

Dalia Bhattacharjee, PH13008

**Title:** “*Wombs for rent*”: The Emotional Geographies of Reproductive Laborers in India

**Abstract:** This dissertation is an ethnographic inquiry into the lives of women working as surrogate mothers in the Indian commercial surrogacy industry. The research has been conducted in three cities: Anand, Bangalore and Chandigarh. The major portion of the data comes from Anand, whereas, smaller field visits have been done in Bangalore and Chandigarh. The central objective of this dissertation has been to bring to the fore voices of the 'reproductive laborers' within a cacophony of discussions on the economics, politics and ethics of surrogate motherhood in India. My fieldwork revealed a much more nuanced picture than the simplistic portrayal that primarily focus on surrogacy as an exploitative industry. I approach commercial surrogacy as a form of intimate labor and attempt to show that the labor performed by the women in this intimate economy does not only lead to alienation and objectification, despite being exploitative. In fact, the narratives collected in this study highlight that even in the regulated conditions maintained by the medical clinics; laborers can achieve a sense of self-empowerment through surrogacy practices. While it is important to acknowledge the exploitative practices that treat women's bodies as disposable within this global circuitry of third party reproduction, it is equally important to pay attention to the emotional journeys and embodied experiences of the reproductive laborers in their gestation period. Inspired by work in feminist and emotional geography, I focus on the everyday world of the reproductive laborers and the centrality of women's embodiment. Such an approach, I argue, is imperative as it is sensitive to the needs of its main actors.