



## REALITY (RE-)VISITED: CHILDREN OF PROSTITUTES IN *BORN INTO BROTHELS*

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### Abstract:

The human quest for securing, recording, and preserving memories of reality lead to the invention of motion pictures, which then gave birth to documentary films. Documentary filmmaking has radically evolved in recent years. Capturing reality come into scrutiny as more and more technological development allows the documentary filmmakers to design and articulate reality more subjectively than ever before. *Born Into Brothels* is a film about real people from the red light districts of Calcutta. Poverty and disease are two common phenomena of the people who live in Sonagachi, Calcutta's red-light district. Another name of the documentary, *Calcutta's Red Light Kids*, skillfully turns audience's focus on the children of the brothels from Calcutta, which in a way, establishes that this film is about kids and not prostitution. The fact that *Born Into Brothels* is about children of prostitutes and not about prostitution makes it an intriguing example in analyzing the presented "reality" as well as the filmmakers' perspectives. This article intends to investigate specific filmic and editorial techniques that documentary filmmakers use in articulating the inevitable reality of society. This article argues that *Born Into Brothels* tries to invoke humanitarian awareness among the audience and in a broader sense into society.

**Keywords:** documentary, reality, brothels, children, Calcutta

### 1. Introduction

We live in a world where everything is continually going through changes. Since the beginning of the current century, technology has advanced, and new inventions in information technology have made a profound effect on the conventional ways of securing and recording reality. Our perspectives about preserving memories and presenting facts have also been shaped enormously based on the medium we use. Since the invention of photographic cameras in the first half of the 19th century, earlier

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mediums of visual representation from facts, drawings, and paintings became obsolete. The introduction of the method of taking and developing pictures has also laid the primary foundation for further developments of photography, which ultimately lead to the development of cinematography. The Lumière Brothers took it further and recorded moving pictures which made it famous. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the recording of moving images led to the demand for showing news about the world and human beings more than anything else. This demand by creating real-time moving pictures formulated the genre of the documentary. By the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the genre of the documentary films has got a fresh stimulus by new mobile technology, better camera quality, and advance video editing tools, which allowed film makers more flexibility and agency in capturing raw reality.

Documentary filmmaking has radically evolved in recent years. There is no clear-cut definition of every single documentary which has ever been made or will be made. The documentary covers educational and political manipulation of a particular subject or an issue of society. To describe the documentary in a sentence, we could say that a documentary film is a form of recording and projecting real people or real events/ real happenings. In response to real people or events, *Born Into Brothels*<sup>ii</sup> (2004) presented the real-life struggle children of prostitutes face in brothels. Another name of the documentary, *Calcutta's Red Light Kids*, skillfully turns the audience's focus on children of brothels in Calcutta, which in a way establishes that this film is about kids and not prostitution.

In 1998, both American director and documentary photographer Zana Briski and Ross Kauffman went to Calcutta to photograph prostitutes but could not find it easy to do. Instead, Briski found enthusiastic children who were interested in learning photography and photographing their mothers. This small and precise initiative lights up a different point of view on lives in the brothels. It brought out the artistic talent of the kids. Zana Briski taught basic photography techniques to eight of the kids and provided them cameras to photograph their daily life in the brothel. It came out as a pleasant experience of life for the kids. However, in the movie, this new opportunity of picturing their life in brothel stands for the possibilities that open a new ray of hope for these kids to come out of the brothel and to change their fates.

This paper aims to investigate the way documentary makers shape their work to present an inevitable "reality" of society. The underlying assumption is that specific filmic, and editorial techniques are used to show "reality" from a particular perspective. This paper will also investigate the motive and intention of the documentary filmmakers in *Born Into Brothels*. To find out about the perspectives used in a documentary, it has to be investigated what "reality" means and how "reality" creates an impact on documentary making.

Before we dive into analyzing *Born Into Brothels*, I believe, it would be helpful to come up with a definition of 'Documentary' film that can set the tone for the rest of the paper. Also, it is important to discuss "reality" in the documentary films and trace the

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<sup>ii</sup> Won the Academy Award for 'Best Documentary Feature' in 2005.

instances of “reality” in *Born Into Brothels*, which will then lead us in understanding the director’s purpose and message in *Born Into Brothels*.

## 2. Documentary: *Born Into Brothels*

### 2.1 What is a Documentary Film?

Documentary as a genre twisted into different meanings, and the definition of the documentary film changes with the change of documentary as a genre or emergence of a sub-genre. In general, we can say, a documentary film is a broad term to describe a non-fictional movie that in some way presents or captures “reality”. To make the definition more precise, documentary film is a non-fiction text using ‘actuality’ footage, which may include the live recording of events and relevant research materials. John Grierson, coined the term “Documentary” in the 1920s, defined it as “*the creative treatment of actuality*” (Wells 189). “Actuality”, in this sense, means that documentaries are about historical events that have taken place. Documentaries work only in reference to the historical world itself and therefore use images, music and witnesses from this world. However, the words “creative treatment” in Grierson’s definition turns the focus onto film production that filming does not capture reality as it is but records it in a certain way. In other words, “creative treatment” implies that the filmmaker is the one who alters or decides on the actual footage by their choices of what to show and whatnot. Bill Nichols, in his book *Introduction to Documentary*, talks about the issue of innovative treatment of footages and discusses the impact of involving real people into the events. He defines documentary as “... *film speaks about situations and events involving real people (social actors) who present themselves to us as themselves in stories that convey a plausible proposal about, or perspective on, the lives, situations, and events portrayed*” (2001/2010a:14).

In short, documentary films are the medium that reveals unusual, interesting, intriguing, and thought-provoking aspect of human life and society. Nevertheless, this revealing or projection of aspects varies depending on the imagination of the filmmaker. It also depends on the motivation of a documentary maker for a specific story or viewpoint on a topic that has not been presented adequately before.

Documentary films can be informative, educational, ironic, absurd, inspirational, shocking and of any combination. Documentary films also make visible what might have never been seen through a regular eye or viewpoint. It also opens the opportunity to analyze facts critically. In *Documentary Storytelling: Creative Nonfiction on Screen*, Sheila Curran Bernard states that:

*“documentaries bring viewers into new worlds and experiences through the presentation of factual information about real people, places, and events, generally – but not always – portrayed through the use of actual images and artefacts. Nevertheless, factuality alone does not define documentary films; it is what the filmmaker does with those factual elements, weaving them into an overall narrative that strives to be as compelling as it is truthful and is often more significant than the sum of its parts.” (2)*

Finally, from the general viewers' point of view, documentary films rely much upon in the mind of the beholder as much as to the film's context and structure. There are some common-sense assumptions that we use to consider a movie as a documentary. Documentaries are - about reality, about real people, and tell stories about what happened. With these assumptions, properties of lenses, emulsions, optics, sound recorders, and style create the basis of a film being regarded as a documentary. In addition, "a documentary is more than evident: it is also a particular way of seeing the world, making proposals about it, or offering perspectives on it. It is, in this sense, a way of interpreting the world" (Nichols 2001/2010a:34).

## **2.2 *Born Into Brothels* as a Documentary Film**

Documentary films remain, mostly, into the audience's consideration to label it as a documentary film or not. In the following, we will try to come up with a definitive answer to the question of either *Born Into Brothels* is a documentary film or not.

In line with the definition of Nichols, *Born Into Brothels* is a film about real people from the red light districts of Calcutta. Poverty and disease are two common phenomena of the people who live in Sonagachi, Calcutta's red-light district. The most intolerable reality of this place is that the children of these prostitutes face the cruelty of their fate; moreover, they also have to tolerate others' discrimination. These real-life children of prostitutes, the real setting of the film into a brothel, and shooting the actual footage from the happenings in the brothel give *Born Into Brothels* the quality to be regarded as a documentary. The title of the film and other stylistic details, such as the excessive use of montage, the non-diegetic mournful music, the dim-lighting and constant juxtaposition of the children's faces with the inner lanes of the brothel communicate a sense of entrapment and evoke sorrow and helplessness amongst the viewers. This engagement of the audiences with the film upholds *Born Into Brothels* as a documentary film. *Born Into Brothels* matches precisely with the definition Bill Nichols proposes for the documentary "... film speaks about situations and events involving real people (social actors) who present themselves to us as themselves in stories that convey a plausible proposal about, or perspective on, the lives, situations, and events portrayed" (2001/2010a:14).

As for the category of the documentary, *Born Into Brothels* get into the participatory or interactive mode of documentary film. The Participatory or interactive documentary films are those who "stress images of testimony or verbal exchange and images of demonstration" (Nichols 1991:44). In a greater sense, this mode of documentary advocates biasness "of situated presence and local knowledge that derives from the actual encounter of filmmaker and other" (1991:44). In *Born Into Brothels*, Zana Briski, the filmmaker, started living in the brothel and directly interact with the kids of the prostitutes and the officials responsible for getting these children into boarding school. Time to time, she intervenes and acts as a voice-over to inform the audience about the current situation of these kids. The unexpected juxtaposition of animals in the zoo with the kids in the dark alleys of Sonagachi arise audiences focus on the fact that children in brothels are also entrapped. One of the most striking characteristics of this film is that the social actors here are

children, and we can assume that children are not acting in the film; however, they provide the true feelings about their lives in the brothel.

### 3. *Born Into Brothels* Success?

To talk about the success of a text, fictional or non-fictional, is always a problematic task because it demands the setting of a standard. Moreover, discussing the success of a documentary film requires more attention to the subject, representation of reality, the auteurs' message and the impact it has on the audience. To evaluate the achievements of a documentary, the first thing that strikes our mind is how far the film achieves the sense of 'reality' in it. I have mentioned earlier that documentary is the representation of reality, real people and real events; now, it is essential to point out some of the techniques used by documentary filmmakers to uphold the realistic nature of the film.

#### 3.1. "Reality" in documentary films

To analyze the realistic aspect, or rather the intended construction of 'reality', in conventional documentaries, it is essential to define the term 'realism' first. This expression stems from the mimetic notion that music, films, paintings and other kinds of art appear to be a mere imitation of reality. In Linda Nochlin's words, realism is "*to give a truthful, objective, and impartial representation of the real world, based on meticulous observation of contemporary life*" (cited in Stam 184). From Linda Nochlin's words, we can say that 'realism' is the truthful presentation of the real world, avoiding any form of subjectivity.

As for the term 'cinematic realism', one can find a variety of definitions which, for example, deal with the question of verisimilitude, but also with the description of 'believable stories' and 'coherent characterization'. According to Formalists, 'realism' can be achieved through stylistic techniques and through a set of conventions that produce a sensation of truthfulness. To illustrate what has just been mentioned, Kracauer and Bazin give the example that a photographer and a filmmaker cannot work without a model, unlike a painter or writer. The use of a model creates a bond between the photographic camera and what it represents. So, according to this view, photographers and filmmakers can present things exactly how they are unlike other forms of arts. (cf. Stam 186)

As I have mentioned before, documentaries are assumed to be real and present truth, but the filmmaker always somehow control the content of a documentary film. No matter if the documentary is based on real footage of real people being interviewed, the filmmaker chooses what footage to show and how to present the interviewees. This proves that documentaries are never entirely realistic and truthful. Documentaries are manipulated at some degree by producers, filmmakers, and cinematographers. The crew members of a documentary film must have self-control placing themselves in the exact position to film the precise shot they want; to make people answer what they want to hear or to capture the feeling they want to convey to the audience. (cf. Nichols 1991:14)

An example that demonstrates that documentaries are not always entirely based on the truth can be found in Robert Flaherty's films. The filmmaker, who made *Nanook of*

*the North* (1922), a study of Eskimos of northern Canada, is known for manipulating his material in such a way that it changes the outcome. However, he was not satisfied with just recording events, and sought to dramatize the Eskimo culture for the sake of attention. For example, he objected to filming the Eskimos using their guns, which is their actual habit, since he felt that the traditional way of hunting and harpooning seals would be more appealing. Thus, he filmed them in his preferred way and manipulated the scene. He even said: “*Sometimes you have to lie. One has to distort a thing to catch its true spirit*” (cited in Wells 2003:192-194).

Now being aware of the fact that filmmakers often employ a variety of particular film techniques to ensure its ‘reality’, it is vital to know the standard methods and techniques used by documentary filmmakers to achieve ‘reality’. One of the most agreed characteristics is that of documentary-like shooting style, which would be a handheld camera often simulating shakiness and gives us a feeling of spontaneity and authenticity. Nevertheless, probably the most common verbal approach used in documentaries to convince us of its truth claim occurs in the form of interviews. Interviews belong to the ‘interactive documentary’, one of the modes of representation arose from the desire to make documentary films seem more realistic and evident. This form of communication often testifies to the power relation between the interviewer and the witness, although the interviewer may often be neither seen nor heard. Sometimes we only overhear the filmmaker’s voice in the film but do not see him in front of the camera. If the mother tongue of the interviewee is distinct or unknown, it is common to place subtitles. What is more, the relationship of the written words and the person speaking contributes to our awareness of the authority of the filmmaker and side by side the authenticity of the events or subjects. (cf. Nichols 1991: 32-55)

Nonetheless, it is hard to find any documentary that lacks this form of verbal communication since the testimonies always inform us about something that they have experienced. If it is just the voice-over narrating facts and past events, we would not have clear evidence at our disposal and thus doubt its credibility. However, the interviewees who are ordinary, non-actors play a highly significant role, for they are used to convince the audience. An overheard exchange between films participants could be another mode of verbal communication, which in turns supports the notion of ‘reality’. (cf. Wells 2003:190)

Another way to illustrate the realistic aspect of a film is the ‘rough’ shooting style. The most essential characteristics of this shooting style are: first, the setting of the film must be authentic; in fact, documentary filmmakers opt for going to real place rather than standard film sets. Second, the linguistic articulation, such as regional dialects and variants, contribute enormously to its realistic character since the everyday language can be regarded as artificial, only used by actors. Third, non-professional actors or the real-life actors, these actors or people have a natural acting style and plays ordinary, sometimes totally nonsense. Finally, stories that are based on social drawbacks also contribute to a more realistic presentation.

Filmmaker’s rhetoric is another means that is worth mentioning, whose purpose is simply to persuade the audience of an argument without even describing or assessing

the facts. According to Nichols, two different ways help to support its persuasiveness: one option is evidence (witnesses, documents), and the other one is 'artistic proof', which includes the strategies and methods employed by the speaker him/herself, the quality of the text as well as its representation of truth. One subcategory of this 'artistic proof' is the emotional appeal to the viewers. Indeed, this type, which is supposed to trigger the viewers' emotions, can either take the form of music and moving images or be made by the commentator themselves. In the case of the commentator, the emotional response must come from 'everyday-life-people', in other words, from the intended audience. In short, to be persuasive, many filmmakers use dramatic elements, spectacular images, and music to achieve an extraordinary effect. (cf. Nichols 1991: 134-135)

At the same time, to support its truth claim, documentary filmmakers must not forget the importance of objectivity. Nichols argued that it is imperative not to hide the fact that documentary represent a selective, altered and idealized version of reality from a specific point of view. Therefore, one should attempt to be as neutral as possible. Nevertheless, according to Bill Nichols, "*objectivity is itself a perspective*" (1991:127). He asserts that even if one remains non-judging, neutral and correct, this behavior also states the world. To make it clear, it is impossible to be entirely objective in documentaries since it is always shown from a specific perspective. Ultimately, it is still the filmmaker's decision what to shoot and how to present it to the audience; hence, there is always a sense of subjectivity.

Since we have already pointed out some of the strategies and methods that are common nowadays, it is also of high importance to have a look at the techniques that are not utilized on purpose. Nichols argued that most documentary filmmakers object to the traditional film methods such as "*...flashbacks, slow motion, visualized memories, anticipations, fantasy, visual representations of altered states of mind such as drunkenness or reverie, dreams*" (1991: 120). Initially, these techniques tend to be used in fiction films, and they are clear signs of subjectivity, which, we might not find in abundance in contemporary films.

Another aspect to keep in mind when studying the construction of 'reality' is the lighting, one of the three components of 'mise-en-scene'. The light in cinema can be used in a range of different ways, such as with the use of filters to alter daylight to moonlight, for example. In documentaries, however, the colors seem to be naturalistic, that means not controlled in any way, which ensures authenticity. To conclude, the natural use of light and colors also contributes to the film's realistic value and is used intentionally by the filmmaker.

Last but not the least, filmmakers often convey us a sense of authenticity and truth simply with their physical presence on-site. To put it in Nichols words, "*Documentary realism [...] testifies to presence*" (1991:184). In television news, reporters often stand in the midst of demonstrations or in the site of an event informing the audience of the current situation, which is precisely what documentary filmmakers do as well. News reporters, similarly, to filmmakers, serve as 'agents of presence' because they prove the facts by showing us that they were really there. Thus, we can argue that documentary moves us into the historical as well as to the present world in which the filmmaker is recording on-

site, which underpins objectivity. Moreover, Nichols considers this so-called 'realist style' as proof of actual presence in the world, the authenticity of records and, ultimately, the limited power of the filmmaker over the occurrences.

To put all into order, so far, we have discussed broadly seven different techniques that can assure the audience that a documentary film is projecting a realistic theme, event, or social drawback. In short, these techniques which uphold documentary as realistic are 'documentary-like shooting style', interview, rough shooting (authentic setting, real-life actors, the story of social drawbacks etc.), the voice-over of the filmmaker, natural lighting, music and images, and physical presence of the filmmaker in the scenes.

### **3.1.2. "Reality" in *Born Into Brothels***

The exact definition of 'voice' in the documentary is how an argument is presented, which can be either implicit or explicit. Hence, the fact that the documentary lacks a voice-over narrator does not mean that there is no voice in the film. In the case of *Born Into Brothels*, the voice is explicit as the filmmaker Zana Briski herself is presented before the camera. Many would argue that the filmmaker's active participation in front of the camera makes the film more subjective and put our attention to her rather than to the subject. However, I will argue in favor of Zana Briski's presence before and behind the camera and using her voice for the voice-over in the film. Her active interactions with the children in front of the camera in the scenes and time to time narration illustrate the main context of the whole documentary film. Briski uses a variety of different methods and techniques that construct a reality-like feeling that will be the focus of the next paragraphs.

To begin with, Briski uses one of the classical methods, handheld camera, in capturing reality and convincing the viewers of its truthfulness. Moreover, there are hardly any explicit editorial techniques being used in the making of *Born Into Brothels*. No additional camera or sound equipment is used in filming; instead, the entire film is shot by a single camera. Besides, almost all of the footages of the early part of the film acts as a side note of Zana Briski's original intent of filming her experience in the red-light district of India. As time passes, she starts to get along with the children; as a result, the focus of the film changes from her experience in the red-light district to children of the red-light districts and about their situation. This change of focus leads to Briski holding the camera while trying to interact with the children, which is the reason behind the rough and shaky footages in the early part of the film. In many instances, the camera stays in a stationary position filming only Briski as she talks with the children; therefore, camera position fails to capture the children's movement of the scene quickly and leave the viewers only with their voice. This incidence of failing to capture the children's movement becomes the strength of the film, as it arises a first-person like feeling to the storytelling, placing the viewer with the children and in the city just as Zana Briski experienced it rather than just a feeling of observing it in a travelogue fashion.

Second, concerning the physical presence on-site from part of the filmmaker- which is supposed to help convey a sense of truthfulness- is prominent in *Born Into Brothels*. We have found the filmmaker always in the film. Her presence in the brothel to



live with them and photography classes with the kids of the prostitutes put her into the centre of the whole film. Zana Briski, the filmmaker, appears to be one of the vital protagonists of the entire story in the film. However, the main camera focus remains to the children and their life-changing experiences through photography. This physical presence of Zana Briski before the camera echoes with Nichols' consideration of 'realist style', which proves the authenticity of recording 'reality'. Furthermore, Zana Briski's presence in the scene assures the originality of the fact.

Third, as far as the 'rough' shooting style is concerned, we should analyze the setting and the characters to come to a conclusion. In fact, the sets are mostly inside the brothel area and at the photography classroom, but also scenes outside of the brothel. Besides, there are various shots of the quarrels between prostitutes, calling names, and scenes of the dark alleys and staircase. However, the filmmaker also shot some scenes outside in the zoo, on a sea beach, and into the offices of different boarding schools. The settings within the brothel area and outside the brothel area invoke a sense of binarism and authenticity to the audience. Furthermore, the protagonists, the kids, frequently speak in a colloquial Bengali language, which makes it confusing sometimes. However, the fact that they speak in their mother tongue also indicates authenticity. Remarkably, the story in *Born Into Brothels* is based on a social drawback. It shows the ignorance of our society to address the fact that children of prostitutes are not born prostitute.

Fourth, as none of the children speaks English, the frequent appearance of subtitles acts as a bridge to enable comprehension. Almost all the film was subtitled except the instances where Zana Briski speaks or provides information and facts about her efforts to admit these children into a boarding school. Besides, the subtitle gives an authentic and real effect in *Born Into Brothels*.

Fifth, concerning the film's rhetoric, it is essential to have a look at the emotional proof or the attachment of the film. The soundtracks are very Indian, and they fit perfectly in the film. *Born Into Brothels* is full of music from classical Indian music to the songs from different well-known Bollywood movies, which triggers feelings. At the very beginning of the film, somber music is being played as Briski shot the dark alleys at night and as she spanned down 'the line,' which evokes sadness in the viewers' mind. But later when the children are on the bus ride to and back from the beach, there is very fast-paced music and songs playing while the children are dancing. This shows the viewer that the lives of these children are not full of sorrow; there is some excitement in the lives of these children too. For the majority of the film, we only hear the sounds of people talking and the noises of the city. This provides an extra sense of the natural setting of brothel life.

Sixth, Zana Briski shoots the whole film without using external lighting. When analyzing scenes within the brothel in the documentary, the noteworthy fact is that they are generally entirely darkened. In other words, viewers' encounter natural lighting, which conveys the impression that it was filmed as it actually took place and not the kind of lighting usually in fiction films such as high-key lighting. On the other hand, as the lighting remains natural, so does the color. We have scenes from inside of the brothel with darkness and grey colors, while scenes from the sea beach or the zoo are much brighter and colorful. The use of bright colors and vibrant images outside the brothel

implicates that there is hope for these children somewhere outside the world, but not into the world they reside in the brothel.

Finally, the way the film ends is worth mentioning. It ends up with detailing the current situation and updates about the children from the photography class. Some of the stories are sad; Manik, Puja and Suchitra are either withdrawn from school or refused to let them go in the school by family members, and Shanti ended up leaving school on her own accord. However, other stories are happy. We have seen that Kochi stays in school, Tapasi run away to go to school, Gour is hoping to attend the university and that Avijit also ends up at school after all of his trials and tribulations.

### **3.1.3. Director's Purpose and Message in *Born Into Brothels***

The director of the film, Zana Briski, makes it clear at the beginning of the film of the reasons behind producing this documentary. She mentions that she wants to allow the viewers to see the red-light district of Calcutta, as is. As a photographer visiting India, she caught up with the lives of sex-workers and wanted to know how it is in reality. So, returned to Calcutta with the new zeal of filming them by residing in the brothel. She used cinematography artistically to show the truth about the people and life in red-light districts.

Another purpose that is prevalent in the documentary is Briski's focus on representing ethnography, a systematic recording of human cultures. In *Born Into Brothels*, Briski primarily focuses on people. We have seen fights, chaotic streets, people taking drugs, alcohol abuse, starvation, children doing some odd jobs, and girls or women are lined up for somebody to come and pick them up for lusty pleasure. The film has also exposed derogatory and demeaning arguments between prostitutes, and the use of the abrasive language of the brothel dwellers; however, it also presents the endless commotion of city streets. Briski has captured the life as it is in this district, and through her narration, we, the viewer, are given the insight of her view on life in a brothel. In the documentary, Zana Briski's direct involvement forces the audience to take account of the fact that these children are in dire need of humanitarian help. So, *Born Into Brothels* underlying theme is invoking humanitarian awareness among the audience and in a broader sense into society. This inherent theme is duly achieved by continually focusing on children and their miserable life in the brothel.

Furthermore, in *Born Into Brothels*, Zana Briski celebrated the art's triumph of expressing social anomalies and differences. She goes to the red-light district in Calcutta and teaches children the art of photography. She gives them cameras and allows them to show their true personal feeling of living in a brothel via photography. The kids take the opportunity and transform the art of photography into a form of expressing their feelings and personalities. As one of the kids in the documentary, Avijit, said about his passion for paintings, "I like to draw pictures because I want to express what's on my mind... I want to put my thought into the colours" (*Born Into Brothels*). He has a natural talent in drawing and coloring and won many medals in drawing. It appears in Briski's eye that he is good at photography as well. He knows how to bleaker a photo with a piece of cloth without being taught. Avijit's talent in photography attracted Briski, and he goes on a trip to

Amsterdam. Not only Avijit, but all the other children in this film are also affected by photography. Gour tells us why he likes photographing: *"I take pictures to show how people in this city live... I want to put across the behaviour of man"* (*Born Into Brothels*). Shanti speaks out the voice of a child's heart: *"we like doing photography so much that we forget to do our work"* (*Born Into Brothels*). This talent of photography has become a way of leaving the gloomy and uncertain life in brothels towards a more enlighten and bright life. It becomes prominent by the time film progresses that camera is a wing of hope for these children.

Another mostly entertained message that Zana Briski wanted to show in the film is the need of education for these children of prostitutes. For instance, Kochi says, *"I keep thinking if I could go someplace else and get an education, I wonder what I could become"* (*Born Into Brothels*). It is clear from the words of Kochi that she is longing for a better life and knows the power of education; unfortunately, she does not have the opportunity. Furthermore, it is a matter of sorrow that not only Kochi but also many children in the red-light districts all around the world have to face such a harsh reality. In a scene in the zoo, we see the children taking photographs of dying animals. In some degree, those dying animals are the representation of the kids themselves who are struggling to live and survive in this harsh reality of life. Alternatively, in another scene, we have watched a bird in a cage. The kids of the prostitutes are also trapped in a cage, a cage of distorted fate like the bird. Like the bird in the cage, children are incarcerated without allowing having a free life though the potential is there. So, on a collective level, this film conveys a message to the people to act positively towards all the marginalized communities that reside within our society.

#### **4. Conclusion: "Nobody lives as filthily as we do in our city."**

Zana Briski has done a fantastic job of capturing and portraying the life of children in the red-light district of Calcutta. Additionally, she has shown us how a single initiative can change the lives of these children. She is successful in presenting the real-life inside a brothel through the documentary techniques that she has implemented; and she allows the viewers to find the differences between living in a brothel and living somewhere else. Consequently, this film invokes a sharp humanitarian awareness among the audience and direct the attention towards the lives of the children of prostitutes. Gour has precisely described the living conditions of the children of prostitutes by saying that *"Nobody lives as filthily as we do in our city"* (*Born Into Brothels*).

Many critics might argue that the film leaves us with a decisive view on the cruelty of social conditions that trap women and children and how hard it is for them to change their reality. However, I would say, it leaves us with a positive impression that there is always some ray of hope remaining somewhere amid all sadness and depression. The notion of hope is perfectly summed up at the end of the film by Avijit's comment, *"though there is sadness in it, and though it is hard to face, we must look at it because... It is truth"* (*Born Into Brothels*).

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