

The First Winner of the Filmfare Awards in India with a Taste of Neorealism

Do Bigha Zamin by Bimal Roy, A Benchmark for Indian and World Cinema

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October 2023

Do Bigha Zamin is a film directed by Bimal Roy, which won the first Filmfare Award in India, equivalent to the Bollywood Oscars. The film won Best Film and Best Direction at the 1945 Filmfare Awards. It also won the Certificate of Merit for Best Feature Film at the first National Film Awards of India. Internationally, it was nominated for Best Film and won the International Prize at the 7th Cannes Film Festival. Other notable awards for this timeless film include the Social Progress Award at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival.

Bimal Roy created this masterpiece inspired by Italian Neorealist cinema, particularly after watching the film "Bicycle Thieves" by Vittorio De Sica. Like many of Bimal Roy's films, artistic and commercial cinema merged to create a film that is still considered a benchmark in both Indian and world cinema.

The story revolves around a farmer named Shambhu, who lives with his wife Parvati, son Kanaiya, and his elderly father Gangu in a small village that is suffering from a drought. After years of drought and famine, rain finally falls in the region, bringing joy to the farmers. Shambhu owns two bighas of land (each bigha equals two-thirds of an acre), which is the family's only means of livelihood. Takur Harnam Singh, the local landlord, partners with some traders to build a mill on his large land, which promises to bring profit and prosperity to the village. The only problem is that Shambhu's modest two bighas of land lies in the middle of Harnam Singh's land.

Harnam Singh is confident that he can buy Shambhu's land. Shambhu has borrowed money from Harnam Singh several times in the past and has not paid back his debts. Harnam Singh offers to buy the land in exchange for the debt. Shambhu is unwilling to sell the only means of his livelihood. Angered by his refusal, Harnam Singh demands that the debt be paid by the next day.

Shambhu and his son assess the debt and manage to gather the money by selling household items and his wife's earrings. However, Harnam Singh manipulates the accounts through his accountant. Eventually, the matter goes to court, where the judge grants Shambhu three months to pay the debt. Shambhu travels to Kolkata to work and save his land. His son secretly joins him, hoping to help his father. As with other Neorealist works, the film portrays the ups and downs of ordinary people's lives; a problem arises, hope glimmers, but

is this hope real or just a fleeting illusion? Shambu and Kanhaiya face difficulties immediately. Kanhaiya becomes ill after sleeping on the streets but recovers after finding shelter. Shambu works tirelessly as a rickshaw puller, and Kanhaiya shines shoes in secret to help his father. Things seem to improve until misfortune strikes again.

Shambu is injured in an accident and can no longer pull a rickshaw. Unable to bear his father's distress, Kanhaiya turns to pickpocketing but is caught and punished by Shambu. Meanwhile, Parvati, worried about her husband and son, travels to Kolkata. She escapes a con man but is injured in an accident. Shambu spends all his savings on her treatment.

In the end, they return to their village empty-handed, only to find Shambu's land being auctioned off. In a heartbreak moment, Shambu tries to collect a handful of soil from his ancestral land but is stopped by a guard. The film ends with a long shot of Shambu and his family walking away from their lost homeland.