

An Ethnographic Study of Commercial Surrogacy Industry in India

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Abstract : Motherhood as an institution is considered as sacred. Reproduction and motherhood have always been a concern of the private space of home. However, with the emergence of technologies like the Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs), this intimate area has moved into the public. A woman can now become a mother with artificial insemination done by expert medical professionals in a hospital. With this development, the meanings of motherhood and childrearing have altered. Mothers have been divided into 'ovarian mothers' (those who provide the eggs), 'uterine mothers' (those who carry out the pregnancy and give birth), and 'social mothers' (those who raise the child). Thus, the ART business deconstructs motherhood by defining who the biological mother is and who the social mother is and who - despite contributing parts or processes of her body to the life of the child is not a mother, but merely the donor of a product, be it the egg or the womb, which is owned by those who are favoured by the contract. The industry of commercial surrogacy in India has been estimated to be of \$2.3 billion as of 2012. There are many women who work as surrogate mothers in this industry for the exchange of money. It runs like a full-fledged business guided by a highly profit oriented capitalist market. The reproductive labourers are identified as mere womb renters or victims and not as active agents in such arrangements. Such a discourse undercuts the agency exercised by the women. The present study is an ethnography into the commercial surrogacy industry in India. This journey furthers the understanding of the dilemmas faced by the reproductive labourers. The paper emphasizes on the experiences of reproduction and motherhood outside the private space of the home in the commercial surrogacy industry in India, and, argues that this multiplicity of experiences need much focus and attention, where, the consumer becomes 'the' citizen and the women workers continue to be victims. The study draws on the narratives of the reproductive labourers, who remain at the center, and yet, at the periphery of such arrangements. This feminist ethnography is informed by the feminist standpoint theory to account for and analyse these varied experiences which further the understanding of the dilemmas faced by the reproductive labourers.

Keywords : commercial surrogacy, ethnography, motherhood, standpoint theory

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