

Manali Karmakar and Avishek Parui. “These Were Made-to-Order Babies’: Reterritorialised Kinship, Neoliberal Eugenics and Artificial Reproductive Technology in Kishwar Desai’s *Origins of Love*.” *Medical Humanities* 46. 3 (2019): 323–332.

In this focused piece Manali Karmakar and Avishek Parui offer a critical intervention in the field of Medical Humanities through a balanced rhetoric posing an important question; whether the unequivocal acceptance of medical technology is liberating or whether it is conforming in the way it re-asserts the status quo rather than defying it. The article traces the engagement of Kishwar Desai’s novel, *Origins of Love* (2012), with the predominant discourses on ART (Artificial Reproductive Technology) through Tamar Sharon’s concept of “renaturalization”. It resonates with Sharon’s argument wherein she reveals that the magnificent claims of deconstructing the prevalent binaries made in the field of biotechnology are actually contradictory in nature and approach. Sharon validates this argument through the concept of “schizophrenic deterritorialization” used by Deleuze and Guattari, which states that instead of destabilizing the bio-normative concept, ART reinforces and re-establishes phallogocentric family production in compliance with capitalism and consumerism (324). The authors of the article position their argument as an antithesis to the various claims made by critics such as Judith Halberstarn, Ira Livingstone, Shulamith Firestone and Donna Haraway who have stressed the deconstructive potential of ART in its blurring of the difference between the human and non-human, and in the process, its eradication of existing social inequalities.

Through the novel *Origins of Love*, the article foregrounds the anxiety of Kate who has IVF treatment to have a child. In her ardent desire to mother a baby, she fails to acknowledge that she has become an active participant in a business which involves the commodification of the procreation process. The first part of the essay, “Reterritorialisation of Reproductive Technology” stresses how “technologisation of biological phenomenon” has normalized ART as an acceptable “second nature” for procreating (324). The second part of the essay, “Reinforcing Bionormative Concept of Family Making”, discusses the culture of bio-consumerism propagated by fertility clinics such as Madonna and Child and well-designed websites such as mybaby.com. It draws upon Deborah L. Spar’s study of the capitalistic character of the surrogacy industry in her book *The Baby Business* (2006), revealing how bio-capitalism exploits the parents’ desire for a baby with their own genetic traits and heredity, further emphasizing the significant factor of caste in the Indian context of Desai’s narrative. The third part of the essay, “Surrogates as Dispensable Commodities”, reflects on how India is considered to be a hub of the surrogacy industry, generating, as Desai’s novel puts it, “an army of surrogates for producing children for the Western world” (328). Through various episodes, the article highlights the commodified and dehumanized status of the surrogate whose womb is merely considered a “passive incubator” (328). In this reading, surrogates and “gamete donors” become “collateral ‘prosthetics’ who are deployed for the production of the baby and are effaced, anonymized and sometimes violently distanced from the produced babies” (327), demonstrating how surrogacy, in an “extreme biocapitalist culture of production and consumption”, can be read in terms of Marxist theories of alienation (327). The commodification of the womb, it is argued, creates “new forms of unequal exchange that are allied to notions of neocolonialism and neocannibalism in a neoliberal

consumerist economy” (328). The fourth and concluding section, “Revival of Neoliberal Eugenics in the Era of ART”, exposes the consumerist nature of infertility clinics and depicts how bioengineering of physical attributes and the baby making process has been reified by the capitalistic economy where babies are being purchased and consumed by the upper echelons of the society (328). Thus, it exposes the power dynamics that operates for the baby making industries and how they get influenced by dominant political ideologies and caste-based hierarchies. Infertility clinics, the article demonstrates, also subtly encourage eugenics “at a macro as well as metonymic levels” (328) through the stress on retaining familial and hereditary attributes (328).

Through the novel, *Origins of Love*, this focused piece shows how the literary text enables us to interrogate the current culture of ART and demonstrates the ways in which the novel reveals how ART reinforces hierarchical, phallogocentric notions of family. ART, the article shows, reterritorializes and domesticates biomedical technologies giving rise to a consumerist economy that transforms an otherwise natural and emotional occurrence into a “production” process with an end product to be “purchased” (330). The article offers a complex and revealing reading of Desai’s novel that demonstrates the important role literature can play in the interrogation of political and social issues around ART and that also compels us to rethink the role of caste in social and political discourses of India.

Soumya Kashyap and Priyanka Tripathi
Indian Institute of Technology Patna (India)