



Understanding the Social Landscape of Surrogacy in India through Select Hindi Films

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ABSTRACT

Films are a powerful vehicle for culture, education, and representation. But there are times when Bollywood films have been problematic (Naidu, 2017). Especially, when it comes to female characters as they hardly miss a chance to paint women as illogical, emotional, and jealous beings (Bagchi, 1996). This article investigates Indian encounters through films about 'surrogacy' as a process. Surrogacy is where a woman carries a baby for a couple or a person who is, otherwise, unable to do so. Surrogacy has become an extremely questionable subject since the new Indian Surrogacy Bill in 2016, and some celebrity profiles are currently opting for it. The Surrogacy Bill makes it accessible only to heterosexual married couples and bans commercial surrogacy. This article tracks films from *Doosri Dulhan* (1983) provoking an unnecessary element of competitiveness and seeding insecurities in a wife from the surrogate mother to tinting moral judgments in *Chori Chori Chupke Chupke* (2001) and from misrepresentative *Filhaal* (2002) to the problematic *Mimi* (2021). Through critical discourse analysis, this study analyzes the surrogacy arrangements in Indian films and their impact on society. Finally, it delves into the intricacies of many such films that lead to portray surrogacy as exploitative, immoral, and narcissistic. The study insists on the surrogate mother's rights over their body and choice that should be recognized and regarded, which is being tarnished through such films. Showing surrogacy as exploitative and immoral eliminates the



matter of choice. The article ends on a note that steps must be taken to change the way that surrogacy is viewed as a healthy and mutually beneficial relationship.

1. Introduction

Films are a powerful vehicle for culture, education, and representation. The world of films is ostensibly one of the most influential areas in society. We are all familiar with terms like cinema, films, actors, theaters, etc. Today, these terms are so ingrained in our culture that even a child of five could understand them and explain what they mean. By far, films have become one of the most widely used mainstream media. Also, one of the main sources of revenue for the country. It is a universal reality that film is a potent social mirror (Yadav, 2013). It interestingly reflects the changes, rifts between cultures, and emerging trends in society. In other words, the film conveys the essence of life. The perspective of cinema is evolving as it moves ahead. Looking at the country's history will show that not everyone in the country was delighted with the art form when the movies first came out; many saw it as a societal evil capable of damaging and influencing young minds.

We have known since the beginning that Hindi films have the potential to influence society to an extent, but various people have different ideas on how to apply this knowledge. *Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru*, India's first prime minister believed that movies can be utilized for further education. Films have become cult objects in the modern world; they permeate every aspect of our existence and even control our imagination. The current approach examines how Hindi films have impacted various facets of social issues. In every era with a different composition and style, Hindi cinema presents a wide range of socialist themes with a powerful message to society. Numerous social problems have existed for a long time, including casteism, religious discrimination, dowries, and the disparity between the rich and the poor. One of these social issues is stereotypes built around the concept of surrogacy. Though Hindi films have had their take on addressing the issue, the treatment turned out to be more problematic. We have a few films that talk about the concept and process of surrogacy which we are going to analyze for this paper; *Chori Chori Chupke Chupke*, *Doosri Dulhan*, *Filhal*, and *Mimi*. Further in this study, we will discuss the treatment, representation, and style of the above films.

2. Literature review

Films are a powerful vehicle with the potential to carry narratives and address issues among a huge number of people. Hindi films leave a different mark on audiences and undoubtedly have a huge fanbase.



Factors combined make it a medium that reaches the masses and hence, it becomes important to make sense of what is fed to such a large audience. Addressing social issues, shattering stereotypes, and directing toward a better society should be at the cutting edge after entertainment. The Indian government's approach to the film industry was likewise mixed. In the immediate aftermath of Independence, there had been some anticipation in the film industry that the Nehru (First Indian Prime minister) government had acknowledged the film as a national art form and actively supported it as a means of cultural representation.

A strong audiovisual entertainment and informational medium are films. The matrices that shape identity, a sense of self, gender, class, and even nationality are films, television, radio, print, and cinema. Not least, cinematic trends demonstrate how to dress, look, consume, and react to members of various social groups as well as how to conform to the dominant culture, be successful, and avoid failure. Cinematic images help shape the worldview, values, and morality and contribute to educating people about what to think, how to behave, feel, fear, and desire (*Kellner, 1995*). Even though Hindi is a northern regional language, its format draws the attention of non-western viewers from Africa, Eastern Europe, Russia, and the Middle East, in addition to the NRI population worldwide. Hindi cinema is unusual in that it unites the nation and creates a nationalistic picture (*Virdi, 2003*). With its wide range of themes, Hindi cinema explores a variety of subjects, including societal issues like caste discrimination, poverty, trafficking, violence against women, and the unemployed which are presented in various compositions and styles. These socioeconomic themes are addressed in Hindi and other regional movies. (**Ram Awtar Yadav**) state in their conclusion that "Indian film has been primarily emphasizing the social and political themes as a backdrop for its storylines since its very beginning."

3. Research Objectives

- to find out the various representations of surrogacy in Hindi Films.
- to discover why the treatment of films made around surrogacy is ambiguous.
- to know the requirements of portraying surrogacy as a healthy and mutually beneficial relationship.
- to address the issue of misrepresentation of surrogate mothers and elements like competitiveness, jealousy, and insecurities involved against them.

3.1 Keeping the research objectives in mind, the following **research questions** are set to conduct the study:

1. Why is surrogacy ill-treated on-screen often?



2. Why is surrogacy looked upon as exploitative and altruistic?
3. Why are elements like competitiveness, jealousy, and insecurities involved against the surrogate mother on-screen?
4. How to motivate filmmakers to address sensitive/delicate issues (such as surrogacy) without compromising on the facts?

4. Methodology

Critical Discourse Analysis is a unique method for examining the underlying aspects of social conduct in visual images and for exposing the ideology and gender imbalance that the narrative implicitly advocates (Mulvey, 1988). A more specialized form of qualitative textual analysis is called critical discourse analysis (CDA). It aids in our investigation of the covert aspects of ideology and social practices pertaining to surrogacy.

Through critical discourse analysis, this study analyzes the surrogacy arrangements in Indian films and their representation in different settings. Finally, it would delve into the intricacies of many such films that lead to portray surrogacy. The films were selected for their temporal diversity, cultural impact, and thematic focus on surrogacy. Each film is analyzed with attention to key elements including plot development, character arcs, visual composition, and the socio-political context in which the narrative unfolds. Special emphasis is placed on how surrogate mothers are framed—whether as protagonists, antagonists, or secondary characters—and what values are inscribed in their depiction.

4.1 Discussion & Analysis

I. *Doosri Dulhan* (1983)

This 1983 film revolves around a childless couple who hires a sex worker to carry their child. The movie had actors *Shabana Azmi, Sharmila Tagore, and Victor Banerjee* in lead roles. '*Doosri Dulhan*' (1983): An underestimated director Lekh Tandon who made gigantic business with '*Professor*' movie during the 1960s and '*Dulhan Wohi Jo Piya Man Bhaye*' during the 70s, made *Doosri Dulhan*, a film about a childless couple who bring back a prostitute played with snowstorm like fortitude by Shabana Azmi, to bear them a kid. Before we get into the film text, the title of the film is itself a disorientation meaning 'second bride', this misleads the concept as well as the audience. Just like

The film guaranteed its starting points in a play by Anil Barve. Yet, assuming we dig further, the possibility of a couple 'employing' a belly returns to an extremely old American film *The Baby Maker*.



Delivered in 1970, the film recounted the account of a nonconformist young lady (Barbara Hershey) who consented to have a child for a childless couple. Says Shabana Azmi regarding *Doosri Dulhan*, "I have obscure memories of this film. Yet, I realize it was far somewhat revolutionary. I did a great deal of examination on the personality of the prostitute who was from Kamathipura, however, I didn't explore surrogacy. It wasn't normal back then. Surrogacy is a tough decision to make for every one of the three individuals included. The requests can be sincerely depleted. Anyway, on the off chance that it gives comfort to the elaborate gatherings, so be it. *Doosri Dulhan* was a business disappointment.

II. *Chori Chori Chupke Chupke (2001)*

One of the most successful commercial films to address surrogacy had Salman Khan, Rani Mukerji, and Preity Zinta in the lead roles, showing how a married couple hires a sex worker to be their child's surrogate mother. The prostitute-turned-surrogate mother's affection for the husband begins to grow, and she shows a desire to keep the child, which causes issues in the end. Salman Khan and Rani Mukherjee's characters Raj and Priya are described briefly at the beginning of the film. The two are cheerfully married and living in a joint family, one of which has a grandson-obsessed grandfather who just cannot stop bugging Priya for a child. Being the ideal daughter-in-law that she is, she consents and gets pregnant, just to have a miscarriage and find out she cannot conceive again in her life ahead because of the accident she met. The family doctor encourages the couple to settle on surrogacy and not inform the family about Priya not being able to conceive. According to the representation in this very film, a barren lady is equivalent to a terrible spouse, an awful daughter-in-law, and a disgrace to the family. Now at this point of the film, we assumed that the couple would go through a procedure of ways to opt for a surrogate child. However, no, not in any event, minding to get their facts checked about what it really implies - an assisted or surrogate birth where the expected parents work with another woman who consents to nurture their child in her womb through a method for artificial insemination. However, no, not in any event, minding to get their facts checked about what it really implies - an assisted or surrogate birth where the expected parents work with another woman who consents to nurture their child in her womb through the method of artificial insemination, Raj and Priya assume it requires having a sexual relation instead. The film reaches the confrontation of the conflict where the lead woman (Priya) is ready to share her partner with another woman in order to bring a child into their lives. The film also hinted at discouraging adoption as an alternative. After Raj, the male lead inappropriately asks each and every other lady he meets to turn into a surrogate for them, the desperate couple chooses a sex worker to turn into their surrogate since this film is tied in with taking care of existing stereotypes, in any case. Madhu (Priety Zinta), the sex worker, consents to do it in return for money and is taken to Switzerland with the



couple to be "prepped" which is code for being impregnated by Raj. After a few unsuccessful attempts, Priya at last figures out how to isolate both Madhu and Raj in a room, drugs her own better half and leads him to engage in sexual relations with Madhu to get her pregnant. Now, while the movie calls this surrogacy, it brings in so much disorientation to the viewers pertaining to the very concept. However, when the prostitute finds love with the husband and insists on keeping the child, things become challenging for the couple.

III. *Filhaal* (2002)

Filhaal was Meghna Gulzar's directorial debut in 2002. It starred Tabu and Sushmita Sen in powerful roles and gave a nuanced portrayal of the surrogacy process. It also showed how surrogacy complicates interpersonal relationships and how motherhood affects women. The story of two friends Rewa (Tabu) and Siya (Sushmita), *Filhaal* was a film that strongly addresses the topic of surrogacy. Whenever Tabu's hitched character couldn't have a child her closest companion Sushmita ventured into loaning her belly. Difficulties in their sexual coexistence followed. The reasonableness, disposition, discoursed, and, surprisingly, the subject mirrored a youthful tasteful sense. As a movie producer would have been exceptionally modest in discussing substitute parenthood. Yet, this film defined a fine boundary between the delicate topic and a durable narration. The connections were taken care of in the story. One has been so short of discussing such countless things that Meghna (director) talks about in the film. Basically men in our general public battle short of examining such issues. Indeed, even women are restrained about such matters. The director managed the touchy issue with such delicate trustworthiness. The film conveyed itself to more youthful watchers. However, it addressed delicate issues but the treatment did not permit any ponderousness to crawl into the account.

IV. *Mimi* (2021)

Mimi, the surrogacy comedy-drama centers on the naive Mimi (Kriti Sanon), a Bollywood hopeful and Ranveer Singh fan from Rajasthan, who signs up to be a surrogate for an American couple without considering the social, emotional, or ethical ramifications of her choice. After seeing Mimi in a programme where she is performing/dancing, the American couple decides she would make a good surrogate mother candidate, and they ask Bhanu (tourist driver) to find someone equally qualified as Mimi. Contrarily, Bhanu offers to get Mimi to act as the surrogate mother. The role of the dancer who offers to be a surrogate mother for an American couple in exchange for Rs 20 lakh is played by Bollywood actor Kriti Sanon. She initially scoffs but then accepts. The American couple asks Bhanu to watch over Mimi while they are away in America while she moves in with her friend Shama. Mimi starts



getting up early for her morning stroll, eats a lot, and takes care of the child in any way she can. In one of her routine checkup sessions, she is told that the baby in her womb has Down syndrome. When Mimi gets to know this, she is horrified, but she decides against considering an abortion and decides to carry the child. She then makes the decision to go back home, but when her parents find out she is pregnant, they are shocked. Mimi reveals that Bhanu is the father of the child when her parents inquire about the child's paternity. Then Mimi and her child are accepted by the parents. Raj is the name Mimi gives to her son who is born healthy and proves that the earlier examination was inaccurate. However, additional problems arise when Bhanu's wife, who resides in Delhi, asks about his whereabouts recently. Mimi, on the other hand, makes everything clear by outlining the surrogacy to everyone, and to Mimi's surprise, her parents back her (Ghosh, 202).

Mimi grows very attached to Raj and chooses to put her aspirations of becoming a Movie star on rest in order to take care of him. Shama (Mimi's friend) and Bhanu (tourist driver) continue to play significant roles in Raj's life as he develops at Mimi's home and is surrounded by Mimi's parents. After watching a video of Mimi and Raj online four years later, John and Summer (American couple) travel to India. Things take an ugly turn when she is told that they have changed their minds regarding the child and now plan to take Raj back to America. On their way back from Mimi's place, the couple came upon an orphanage and decided to adopt Tara since they connected with her. After witnessing Mimi and Raj, Summer explains how she came to the realization that parenthood had nothing to do with blood and everything to do with love and caring. Knowing that Raj is Mimi's son and truly belonged with her, they leave him with her and her family.

5. Conclusion

Every film is created and filmed in a specific culture. They are an essential component of who we are and reflect our values and interpersonal relationships. In contrast to real-life interactions, movies make it simpler to understand our issues, beliefs, problems, and capabilities. We can examine ourselves and adapt when our prevailing notions and beliefs are questioned through cinema. The theme of surrogacy, the suffering of childless couples, the joy of parenthood, and the effect on the surrogates are still being explored in Hindi Films. But the stigma remains, since merely addressing the issue is not enough but the correct representation which these referred films lacked. *Filhaal* (Gulzar, 2002) and *Chori Chori Chupke Chupke* (Abbas-Mustan, 2001) came out dramatizing surrogacy in their respectively commercial and altruistic versions. Though there are times when a role-reversal was seen in the movie '*Vicky Donor*'(2012), after being persuaded by a desperate fertility specialist, the man, who was initially



hesitant, decides to donate his sperm. During the critical analysis of the films we also noted that the emotional and sensational side is clearly foregrounded. The representation is strongly tilted towards commercial surrogacy in India as exploitation and likely influences the viewer towards surrogacy being an exploitative, immoral, and narcissistic practice which definitely paints surrogacy obstructive (Pande, 2011). Though such delicate issues need not be oversimplified, steps must be taken on changing the way that surrogacy is viewed as a healthy and mutually beneficial relationship (Pande, A. 2009). This paper underscores the need for filmmakers to adopt a more responsible and research-based approach when addressing complex socio-medical issues like surrogacy. Doing so would not only contribute to more ethical storytelling but also foster public understanding rooted in empathy, legality, and gender justice (Majumdar 2014).

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