CHAPTER THREE
THE CURSE OF INFERTILITY

The previous chapter examined the concept of choice of motherhood for women. This chapter attempts to analyse what happens to women when this choice is denied to them biologically, and they are unable to conceive. It will deal with infertility, which, by and large, in Indian society is constructed as a curse. The chapter begins with a brief introduction to the concept of infertility, and is divided into two sections: The first section, Consequences of Infertility (3.1), explores the various physical, social, psychological and cultural consequences that infertility entails, through an analysis of select literary and cinematic texts. The second section, Overcoming Infertility (3.2), examines the various options that infertile couples exercise in order to have a child, as portrayed in literature and cinema.

In medical terminology, infertility has been defined as the inability to conceive despite cohabitation without the use of contraceptives. The definition, however, is insufficient as it does not encompass the socio-cultural definition of the word, and does not touch upon the repercussions of this problem, which in Indian society, may be close to a physical handicap or a serious disease. Sudhir Kakar quotes an ancient proverb in The Inner World – A Psychoanalytic Study of Childhood and Society in India (1981), which states, “Better be mud than a barren woman” (78). Feminist critic Christine Crowe remarks in “Women Want It: In Vitro Fertilization and Women’s Motives for Participation” (1987), “[...] due to the ideology of motherhood in which motherhood is perceived as the ‘natural’ situation for women, the infertile woman is subject to a considerable amount of social scrutiny” (93). The perception of infertility as a curse seems inevitable considering the importance accorded to motherhood in Indian society.

The stigma associated with infertility is not restricted to India alone, but spreads across cultures. The extent to which it is treated as a curse varies from culture to
culture. In *Perspectives on Black Women Writers* (1985), Barbara Christian talks about infertility from the African perspective through an analysis of literary texts: “The ‘barren’ African woman is seen as an incomplete woman. She becomes [...] ‘the dead end of human life, not only for the genealogical level, but for herself.’ Unlike the revered mother, the old barren woman is supported not out of love, but out of charity, and her death is seen as a relief to all” (216).

Unfortunately, infertility has not been accorded as much attention by feminists as it deserves. In fact, Jan Silverman, a founding member of a self-help group called IFF (Infertility – Facts and Feelings) expresses his feelings, “I feel feminism has ignored the plight of infertile women completely. This is a point that angers us. So much concentration has been put on birth control, on abortion, on choices in the birthing process” (Cited in Rehner 14).

Globally about ten to fifteen percent of all couples are infertile (Sami and Ali). According to an article entitled “Now There’s Hope for Childless Couples!” published in *Bombay Times* (2006), India alone has about twenty million infertile couples. As infertility affects comparatively only a small group of women, the issue has been suppressed and has not received as much media coverage as issues like abortion and the right to contraception, vote and equal pay for equal work. However, infertility is a major cause for concern. By deeming infertility a curse and offering options for women to alleviate themselves of infertility, patriarchy exercises control over women and reinforces the idea of motherhood as a norm. Shoma Chatterji in *The Indian Woman’s Search for an Identity* (1988) argues that woman’s fertility works against her liberation – “[...] for a woman, her fertility and her infertility is converted into a powerful instrument of socio-economic and political control in the hands of a male-dominated system – doctors and medical scientists included” (217).

The Marxist approach to the division of labour offers an interesting critique of the patriarchal system, and lends itself to various interpretations, especially in dealing with the concept of infertility. The work performed by women at home, which
includes nurturing children and looking after the house, has been perceived by Marxists as unremunerated work, having only a use-value. Yet, the work has been recognized and rewarded socially, and the biological mother has been accorded a social status in society. According to Black feminist critic Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenti in “Calix the Beyala’s ‘Femme-Fillette’: Womanhood and the Politics of (M)othering” (1997), the social status is “directly linked not only to the womb as agent of reproduction but one that also controls the numbers ascribed to the womb”. She goes on to explicate the repercussions for the childless woman, “What this means is that childless women or women who do not produce certain quantities of children are consciously excluded and positioned as inappropriate Others, as women who have no rights within the public sphere” (105). The very elevation of the social status of the mother in Marxist terms, based on her role in (re)production necessarily degrades the infertile woman since she seems to produce neither surplus value, nor use-value.

What is interesting to note is that men do not necessarily go through the same suffering and isolation that the women do, even if they may be responsible for infertility. The concept of male infertility in mythology has been analysed by Sukumari Bhattacharji in “Motherhood in Ancient India” (1990). She points out: “Male infertility was dimly known as the custom of levitate indicates, but no stigma ever attached to an impotent male. We hear of impotent kings both in Brahmanical and Buddhist literature but never with any aspersion of inauspiciousness [...] It was always the woman who got blamed for failing to procreate” (51). An obvious case of male impotence is the figure of Pandu in the Mahabharata. Kunti and Madhvi produced sons through divine forces, who were accepted and whose legitimacy was never questioned. Pandu’s impotency did not lead to him being considered inadequate or inauspicious, as would have been the case for a woman.

However, while Pandu was not subject to stigma, ostracism and humiliation, he had to relinquish his right to the throne since a man who could not father a child was not allowed to be a king (Pattanaik). In ancient India, a man who could not produce children was allowed to remarry several times in order to beget progeny. However, if
despite these efforts he failed, he was declared sterile. In such cases, another man could be invited to cohabit with the wives, a practice known as *niyoga*. This is evident in the story of King Vichitravirya found in the Mahabharata. The king dies without producing progeny, and his mother then invites sage Vyasa to cohabit with his widowed wives (Pattanaik). Such practices, though not very common and often performed clandestinely, persist even to this day. Anees Jung in her study of India as discussed in *Unveiling India – A Woman’s Journey* (1987) cites the example of the Bishnoi community wherein a sterile man must accept defeat if he finds the sandals of another man outside his doorstep, since the wife is entitled to take another man if her husband is impotent.

Irrespective of whether it is the male or the female who is sterile, there are various consequences of infertility. Dr. Shireen J. Jeejebhoy cites the primary ones in “Infertility in India – Levels, Patterns and Consequences” – health seeking or fertility seeking behaviour, marital instability, emotional harassment and loss of self-esteem. In order to avert these consequences, most couples resort to finding solutions for the problem of infertility. Some rely on religion and place their faith in divine forces, while others opt for medical treatment available to them in the form of reproductive technology.

By projecting motherhood as the primary social function of women; by making women who are unable to fulfill this function feel inadequate and incomplete; by punishing infertile women through harsh ill-treatment; by reinforcing the need for couples to have children and finally by providing and encouraging them to avail of reproductive technology regardless of its high cost and the bodily damage it entails, patriarchy deems infertility a curse. The concept of infertility as a curse is undoubtedly a deliberate ideological socio-cultural construction.
3.1 - Consequences of Infertility

This section deals with the various repercussions of infertility that a woman often faces as reflected in several narratives. Kamala Markandya's novel Nectar in a Sieve (1955) deals with the issue of remarriage if the woman is infertile, while A. Krishnamurthy's film Swarg Se Sunder (1986) depicts social ostracism. David Dhawan's film Gharwali Baharwali (1998) turns a complex situation into a comical one, justifying the second marriage of a husband whose wife is barren. Githa Hariharan's Thousand Faces of Night (1992) presents physical abuse and ill-treatment of the infertile woman. Indira Goswami's short story "The Offspring" (1999) presents the theme of infertility from the male perspective, and finally Manju Kapur's Home (2006) depicts the loss of self-esteem and devaluation in social status within the family that infertility entails. One of these texts (Nectar in a Sieve) will briefly be discussed again in the next section which deals with the methods that infertile women use for overcoming infertility.

Given the importance of childbearing in Indian society, women who are unable to bear children for whatever reasons must suffer the consequences, which can be severely damaging both physically and emotionally. The consequences of infertility are social as well as psychological. Infertility may result in emotional and physical harassment of the woman, who may be beaten up by her husband and in-laws for her inability to bear children. She may be deprived of basic amenities like food and health care. In the Vedic period, a barren woman could be cast away because she was possessed by nirrti, an evil and ugly spirit who destroyed everything good (Bhattacharji 51).

The inability to bear children can destroy a marriage and lead the husband to seek another wife to produce progeny. Manusmriti, an ancient Indian text which deals with laws regarding the social behaviour of man, claims that if the wife has not given birth to children for eight years, and if she produces only girls after ten years, the husband should marry again. Moreover, her reluctance to accept her husband's
second marriage should not be treated with sympathy and understanding. Instead, she should be scolded and sent to her father’s house (Cited in Kelkar 41). Ancient texts thus provide justification for divorce or second marriage in the case of the husband if the couple is childless.

Such ideas were not restricted to India alone, but malpractices against infertile women have been observed all over the world, irrespective of nationality or religion. Ignorance of facts regarding conception led to the belief that women alone were responsible for infertility. Apparently, in ancient Rome, a man could divorce his wife if she was suspected to be sterile. Moreover, when noted Greek philosopher Aristotle suggested that males could also be responsible for the inability to produce progeny, he became an object of mockery since patriarchal customs and beliefs necessarily placed the blame of infertility on the woman concerned. Research conducted by Karl Ber from St. Petersburg regarding the contribution of the male and female to conception alleviated women of the total responsibility for producing children, making both partners subject to scrutiny in case of failure of conception (A Portion of Donor Sperm).

Fertility also plays an important role for the Muslim woman. According to G I Serour, Fellow of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists in “Bioethics in Infertility Management in the Muslim World”, “The social status of the Muslim woman, her dignity, her self-esteem and her place in the family and society as a whole are closely related to her procreation. Childbirth and childrearing are regarded as family commitments and not just as biological and social functions”. By implication, a woman who cannot procreate does not fulfill her familial commitments, and suffers devaluation in social status.

Societies all over the world thus seem to accord immense importance to fertility, the absence of which can be a serious ordeal for the woman concerned. It has been observed that infertility results in severe socio-psychological repercussions, including a threat to marital stability, a loss of self-esteem, and a feeling of failure. The
remaining section will illustrate some of the consequences discussed above through an analysis of various texts.

3.1.1 Kamala Markandya’s Nectar in a Sieve

Kamala Markandya’s famous masterpiece *Nectar in a Sieve* (1955) is an important text that needs to be considered in any discussion of infertility. Although the book was written in the 1950’s, it is a significant text which deserves special mention because it paves the way for other texts that would be discussed in this work.

The novel uses the fertility of a woman as a symbol of fertility of land or soil. The terminology used to describe fertility of both women and soil is frequently the same – and so is the terminology used for infertility. Words like barren and sterile are used both for women and land. In this novel, the protagonist Rukmani becomes a symbol for natural fertility and is compared to the earth which nurtures and nourishes the seeds that are planted on it.

Written in the first person narrative, Rukmani describes her first experience of pregnancy using the metaphor of the land. Her description of the joy she experiences in the growth of vegetables like beans, brinjals, chillies and pumpkin is akin to the experiences of a mother who experiences changes in her body from the point of conception to pregnancy and child birth:

> And their growth to me was constant wonder - from the time the seed split and the first green shoots broke through, to the time when the young buds and fruit began to form. I was young and fanciful then, and it seemed to me not that they grew as I did unconsciously, but that each of the dry, hard pellets I held in my palm had within it the very secret of life itself, curled tightly within, under leaf after protective leaf for safekeeping, fragile, vanishing with the first touch or sight. (12)

However, not always does the earth bear fruit – there are times when it becomes barren and there is scarcity of food grain. So also, in the life of Rukmani, there is an interim period of barrenness which lasts seven years after her first daughter Ira is
bom. Rukmani suffers from secondary infertility in which, according to World Health Organisation, Geneva, 1991, "the woman has previously conceived, but is subsequently unable to conceive despite cohabitation and exposure to pregnancy for a period of two years" (Cited in Jeejebhoy).

Rukmani is grateful to her husband for remaining faithful to her despite her inability to produce sons. She discovers only later that during this period her husband had sired two sons through another woman. Needless to say, her reaction is that of shock:

Disbelief first, disillusionment; anger, reproach, pain. To find out, after so many years, in such a cruel way. Kali's words: She has fire in her body, men burn before and after. My husband was one of those men. He had known her not once but twice; he had gone back to give her a second son. And in between, how many times, I thought, bleak of spirit. While her husband in his impotence and I in my innocence did nothing. (86)

Interestingly, the cuckolded husband is also in the same condition as Rukmani, and they both seem to be tied together because of their inability to produce sons. Neither can protest against the infidelity of their spouses. Even after discovering the truth, Rukmani does not take any drastic action. She had not borne him sons, and he could not be sure that she would bear him sons in future – hence, she could not really blame him for his actions. As Cain (1990) argues, children, especially sons, provide more than status to women: "They are the insurance against 'patriarchal risk' – the special risks that women face as a consequence of their economic dependence on men" (Cited in Kapadia, Shah and Verma 194).

Indeed, not only does Rukmani face this risk, but her daughter Ira also goes through the same trauma, anxiety and insecurity. In fact, in Ira's case, the situation is taken a step further since her husband abandons her because she is unable to conceive. He comes to their house one day, and addresses Rukmani: "'Mother-in-law', he said, 'I intend no discourtesy, but this is no ordinary visit. You gave me your daughter in marriage. I have brought her back to you. She is a barren woman'" (50). When Rukmani argues that they have not been married long, and that Ira may conceive late,
he responds, “I have waited for five years. She has not borne in her first blooming, who can say she will conceive later? I need sons” (50).

The ‘need’ for sons is one of the foremost reasons why people produce children in the first place. According to Farooq and De Graff, apart from emotional satisfaction, “In many non-industrial societies children also make significant economic contributions to the household in the form of labor [...] Children also represent a major means of practical assistance and expected help in old age. Whereas savings, pensions and social security income support many parents in industrialized countries, children represent this old age security in peasant societies” (Cited in Kapadia, Shah and Verma 194). As Nectar in a Sieve is set in a rural area, children, specifically sons, become an economic necessity. Sangeeta Datta comments in “Relinquishing the Halo: Portrayal of Mother in Indian Writing in English” (1990), “This is enough to justify his renunciation of Ira and validate a second marriage” (89). In fact, Rukmani’s husband also condones the act, “I do not blame him... He is justified, for a man needs children. He has been patient’” (50).

However, the act has severe psychological repercussions on Ira, who has been bearing the brunt of humiliation for a long time. On the one hand she is relieved. “At least now there is no more fear, no more necessity for lies and concealment” (50). On the other hand, there has been a huge loss of self-esteem: “[...] I a failure, a woman who cannot even bear a child” (50). Dr. Shircen J. Jejeebhoy asserts, “The inability to perform their roles as child bearers and rearers, and the common misconception that infertility is always the shortcoming of the female is observed to take a huge toll on the woman in terms of loss of self-esteem, grief and feelings of failure”.

Expectedly, the abandonment by her husband leaves Ira in a state of depression: “[...] he moped about, dull of hair and eye, as if the sweetness of life had departed – as indeed it has for a woman who is abandoned by her husband” (58). Ira loses interest in life, and finds herself incapable of dealing with the trauma. The last straw is her discovery of her husband’s second marriage – news which her mother breaks to her:
“You must not blame him. He has taken another woman” (60). Now, Rukmani too seems to justify his act by advising her daughter not to hold him responsible for his actions. It seems to be a natural consequence of the turn of events – an inevitability that cannot be challenged or averted. The reaction of both Nathan and Rukmani point to the conditioning of an entire society where a woman is reduced to a mere function – and that function is to breed children. If she is unable to fulfill the function, she should be discarded, just like a useless machine that has become redundant.

Although Rukmani seems to understand her son-in-law’s reaction and even seems to empathize with him, her immense love for Ira causes her to worry about Ira’s future: “We had no money to leave her. Who would look after her when we were gone, and the boys were married with families of their own? With a dowry, it was perhaps possible that she might marry again, without it no man would look at her, no longer a virgin and reputedly barren” (61-62).

Rukmani’s comment points to the bleak future that a barren woman abandoned by her husband has in store for her. The husband provides financial, social and emotional security which is denied to Ira as an abandoned wife. Her status as a barren woman and poverty would further reduce her chances of remarriage rendering her helpless and dependant on her parents, and after them, her brothers. The novel thus explores the consequences that a barren woman must face on account of her infertility.

3.1.2 A. Krishnamurthy’s Swarg Se Sunder

A. Krishnamurthy’s film Swarg Se Sunder (1986) explores the social consequences of infertility – and the inhuman treatment that is often meted out to an infertile woman. The film is set in a village called Madhavpur, and revolves around the village head Vijay Chowdhry, and his wife Laxmi, who have been married for five years but do not have any children.

The body language of the couple indicates that they share a strong emotional bond and are deeply in love with one another. The narrative implies that the infertility is
not really a medical problem, but rather the result of inadequate and insufficient quality time spent together. As head of the village, Vijay finds himself too preoccupied with the activities of the village to concentrate on his family life. By depicting the hero and heroine of the film as an ideal and loving couple possessing inherent goodness of character, the film maker seems to empathize with the husband and wife.

While Vijay and Laxmi enjoy the respect of most villagers, there are certain people who constantly taunt Laxmi for her infertility. Foremost among them (and in fact, the only one who voices her opinion throughout the film) is the village grocer’s wife, Manalekha. Manalekha represents a section of society which considers the very presence of an infertile woman inauspicious. Wigde quotes a study conducted in Andhra Pradesh where “Childless women are kept purposely from celebrations of new born children and celebrations of first pregnancies as their presence is considered inauspicious” (65).

Indeed, this is precisely what happens in the film. When Laxmi arrives at a child’s naming ceremony, she brings with her a gold chain for the baby. Manalekha has brought a grotesque and repulsive toy which would certainly frighten a young child. However, she comments that her gift is superior since a gift ought to be weighed not by its monetary value, but according to the person who has given the gift. “I am an auspicious woman because I have given birth. If an infertile woman gives gold or silver to a baby, it becomes inauspicious for the child.” She asserts that it is inauspicious for Laxmi to be present at the function since she has been married for five years but has still not conceived.

She then goes on to pronounce Laxmi a “baanjh” in an abusive and contemptuous tone, repeating the word several times for an enhanced effect. The portrayal of Manalekha as a one-dimensional evil character allows the audience to sympathize with Laxmi who becomes a victim of prejudice. However, the very fact that Manalekha is not sophisticated or educated allows her to express her views
uninhibitedly. There may be other women who also look down upon Laxmi but would hesitate out of politeness and courtesy from addressing her as baanjh the way Mahalekha spontaneously does.

Sandhya Kaul explains the significance of the Hindi word baanjh in Child Bearing – A Social Phenomenon (1996): “The term baanjh refers to an unproductive and sterile field as well as the woman who fails to conceive. She may have inflammation (sojan) in her uterus. It may be out of place or the mouth of her uterus may be too narrow. She may be so thandi (unresponsive or sexually uncommunicative) that her husband’s seed cannot germinate, or impregnate her, or – as they believe – she may be affected by evil spirits” (58).

The word baanjh recurs through the film on various occasions in an attempt to insult Laxmi and to rub in her infertile status. When Laxmi is about to inaugurate a grocery store in the village, Mahalekha comments that if a barren woman inaugurates the shop it can never prosper. Laxmi’s humiliation is evident from her facial expressions – and despite the status that is accorded to her as the wife of the head of the village, she finds it impossible to protest against such comments. Her status as a barren woman supersedes that as the head’s wife. She seeks her husband’s reassurance, and he tells her not to bother about the loose talk of an uneducated woman.

Ironically, it is Mahalekha’s own daughter Lalita (a complete contrast to both her parents) who is instrumental in changing Laxmi’s status. Lalita enters the family as Laxmi’s sister-in-law, and proceeds to take Vijay and Laxmi for a holiday to Ooty. Both Lalita and Laxmi conceive but the moments of joy of the family are thwarted yet again by Mahalekha’s comments. She cannot understand how a barren woman can become a mother at the same time as her daughter. She wishes to take her daughter away from the house because no one has any experience with children in this house – and her daughter’s child would not survive if Laxmi’s shadow falls on the child. She states that the house is “like a tree that has never borne any fruit”.

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The repeated use of metaphors of a barren field, and a tree without fruit serves to reinforce the sterility of the woman. Laxmi proves these theories wrong when she delivers a baby boy; and her first reaction after looking at the baby is that she has now regained her lost identity. She proudly tells her husband, “I am Laxmi. Now you will always call me by this name. Sometime ago I had been given another name – baanjh. Now I am a mother. No one will ever call me baanjh again.” To quote Wigde once more, “A woman is considered complete or ‘real’ only when she becomes a mother. She proves her womanhood in this way and feels secure in her marriage because it is believed to bond the marital relationship. As a mother she feels she has accomplished what she was supposed to do as an adult woman” (62).

Laxmi’s sense of satisfaction and contentment, however, is short lived. Lalita delivers a dead baby, and in order to avert the possibility of her death which may arise due to shock, Laxmi is coaxed by her husband to give the child to Lalita. The conversation takes place inside the hospital room and Laxmi’s helplessness is evident in her physical position as well as her emotional state of mind. Laxmi expresses her hurt and anguish for the first time, and speaks to her husband about the ostracism and humiliation she has been forced to undergo. Having borne the insults of people for five years and having been called all sorts of names, Laxmi wants to silence her detractors.

However, the one thing that seems to bother her more than her own humiliation is the suggestion of her husband’s impotency. “People have held you also responsible for my childlessness. I want to answer them back”. She takes complete responsibility for the childlessness, having been conditioned into believing that bearing a child is a woman’s task. The father is absolved of all responsibility towards childbirth and conception. The narrative constructs her as a traditional self-sacrificing woman who is so devoted to her husband that she cannot bear any insult heaped upon him. For the audience, Laxmi, through this gesture, becomes an object of empathy and respect. Like the mythical heroines whose ideals she embodies, she becomes a role model for
women in the audience who can not only identify with her, but can idolize her as well.

She consents to give the child willingly to Lalita, but only once she wants to let everyone know that she has given birth. “I want to hold my head high with pride,” she tells her husband. The statement reveals the intensity of her loss of self-esteem on account of her infertility. The craving is not for a child – whom she is willing to give up to her sister-in-law because she shares an affectionate bond with her, and whom she feels grateful to for enabling her to become a mother in the first place. At one point she claims that Lalita has been lucky for them and has brought happiness into their lives.

More than the child itself, her joy of becoming a mother is based on the fact that she no longer has to carry on the burden of being a barren woman. The child would elevate her status in society, and make her feel like a complete woman. It would earn her the respect she has been deprived of. According to Anne Woollett, “Motherhood [...] confirms women’s female identity and is in this respect central to their sense of themselves. It demonstrates women’s physical and psychological adequacy and, as the producers of the next generation, gives them identifiable social functions” (53).

Laxmi’s dream of being recognized as a mother is shattered when she abides by her husband’s desires and gives up the child to Lalita, announcing that her own baby died during childbirth. The momentary satisfaction that the birth of the child had given her is now taken away, and she must once again tolerate the humiliation inflicted upon her by society. Lalita shares the joy of motherhood with her, and they both raise and nurture the child together. In a song that plays in the background as the two women are shown taking care of the child’s needs, the child is referred to as Krishna. Through the words “we are two mothers of the same child”, the song raises the question of the identities of the biological and foster mothers, adding that it is best to leave the question unanswered.
When Manalekha arrives at their house and sees Laxmi breastfeeding the child, she commences her insinuations yet again, and addresses her daughter: “For so many years this woman remained barren. When she gave birth to a child, the child died. This female snake has swallowed her own child. Now your child will also die because her evil eye has been cast upon your child. She is feeding the child poison in the form of milk”.

When the child becomes sick and is diagnosed as suffering from pneumonia, Laxmi begins to start believing Manalekha. The child contracts pneumonia because she had given him a bath, and the child was too young to be bathed. Vijay’s questioning of her action, and Manalekha’s prognosis that the child would get fever, vomit blood and eventually die, leads her to self-blame. She curses herself and begins to believe that she is indeed accursed.

The constant repetition of various curses and accusations that have been hurled at her are stored in the subconscious mind. When the child begins to show signs of deterioration, the accusations which have by now been internalized, resurface and come into conflict with the conscious mind. Laxmi is in a state of emotional turmoil and depression, and actually begins to believe in the possibility of these accusations being true. This self-doubt is momentary, but lasts until the child is cured. Laxmi’s very questioning of her own identity as an accursed woman who may kill her own child is an evidence of the dangers of internalization of a particular ideology.

Laxmi is constantly portrayed as a victim trapped in a situation, which has been created for her by a society that dooms a childless woman. Ultimately she is rid of the curse of being barren when the truth about the birth of the child is revealed. However, it does not compensate for the trauma she has been made to go through. The film explores the theme of infertility from the point of view of the barren woman, by providing an insight into her anguish and suffering, and also offers a glimpse of the views of society which metes out such injustices to infertile women.
3.1.3 David Dhawan’s Gharwali Baharwali

David Dhawan’s film *Gharwali Baharwali* (1998) uses the comic form to deal with the issue of infertility. The deliberate choice of comedy which is characteristic of Dhawan’s films seems to render the issue of infertility insignificant. Yet, the film makes statements that reflect contempt of infertility and also offers a ‘solution’ to the problem in the form of remarriage.

The film begins with the introduction of the characters, Arun (Anil Kapoor) and Kajal (Raveena Tandon), who have been married for three years, but do not have any children. Arun’s father, played by Kader Khan, is impatient to have a grandchild, and urges his son to get married again. “If a woman can’t become a mother,” he states emphatically, “she has no right to remain married”. The problem with Kajal is that she can’t give him the joy of grandchildren, and she can’t give an heir to the family. The affluence of the family is depicted through the luxurious and palatial house in which the family lives – which indicates clearly that there is a huge property to be inherited. Anjali Wigde had stated, “The system of patriarchal descent, patriarchal residence (residence with or near the patrilineal relatives of the husband), property inheritance, lineage and caste are responsible for the extreme importance given to fertility in Indian society” (57).

Moreover, the other issue which needs to be considered is that of lighting of the funeral pyre of the father. Arun’s father addresses this issue as well. Arun will light his funeral pyre, he points out. “But then who will light Arun’s?” The importance of the funeral rites being performed by the son is reiterated frequently in Hindu scriptures. The belief that unless the son lights the funeral pyre, he cannot hope to go to heaven or attain salvation, is the cause of much agony in families which do not produce sons. Sandhya Kaul (1996) quotes the relevant scripture which states, “*pum nam karam tradyate iti patrah*”. She adds, “The mythological belief is that men are sent to hell for the crime of not having sons; they have been believed to have suffered age-long agonies till they were saved by miracles” (57).
The fear of his son not attaining salvation worries Arun's father and he demands an heir to the family. The couple visits a doctor, and it is discovered that Kajal can never become a mother. Arun, who loves Kajal immensely and does not want to hurt her or remarry, decides to take the 'blame' of infertility upon himself, and does not reveal the truth to her. This act of self-sacrifice and his caring attitude towards his wife elevates his status for the viewers of the film, who would perceive him as a selfless and likeable character. It is significant that he never blames Kajal of being incapable of producing a child, and that he accepts his predicament unquestioningly.

When Arun's father discovers the secret, however, that it is not his son but his daughter-in-law who cannot bear children, he rakes up the issue of remarriage yet again. It is interesting to note that he had remained silent so long as he believed that his son was impotent. The fact that his daughter-in-law would never be able to become a mother because of her husband's impotency did not bother him, and nor did he show any concern or support for her future -- or suggest that she marry another man. His silence on the issue reflects the hypocrisy and double standards of a society where the man's emotions and needs take precedence over the woman's.

Kajal's own desire or need for motherhood is suppressed. Believing that her husband needs medical assistance in order to produce children, she remains supportive of him and does not express her disappointment at being unable to become a mother. Kajal is portrayed as the typical Indian woman and is reminiscent of figures from Hindu mythology who remain devoted to their husbands despite all adversities that they are made to face. The film, in fact, does not capture Kajal's agony or trauma at all, focusing on the emotions of the male characters instead. Like many other Hindi films which are hero-oriented, the focus remains on the actions of the hero, while the woman becomes an ornamental object whose sole purpose of existence is to allow the hero to emerge 'heroic'.

To revert back to the story, Arun's father, adamant on becoming a grandfather, brings together a group of women and urges them to woo his son. He offers a handsome
reward to the woman who can woo Arun, including a flat and a huge sum of money. This scene again uses comedy, even farce, to reinforce and justify a second marriage if the wife is infertile. The use of comedy seems to relieve the tension that is the backdrop and cause of such a decision. Since his son refuses to accept his decision, he resorts to conniving ways and means to ensure that his demands are met.

He claims that he had never objected to Arun’s marriage with Kajal (implying that as a father, he had the right to do so), and had not even sought information about her. However, he will not tolerate her if she cannot produce a child. When Arun retorts by telling him that he should be ashamed of himself, he responds, “You should be ashamed that you can’t even give me a grandchild to make me happy”. The comment seems to suggest that Arun has failed in his filial duty as a son and is depriving his father of the joy and happiness that a grandchild would bring him. Arun’s own happiness and desires seem to be secondary to those of his father.

When all other methods fail, the father threatens to kill himself if Arun refuses to comply with his wishes. Arun has hitherto been trying in vain to convince his father to change his mind, but has failed. He has remained firm in his refusal to remarry but the threat given by his father forces him to change his mind. The father’s life appears to be more important than the happiness of his wife at this point of time, and he accepts his father’s decision, and agrees to marry again.

The narrative of the film then allows for an unintentional second marriage because of a twist in the story. Arun goes to Nepal with his friend Jumbo, where he becomes a victim of circumstances due to the mistake made by Jumbo and the rigid laws of Nepal. He ends up marrying Manisha (Rambha) who is the epitome of virtue and self-sacrifice, and who earns Arun’s respect and compassion by her sheer simplicity, ‘innocence’ and ‘devotion’. Arun is once again depicted as a righteous man who would not want to hurt anyone intentionally. The narrative does not at any point hold him responsible for the turn of events. It is the events themselves that determine the story, and not the characters. Hence, the sympathy of the audience is once again
veered towards Arun, who seems to be helplessly finding his way through a confusing maze.

Ironically, when Arun returns home, hoping that his father would be pleased with the turn of events, he is shocked to discover that his father has developed a close bond with Kajal. The father now states that having discovered the greatness of Kajal, he would never allow his son to marry another woman. This transformation places Arun in a dilemma that he is unable to handle.

Meanwhile, Manisha becomes pregnant and offers to give up her child for Kajal, who consequently unknowingly adopts her stepson. Adoption in this case seems to be a perfect solution since it allows Arun’s son (the inheritor of the property, and the bearer of Arun’s genes) to enter the household in a legitimate manner, and hence, no objection is raised to Kajal’s desire to adopt a child. It is a unanimous decision which brings happiness to the entire household. Arun, who knows the truth, feels guilty about his injustice to Manisha, but is powerless. When his father learns the truth, however, he insists on bringing Manisha back from Nepal. She has made Arun a father, given him a grandson, and given the family an heir. She deserves love and respect which he proceeds to offer her. Manisha, who had hitherto been neglected by the family and been pushed into oblivion, now witnesses elevation in her status because she is a mother.

Sudhir Kakar discusses the change in the status of an Indian woman once she becomes a mother:

For an Indian woman, imminent motherhood is not only the personal fulfillment of an old wish and the biological consummation of a lifelong promise, but an event in which culture confirms her status as a renewer of the race and extends to her the respect and consideration which were not accorded to her as a mere wife. It is not surprising that this dramatic improvement in her social relations and status within the family, the resolution of her emotional conflicts and the discovery of a way of organizing her future life around the core of motherliness tend to be experienced unconsciously as a gift from the child growing within her. The unborn child is perceived as her
saviour, instrumental in winning for its mother the love and acceptance of those around her, a theme which recurs in many legends and tales. (79)

Unfortunately, Manisha receives this deliverance and acceptance not during her pregnancy as Kakar suggests, but years after the birth of her child – only after the identity of the child has been revealed to Arun’s father. The child (significantly a male child) is indeed her saviour, for he is indirectly responsible for her entry into the household – a privilege she had been denied previously.

Kajal finds it difficult to understand and accept the undue attention being showered on Manisha (who is brought to the house as a maid servant in order to protect the secret of her identity from Kajal). When she finally learns the truth, she first reacts by an indirect accusation to Arun for having remarried. She then states that having been under the impression all along that it was he who could not father a child, she had always remained supportive of him. Her assertiveness, however, ends with this statement.

The next shot shows Arun leaving for his grandmother’s house in despair (an escapist decision since he cannot deal with the complex turn of events and holds himself responsible for hurting all those whom he loves), only to find both his wives together sharing a harmonious and amicable relationship. Kajal must bear the consequences of her infertility and accept the second wife of her husband, albeit smilingly. She must be grateful for her husband’s love for her, which had prevented him from proactively seeking another partner. Another man in a similar situation may have abandoned her. The fact that he took another wife happens to be a mere ‘coincidence’.

The discourse does not touch upon the legal complications involved in a man committing bigamy despite the fact that the film is clearly set in a post-colonial modern India in a Hindu family. The law does not permit a man to remarry without divorcing the first wife, and bigamy is punishable under sections 494 and 495 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (45 of 1860) of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955. The
narrative structure of the story and the repeated coincidences justify the events that take place. Moreover, the light hearted comedy further neutralizes the strong ideological statements that the film makes. The justification of bigamy because of the barrenness of the first wife is understated and subtle – and therein lies the danger of internalization of such values.

3.1.4 Githa Hariharan’s The Thousand Faces of Night

Githa Hariharan’s novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) won her the Commonwealth Writer’s Prize for ‘Best First Book’. The novel focuses on the lives of three women, belonging to three different generations who share experiences that are very different from each other, and are yet linked together because of the one common factor that binds them – their gender.

The novel depicts through a flashback the life of the old housekeeper Mayamama who works in the house of the protagonist Devi. Her horoscope reflected that she was destined to have sons who would take care of her in her old age. Yet, she failed to conceive even ten years after her marriage. Through these ten years she became a victim of all kinds of ill-treatment by her mother-in-law. Mayamma talks about her mother-in-law’s hostility and the punishment meted out to her for being sterile: “She tore my new saris and gave me yesterday’s rice to eat. What is the use of feeding a barren woman?” (112)

The word ‘use’ transforms the woman into a breeding machine which need not be maintained if it fails to achieve the function for which it is intended. Just as a cow is fed so that it will produce milk, or a goat that is fed before being taken to the altar for being sacrificed, so also is the woman of the house given food to eat in order that she will produce offspring. As Malvika Kaul had rightly pointed out in her article “When Fertility Becomes a Killer” (1999), “A girl is always a potential mother. She is even fed to be a mother” (10). Indeed such is the case with Maya, whose mother-in-law would restrict her diet on a regular basis: “No, no, Maya. No rice for you today. It’s Friday. No rice today, no vegetables tomorrow, no tamarind the day after. Stop
thinking of food, daughter-in-law; think of your womb. Think of your empty, rotting womb and pray” (114).

The ill treatment is not restricted to mere deprivation of food alone. It is harsh and excruciatingly painful. “She pulled up my sari roughly, just as her son did every night, and smeared the burning red, freshly-ground spices into my barrenness. I burned, my thighs clamped together as I felt the devouring fire cling to my entrails” (113). The level of torture continues even as Mayamma remains silent and bears the brunt of her misfortune silently: “The next time it was my breast. Cut the right one open, here, take this blade. Take the silver cup with the blood from your breast and bathe the lingam” (113). The breast, like the vagina, is a symbol of fertility, representing femininity and sexuality. Both these reproductive organs, associated with motherhood, are punished and made to suffer for their inability to fulfill their respective functions – the vagina for refusing to accept the male sperm, and the breast for not producing milk for a child. Mahashweta Devi had also used the symbol of breast for motherhood in her story “The Breast Giver” (2002) which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. Ironically, where the female organs are put through a painful ordeal, the male organ is to be worshipped. In fact, ‘the blood from the breast’ is to be used to bathe the ‘lingam’. The lingam is a phallic symbol and is associated with Lord Shiva.

Mayamma suffers not only on account of her mother-in-law’s ill treatment, but is deprived of affection even from her husband who treats her as an object of sexual gratification and an instrument for breeding: “He snorted like an angry bull. He pushed my sari aside even before my head touched the pillow. I was a silly little girl then, his grunting frightened me. If I turned away to sleep, he held my hair tightly with one hand and hit me with the other” (118). The conjugal right of the man over his wife is clearly taken for granted, and she does not have the right to refuse him. She must comply with his desires, even if it is against her wishes.
Mayamma eventually conceives after ten years, but the baby dies at childbirth. She describes the reaction of the doctor and her mother-in-law when she screams with pain:

The oily, pock-marked village doctor, his hand still dripping with my blood, looked shifty. A woman must learn to bear some pain, he mumbled. What can I do about the sins of your previous birth? But my mother-in-law was far more sure of herself. She slapped my cheeks hard, first this then the other. Her fists pummeled my breasts and my still swollen stomach till they had to pull her off my cowering, bleeding body. She shouted, in a rage mixed with fear. ‘Do you need any more proof that this is not a woman? The barren witch has killed my grandson, and she lies there asking me why!’ (Prelude)

The reactions of the two individuals point to two different strands of perception about infertility. The first, reflected in the statement of the doctor, suggests that infertility is the result of a sin committed in a previous birth. The concept of reincarnation and karma are central to Hindu philosophy, which decrees that an individual’s status in his next birth will be determined by his deeds and actions in the present birth. Hence, a sinner may be punished by being born infertile in the next birth.

Moreover, the belief that an individual pays for his/her sons is reiterated in Christian myths as well. Jan Rehner cites the example of the Judeo Christian story of Rachel and Jacob in *Infertility – Old Myths, New Meanings* (1989) to explicate the phenomenon. Rachel, Rehner argues, is barren supposedly because she has taken away her sister’s husband. Rehner perceives Rachel’s infertility as a punishment for her sins. “This story perpetuates demoralizing myths about infertility; first, that a woman’s inability to conceive is a judgment, a retribution for some sin or flaw or unworthiness. Moreover, it is the woman’s fault. Children are blessings from heaven; barrenness is a curse” (25). She adds later, “Infertility has even been conceptualized as nature’s way of preventing the psychologically inadequate from reproducing” (29).

Indeed, women who are unable to reproduce are considered unfeminine, abnormal and strange. Motherhood confirms a woman’s female identity and to quote Anne
Woollett (1991), “It demonstrates women’s physical and psychological adequacy, and as the producers of the next generation, gives them, identifiable social functions” (53). This leads to the comment made by Mayamma’s mother-in-law who declares with great confidence that she is not a woman, but a ‘witch’ who has ‘killed’ her grandson. Woollett suggests, “Childless women are believed to reject or to fail to reach the ultimate and proper goal for all woman, and hence must be mad, inadequate or somehow at odds with themselves and society” (60).

The association of a childless woman with a witch is common in many societies across the world. Feminist critic Adrienne Rich comments in Of Woman Born (1977):

Throughout history, the ‘childless’ woman has been regarded (with certain specific exceptions such as the cloistered nun or the temple virgin) as a failed woman, unable to speak for the rest of her sex, and omitted from the hypocritical and palliative reverence accorded to the mother. Childless women have been burned as witches, presented as lesbians, have been refused the right to adopt children because they were unmarried. (251)

A woman who cannot give birth is thus an outcaste in society. It is significant that while motherhood is exalted and the fertility of a woman is glorified, menstruation, which marks the beginning of fertility for a woman, is regarded with contempt. Menstruation turns a girl into a woman, enabling her to fulfill her reproductive functions – to become a mother. It is the symbol of her ‘femininity’. Yet, a menstruating woman is considered unclean and impure in most religions.

Jasbir Jain comments in Writing Women Across Cultures (2002):

There is fear of female blood right through myth and religion. The exclusion of women from priesthood, and from social interaction during menstruation, the centering of creative energy towards the fulfillment of male sexuality are all symbolic of male control. The flow of female blood has traditionally been viewed as a source of pollution for which women are made to feel guilty. It is perceived as a failure to control the body, as an inability of the menstrual blood to turn into semen; it also indicates a failure to conceive. (14)
Mayamma recalls the time she attained puberty, and happened to be in a temple. She recollects her own feelings as well as the reaction of the priest at the temple. “The blood that flowed down my bare leg, hot and sticky, that afternoon when I played in the temple. The hairy priest with a white flesh, my heart overflowing with something like pride. Go home, he hissed, and before I could turn around to run, his heavy hand marked my cheek with a stinging slap. Hussy that I was, I had stained the purity of the temple with my gushing womanhood” (115).

It is a common belief that a menstruating woman would render a holy place impure by her blood, and hence in many religions including Hinduism and Islam, menstruating women are not permitted to enter a place of worship. In many cultures even today, the menstruating woman is secluded and isolated, and is not allowed to touch objects in the house or enter the kitchen.

The novel thus points to the irony of a situation where motherhood is revered, but menstruation regarded with contempt and disgust. It points to the atrocities inflicted upon a woman and her body for failing to conceive, and also comments on the helplessness of the victim who has no choice but to bear these atrocities, being dependent upon her husband’s family for a living.

3.1.5 Indira Goswami’s The Offspring

Indira Goswami’s short story “The Offspring” (1999) presents the rare male perspective on the issue of childlessness. The story revolves around Pitambar Mahajan, a middle-aged man, who belongs to a low caste and does not have an offspring. His first wife had expired, and hoping to have a child, he had brought home a second wife. But she was suffering from rheumatism, and was unable to bear him a child.

The story begins with Pitambar staring intently, and perhaps enviously at a young boy when he is interrupted by the village priest Krishnakanta, “You have no child to call
your own! Why do you devour that child with envious eyes?" (56) The statement reflects the preoccupation of Pitambar with his childlessness and his recognition of the ageing process which would soon render him incapable of fathering a child since he was already in his early 50's. The use of the word 'devour' is also significant since it indicates his animal-like obsession with the thought of having a child. It also points to the helplessness of a man who can do little to alleviate the situation he is in.

The priest goes on to inquire about the health of Pitambar's wife, and on being told that she is far from recovery, he comments, "So there is no hope of an issue, is there? Very sad! There will be no one to continue your family line" (156). Interviews with various people in sociological research has revealed that one of the primary reasons couples want to have children is to continue the family line. And for Pitambar, it becomes a growing obsession. "He was consumed by the fear of dying without an issue to continue his family line. This gnawing fear was whetted when people, like the priest, constantly reminded him of this, rubbing salt in his wound" (59).

Jan Rehner cites Dianne and Peter Houghton who refer to "visualizing yourself as part of a family tree that grows no branches" as "the contemplation of genetic death" (57). She goes on to say, "For many infertile women, genetic death represents not only a loss of influence over the future, but also an alienation from their past, the loss of a sense of continuity" (57). In this case, it is not a woman, but rather a man who is concerned about his genetic death.

While there are people like the priest who remind him of his genetic death, there are others who do so indirectly. Moreover, the preoccupation reaches a stage where Pitambar imagines his tenants, who have come to bring him his share of rice grown on his land, mocking him: "Ah! You don't have children. All your granaries are overflowing with paddy. Who will eat it all? And you are growing old. Now is the time to worship God and offer charity and alms, they seemed to say" (63).
The priest, who has been haunting him with his taunts, now offers him a solution. He suggests that Pitambar beget a child through Damayanti, the Brahmin widow of a young priest from Satra, who is well known in the village for her sexual exploits and consequent pregnancies and abortions. Pitambar, already attracted towards the widow, agrees without any consideration for his wife, for having a child has become his primary concern. As Wigde points out, “In most societies including India, men need to have children to have heirs and to prove their masculinity” (61).

Pitambar’s ‘superior’ position as a man, however, conflicts with his ‘inferior’ caste. Hence, when this proposal is sent to Damayanti, she is outraged: “That Pariah! How dare he send this proposal to me! Doesn’t he know that I am from the Jajamani bamun caste and he, a vermin, is a low caste Mahajan?” (64) She gives in when she is offered a legal marital arrangement, money; as well as peace and happiness which will supposedly ensue after marriage. Having convinced her to marry Pitambar, the priest comments that “her womb is empty now” (64). The woman becomes a commodity to be used for procreation, and the womb is reduced to a mere vessel for carrying the baby.

Meanwhile, there is no consideration for Pitambar’s ailing wife who is in a pitiable condition – perceptive and aware of what is happening around her, and yet unable to protest against the injustice. “The fire in her eyes had gone out, only the ashes remained” (63). When she stares at her husband as he removes money from a wooden box that contains their valuables and savings, he threatens to scoop out her eyes. Krishnakanta, who happens to be present at the time advises him, “Look, if she stares too much, give her a dose of opium. But she is not quarrelsome. She probably feels deeply guilty for not bearing you a child” (65).

The woman, having failed in her duty as a child bearer had become redundant. She is dismissed easily through a dose of opium, and her silent stare (which may easily stem from anger and rage) is interpreted as ‘guilt’ for her infertility. Guilt is an emotion that the priest takes easily for granted – an emotion that seems to be natural and
understandable given the circumstances. Since the wife is unable to express herself, the presumption, which becomes a convenient justification for Pitambar, is accepted without any qualms.

Pitambar’s treatment of his wife is callous and ruthless. When confronted with the “unblinking gaze of the sick woman,” he growls, “You barren bitch! Why are you staring at me like that?” (69) Beneath this aggressive exterior may lie a feeling of guilt in Pitambar himself, which resurfaces when his wife looks at him. His wife’s face, though expressionless, seems to be suggestive of helplessness and resignation. It is perhaps the recognition of his unfairness to his wife that leads him to project himself as an assertive and strong man.

Meanwhile Pitambar’s dreams of becoming a father seem to be coming true when he is told that Damayanti is carrying his child. His joys know no bounds: “Was it really true? Could it be his own, his very own child in that woman’s womb? But then, it must be true! This bamun probably would not lie. It really is my child” (68). He visualizes the future of his child: “The long golden thread of his family lineage appeared to pull them forward to a glorious future. He saw both father and son fading into a bright light where heaven and earth fused together in the distant horizon” (69). It is taken for granted that the child is male – because only a male child could be an heir to his land.

However, the excitement that Mahajan experiences also has a shadow of doubt, uncertainty and insecurity about it. Although traditionally the father has complete control over his child, in this case, the caste issue reverses the tables. Pitambar kneels at the feet of the priest saying, “Please, Bapu! Don’t let my hopes be shattered. You know my background. My forefathers were brave warriors. They fought the Burmese invaders. You know that. If this lineage is sapped, if there is no son to carry on, what tortures my soul will go through, only this doomed sufferer knows! And now this seductive sorceress holds my life in her fist” (68).
Ironically his worst fears come true. Exercising control over the unborn child, Damayanti destroys it, refusing to carry the seed of a low caste. The priest blames the inauspicious star under which Pitambar’s first wife had died. Pitambar, however is shattered, and is unable to digest the news. Damayanti is woken up one night by the sounds of someone digging the ground: “He was digging with single minded determination. Gradually, the tempo of the digging increased. The Mahajan’s whole body and face assumed a terrible, violent aspect. He dug and clawed the earth frantically, in a frenzy” (72). The use of imagery and words like ‘violent’, ‘dug’, clawed’ and ‘in frenzy’ seem to reduce Mahajan to a savage with an animal like instinct. Goswami had also suggested earlier that he was ‘devouring’ a child with his envious eyes. These words evoke the image of a hungry lion waiting for his prey, and becoming wild when the prey escapes.

Damayanti reproaches Mahajan, “What will you get there? Yes, I have buried it. It was a boy. But he is just a lump of flesh, blood and earth! Stop it, stop the digging” (72). The indifferent detachment of Damayanti is clear in her referral to the child as a ‘lump of flesh, blood and earth’. The writer defamiliarizes the notion of the maternal instinct which has connotations of a bond between the unborn child and its mother – shifting the bond to the father instead. There is yet again a reversal of traditional roles and conceptions of ‘masculinity’ which is associated with being rational and ‘femininity’ which supposedly denotes ‘emotionality’. Mahajan responds to Damayanti’s ‘emotion-less’ comment stating, “I’ll touch that flesh with these hands of mine. He was the scion of my lineage, a part of my flesh and blood! I will touch him” (72).

Damayanti’s act of killing her unborn child is a case of maternal feticide, which would conventionally be regarded as a heinous deed. Susan Sage Heinzelman discusses the concept of maternal infanticide in “Going Somewhere: Maternal Infanticide and the Ethics of Judgment” (1988). According to Heinzelman, “Maternal infanticide has always been represented as an unnatural crime that is beyond comprehension; like witchcraft, with which it is often connected, it is the crimen
exemplum, the sure sign of Satan in the world, the work of hidden and unknowable forces" (175). She claims that there is a difference between the murder of a child by a father and that by a mother. While the murder of a child by the father may be perceived as imaginable and is even perceived as being within the rights of the father, "maternal infanticide is frequently employed to summon up images of a radical social malaise" (176).

Heinzelman examines several narratives that deal with issues like infanticide, and comments on the representation of the 'bad' mother who murders her own child:

[...] infanticide is frequently represented as the prototype of uncivilized behaviour, consistent with an ancient narrative about women, their irrationality and violence. The mother is demonized not only for the horror provoked by her individual actions, but as the representative of the principle of evil, the personification of all that must be cut out from the body politic. In this reductive narrative... the murdering mother embodies all that threatens civilization and apparently nothing short of a re-birth into a new polity, with new parentage, can relieve that threat. (183)

In the story, however, Goswami does not project Damayanti as an 'evil' woman, and refuses to make a judgment on Damayanti's action of murdering her unborn child, leaving it to the reader to make an interpretation of the act.

The story presents an interesting inversion of the male-female stereotype and their responses to a given situation. Through the character of Pitambar, Goswami delves into the psyche of a man consumed by the fear of the end of a lineage, who is willing to resort to any means to find a solution to his predicament. The character of Damayanti reflects the empowerment of a woman due to her superior caste - an empowerment which, despite her gender and status as a widow, allows her to exercise and assert control over her body. It further allows the author to deal with the issue of maternal feticide which is presented to the reader not as a monstrous act, but as the right of a woman to decide whether or not to give birth. The story also portrays the helplessness of Pitambar's wife whose silence is suggestive of her disapproval of her husband's actions, and yet her inability to fight against her husband and society.
3.1.6 Manju Kapur's Home

Commonwealth Writers' Prize winner of 1998, Manju Kapur tackles the issue of infertility in her recent novel *Home* (2006). Revolving around the lives of two sisters, the novel establishes their identity as infertile women in its very first sentence: “Mrs. Sona Lal and Mrs. Rupa Gupta, sisters both, were childless. One was rich, the other poor, one the eldest daughter-in-law of a cloth-shop owner, the other the wife of an educated, badly paid government servant” (2). The introduction seems to suggest that infertility is the one common factor that the sisters share, an exception to the rest of their lives which are starkly contrasted by their financial and social status.

It is precisely this difference in the social status that leads both women (and their husbands) to perceive infertility differently. While Rupa accepts her infertile status as her destiny, Sona longs and strives desperately for a child. Rupa’s family is embroiled in a legal court case with a tenant which has been draining their financial resources, besides causing them mental agony. Rupa tells her sister, “We are cursed, Didi, what to do? It is our fate. Perhaps it is just as well we don’t have children, that man will trouble us life after life” (2).

Her husband, Prem Nath, too has accepted her condition and Rupa proudly says that he “does not hanker after children, he says his sister has enough, he helps with their education, his heart is as big as the sky” (25). It is significant that no medical test has been conducted on either couple and the cause of infertility has not been diagnosed. It is assumed that the problem lies with the woman, and Rupa is thus grateful to her husband for having accepted her unconditionally: “Her husband was a decent man, never throwing her barrenness in her face” (39).

Unlike the ‘traditional Indian male’ who craves for children to carry on his lineage and the name of his family, Prem Nath is different and has ideas which are considered philosophical by his family members. “He did not regret not having children. Part of his capacity to think, felt his admiring wife, was reflected in his stoicism. To want
children was another word for I, me, mine. It was easier to be free without such attachments. Besides, India had enough children (69).” Prem Nath is juxtaposed with the other male characters, and seems to be an exception because unlike the others, he is learned and seems to exhibit an interest in books. The male members of Sona’s family, in contrast, are traders with no interest in education, and no individuality in thoughts or ideas, having become accustomed to following traditions without questioning them.

Rupa seems to be fortunate to be blessed with a husband who does not desire children. Her infertility, in fact, gives her an opportunity to embark upon a career, and enables her to make money by selling pickles and chutneys. It has been suggested in the socio-psychological theories discussed in Chapter One that in the case of men, their inability to reproduce is compensated by their desire to ‘produce’ in other areas, and that they derive satisfaction from the projects that they engage in or develop. In Rupa’s case as well, she experiences pleasure in engaging in paid labour, which not only allows her to contribute financially to the family but also gives her a sense of achievement.

Moreover, she receives support in her endeavours from her family members: “Without children, Rupa had the time to start a little pickle business. Her husband encouraged her, her father-in-law helped her paste on the labels with a trembling hand, her brother-in-law (Sona’s husband) helped her with his contacts among the shopkeepers of Karol Bagh. As long as her products were good, orders were plentiful. Rupa worked hard at her recipes, experimenting with new ones and expanding her repertoire” (17). However, years later Rupa must explain to her niece that the world of paid labour is not a woman’s domain: “[...] women’s work was allowable only in unconventional situations (no children), and that respectability demanded that it be avoided as much as possible” (212).

Needless to say, Rupa does experience pangs of remorse at her own childlessness, especially when her sister eventually conceives after ten long years. However, these
pangs are momentary, and are suppressed easily with support and inputs from her
husband who never expresses any regrets at being childless. Returning home after
Sona’s delivery, Rupa compares her own state with that of her sister, “What did she
have in her home besides one husband and one old father-in-law? Nothing, and with a
dry and barren womb there would continue to be nothing” (38). The feeling of
emptiness bothers Rupa, and what seems to her even more disturbing is that she
would have to deal with the state of emptiness and loneliness throughout her life.

In a conversation after the birth of Sona’s first child, Rupa remarks to her husband,
“Maybe I too will now get... After ten years is quite something. Anything can
happen” (38). Her husband, however, does not share her optimism. “Maybe,” he
said slowly. “But things are all right the way they are.” When Rupa responds by
saying that if they had children, they would look after them in old age, he is skeptical,
“Who knows how children will turn out?” (38) Unlike Rupa, he is not envious of
Sona’s new found maternal status or the social elevation that it would entail in her
family. “We are better the way we are – no giving, no taking, everything neat and
clean” (39). When Rupa pursues the conversation further, he eventually sounds sad,
“What can one do?” Rupa assumes that he is attempting to cover up his real emotions
in order to console her and prevent her from feeling worse: “It must have been
difficult for him to see Sona getting a baby, and nothing from her, thought Rupa”
(39).

Rupa and Prem Nath eventually get an opportunity to experience parenthood, albeit
briefly, when Sona’s daughter Nisha comes to stay with them. Nisha displays signs
of mental unrest after having been sexually abused by her cousin Vicky, and is sent to
her aunt’s house so that she can get over her fears and nightmares. Nisha brings a
complete change in Rupa’s household. “The childless Rupa was now partially
blessed [...] The first night the child was there, three adults hung about her watching
every bite of puri aloo she put into her mouth. After she had eaten, Rupa changed her
clothes, made her brush her teeth and wash her feet put a little cream on her face, and
replaited her oiled hair” (67). Rupa’s husband is as enamoured by the child and Rupa
regrets her inability to have a child of her own when she observes Prem Nath watching Nisha in fascination: “What a father the man would have made! Yet he never made her feel inadequate nor had she experienced the hell her sister had” (67).

Although Prem Nath frequently reminds Rupa that Nisha is a borrowed child who would be returned one day, he himself begins taking an interest in the child’s studies. He introduces her to the world of books, makes inquiries about schools for the child, and is instrumental in having her admitted into a good institution. In fact, Rupa and Prem Nath appear for the parent-teacher interview for admissions in school rather than Nisha’s biological parents. While the issue is never discussed in so many words, Prem Nath and Rupa unofficially become Nisha’s adoptive parents, taking care of her every need. Yet, they are never given the status of adoptive parents, and remain, for all practical purposes, Nisha’s guardians with no legal rights or control over her.

According to the Wikipedia Encyclopedia, adoption “results in the severing of the parental responsibilities and the rights of the biological parents and the placing of those responsibilities and rights onto the adoptive parents” (Adoption). However, by conveniently working out a situation where the ties with her own family are not severed through weekend visits to her parents, and by providing financial assistance in the form of gifts and bearing expenses for Nisha’s education, Sona and her husband ensure that they do not give up their control over their daughter. Hence, even though Rupa and Prem Nath take over all the responsibilities for Nisha’s upbringing, they can never achieve the status of Nisha’s parents.

When Nisha’s grandfather expires, her father Yashpal decides to bring her home after eleven years of having lived with her uncle and aunt. The news is broken to Rupa who cannot even express her feelings to her sister: “‘She is yours, Didi,’ said Rupa, staring hard at her knitting, willing her hands not to slow down, or the tightness in her throat to become a sob” (124). She realizes the insignificance of her own position: “What were an aunt’s rights? Could she say, I won’t give her to you, she is mine” (124). She recalls her husband’s advice: “Her husband was right, advising her not to
lavish so much love on a niece-on-loan. But then her husband was a thinker, he understood the world, she was just a simple woman” (124).

Yet, for Prem Nath, Nisha’s departure is also a blow, having become accustomed to her presence in the house and having developed an attachment for her. Nisha departs from the home of her uncle and aunt “leaving two mourning people in a house that screamed her loss. No noise, no chatter, no singing, no comfort in seeing the girl study, eat, sleep, dress, silent husband and wife with background TV” (124). The couple cannot directly communicate the sense of loss experienced, not even to each other. For years, Rupa and Prem Nath had been accustomed to an empty house with no chatter of children. Nisha’s entry into their lives had changed everything. Yet, having experienced the joys of parenthood briefly, it becomes more difficult to go back to being childless.

Meanwhile the efforts put in by Prem Nath and Rupa seem futile and are not appreciated by Sona when she realizes that her daughter has not been prepared for the real task that is the girl’s domain – looking after the house and managing the kitchen. “Her mother discovered to her horror that, at sixteen, Nisha’s cooking skills were negligible [...] ‘What can Rupa have been thinking of? I assumed she was teaching you everything she knew’ (126). Sona does not think it commendable that her daughter excels in studies: “What does a girl need with studying? Cooking will be useful her entire life” (126).

Sona conveniently rests the blame on Prem Nath’s middle class status and Rupa’s own barrenness for their supposed incapacity for parenting: “No children had produced an excess of love, and a girl who was good for nothing” (126). Sona assumes that the thwarted maternal instinct has led Rupa to shower excessive love on Nisha. In an attempt to compensate for her inability to reproduce, Rupa seems to have pampered and spoilt Nisha completely, leaving her unfit for her real future – marriage. Sona begins to regret her decision of having sent Nisha to live with her sister: “She had made the supreme sacrifice of sending away her own blood for
eleven years, and the woman returned a sub-standard female” (127). It is interesting to note that Sona had not perceived sending Nisha away as a sacrifice earlier – it was in fact a matter of convenience for the family. Now, however, she begins to feel sorry for herself and interprets her decision as a sacrifice in favour of her sister.

Sona’s own situation had been, to an extent, similar to that of her sister. While she had also remained barren for ten years, she had eventually conceived after the entry of an adoptive child into her life who had been imposed upon her much against her own wishes. Numerous cases are cited wherein a couple has a biological child after adopting one. James Gordon, Chairman of the Complementary and Alternative Medicine Policy, and Director of the Center of Mind Body Medicine in Washington, says that he has heard the anecdote of couples conceiving after adopting a child, repeatedly in thirty years as a physician. “You sort of let it go and reach a stage of acceptance, and it gets easier” (Cited in Ianzito).

However, unlike Rupa, Sona had never been complacent about her infertility, and nor had she accepted it as her destiny. Living in a joint family, she had always resented being unable to fulfill what seemed to her to be the basic function of a woman. Her husband, Yashpal, who had fallen in love with her at first sight, remained too enamoured by his wife to ever blame her for her infertility. Unlike Rupa’s husband Prem Nath, however, he did desire children, and expected their life and relationship to improve when the children arrived. He was even hopeful that his mother, who had disapproved of his marriage to Sona, would change her attitude towards her daughter-in-law once she was blessed with grandchildren.

However, Sona’s inability to produce the grandchildren does not become a preoccupation with Yashpal as it does with Sona. Wright (1991) and Greil (1988) suggest that in most cases, among infertile couples, women tend to show higher levels of distress and feelings of incompetence than their male partners (Cited in Coleman and Nonacs). This could possibly be on account of the pressure placed on the women by their family members to produce children who frequently lack awareness
regarding male contribution to infertility, and hold the woman solely responsible if she is unable to reproduce. The inability of a woman to meet the demands of the family members leads her to experience guilt and results in a loss of self-esteem which the man escapes simply because of the comparatively lower pressure that he experiences from those around him. Moreover, the man can occupy himself with work outside the house, while the woman who is confined to the house remains preoccupied with the notion of infertility as she has no form of escape.

Sona blames herself for her infertility, and experiences a loss of self-esteem. She recognizes that although she could not offer any wealth to the family in the form of dowry, they had always known of her financial status and never expected her to come loaded with gifts. “But no children? How could anyone justify that? To blame nature was a poor excuse, she did not even try. She trembled at her future, and lay awake for hours with her adoring husband snoring gently beside her” (14). She is convinced that all her positive qualities do not compensate for her inability to provide an heir to the family: “She was humble, easy to mould, and ready to please. Sona was gold, like her name. But what use was all this if the Banwari Lal blood did not pass on in its expected quantity” (15). According to Dr. Shireen J. Jeejebhoy in “Infertility in India: Priorities for Social Science Research”, in the case of women, “the inability to perform their roles as child bearers and rearers, and the common misconception that infertility is always the shortcoming of the female is observed to take a huge toll on the woman in terms of loss of self-esteem, grief, and feelings of failure.”

On a couple of occasions, in a fit of anger, her mother-in-law expresses her rage against Sona. This anger and resentment has its foundations in her son’s very decision to marry a woman against her wishes. It is aggravated when she observes the constant attention he seems to shower on his wife, and she finally gives vent to her feelings when her own daughter passes away: “What can you know of a mother’s feelings? All you do is enjoy life, no children, no sorrow, only a husband to dance around you” (19).
Based on such occasional comments, Sona develops an inferiority complex, and assumes that the members in her family perceive her as an incomplete woman: “Everyone, she felt, found her defective goods, despite her pale colour, large hazel eyes, small neat nose, red lips, even teeth and perfect skin. How she wished she did not have to live in a joint family! If she and her husband lived separately, she could be happy, like her sister Rupa” (16). She constantly compares her situation to that of her sister, and fiercely envies her sister’s independence, convinced that Rupa “had no one to envy, no one to rub salt in her wounds, no one to keep those wounds bleeding by persistent hurting comments” (17).

To add to Sona’s misery, her younger sister-in-law Sushila, who gets married two years after her, conceives soon after her wedding. Sona’s envy had reached an extent where “she indulged in one wild fantasy, maybe Sushila will not have children, then sadly got rid of it” (13). She imagines the elevation in Sushila’s status in comparison to hers the minute her children would be born. When her sister-in-law eventually gives birth to a son, her “jealousy raced up and down her veins like sharp-pointed needles” (15), though she remains careful to hide her feelings from her husband. When he brings his brother’s child to her to play with, expecting her to be happy at the prospect of a child in the family, she cannot understand his gesture: “Was it men, or the exceptional large-heartedness of her husband?” (15) Like Prem Nath, Yashpal does not grudge his wife her barrenness – and once again, lack of medical evidence allows the families to assume that the problem lies with Sona. This is enhanced by the knowledge of her sister’s infertility.

Sona does not accept her condition as Rupa does, and turns to God, imploring for a child, and following strict rituals to enable her to produce a child:

Every Tuesday she fasted. Previously she would eat fruit and drink milk once during this day, now she converted to a nirjal fast. No water from sun-up to sundown. She slept on the floor, abstained from sex, woke early in the morning, bathed before sunrise. For her puja, she collected fresh white flowers, jasmine or chameli, unfallen, untrodden from the park outside the
Yet, she refuses to seek medical help since she perceives it as demeaning and shameful. When Rupa reminds her that she can afford the best medical care, and questions her avoidance of doctors, Sona “side-stepped the question, not wanting to reveal how humiliating it would be to be seen as a flawed creature, whose body needed expensive medical aid to perform its natural functions.” She refuses to take initiative to seek medical help. “If her family had wanted it, how willingly she would have put herself in the hands of modern medicine, suffered a thousand tests. But strangely her in-laws had never suggested this. Perhaps they wanted to punish her, perhaps they felt she was not worth the money” (25). She is ashamed of her own body for its inability to perform its natural reproductive functions. Perhaps her family members echo her sentiments and would perceive it as embarrassing to seek medical assistance, which explains their lack of initiative for medical investigations. Sona herself is afraid to go secretly for medical tests with Rupa because if “there turned out to be something really wrong with her, she would be doomed to live with this weight on her hopeless heart” (25).

When Sona’s sister-in-law expires, the custody of her son Vicky is conveniently handed over to Sona because she does not have any children of her own: “Sona’s childless situation continued to make her vulnerable. She was considered to have a fund of motherly emotion waiting to pour itself into the orphaned Vicky” (25). Her mother-in-law comments that he has no one else in the world now, adding, “It was your kismet not to have children so you could be a true mother to your nephew” (26). She is told that God has rewarded her devotion and fulfilled her prayers. The family rejoices that “there was something so tangible by which Sona could express her thwarted maternal longings” (27).

Sona, however, does not envisage Vicky as the answer to her prayers: “How can I be his mother? Or make up for anything? If it is in my fate not to have children, it is in his not to have parents. I have to accept that as much as he. How can some dirty
little street boy be forced on to me as my child? I would rather die” (26). She cannot bear the thought of not having her own child, and being forced to treat Vicky as a substitute: “But was this dark, ungainly, silent, sullen child any substitute for the baby that was to still the yearning in her heart, that was to suckle from her breasts, and use her ample flesh to its satisfaction” (27). Unlike Rupa who had readily consented to take care of her sister’s daughter, Sona cannot come to terms with taking care of a relative’s child.

Sona eventually conceives after she visits the shrine of Chitai where she prays for a child. During this visit, which is a pilgrimage cum holiday, Sona experiences a new kind of sexual pleasure: “Sona had not realized how much difference leisure and a change of location could make to a man’s sex drive” (32). The very fact that Sona does not go through any medical treatment for her infertility, that no problem is ever diagnosed nor any solution proffered leads one to question the cause of her infertility. Research has suggested that unexplained infertility could sometimes be caused by stress. While these ideas have been controversial and have been severely attacked and critiqued, they still continue to exist. In an article entitled “Relax to Conceive” (2002), Christina Ianzito cites studies conducted by Sarah Berga, Director of the Division of Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, USA. According to Berga, women who have high levels of cortisol (a stress indicating hormone) stop releasing eggs. Ianzinto comments, “Infertility begets stress, which begets infertility, it seems.”

Research conducted at the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, USA suggests that reduction in anxiety and stress can improve fertility. In fact psychotherapist Barbara Blitzer, based in USA, conducts workshops to reduce stress in order to help couples to conceive (Ianzito). In other parts of the world as well, psychological counseling has been known to help infertile couples. It is possible that Sona’s anxiety has been responsible for her infertility, and that a break from the mundane routine as well as the positive aura of the shrine of Chittai eventually helps her to conceive.
The attitude of the family members changes immediately after the discovery of her conception. While her husband gifts her a gold necklace set, her mother-in-law begins to treat her with affection, and is extremely cautious about her health. Sona, who had grudged the manner in which her mother-in-law had treated her earlier, now basks in the new-found glory that impending motherhood seems to bestow upon her. When Rupa comments on the sudden change in her mother-in-law’s attitude, Sona virtually justifies it by empathizing with her feelings. “Oh, she wanted a grandchild. It is understandable [...] It is the way of the world” (35). The same behaviour had been unacceptable to Sona earlier, and had caused her a great deal of anguish and depression. Now that she has succeeded in achieving her goal and satisfying the wishes of the family members, she can look back upon the taunts of her mother-in-law with not merely tolerance, but even acceptance and understanding.

The birth of Sona’s baby girl removes the stigma of barrenness that has been associated with Sona for a decade, and also conveniently allows Sona to rid herself of the exclusive responsibility of Vicky, which is now shared by the other family members. Becoming a mother herself gives her a right to voice her own opinions, which would have been silenced and ignored earlier: “Motherhood increased the things she could openly say” (44). However, it is with the birth of her son Raju that her status within the household really changes: “That moment on the hospital bed she experienced as the most blessed of her life. The mother of a son, she could join Sushila as a woman who had done her duty to the family, in the way the family understood it. Gone was the disgrace, the resentment, gone with the appearance of little Raju, as dark and plain-featured as his father, but a boy, a boy” (49).

While the birth of the girl breaks the jinx on infertility, the ‘boy’ child still remains essential in order to elevate the status of the woman in the household. As Anjali Wigde suggests, “Women want to have children (sons, in the Indian context) because it brings them power in real terms, and also because, for many, it is the only power base they have, from which they negotiate the terms of their existence” (61). Sona’s
envy of Sushila’s position which had been created with the birth of the sons of the latter, now diminishes, since Sona herself can boast of having produced sons with pride.

Through the lives of the two families, the novel effectively explores the theme of infertility. The complacence of the male characters who do not hold their wives responsible for infertility is revolutionary. It marks a change in the image of the traditional Indian male who is always portrayed as being obsessed with his virility and sexual potency, with an intense desire for offspring who will continue his lineage. By projecting the husbands as understanding and practical, and yet refraining from idealizing them, Kapur presents a new face of the Indian male.

The characters of the sisters also reveal the importance of fertility for the woman. It is significant that Rupa’s self-image is based on her husband’s attitude towards childlessness. Had her husband chided her for being infertile, it is implied that Rupa may have suffered a loss of self-esteem. However, his acceptance of the situation, and encouragement to work allows her to deal with her predicament. It further allows her to engage in productive labour, and earn money to support the family. Yet, given a choice, it is suggested, that she would perhaps be happier in the traditional role of a mother. Her work is simply a substitute for childcare that she has been deprived of. This is also evident in her joy which lasts while her niece stays with her, since it seems to complete her family and give her immense joy and fulfillment.

Sona’s attitude to infertility is also derived from the attitude of others around her. Living in a joint family, she constantly imagines comparisons being made between herself and her sister-in-law. Despite the fact that her husband showers her with love and attention, she perceives her status within the family as being insignificant and her position within the household as insecure. It is only with the birth of her children, especially her son, that she regains her confidence. Fertility thus plays an important role for the women in the novel, and is an integral part of their identities, defining their social status and their self-image as well.
3.2 Overcoming Infertility

The desire for a biological offspring leads childless couples to resort to all kinds of behaviour that can rid them of this curse. Some couples turn to religious and cultural rituals, placing their faith in various superstitions, while others resort to reproductive technologies, which are becoming increasing popular. The third option of adoption is rarely exercised since preference is given to a biological child who will ensure that the genes of the family are passed on from one generation to another.

Various Gods and Goddesses, as well as specific temples and shrines are supposedly associated with fertility and unless prayers are offered to these deities, it may result in serious repercussions like infertility. This is true not only in India, but also in other cultures all over the world. For instance, the Greek God Priapus is known for his sexual and procreative prowess. In India, he has his equivalent in Lord Shiva whose phallus is worshipped as it supposedly symbolizes fertility (Krishnamurti 46). People residing in villages near Kishore Bharti believe in seven goddesses called ‘Maili’ who are responsible for the balances and imbalances of a woman’s menstrual cycle and childbearing. The Goddess Udnav Maili, also called Banjh Maili, is held responsible for causing infertility in women. (Kishore Bharti Group 16).

Just as there are some Gods and Goddesses who may prevent fertility, the infertile couple can also approach several Gods and Goddesses, or visit certain temples and can thus get cured of this problem. The seven Pagodas between Chennai and Masulaipatnam are favoured for answering the prayers of barren women just as the statue of Bhim on the ‘Burning Ghat’ at Benares is known for its blessing of fruitfulness (Kaul 24). The tree worship of the Vat tree under which Savitri is said to have brought her husband back from the throngs of death on Vatapurnima, is connected with fertility (Pandey 196). The Goddess Sasthi is considered to be the presiding deity of children and supposedly grants children and protects them, while women also worship Kali to pray for an offspring (Bhattacharji 51).
In some parts of India, serpent shrines are also worshipped. Serpents have often been associated with fertility. One reason may be that since the serpent could slough its skin, it was believed to possess the power of rejuvenation. Moreover, because the serpent lived under the earth, it was believed to hold the secret of transforming seeds into plants. Not only do women worship serpents for their own fertility and the virility of their husbands, but farmers also worship serpents hoping for a good harvest (Pattanaik).

Certain superstitions and practices related to infertility and its solution also exist in various parts of the country. Certain communities believe that a barren woman will conceive if she wears the sari of a pregnant woman after the performance of a religious ceremony for expectant couples (Kaul 59). In a South Indian village, a ceremony for barren women is very common. The barren woman is first bathed in a village tank and then made to lie prostrate on the village road. The priest, supported by two men, walks on the road, stepping on the back of the woman, holding on his head a tall phallic symbol covered with marigolds (Pandey 197).

Apart from the traditional solutions for infertility, modern science has now developed various reproductive technologies, which can assist infertile couples in producing children. Although the concept of surrogate motherhood seems to be a fairly recent phenomenon, ancient myths in both Christianity and Hinduism cite examples of both surrogate motherhood as well as artificial insemination – without the use of technological invention, of course.

According to the Bible, when Abraham was unable to have children with Sarah, a woman named Hagar became the surrogate mother. A correspondent from Hindustan Times, Indore in an article entitled “First Case of Surrogate Motherhood” (2005) states, “This is a classic example of ovum surrogacy—when the man who would be the biological and social father of the child established physical contact with a woman who would be the biological mother, but not the social mother”.

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A Hindu myth related to the concept of surrogate motherhood can be found in the Bhagvata Purana. According to the myth, Kans, the king of Mathura, in order to avert the prophecy that his sister’s child would be his killer, imprisons his sister Devaki and her husband Vasudeva. He kills six of her children as soon as they are born, but divine intervention prevents him from killing the seventh child. The goddess Yogamaya transfers the fetus from the womb of Devaki to the womb of Rohini, Vasudeva’s second wife. Thus, the child is conceived in one womb, but transferred and incubated in another.

Similarly, there exists an example of artificial insemination in a story related to the birth of Hanuman. Apparently, Lord Shiva spurted semen upon seeing Lord Vishnu in the guise of enchantress Mohini. The semen was collected by the sages and given to wind-God Vayu, who in turn poured it into the ear (which is seen as a symbol for the womb) of Anjani, a monkey. This resulted in the birth of Hanuman, and is evidently a case of plantation of the semen in the womb without intercourse – an idea that has now been popularized in reproductive technologies.

Over the last couple of decades, reproductive technologies have become increasingly popular as they offer a ray of hope and an optimistic approach to the ‘cure’ of infertility. Surrogate motherhood has become a booming business, especially in India where the cost of treatment of infertility, the procedure of In Vitro Fertilization and of hiring the womb is relatively low as compared to other countries, especially in the West. Within India, it remains unaffordable except to the upper and upper middle classes. As Seema Kamdar points out in “The Mother of All Births” (2005), surrogate motherhood has been described as “the ultimate act of outsourcing”. The problem in India arises also on account of the lack of any law which deals with surrogate motherhood. At present, due to the absence of any law regarding surrogacy, the couple adopts the child borne by the surrogate mother (Kamdar). Although the Central Government has made a draft for legalizing surrogate motherhood, and the draft has been ready since July 2002, it has yet to be implemented. Currently, the guidelines offered by the Indian Council for Medical Research are being followed (Cited in Martins).
Once the law is implemented, only married women who are unable to conceive will be able to hire the services of a surrogate mother. The surrogate mother will enter into a contract, and will be compensated for her ‘service’, and the married couple seeking surrogacy will pay for all her expenses related to the pregnancy. However, she will have no claim over the child whatsoever once she has delivered the child. She will not be held responsible in case of death of the child, just as the married couple will not be responsible in case of the death of the surrogate mother. Each case of surrogacy will require a mandatory registration with the authorities of the state in order to prevent misuse of law (Center to Draft Law).

However, apart from the legal complications, religious aspects often need to be considered, and the attitude towards surrogacy varies from one religion to another. While surrogacy is not forbidden to Hindus, Jews and Buddhists, the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Christians do not accept surrogacy since it is contrary to the unity of marriage (Surrogacy). In fact, the Catholic Church also severely critiques Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART), and attacks the idea of donation of the egg or sperm, or the extracorporal union of the husband’s sperm and the wife’s ovum. According to a Vatican document, “From the moral point of view, procreation is deprived of its proper perfection when it is not desired as the fruit of the conjugal act” (Cited in Krishnakumar). The Church encourages adoption, claiming that “there are more children waiting for mothers than there are wombs waiting to be filled” (Cited in Krishnakumar).

Islam, like the Catholic Church, also does not approve surrogacy because pregnancy should be the fruit of a legitimate marriage (Surrogacy). In Egypt, for example, the Al Azhar’s Islamic Research Academy, Islam’s highest religious authority, has issued a fatwa forbidding surrogacy because it is considered un-Islamic and apparently contradicts the Islamic law. (Muslim Academy). However, Islam encourages treatment of infertility through ART, but insists on the purity of genes and heredity.
Islam differs in its approach to adoption from the Catholic Church. The Islamic term for adoption is ‘kafala’ which derives from a word meaning ‘to feed’, and essentially refers to a foster-parent relationship. Islamic rules emphasize that the foster parents do not take over the role of the biological parents, but are merely caretakers of someone else’s child. Although their role is valued, it has its own restrictions. For instance, an adoptive child retains the surname of his biological parents, and does not take the surname of his foster parents. Moreover, the child also inherits from the biological rather than adoptive parents (Adopting a Child in Islam).

Religious considerations apart, reproductive technology brings with it another set of social, psychological and emotional problems. While on the one hand, such technology protects women from social ostracism and isolation, and relieves them of psychological trauma; it also traps them and can prove detrimental to their psyche. Reproductive technologies have come under severe attacks from feminists who have criticized them and regarded them as powerful weapons for controlling women.

This section begins with a study of Bhabani Bhattacharya’s novel Music for Mohini (1952). It then presents a brief analysis of a text already referred to in the previous section, wherein religious offerings are made in order to beget children, namely Kamala Markandya’s Nectar in a Sieve (1955). It then moves ahead five decades, where technology and other forms of begetting children seem to have taken over religious offerings. This is done by examining two cinematic texts in detail which deal with the concept of surrogate motherhood – Chori Chori Chupke Chupke (2001) and Meghna Gulzar’s film Filhaal (2002).

3.2.1 Bhabani Bhattacharya’s Music for Mohini
Bhabani Bhattacharya’s novel Music for Mohini presents a juxtaposition of the city with the country, and a modern value system with traditional superstitious beliefs. The novel revolves around a young girl, Mohini, who undergoes a major transformation when she gets married to a research scholar Jayadev and moves from her hometown Shibpur to the countryside in Behula. Mohini makes the transition
from a vivacious and lively radio singer to the sober mistress of the Big House willingly despite the difficulties it entails. Her husband’s horoscope had decreed an early death which could only be prevented if he would be able to produce a son by the time he was twenty eight. The child’s ‘father-luck’ would save him, and her mother-in-law is therefore very keen for her grandchild to be born early.

Mohini’s mother-in-law expresses her longing for a grandchild barely a month after the wedding, by suggesting that she start making quilts for her baby. “Our ancestors in heaven are joyful when a son is born to the house on earth. The family name will be carried for one more span of life on earth, and at the funeral anniversary of the departed sacrificial water should be poured” (155). When Mohini discovers the truth about her husband’s horoscope her own longing for a child turns into a serious responsibility which is both a source of fear as well as elation: “Out of her would come the means to save her husband; her child, born with the insignia of father-luck, would flout death! Pride and a passionate joy ran through her blood, and she felt a sudden heaviness in her body, as if she were already bearing the supreme gift of life. She was power! She was fate!” (157)

When two years pass, and Mohini has still not conceived, her mother-in-law becomes impatient. “Vow to the goddess of births that you’ll give her a nose-ring set with pearls when she fulfils your wish. If the nose-ring is not enough, then you must give her something more, something of yourself. You’ll cut the skin of your bosom and give her the blood in a lotus-leaf bowl. I, too, shall give my heart’s blood and pray for the gift of a grandson” (217). The goddess of births must therefore be appeased at any cost – and the cost could include the blood of the prospective mother.

While Mohini is aghast at the prospect of such a practice, it is a custom in villages where the villagers have strong faith in the power of gods and goddesses, and are willing to do anything to please them. According to Sandhya Kaul (1996), “Certain deities of the Hindu pantheon are supposed to be susceptible to the prayers of barren women who invoke the desired blessing of fruitfulness” (24). However, the mother is
not merely asking Mohini to pray to the goddess but to give her blood. Mohini’s first reaction is that of horror and rage: “Anger burned in her. What wrong had she done to need such crude penance? She would never submit to this. Never. The mother had been taking too much for granted...” (217)

Yet, the mother has been through her own share of hardships, having become a widow at twenty five, and has sacrificed herself for the sake of her son. In her first year as a widow, she had vowed away her right hand to Siva, in order to beg for protection for her fatherless son. Needless to say, she expects her daughter-in-law to make the same kind of sacrifice for her unborn child, and finds nothing wrong in such practices. The other village women support the mother-in-law. When Mohini discusses her mother-in-law’s views with her friend Meera, she is told that many barren women who make vows to the virgin goddess get ‘cured’ and conceive.

Mohini’s husband, Jayadev, however, does not believe in the science of astrology, and is averse to any form of superstition. When Mohini proposes a second marriage for him in order to enable him to produce a child who will save his life, he replies firmly, “We’re fighting ignorance and superstition, aren’t we? We’re fighting the false clayfoot gods. They’ve had their day and now they must quit... Or else the true gods will elude us.” He adds emphatically, “I tell you, I’m not going to die soon, Mohini, and I don’t need a child whose luck will save me – what a fantastic idea! – from the malice of the stars. Mother makes herself unhappy because of her crazy faith” (220).

There is a clear conflict between the ideas of the mother and son, with the former placing all her faith in god and superstitious beliefs, and the latter insisting on being practical, realistic and modern in thoughts and actions. The conflict is not only between two individuals, but between the pre-independent and post-independent India. While one holds on to its roots and falls back on tradition, the other moves forward to a new era and a new beginning. Mohini, caught between the two schools of thought, is confused, but later hears an inner voice that encourages her to have
courage: “Do not bow down to such insult. You are the New India. The old orthodox ways have been our yoke, have enslaved us. Let us be free” (221).

Yet, Mohini constantly feels the pressure that her mother-in-law seems to place on her. Mohini imagines her saying, “You are the doom of this ancient house” (222). Unable to bear the furtive glances that her mother-in-law seems to be giving her, Mohini gives vent to her frustration one day, “It isn’t what you are thinking, Mother. I am not going to have a baby. I never will” (222). The mother, otherwise an embodiment of serenity and placidity, also loses control over her words for the first time: “What evil destiny made me bring you into this house? Your barrenness will curse it for all time. You will take the life of your husband, you will... you will put an end to the Big House. Those deceptive luck signs – scrape them off your skin with a knife. Do not bear the shame of so much falsehood” (222). The very marriage of Mohini and Jayadev had been based on her horoscope. Mohini had been chosen precisely because she bore the luck signs which would ensure happiness in the Big House. Yet, even after two years, Mohini seems to have failed in her duty of producing an heir for the household.

Mohini realizes that she has been reduced to a baby producing machine, and this idea enrages her even further. “‘I am needed only to bear a son.’ Mohini clenched her hands as the mother’s words rang in her ears, and she cried, ‘Just as well I am barren, just as well I am barren.’ And even as she calmed down, her hands clenched again, and her eyes were bright. ‘I won’t have a son who is to be the limb of the cold heartless Big House.’” While she is furious with the mother for her words, she cannot help but curse her barren body. “What’s wrong with you? This body is smooth and tight, fairer and fuller than in my girlhood. It looks like all the others who have children. Meera, Renu, Bimola – had their first babies within two years after marriage. What’s wrong with you then?” (223).

Mohini has sacrificed all her joys for the Big House and made great efforts to adapt to her new life style and her family, and has always prided in her own malleability.
Now, however, she perceives herself from the point of view of the others around her, and realizes her own inferiority in comparison with the other women in the village who seem to be mocking her:

This was no place for a barren woman. All Behula was pitying her, scorning her. She was the doom of the Big House, the destroyer of an ancient line. Even the peasant women who came to her, they, too... How could she have failed to notice? How could she have been so insensitive? Her odd castle in the air! Like those odd castles of her girlhood fancy. Had she not grown at all then? How could she face the women, preen herself as their teacher? She would be less in their eyes than the least among humankind. (225)

The doom of the Big House comes close to being a reality when Jayadev narrowly escapes death after being bitten by a snake. The horoscope that had prognosticated an early death seems to be coming true. The mother brings up the issue of appeasing the goddess once again, “This is Fate’s ultimate warning. Fate will strike again – to kill. We have one last refuge, one final hope – the Devi in the shrine. We can afford to wait no longer. Tomorrow, early, we’ll leave for the temple” (228). The very fact that Jayadev has managed to survive seems to reinforce the faith that the mother has in astrology, and his experience further increases the sense of panic that the mother feels. The only solution seems to lie in offering blood to the goddess.

Mohini, who had been averse to the idea of such superstitious beliefs earlier, now understands the feelings of the mother. Even if the horoscope were to be proved false and if her husband managed to survive, he would die sonless. The ancestors who were worshipped by their survivors on earth “were no mere shadows but deathless symbols of a spiritual heritage” (230). Mohini is fascinated by the idea: “Was that the inner meaning of your pitripurusha, their true value? Were they symbols of the continuity of culture as the household gods, images in clay, stone, brass, were symbols of God?” (230) The ancestors suddenly seem to hold a new value as they seem to symbolize a cultural lineage which is passed on from one generation to another, thus creating history.
Mohini begins to understand what the grandchild means for the mother, who believes in supreme self-sacrifice for the sake of her family and not merely in duty and compassion: “If necessity pointed to a co-wife, it was your proud privilege, not a punishment, to perform the welcome ceremony for the new bride, waving lit lamps before her face, touching her ears with honey! This much was certain: the mother in the prime of her youth would herself have arranged her husband’s second marriage if fate had made her barren” (230). Mohini realizes that the mother has not only set an example for her as an embodiment of self-sacrifice, but has also offered to give her own blood to the Devi as a source of encouragement for Mohini. The mother epitomizes and embodies the archetype of the self-sacrificing woman who appears in various forms in various Hindu myths, such as that of Sita and Gandhari. Mohini, like other women before her, is expected to follow these mythological role models and revel in her act of sacrifice rather than feel an aversion for the act she is about to perform.

While the mother-in-law is a firm believer in the value of self-sacrifice, her son is the opposite. Since Jayadev would not approve of the act, the journey to the shrine is undertaken in a clandestine manner. However, he learns of his mother’s plan through Sudha who has always harboured strong feelings for Jayadev and, out of jealousy and spite, does not want Mohini’s deep desires to be fulfilled by the goddess. Sudha observes that despite possessing all the coveted luck signs, Mohini has been unable to produce an heir for the family: “It was strange that all the luck signs had not helped the mistress of the House with her fruitless womb. She was not a womanly woman, an abnormal woman who would throw the village into desperation and distress” (233).

Predictably, Jayadev is upset when he learns of his mother’s act, and feels a pang of resentment and anger towards her. “She was responsible. Jayadev felt the blood in his temples. As though he feared to die! As though he must buy his life at the cost of Mohini’s suffering! And to what purpose? That stupid horoscope. That evil power”
He feels guilty that his wife is torturing herself for his sake and sees the confrontation with his mother as inevitable:

The task at hand – the clash with his mother with her iron will and misguided faith – would be difficult. What, he wondered, had happened to the ancient quest of the Hindus, the quest for satyam, sivam, sundaram - Truth, Goodwill and Beauty? The core, the spiritual content had been choked by centuries of evil overgrowth. Misguided faith burned like a great lamp of oil that gave little light but a great deal of smoke. It was this smoke which was pouring over India, this smoke which made the Big House stifling. Jayadev had long known that the conflict between himself and his mother must one day take real shape. It, too, was part of the wider conflict.

Jayadev's views seem to echo those of the writer. Jayadev does not find religion itself problematic – what he finds problematic is the fanaticism associated with it, and the misinterpretation of spirituality which seems to take the nation towards a regressive past rather than a progressive future.

Jayadev manages to reach just in time to prevent his wife from performing an act that to him is heinous. “Mohini mustn’t insult herself. [...] I won’t have it. To appease a cruel goddess in this primitive way!” When his mother confronts him by reminding him that for several years, barren women have given their blood to the Devi, he responds by stating the social responsibility that the family of the Big House has towards the other villagers. “We are not slaves of the stars [...] There is no room in the Big House for crazy beliefs. The village looks to us for ideals and a way of living. The pattern we set is not our private affair; it carries the strongest social sanction” (238).

For the mother, such an act is nothing short of heresy. She rejects her son's modern thoughts, reprimanding him for being 'degenerate' and wondering what sins she has committed in the past to be punished thus. Recognizing the helplessness of her own position, she finally gives in, albeit in despair. She has only one request of her son: “... in your quieter moods, my son, turn your mind to your revered pitri-purusha who dwell not in a dim sky-world but deep within you, seeing all, hearing all, and
saddened now by your decision to end their life which has gone on for a thousand years” (239). Her ideas seem to be based on the Hindu belief in *pitr-runa*, meaning debt to the ancestors, which can only be repaid by fathering male children. Those who fail to repay this debt will go to Put (hell) where they will suffer till eternity. In fact, the very word *putra* (son) in Sanskrit means deliverer from Put. While the *putri* (daughter) is also a deliverer from Put, it is to a lesser extent than the *putra* (Pattanaik).

There is an interesting tale in the Mahabharata, wherein sage Agastya attempts to attain *moksha* or salvation, and departs to the forest leaving behind all materialistic pleasures of life in order to perform austerities. However, he is unable to attain liberation of the soul. One day, he sees a vision of his ancestors who tell him that they are trapped in the land of the dead and cannot escape. In order to help them, he must go back to the material world, and father children which will enable them to be reborn. They will return to the land of the living and will also attain *moksha*. If, however, he fails in his duty, he will go to Put (hell) and suffer till eternity. Agastya returns to his village, fathers children, and returns to the forest only after they have settled down (Pattanaik).

Such myths and beliefs evoke strong faith in the mother, a staunch Hindu and a deeply religious person whose beliefs are rooted in tradition. Needless to say, the mother is deeply shaken by her son’s act, for it symbolizes not merely defiance of his mother, but a defiance of destiny and fate as well. Her despair has reached a stage when she actually contemplates sending Mohini away to her family, and asking Sudha to seduce her son in order to give an heir to the family. She has just begun to implement her plan by proposing it to Sudha when it is discovered that Mohini is three months pregnant. Mohini has known of her pregnancy, had been aware of it even when she had gone to the shrine, but had dared not believe it. “She could bear no more mockery, so she had hidden her secret from everyone, even from herself” (247).
The mother is aghast at her own action and is thankful that the truth of Mohini’s pregnancy was revealed to her before she could implement her plan. She begins to comprehend her son’s thoughts:

His ideas, his point of view, molded by the new spirit in the land, were different from hers and opposed to them, but they were nonetheless, true ideals. Right or wrong, he had honest faith in his set of values, his set of tools for improving life. How could she have misjudged him so completely or think of him debased? In that moment of insight the mother almost understood her son, and through him, the new revolt, the restless spirit of the new dawn. (248)

While the mother’s insight symbolizes an acceptance of the new world with its values and ideals, she does not at any point of time renounce her faith in the goddess. Even when Mohini reveals to her that she had conceived long before their pilgrimage, the mother refuses to deny the Devi’s contribution: “[... ] The Devi has always known your heart’s true desire. You promised her a nose-ring set with pearls, remember? Your will to penance was real; that, too, the Devi knew. The act itself is nothing, a symbolic gesture. The goddess is not duped by the veiled face of things, she looks deeper behind the veil” (249). The revelation of the pregnancy has averted the great tragedy that would have befallen the family had she implemented her strategy, and the mother attributes this to the goddess.

Meanwhile Mohini’s pregnancy finally allows her to come to terms with her own situation, and brightens her life. “At last, there was no discord... Her life was music – the true quest of every woman, her deepest need” (250). Music represents a harmony of all the notes – and in her life the notes are represented by the people in her life including her maternal family, her husband, and the Behula village. This harmony was eluding her until now, for she had been unable to fulfill her duty towards her husband, his mother, their ancestors and the village. Now, however, her life seems blissful and content. The unborn child has made it possible for her to attain harmony and peace of mind that she had been deprived of.
The novel thus explores the psyche of a young girl whose vivacity and jest for life are threatened by her barrenness, and gives an insight into the trauma she experiences as a result of being infertile. It further delves into the issue of superstitious beliefs surrounding infertility and the consequences that a village woman must bear for sterility. The novel clearly rejects these superstitious ideas, pointing to the need for a more rational manner of thinking. Superstition seems to represent regression and is perceived as being detrimental to the progress of the nation which must rid itself of such beliefs if it is to develop and evolve. By allowing Jayadev to intervene and prevent his wife from being insulted by offering her blood to the goddess, and by ensuring that the mother eventually accepts her son’s ideals, the writer seems to suggest a step forward. However, the novel simultaneously also reiterates the importance of fertility for a woman when it allows Mohini to achieve harmony of the mind only after she has conceived. This seems to suggest that complete fulfillment can only be attained in the case of a woman by becoming a mother.

3.2.2 Kamala Markandya’s Nectar in a Sieve

Markandya’s novel Nectar in a Sieve (1955), as discussed earlier, deals with the infertility of both mother and daughter. Rukmani does not conceive for a period of seven years after her first daughter is born. This is a period of severe tension and trauma for Rukmani and the rest of the family – especially since the first-born is a daughter, and having a daughter is as good as being barren. Shoma A Chatterji suggests, “If she fails to produce a son, then she can as well be sterile, though in reality, the husband decides the sex of the baby through his own chromosomal balance. Her upbringing teaches her to blame herself, to wallow in guilt, to feel empty and meaningless” (1988 123).

Rukmani’s mother is also tense about the future of her daughter: “My mother, whenever I paid her a visit, would make me accompany her to a temple, and together we would pray and pray before the deity, imploring for help until we were giddy. But the Gods have other things to do: They cannot attend to the cares of every suppliant who dares to raise his cares to heaven” (18). The concern for the mother is
understandable, especially in the context of the study conducted among the matrilineal Nayars of South India. The study reveals that it is the duty of the “matrilineal kin to attend to the family god of fertility and to the needs of females of the matrilineage to see that they foster progeny in the kin’s group’s best interests. When this responsibility is violated, powerful forms of negative consequences may transpire for all lineage members, in the idiom of curses of family fertility gods” (Cited in Wigde 64).

Rukmani’s mother sees it as her responsibility and strives to ensure that Rukmani gives birth to a son. She does not give up, even when she is suffering from consumption and has become too feeble to even rise from her bed. On her death-bed, despite the suffering and pain she has been undergoing, she beckons Rukmani and places a small stone lingam in her hand. “‘Wear it’, she said, ‘You will yet bear many sons. I see them, and what the dying see will come to pass… be assured, this is no illusion’” (18).

The lingam is a symbol of fertility and as mentioned earlier, is also a phallic symbol. The belief in the powers of the divine reflects the strong religious sentiments of the mother who has faith that the gods will fulfill the wishes of those whose devotion pleases them. The conviction that dreams of dying person come true is yet another superstition that Rukmani also believes. Hence, “I placed even more faith in the charm my mother had given me, wearing it constantly between my breasts” (20). Ultimately, it is not the charm that works, but medical intervention of a British doctor who treats both her and her daughter Ira for infertility, producing positive results. However, the faith in religion and superstition keeps the family optimistic and gives them hope.

3.2.3 Abbas Mustan’s Chori Chori Chupke Chupke

Abbas Mustan’s Chori Chori Chupke Chupke (2001), which deals with the issue of surrogate motherhood, generated a great deal of controversy because of its connections with the underworld, to the extent that some of the issues being dealt
with in the film became overshadowed. The film begins with an interview of well-known industrialist Kailash Nath Malhotra (Amrish Puri), whose only unfulfilled desire is to have a companion— a great-grandson who will be his support and keep his name alive. He emotionally blackmails his grandson Raj (Salman Khan) into getting married only so that he can have an heir who will continue the family line. Raj marries Priya (Rani Mukherjee), an ideal wife and daughter-in-law who impresses the family by stating that love is what binds a family together.

Priya soon conceives, and the family receives the news with jubilation. Kailash Nath, who used to secretly eat sweets despite being a diabetic patient, now gives them up because he has found a desire to live, and takes up physical exercise to remain fit and healthy. Raj is grateful to Priya for the happiness she has brought to the family. Unfortunately, Priya, in her excitement at watching a family cricket match, moves forward as the ball approaches, hits a plant, and falls down. This results in a miscarriage. In order to avert a fatal infection, the doctors remove her ovaries, thus rendering her infertile. The family doctor and friend Dr. Balraj (Prem Chopra) reveals the secret to Raj, and urges him not to break this news to the family since his grandfather, who has already had two heart attacks, would not be able to take this news. Priya overhears the conversation, and both Raj and Priya are devastated.

All conversations in the film up to this point have been geared towards the anticipation of the birth of the great-grandchild of the family, who is automatically assumed to be a male child. There has been constant pressure on Raj and Priya to give the family an heir. When Raj and Priya return home, the pressure is built up again through the comments made by the family members. While Dadaji Kailash Nath says, “Just wait— within a year, this house will resound with the sounds of a child in the house,” Raj’s mother Asha blesses her daughter-in-law that she should have a son. Raj’s maternal aunt tells Priya that miscarriages are common, and cites the example of a friend who bore four children after her first miscarriage.
The familial expectations disturb Priya, who shares her feelings with Raj, “Have you seen the eyes of your family members? There is hope in every eye – that I will give an heir to this family. They will find out at some point. Then, what will happen?” More than her own desire to have a child, Priya seems to be concerned about the family members. Jan Rehner had suggested, “Infertile women often feel they have failed not only their own expectations, but those of others” (35).

Raj suggests that they go abroad for a year, and adopt a child. This option, however, is overruled when Dadaji tells Priya about his dream which brought tears of joy to his eyes: “I fell asleep reading the paper. And I dreamt that I had become a great grandfather. I saw a little child playing in my lap, laughing heartily.” He adds, “Do you know, a dream seen in the morning comes true?”

Priya is unable to deal with the pressure, and asks Raj to get married again. She tells Raj about Dadaji’s dream, “A child just like you was playing in his lap. He doesn’t want anyone else – he wants your blood. How can we give him an adopted child and pass it off as your blood? How can we play with his sentiments? There is a defect in me. I can’t become a mother. But you can become a father”. The option of adoption is rendered unacceptable because of the desire for a biological offspring who shares the genes of the father, if not the mother. Moreover, the genes of the father seem to be more important than the genes of the mother, and need to be passed on to the future progeny.

The very idea of such a thought crossing Priya’s mind and her vocalization of the idea is evidence of her conditioning which teaches her to see herself as a failure and an incomplete person. Anjali Wigde had asserted, “Since a woman is defined by her fertility, she internalizes the motherhood role to the extent that if she is infertile, she feels worthless. Then she proceeds to do all she can to reverse the situation. The experience of infertility/childlessness is usually marked by anxiety and fear, societal pressures to conceive and social stigmatization, and various trials of various treatments” (63).
Priya’s first trial is to convince her husband to remarry, but her suggestion is vetoed when he asks her, “If a similar accident had happened with me, would you have married again?” The portrayal of Raj as a devoted husband who dotes on his wife and remains supportive of her enables him to earn the sympathy and admiration of the audience. Priya comes across an article on surrogate motherhood, and shows it to Raj. When Raj interprets her idea as that of a test-tube baby, she responds, “No. Our family is so well-known that we will not be able to keep the test tube baby a secret. If we can find a girl who will give birth to our child…” Considering the awareness of the technology of In Vitro Fertilization, the justification for choosing a surrogate mother who will sleep with her husband seems absurd. The option of going abroad and having a baby through artificial insemination with the help of a surrogate mother could have been exercised, but instead, Priya suggests that her husband engage in a physical relationship with another woman to have a child who will be ‘his’ blood but not ‘hers’.

Raj reasons with Priya, “If I really wanted to have a child with someone else, I would not have refused to remarry. Why would I speak to you about adoption? It is because I love you very much and don’t want to share this love with anyone else.” In Raj’s case as well as Priya, the decisions reflect an element of self-sacrifice. Raj, knowing how desperately his family wants a biological child, is willing to sacrifice the desires for the family members for the love of his wife. Similarly Priya is willing to sacrifice her husband for the sake of the much-awaited heir to the family: “You get sorrows for free, but you have to pay the price for happiness. For the sake of a child, I am willing to share you with another woman”.

Raj agrees to comply with her desires, and looks for a potential mother for his child. He finally finds Madhubala (Priety Zinta), a prostitute who dances in a bar, wears gaudy clothes, speaks in a crude fashion and appears lewd and vulgar. Raj approaches her in a dignified and polite manner, treating her with courtesy and respect that she has never experienced before. He offers her a sum of ten lakh rupees.
for lending her womb, staying with him for a period of one year, and bearing his child. She is lured into accepting the offer because it seems to offer her a luxurious lifestyle that she has never been exposed to. This is evident in her reaction to the lavish hotel room where Raj stays, and her child-like excitement at watching television on a large television screen.

Images of wealth and a lifestyle so different from her own, combined with Raj’s gentlemanly behavior ensure her readiness to accept the offer without a second thought. Madhu looks at the money and reflects, “Earlier, I used to earn to feed my stomach. Today, my stomach will earn for me.” April Cherry remarks in “Nurturing In The Service of White Culture: Racial Subordination, Gestational Surrogacy, and the Ideology of Motherhood” (2001), “The sexual division of labor in patriarchal capitalism and the ‘feminization of poverty’ ensure that a surrogacy contract will appear financially attractive to working class women, although the payment is very meager for the time involved and the nature of the service. Class questions are also clearly raised” (83). Although in this case, the payment is not very meager, Madhubala’s poverty is certainly exploited for the advantage of Raj, who represents the upper class. His attitude towards her seemingly nullifies this exploitation but later creates emotional problems that Madhu finds herself incapable of dealing with.

Raj gradually tries to transform Madhu and incorporate her into his world in a manner reminiscent of Pygmalion and My Fair Lady. However, it is initially difficult for her to reconcile this new image with her past. She is insulted by the hotel manager and the owner of a shop she visits to buy clothes. Raj avenges her humiliation and ensures that she is treated well and receives the respect she deserves. His attempts to woo her and metamorphose her into a presentable lady are so subtle that she does not even recognize the transition from an uncouth and ribald sex worker into a confident and smart young woman. He does not want to reveal her identity to his wife for fear that she may reject Madhu based on her pre-conceived notions about Madhu’s profession.
Meanwhile, Priya has been informed of the latest developments, and the couple is ready to migrate to Switzerland with Madhu. This is a common practice in the case of surrogate motherhood, since it helps in averting questions by inquisitive relatives, and allows the couple as well as the surrogate mother to maintain secrecy about the birth of the child. Reena Martins reaffirms this in her article “Rent a Womb” (2006), “To fob off embarrassing questions, most women leave their cities or their neighbourhood when they are supposed to be pregnant”. As for the surrogate mothers, Martins states, “While some [...] stay at home till they deliver, others live with the couple seeking a child when the signs of pregnancy become obvious”. In this case, Madhu starts to stay with the couple even before she conceives, and Priya announces her pregnancy only after Madhu’s pregnancy is confirmed.

It is interesting to observe how Priya deliberately creates a situation which is conducive to pregnancy. She sleeps in a separate room (significantly the guest room) while Raj and Madhu sleep in the master bedroom that has memories of the couple’s honeymoon associated with it. When Priya enters their room in the morning, she finds Madhu sprawling on the bed, and Raj sleeping on the sofa. Realizing that Raj’s commitment and love for her will not permit him to initiate a sexual relationship with Madhu, Priya stays away from home during a thunderstorm, and urges Madhu to seduce him by mixing alcohol in his aerated drink.

Raj’s devotion for his wife is evident even in the seduction scene where, after having consumed the drink, he imagines that he is making love to his wife and not Madhu. The camera projects the images of Madhu and Priya one after another in quick succession wearing the same outfit to show the confusion in Raj’s mind. He hesitates when he momentarily recognizes Madhu, and tells her, “I really love my wife”. The act of sexual intercourse with another woman seems to be virtually imposed upon him by his wife, and he appears resistant till the very end. This once again reinforces the image of the “good” and devoted husband.
Priya’s reaction to the discovery of the success of her plan is a mixture of emotions. On the one hand, she is happy that the plan has been successful, but on the other, her face has a pained expression upon the realization of her husband’s infidelity which she has initiated herself. Raj’s face also reflects guilt, which is then replaced by affection for his wife. Madhu conceives, and the family is informed that Priya is pregnant.

The three of them seem to be very happy together until Madhu confronts Raj’s childhood friend and partner Ajay. Recognizing her from a previous meeting before her transformation began, Ajay makes a pass at her, implying incorrectly that Raj has told him about her past. Madhu feels deeply insulted and is devastated by a reminder of her past, which is but a distant memory for her now. She begins to feel like a commodity: “First you gave me so much respect and took me to the skies. Then you dropped me from there. All you wanted was a child – I could have given it to you when I was on the streets. Why did you have to introduce me to your society if you were going to tell your friends that I am a whore?” Although this is not the case in this particular situation, Trevor Allis suggests in “The Moral Implications of Motherhood by Hire” (1997) that the danger of such a depersonalization does exist in the cases of surrogate motherhood: “One [...] treats a woman's womb as a commodity to house the foetus, which can be rented for a few months for a stipulated amount of money. Women are used as human incubators. The relation between the surrogate and the child is commercial rather than emotional.”

Raj, however, does not treat her like a commodity, and that leads to further complications as Madhu starts falling in love with him. Raj protects her from being raped and thrashes Ajay for daring to call her a whore. He gives up a friendship and a business partnership of five hundred crore rupees for her sake: “For her, I will give up all the wealth in the world. Do you know why? Because she is priceless for me”. These words, along with Raj’s caring attitude in helping her recover from the physical and emotional trauma, lead her to fantasize about him as a knight in shining armour. She sees him as the charming prince in the stories told to her by her mother in
childhood, who would come and woo the princess, leading to a happy ending. Her interpretation of Raj’s attention, however, is exaggerated. Although Raj treats her with consideration and care, his love is focused only on Priya. He is grateful to Madhu for what she has done for him, and holds her in high esteem – but does not love her.

She receives love from Raj’s family who turn up at Switzerland unexpectedly. They treat her like a member of the family, giving her the emotional bonding she has never seen before. The attachment keeps growing, and mounts considerably when Madhu is made to sit for the godbharai ceremony (a ceremony conducted for expectant mothers towards the end of their pregnancy) in place of Priya. Raj’s mother reveals the importance of the ceremony to both Madhu and Priya, “The godbharai ceremony is a very special day in the life of a woman, because a woman takes not one but three births. The first is when she comes into the world as someone’s daughter, the second as a wife, and the third as a mother. And this ceremony is conducted before she becomes a mother so that the unborn child gets the blessings of so many people. This ensures that the birth of the child is not a painful one, but one of joy”.

The recognition of the importance of the event, and of motherhood is further reinforced by Dadaji’s words. He addresses her thus, “The woman who is going to give an heir to my family – I bow before you. May your child live long, and just as the sun spreads its light around the world, may your child keep the banner of our family flying high”. Madhu has been treating motherhood as a means of earning money, but the implications of the role of mother and the significance accorded to this role in society are new for her. When the priest spells out the names of all the family members of the unborn child, the last name is that of the mother – and the name of the mother is Priya. This triggers a strong emotional reaction in Madhu who realizes that her identity is being wiped out, and that she is merely a surrogate.

Madhu decides to leave, and the next shot shows her at a railway station waiting for the train to arrive. Priya finds her at the station, and asks her where she is going.
Madhu responds, “This child’s mother is not Priya Malhotra, it is me! This is my child. I won’t give up my child”. The problem of a surrogate mother establishing a bond with the unborn child whom she has nurtured in her womb for nine months is perceived as natural, and can thus lead to complications, especially in the case of lack of clarity of laws. Sharita Shah, a Mumbai-based psychiatrist states: “Post-partum blues are heightened in surrogate mothers.” An infertility specialist based in Mumbai, Hitesh Parekh adds, “There are no laws on this. If the surrogate mother decides not to part with the child, there is nothing one can do about it,” (Cited in Martins). If the laws regarding surrogate motherhood are implemented, the surrogate mother will be bound by the contract she enters into, and will be obliged to give up her child.

April Cherry cites a case of Anna Johnson and Mark and Crispina Calvert in USA, wherein Anna Johnson, an African-American single woman, agreed to act as a surrogate mother for Mark and Crispina Calvert in 1990. According to the contract, Anna Johnson would be paid a sum of ten thousand dollars, and she would have to relinquish parental rights over the child after it was born. Toward the end of the pregnancy, Johnson indicated that she would not give up the child.

The matter went to court, and April Cherry describes the decision of the court:

The trial court found, and the California Court of Appeals affirmed, that because Mark and Crispina Calvert were the genetic parents of the resulting child, they were the “natural” and legal parents. The court held that Ms. Johnson, the birth other, was a stranger to the child, and as a result, not entitled to any legal relationship with the resulting child. By concentrating their analysis on the genetics of “blood” of the parties, and of the child, the court found it impossible to acknowledge or even to consider that a Black woman could legally mother a White child. (83).

In this case, the surrogate mother is the genetic mother, but is still expected to relinquish her right over the child. The appeal is not legal but emotional. Priya, who along with the other family members has been waiting and praying for the child for the last six months and sees it as a source of joy for the entire family, urges her, “Unlike me, there is nothing lacking in you. You can get married and become a mother again. But I am incomplete. I can never become a mother”. The statement
reflects Priya’s lack of self-esteem, and internalization of the ideology of motherhood which entails that a woman is complete only if she is a mother. She offers to give Madhu whatever she asks for, and Madhu demands her husband Raj in return for the child. The shock of the statement is reflected in the sounds in the background – sound of the train, and sounds of lightning and thunder.

Ultimately, Madhu gives the child to Priya when she overhears Priya telling the doctor to save her life rather than that of the baby when her delivery seems complicated and life threatening. However, this decision involves a certain amount of self-sacrifice. When Madhu leaves the family, she takes with her only a family photograph. She refuses the wealth that Raj offers her stating, “If I take anything else, it will seem as though a mother has taken the price of her child”. The experience has changed her completely, and the surrogacy now seems to be an altruistic decision rather than one based on a financial contract. She seems to have ‘recognized’ the meaning of motherhood, and hence gives up the child as a gesture of love for the man she loves. For, she tells Raj, “I will never go back to the world from which you brought me. You touched me once. Now, no man will ever touch me again”. She sacrifices her child and the experience of motherhood.

Surrogacy has often been compared to prostitution. Trevor Allis comments, “Many women in the past have sold their bodies for sex, they have now ended up selling their bodies for reproductive purposes”. Susan Ince also discusses the issue in “Inside the Surrogate Industry” (1984), “Motherhood is becoming a new branch of female prostitution […] Women can sell reproductive capacities the same way old-time prostitutes sold sexual ones but without the stigma of whoring because there is no penile intrusion” (115).

In the case of this film, however, there is penile intrusion, and there would have been the stigma of whoring had Madhu decided to take money for the child. The film does point to the complications that may arise because of surrogacy, and also reflects the need for formulation of laws regarding surrogacy, the absence of which can lead to
severe exploitation of surrogate mothers, especially since the surrogate industry seems to be growing at a fast pace and replacing adoption as a solution for childless parents.

3.2.4 Meghna Gulzar's Filhaal

Janice Raymond in Women as Wombs – Reproductive Technologies and the Battle over Women’s Freedom (1995) states: “Under the guise of fostering procreative liberty, these reproductive arrangements help mold women into traditional reproductive roles. The fact that this compliance is ratified with the victim’s consent only serves to emphasize how deeply conformity is entrenched and concealed in a gender defined society” (103).

This is clearly illustrated in Meghna Gulzar’s film Filhaal (2002), which deals with the concept of surrogate motherhood using In Vitro Fertilization. The narrative of the film shifts back and forth from the present to the past. The film begins with a comparison between human beings and birds, when the servant of the house comments that a cuckoo’s eggs are always taken care of by a crow, just as his mistress’s eggs are being taken care of by her friend. The mistress, Reva (Tabu), is a ‘traditional’ woman with dreams of a happy family, while her friend Siya (Sushmita Sen) is a career-oriented ‘modern’ woman who has been avoiding marriage because she does not wish to have a baby who will interfere with her ambitions.

After a brief flashback the narrative shifts to the present where Siya is in a hospital waiting for her delivery. Reva’s husband Dhruv (Sanjay Suri) is with her and is registering her name at the hospital. The name of the mother (Reva) is different from the name of the patient (Siya). This leaves the clerk at the registration counter confused, especially since Siya is a spinster but is having a baby.

In a flashback again, the viewers see Reva, who starts panicking when she does not conceive after six months of her marriage. She goes to see an astrologer who assures her that there is no problem, and that she will soon become pregnant. Her
maid servant advises her to fast and give food to the needy if she wants to have a child. Reva also seeks the advice of a gynecologist who helps her to plan her pregnancy carefully, and comments with amusement that the couple seems to be in a great hurry for a baby. Anjali Wigde explains this phenomena, “Conception may become an obsession or preoccupation, and may cause anxiety, despair, depression and other psychological problems. Menstruation is no longer viewed as a sign of femininity, but becomes symbolic of the failure to conceive” (65). Indeed conception becomes an obsession for Reva who cannot rest in peace until she has tried all possible solutions recommended by various people to help her conceive.

When Reva finally receives confirmation of her pregnancy, she is overjoyed. She feels fulfilled as a woman, and basks in the attention that is bestowed upon her. Her husband gives in to her whims and cravings, and her family looks forward to the arrival of the baby with great expectations. In contrast, Siya questions why the argument that men give for delayed marriages is not applicable for women. When men express their desire to be “settled” in life before they get married, it is considered natural. However, women are not expected to do the same. Siya tells her boyfriend Saahil, who has been waiting for her to accept his proposal, “I want to be complete.” Saahil shows her a picture of Reva, and asks her, “Do you think Reva looks incomplete?” Each person seems to derive their definition of fulfillment and happiness from different sources. For Siya, her career offers her satisfaction, but for Reva, the imminent birth of the child is a great source of joy.

Reva’s happiness, however, is short-lived for she has a miscarriage and discovers that she will never be able to conceive again. She is shattered and heart-broken and tells Siya that everything is over. Motherhood for her is the ultimate goal of a woman, and if she cannot achieve this goal, she can never be satisfied with her life. She becomes depressed when she sees a couple with a child, for that is her concept of a ‘happy family’. To quote Wigde again, “Infertility has often been compared to bereavement and can be a wrecking experience for both the woman and the man. It may lead to identity dilemmas, lowered self-esteem, frustration and a sense of powerlessness”
For Reva, the realization of her infertility is akin to bereavement. She tells her husband Dhruv (Sanjay Suri) that she cannot bear the emptiness and loneliness that she is facing. When Dhruv suggests that she should do something to keep herself occupied, she vehemently retorts in a manner that is almost childlike, “I don’t want to pass my time. I want a baby.”

Reva vetoes Dhruv’s suggestion for adopting a baby, immediately asserting that she wants her own baby, and wants to try again, despite the risk it involves: “At most I will die. As it is I am barely alive”. According to Sangeeta John and Farwa Imam Ali in “Agony and Ecstasy” (2004), “Most couples keep adoption as their last resort probably because it is difficult to suppress the human urge to preserve one’s genes through procreation” (46). Reva, however, does not even want to consider the option of adoption, and it is significant that it is her husband who seems open to the idea and makes the suggestion to her.

Reva refuses to give up trying to conceive, and wants to avail of all the opportunities medically available to her even at the cost of her life. The fact that technology can assist her in conceiving complicates matters further. Barbara Kate Rothman points out in “Choice in Reproductive Technology” (1984) that these technologies create a burden for infertile women – the burden of not trying hard enough, not availing of all the choices available, not consulting the innumerable infertility specialists. According to Rothman, the social structure creates needs and also “creates the technology which enables people to make the needed choices” (32). Patriarchy defines infertile women as inadequate, and provides them an opportunity to become ‘normal’ women who bear children through technology.

Moreover, these technologies are also instrumental in rejection of the idea of adoption, and reinforcement of a ‘natural’ bond between a mother and her biological child, creating a desire for biological offspring only, just as is depicted in the film. Christine Crowe suggests in “Women Want It: In Vitro Fertilization and Women’s Motives for Participation” (1987), “IVF curtails any potential for the redefinition of
parenthood – or infertility – by focusing exclusively on women’s biological reproduction. In doing so, it reinforces the ‘natural’ bond between a mother and her biological child as well as reinforcing the idea that the nuclear family – or indeed one’s own biological children – is the only desirable structure of social relations between adults and young children.” (93)

Reva, in her attempt to become a ‘normal’ woman with a biological child visits her doctor. Her doctor explains the concept of surrogate motherhood to her by providing a simplistic comparison of cooking food. Reva’s vessel (womb) is too small and renders her incapable of cooking food. Hence, she must borrow Siya’s vessel to cook. The food (genes) will be hers but the vessel (uterus) will be borrowed. The function of motherhood is thus split.

Genoveffa Corea objects to this deliberate splitting of the motherhood function by patriarchy in “Egg Snatchers” (1984). Corea notes that the various technologies for reproduction result in three kinds of mothers: genetic mothers or egg-providers, surrogate mothers or uterus-providers, and social mothers who look after the child. The attempt to possess woman’s procreative power, says Corea, turns a woman into a “vessel for the babies men make” (45). In this case, however, there are two kinds of mothers – the egg provider (Reva) and the uterus-provider (Siya).

Alternately, they may even be classified into two categories, the “egg layers and egg hatchers” as defined by Julie Murphy in “Egg Farming and Women’s Future” (1984). Murphy argues, “Reproductive technology, in the service of patriarchy assumes that women’s bodies are fertile fields to be farmed. Women are regarded as commodities with vital products to harvest: eggs”. She adds, “Egg farming thereby limits female bodies to reproductive bodies, more systematically than ever before” (68). The division of women into two classes serves to reinforce reproduction as the essential role of women.
What is significant is that it is Reva who initiates the process of surrogate motherhood and not her husband Dhruv. Dhruv is portrayed as being a sensitive and caring husband who is extremely supportive of his wife. He never blames her for her inability to conceive, but accepts the predicament as an inevitability. In fact, he tries to dissuade Reva from opting for surrogate motherhood, foreseeing the complications that may arise. However, it is she who is adamant on implementing the decision. By placing the burden of the decision on Reva's shoulders, the film elicits the extent to which social conditioning and internalization of the prescribed role affects women and influences them in their decisions.

Although the husbands in both Filhaal and Chori Chori Chupke Chupke (CCCC) raise objections to their wives' decisions, the objections are mild and are easily revocable. The narrative structure seems to repeat itself in film after film. With the husband being supportive of the wife and refusing to blame her for infertility, the onus is once again on the woman to take a decision. The decision thus seems to be entirely the wife's and seems to result from her preoccupation with her failure as a woman.

It is also important to note that Siya, who had been postponing her marriage plans precisely to avoid pregnancy and childbirth now takes the decision to become a surrogate mother for her friend at the cost of the hindrance to her career and her relationship with her boyfriend Saahil (Palaash Sen). The decision of an unmarried girl to become a mother in Indian society is extremely unconventional and would undoubtedly lead to social stigma.

The film implies the repercussions of splitting the function of motherhood, perhaps unintentionally. The 'egg layer' soon finds herself becoming envious of the 'egg hatcher'. Reva observes Dhruv showering Siya with attention which she feels is rightfully hers. When he expresses his desire to include her in their dinner outings, for if she is with them, the baby will be with them as well; she feels a pang of
jealousy. Reva is denied the affection and pampering she had received when she was pregnant, as it is now transferred on to Siya.

There is a humorous exchange between the two friends on how the baby will address them. While Siya says that it will address both of them as ‘mother’, Reva is quick to retort that Siya will be called ‘masi-ma’ (meaning aunt-mother). She would not want to share the honour of being called mother with anyone else, not even her friend who is carrying the child for her.

Reva’s frustration at not receiving as much importance as she would like keeps mounting as the delivery date approaches, and unable to bear the suffocation, she finally explodes in her address to Dhruv and Siya: “Our child? It’s not our child. It’s either yours or hers. She has become the mother and has reminded me of it several times. If I had to go through all this, I would rather have adopted a child. But I wanted to become a mother. But what did I get? She has been receiving all the joy and status of a mother. All that is hers, not mine. She takes all the decisions—respect, experience, desires—everything is hers.” Her rage reaches a point when she actually asks Siya to abort the child. Despite the fact that the situation changes later when Siya’s condition becomes serious, and Reva ultimately takes her words back, the fact remains that surrogate motherhood does not give the biological mother the satisfaction of giving birth to a child, and brings with it a series of unwanted complications.

It is interesting to note that Siya, who had always been too career-oriented to want a baby, now changes her mind after giving birth to her friend’s child. A ‘maternal instinct’ develops in her and she is now ready to start a new life, conforming to the traditional role of mother and wife. This implies that motherhood is not only desirable but also ‘natural’ for a woman—and no matter how much a woman may try to think of an alternate path for herself, it is motherhood, which will remain the dominant social function and role.
The film thus emphasizes the reproductive function of the woman's body through the characters of Reva and Siya. It portrays the psychological feelings of inadequacy and incompleteness that a woman experiences if her body refuses to perform the function it has been assigned. It allows one protagonist to avail of the technologies available to enable the body to perform its prescribed role, and also comments on the repercussions of using such technologies. Moreover, it also illustrates how a woman who had initially rejected the reproductive function of her body changes her mind as a result of her experience of giving birth. In the case of both characters, the film reaffirms its faith in the primary purpose of a woman's body - and that purpose seems to be to give birth.

It is important to observe the deliberate choice of the star cast of the film. Sushmita Sen, as an ex-Miss Universe, represents the urban and modern woman, who has an additional advantage of enjoying a glamorous image. She is also a single mother in real life, having adopted a baby girl despite being a spinster. This, in the context of India, is a fairly bold and unconventional decision. She becomes a perfect choice for the character of Siya, because the audience can identify her with the character she plays. One can apply the Lasswell model of Mass Communication (discussed in the first chapter) to this film. The model asks 'Who says what to whom in which channel with what effect', and Sushmita Sen (who) as the spokesperson for surrogate motherhood (what) through an extremely popular channel like cinema (channel) would undoubtedly generate tremendous response from the audience (effect).

Moreover, the choice of relatively unknown faces like Sanjay Suri and Palaash Sen for the characters of Dhruv and Saahil is also significant. Had director Meghna Gulzar worked with more established male stars, it would have led to an overshadowing of the female characters, who now become more prominent by contrast. The male characters are also rendered redundant in the film and play supporting roles. It is the women who proactively determine the events in the narrative.
Another interesting aspect of the film is the issue of class in relation to surrogate motherhood. The In Vitro Fertilization procedure that surrogate motherhood entails, is an expensive one, and is only affordable to the upper classes even today. Moreover, the success ratio of the procedure being relatively low, couples often repeatedly go through the process until they have a baby. This entails tremendous expenditure. In the case of *Filhaal*, Meghna Gulzar has portrayed an upper class family which seems to have no concern for finances, and seems to easily afford the IVF procedure. Although the film did not generate too much revenue, perhaps because of the lack of mass appeal, novelty of the subject and its treatment, it did generate a lot of discussion about the concept of surrogate motherhood which was now brought into the open.

Thus, infertility can be seen as a curse with harsh consequences that must be borne by the infertile woman. This chapter has examined the various consequences of infertility, which seem to suggest that a woman who is unable to fulfill the function of motherhood for which she is supposedly destined, is liable to be punished. The punishment seems to vary depending on the circumstances and the response of the family members. This chapter has also analysed the different solutions adopted by couples to alleviate the problem of infertility, and looked at the dangers of some of these ‘solutions’.

While the ‘nature’ of solutions seems to have changed over a period of time, with the strong faith in religion giving way to the use of technology and surrogate motherhood, what has not changed is the ‘need’ for a ‘solution’ to overcome infertility. Infertility remains a curse which strongly affects the self-image of the woman and her status in society, and all efforts must be made to ‘cure’ infertility, no matter what the cost (whether emotional, physical or financial) may be.
During the 50’s, women paid for infertility by physically torturing themselves to please Gods. In the twenty first century, women who can afford assisted reproductive technology not only pay huge sums for technological techniques (which were not available to women earlier), but also put their bodies through various tests and medical intervention, again resulting in physical torture of the body. The emotional trauma and pressure to procreate does not seem to have changed over a period of time, and continues to haunt women even today, which is evident in the increasing demand for reproductive technologies. Even families who decide to adopt children (with adoption generally remaining for most couples the last resort if technology fails) seem to be victims of conditioning that devalues childlessness. The next chapter will question the concept of the ‘ideal mother’ whose qualities all women are expected to imbibe.