

SWINDLING OF SURROGACY IN KISHWAR DESAI'S *ORIGINS OF LOVE*: A STUDY

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Abstract

Kishwar Desai is a novelist, well-known for her works on the problems of gendering in India. Apart from being an award-winning writer, she also writes columns for Newspapers and Magazines. Being a journalist she explored many issues and gathered information about the evolution and blooming of surrogacy in India – a multi-million dollar industry. In her narrative, Kishwar portrayed and wrote the stories of surrogates and the health care centres, which were entangled in the enactment of surrogacy. Her illustration of the surrogacy and its plan of action, IVF and stem-cell surgery furnish various angles on the matter of replication through unnatural insemination.

*This paper sets out to probe into the story of exploitation of the surrogacy in India, in Kishwar Desai's science fiction *Origins of Love*, which lays emphasis on the motherhood in India. Though the location is in India, it draws in and connects people from different parts of the world who post their blastocysts to India, to deliver their babies through the surrogates. The clinic encourages for the tourism of the intending parents and the agent welcomes the customers and the surrogates to rent their wombs for the blastocysts ordered online. Apart from the study of different facets of surrogacy, it also explores how the blastocysts are being used to conduct stem-cell surgery or research in India.*

Key words: surrogacy, international parents, IVF, stem-cells.

What is surrogacy? How come the business of surrogacy furnish in India? Is it legal in India? What made people to visit only India for surrogacy? Surrogacy is hiring a surrogate to carry other people's child and confide the child safely to the intended parents after the delivery. In the past, there were very less people who knew about the practice of surrogacy in India. The surrogates were hired in very rare cases at the time of emergency. But now, Surrogacy has become 'a new form of outsourcing' to India, where, even the global clients hire a surrogate to carry their child at any cost without any official regulations. It has become

commercial with the existing knowledge and technology, which turned out to be a complete business industry. The surrogacy industry in India bloomed with the entry of International clients. In many countries surrogacy is illegal and if legal the woman does not produce eggs at all. 'Gay couples, homosexual couples, infertile couples' from various countries hire commercial surrogacy and chose India, as it is the destination for outsourcing wombs. Surrogacy is not illegal in India, at the same time there is no specific legal framework governing it. Therefore, this made an attractive destination for infertile couples who live in other countries that have strict surrogacy laws.

In 2015, the Indian government banned commercial surrogacy, except for research purposes. Until then, surrogacy had become commercial flourishing the industry with local and global clients. Still, in the year 2016, the bill lapsed owing to the deferral in the Indian parliament. Though the bill was reintroduced and posted by the lower house of the Indian parliament, the Lok Sabha, in 2019, it still requires to be agreed upon by the upper house, the Rajya Sabha, and the Presidential concurrence before it becomes a law.

There are different types of surrogacies basing upon the selection of 'mother and embryos.' On the basis of selecting the mother 'altruistic surrogacy and commercial surrogacy' is used. In commercial surrogacy, the surrogate is not interconnected with the intended parents and she has to confide the child to them after the delivery. She is paid over for her medical expenses and for carrying the baby. Commercial surrogacy was allowed in India few years ago, but after the amendment of surrogacy bill in 2016, the bill proposed to ban all forms of commercial surrogacy. Not only in India, commercial surrogacy is also banned in many countries. When it comes to Altruistic surrogacy, it is allowed without any objections. That means the surrogate who is connected with the intended parents like a friend or relative can carry the baby for free.

Based on embryo, 'traditional and gestational surrogacy' method is used. In traditional method the surrogate carries the child for full term and is called the birth mother of the infant. She uses her own eggs to deliver the baby for its intending parents. Whereas, in gestational surrogacy IVF treatment method is used. The eggs of the legitimate mother are fertilized with donor's sperm and then the embryo is implanted into the surrogate. Thus, the infant is born with their parent genes, caste, race and religion, and through this method the legitimate mother becomes the birth mother.

For some women in India, surrogacy has become an enduring factor for them to survive and make a living. It also became a temporary occupation for poverty women where they are considered as labourers and not the mere victims. The surrogates are sent into surrogacy by their families, brokers or their own interest to make sheer amount of money. Some spend the money to built houses and start small business while some spend the money on children's education. There are women who become mascots and their husbands become the breadwinners through the surrogate's earnings.

Once when the women are hired by the clients she must act as a perfect surrogate; she must be a willing person and virtuous mother having control over herself. The surrogate is expected to be disciplined in the entire process without making fuss before and after the delivery. She should nurture the baby and should not act like a selfless woman treating surrogacy as a trading business. The surrogates are hired with necessary conditions which is a basic required contract for them. They have to give up on the baby to the intended parents right after it is born; they should not have any claim on the baby; neither the doctor nor the commissioned parents are responsible if anything happens to them during the progress of surrogacy; the payment is given to them in installments and last payment is made after the delivery. The doctors ensure the surrogates not to get attached to the baby emotionally so that the parents may not face trouble.

This paper highlights the enslavement of impoverished women in the surrogacy industry. Taking this into account, the analysis has been made through the novel *Origins of Love*, in which Desai dexterously explores multiple problematic fertility issues such as IVF, surrogacy, international adoption and also embryonic stem cell treatment in India. She also skillfully weaves emotional turmoil of women with many fictional characters mixed up in various sub-plots. There are two classes of women in India or abroad – one group grapples into surrogacy for their identity, as participants need healthy bodies or help the other person freely, while the other group is coerced into surrogacy with the consent of their families which they take the chance to act as a surrogate and earn sheer amount of money. Here, in Kishwar Desai's science fiction *Origins of Love*, one can comprehend how innocent women were being exploited and experiencing surrogacies.

In *Origins of Love*, Madonna and Child clinic did the business with the multinational adoption and the surrogates are Indians. The mothers carrying the baby are from below poverty people, who are in much need of the money to look after their household. The surrogates in the clinics carry not only the children of international couples but also local people too. They are kept in the clinic for over nine months, as the women should be well-fed and carefully monitored. New surrogate mothers are brought to the clinic by Sharma, the office boy who manages with the egg donors. Moreover, he brings two younger women to the clinic to bear a child which according to the rules is not acceptable. Before planning to be a surrogate, the women should at least have given birth to one or more than two children of her own or she must be thirty or more than in age.

Dr. Subhash Pandey, the physician and Dr. Anita Pandey, Gynaecologist and Dr. Ashok Ganguly of Madonna and Child IVF clinic dealt with the trading business of surrogacy in Delhi. The surrogacy business grew from one or two babies to number of babies and it attracted the hospital to run the business as it was simpler in the beginning having straight forward cases from international and local as well. The international clients brought more money with the travel of sperms, eggs and blastocysts. The reason why many of the

international clients go for surrogacy in India is, women in India are more conservative and free from drugs and alcohol. While most of the clients hire the surrogates in India because of the benefits of the laws. Though the clients look for the benefits, their primary step is to help the needy who are desperate over poverty. The surrogates become wombs for precious middle-class, upper-class and international clients. They get engaged into the embodied labour and their purpose is to produce babies for the rich couple.

Once the surrogate is ready for the operation, then the Indian parents meet the surrogate throughout her pregnancy while the international parents meet the surrogate once before the transfer of embryos and again at the moment of delivery. In India, surrogates are typically expected to stay in the clinic for entire nine months of pregnancy and live with other surrogates for continuous monitoring of their health condition. They are also provided with proper nutritious food for the growth of the baby in the womb. Staying in the clinics, the surrogates do not have any work to do except to take rest and pace up and down. However, some clinics perform small activities to build up the women into a better worker at the moment of pregnancy. She is taught English to converse with the global clients and report her health conditions to them. The husbands of the surrogates are permitted to meet them but are not supposed to stay in the clinics. Most of the global clients opt for normal delivery of the surrogates to avoid physical complications after the delivery.

There are twelve international couples who take prior appointment in Madonna and Child clinic for the surrogacy adoption. 'Three Americans, one French, five British, one German and two Australians. The clinic easily deals with everyone, except French gay couple, one Britain couple and other from Germany' . . . 'homosexuality is a grand old Indian tradition' (20) . . . Homosexual cases in India are a complicated case as the problem arises with the adoption. Even the heterosexual cases are not that easy, because some of the countries sent out advertisements that infertility clinics in India should not entertain surrogacy for citizen of their country. But still, the intended parents prepare for the judicial battle. The investment for the international national couple is highest especially the gay couples. The French gay couple brings more worries to the doctors in the clinic as it was difficult for them to take the child back and give them French citizenship.

Madonna and Child clinic dealt with five international gay couples and they got good experience from it. But there is also a French couple, whose adoption of twins escalates a real problem in the clinic. The gay couple were not approved to take the twins back to their home town because France did not recognize surrogacy. Taking the infants to their country becomes a public case, where on the other side, the Indian judges were sympathetic and wanted to favour them. And also, there creates a febrile atmosphere outside the clinic. The local militant organization, Pratha Suraksha Sansthan surrounds the hospital as they opposed surrogacy mainly for gays – 'A Husband Cannot Be a Wife' (346). The Sansthan is an organization with many supporters including government officials, politicians and god men

and vigilantes. They believe that homosexuality is a sin against nature. Perhaps if gay couple stops following the path of surrogacy in India, then the rest of the world would also stop using India as a 'child production factory' for gay couple.

A leader from Sansthan turns up at Madonna clinic demanding the French couple to give upon the twins. He says 'God created men and women to marry each other – what you are doing here is evil' (352)! He argues that the hospital is meddling with nature and they are sending two girls with two men where the clinic is ruining four lives and not two. He wanted the twins to be taken care by the legitimate mother who delivered them. He says – recites a Sanskrit shloka:

Best will be if we actually give them to the birth mother. . . That will be a proper way to do things. Let these men repent and let the mother have the children. . . 'Reform and leave this life of sin before it's too late' . . . Your test-tube babies will replace natural birth – and what will happen? *Kalyug!*' . . . 'if we carry on like this we shall create hell on earth' (352).

Dr. Subhash always thought of involvement with gay couple was bad idea and would bring them problems. There is also another client Susan Oldhams from UK, tries IVF for the second time – using her son's sperm. Usually the blastocysts are sent to India with some normal procedure of few months and run some medical tests before sending it on. But in Susan's son Martins's case the blastocysts are sent to India from Mybaby.com, London, within a week, without doing their medical procedure to remove virus. It was Preeti who was hired as a surrogate to Oldhams.

Preeti is a North Indian and was a perfect choice for surrogacy in the clinic. To make money for the well-being of the household, she acts as surrogate in the clinic. Preeti's pregnancy was a special case in the clinic and it was very important for Dr. Ganguly to keep all the records and analysis updated. She carries the British couple Susan and Martin's child and they wanted her to have a normal delivery and not a caesarean.

Preeti and Reena are from Uttar Pradesh. Like Preeti, Reena needed money but for different reasons. Her husband is unemployed and he lives in village. Though Reena had told the doctors in the clinic that she had a child, in actual she had lost the child due to some illness and poor nutrition. She had a difficult pregnancy. She is seen quite nervous about the delivery. She constantly suffers from morning sickness, blood pressure and water retention. She is kept a special eye and is monitored day and night. Despite all the complications she had suffered she delivers a baby boy. However, after the delivery a new problem sets in.

Reena tries to nurse the baby boy in private without the presence of the Australian parents. Having lost her own child, she becomes emotional about the boy. The post-partum depression combined with anxiety about giving away the child makes Reena possessive. She fears that once she hands over the infant to the intended parents, she would 'lose her identity

as a mother.’ With the packed luggage she tries to escape with the baby. Preeti stops her and Reena burst out crying –

‘I can’t give him up *didi*. I don’t have any children, as you know. I would rather have this one than not have one at all’ . . . ‘I don’t want the money. This is my child; I know it. He is a gift from God to me. *Didi*, don’t stop me, let me go (288).’

Preeti feels sympathetic towards Reena, but thinking of the lessons they were taught in the clinic she stops her. The hospital clearly instructed them, that they should separate their mind and heart and learn to not to get attached emotionally to the child in their womb from day one. Preeti knew that running away was the job which she could never ever do because she is gripped at the start by the premonition that something would go wrong with her pregnancy.

After the incident of Reena’s escape, Preeti delivers baby Amelia. Usually, when the surrogates deliver successfully and new born steps into the world, Madonna and Child clinic celebrates with joy and happiness. But when Amelia is born, the hospital that was supposed to fill with eruption of joy fills with grim and worries. She is placed inside the incubator, as she was quite immature and infected with HIV. After the delivery Preeti vanishes, she is wheeled away secretly to another hospital to get pregnant again, and that clinic is maintained by Dr. Ganguly and Sharma to make more money through these poor women. Ganguly tries to harm baby Amelia by pulling away the drip in her hand which was a terrible thing and even more malevolent. On seeing Dr. Ganguly’s behaviour Sonia protects the baby keeping all the doors wide open to keep an eye on the baby until Preeti returns.

Watching the whole episode from her room, Sonia felt she would never ever forgive herself for her own foolish suggestion she gave to Rohit about the money making through surrogacy. Her dream of going home to see her children as a free woman and giving them good education vanishes. Being in the hospital already five months pregnant, she feels like an animal with no feelings. As far as she was concerned – she is only a stupid ‘Dalit woman.’ She feels that all are using her. The hospital doctors, Rohit, Renu madam and Vineet Bhai. Everyone got something out of it, but Sonia she is the only person who is a total loser. She realizes that she could not even run away after the incident of Reena’s escape. Sonia is a local surrogate from Delhi, and is a single mother of three children. To educate her children and get them back from her village, she makes up her mind to act as a surrogate. She stays with her cousin Rohit who works as a peon at Delhi Health Minister, Renu Mishra’s home. Sonia suffers not only with her odd pregnancy but also domestic violence. She tries to keep her surrogacy confidential from Rohit, but with the increasing domestic violence it gets difficult to manage. Thinking that carrying another child in the Madonna and Child clinic would bring her lot of money and pay off Rohit’s debts and go to her children, but she makes a foolish suggestion about the surrogacy and does not realize that she would become pawn in a

complicated game. To escape from Rohit, Sonia plans to tell him about surrogacy and creates a problem by telling him about carrying Health Minister Renu Mishra's baby. This idea becomes perfect plot for Rohit to perform it flawlessly. He snatches away the opportunity from Sonia saying:

‘Offering her your womb will be a great move. Instead of selling the womb to two *firangis*, why not give it to someone who deserves it much more? After all, she is a neta – a leader. Your child will be a politician too – think of how important we will be!’ (195).

Sonia gives birth with many contradictions after few months of Amelia's birth. Feeling the contradictions, without any fear she does what she was supposed to do and delivers a baby boy. When all these things happen in Madonna clinic, a transnational couple arrive to India from London for IVF.

International parents enter the surrogacy industry with the deals made with Indian women through the Fertility and ART clinics. At present Art clinics in India are expected to follow the canon with content to the regulation of laws. With the development of medical technologies, specialists have tailored fertility solutions through surrogacy and fertility treatments. The fertility treatments are done through IVF to the people having problems to bear a child. The transnational couple from South London, Kate's and Ben's marriage is stolen by ‘several miscarriages.’ Each time Kate gets pregnant, they are seen very desperate about the unfortunate incidents happened to them in the past. They plan for IVF and visit Madonna clinic in India, but end up adopting baby Amelia who is left homeless and parentless. Apart from Surrogacy and IVF Desai throws a light on ‘Stem - cell surgery’ too.

India is one of the developing countries to work on the human stem-cell experimentation and treatments. The Indian companies and research institutes are involved in the stem cell studies. Their activities also involved clinical trials, treatments and services. According to a website of medical research, only stem cells from bone marrow were permitted for treatment, taking it from the embryonic cells on the grounds of licensed clinic under the Amendment of the New Drugs and Clinical Trail Rules of 2019. The ply of stem cells in patients without the license is ‘unethical’ and considered as ‘malpractice.’ The stem cells are brought up from the bone marrow and to others segments of the body. They are just like a miracle cure which has a power to take shape of damaged part of the body and are injected into the body and provide a replacement. The Stem-cell surgery is prohibited in many other countries so as in India too. But still in India, embryonic stem-cell surgery is being practiced in few hospitals.

In *Origins of Love*, Madonna clinic has a tie up with ‘Mybaby.com’ company in UK. The international parents register and sent their embryos through this company which heads towards the ‘Birthing Babies’ company in Delhi that further route to Madonna and Child clinic in Gurgoan. But unfortunately, the embryos are confiscated by the customs and routed

to Freedom hospital in Mumbai. According to Dr. Wadhvani, in Freedom hospital they do not do any IVF but they own a surgical unit where they perform various kinds of procedures. They often use the bone marrow and umbilical-cord cells for serious cases. Whereas in very rare cases they also use a tiny number of embryonic stem cells to get an amazing results. Instead of destroying the embryos, Dr. Wadhvani steals them for a good cause of 'saving lives.'

Thus, this paper aimed to focus on surrogacy. Be it in India or anywhere in the world, it not at all easy to be as a surrogate. One has to overcome many physical and emotional problems and this is such a difficult and tough task for women to overcome from it. In India, no self-respecting educated woman from middle-class family would concur to carry another couple's baby unless there is a compelling reason. There are also some of the mystifying cases like mother carrying her own daughter's baby who is incapable to carry it on full term. Surrogacy through IVF in India had not only changed the destinies of women, it also completely disrupted the mind set of the family. The women are sometimes trafficked and trapped into endless cycles of surrogacy in various ways and earn money through it with the consent of the family.

Therefore, in *Origins of Love*, Desai delved into sensitive and controversial issues which are serious in the present days. She skillfully provides interesting information about surrogacy industry, IVF and human stem cell research in India. She presents the plight of poor young Indian women forced into surrogacy because of economic and family pressures, and how they are exploited and treated at the fertility clinics. Besides, she also shows how women face things mentally and how difficult it is to become 'a mother' going through all the hurdles. "Life is precious but the women and children are being exploited by the clinics with a price" (Desai).

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