

Ngoc Le

Dr. Seeman

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Surrogacy: Made In India

The film “Made In India” follows an American couple, Lisa and Brian, who wish to have a child of their own. Unfortunately, they cannot because Lisa has polycystic ovarian syndrome which puts her uterus in a condition that is not viable to carry a fetus. They decide to have a baby through surrogacy because it is their last hope. However, surrogacy costs around \$70,000 to \$100,000 in the U.S. whereas in India it is much cheaper at less than \$10,000. Because Lisa and Brian can only afford to have surrogacy done in India, they decide to do it. The film introduces us to Planet Hospital, the surrogacy firm that is in charge of easing the process of receiving healthcare from outside countries. Rudy Rupak, who is the co-founder of Planet Hospital, claims that their service has the answers to all legal problems. We are also introduced to Aasia, the surrogate who agrees to carry the baby mainly for monetary gain. Throughout the film, we see the effort and stress Lisa and Brian go through as they adjust to being in India, overcoming language barriers, and performing medical procedures for the clinic to receive Lisa’s ovum such as daily injections. We also see a few of Aasia’s struggles, such as her living environment that pushed her to become a surrogate, her discontent with her payment, and how this situation affected her relationship with her family. At the end of the film, we see that Planet Hospital and other surrogacy firms will spread their service and become more well-known. This film was easy to follow and was able to capture the input of several parties involved and their opinions on

surrogacy in a different country. However, this film was mainly created to show the perspective of Brian and Lisa. If this film showed more of Aasia's perspective, I believe that my opinion on surrogacy would change.

By the end of this film, I had several concerns. First, I was concerned about how much representation surrogates like Aasia were receiving and should be receiving. I found it concerning when I noticed how little Aasia knew of the situation she was getting herself into. Aasia explained how she did not understand how the process of surrogacy worked in her body. She stated that she would be given "medicine" to become pregnant. She did state that she was uneducated. However, this is no excuse for the surrogacy firm to not fully explain to her that surrogacy works by creating an embryo that would be inserted into her through IVF. I am sure that this film had several clips that they cut out, and I wonder if one of those clips showed how the surrogacy firm explained the process to Aasia. I believe that it should be a policy for the surrogate to fully understand the process of surrogacy and the risks that come with it so that the surrogate is mentally prepared and able to confidently decide whether becoming a surrogate is ideal. Additionally, at the end of the film representatives of Planet Hospital shared that they would discuss plans to spread the surrogacy services Planet Hospital has to offer to other countries. When asked if there would be people representing surrogates, Rudy Rupak and his colleague stated that they do not know and that they will find out at a meeting. This is concerning considering how risky it is for surrogates to undergo this process. We also saw how Aasia is just one surrogate who had a birth complication and complications with her payment, yet it seemed as though Rudy Rupak and his colleague didn't think to have representatives for future surrogates. This shows that Rupak and other representatives of Planet Hospital mainly

have monetary motives that do not consider the impact their service can have on surrogates who are forced to become a surrogate because of their poverty.

This brings me to my concern about exploitation. In class, we discussed whether or not Planet Hospital is exploiting people who live in third-world countries. I believe that Planet Hospitals' main priority is to exploit those who live in third-world countries, such as India, especially after we see the lack of concern Planet Hospital representatives have for those they are exploiting. Throughout the film, we mainly see Rudy Rupak's concern for Brian and Lisa, never Aasia, because they are the ones paying Rupak at the end of the day. Also, Aasia explains how she is only becoming a surrogate because she lives in poverty, or else she never would have chosen such a job. She also explained how her husband's salary is not reliable since his career relies on how many customers he has. Although she did not want to become a surrogate and her husband was against it, she had no choice but to become a surrogate to provide for her family, despite it being a risk to her health and to her relationship with her husband. We even see that Aasia decides to become a surrogate again despite having birth complications that put a risk to her health. This all shows how desperate Aasia is for money because of the lack of opportunities to earn money in her home. I wonder how her second surrogacy will impact her relationship with her husband, especially since she promised him to never do it again. She stated that she will use most of the money received for her daughter because her sons will be able to earn money but her daughter won't. This shows that to solve this problem of exploitation, we have to look at the bigger issue which is the growing poverty and the discrimination against women in India. In 2021, it was found that only 23% of India's workforce are women (Banerji et al., 2023). This is due to societal stereotypes of women's capabilities and their roles. To solve this problem, there

needs to be a push for more laws to protect discrimination against women. As I watched the film, I was confused on how much Aasia was promised to receive and how much she actually received. The film shows Lisa stating that Aasia will receive \$7,000 whereas Sunno, Aasia's sister in law, states that Aasia was promised to receive \$2,500. This further shows how the film leaves out crucial details to Aasia's perspective to focus on the couple. This also makes me question whether Planet Hospital explained the same contract with Aasia and the couple.

Although Brian and Lisa received criticism for their decision, I don't blame them. I believe that they were also put in a situation where they had no choice but to have surrogacy done in India because they couldn't afford any other option. I do not believe that they should be blamed for exploitation. Instead, the surrogacy firm, such as Planet Hospital, should be the one to blame. If this film mainly showed Aasia's perspective, I think I would criticize Brian and Lisa. However, Brian and Lisa expressed their clear wish to have their own child, and how much effort they put in to have a child before they settled on their last option. They explained how they thought about adopting, but Lisa wanted to have her own child to pass down her father's legacy. Brian also explained how it was unfair that the public was criticizing them for not adopting just because they are infertile and I agree. There is no reason to criticize infertile couples for not adopting and not applying that same reasoning towards fertile couples who do have their own child.

I was shocked to learn that ICMR, an advisory body of the government of India, created a set of guidelines regarding surrogacy rights, but did not make it mandatory. If it is not mandatory, then there is no real written document to protect couples who have a child through surrogacy in India. ICMR stated that they made the guidelines when surrogacy was not as

popular, but that is no excuse to not protect Brian and Lisa's rights. For future policies, I believe that ICMR should push to make their guidelines mandatory in all hospitals in India. I also believe that Planet Hospital should be more prepared for legal problems like they promised. Throughout the film, I noticed that Lisa and Brian had to be responsible for many legal problems that Planet Hospital promised to take care of. For example, we saw how Lisa had to call the U.S. consulate to make an appointment with the U.S. embassy. If Planet Hospital fulfilled their promise to be prepared for any legal problems, Lisa would not have had to go through this issue. Lisa and Brian were also told that Aasia would be highly monitored to ensure that the baby would be delivered safely, yet we saw that this was not true since Aasia had an emergency C-section. Overall, I am glad that I watched this film because it showed me the complications of surrogacy and exploitation services. I only wish that this film showed more of Aasia's perspective.

Sources

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