

To Be Or Not To Be A Parent: A Study On Unprepared Indian Parenthood Based On The Malayalam Movie Sara's

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Abstract

"In medical practice, there few surgical procedures given so little attention and so underrated in its potential hazard as abortion"

Dr. Warren Hern, MD Abortion practitioner and author of Abortion Practice (1990)

Abortion has always been a well-balanced topic of debate since the postmodern era, which has reshaped the concept of maternity. The conversation becomes increasingly intricate when analyzed through the perspective of women's rights and their autonomy. The intersection of societal expectations, individual choice, and the consequences of unplanned parenthood creates a narrative fraught with implications for women's health, agency, well-being and child welfare. Motherhood is often held high on a pedestal in society, various cultural narratives promote the notion that a woman's highest calling is to become a mother. This societal imposition is reinforced through various channels, including media representations, religious doctrines, and family structures, which collectively shape an environment that valorises motherhood while concurrently stigmatising those who choose not to have children or who seek abortion. This paper aims to explore the ethics of abortion, particularly focusing on how societal norms compel women into unwanted motherhood, the consequences of unplanned parenthood, and the stigma surrounding abortion in the Malayalam movie Sara's. Through these themes, this paper will analyze many complexities that arise when women are coerced into the role of motherhood against their will, and how such coercion not only impacts their lives but also affects the lives of their children.

Keywords Abortion, Parenthood, Motherhood, Child Welfare, Societal Norms

Introduction

The discourse surrounding unplanned parenthood is wide ranged issue that intersects deeply with societal norms, women's autonomy, and ethical considerations. In recent years, the representation of themes related to reproductive rights in cinema has gained prominence, particularly in regional films that reflect specific cultural contexts. The Malayalam movie *Saru's* released in 2021 directed by Jude Anthany Joseph is a recent portrayal of breaking such stereotypes. Reading along with the movie the central character Sara Vincent, who aspires to be an independent filmmaker, is expected to have an unplanned pregnancy after being married to a resonating partner who also tries to defy the societal norm of having children.

In Malayalam cinema, narratives that engage with such critical issues merely entertainment, they serve as cultural artifacts that can influence public perceptions and discussions on women's rights. The plotline of the movie *Saru's* follows the central character Sara, played convincingly by Anna Ben. From a very young age, Sara was clear that she didn't want to give birth. She's an aspiring filmmaker and when she meets Jeevan (Sunny Wayne), who also has a very similar opinion about wanting to have kids, they hit it off. They fall in love and get married. As fate would have it. Sara accidentally gets pregnant and her decision to keep the child comes at the cost of her dream of finally becoming a filmmaker. *Saru's* juxtaposes individual autonomy against the backdrop of familial and societal pressures, inviting audiences to reconsider their perceptions of motherhood and the ethical implications of reproductive choices

This film initiates conversations about the psychological and emotional ramifications of being coerced into motherhood and raises significant questions regarding the societal structures that govern women's reproductive health. By analyzing *Saru's*, this research paper aims to analyse the film's critical reflections on unplanned parenthood, the ethical responsibilities surrounding reproductive choices, and its impact on women's psychological well-being

The Imposition of Motherhood: Societal Norms and Women's Helplessness

Humans are social animals and hence social norms apply to them, the rules and expectations that guide how people should behave and serve functions in society are what we know as social norms. These norms create a dichotomy within which women are often forced to negotiate their identities. For many, the decision to have a child is not solely a personal choice but rather a decision fraught with societal implications. Women who decide to pursue careers, education, or personal interests may find themselves facing judgment and pressure to conform to traditionally stereotyped gender roles. The expectation that women should naturally desire motherhood can lead to feelings of inadequacy or guilt for those who resist this narrative.

"You have got promotion and became settled. Now you feel you became matured and old enough to be a father. Then, what about me, my career and dreams? I have just started the film. If I continue with this I would be in the same stage where I stood two years ago. You encourage me to fly with my wings open and then, you yourself bind some stones around my waist. Isn't it?" (Sara's)

The lines quoted above are from a scene in the movie where Jeevan shouts at Sara saying that he has attained maturity in his life over the past two years and now he might reconsider his opinion about parenting. Here, her identity as a working woman is being forced to compromise. The consequences of being compelled into motherhood can be profound and far-reaching. Forcing women into roles they are unprepared for or unwilling to occupy can result in significant psychological distress. The psyche of Sara is being ignored even though she has made herself clear that she doesn't want to give birth and go through the gestation period. When women are ready to become mothers, the implications extend beyond their mental health; the effects ripple outwards, impacting the well-being of their children

Apart from the movie plot line, unplanned parenthood is not just a personal issue but a societal one, exposing systemic failures in education, healthcare, and support structures. The failure to equip women with the knowledge and resources they need to make informed choices reflects broader societal attitudes toward women's autonomy. The stigmatisation of abortion as a taboo within many cultures further complicates women's ability to make choices about their bodies.

Women who find themselves in unplanned pregnancies may feel forced to carry a pregnancy to term due to societal pressures, religious beliefs, or fear of judgment.

"The question is sometimes raised whether it is not true that God sends children into this world and we should not interfere with the Will of God-that is the way in which it is put. I may tell you that if God has given us any intelligence, he has given it to us to be used. Intelligence is a Divine gift, anticipating consequences and planning with special relevance to the facts." (Radhakrishnan, 16)

There is a politics behind the abortion taboo in religion, which may be further linked to the representation of minorities. The failure to acknowledge unplanned parenthood as a legitimate concern results in a cycle of shame and helplessness, wherein circumstances beyond their control trap women. The societal taboo surrounding abortion contributes significantly to the challenges women face when making decisions about their reproductive health. In many cultures, abortion is viewed not only as a moral failing but as an act of defiance against the natural order. This stigma can lead to intense feelings of shame and guilt, discouraging women from seeking necessary medical care or support. The barriers to accessing safe and legal abortion services not only infringe upon women's rights but also risk their physical and mental health, as many may resort to unsafe procedures out of desperation. This further perpetuates the cycle of harm that society inflicts upon women who do not conform to the traditional narrative of motherhood

The Interconnectedness of Abortion and Child Welfare

Central to the discourse on abortion is the principle of autonomy: the right of individuals to make decisions about their bodies. In the movie, Sara is sternly opposing the idea of bearing a child and her family members are against this and makes her feel guilty of her decision to abort the child. Doctor Hafees, whom Sara is consulting, asks the couple in a therapy session and also acquaints the audience with the provision in the law that allows a woman to abort, if they suffer any mental or physical issues with it.

"According to the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act in 1971, if woman. suffers from any mental or physical issues as a resik of her pregnancy, she has the right to discontain her pregnancy. For this, not even the consent of the hussatis nenard (Sara's)

He abe supports Sars in her decision by saying "It's your body. So, the decision also should be yours" (Sara's). At the end of a session, he quotes "Better not be a parent than he a bad parent" (Sara's), which makes the audience to think and enable to understand the impact of being a bad puurest ov of criminals who became one dald's mental, physazal and intellectual life citing the example aftermath of bad parenting. This concept is foundanonal to reproductive sigles, asserting that women should have the ability to make informed choices regieding pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood without coercion from external societal forces. The ethical discorarse around abstion challenges the assertion of hers riglas whether societal governmental or religious-over a woman's headily autonomy. When women are siriped of their ability to make choices about reproductive health, they koe not only their agency but also the capacitym maure their well-being and that of any potential ofispring.

On the contrary, when access to abortion in limited or when there is a stigma sumunding it, the result can be an increase in unwanted pregnancies, leading to higher rates of maternal zast infant mortality, as well as social and economic burdens. Unwanted motherhood presents challenges that can adversely affect both the mother and child, Studies show that children burn into environments where they are not deviend may face a higher risk of neglect, abuse, und a lack of social and emotional support. This sets off a cycle of disadvantage that often continues across generations. When mothers do ant willingly ombrace motherhood, they may struggle to form a hond with their children, Irading in attachment Haues and emotional seglect. Moreover, the financial and social implications of unplanned parenthood can worsen exiting inequalities, Women who are compelled imo motherhood are odien less prepared-financially, emotionally, and socially to provide for their children's needs. The consequences albe affect the children themselves, as they may encounia limitations in educational, social, and economic opportunities while growing up in resananve envir

Furthermore, there is a pressing need for a shift in societal perceptions of motherhood. By expanding the concept of women's roles beyond just motherhood and acknowledging the complexities of individual situations, society can foster an environment that champions women's choices instead of stigmatizing them. Community support systems, such as counselling services and parenting classes, offer vital resources to assist women navigating unplanned pregnancies, ultimately leading to positive outcomes for families. The stigma surrounding abortion plays a pivotal role in shaping women's experiences and choices. Societal attitudes create an environment where women feel judged and marginalized for seeking abortion services. This stigma can also prevent open discussion about reproductive health, further perpetuating misinformation and fear. Addressing this stigma requires comprehensive public education efforts aimed at dismantling misconceptions about abortion and its implications. Efforts also focus on elevating the narratives of women who have experienced abortions in a compassionate and understanding manner. When women share their stories, it can foster greater empathy and provide context for the complex circumstance they endured. Reducing the stigma surrounding abortion allows for a more matured conversation about women's rights and reproductive autonomy, ultimately enhancing society's understanding of the ethical considerations surrounding this topic.

Shifting the Narrative: The Path Forward

To create a more supportive environment for women facing unplanned pregnancies, it is crucial to transform the way abortion and motherhood are perceived in our society. This transformation involves acknowledging the complex realities that women encounter and providing support instead of judgment. By denoting the significance of well-informed decision-making and women's empowerment, we can foster a dialogue that recognizes the complexities surrounding unplanned pregnancies and the ethical considerations of abortion.

"11, therefore, your intention is to safeguard the health and happiness of family life, you must determine the time of childbirth, since the arrival of the children. I take it, to determine this is to plan a family. Radhakris 15)

Reframing the conversation involves recognizing that the choice to terminate a pregnancy is deeply personal and influenced by various factors such as financial stability, emotional readiness,

personal circumstances, and health considerations. Rather than portraying abortion exclusively as a moral issue, & should be regarded as a matter of public health and women's rights, emphasizing the importance of safe and legal abortion services for the well-being of both women and children. Educational efforts can play a significant role in reshaping societal perceptions. Schools, community organizations, and healthcare providers should collaborate to provide open discussions about reproductive health, including the implications of unplanned pregnancies, and the option of abortion. Prioritizing education can help reduce stigma and misinformation, enabling women to make well-informed choices that align with their values and circumstances.

Advocating for reproductive rights also entails a dedication to progressive policies and legislation that safeguard and enhance access to reproductive healthcare. The governmental policies, for instance Family planning, should be made palpable to the commoners and the agency should have a responsibility to provide comprehensive sex education and contraception as preventive measures against unintended pregnancies. Policies that support maternity leave, childcare services, and family planning can help alleviate some of the challenges associated with motherhood, enabling women to pursue their academic and career aspirations while managing family responsibilities. Encouraging women to share their stories can humanize the issue and dispel misconceptions that persist in public discourse. Personal narratives can foster empathy, raise awareness of the diverse realities behind unplanned pregnancies, and shed light on the complex factors influencing the decision to seek an abortion. Moreover, engaging men in conversations about reproductive rights and responsibilities is essential for creating an inclusive dialogue. Encouraging men to share their perspectives and support women's autonomy can help dismantle the patriarchal structures that often dictate discussions around women's bodies and choices.

Looking ahead, it's clear that the reproductive rights and the ethical considerations surrounding abortion will only grow more intense. Ongoing discussions about women's autonomy and the impact of unplanned motherhood will continue to challenge societal norms and call for change. It is essential to stay vigilant and proactive in advocating for women's rights, ensuring that reproductive healthcare is acknowledged as a fundamental human right. Education, advocacy, and the sharing of personal stories will play a crucial role in shaping public perception.

and policy regarding abortion and motherhood. In this new paradigm we envision a society where every child is born into a surting environmen, supported by families who are realy and willing to simbrace the sesponsibilities of parenthood. By peorizing mornad chosors, comprehensive healthcare, and compusmat, me work towards a world that respects and uplifts women, enabling them to thrive in all aspects of life whether as individuals, partnen, or mothers.

Conclusion

The paper gives the conclusion that, in the movie Sara's, the final decision-making power remained with her as she well supported by her partner Lather, the choice of wisether to have a child or not, should always be a woman's. If the scenario was reversed and she was forced to have a child ont of her will the matome would have hem a different one. The ethical aspects of abortion and undesired motherhood uncover entrenched societal standards that isquently marginalize women's independence and decisions. haye examined, socirial expectations can pressure women into motherhood against thee will, resaking in significant psychological, social, and economic consequences for both mothers and children. The link between unplanned paneushooaal, the social disapproval of abertion, aul header societal frameworks emphasizes the immediate necessity to remsess how smazety views reperadactive rights and methethood

To make an environment that promotns wonam's independence, deconstruct the stigma surrounding abortion and endome comprehensive reproductive heath education. and accessible services. The movie does not portray motherhood as a handen but it allows o to introspect on the sacrifices women have to make to rase kids. It also talks about how putriarchy has made raising kals solely a woman's job as the nen are the leadwinner. In essence, the ethics of abortion are not solely about the action self but about the wider repercussion for woouen's rights, societal support systems, and the welfire of future generations. It is crucial that we recognize the complexities of these issues, suppoй мовен's autonomy, and endraws in establish a society that priorkizes infirmed decision-making and ompathy for all

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