

Reflections of Infertility and Surrogacy in Contemporary Cinema -A Study of Select Indian Films

Prof.Y.S.Sharada

Department of English Language & Literature, Sri Padmavati Mahila Visvavidyalayam, Tirupati-515 502, Andhra Pradesh

Abstract- In the contemporary world Infertility and Surrogacy have often been subjects of debate and discourse. The reproductive issues concerning women's health have become a cause of concern in the fast-changing world. Couples have been struggling hard to attain parenthood but they have been denied of it due to several complications associated with women's reproductive system. Just in time IVF, Surrogacy and other ways of getting a child has come as a boon for several couples. While the idea of surrogacy is an option for several such couples, it is not without its shortcomings.

Cinemas have always attracted the attention of majority audience more especially after the onset of the Corona Virus which confined people to their homes leaving them with no other entertainment but the television news and the movies and series on OTT platform. While most movies are meant for entertainment, there are a different set of movies which throw light on the contemporary burning issues and social evils too which are a cause of concern. In this direction, cinemas have also shed light on the issues of Infertility and surrogacy. Such movies not only create an awareness among the ignorant lot but reflect on the diverse realities of those struggling with infertility. By watching such movies one can foster empathy, understanding and support and dismiss the myths and wrong notions associated with it. At the same time such movies also highlight the emotional, moral, ethical and legal issues concerning surrogacy. Four movies belonging to four different languages have been chosen for this paper wherein some of these movies are based on true events. The movies chosen for study are Welcome Obama (Telugu), Mimi (Hindi) Are you Ok, Baby (Malayalam) and A Child Too Many (English Film).

Key Words: Infertility, Surrogacy, Cinema, OTT platforms

In the contemporary world Infertility and Surrogacy have often been subjects of debate and discourse. The reproductive issues concerning women's health have

become a cause of concern in the fast-changing world. Couples have been struggling hard to attain parenthood but they have been denied of it due to several complications associated with women's reproductive system. Just in time IVF, Surrogacy and other ways of getting a child has come as a boon for several couples. While the idea of surrogacy is an option for several such couples, it is not without its shortcomings.

Cinemas have always attracted the attention of majority audience more especially after the onset of the Corona Virus which confined people to their homes leaving them with no other entertainment but the television news and the movies and series on OTT platform. While most movies are meant for entertainment, there are a different set of movies which throw light on the contemporary burning issues and social evils too which are a cause of concern. In this direction, cinemas have also shed light on the issues of Infertility and surrogacy. Such movies not only create an awareness among the ignorant lot but reflect on the diverse realities of those struggling with infertility. By watching such movies one can foster empathy, understanding and support and dismiss the myths and wrong notions associated with it. At the same time such movies also highlight the emotional, moral, ethical and legal issues concerning surrogacy. Four movies belonging to four different languages have been chosen for this paper wherein some of these movies are based on true events. The movies chosen for study are Mimi (Hindi) Are you Ok, Baby (Malayalam) and Welcome Obama (Telugu).

The first movie is taken for the current paper is the Hindi movie Mimi wherein Kriti Sanon plays the role of the titled character Mimi. Mimi (Kriti Sanon) is a small-town girl from Rajasthan who gets offered Rs 20 lakh to act as a surrogate for an American couple. The middleman is Bhanu (Pankaj Tripathi) who, in his

perfect style, manages to convince both parties. The only hindrance being: how Mimi will hide her pregnancy from her parents and society at large. The film touches upon the challenges of surrogacy and how society looks at it.

John and Summer, an American couple are looking for a surrogate mother wherein their tour driver Bhanu finds about it and decides to help them. When they accidentally come across a local dancer Mimi they feel that is the end for their search. John and Summer ask Bhanu to convince her to be a surrogate mother for them but Mimi who wants to be an actress has no idea about surrogacy. Bhanu explains her and makes her meet the couple who offer her 20 Lakhs where Mimi feels this could help her fulfill her dream of being an actress. John and Summer introduce Mimi to their doctor and start the treatment but Mimi has to hide her pregnancy from everyone and takes shelter in the house of her friend Shama for nine months by assuring her parents that she will be away for sometime as she is going out for a film shoot. In the course of time when John and Summer find from the doctor that the baby has complications they decide to abandon the surrogacy and return back to America leaving Mimi in loop. Mimi's pregnancy is found by her family and in order to escape she claims Bhanu to be the father of the baby. Bhanu's wife and mother find about the same and come to scold him but things get sorted out. Four years later when the baby now called Raj is doted by everyone in the family as well as friends John and Summer arrive to take him back threading legal action. Years later, after the baby has been loved and kept safe by this large unusual extended family his whole life, John and Summer show up again. John says that Summer never recovered from walking away from the baby, she even attempted suicide, and then they saw a video of Kriti and her white son dancing together and knew their child was healthy and alive. They threaten lawsuits and Kriti agonizes, but then decides to give her son up to save him from a long legal battle they can't win. At the last minute, they go to meet John and Summer and hand off the baby, and John tells them they don't have to. Instead, he and Summer met and fell in love with a little girl at an Indian orphanage. They are taking their daughter home, and leaving Kriti with her son.

Though the movie ends on a happy note after several ups and downs Mimi faces to retain the child for herself, the movie clearly reflects the current scenario.

Several cases have surfaced wherein the surrogate mothers who generally accept the deal in exchange for due to their poverty and finally are cheated by the middlemen or disowned by the parents. This causes lot of trauma not only to the surrogate mother but she has to battle between her moral sense and poverty stricken state.

The next film taken for study is **Are you ok, Baby?** a Tamil film. Vidhya (Abhirami) and Balan (Samuthirakani), a couple from Kerala, adopt a baby girl whom they lovingly named Anya. They start bringing up the child with a lot of love and care. The child, in turn, brings joy and contentment to the couple who have been desperately waiting to turn parents for years together. 'Everything is fine for a year. Then, a storm starts to brew in their lives.

One fine day, they get a call from a reality show host (Lakshmy Ramakrishnan) who says that the child's biological mother, Shoba (Mullai Arasi), has approached them seeking help in reclaiming her child. Further, Vidhya and Balan point out that they were the ones who bore the hospital costs of the mother when she was pregnant and the treatment costs of the child when it required medical attention. They also claim to have paid the father a huge amount for the sake of the child. However, the fact that they paid money soon turns the case against them, and they are charged with child trafficking. What happens next is what the film is all about.

More importantly, it highlights how complex the adoption process in India is and how insensitive child adoption laws are and that they are not in touch with ground realities. Further, it portrays how many people, who think they have properly adopted a child because they have the permission of the biological mother, find themselves in major problems at a later stage because of not getting the adoption deed ratified in a court of law.

Cinema is a reflection of life. Whatever problems exist in the society are reflected in the movie. Very few directors attempt to focus on the moral concerns of the society. Are you ok, Baby is one such movie which provokes the audience to give a thought to the issues concerning surrogacy.

The third movie is basically a remake of the Marathi film 'Mala Aai Vhahyehy!', but the makers have not highlighted that before. The director of the Marathi film, Samruddhi Porey, is given a credit in the film

along with Mr. Singeetham Srinivasa Rao for Screenplay.

The story deals with the emotional issues surrounding the practice of surrogacy. Lucy (Rachel) is an American in search of a surrogate mother. An agent brings her to Yashodha (Urmila Kanitkar) and a deal is brokered. Yashoda needs money for the medical care of her daughter and that is why she agrees.

After Yashoda is clinically impregnated, Lucy stays with her to take care. But as fate would have it, Yashoda suffers a fall and Lucy suspects that the baby is going to have abnormalities. She disowns the kid and asks Yashoda to get aborted. An emotionally attached Yashoda disagrees.

After a while, a healthy baby boy is born and Yashoda brings him up with a lot of love. However, mother and son are in for a rude shock when Rachel returns, to claim her son. What follows is an emotional struggle that highlights the conflicts between biological parents and surrogate mothers.

When a woman gives birth to a child, it generally creates a bonding between the two. This fact cannot be denied. While surrogacy comes as a boon to infertile mothers, it at times causes severe trauma to the surrogate mother when she is left in a lurch on account of the pre-natal health of the child. Several such cases have proved the need to frame laws for surrogacy but they do not seem to serve the purpose completely especially when the surrogate mother gives birth to twins. The parents are not willing to adopt both. Hence, there is a need to come up with laws which are more intact and would suit all kinds of cases.

REFERENCE

- [1] Mimi, , Bollywood comedy drama film released in 2021 directed by Laxman Uteka
- [2] Are You Ok, Baby? Indian Tamil-language film released in 2023 and directed by Lakshmy Ramakrishnan
- [3] Welcome Obama Indian Telugu-language film, released in 2013 and directed by Singeetam Srinivasa Rao.