondage.

PHYSICAL DISTANCE IN *BANDINI* AND *SUJATA*

Physical distance is used as a key element in putting forth the idea of social 'difference' in Bimal Roy's films. Roy uses space to highlight the distance of characters from conventional society as well as the differing ideas of people. Space is also used as a psychological barrier between characters.

In *Bandini*, Kalyani being in jail is in itself an obvious physical distance from the rest of society. Kalyani spends her time in jail partly as a recluse and partly as a prisoner who has openly embraced the other inmates. The guilt of her crime haunts her and her idea of penance includes thinking that she deserves to be hated. This results in her choice of being physically distant from all other people apart from the other prisoners. An additional reason for her being physically distant from everyone else is that she has no family or home to go back to.

Deven enters Kalyani's life when a prisoner falls ill with tuberculosis and he asks if someone would like to volunteer to take care of the sick inmate. Kalyani volunteers to help the inmate, which causes Deven to be in awe of her selflessness. As he comes to visit the sick inmate daily, he notices Kalyani's withdrawal from the rest of the outside world. Though she is sympathetic and altruistic, she is distant and secluded. During one such visit, while Kalyani passes a syringe to Deven, their fingers touch for a split second. Kalyani does not flinch for even a second, but this momentary lapse in her physically distant personal space results in Deven falling in love with her.

Deven's visits to the prison soon catch the attention of other jailors and prisoners and rumour starts that he has fallen in love with Kalyani. Inmates mock Kalyani, telling her that she has trapped Deven with her sweet talk. For Kalyani, this is very much like the time when the villagers taunted her after Bikas's disappearance. Unable to bear a similar situation again, Kalyani confronts Deven, who hints at his love for her. After this revelation, Kalyani physically avoids Deven, even to the extent of hiding during his visits and sending another inmate in her stead.

In *Bandini*, the use of bars, grills, walls, barbed wire, and other barriers are representative of physical distance. Bimal Roy uses these physical barriers to show the physical as well as mental confinement of characters. Such barriers are also used as a foreshadowing technique, symbolic of what is to come.

During the song 'O panchi pyaare', all the inmates look at a bird from their prison bars. Though the prison Kalyani lives in is an open one and Bimal Roy could have chosen to show the bird in simple shots, he chooses instead to use the 'bars' metaphor. This is one of the introductions of the recurring use of bars and other barriers to represent physical distance.

When Deven proposes marriage to Kalyani, Deven is on one side of the door and Kalyani on another. They are not even able to see each other. This physical distance is indicative of Kalyani's unwillingness to accept the offer.

Once Deven resigns and leaves for his hometown, his cart is seen crossing the prison boundary wall, and Kalyani listens to the sound of the cart moving away from the other side of the wall.

In the flashback sequence, bars and barriers are used as tools to foreshadow what comes later in Kalyani's life. When Kalyani goes to deliver a letter to Bikas for the first time, a shot of her behind barbed wire symbolises the thorny path, which she takes after falling in love with the freedom fighter. Additionally, when Bikas receives the letter from the gap in the wall, he immediately looks outside to find its deliverer, and for the



first time, he sees Kalyani. Their first meeting is through a window with bars on it. The bars meant to keep Bikas imprisoned soon become the same bars to imprison Kalyani, and a role-reversal takes place.

In the last sequence, Kalyani and Bikas sit at opposite ends, with a divider separating the space between them. They cannot see each other through it, and after Kalyani's sufferings, she prefers to maintain distance from her former lover. Here Bikas narrates his reasons for abandoning her, and asks for her forgiveness. Once he leaves that space to board the ship, and Kalyani moves away from him as well to board the train, realisation dawns on her, and she runs toward the ship, deciding to eliminate that physical space forever.

In *Sujata*, physical distance between the characters plays a highly important role in reflecting prevalent thoughts and attitudes of that time. From the first moment Sujata is brought in by some workers to Upen (her foster father), the difference of 'her kind' is highlighted. The workers stand far away from where Rama's birthday party is taking place. Their distance from the 'well-off' crowd is made clearer with shots of affluent people smoking, speaking English, eating ice-cream, and wearing modern clothing.

During the lullaby 'Nanhi pari sone chali', Charu touches Rama affectionately, reinforcing their mother-daughter bond. There is no such motherly touch for Sujata, who lies crying in another room. However, as Charu cares for the child, she sings to Sujata through the window, but because of Sujata's caste, Charu maintains a very obvious physical distance from her.

Sujata and Rama are first introduced as older children in a sequence where they are on a see-saw. The foster sisters have grown up together at this point and Rama remains rather oblivious to Sujata's difference in society. Therefore both Sujata and Rama are on equal ends of the see-saw. However, the branch of a tree divides the frame into two, splitting the equal ends of the see-saw into two unequal parts. Whereas it is possible to see the Chowdhury residence from Rama's side of the see-saw, Sujata's side is empty, much like her own existence, which at this point is a balance between her love for her foster family and her realisation that she is treated differently and is in many ways, an outsider.

Sujata's first introduction as an adult takes place outside the house, an indication of her removal from her house, or her society. The first shot of Sujata is behind a drying sari. Her face is not seen, but her silhouette is symbolic of her underdeveloped existence. She lives comfortably with her foster family but she is still an outsider. Her existence becomes almost like a shadow. When Rama is introduced however, she is sitting in front of the piano playing music. While Sujata is outside the house drying clothes (which is a common household chore), Rama is shown indulging in a hobby that was usually reserved for rich people at the time. Their obvious physical distance as well as difference in activities reinforces the idea of physical distance representing mindsets.

While Rama finds comfort indoors, Sujata is most herself outside the house, in the garden. It is in the garden where Sujata finds true happiness. The garden is physically distant from the rest of the house, but it is one place where Sujata does not have to feel like an outcast. It is in the garden that Adhir first tells Sujata that he comes to her house only to see her.

During Rama's birthday party as an adult, Sujata stays in another room, far away from the rest of the crowd. Adhir sees her through the window and notices her sadness. Even while she is under the same roof, Sujata avoids contact with people who are not a part of her foster family. After hearing her parents calling her 'like a daughter' and not 'daughter', she goes to the garden for solace. She finds solace when Adhir tells her that no matter what people say, he thinks that Sujata is Upen's daughter.

It is also in this garden that Sujata tells Adhir that he must stop loving her. She is not able to put her words together coherently when he phones her previously. In the garden, she finds her voice and reveals her true identity of being an untouchable woman.

In the song 'Jalte hain jiske liye', Adhir expresses his love for Sujata. However, her true emotions are veiled as a result of the real physical distance the phone represents. Though she can hear Adhir's voice, she cannot see him and he cannot see her. She then tells him to forget all about her. Her strange response on the phone leaves Adhir perplexed, and though he tries to reduce this 'distance' by calling again, Sujata does not receive the phone but retreats into the adjacent room and locks the door, thus distancing herself from him completely.

During the climax, with Charu in a fragile state, physical distance, both literally and figuratively, is reduced. The physical distance, which represents psychological barriers, is eliminated with the insertion of the blood transfusion tube that connects Sujata to her foster mother by blood. After Charu discovers that her life has been saved thanks to Sujata, she sets aside previous physical distance, calls Sujata to sit beside her, and embraces her, thus removing all kinds of physical distance existing previously.

THE CITY AS A SYMBOL OF CHANGE IN *DEVIDAS*, *BANDINI* AND *SUJATA*

Cities in Bimal Roy's films foreshadow unexpected changes for the characters. This can be seen especially in *Bandini*, where Kalyani's life changes completely once she leaves her village to go to the city. The song 'O jaanewale ho sake to laut ke aana' in *Bandini* shares a commonness with 'Mausam beeta jaaye' in *Do Bigha Zameen* in the respect that both songs play in the background as the protagonists leave their villages behind to go to the cities. Both songs call for their protagonists not to forget the place they are leaving in the pursuit of a new life. While Shambu loses his land after going to the city to earn a living, Kalyani loses her father, her freedom, and in the process, her identity.

In *Bandini*, Kalyani decides to leave her village once the villagers taunt her and her father regarding the disappearance of Bikas. Unable to bear her father being abused, Kalyani decides to leave to the city. This movement signifies Kalyani's severance from her roots, the place she was born in, to a life in the unknown world. Kalyani, who was once the postmaster's daughter, known by everyone in the village, suddenly becomes the outsider.

Once Kalyani is in the city, she desperately seeks a job so that she does not have to depend on anyone. However, due to a lack of jobs, she has to make do with the job of a servant in a hospital. The work is considered to be too lowly by Kalyani's female friend. However, Kalyani does not care about the kind of work at this point and accepts the offer. Seeing her hard work, she is soon asked to take care of a paranoid woman, but this has severe repercussions.

Just as Kalyani begins settling down in the hospital, news reaches her that her father died in an accident as he was coming to search for her in the city. Shocked and saddened beyond words, Kalyani returns to the hospital, only to be ordered about and shouted at by the paranoid patient. After she discovers that the patient is actually Bikas's wife, Kalyani loses all sense of stability and in a fit of rage, serves poison to Bikas's wife in a cup of tea, thus committing murder in a city that changes her life drastically.

After the deed, Kalyani surrenders to the police and seeks penance for her guilt in prison, which becomes the only place she now has. Her bonds with her own village are completely cut.

In *Devdas*, the city is a metaphor for Devdas's change in personality, which directly affects both of the women in his life. Devdas is sent away to Calcutta when he is a child, and in spite of the distance that tests the endurance of love of the two childhood friends, Paro secretly accepts Devdas as her soulmate.



After Paro defies society's conventions to enter Devdas's room in the night, Devdas too decides to talk to his family about a future with Paro. However, he is snubbed. Without fighting back, Devdas flees to Calcutta once more, with each of his returns to the city heralding his descent into depression and self-destruction.

When Paro is married off, Devdas returns to Calcutta once more, this time going to a courtesan's (Chandramukhi) dance hall for the first time in his life. What follows suit is his dangerous addiction to alcohol and his money wasting habits.

Devdas's change from a young, intelligent man to a depressed alcoholic has a profound impact on Paro, who still harbours love for her childhood friend, and Chandramukhi, who changes completely because of her love.

His death knell finally rings when Devdas's old city friend Chunnibabu passes him a glass of alcohol, finally ending an addiction that had started in the city.

In *Sujata*, Upen and Charu take Sujata in when they are 'in the mountains' and outside the city. It is in this set up that Upen and Charu treat Sujata very well, not giving her complete parental love, but not revealing her true birth status either. However, once Sujata becomes an adult, and the Chowdhury's return to the city, Buaji tells Charu and Upen that they must live by the 'rules of society' now that they are back in the city.

The city not only changes her foster parents' treatment toward her, but also brings a revelation that changes Sujata's perspective of her self. Sujata starts understanding a difference in treatment, and starts retreating into a shell of low esteem. However, Adhir's entry (also from the city) changes this once and for all.

A CONCLUSION: PERCEPTION OF SELF IN BANDINI, DEVDAS AND SUJATA

Bimal Roy asks important questions through his characters, often highlighting the dichotomy of traditional societal norms. In *Bandini*, Kalyani accepts her difference from society after she poisons a woman, and therefore chooses to abandon a happy life in penance of her guilt. When she becomes aware of Deven's affections for her, she has to refuse his love 'for his own sake'. Though Deven offers her a chance to come back into society by proposing marriage to her, Kalyani thinks she is not deserving of going back to a normal life. Her guilt, though apparently lessened by the sharing of her life story, seems to return at the very end of the film, when Kalyani makes her ultimate choice.

This guilt remains a part of Kalyani's identity until the end of the film, where she makes her choice to go back to Bikas. Knowing about his decision to go back to his village even though he has no one to take care of him and treat his tuberculosis, Kalyani cannot see the man she once loved withering away in pain. Guilty that she will be the reason for his death if she ignores him, Kalyani makes her decision to return.

In *Devdas*, both women are mirrors of each other, but are completely different as well. Whereas Chandramukhi is loathed by society and therefore loathes herself, Paro is unafraid of society and holds her self-esteem in high regard. Chandramukhi rejects the material world and a profession that earns her money to 'cleanse' herself and return her chastity and innocence. From a courtesan surrounded by unknown men, she completely rejects other male companionship and devotes herself to the worship of the lord and the service of less fortunate people. She also waits for Devdas to return and expresses her spiritual and devotional love for him.

Sujata's low birth and differential treatment from her foster parents engrains a sense of low-esteem in her. She accepts her 'subservient' position in society by being physically distant from other people belonging to higher castes. She also believes that she is undeserving of the affections of a man who is from a higher caste than her. Having internalised much of her self-worth the way society dictates it, *Sujata* even decides to go to the extent of forfeiting her love for the greater happiness of her family. She thinks that by being an untouchable woman, she is less deserving of a happy life and the affections of a Brahmin man.

Bimal Roy reinforces the idea of social difference through his characters, who represent not only very varied women, but also very distinct mindsets. His characters are mainly those who have voluntarily chosen the life of an outsider, as in the case of Paro, who in spite of being married, rejects its materialism. Chandramukhi on the other hand is a courtesan not by choice, but by compulsion. However, her decision to be an unmarried devotional lover is her own choice. Similarly Kalyani, though imprisoned due to an unfortunate incident, chooses to repent her crime by being in jail. Her last decision to leave the promise of a married life to return to the man she loves is also not forced upon her.

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