



Representation of the Protagonist in Bimal Roy's 1959 film *Sujata*:-

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Abstract:-

Women in many of the Bollywood films have been time and again portrayed as submissive, unimportant people, just as mere objects of sex, who do not have power to take decisions in life. On the contrary, the female protagonists in the films of Bimal Roy, took center stage and did what was beyond imagination for women in those days. That was an era where women were mostly confined to their houses and generally did not earn or learn. Women in films of Roy were decisive and made their own choices in their lives. Be it Lalita of Parineeta (1953) or Madhumati of Madhumati (1955) or Kalyani of Bandini(1963) or Paro and Chandramukhi in Devdas (1955), or Sujata in Sujata (1959), or Kamini in Biraj Bahu (1954), female leads in the films of Roy were never mere puppets in hands of men. Though scorned by society for being a dalit, a criminal, a prostitute, or just because they were females, yet in his films, women stood strong and fought against all odds. The paper attempts to analyze the portrayal of the protagonist in the film Sujata played by Nutan.

Keywords:- Bimal Roy; Women protagonist; Bollywood; Sujata; Decisive; Empathetic; Realism

Introduction:-

Two years ago, while we celebrated the centenary of Indian cinema, the reminiscences of its journey over the years must have surely overwhelmed us. From the soundless to the talkie epoch and from the black and white to the color age, Bollywood stands distinct in the world with its unique singing and dancing around tress format and has evolved into the largest film industry in the world. From 1940s to 1960s, the period often refereed as the golden era of Indian Cinema, directors like Guru Dutt, Raj Kapoor, Mehboob, Satyajit Ray, Bimal Roy etc mesmerized filmgoers with their magic over the silver screen with their critically acclaimed, realistic films. Those were the years between which India was struggling for independence, going through famines; poverty was all pervasive and cities were just budding .Exposed to such stark realities around them, film makers took up issues like caste discrimination, female feticides, wife beating, adultery, smuggling, robbery , rich poor divide etc as themes for their works. These

filmmakers made films with an artistic and humanistic view point. Be it Raj Kapoor who made people think through laughter, or Adoor Gopalakrishnan or Satyajit Ray who brought out stark realities of society or experimented with cinematography, the films between 40s and 60s were indeed spectacular in totality.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that women in India have been victims of subjugation at one or the other point of time in their lives. The male chauvinism and patriarchal dominance have silenced their voices since centuries in this land. Women in our society, more so in the older days, were generally expected to stay confined to the walls of their houses and look after household chores. An ideal woman was expected to be docile, resilient and agree to all decisions taken by males in her house, never complain or take stand even if she was wronged. Though such submissive images of women have been churned out by numerous directors on our celluloid, yet

Bimal Roy was an exception with his portrayal of female characters .

Bimal Roy (1909-1966), one of the most acclaimed directors in the history of Indian Cinema, used the medium of films to question various forms of exploitation prevalent in our society. He started his journey in films as a cinematographer for P C Barua's *Devdas* .With eleven filmfare awards, two national film awards, and international prize at the Cannes film festival, Roy left an indelible impression over audiences with master pieces like *Devdas* (1955), *Madhumati* (1958), *Sujata* (1959), *Bandini*(1963) , *Biraj Bahu* (1954), *Do Bigha Zameen* (1953), *Parineeta* (1954) etc. His films not only received critical applause, but were also blockbusters and were loved by audiences. He was well known for his symbolic representations, subtleness, restraint and perfection in camera placement. Many of his works were adaptations of literature, for instance *Parineeta* was based on a love story by Sarat Chandra, *Usne Kaha Tha* was based on a story of Premchand, *Kabuliwalla* based on Tagore's short story or for that matter, *Bandini* was based on the novel *Tamasi* by Jarasandha.

It is interesting to note that women in Bimal Roy's movies enjoyed significance and strong stature in an era when women were hardly educated or rarely went out to earn a living, Roy's female protagonists were strong, decisive, emotionally independent, had a distinct identity of their own and not mere foils to men.

Analyzing character of Sujata, the female protagonist in Bimal Roy's 1959 film *Sujata*:-

The film *Sujata* starring Nutan as Sujata-an untouchable low caste orphan and Sunil Dutt as Adheer, is based on a short story of Bengali

writer Subodh Ghosh. It portrays romance between a Brahmin boy and an untouchable girl. Bimalda, as he was fondly addressed, with his exquisite mise-en-scene, sketched the pain and predicament of a low caste orphan girl in Indian society. After Sujata's parents die of Haija, she is brought to the brahmin middle class couple-Upen and Charu , who bring her up out of benevolence. As she grows up, she is apprised of the stark reality of being an untouchable. She is again and again introduced as '*beti jaisi*' or 'like daughter' by Charu, which hurts her so much so that she builds a cocoon around herself and though as a child ,she is demanding and throws tantrums, she grows up to be calm, pensive, mature, and silent. The climax depicts her assertiveness and inner strength, when she saves the life of her foster mother, Charu, who after falling down from stairs needs blood and ironically only Sujata's blood group is a match to her blood. When Charu learns that Sujata has donated blood to her, she realizes her mistake and finally convinces Sujata to marry Adheer.

As a little girl Sujata is depicted as one who innocuously fights for her rights at home.

After seeing Rama eating *Halwa* i.e sweet porridge given by her father Upen, She runs to him asking: - "Bapu mera Halwa...".Again, when she takes up books from Upen's library and says:-"*Main padhungi...*", Charu stops her by saying,"*Kitab kyu utha rahi hai sujata, Mat chu in kitabon ko, bapu tere bigdenge*", but Sujata doesn't give up. She goes to the servant's room and takes away the Ramayana from the servant. She fights and cries to learn the Ramayana from the tuition master who had come to teach Rama.

The scene where she calls Upen, when he inadvertently forgets to carry his cap ,while he is about to leave home for work, one gets a glimpse of Sujata's concern and care for her parents . She

calls out for Upen and says:- *“Baapu ye lijiye aapka cap, aap roj le jaate hain aaj kyu bhul gaye, agar mujhe bhi ni yaad rehta toh aapko dhup me takleef hoti na.”*

In another instance, despite being a little girl, she follows the instructions of her tuition teacher and gets ready herself and prepares her suitcase, when masterji comes to take her to the orphanage. This scene shows her self sufficiency and sense of time. But when she understands it as a lure to take her away from her parents, she rejects all offers of toys or chocolates and chooses to be with her parents. It also gives us an insight into her righteousness and strong attachment that she has developed with Charu and Upen over a period of time.

Sujata grows up to be a composed and sensible lady. She does all house hold chores well in time. She is punctual to the extent that Upen says *“Sujata is ghar ki ghadi tum hi ho”*.

In a conversation with Adheer, Rama describes the time bound work done by Sujata which gives an idea of Sujata’s agility.

“ Wo kabhi ek minute bhi khali nei baithti ,subeh se sham tak ghadi ke mutabik kam karti hai.....subeh aath baje khade rasoil ghagr me dekh bhal kar rhi hai, das baje baithi bhandar ghar me list bana rhi hain,Sade das baje mahaver ko pese dekar bazaar bhejne ki jaldi me hai, aur dopeher ke teen baje bazaar se laye hue saaman ko suljhane me lagi hain , aur sade char baje kapde samten me lagi hai,panch baje chai ki taiyari main hain ,aur phir bagiche main.....”

Sujata perpetually goes through an identity crisis. The question of who she is always rings in her. After knowing that her parents are no more and since she was born in low caste, she is despised and unwanted, she decides to end her life, but

changes her mind after reading lines of Gandhiji on a memorial –*“ Maren kесе, аatma hatya karke, kabhi nehi, авashyakta ho toh jinda rehne ke liye maren”*. The question of whether she was of a low caste because she was born in a low caste family or to the Brahmins as she was raised by a Brahmin family keeps her in a perpetual dilemma.

Her maturity is displayed when Upen asks her to not misunderstand Charu, to which she calmly replies –*“Main kya samajhti nehi hoon bapu...”*. She tries to stay happy and content in life. She makes herself busy in household chores. She is extremely attached to nature and spends most of her time in the garden, looking after saplings, watering them, caring her plants like a mother does to her child.

Like every young lady, she is full of desires and passion. She falls in love with Adheer. Her juvenile ecstasy is also depicted in her interactions with Rama. Her romantic temperament is seen when she sings and dances when alone at home to a rainy weather outside-*“Kali ghata chaye mora jiya tarsaye, aise me khahin koi mil jae...”*

Many a times, especially in social gatherings, she gets offended again and again when introduced as *“Beti jesi”* by Charu, she feels left out and neglected and often goes back to childhood reminiscences. For instance on the occasion of Rama’s birthday she recollects how as a child her birthday was never celebrated. She used to plead before Charu to celebrate her birthday:-

“....mera bhi janamdin karo na ammi, mera bhi janamdin karo na ammi, main bhi Rama jese sajungi, me bhi rama jese baithkar tumhare god main kheer khaungi....”

But is eventually left out crying and locked up in a room alone.

She has a sentiment of burden lurking deep down her heart. The burden is about being raised by the bureaucrat upper caste family. This sense of indebt leads her to refuse Adheer for marriage when she comes to know that Charu wants Rama and Adheer to be tied up in the nuptial bond. This gesture of sacrifice for the sake of Charu and Upen's happiness tells us of her soft heartedness.

*"...aapko sukhi banane me mujhe apne ammi
bapu ko dukh dena padega,
jo main duniya ki kisi bhi lok ke liye nei kar
paungi,
unki ichha hai aapka vyah rama ke saath ho,
agar mujhe aap sukhi dekhna chahte hai, toh aap
rama ke saath vyah kar le,
main jeevan bhar ammi bapu ke saath reh ke
unki seva karungi..."*

Through her dialogues, expressions and mannerisms, one gets to know several aspects of the protagonist in the film.

Conclusion:-

Sujata reveals the caste dynamics in India. The paradox lies in the name 'Sujata' itself which means – a person from the upper class. It is surprising that though the film does not picture

any melancholic or misfortune scenes, nor are the foster parents cruel to her while bringing her up, yet the movie subtly brings forth the predicament and pain of a low caste girl because of the caste prejudices prevalent in Indian society. The characters in the film are portrayed in grey. Roy portrays both the good and bad side of the central character Sujata candidly. Her predicaments, sacrifice, empathy, anger, ecstasy, love, care are depicted in various scenes throughout the flick. The fact that not for a single moment one feels the plot to be boring and lengthy is testimony to the splendid illustration and imagination of Bimal Roy.

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