



Subalternising the Surrogate: Reading Health and Precarity in the Indian Commercial Surrogacy Arrangement

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Abstract:

This paper seeks to study one of the least researched aspects of surrogacy, the health hazards and precarity that threaten the lives of the surrogate women. The paper reads surrogacy through the lens of Subalternity to argue that surrogate mothers, their subjectivities, must come under the wing of contemporary Subaltern Studies, as an extension of Postcolonial Feminism. This paper specifically delineates the systematic subalternisation, marginalization and suppression of the voices of the surrogate women through this medical arrangement which becomes exploitative and precarious. Questions of the woman's body, her agency and autonomy and how her body is controlled by the 'medical elite' and its agents. It refers to Foucault's concept of the construction of discursive knowledge, hegemony by the powerful elite. This is to study how the surrogate's lack of basic knowledge of her own body and of the medical interventions in her body are used as political tools to systematically silence and subalternise the surrogate women. The paper seeks to bring surrogacy under subaltern studies and postcolonial feminism to understand the subjectivities of these women who are mechanised in the surrogacy arrangement. The paper questions medical ethics, medical abuse and medical violence/exploitation in the name of glorifying motherhood. It also questions the lack of authentic voices of former commercial surrogates and the adequacy of the laws governing the now legal altruistic surrogacy arrangement. The overarching issue that the paper attempts to discuss is that of reproductive health and justice, in the context of commercial surrogacy in India before its ban.

Keywords: Commercial Surrogacy, Health, Precarity, Subaltern, Agency.