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**Disruptive Embodiments: An ethnography of risks and failures during commercial surrogacy in India**

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## THESIS SUMMARY

This thesis explores the contested field of commercial surrogacy in India and examines the actors' attitudes towards uncertainties and risks along with their much-neglected experiences of failures or disruptions. It demonstrates how an understanding of any biomedical procedures or biotechnological interventions is incomplete without the knowledge of its impact on moments of failure or disruption. Not all In vitro Fertilisation (IVF) cycles performed during surrogacy lead to successful childbirth. Further, the way in which commercial surrogacy is practiced in India allegedly places the bodies of surrogates and the newborns at health risks and legal uncertainties. Although studies so far have provided critical insights into the working of the transnational market of commercial surrogacy in India, none of the existing research on commercial surrogacy, be it from India or other countries in the world; have explored how perceptions of risks and events of disruptions shape the discourse and practice of commercial surrogacy on ground. Neither have any existing research looked into the branching out of the transnational market of commercial surrogacy to its own domestic clients. This thesis widens the scope of discussion on commercial surrogacy in general and on surrogacy in India in particular by examining—how risks are perceived and managed during the process of surrogacy; and what does each form of disruptions (like missed conceptions, miscarriages, foetal reductions and abortions) mean to the surrogates and the intended parents (IPs). Further, unlike most surrogacy research from India, this thesis studies surrogacy that are commissioned by Indians themselves, to understand whether experiences of risks and disruptions differ between people from similar socio-cultural and geo-political setting. By drawing from the fields of sociology and phenomenology of bodies, sociology of reproduction, risk studies, science and technology studies and ethnographic methods; this thesis is the only detailed ethnographic research so far that examines the market of commercial surrogacy which is accessed solely by Indians (local and transnational clients) in India.

Through a multi-sited ethnography at four clinics – two in Delhi and two in Kolkata, this thesis examines the ongoing interactions between the actors (surrogates, IPs, doctors, agencies, agents, clinical staff and surrogate home staff), technology, and the market through subsequent stages of surrogacy, as well as during moments of disruptions. It shows how the surrogacy industry mitigates the uncertainties involved in the process by systematically silencing certain risks and chances of failure, while at the same time constructing those biomedical or

organisational processes as risky, which they can demonstrably control. Further, by examining experiences of pre and post-conception disruptions, this thesis exhibits how the surrogacy discourse fails to create space for addressing the loss, grief, needs and expectations of the surrogates and IPs. In the process, it fails to accommodate the non-normative embodiments of the disruptive bodies. Hence, it argues that the occurrences of risks and disruptions need to be seen as a 'normal' state of event, to potentially benefit theorisations on surrogacy. Doing so will also help develop suitable ethical and legal frames for the practice. Further, it demonstrates why the recent debates on surrogacy could benefit from situating the practice within the country's local medical and socio-cultural context. By drawing from the fields of sociology and phenomenology of bodies, sociology and anthropology of reproduction, risk studies and science and technology studies, this interdisciplinary thesis lays out how an association between techniques of management, technology and hopes perpetuate the bioeconomy of surrogacy in India.