

Critique

Purushotham Chalapathi and Deepika Bansal

Who Won the (Emotional) Conflict in *Mala Aai Vhhaychy!*?



***Mala Aai Vhhaychay!*, Marathi, 2011 by Samruoddhi Porey**

Mala Aai Vhhaychy! (I Want to Be a Mother) presents a poignant narrative that foregrounds the emotional conflict between a biological mother, a surrogate mother, and the boy born of their intertwined lives. The film takes several dramatic turns before culminating in a resolution characterised by a harmonious conclusion, albeit one preceded by significant emotional turmoil. In cinematic storytelling, conflict necessitates both a compelling cause and a well-constructed ensemble of characters. Here, the auteur adeptly leverages a profound thematic cause—the separation of Madhav, the son, from his two mothers, Yashoda (the surrogate mother) and Mary (the biological mother).

The auteur Samruoddhi Porey, both an advocate and filmmaker, leverages her legal and artistic expertise to foreground pro-woman issues, focusing on surrogacy in rural India. Through feminist and postcolonial lenses, the film critiques the commodification of motherhood, exploring the tensions between traditional maternal practices and the encroachment of modern medical technologies. It unpacks surrogacy's ethical and emotional complexities, examining how globalised medical practices intersect with localised cultural values. The narrative ultimately underscores maternal love's resilience and transformative power,

highlighting sacrifice and empathy as forces capable of transcending structural inequities.

From a feminist theoretical standpoint, the film critiques the exploitation of women's bodies within patriarchal frameworks, particularly in the context of surrogacy. While Mary embodies motherhood's commodified, transactional aspects, Yashoda represents the emotional labour and sacrifices inherent in traditional maternal roles. This duality exposes the reduction of motherhood to a contractual transaction while also emphasising its deeply embodied and relational nature. Through this contrast, the film calls attention to the profound emotional and social dimensions of caregiving, urging a reconsideration of how motherhood is constructed and valued in contemporary society.

Moreover, the film draws a critical distinction between surrogacy as a clinical and transactional process—reflective of Western influences—and the cultural and emotional depth of motherhood rooted in Indian traditions. This contrast underscores the filmmaker's perspective on the enduring values embedded in Indian familial and maternal practices, challenging the commodification of parenthood introduced by modern medical technologies. For instance, Yashoda's connection to Madhav is not merely biological but deeply emotional, as reflected in scenes of shared labour and nurturing within the rural milieu.

The ideological framework of the film underscores the limitations of technological and scientific advancements in capturing the essence of motherhood. While the 21st century has introduced medical innovations such as surrogacy, the narrative asserts that

these cannot replicate the profound and empirical experiences intrinsic to motherhood. The portrayal of motherhood in *Mala Aai Vhhaychy!* emphasises its profoundly personal and holistic nature, encompassing a woman's journey from nurturing a child in her womb to cradling them in her lap, breastfeeding, feeding morsels by hand, singing lullabies, gently disciplining, and safeguarding the child's well-being.

At the end of the film, the symbolic act of a plough striking farmland vividly represents the deep anguish of a mother losing her child. The internal struggles of both Yashoda and Mary are portrayed with authenticity, resonating strongly with female audiences by capturing their emotional experiences and perspectives. Additionally, the characters of Ganpath and Sharda reflect the compassion and empathy of rural villagers, emphasising communal care and support. Ganpath's attempts to alleviate Madhav's moodiness and silence evoke a universal sense of nostalgia, resonating with men in their roles as fathers, brothers, uncles, or friends. The filmmaker further delves into non-verbal communication, illustrating how unspoken exchanges between a mother and child serve as profound conveyors of emotion. Specific scenes, such as Madhav's hesitant but meaningful gestures toward both mothers, exemplify this delicate dynamic.

The emotional conflict at the story's heart is resolved through selfless sacrifice and profound love, with each character finding victory differently. For Yashoda, the surrogate mother grappling with immense personal, physical, and emotional hardships, the decision to let the boy go is excruciating.

Yet, she believes that Mary, living in the USA, can provide the child with opportunities she cannot—better food, fine clothes, and a future filled with prospects she can't offer. Despite the agony of letting him go, Yashoda chooses the boy's well-being over her desires. In this painful act of self-sacrifice, her motherhood triumphs over the mother. Her love for him transcends her needs, securing his future even at the cost of her heart.

Meanwhile, Mary, the biological mother, finds herself in a similar emotional struggle. Though she could offer her son a comfortable life in the USA, she recognises that his happiness lies not in material wealth but in his bond with Yashoda. The deep, unspoken connection between the boy and Yashoda holds more weight than the promises of a better life abroad. In a moment of quiet wisdom, Mary prioritises the boy's emotional fulfilment over her longing to have him by her. In this act of unconditional love, Mary's motherhood prevails—her selflessness speaks louder than the pull of her desires. Hence, she, too, has won over her desires.

Finally, the boy, who initially appeared eager to leave with Mary, undergoes a quiet yet profound transformation. As the weight of the decision sinks in, he realises that his deepest attachment lies not in the promise of a new life but in the woman who raised him with care, warmth, and unwavering love. The bond he shares with Yashoda is irreplaceable. His decision to stay with her, driven by a deep, unconditional love, marks his victory over this emotional and critical conflict. In

choosing Yashoda, he embraces the source of his emotional security and trust—the person who truly knows him.

Ultimately, each character wins the emotional conflict, but their victories are born out of love and sacrifice. Yashoda triumphs by letting go for the boy's sake, Mary by valuing his happiness over her desires, and the boy by affirming the profound emotional connection with the woman who nurtured him. Their victories are not defined by material gain or outward success but by the pure, unspoken bond that transcends all. This story celebrates the quiet power of unconditional love, where motherhood is defined not by biology but by profound emotional bonds, and genuine truth takes precedence over external markers of success.

The narrative draws a powerful mythological parallel between the bond shared by Yashoda and Shree Krishna in Dwaparayuga and that of Yashoda and Madhav in Kaliyuga. This thematic culmination is poignantly underscored through a symbolic sequence in which rain serves as a metaphor for the triumph of motherhood. The downpour symbolises a renewal of hope and the promise of a harmonious future for Yashoda and Madhav, embodying a metaphorical calm that follows the storm. This symbolism intricately reinforces the film's exploration of maternal strength, illustrating how love transcends time and fosters resilience in the face of adversity.

Purushotham Chalapathi is an Assistant Professor in the Dept. of English & Foreign Languages at Madanapalle Institute of Technology & Science, Madanapalle, AP and Deepika Bansal is a Filmmaker and Graphic Designer.