



**Mimicry or Mimi's Cry:
An Alternate Reading of *Mimi* (2021) as a Response to Neo-Colonialism**

Dr. Anita Goswami

Assistant Professor Department of English, COER University Roorkee Uttarakhand, India

Corresponding Author: Dr. Anita Goswami

Email: drgoswamianita@gmail.com

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Abstract:

The archetypes of the stories of East-West encounters are visible *in mass* in Indian art, literature, and cinema. Although the objectives behind the visits of the Britishers earlier or the Americans later in the wake of the neo-colonial regime have been different, the nature of these encounters has always remained uniform. The direct relation between the Europeans' coming to India for the exploitation of resources and an American couple's search for an Indian girl who can work for them as a paid surrogate mother can be easily denied apparently. But a full view of the contexts can promise an affirmative answer.

The present paper is an alternative reading of *Mimi*, the 2021 Hindi-language-comedy-drama film which seems to depict, on the surface level, the tragi-comedy of Indo-American encounter between an American couple and an Indian surrogate mother. A careful analysis offers an alternate reading of the inheritance of the colonial past as neo-colonialism. How the external economic forces have caused erosion and assimilation of the culturally significant institution – m. Role of language, sisterhood among women of different religious origins, and mutual fulfilment are some issues that are discussed in this paper.

Key Words: Surrogacy, Motherhood, Culture, Neo-Colonial Regime, Narrative, and Identity.

Introduction:

It is indisputable that cinema serves as a significant medium via which individuals can gain enhanced comprehension of their culture, customs, and society. In a broader context, the engagement of films inside social institutions inherently imparts insights into various dimensions of global existence. In addition to their visual potency and narrative elements, films hold significant influence in shaping our understanding of social and cultural circumstances. This is primarily due to their ability to present social realities in a manner that accurately reflects the ways in which individuals either conform to or challenge the prescribed roles they encounter, whether these roles are deemed tolerable or intolerable. Several of these works depict themes of alienation and despair, along with a multitude of conflicts that arise from individuals grappling with their social circumstances and the various problems that life presents to them. From this perspective, the act of viewing a film assumes a considerable magnitude, since it engenders profound emotional, psychological, and pedagogical impacts upon individuals. Based on this, the paper aims to discuss some perspectives on the cultural conflicts arising out of interaction among people from different cultures woven in the Hindi language comedy-drama-film *Mimi*.

Released on 26 July 2021, this two-hour traffic is a fine example of a social problem film that brings home the concept of motherhood eroded from

its traditional definition and pitted against a neo-colonial mindset where the 'womb' is upheld as 'a piece of land' that can be bound by contract. *Mimi*, written and directed by Laxman Utekar and co-written by Roshan Shankar, starring Kriti Sanan and Pankaj Tripathi, is a remake of the 2014 Marathi film *Mala Aai Vhhaychy* which was inspired by a true incident. Mimi (Kriti Sanan), an unmarried, poor young local dancer, aspiring to become an actress opts to be a surrogate mother for a foreign couple. As the narrative evolves, the couple, John and Summer, fearing some medical complications, refuses to bear further responsibility for Mimi and the unborn child; suggesting Mimi to abort they quit India. Mimi, reluctant to go for abortion, passes through the inferno of social and parental scrutiny. But, however, Mimi with the help of Bhanu (a cab driver who had convinced Mimi on behalf of the American Couple), and her Muslim friend Shama, bears and rears the child and gets not only acceptance but the appraisal and love of her people as the mother of a uniquely beautiful child. Later, the claim by the American couple for the child arouses a big row in Mimi's household. Instead of the threat of legal action, Mimi's dilemma whether give the child to the couple or not, and, the couple adopting an orphan child have a strong and symbolic bearing with neo-colonialism. Although the term 'neo colonialism' was coined by the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, it was first used by Kwame Nkrumah in the context of African countries

undergoing decolonisation in 1960s. Nkrumah's arguments exhibits a clear foundation in Marxism; nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that his perspective is also influenced by his identity as an anti-colonial patriot. Nkrumah highlights the conditions that give rise to neo-colonialism, which align with the factors identified by Marxists as the general crisis of capitalism. However, it is important to note that Marxism also acknowledges another factor, namely the intensification of class struggle within imperialist nations.

In this regard, Nkrumah presents his own perspective. He does not perceive the working classes in imperialist nations as entities that are in opposition to neo-colonialism. The individual maintains a sense of scepticism towards the imperialist nations as a whole, encompassing not only their ruling classes but also their working classes. The individual maintains the perspective that neo-colonialism, akin to traditional colonialism, represents an effort to bring out the internal conflicts inherent within capitalism. Nkrumah specifically criticises the fact that, following the war, even the leaders of the working classes have purposefully utilised colonial profits to establish and develop the 'welfare state' as a means to protect their working classes from widespread unemployment and substandard living conditions. According to his perspective, it may be argued that there exists an ongoing global class conflict between the affluent nations, experiencing increasing prosperity, and the underdeveloped nations, facing escalating poverty. Nkrumah observes that "in place of colonialism as the main instrument of imperialism we have today neo-colonialism." He further makes clear that the economic and political conditions are very much affected by external or imperial forces known as neo-colonial regime. He states:

The essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside. . . . It is possible that neo-colonial control may be exercised by a consortium of financial interests that are not specifically identifiable with any particular State.

(IX)

The first and foremost instance of neo-colonial concerns in *Mimi* is India's position as a former colony of the Britishers and America as a global power with control and influence on the economies of the third-world countries including India itself. The very opening scene of *Mimi* sets the Indians' subject position under a neo-colonial regime where people more or less have been beset by the problem of "capability deprivation." Developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum the theory of Capabilities Approach stresses the importance of "real opportunities based on personal

and social circumstance" (Nussbaum 6). A constant lack of these capabilities has rendered Mimi and others like her vulnerable. By contrasting the overall development of Indian youth, especially, girls living in meagre circumstances, with the rich American couple's search for "a young and healthy girl" so that they can get a healthy child, the cultural differences about the perception of individual body has been dramatized; and while doing so, the vulnerability of Indians has been underlined and it has been made clear that their weak economic conditions have turned them into perfect marks for exploitation by foreigners and visitors from developed countries because for them "money is not a problem" as Summer acknowledges it. (*Mimi* 2:51-3:20)

After scrutinising several sex workers in Delhi, the American couple, John and Summer, left for Rajasthan. On the way, Bhanu, the cab driver, catches their conversation and offers them aid. His efforts reveal a lot of things about Indian poverty that stresses the position of Indian individuals' inability, in Aristotelian terms, to "fulfil their societal roles and receive what was their due from society" (Sen10). John and Summer's efforts to make Bhanu understand what surrogacy stands for, provide a better understanding of the neo-colonial concerns in the film when Summer explains surrogacy using the metaphor 'a piece of land' for the female reproductive system. This metaphor contains within itself the nucleus of the colonial past and the course of the film supplies sufficient proofs of what Kwame Nkrumah has condemned as the worst form of imperialism. Nkrumah asserts, "For those who practise it, it means power without responsibility and for those who suffer from it means exploitation without redress" (11). In the negotiation scene they pressed Mimi on the pretext that opting surrogacy will enable her in fulfilling her desire to become an actress; and to conceive she is not supposed to sleep with John. For this she would be paid twenty lakh – five lakhs during the pregnancy and fifteen lakhs after delivery on the conclusion of the contract. In fact, on learning that their plantation (*Mimi*) is going to produce bitter fruits because the child they were expecting from Mimi is declared abnormal by the doctor, they fled back to America even without facing heartbroken Mimi for the last time.

Though the secret of Mimi's pregnancy is revealed yet the actual identity of the person who has impregnated her is still hidden. Mimi cops up with the mental ordeal without redress. She returns home with Bhanu as the father of her unborn baby and the comedy starts developing again. If Mimi is the surrogate mother, Bhanu, who is running away from his own wife because he is unable to produce children, aspires fulfilment as a surrogate father. Mimi gave birth to a uniquely beautiful white child.

Mimi's secret or 'raj' metamorphoses into Mimi's son who is named Raj. Now Mimi's son Raj becomes Mimi's identity and legacy. But her legacy is threatened when almost four years later the American couple returns to claim the child. On Mimi's firm refusal to let John and Summer take Raj with them to America, John threatens her. When Bhanu refutes their claim by supporting Mimi, John says:

No, Bhanu, no. He isn't. Look at him. Look. No. Bhanu, do you think he belongs here? No. He is our son and we are not going back without him. You don't know this, what Summer tried to do? Summer attempted suicide. Now do you want her die? Because I don't. I'm not gonna let that happen and I will go to any extent for my wife's happiness. So, give me my son back...or I will take legal action against you. (*Mimi* 1:50:04-1:50:55)

In the end, Mimi's decision to let John and Summer take Raj with them to America whereas John and Summer's leaving India with a newly adopted girl child points to cultural acceptance and assimilation. And the film ends with the message "that you don't need to give birth to a child to be a parent. And that you don't need to have your own child to be a parent" (2:06:38-2:06:48). That instead going for surrogacy

Thus, it can be said that *Mimi* is a social problem film that shows that the filmmakers are largely obsessed with social problems and show their concern in exposing social vices and follies or criticize social institutions. Although the underlying purpose of this film is to make people aware of surrogacy and the loss and gain affixed with it. The film does not spell out specific methods of reform. It concentrates instead on defining the problem and emphasizing its importance. As a social problem film, it treats its subject in a light, satirical, and comic manner. Apart from surrogacy, the mother's love for her child is another equally important theme. Laxman Utekar confirms that besides entertainment a film should compel the audience to think. He opines:

we are so lucky that we are in this media and it is our unusual responsibility towards society because cinema has a huge impact. And we are not here just for the stand-up comedy. We want to make people laugh, and we want to make people cry, but same time we want to give them something to think.
(Utekar 21:25-21:50)

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