

Bhalobashar Anek Naam

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Based on a story by Bibhuti Bhusan Bandopadhyay, and swinging between light humour and serious dilemma, Tarun Majumdar's "Bhalobashar Anek Naam—Love has many names" (Bengali, 135 mins, colour) is an action youth—movie, full of diversions and sympathy. The film commences with the Kolkata city scene, with title card, intercuts, of "No Vacancy". The credits appear in an inter-play of sketches and drawings. The perimeter of the city ends with a suburban, electric train zooming out, and a village is presented with a palanquin carried on shoulders, in the background.

The village folks have been awaiting the arrival of Bimal Mukherjee (Gaurav Chatterjee), the newly appointed teacher in the village school. At Bataspur station, the brahmin station master Mr Ganguly (Manoj Mitra) is present to receive him, along with Sadananda Das (Biswajit Chowdhury), the Secretary of the school, who had signed the appointment letter. Bimal is provided residence in a vacant railway quarter, close to Mr Ganguly's residence, Mrs Ganguly prepares Bimal's dinner. The Ganguly couple secretly desire that Bimal, the brahmin marry Bulbuli (Mouli Bhattacharya) their teen aged daughter.

Kirit (Tapas Pal) sells herbal medicines on running suburban trains, and has to stay away from home, six days a week. Remembering his wedding anniversary, he returns home with a new sari for his wife Minnie (Moushumi Chatterjee). While on her way to draw water from the village pond, full of hyacinths, Minnie notices the new teacher, Bimal. Curiosity arises in both, and stares lead to bonds, between Bimal and Minnie. Minnie had lost a younger brother, and Bimal's elder sister has died some years ago. The transposed relationship converges in brother-sister affections. They meet on the steps to a dilapidated bungalow, and Minnie carries sweets and pies for Bimal. Meanwhile, Bulbuli sings her heart out, with Hindi and Bengali- film songs, from the 1950s and 1960s. During private tuitions, Bimal discovers Bulbuli's lack of primary knowledge of grammar and spellings. Nakul Bhattacharjee (Biplab Ketan Chakravarty), with bare torso and only a dhoti, pursues all the village women, walking to the pond. On his short cuts to the village school, through woods and foliage, Bimal keeps meeting a travelling player, with masks of gods and goddesses.

Bimal has a pile of books at his residence, including Shelley's poetry. Evenings he spends reading, in the glow of a kerosene lamp. Shambhu, a cousin, who is a supervisor in the Railways, visits the railway station on inspection. Mr Ganguly is scared that Shambhu could discover Bimal's unauthorized occupancy of the railways quarter. But things smooth out as the cousins discover each other, after a long absence. Shambhu cooks meat in Bimal's residence, for dinner. After numerous sneezes, one evening Bimal returns home with fever. Fellow teacher Moinuddin (Soumitra Chatterjee), who is also an amateur homeopath, provides medicines. While Moinuddin plays the violin, another railway employee (Paran Banerjee), sings along a village path. Minnie lights lamps, in prayers. Each day of absence of Bimal, is marked by a stone, placed by Minnie, on the steps of their daily rendezvous. With Bimal's indifference to Bulbuli, the Ganguly couple ignore Bimal, Moinuddin brings food for Bimal.

The school puja vacations are announced. Minnie suggests to Bimal that on return from Kolkata, Bimal bring along his mother and brother. She gives a tiffin carrier of food to Bimal. As Moinuddin plays the violin, Bimal accompanies on flute. An educated cousin of Minnie, Suni (Meghna Mukherjee) is one day spotted on the train by Kirit, selling incense. She runs away in panic. Without a mother, and being ill treated by her step mother and father, she leaves her father's dwelling. Kirit spots her crying at a roadside station, and brings her home, as her own sister.

Minnie is overwhelmed, and makes Suni comfortable. Bimal returns to the village, after the puja vacations, carrying a letter for Minnie from his mother, alongwith a photo of Bimal's departed sister. Suni and Bimal meet, and ties develop. Spotting a snake, Suni pulls Bimal away. A new girls' primary school is being opened shortly in the village, and Suni obtains a teacher's job.

An affluent relative in Kolkata, offers Bimal an executive trainee appointment in a factory in Moradabad, involving numerous foreign trips. There are inter-cuts between roaring sea waves, and swirling trees and forests. Bimal faces a dilemma, while the village elders look forward to Bimal's engagement with Suni. Attachments, kindness and human ties are all shaken up by the attractive job offer. Meanwhile, Bulbuli's marriage has been arranged with a less educated, rustic dandy.

One day, the village peeping tom, Nakul, notices Minnie bending over Bimal's chest, while stitching a shirt button. He carries the news to Kirit, who is naturally upset. Moinuddin finds difficulties in composing tunes, to the headmaster's poem, which is to be sung at a school function. There is a reconciliation between Minnie and Kirit, and Nakul is thrown into the muddy pond. Bimal and Suni sing a duet, Rabindra Sangeet, at the school function. Sambhu comes to the village, to escort Bimal, on way to his new assignment in Moradabad. On the day of departure, the stationmaster suspends all train movements. But Bimal leaves, and returns soon after. He meets Suni, who passes an old pebble to him, which they would roll to each other, during their earlier courtship.

The narrative of "Bhalobashar anek naam" is never bigger than life. Tarun Majumdar's script oscillates between comic, burlesque and the serious, without pointing to other levels of intensity, which permeates real life. The humour is derived from incongruities and occurrences, avoiding comments on urban unsophistication or rustic robustness. The characters are portrayed as neither sublime nor banal; but stereotypes emerge with looks of amazement before platitudes. The multiplicity of village spaces, adorned with sunlight and the shadow of tall trees, is filmed admirably with a mobile camera, and skilful editing. Bulbuli's singing of olden day film songs, re-inforces the sterile and infantile dialogue. But the script's horizon of human affections, kindness and love remain boundless. *~ ~ ~*

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