

Critique

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***Mimi*: The Woman Protagonist and
A Story of Subverted Motherhood**



***Mimi* (2021) by Laxman Utekar**

Motherhood as an institution, agency, and experience claims considerable attention not because it is a conventional empirical condition but because it is diverse, at times deviant, and different strategies emerge for both women and men, as well as the third gender. In films in India and abroad, motherhood is an accepted notion and rarely questioned. But of late, changing social and cultural parameters have prompted studies and analyses focusing on age-old innate human drives, their conventional and deviant manifestations and striking, curious behavioural patterns.

Cinema is graphic, and the narrative makes the pace and acceleration work. It is always important how the director treats the

subject, how the technicalities like camera work aggravate the inherent significance, and how, for that matter, dialogue, sound, and music collate to set the tone of the theme effectively. These are not the only criteria used and exercised to read a film. As a vital part of cultural, psychological and aesthetic entertainment products, the film must create ideas, questions and a stirring of thought in the reader or viewer.

A 2021 release film, *Mimi*, directed by Laxman Utekar and written by Rohan Shankar /Laxman Utekar, is a sensitive, humane and aesthetic portrayal of a woman protagonist confronted by never before the situation of surrogacy fueled by the impertinent ambition of becoming a

Bollywood filmy heroine in a backward town in UP sometime in 2013 as the clippings suggest. The female protagonist is lush and vivacious Mimi (played by Kriti Sanon), driven by an excessive and obsessive desire to join the Stars, the successful heroines of Bollywood, Mumbai. Her mischievous nature is overlaid by self-confidence because she can dance and is a popular local artist.

The treatment of surrogacy in the film is meted with various angles, bringing into account the thoughtless commercial conditions which display the poverty and dire need for money in this age of capital scene. The departure theme such as this is treated with clarity but without vulgarities and gross display of complex realities of women who lend their wombs for the commercial production of babies. Surrogacy is a complex subject, and as an instrument, it offers diverse possibilities and social and political manifestations. Here in the film, the tone is solemn but a slight travesty. The satiric treatment makes it humorous, and the introduction of a curious character brings that about called Bhanu Pratap, the driver (played by versatile Pankaj Tripathi), who is an agency of all the episodes and turns and twists that roller coast the journey of Mimi who at the beginning of the movie is a novice and utterly gullible to the intelligent manoeuvrings of Bhanu. He is experienced and somewhat of a reader of personalities. His ambivalent but omniscient presence on the screen throughout gives him a Mephistophelean quality. Because he'd earn a substantial amount of money from the intended parents, he entraps Mimi for gestational surrogacy but also, as a saving

grace, does not leave her in distress when calamity occurs.

The onset of the movie and the events begin with a desire for success and greed for money. What money can do in absolute terms and how desire and money are integrated for people who tend to care less for morals, perhaps, are vital themes taken up by the director. Of course, the critique of the modern condition as manifest is mostly subtle, and direct intervention is not apparent. But the tricky fallout of the reckless and impulsive decision of the protagonist is most directly seen in the consequent series of events when the foreign couple abandons their project of surrogacy, fearing an abnormal baby. The sheer waste of spirit, energy and time shatter and devastate Mimi who already has entered the last months of pregnancy. Perhaps the director wants to highlight the callousness of the foreigners who consider it their right to buy and throw at their whims the birthing site (the womb), absolutely like a commodity. Mimi, for them, is just a healthy female body they'd use at will. The rate of exchange in these cases would always be uneven.

This is the second stage of dialectical conflict that emerges as an existential one for the protagonist. Mimi's portrayal at this phase is of entrapment, sheer vulnerability, and victimisation. Her courage and grit to face society's slander evolve once she realises her unthoughtful decision and the grave consequences it brings forth for herself and her family.

So, from this turn, Mimi gathers maturity and decides to deliver the baby despite all the misgivings. This subverted motherhood grows in her maternal instincts and responsibilities. From complete self-

absorption and shortsighted impulse, Mimi acquires rational self-reflection, which imparts a sense of morality. This is evident when she decides against all her emotional bonding that her son ? should return to his natural parents. This, again, is strongly objected to by the infant's grandparents (Mimi's parents) and everyone else in the household.

What emerges at the end of the storyline as a resolution is not very distinctive or novel, and the curiosity of the ordinary spectator is not much toyed with. The socially conscious director perhaps is imparting an ambivalent message through the all-ends-well sequence, keeping at bay all other possibilities that could have befallen Mimi, her person and her family. If She were to hand over Raj, the child she gave birth to, his natural parents, as she was apprehensive of, what would have been the next phase? Would she get back her independence? And her freedom as before? That opens possibilities that could disturb the viewers. And now, as the curtain draws closer, what is the essence of this Mimi? How has her ambition shifted? The maternal instincts that arose recently with this episode of surrogacy, is it compensatory for all her desires? These, after all, are possibilities only.

The storytellers (directors and writers) told the story well. The treatment seems smooth and tangle-free because there's no pause; it results from excellent screenplay and accurate, hassle-free framing of scenes and shots. Because the focus is on the theme, no loose shots distracting the viewers are kept. Even the humorous scenes exhibiting the

fairness of the baby bespeak the folk mind and beliefs regarding the bias about complexion in our country.

One or two statements about the character portrayal of Mimi by Kriti Sanon need to be added, not only because her bagging the national award is a vindication of her acting prowess but also because the youthfulness and vivacious beauty that the actor produces on the screen, is a pointed focus on her naivety and sharp bodily grace. That is relevant to the foreign couple's search for a healthy, youthful body to conceive a healthy baby. So, Mimi's artistic potential as a dancer seems to be a bonus for them! The cruel irony is projected in the song "Param Sundari", orchestrated with Mimi's dance sequence. It is an ironic metaphor for how things will materialise for this chirpy, overconfident, beautiful girl, all set to step into Bollywood (?)—her desired space of wish fulfilment! The appreciative glance of the couple (intended parents) searching for a potential surrogate mother is telling not on her artistry but on their choice of the "desired body".

This is a well-written piece that constantly relies on racy and, crisp and suggestive dialogue. The treatment in the film is, at times, flimsy and light, and the underlying sense of risk and loss is subdued. The tone is not melancholy or grave, which is why the viewers have a cinematic experience that's entertaining and fulfilling. An all-absorbing film with detailed artistry of such kind needs to be appreciated.

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