CHAPTER 4

Surrogacy as Performance of Violent Love: Reading Luke’s Magnificat alongside the Bodies of Indian Surrogate Mothers

The individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection.

—Louis Althusser, Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays

In a predominantly traditional society such as India, infertility has been, and, in some circles, continues to be considered a curse. The desire to have a male child, combined with the role of a woman as a mother, makes the surrogate industry in India a successful business venture. The stigma of infertility not only plagues the wombs of Indian women, but is also a matter of grave concern for their Western female counterparts. However, one of the major differences between Indian women and western women is that the former deal with this condition in isolation because infertility, overshadowed by religious connotations, continues to stigmatize women’s bodies. Sadie Stein points out: “Surrogacy, in America, is normalized. No one blinked an eye when a surrogate gave birth to twins for Sarah Jessica Parker and Matthew Broderick; the inevitable class tensions were gently lampooned—and conveniently resolved—by Tina Fey and Amy Poehler. And while nothing involving maternity can ever be treated with the rakish dash recent rom-coms have shown the sperm donor, more pop-cultural mainstreaming seems both inevitable and in some wise desirable, too.” In contrast
to India, discussions about infertility in western societies are more open and sometimes even glamorized and celebritized in popular culture.

Therefore, in a world driven by consumerism and capitalism, countries like India provide fertile ground for entrepreneurs, even in the realm of infertility. Raywat Deonandan highlights this point in his article, “The Ethics of Surrogacy”:

The existence of a global infertility epidemic is clearly at odds with our conception of the world as being overpopulated. But, primarily in wealthier, developed nations, the provision of medical reproductive services to people deemed infertile is now a billion-dollar global industry, spurred on both by advances in technology and the emergence of a globalized economy. Unsurprisingly, India is one of the world’s most popular providers of reproductive services, leveraging her medical depth, advantageous currency exchange, and pervasive poverty. But when human reproduction meets commerce, gender inequality, and wealth disparity, the potential for ethical transgression becomes great indeed.3

The success of surrogacy in India relies on two important aspects. First, the cost of surrogacy in India is quite low. In addition to this, laws/regulations relating to this industry are lax, especially when compared to the developed and advanced countries in the West.4 Second, the use of medical intervention leading to a successful conception, plays on the sentiment that the women struggling with infertility are finally able to achieve their true essence of womanhood through motherhood. Nancy Chodorow writes: “In all cases, the implication is that the mode of reproduction of mothering is unchanging, and retains the form of its earliest origins. These accounts argue that women’s mothering is, or has been, functional—that children, after all, have been reared—and often imply that what is and has been ought to be—that women ought to mother.”5 Therefore, the dreams of wealthier couples are implanted in the wombs of poor and low caste Indian women. These women, who were once reproducing solely for domestic purposes, are groomed and transformed into professional surrogate mothers in a capitalistic economy.

Such hybrid moments captured, brought to light, and maybe even acknowledged by the vocal voices discussing the ethical implications of surrogacy in India, could lead to a fuller picture of a maternal identity rooted in an ambivalent love, obscuring the barriers between being an unselfish mother to a genetically different child and becoming a professional mother, selfishly daring to dream about a better future for her own children. The divided body of the Indian surrogate mother never