

Outsourcing Pregnancy

In 2002, India legalized commercial surrogacy in hopes of attracting foreign customers. The western Indian city of Anand may soon be to paid pregnancy what Bangalore is to call centers. In 2008, more than fifty women in the city were carrying pregnancies for couples in the United States, Taiwan, Britain, and elsewhere. One clinic there provides group housing, complete with maids, cooks, and doctors, for fifteen pregnant women serving as surrogates for clients around the world. The money the women earn, from \$4,500 to \$7,500, is often more than they would otherwise make in fifteen years, and enables them to buy a house or to finance their own children's education. For the prospective parents who go to Anand, the arrangement is a bargain. At around \$25,000 (including medical costs, the surrogate's payment, round-trip airfare, and hotel expenses for two trips), the total cost is about a third of what it would be for gestational surrogacy in the United States.

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But the global outsourcing of pregnancy also dramatizes the moral qualms. Suman Dodia, a twenty-six-year-old Indian who was a gestational surrogate for a British couple, had previously earned \$25 per month working as a maid. For her, the prospect of earning \$4,500 for nine months' work must have been almost too compelling to resist. The fact that she had delivered her own three children at home and never visited a doctor adds poignancy to her role as a surrogate. Referring to her paid pregnancy, she said, "I'm being more careful now than I was with my own pregnancies." Although the economic benefits of her choice to become a surrogate are clear, it's not obvious that we would call it free. Moreover, the creation of a paid pregnancy industry on global scale — as a deliberate policy in poor countries, no less — heightens the sense that surrogacy degrades women by instrumentalizing their bodies and reproductive capacities.

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