Chapter Three : Social Construction of Motherhood
1. Introduction

In the last chapter I discussed the new reproductive technologies and reviewed the debates that have emerged around the implications of the use of such technologies. I discussed perspectives by some theorists on why reproduction is 'controlled', various stances on the NRTs, feminist views on NRTs, commercialization of NRTs, implications of NRTs for motherhood and infertility, socio-ethical and socio-legal issues, some implications of the NRTs in India and the developing world, the 'problem' of infertility and implications of infertility technology in the Indian context. I also discussed campaigns against some NRTs in India and briefly discussed what reproductive rights and choice mean in the context of the NRTs.

The objective of this thesis is to understand the sociological implications of the infertility technologies as mentioned earlier. It is located at the intersection of Sociology, technology and gender. I am attempting to understand how technologies which intervene in the process of reproduction, affect women.

It is important to understand how technology operates in society, how it is controlled by various interests of sections of society, by market forces, how it reflects dominant agendas and interests and what social meanings it has.

This chapter is not about NRTs perse but the social usage of the technology. An attempt shall be made to understand the operationalisation of these technologies by understanding their social meanings by an understanding of the social and cultural
construction of womanhood and motherhood in Indian society. I shall also
subsequently present voices from the field which will provide some insights into the
social structures and how values actually operate in society.

Social and cultural forces play a great role in constructing what womanhood means.
In other words, the categories 'men' and 'women' are socially constructed and these
social constructions define their social activities. This varies cross-culturally in terms
of expectations and values in individual cultures which are associated with being
male or female.

Women are biologically different from men because they reproduce. Even though
men do not have that capacity, women are considered inferior because of it. But
when one takes into consideration women who cannot reproduce, and the social
pressures they have to bear because of that, one is compelled to ask why is fertility is
so important in our society. Why is reproducing a child so important? Why do
women go through all kinds of invasive treatments to have a child?

There are many answers to this question and I shall explore some of them here. In
the Indian context, the answers are located in the existence of patriarchal family
structure in most families, and the concerns with maintenance of the male line. The
system of patriarchal descent\(^{10}\), patrilocal residence\(^{11}\), property inheritance, lineage\(^{12}\)

\(^{10}\) A mode of social classification linking a person and her/his ancestors and often defining the types
of relatives with whom a person is affiliated in a kin group (for eg. patrilineal, matrilineal etc.
and caste is responsible for the extreme importance given to fertility in Indian society which shall be discussed in detail in this chapter. Fertility is significant in understanding and in defining womanhood which is equated with motherhood.

In this chapter I shall discuss the connections between gender inequality and the ideology of motherhood; whether motherhood gives power to women or contributes to their powerlessness; the ideology of motherhood and family structures in India; Hindu feminine identity in India and the mother as goddess.

It would be critical to begin by an understanding of the social/cultural construction of gender.

2. Social construction of gender and gender roles

When people occupy social positions their behaviour is determined by what is expected of that position rather than by their own individual characteristics. 'Roles' are socially defined attributes and there are expectations associated with social positions. 'Role' is sociologically important because it demonstrates how individual activity is socially influenced and thus follows regular patterns. In this section I shall discuss the social and cultural construction of the sexes and sex-roles.

11 Residence with or near the patrilineal relatives of the husband (Ubertoi: 1993).

12 A unilinear (descent from male or female links) kin group consisting of persons who can trace descent from a common ancestor through a determinate number of generations (Ubertoi: 1993).
If the sex of a person is biologically determined, the gender of a person is socially and culturally constructed. Notions of gender, sexuality and sex-roles are culturally specific. There are alternative understandings about women's unequal position. Within anthropology, 'culture' has been identified as a key category. The cultural understandings of the category 'woman' vary across cultures. In order to analyse women's subordination, 'gendered' relations have to be considered.

Various cultural understandings of the categories 'man' and 'woman' have been considered by anthropologists like Sherry Ortner (Ortner: 1974). Her 'nature/culture' argument asserted that women's physiology and reproductive functions make her appear closer to nature and men seek cultural means of creation and are therefore associated with culture. Thus, women's social roles are restricted because of her reproductive capacities as she is mostly within the domestic sphere. Women's activities are organised in society based on the fact that women are restricted to the domestic sphere. Men are considered closer to culture because they move about more widely in social and geographical space and thus are more aware than women (MacCormack: 1980). So men were part of the 'public' sphere. These divisions in social life by sex were because of the woman's role as the mother and the rearer of children. So the woman becomes "the not yet culturally created person" (Moore: 1994: 16). Though the relationship between the two spheres is open to question as it might not be hierarchical in all societies. This division resulted in according different rights to men and women. These rights further contributed in separating the domestic and public spheres for women and men respectively and
formed the basis for ideas regarding motherhood, fatherhood, the family and home.

According to Moore, it is universally true that a mother-child unit is 'naturally' part of all cultures (Moore:1988:23). But domestic units do not have the same form and function in all cultures.

This argument linked sexual stereotypes and ideologies to social roles and cultural symbols. These associations according to Ortner, were cultural constructs and not essential features rooted in reality. She observed that female subordination is universal but she looked beyond biological differences between men and women and found that the subordination was so because of cultural ideologies and symbols (Ortner:1974). The reason for this universal subordination of women according to Simone de Beauvoir, is mens' assertion of their creativity through the medium of technology and symbols and women's restriction to the function of reproduction. Men create lasting objects and women create perishables. But she believes that the truth is...

...that both men and women are nature and culture and there is no logic compelling us to believe that at an unconscious level women, because of their naturalness, are opposed and subordinate to men (quoted in Moore:1988:17).

Though societies might differ in their sexual ideologies and stereotypes, certain symbolic associations between women and men and other aspects of cultural life are the same across many societies. Men and women are constructed in opposing ways. In individual cultures there are ideas about ideal behavior, and there are certain values and expectations specific for each of the sexes.
Though this 'nature is to culture' as 'woman is to man' opposition has been critiqued, it gets a basic point across, that, the categories of man and woman are the result of cultural constructions. Some feminists on the other hand asserted that women's status is dependent not on their role as mother and not on their confinement to the domestic sphere, but on whether they control resources or not (Leacock:1978,1981). The category of the universal woman was questioned by feminist anthropologists like Jordonova(1980), Ortner and Whitehead (1981), MaCormack and Strathern(1980) etc. The category man or woman cannot be assumed as they are a result of social relations. Moore suggests that there is no gender model since there are differences between and within cultures and that there is no universal subordination of women. Women are oppressed by patriarchal structures but those have to be specified and not assumed (Moore:1988,1993).

It is therefore important to understand differences of race, class and ethnicity in order to understand differences or commonalities within and between different societies. To understand unequal gender relations, feminists would have to do the same.

It is also important to understand the cultural construction of gender in a society, to understand the ideology regarding womanhood and motherhood. The 'naturalness' of motherhood has been criticised as motherhood is also culturally constructed. It depends on how the attributes of womanhood are linked to attributes of motherhood like fertility, maternal love, nurturance etc. When the categories
'woman' and 'mother' overlap, then attitudes towards women are linked to ideas about marriage, family, the home, children and work. But there are also societies where these categories do not overlap and women are not totally responsible for child-rearing (Moore: 1988:25).

In the next section I shall discuss the cultural construction of motherhood, specifically whether motherhood is a means of power and the connections between gender inequality and the cultural construction of motherhood.

3. The social construction of motherhood

The idea of social construction of reality is based on the thought that people interact by using symbols to interpret one another and assign meaning to perception and experience. For instance, when a person asks a woman who has been married recently and is childless about when she is going to have a child, her/his words play a critical role in what the married woman will experience as reality. The taken for granted everyday routines, interactions and events are seen as the source of individual experiences and the shape of groups and societies (Johnson: 1995:203-204). It is important to understand the ways in which people experience everyday life and imbue their activities with meaning (Outhwaite et al: 1993:460-461).

.....people encounter each other in an already constituted, meaningful, intersubjective life-world, which is the 'paramount reality' for human beings and advocates the study of the ways in which people experience this everyday life-world. The existence of others is taken for granted in everyday life. People orient themselves using typifications...through which meaningful interaction is effected (ibid:461).
3.1 Reproduction/motherhood: Power or powerlessness?

The fact that there is a biological difference between men and women leads us to the question of the perception of such a difference in a society. Does women's capacity to reproduce make women inferior? Some feminists like Shulamith Firestone viewed this biological difference as the reason for women's subordination and proposed that women should have control over their bodies. She suggested the use of technology to get rid of this difference (Firestone: 1971). Even Simone de Beauvoir considered pregnancy as something which alienates a woman from herself (Beauvoir: 1949).

Since women can reproduce and men cannot, in many traditional societies, reproductive capacity is something which women consider their source of power, as defining their identity and status. Feminists like Adrienne Rich feel that the way motherhood is constructed results in its institutionalization, and subordination of women. But, the experience of motherhood itself is not negative (Rich: 1976). Some feminists look at reproduction as a combination of a capacity and a limit. That depends on the specific culture and on the extent to which men regulate this capacity. This is also enunciated by the interviews with childless women. Motherhood is looked at as a very positive experience by most of these women mainly because of its social importance.

3.2 Gender inequality and the social/cultural construction of motherhood

Inequality between men and women has been explained sometimes by understanding the ideology of motherhood prevalent in a society. Feminists view it as one of the important ways by which this gender inequality is created and maintained. Under
certain conditions in society it becomes important for men to own children and control women's sexuality and fertility and then it becomes important to establish fatherhood (Engles:1973; Reiter:1977; Lerner:1986). Controls on women's reproductive capacities were exercised in patriarchal societies to control inheritance in the male line. Private property needed heirs who could be identified (Engles:1973).

This ideology of motherhood posits women as producers of children and of labour power. These women, in the context of private property in capitalist societies, are women who have to adhere to a particular ideology of motherhood. Men need children to have heirs and to prove their masculinity, but even though they might envy women's capacity, women are subordinated precisely because of this capacity in most societies. Women's activities are restricted to child-care and maintenance of the family. This affects the position of women in these societies subordinating them to men. Such subordination is possible because firstly, women's activities are restricted to the household and secondly, they are not considered economically productive.

Simone de Beauvoir reacted to the prevalent ideology of motherhood, which she felt, prevents women from asserting their individuality and from being creative (Beauvoir:1949). The nuclear family was perceived as oppressive by many

13 A social group occupying a dwelling or other domicile (Uberoi:1993).

14 A group consisting of a married couple and their unmarried children (Uberoi:1993).
feminists, as motherhood was part of being in that kind of a family (Friedan:1965). But some feminists did not believe that they would have to give up motherhood to assert their feminine identity. They critiqued motherhood as an institution, but not as an experience, which they considered empowering (Rich:1976). Rich felt that because motherhood is not a choice for most women in a patriarchy, it is oppressive. Therefore she said women should have control over their own body and sexuality to reduce control of this institution over them. Though she has been criticised for emphasising this biological ability of women, other feminists have agreed with her about its institutionalization as being oppressive for women.

The 'mothering role' of women is reproduced in society irrespective of whether they become mothers. This role affects ideas about masculinity and femininity and reproduces sexual inequality. These ideas have been explored in-depth by Nancy Chodorow who believes that the 'mothering role' has a psychological influence on girls and boys (Chodorow:1978:11). According to her,

> Women's capacities for mothering and abilities to get gratification from it are strongly internalised and psychologically enforced, and are built developmentally into the feminine psychic structure (ibid:39).

Chodorow feels that there can never be equality between the sexes as long as women are held responsible for bringing up children. Motherhood is seen as positively significant at one level in some societies, and as devaluing, especially in the labour market, at another one. But with the understanding that the ideology of motherhood was dependent on the way a society constructed it, motherhood came to be looked at not just negatively. In fact, it is
considered a resource for women who are denied the experience. This is true of infertile women who centre their whole life around the fact that they cannot bear children. Infertile women feel inadequate because of societal pressure and the pressure they put on themselves.

The ideology of motherhood differs according to the socio-cultural context, ethnicity, and class (Rich: 1976; Rosaldo: 1980). In some societies it might have connotations of respect and power. For instance in India, where society is mostly patriarchal, the mother goddess is highly revered. Mothers do have respect but to a very limited extent, and that respect is usually for mothers of sons. This can vary depending on factors like gender relations, class and caste, even within a society.

A woman is considered 'complete' or 'real' only when she becomes a mother. She 'proves' her womanhood in this way and feels secure in her marriage because motherhood, it is believed, bonds the marital relationship. She also feels she has accomplished what she was supposed to do as an adult woman. Women who cannot mother are tortured by the fact that they cannot feel 'fulfilled' like most women. A woman who is single or childless by choice is considered incomplete and selfish in most societies, whether western or traditional.

In the next section I will discuss the ideology of motherhood with special reference to India.
4. The social construction of motherhood in India

The ideology of motherhood in India is discussed in the context of the Indian family structures which have a patriarchal kinship system, patrilineality\textsuperscript{15}, marriage and attitudes towards adoption and re-marriage.

The Hindu feminine identity, fertility and feminine identity and the glorification of the mother goddess are also important factors in the cultural construction of motherhood in India.

I shall be discussing the above mentioned in the following section.

4.1 The social construction of motherhood and family structures

The ideology of motherhood is related to the way families are structured, kinship practices and depends on the variations in them. Ideas about womanhood and motherhood are linked to family and marriage. To understand gender relations in different cultures, an understanding of their kinship systems is important. Family organisation and marriage are important to understand reproduction and motherhood. Kinship is also important in understanding inheritance, rights over children, authority and responsibility of members of the family or kin-group. According to Leela Dube, kinship is a very strong force, especially in South Asia (Dube:1994). One of the major causes of inequality between men and women is the way the patriarchal family is structured and the understanding that mothering is one

\textsuperscript{15} Descent reckoned exclusively through male links (Uberoi:1993).
of the major roles of women in society.

The Indian kinship system is not homogenous. There are different systems depending on region, religion, caste, class and ethnicity. But there are commonalities and differences. Women's experience of relations within and between families depend on the type of marriage in a particular system (like in the north versus the south i.e. close kin versus distant kin). Irawati Karve has explored this in her analysis of kinship structures. According to her, the commonalities between different kinship systems are the joint family\(^\text{16}\) system and the caste system (Karve:1965).

The north Indian superiority of 'wife-takers' over 'wife-givers' also influenced the south Indian system. Both systems give importance to the relations established through marriage which are not symmetrical (Dumont:1983). In both systems, inspite of no close-kin marriage in the north, marriages are arranged and partners are chosen within a caste or sub-caste and not within very close-kin (Dumont:1968). In the north, women tend to marry higher in the hierarchy (caste and class) making the alliance more unequal because of the superiority of husbands family's caste status. The lower status groups throughout India tend to imitate higher groups in kinship practices\(^\text{17}\).

\(^{15}\)Descent reckoned exclusively through male links (Uberoi:1993).

\(^{16}\)Family containing two or more married couples, in this context, usually parents and sons with wives and their children (Uberoi:1993).

\(^{17}\)This has been termed 'sanskritisation' by M.N Srinivas (Srinivas:1977).
According to Karve, in the north, marriages are avoided with close-kin and the family who gives the daughter is inferior to the family who receives her. In this system, the caste status must be maintained and at the same time there are rules of local exogamy\(^{18}\) and against close-kin marriage. Marriages\(^{19}\) usually take place early and because they are arranged by the parents, the man is usually a stranger to the bride. She leaves her mother's home to live with this stranger, which puts her in a vulnerable position. Karve points out that different words for daughters and brides imply a double standard of behaviour and of morality for each. A bride is expected to be on her best behaviour. She has to live with her mother-in-law with whom, she is stereotypically, in conflict. If she behaves properly in her new house, she does not have to fear being thrown out. Proper behaviour usually means enough dowry\(^{20}\), efficiency in doing housework, respectfulness and service to elders, husband's pleasure and her earnings (Dube:1994:14). What Dube overlooked in this list was fertility and bearing sons. Staying in the in-law's house means for her, a further lack of control over her own life and losing rights in her natal home. The bride, inspite of contributing to productive activities, has no control over resources.

\(^{18}\) The rule prohibiting marriage within a specified group (Uberoi:1993).

\(^{19}\) A socially sanctioned relationship between a man and a woman, usually involving economic cooperation and residential and sexual cohabitation and ensuring the legitimacy of the children born of the union (Uberoi:1993).

\(^{20}\) Gifts transferred by the bride's kin to the bride and/or bridegroom on the occasion of marriage (Uberoi:1993).
Marriage is sacred and it is believed that no one should die without getting married and...

...to be childless is to miss heaven (Karve quoted in Uberoi: 1993:58).

A girl's happiness thus depends on her marriage but at the same time it is sad for her to leave her parent's house. At her in-laws, she is a stranger and...

...only when a girl becomes a mother of a boy does she feel completely at home in her husband's house (ibid:58).

There are certain patterns of behaviour that a woman who marries into a joint family (where the man lives with the family among whom he is born and the wife spends her life with this group of complete strangers) must follow. She hardly has any freedom and is supposed to be subdued and not come into any contact with the other males in the house or be seen or heard too much except when she is working. She gets some freedom only when she becomes a mother or when her mother-in-law becomes old. If she does not fulfill her role, and something goes wrong, then she is certainly blamed for it (that also includes not being able to conceive).

Control over her sexuality begins since puberty in her parent's home and continues after marriage too. Sexuality is related to her reproductive capacity. The notion of purity is very strong and women are responsible for maintaining caste status. Because of controls imposed over women's movement outside the house, there is a lack of exposure to the larger world. Then a woman's major role becomes mothering and taking care of the house (though lower caste women also work in the fields and most upper caste women are also involved in extended agricultural
As mentioned earlier, the groom's family is usually higher in status in the north and that has to be maintained. As a result of this kind of marriage, where the bride is 'controlled' by the patri-kin, and because of its patrilocal nature, she feels isolated among strangers. Even when the family becomes a (sort of) nuclear unit, with only the husband, wife and the children it continued(es) to have economic and ritual ties with the patri-family (ibid:62). Therefore the situation remains almost the same for the wife. She is still 'controlled'.

The patriarchal, patrilocal and the patrilineal nature of the family in the north exists even today. There might be minor changes, but the norms of behaviour according to status (according to generation, sex, insider or outsider) are almost the same (ibid:63)\textsuperscript{21}. Marriage is usually a relationship between two families than between two individuals, though this might not be as true for marriages by choice which are becoming common in urban India.

In the central zone there are other features besides some other practices which also might vary as there are inter-regional differences. In the south, marriages are between close-kin and the distinction between daughters and brides is not sharp, causing the wives less stress. There is no sharp distinction also between kin by blood and by marriage, like in the north. Women, according to Karve, have greater

\textsuperscript{21} In this study I have taken into account the northern region kinship pattern because almost all the couples I have interviewed for this study are from the north and belong to the regional kinship category described above.
freedom in this society (ibid:71). But that statement is to be critically analysed as certain aspects of 'patriarchy' are common to most patri-kin groups, especially when it comes to women's overall status in the family.

4.1.1 Patrilineality

Rights of succession and inheritance depend on the line of descent, from the male and the female or from either depending on which one is privileged. Indian society is mostly organised on patrilineality (through the male line) and descent, inheritance and succession are all in the male line. Residence is patrilocal and authority is vested with senior males. Such societies are described as "patriarchal" (Uberoi:1993:114). The strength of the lineage organisation depends most importantly on caste and class status, land-ownership and adherence to sanskritic ideals (Shah:1993 and Gough:1993). These factors influence family relations with the higher caste families being more hierarchical and the lower caste families more egalitarian, which also has implications for gender relations (Gough:1993).

The social rights and obligations are grounded in theories of biological inheritance that specify the form and nature of each parent's contribution to the individual male and female child (Uberoi:1993:117).

4.1.2 Marriage

The social inferiority of the wife-givers over the wife takers, is common between north and south India. There are marriages within the same caste which affirm caste
status and marriages within or marriage of daughters into a higher caste which is usually consistent with the Hindu ideology of *kanyadaan*\(^{22}\) and accompanied by a large dowry (though in some tribal societies the bride's family is given 'bride-price'). Irrespective of the kind of marriage, 'bride-givers' are inferior to 'bride-takers' in Hindu culture (Ubertoi 1993:231). Since marriage is between two social groups than individuals, it is usually arranged.

Dowry is the mode of marriage payment characteristic of the north and of high status groups (Miller 1989). Though now even low status groups and groups in the south take dowry. The type of marriage payment depends on women's rights in property and their role in production. Among dowry giving communities, women are usually non-productive and it is given as a sort of a compensation for that and also as a sort of an inheritance of parental property, even in a limited sense. Some communities, to claim higher caste status, take dowry now instead of giving 'bride-price'. Dowry-taking also increased with the increasing consumerist life-style. A woman therefore marries into a family where the demand for more dowry can be made at any time. The dowry usually does not belong to the woman and is under the control of the groom's household. She finds herself in a vulnerable position with the threat of being thrown out or treated badly or killed, looming large. In this context, her position becomes even more precarious if she cannot have a child or she has only girls and no boys.

\(^{22}\) The gifting of a maiden in marriage, the most prestigious form of Hindu marriage (Ubertoi 1993).
Joint families, whatever type they might be, define property relations and regulate marriage and inheritance. The joint family system is found mostly in north India, except for the north-east (Karve:1965). Nuclear families seem to be more advantageous to women, as women then have more "bargaining power" (Kolenda:1987 mentioned in Uberoi:1993:385). Though it had been said that modernisation would bring about nuclear families and subsequently various other changes like freedom of marital choice, increase in divorce, disappearance of dowry etc., but this change has been minimal and if at all it has been due to the rise of a salaried middle class (Vatuk:1972 mentioned in Uberoi:1993:388). Even then, this class had strong ties with their kin in the rural areas and was not purely a nuclear family. Some rules of patrilinearity are relaxed but to a limited extent, as marital choice is rarely free and dowry exists. There are inequalities within the family in terms of division of labour and distribution of resources. Patrilineality favours some family members over the others. Important resources like education, food and medical care are influenced by gender.

4.1.3 Adoption and re-marriage

Among the higher castes, adoption of boys by widows was encouraged as levirate was not allowed. They were encouraged to adopt the husband's brother's or cousin's child. This was to keep property within the same group. Sometimes adoption was prevented in the hope of a larger share of property which would otherwise have
gone to the adopted son. Men who were childless even after many marriages, adopted a child. The most important reason for males to have more than one wife was the desire for a male child. The man could also marry his wife's younger sister. If a wife was 'barren' even then they would remarry, sometimes with the wife’s encouragement (Karve:1993:59). That is because an adopted child would be a complete stranger, whereas the second wife's child would be the husband's child. But most of the time, according to Karve, the other wife's children are a reminder to her of her "defeat" (ibid:60).

Widow remarriage was prohibited but there was no taboo on the second marriage of a man. Even now, inspite of the law against polygamy, there are men who have two wives. This is not forbidden by many caste groups. Some of the popular TV serials today show the central male character happily married with two wives. So the threat of a second wife looms large on the first wife even today, as will be revealed later in this chapter through Poonam's narrative. Since relation by blood is so important, illegitimate and adopted children are not accepted easily even today.

4.2 Hindu feminine identity in India

Since national identity in India is defined in terms of Hindu identity, identity of women is what has been defined for Hindu women. Though most women interviewed for this study are Hindu but most of the expectations from a Hindu woman are relevant to women of other religions too.

23 Widow's marriage to her husband's brother.
The identity of a woman in India is formed in relation to the values, meanings and symbols of Indian society. Her self is affected by the cultural world outside. The meanings and values of the cultural identity are internalised (Kakar: 1988). Most women in India internalise the value of motherhood which is considered the ultimate achievement for her, especially if she gives birth to a son. She has been prepared into the 'motherhood role' even when she was a daughter and a new bride as she has been absorbing the traditional ideals of womanhood. In a culture where girls are culturally devalued, it is very important for a woman to be the mother of a son. Otherwise it results in, for many women, feelings of inferiority and worthlessness. When she is growing up in her parents' home, she is prepared to be a woman who is supposed to spend her life pleasing her husband and her in-laws. She internalises these ideals for love and approval. A woman is also supposed to be chaste, pure, faithful and devoted to her husband inspite of anything. She should be all this to be acceptable, this is the definition of a good woman, wife and mother. The 'good woman' myth is perpetuated by Sita in Indian mythology and the motherhood of sons, by Savitri. Sati is also the embodiment of sacrifice, where a woman's life becomes meaningless without her husband and she gives her life on his funeral pyre. She, in a way has no identity without her husband, which is inextricably liked to his identity.

The Hindu wife has to be chaste, free of desire, but for her husband. It is said that if
he has desire for any other woman but his wife, he pays with his potency.\textsuperscript{24} The woman who enters a family as a bride, is supposed to maintain certain codes of conduct with other males. She is not supposed to be close to any other male member of the family, so that there is no threat to the organisation of the family. Anyway, traditionally she is married early to prevent any pre-marital sexual liaisons. A woman is married off into unfamiliar surroundings where she has to be more submissive, has no power and usually has no one to share her feelings with. She has to make all attempts to be a good wife and a good daughter-in-law. Her husband is supposed to be worshipped like god, however unfair he might be. She is supposed to fulfill her duties towards him inspite of anything. She does not have any status as a daughter-in-law. The couple hardly gets a chance to be intimate and develop their relationship in a joint family. If at all, that happens later, with parenthood. Since most of the husband's attention is on his family, he is closer to his mother than his wife. Thus according to Kakar,

\begin{quote}
...the conclusion is unavoidable that the identity struggle of the adolescent Indian girl is confounded by the coincidence of marriage, the abrupt and total severance of the attachments of childhood and her removal from all that is familiar to a state of lonely dependency upon a household of strangers (Kakar: 1988:65).
\end{quote}

Pregnancy and motherhood bring a better deal for this woman whose status is then enhanced. It gives an anchor to her shaky identity. People in the family begin to care for her. In India, there is a religious and historical tradition of equating woman with mother. To be the mother of a son is even better respected as it is supposed to

\textsuperscript{24} This is derived from the myth of Sandhya who is freed of desire as a new-born and is re-born as Arundhati, the chaste wife (Siva Purana 2.2.5.:1-68, translation quoted in Kakar: 1988:58).
provide deliverance. The childless woman is miserable, as is the goddess Parvati in her childlessness which she has described as the greatest sorrow of all (O'Flaherty:1973 quoted in ibid:66). Having a son perform the last rites of his parents brings salvation for the couple. Besides the ritual and religious importance given to motherhood, there are various motherhood myths and the general social and economic (if she has a son) importance which makes motherhood a central feature of a woman's life. Pregnancy according to Kakar, brings relief from the doubts about fertility and the insecurity of childlessness. So motherhood becomes the main feature of her adult identity. But she is also given importance because as a mother she becomes the perpetuator of the race. She too feels grateful for motherhood as it accords this new status to her. She has self-respect because of her son and exercises authority through him. This motherhood identity is by society to 'control' the mother and sometimes by the mother to deal with certain situations.

4.2.1 The mother as goddess

In Indian society, the same association that Sherry Ortner talked of is seen, as women and mothers are associated with nature. Nature is feminine because of its fecundity and this theme is important in many folklore and myths. Original power is said to rest in mother goddesses. Female deities preside over the most critical sectors of life such as food, personal survival and perpetuation of the race (Nandy:1988:73).
All creation and power in Hinduism is based on femaleness, she is the fertile bestower and the destroyer. As seen earlier, the woman is also nature, the field or the earth where the man puts his seed. So women are both power and nature (Ortner:1974). This combination is what makes her dangerous but she is also the 'giving one', representing growth, prosperity and fertility. There are benevolent and malevolent goddesses in the Hindu pantheon. The former are properly married and have transferred their sexuality to their husbands and the latter control their own sexuality.

Classical Hindu laws focus on the 'wifely role' of the Hindu woman. Women are to be kept under control. There are less definite norms for mothers in Hindu mythology, in law books like the Dharmasastras and Sanskrit texts. But goddesses are considered mothers who protect.

The reverence given to the mother in India as the goddess is seen as compensation for the real state of mothers in society where they are not autonomous, are subordinate to their husbands and are powerless. Whereas the mother goddess represents...

...a world view in which the creative power of femininity is central... (Ganesh:1990:WS-58).

In spite of the difference, mothers carry the ideological burden of glorification. Being a mother is considered a virtue because of its sacrificing character. There are various rituals which also accord status to mothers. But on the other hand, there are taboos
which deprive women of nourishment during pregnancy. Whatever status is accorded to the mother of a son, lesser is accorded to the mother of a girl and if the woman cannot have a child she not only does not have any status, but her life is spent in misery.

Mothers truly represent the dual character of the Hindu female as mentioned above. The 'mother role' is used as an example of ideal behaviour. Since she can give and take away, she is feared, but is accepted because she is necessary. As compared to wives, mothers are in control of themselves, their sexuality and their children. Hers then becomes the alternate role to that of the dutiful wife (Wadley: 1988:33).

But inspite of this powerful representation of mothers in Hinduism, the 'mother role' is still like the wife's role, she continues to be dutiful. The only difference being the difference in her status which becomes a shade better within the family, especially if she has a son.

4.3 Fertility and feminine identity in India

The ideology of motherhood in Indian society explains why fertility is so important to define womanhood and motherhood. Demographers define fertility as the number of children people actually have. In theory, the concepts apply to both men and women, but in practice the focus has been on women. Birth rates (and even infertility) cannot be understood without paying adequate attention to men's social and biological roles in reproduction (Johnson: 1995:109).
Indian demographers and those focusing on India are very concerned about the total fertility rate. Most women are assumed to be fertile, as very few are actually infertile or have problems with conception. But they are still quite a large number in a large population. In the context of the way feminine identity is defined and the ideology of motherhood, being fertile is important and infertility is a huge problem. Though it might be a problem for the State to control fertility, but it is very important in the cultural context, because as mentioned above, kinship and family ties depend on the progeny.

The metaphor that the male contributes his seed to the field which represents the mother is used in most of north, central and some parts of east India. The seed is in the semen which is supposed have a relationship with blood. It was believed that the child carried the man's blood as semen was considered a product of his blood. Therefore the child's identity and blood is derived from the father. Those males who share common blood also share property. The role of the mother is of the nourisher, she is supposed to be only the vehicle. These symbols are also used in Hindu marriage rituals which are aimed at purifying the womb which will receive the seed. The paramount duty of a man is to become a householder and perpetuate the lineage through male offspring only.

25 According to a survey done by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on the incidence of infertility in different countries, the incidence of infertile women in India is 3 percent and about 10 percent of Indian couples have problems of infertility (WHO:1991). An India Today report stated in 1993 that nearly 16 million couples in the 18-39 age-group are afflicted by the problem (Katiyar:1993).
Infertility is explained by some, by comparing the infertile woman with infertile fields and infertile men as those with no seed. Sometimes the language of the seed and field is used to assert parental right by the man. This symbolism very strongly emphasises the patrilineal descent principle (Dube: 1986:22-29). The mother's contribution is recognised in matters of caste endogamy where purity of blood is very important to maintain caste boundaries and to preserve caste purity (ibid:34). What Dube is trying to say is that the use of these symbols emphasised an unequal relationship between the sexes and women's contribution to biological reproduction is underplayed. Though the symbolism ties her down to motherhood, she does not have rights over her own children. In a patrilineal kinship structure of an agrarian economy, rights of ownership, control and use of land are governed by the patrilineal principle. In India, inheritance and succession are governed by the mostly followed principle of patrilineal descent and residence at marriage has been patrivirilocal. Inspite of the property laws which entitle daughters to a share in their ancestral property, it is not acknowledged.

The woman's link to the earth also signifies the idealised role of the woman bearing pain like the earth does, when ploughed. If a woman is childless she is compared to barren land and sterility in a man is referred to as infertility of his seed. Since the man owns the field and the seed, the offspring belongs to him (ibid:41). Dube emphasises that the man's rights are not just restricted to the woman's sexuality or her reproductive capacity but also include her productive capacities as well. She also

26 The rule enjoining marriage within a specified group (Ubero: 1993).
has no right over the earnings of her labour.

As seen above, even though the woman reproduces, the male is considered superior in reproduction because he contributes the seed. The woman is the 'field' and the 'produce' belongs to the one who owns the 'seed' and therefore the 'field' too belongs to him. Therefore a man has control over a woman's sexual, reproductive and productive capacities (Dube:1986).

Women cannot make decisions regarding their own fertility and if they are infertile or cannot have sons, they go through misery. The individual patriarchal family is considered protective, oppressive and subordinating.

In ancient times in India, prayers to conceive a male child began immediately after the wedding. In a ceremony called garbadhana, the prayer is for a male child. There were other rituals concerned with gestation, birth and for the child but in all these the woman's only role was to observe rituals for the well-being of the father and son and make sacrifices. The woman was a passive factor of reproduction though motherhood was glorified as a compensation to women because they satisfied society's preference for males who were potential producers and inheritors of property (Bhattacharji:1990:WS-50). Women were blamed as being as too inauspicious to retain their conception if they failed to conceive. No stigma was ever attached to an impotent male. Even though fertility was very important it was not enough without sons.
It was always the woman who paid socially and emotionally for childlessness. She was regarded as inauspicious, incomplete and a futile being (ibid:WS-54:). That was also because of the socio-economic conditions prevailing in an agricultural society. Children are required to be used later as labour and sons are required to leave property to. In polygamous families, wives with children have superior social status than childless wives. There were many rituals for which a childless wife was not eligible. Though a woman with children could not claim her offspring as her own, she experienced fulfillment emotionally because of the social recognition of her fertility.

Women's capacities for mothering and abilities to get gratification from it are strongly internalised and psychologically enforced and are built developmentally into the feminine psychic structure (Chodorow quoted in ibid:54).

Women were denied opportunities for creative expression and had only motherhood as an expression of social utility. Many women are still denied opportunities of self-expression and want to experience motherhood for that.

4.4 The glorified powerless Indian mother

Being a mother is an important social role, though mothers do not have power, control over material resources or rights over their procreative capacities. The origin of private property was considered leading to the "world historic defeat of the female sex" (Engles:1884:231). Engles dreamt of freeing women by breaking down the capitalist mode of production. If freed, he thought, women could get into social production. But the idea of emancipation should not be an idea of freeing women.
from reproduction, but having an emancipated ideology of motherhood.

Motherhood has been "institutionalised" by capitalist patriarchy. There are strong patriarchal norms within which women produce children. According to Jasodhra Bagchi, the ideology of motherhood was given importance in the cultural life of Bengal during the nationalist movement. It was an ideology of glorification, but in practice women were to follow a different social philosophy, of what she calls deprivation (Bagchi:1990:WS-65). Because Bengali mothers were made to feel somewhat empowered by her sons, they contributed to patriarchal control within the family.

The material powerlessness of the mother is revealed in Indian literature. Some novels have revealed...

...the tremendous ideological burden which the individual woman has to bear and act out and also capture the stirrings of female discontent against such role-constructs (Dutta:1990:WS-84).

The analysis has revealed that motherhood is used as a compensatory mechanism used to manipulate and control women. The Indian mother has internalised the cultural and psycho-biological myths about motherhood. There are dual images of the woman, the cultural image of female authority and the material image of powerlessness (ibid:84).

5. Field view: Interviews with childless women

The following is the analyses of the interviews with childless women on the following aspects: causes of infertility, spouse's response to the woman's infertility,
family's response, friends' response, other social pressures, images of her own body, rituals for new-borns, infertility and its effect on marriage, perceptions of womanhood and motherhood, attitude towards biological and social motherhood and adoption within or outside the family.

5.1 Poonam's story

Poonam is a 42 year old housewife married to a 46 year old businessman for the last 19 years. They are Hindu Punjabis and live in a joint family with separated kitchens. They are both school dropouts.

Poonam's desperation for a child is revealed by the fact that she and her husband started trying for a child only 6 months after they got married. She had been married for 19 years at the time of the interview. She had adopted her husband's sister's daughter a few years after her marriage. She had recently given birth to a girl child through Intra Uterine Insemination (IUI) with donor sperm. Her husband did not know that donor sperm was used. She said he would object if he knew because they would not know the donor's lineage and about the "purity of his blood".

I did not tell him because he would not allow it....thinking about the donor's khandaan\(^{27}\) and khoon\(^{28}\).

Male infertility is not considered as problematic as female infertility in a patrilineal society like ours, where property is inherited by male heirs and passed on in the male line even though women legally have a share. Therefore, male children are desired.

\(^{27}\) Local descent group (Uberoi:1993).

\(^{28}\) Blood (of the same blood).
With some, it is acceptable to have another wife if the first wife cannot conceive. Even if there is no second marriage, there is the threat and the insecurity that the husband will remarry. Somehow, the wife is held responsible for childlessness because she is the one who gives birth. She is not left guilt-free even when its proved that the male is infertile. The in-laws usually support their son and blame the daughter-in-law. Nevertheless, it is a blow to the male ego if he discovers that he is impotent or infertile. It does not fit into their concept of `malehood' and virility.

Poonam expresses her views on his infertility candidly.

I've got used to it, I feel good that its not my problem. He didn't want to get tested, didn't want to admit it. He is very egoistic. Eventually, when he couldn't bear it he went through surgery (he had an sexually transmitted infection). But, he doesn't know that his sperm are only 20 percent. Initially, he even refused to get the minor surgery to correct his problem because he didn't want to accept that his malehood had been affected. He is embarrassed about his premature ejaculation but inspite of all these problems with him, he wants to throw me out of the house. My in-laws know about his problem, but they don't want to believe it.

The definition of femininity is fertility and motherhood is the most desired virtue for a wife. If a woman cannot give birth, she is not a `complete' woman. There are constant threats of another marriage or divorce. Though polygyny is not practiced among the families of the women studied, the threat is always there.

My mother-in-law called me a hijra\textsuperscript{29}, blamed me, threatened me, said that I will be thrown out. She said that if Muslims can get married again even after 40 years of the first marriage, why can't her son. ...even after the legalisation of the adoption of our daughter, the pressure to have my own wasn't lifted. Not that I wanted my own child so badly...especially when I got to know that it is going to be with a donor's sperm...but I wanted to prove that I am a woman and that I can also give birth.

\textsuperscript{29} Eunuch
In the north Indian kinship system 'wife-takers' are traditionally superior in caste and class status to 'wife-givers' and 'wife-givers' enhanced their status by marrying into a superior caste and status family (hypergamy). But in a few cases like Poonam's, the 'wife-givers' are superior in status and married their daughter into a family of lower status. In such a situation the husband and his family might feel inferior and it may result in a "complex". Poonam is convinced that this "complex" is also one of the main reasons for her marriage not working out.

Poonam is convinced that this "complex" is also one of the main reasons for her marriage not working out.

... since I married into a lower income family, it resulted in a complex in him. He used to avoid getting tested as this would make him feel worse.

Infertility and marriage

When a bride gets married she is not seen just as a reproducer of sons but is also expected to contribute and take over the work in the house and in families involved in agriculture, also work in the fields. In urban areas, the woman is expected to do house-work. If the woman happens to have any 'flaw' (like infertility), she is sometimes ill-treated as Poonam has been.

Marital problems were there from the beginning. I was immature so I was not liked, things never worked out with my mother-in-law because she used make me do all the work of the house, they did not keep any help. My husband told me that even if my mother-in-law treated me badly I should accept the ill-treatment from her. He never said anything to her and when the conception problem happened, it just became worse. My mother-in-law believes that a man cannot have an infertility problem, only women are to blame.

Regarding the effect on her marriage, she is very clear about the reasons.

Our marriage never worked, he used to visit prostitutes and developed an infection which created a lack of sperms. But I was not told before marriage that he had a habit of visiting prostitutes. In the first ten days of marriage he
had made it clear to my behno\textsuperscript{30} that he would have other women because everyone has other women. He never cooperated with me for anything. We never had a good married life. He wanted to marry again because I could not conceive and that is why I continued treatment for many years. Even after stopping it for six years I started again. My mother-in-law used to force the doctors to give me hormonal tablets to conceive. If I would not take treatment, they were threatening to throw me out and not to let me have any claims on any property. I became insecure and that is another reason why I decided to try all over again. I wanted to prove to them that I can do it that there is nothing wrong with me...and it worked.

But I feel we would have still had problems in our married life even if I would have had my own child a few years after marriage because he would have kept other women.

He is still into having a good time with other women on his trips. At the moment he's having one with the maid. I know it but cannot do anything. I have to tolerate it.

In patrilineal societies like India's, marriages are arranged and most of the time the bride-to-be cannot choose who she wants to marry. Marriage is usually based on caste and class considerations and the groom is usually chosen by the elders in the family. Poonam says she was not very interested in this marriage and does not feel guilty for not having borne a child.

I did not feel guilty about not being able to have a child because I know that the problem was with him, not me. I have sometimes felt that I should have married someone else. Because if he had married someone else it would be the same because he is infertile. When he came to see me before marriage, I never saw that sparkle in his eyes but I couldn't explain this to my mother and eventually got married to him.

I'm glad that infertility is his problem rather than mine because I don't have to feel bad even though I'm made to. Infertility is sad for women because of what they have to go through.

I used to feel sad and lonely because of this but more so when my mother-in-law used to call me names. I felt this the most when they were going to throw me out of the house. Its only then that I decided to go for this advanced treatment.

\textsuperscript{30} Sister's husband.
But there is no one who understands me and my pain. Nobody. I only talk to my younger sister mostly on the phone or to my part-time domestic help.

Poonam was a stranger in the house she married into, like most women in patriarchal societies. She, like them, lacked a sense of identity in this strange house.

I am not allowed to have my own friends, only my husband has friends. Relatives have always pointed fingers at me for not having a child and made me feel unworthy and unwanted..... they always talk about it.

The importance of male child in a patrilineal society is reflected by some rituals which are different for male and female children.

Some rituals are the same for newborn boys and girls. But the mother gets less time to rest if she produces a female child, the chauka\textsuperscript{31} ceremony when the mother is supposed to enter the kitchen is on the 13th day, whereas if its a male, its on the 22nd day. Lodhi\textsuperscript{32} is celebrated with great pomp if its a male but not so if its female.

If the woman cannot produce a child she is considered "manhus"\textsuperscript{33}. Poonam who was considered so, went through various treatments but also kept vrats\textsuperscript{34} for conception.

I kept Friday vrats for 4 years, went to dargahs\textsuperscript{35} and temples in Kashmir and many times to the Vaishnav devi\textsuperscript{36} temple.

For Poonam motherhood is 'completeness'..... and survival.

\textsuperscript{31} This is a ceremony that brings an end to the resting period of the new mother, so that she can enter the kitchen and resume work.

\textsuperscript{32} This celebrated by Punjabis of north India. It indicates the end of winter and is celebrated after the sowing for the season is over.

\textsuperscript{33} inauspicious

\textsuperscript{34} Fasts

\textsuperscript{35} Memorial of a muslim saint.

\textsuperscript{36} Temple of a mother goddess, one of the many forms of Durga.
It's very important for every woman to become a mother because a woman is _adhura_ without being a mother. A couple's married life is absolutely incomplete without having a child. A family is always with children. A woman, to be feminine, should be a mother but financial independence is very important because I have had a very bad experience asking for money. A woman should have all the qualities of a woman, but she should earn own money.

The urge to mother a child also comes from inside. I cannot explain the exact feeling. Having my own child is more important than adopting a child because of the family pressure. My husband agreed to adopt his sister's child but wanted his own male child. I too wanted my own child to experience bringing up a child, but mostly because of the positive effect it would have on my marriage and family.

Children are more important to my husband and his family because I was being thrown out because I did not have any. A male child is more important. My mother-in-law used to maintain a difference with food, between the males and the females, with me and when my adopted daughter was growing up, she did it with her too. Ever since the kitchens were separated eight years ago, it has been better. Now my daughter is 14 years old. The little boys of my brother-in-law's (who live in the same house but on different floors) are treated better. Ceremonies, especially the first _lodhi_ of theirs was celebrated well.

My sister-in-law told me that since I am not from her community she did not like me anyway. I feel my marriage would not have worked even if I had a child within the first year. When the adoption of this girl from my sister-in-law was being formalised, even then my in-laws were not happy with me. They wanted me to have my own child.

Adoption within the family is encouraged more than adoption of any child, especially of unknown origin. But, it is resisted for a long time and used as a last resort for most couples, because the adopted child does not get societal legitimacy like a biological child.

I didn't get a chance to explain to myself the fact that he was going to adopt a child. The child was imposed on me by his sister and I was prepared to take of her only for a while. I felt the child was a burden and I couldn't accept her. She is his sister's child and has a male twin. The real mother used to come and celebrate her birthday. After a couple of years he got the legal

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37 Incomplete
papers made without telling me and I got to know on a family function through another relative. He just got my signature, but I wasn't prepared for it, I was upset because I thought it was a temporary arrangement. I wanted to prove my fertility.

Poonam went through many procedures of Intra Uterine Insemination through donor sperm without letting her in-laws or her husband know about using donor sperm till the child was born. Her husband's sperm was taken for every procedure but only donor sperm was inseminated.

*Hakims* 38 believe that if the male liquid and female liquid don't meet at the same time, conception won't take place, whereas doctors say that the sperm, if introduced inside for six hours, can result in pregnancy... That's how it worked for me...

And now, when I have had my own, they are still not satisfied because it's a girl. When she was born there were very few functions on the 6th day and the 13th day but there were no gifts given like gold etc., as is the practice. Her birth did not mean much to my in-laws.

In fact, I wanted to tell dr. to put the male sperm (sex-pre-selection for a male) but some astrologer had told my husband that it's going to be a boy. So he didn't listen to me when I wanted to get the male one put. I want another pregnancy and the next time I will make sure that I will get a male.

When parents become old they have only their son to take care of them...daughters go away. One of my relatives' son is away so they are in a bad state. I don't want to be like that.

But I am really exhausted doing all this. There are so many side-effects and I have become so weak and fat. My mother-in-law used to force doctors to prescribe any medicine and as a result I took so many hormonal pills for so many years that I put on so much weight and became moody. I started getting milk on my own due to these medicines and then I had to be treated for increased prolactin.

Poonam is a woman who has reconciled to the idea of living a life with a husband and a family which has put her through this. This woman has been over-dosed with hormones, which has resulted in obesity and she her hair has as grayed prematurely.

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38 Physicians who practice the Unani system of medicine.
She looked old enough to be the grand-mother of her newborn.

Her husband was very uncomfortable about the interview. She said it was his "male ego" which made him feel so and that she felt he didn't want his "secret" to be shared with an outsider. She said she could not leave him for another man as she is not attractive and is "fat", and because her parents are not supportive. So she has reconciled to the idea of staying here for financial security and for "society".

Poonam's is a subversive voice in a context where there are no alternatives. Hopefully her daughter will have some.

5.2 Sweety's story

Sweety is a 42 year old Sikh Punjabi housewife. Her husband has a well established transport business. She and her husband are graduates. They have been married for 22 years and have been trying to have a child ever since they got married. She has been taking treatment for infertility for the last 20 years. After trying to conceive for eighteen years, she managed to conceive once but miscarried.

She seemed very nervous when I met her at the clinic but seemed confident during the interview. She seemed to have come to terms with her situation. She talked of everything in material terms, i.e. relationships, attitudes of relatives towards them and towards their childlessness. Sweety lives in a joint family and says she has many "family problems".

I have problems because I have this problem of bearing things. My husband has two brothers, there used to be many families coming over. The whole burden of the kitchen used to be on me. I used to do more work so the expectations were more too. I also used to take care of my mother-in-law. If I stop doing things for people its a problem. My mother-in-law used to stay
with us because she did not want to stay with anyone else. After some time the brothers separated their kitchens.

My relationship with my mother-in-law was fine, but she was mentally disturbed towards the end of her life. She died two years ago. She used to love me a lot but my sister-in-law used to influence her against me. She used to feel insecure that I will take her jewelry.

People who do everything and get dominated on, continue like that and that's what happened with us. We had some problems with joint expenses. Some families spend more and some less. My husband does not say anything. He takes care of most of the business work and does most of the running around. He is the most hardworking. The people in the family thought that he is so nice to them because he is not close to his wife and does not listen to her because she doesn't have children. They thought that we do not get along. As it is life is tense. My husband used to stand up for me and say that he does not do anything without asking me.

Her life seems to centre around her feelings of inadequacy and conception.

Nobody ever told us that we had a problem but we have been trying for a child ever since we got married. We got to know that my eggs do not rupture a few years ago. All my husband's tests were okay, mine were okay too.
I used to feel very sad, my eyes used to fill up with tears if anyone used to say anything. When I got to know that my eggs are not okay I cried a lot.

When I was younger they could not understand why it's not happening. They used to give me 'fertile' drugs but with age, the chances of having healthy eggs reduce. I did not have any defect, sometimes my report was not okay but most of the time it used to be okay. I was quite healthy otherwise. When I got married my colour was white and red and my face was broad. We used to eat a solid diet. I'll show you my photographs, I was so slim and healthy, now I've put on weight and my face looks weak. Maybe things got spoilt because I used to bear a lot of pain without saying anything to anyone. I used to just lie down quietly.

Earlier I used to think the pain is because of intercourse, it must be happening to everyone. I never took the pain seriously I used to do some fermentation. It never happened before marriage. I don't have the habit of making a big deal but I also could not explain the problem to anyone.

She is insecure about whose blood the child will have, it has to be a child from a "good family", not just anyone's.
Earlier my eggs used to rupture but later they stopped rupturing. Even after taking injections they did not rupture. Then I used eggs donated by my bhabhi who donated them two times and the third time they froze the eggs. Her husband was not told about this as he might not have allowed it. But these eggs were fertilised with my husband's semen. I wanted to take eggs from the family, I want a good child, a healthy child. The doctors said they could arrange for a donor but I was wondering whose it will be. Then my bhabhi offered to go through the operation and give me her eggs. She went through the operation twice. We did not tell anyone because the word would spread. I have not been again for IVF as I did not feel like it, I was not feeling upto it. I will go again.... at least two times.

There are various coping mechanisms, one is to ignore and block things out. In the context of a patriarchal family, the woman who is married into it, has nobody to share her sorrow with. She remains an outsider, more so, if she does not (re)produce.

I do feel sad sometimes (cries.....). We have distracted ourselves a lot so that we do not feel like this. These days no one understands anyone's pain. Maybe my sister did but she also became my sister-in-law, my jethani. Now that thing comes in the relationship. You have to keep everything to yourself. These days nobody talks about what is in their heart. Maybe with friends... yes, I have one. We share things once in a while. With my neighbour's friend I share day to day problems like the ones with my mother-in-law or sister-in-law. Earlier, I used to cry a lot, but my husband does not like it. He said he would not talk to me if I cry, so I stopped. If my eyes used to fill up with tears he would not talk to me. He used to get angry if I used to cry regarding this problem. Earlier my husband never used to talk to me because he used to consider everyone else in the family his own. But since the last 2-3 years he discusses everything with me. He used to spend time with his mother but now she is no more.

Now I don't feel that sad, I have become less concerned, have become a dheet. If it happens, it happens, if it doesn't, its okay. What can one do? I have spoilt my looks, my eyes, after crying so much. I have to leave it aside. I can love other children too, though its not the same as having your own

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39 Brother's wife.

40 Husband's elder brother's wife.

41 A person who is unaffected.
child. I keep myself busy, I keep the house clean, I go for kitty parties, I teach recipes...

Even though some women may feel supported by their husbands and friends but the joint family is difficult to cope with, especially when things are not going "naturally".

As far as my husband is concerned, he is quite supportive. He says, if we don't have a child maybe its for the better, its God's wish. He never made me feel that there's a problem.

Everyone in the joint family knows about this and that I am taking treatment. They have taken advantage of this... because we do not have anyone to spend money on. They used to say "why are you saving money, you do not have children or why do you need good things". They want us to spend money on them. But why can't we have a good house or more gold. I have a good quality life so my sister-in-laws feel jealous. I wear good clothes and jewelry. They keep commenting on it. I spend freely on myself. We have traveled all over India and went to Europe last year.

My parents know about this but they have never interfered in our life. Neither do I feel excluded in the company of other women or friends with children. I am quite friendly with their children. I have never felt jealous about other people's children. My friends are quite supportive regarding my problem and they do not treat me differently compared to other couples with children. I don't mind if my friends discuss their pregnancy with me or discussing my problem with them. But I do feel like experiencing a pregnancy like I did in those six months I was pregnant. Not many people ask me or my husband about this problem. Old people don't ask questions but give blessings for a child. Sometimes people suggest adoption, these days nobody says anything directly.

Though there are rituals for both new born girls and boys but there is a difference in favour of the boy.

The are some rituals in our extended family when a child is born. There is a chola\textsuperscript{42} ceremony and amrit chaiana\textsuperscript{43}. We have a function after ten days. Churi\textsuperscript{44} is made if a boy is born and khichri\textsuperscript{45} is made if a girl is born. After

\textsuperscript{42} This ceremony is for longevity of the new-born, who is dressed in a cloth belonging to the grandfather.

\textsuperscript{43} Purifying ceremony for initiation into Sikhism.

\textsuperscript{44} A rich sweet wheat preparation with pure ghee (milk fat)
one year we celebrate the first lodhi or the first birthday. For boys there is a pagdi\textsuperscript{46} ceremony when he is older.

There are some beliefs regarding infertility but I don't know of any. Nowadays nobody talks about it in that way, at least nobody has said anything to me on my face. These are there in the villages. My cousin had a problem so my mama\textsuperscript{47} asked her if she wanted to marry again.

The threat of a man being with or marrying another woman if she does not bear a child or a male child, is common in a patrilineal society and turns into reality in some cases. But she believes that childlessness is not the only reason men have two wives or see other women. She feels it is acceptable if the wife does not have children but unacceptable if she has children. She goes on to narrate two incidents which are not related to infertility but to men having two wives or seeing other women.

My cousin was a very decent guy but he got involved with a call girl. He left his three children and his wife and started staying with her. His wife gave her children poison and had it herself but they were saved. How could he stay with another woman inspite of having children? He had a son too. When a man goes crazy nobody knows what he will do. The wife gave poison to her children, when people are very upset they don't care what happens.

My sister-in-law's dewar's\textsuperscript{48} father-in-law kept a second wife after his daughters were married off. Because he wanted a son. Its so difficult for two wives to stay in one house. Some men do this and we, inspite of not having children, love each other.

The wife is supposed to be "sacrificing". The feeling that a woman should try everything to keep things in place is very evident. The most important thing in a

\textsuperscript{45} Sweet rice.
\textsuperscript{46} Turban worn by Sikhs.
\textsuperscript{47} Mother's brother.
\textsuperscript{48} Husband's younger brother.
marriage is to not leave the conjugal home\textsuperscript{49} no matter what. At least there has to be a feeling that everything has been tried in the circumstances, to overcome the situation.

Women should have the quality of sacrifice and adjustment. You get a lot of satisfaction. One should not get dominated. The man should also tolerate a bit. My grandfather married a second time because he had four daughters with my dadi\textsuperscript{50}. He asked her to leave the house but instead she asked him to leave. She would have left him but for her daughters. But he had only one girl from the second wife. She did not have any children after that. Then he forced my dadi and she had four sons. Then the other wife left. But her relationship with her husband was not the same. They say that a wife should not leave her husband's house, no matter what. Life is full of ups and downs. Everyone comes from a different background, one should struggle and adjust with different natures. In our relationship we fight but I have to suppress some things and adjust.

I have undertaken some pilgrimages for conception. We have gone to Hajur Sahib\textsuperscript{51} near Hyderabad, its called nadhed jagah. Its specifically for ladies. One should go there and get the prasad\textsuperscript{52}. We also went for snan\textsuperscript{53} to Amritsar once every month, for twelve months. I conceived the first time after this. I have never kept any vrats. My husband does not like it. From my side I have done everything.

Sweety feels that childlessness has not affected their marriage. She feels that her relationship with her husband is good and they have been so close that she never felt the need to go to her parent's house. But, she still has to accept what her husband decides and feels guilty for not being able conceive or for the spontaneous abortions. This guilt is probably why she is in denial regarding her infertility "problem".

\textsuperscript{49} Home consisting of a man, a woman and their children (Ubero:1993).

\textsuperscript{50} Father's mother.

\textsuperscript{51} A Sikh worship place.

\textsuperscript{52} Sacred food from a religious place.

\textsuperscript{53} Purifying bath at a religious place.
This problem has not affected my married life. We never felt it because my sister's children were there for 8-10 years. There used to be tension regarding this sometimes and I used to talk of adoption but my husband never agreed. He felt that there are other children in the house so its okay. I feel guilty sometimes now. Earlier I never felt guilty because at least I managed to get pregnant once. But now I feel its because of me that I had an abortion two times. I might have made a mistake, done something strenuous. Earlier we never felt that we will not have a child. At least I conceived twice, so people will know we are okay. But some people might feel that since it resulted in an abortion, one of us is not okay.

No, I never felt that my spouse should have married someone else. Maybe I did tell him in some other context when he would get angry, that "because I do not have children you are angry". But he told me never to bring it up again. Ever since, he gets less upset or angry. It doesn't matter whether infertility is my problem or his, because we both do not have a problem so the question does not arise.

My relationship with my husband is good. He takes me everywhere, even to his friends' houses. I go with him on business trips. He wants me around always. I have never been to my parents house. I have always got what I wanted. He is very good. We spend time together. He is the nicest out of all the brothers. Now, he is getting more attached with me as we are growing older. He has become more caring and the relationship has become more loving. He has realised that its not our fault. Now, he has also started doing path. It has helped him a lot. We have never felt that we should leave each other. I never hide anything from him. The first time when I got to know that even with injections my eggs were not rupturing, I came home and cried a lot. The doctor had suggested that I could get donor eggs without telling my husband. But I decided to tell him. I told the doctor that only if its okay with him I will do it. I do not want any friction later. But, he told me to do what I wanted.

Motherhood is still the most important goal for a woman. The blood-bond between mother and child overtakes the one with the husband.

Yes, of course its very important for every woman to become a mother. You feel happy doing things for a child, it gives you happiness. A couple's married life is incomplete without a child. With a child, love increases between husband and wife. He likes children more than me. I like fair, good looking and naughty children. Earlier I was not exposed to children. Now I like them. A family is complete only with children.

54 Term used by Sikhs for reading from their religious text.
There is a maternal instinct which is an individual urge. It is an attachment. You are not related to your husband, but you are related to your child.

It's important to have children, especially a son, because old age becomes difficult without children. We knew an old couple who had a very difficult old age because they had only one daughter. Then who will we leave our money for? With children, there is a routine, one does not get time to get involved with other problems.

There seems to be a reluctance towards adoption especially if the couple lives in a joint family, where there are other biological children of the other brothers and there is difficulty taking independent decisions. Also, because the lineage of the child is important, so adoption is usually from within the family or a child is especially conceived for the childless couple.

I have experienced pregnancy, now I want to experience childbirth and bringing up a child and its positive effect on my marriage. We will try for our own child for some time then we might adopt. My husband did not agree for adoption earlier because he wanted me to try. But now he might agree because we are tired. Also because he is disappointed with the extended family.

If these procedures do not work then I will ask my bhabhi to have a child and give it to me. I will ask her after a year or so. We are getting older and we should be there when the child needs us. I would have tried IVF 4-5 times by then and anyway I have had one experience of pregnancy. She will not feel bad giving me her child because she knows that I will keep the child better than them. We have never had any problems with them or my elder bhabhi. We try to do a lot for them. Recently we had a wedding in the family so we gave equally heavy (expensive) sarees to them. Though my brother does not know that she gave me her eggs, but he will let her have this child for me. He cannot say no because my father still has a hold on the house and if he tells him he will do it. We do a lot for them too, so what if they are doing this for us? If they have a problem we are always there. My in-law's family will not mind and now that we have experienced that the other children do not bother for us, we have to have one of our own.

I will have to accept the child whether its a boy or a girl. Since we have asked her for it we will have to take it. Its not that I will not take it if its a

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55 Traditional Indian dress.
girl. Anyway she has a boy and a girl, what will she do with another girl. My sister's husband, who is also my jeth, had asked me to take their boy but we did not because its the same house and one cannot feel free. They might not like it if we hit the child and they might feel that we are not treating the child well, because he is adopted.

I do not want to take anyone's child, like from a poor family. I want one from within the family. The child should be okay physically, one should know whose child one is adopting. I know a couple who adopted their niece and then a boy. They asked their guruji who asked his disciple to produce a child for them. Guruji did not tell them whose child he is but people keep asking them.

Even if I adopt I can try IVF again after some time. I cannot do it continuously because my body does not allow it, I feel very weak.

5.3 Discussion: The reality of 'barrenness'

In India, a woman who cannot give birth is considered 'barren' and is said to have sinned in her previous life, which results in her 'barrenness'. There are various beliefs regarding in fertility prevalent in India. Some of the women I interviewed said that infertile women are considered inauspicious. According to a study on fertility in a Rajasthan village, a barren woman... is considered an ill omen both for the household and the larger society. It is inauspicious to run into her early in the morning or on auspicious occasions, such as rituals of childbirth, wedding and marriage, or while setting out of the house to the fields for sowing, or to another village or city. These considerations are indicative of her lower status....The dart of barrenness is thrown at her to whittle down her strength and to latently glorify fertility (Patel:1994:78).

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56 Husband's elder brother.

57 Religious leader
One of them, referred to Hindi films where the 'barren' woman is cursed by her in-laws or blames herself for not being able to conceive. Invariably the husband marries someone else or like in the film, *Doosri dulhan*\(^5\), the wife forces her husband to 'hire' another woman (a sex-worker) who is paid to get pregnant and give her child to them. This is acceptable in a culture where sex outside marriage is taboo. For the wife, it is a sacrifice, but she makes it because she would get a 'precious' baby in return. Hiring surrogates is still uncommon in India, though it is quite common within families where a brother or a sister gives up a child for adoption or has a child specifically for the childless sibling. Hiring surrogates is quite common in the west though it comes with many legal problems. There are many instances of the surrogate going back on the contract resulting in court battles. In India there have been only few reported cases of commercial surrogacy (Appendix I). Even in the above mentioned film, the sex-worker goes back on word after she has her child, but eventually gives him to the couple when she realises that the child cannot have his father's name and will be ridiculed as an illegitimate child for the rest of his life.

Male surrogacy was prevalent in India in the time of the *Mahabharata* as mentioned in the previous chapter. One also hears of practices where a woman is asked to take the blessings of a *sadhu*\(^5\) to have a child. The woman is inseminated by him, which is the *prasad*. Not many women in modern India go to *sadhus* but they look to modern medicine for help. The Indian public health system, does not offer any

\(^5\) The other bride.

\(^5\) Mendicant.
preventive measures for infertility. Treatment is mostly available in the private medical system, at a high cost. For years gynaecologists and sexologists have been putting women and men through hormonal therapies or surgery or through treatments of other heavy antibiotics, to "cure" this "problem". In vitro fertilisation gave these desperate couples a chance to have their own baby. In the search to have one's own biological child, couples who come from the higher socio-economic group, could now have a child. In India, where there is a stigma against infertility and childlessness, this seemed a great scientific achievement. Most couples who take treatment are most apprehensive about the societal reaction to their childlessness. As in the west, the need for a child in India, is not so much a biological need than a social one. Having a child is the next immediate step after marriage for a woman. She is valued most for her fertility, if she is not fertile, she is not a complete woman. Symbolically her sindur\textsuperscript{60} is the symbol of her fertility. Even a family is defined with children as it is incomplete without them. A couple will always be asked about their children even many years after marriage.

One of the major needs fulfilled by having a child is the social acceptance of a woman as a mother. Motherhood is sacred in India and as mentioned earlier, most female goddesses are mother goddesses in Indian mythology. Motherhood, then is a powerful state which give a woman better status (even though a shade better) in the family. There are sacrificing qualities associated with being a mother, so after being given some status in her family, she is also supposed to be sacrificing as part of her

\textsuperscript{60} A red powder worn by a married Hindu woman in the parting of her hair.
motherhood role.

Childlessness also brings exclusion from the social nexus of mothers and couples with children. People are usually insensitive to this problem and sometimes, make pointed references to it. Moreover, children seem to be the central point of discussion for mothers, so a childless mother would feel excluded and her childlessness becomes more obvious. Some women who are infertile feel constantly preoccupied with their body waiting for a sign of something going wrong or right. There is anxiety with the onset of menstruation, it is viewed not as a sign of femininity, but as a failure. There is concern that if she gets pregnant, will it hold or not or preoccupation with the cause of infertility or with unexplained infertility. The woman faces problems with her in-laws but also in her marriage. The relationship between husband and wife is sometimes strained, there are very few men who would be supportive of their wife if she had an infertility problem, but if the husband has the problem the wife is mostly supportive and even tries to cover up and take the "blame".

Since a woman is defined by her fertility, she internalises the motherhood-role to the extent that if she is infertile, her concept of self takes a jolt which results in feelings of worthlessness. Then she proceeds to do all she can to reverse the situation. even if the male has an infertility problem, the woman and society "blame" her for it since the child is borne by her. In the recent past, there has been an effort made by doctors, to explain that male infertility is also a problem, but even then, women take
it upon themselves, as they are asked all the questions and are answerable to society more than men. If the problem is with the woman, then the self-blame is even worse. They feel guilty and much of their fertile years are spent in working towards rectifying the "problem".

Infertility has very often been compared to a bereavement and can be a wreaking experience for both the woman and the man. It may lead to identity dilemmas, lowered self-esteem, frustration and a sense of powerlessness (Rowland:1985). Most childless couples find infertility very difficult to cope with, throughout their lives. It can lead to psychosomatic problems and constant feelings of guilt.

Most women feel a sense of isolation from a lack of discussion about infertility. Educated women, who want to read about it, have access to information material written from the doctors point of view. There are very few books available in India and very few women are told about the physical and psychological consequences of infertility treatments and IVF.

The experiences of infertile women remain mostly invisible inspite of it being a major life crisis for most women. It changes the woman's self-perception, changes the direction of her life and if there is medical intervention, her life almost comes to a standstill. Then her personal problems become public and relationships become strained. Infertility is an emotional experience and involves a lot of anxiety and grief. It is a personal and social dilemma for women and those around them. It is seen as a
woman's "problem", but is an issue which does not concern women alone. Even men have strong feelings about their fertility and their desire for children.

For some women, it brings insecurities, they feel vulnerable and getting close to people easily, becomes difficult. For most, it is very difficult to reconcile with their infertility and they spend their energies on how they could carry on with their lives without children.

There are many reasons for the importance given to biological children in society. It is assumed that the desire to have children is normal and parenthood is part of the natural order of things. Infertile women do not find it difficult to express clearly why they want children probably because they are thinking about it constantly. Some women might not be that enthusiastic about motherhood but want a child to satisfy their in-laws or husband. Self-esteem becomes an issue because motherhood means a change in status and identity for all women. It could affect their personality and until women's primary role is perceived as that of a mother, infertility will form the core of their identity. A child is like a reflection of oneself, and some women want children or want to experience pregnancy and child-birth. Some want to experience bringing up a child. Some are under external pressures to have children (as in India). For some, it makes them feel part of daily life. There is also a sense people have of what is the ideal time to have a child. A child is like an achievement, men can prove their sexual potency. It is important for women because for them, there is a link between femininity and fertility. Motherhood also gives women a female adult
identity, a reputation of a responsible human being. Children provide emotional satisfaction, make life interesting and provide a reason for living. People also want children because they want to see a part of themselves in their child, it is almost like a biological need. Some want to be able to spend their wealth that they have acquired or achieved, on someone, and a biological offspring is the best person to spend it on. Having a child, for some couples, affirms their love for each other as a child is seen as a binding factor. A child is also looked upon as someone who helps an urban middle-class housewife spend her time, the child occupies her and gives her status in society, she also has something to talk about with other women. Whereas a poor woman, has children also for economic reasons. The more children she has, the more earnings there are for the family as a whole. So, children are precious resources for her as she anyway cannot send them to school.

In India, there is not just societal pressure to bear a child but to have a male child who will continue the name and lineage of the family and provide physical and financial security in old age. India, therefore has the unfortunate history of female-infanticide and sex-selective abortions. Female children are just not welcome as revealed by the sex-ratio in most states. If they are around, they are more malnourished and less educated and have fewer opportunities than the male child. So, women continue to have children till they have at least one male child, be it through sex-selective abortion or even sex-preselection. The law against these is not implementable and as there are many loopholes and it is performed, almost openly. The law will not be effective unless there is a change in societal attitude.
Feelings of losing control are expressed by some women who are childless, losing control over their body and their life. For many women, conception becomes an preoccupation resulting in anxiety and despair, depression and various other psychological problems. This adds to the problems that already exist. They feel sad, disappointed and exhausted by the intensity of their emotions because this has taken over their life. Its like their life is on hold when they are going through the treatment.

In-depth interviews with infertile people undergoing treatment, have revealed that women express disappointment at failing expectations and that treatments allow hope but also defer final acceptance of infertility.

Since this experience damages self-esteem it might have repercussions on other relationships of the woman. In India, women often complain of being ridiculed by their in-laws for not being able to conceive. Such a situation permanently damages this relationship. Even husbands ridicule their wives and are rarely supportive. If infertility is his problem, then it hurts him because he considers it a threat to his masculinity. Women feel rejected by their partners because they are made to feel incomplete and the threat of someone else coming on the scene looms large. She is subject to anger and accusations are made against her and she is made to feel responsible. The couple's sexual life becomes mechanical which also affects the relationship.
Women have to cope with blame and go to great lengths to have a child. Women who remain childless have to learn to live with it and learn from their experience positively. Being with children is not necessarily a fulfilling experience and there could be many other experiences which need to be explored. Eventually, in modern society, even couples with children become childless after their children go away. It is believed that having children makes women more likable, more womanly, warm and caring. But the same qualities surface in other satisfying and equal relationships with adults. Women can find an identity beyond parenthood and find new ways of relating that are not family-centered.

6. Conclusion
There is considerable research carried out in the west on the sociological and psychological implications of infertility and infertility technologies, but there is a dearth of such research in India. In India, there has been much debate on reproductive technologies like Amniocentesis, sex-preselection and hormonal contraception. But there is yet, to be a debate on social aspects of assisted reproduction in India. This thesis is one such attempt.

It is important to understand why fertility is so important in our society. It defines womanhood and womanhood is defined by a woman's capacity to mother. The social activities of men and women are defined by the categories 'man' and 'woman' which are socially constructed.
The system of patriarchal descent, patrilocal residence, property inheritance, lineage and caste is responsible for the extreme importance given to fertility in Indian society.

The position of women in different societies depends on the cultural understandings of the category 'woman' which vary. In order to analyse women's subordination, gendered relations have to be considered. Various cultural understandings of the categories 'man' and 'woman' have been proposed by anthropologists, which have been discussed in this chapter. This separated the domestic and public spheres for women and men respectively and formed the basis for ideas regarding motherhood, fatherhood, the family and home. Men and women are constructed in opposing ways. There are ideas about ideal behavior, and there are certain values and expectations specific for each of the sexes in individual cultures.

It is important to understand the cultural construction of gender in a society to understand the ideology regarding womanhood and motherhood. The attributes of womanhood are linked to attributes of motherhood like fertility, maternal love, nurturance etc. When the categories 'woman' and 'mother' overlap, then attitudes towards women are linked to ideas about marriage, family, the home, children and work.

Some feminists have viewed the biological difference between men and women as the reason for women's subordination and consider pregnancy as something which
alienates a woman from herself. In many traditional societies, women's reproductive capacity is something which women consider their source of power, as defining their identity and status. Some feminists feel that it is the way motherhood is constructed that results in its institutionalization, and subordinates women but that the experience of motherhood itself is not negative. Some look at reproduction as a combination of a capacity and a limit.

Feminists view the ideology of motherhood as one of the important ways by which gender inequality is created and maintained. Men need children to have heirs and to prove their masculinity but even though they might envy women's capacity, women are subordinated precisely because of this capacity in most societies.

The 'mothering role' of women is reproduced in society irrespective of whether women become mothers or not. This role affects ideas about masculinity and femininity and reproduces sexual inequality. Women's capacities for mothering and abilities to get gratification from it are strongly internalised and psychologically enforced, and are built developmentally into the feminine psychic structure.

With the understanding that the ideology of motherhood was dependent on the way a society constructed it, motherhood came to be looked not just negatively. The ideology of motherhood differs according to the socio-cultural context, ethnicity, and class. For instance, in India (which is considered mostly a patriarchal society), where the mother goddess as mother is highly revered, mothers do have respect, but
to a very limited extent, and that respect is usually for mothers of sons.

A woman is considered 'complete' or 'real' only when she becomes a mother. She 'proves' her womanhood in this way.

The ideology of motherhood is related to the way families are structured, kinship practices and depends on the variations in them. Ideas about womanhood and motherhood are linked to family and marriage. Family organisation and marriage are important to understand reproduction and motherhood. Kinship is also important in understanding inheritance, rights over children, authority and responsibility of members of the family or kin-group. The way the patriarchal family is structured is one of the major causes of inequality between men and women and of the understanding that motherhood is one of the major roles of a woman in this society.

The patriarchal, patrilocal and the patrilineal nature of the family in north India exists even today. If the family is joint, then they define property relations, regulate marriage and inheritance. Some rules of patrilinearity are relaxed but to a limited extent, as marital choice is rarely free and dowry exists. There are inequalities within the family in terms of division of labour and distribution of resources. Patrilineality favours some family members over the others.

Adoption is encouraged only within the family so that property stays within the same group. As relation by blood is so important, illegitimate and adopted children
are not accepted easily even today.

The identity of a woman in India is formed in relation to the values, meanings and symbols of Indian society. Most women in India internalise the value of motherhood which is considered the ultimate achievement for her, especially if she gives birth to a son. The childless woman thus is miserable. Besides the ritual and religious importance given to motherhood, there are various motherhood myths and the general social and economic importance (if she has a son), which makes motherhood a central feature of a woman's life. Pregnancy brings relief from the doubts about fertility and the insecurity of childlessness. So, motherhood becomes the main feature of her adult identity.

The reverence given to the mother in India as the goddess is seen as compensation for the real state of mothers in society where they are not autonomous, are subordinate to their husbands and are powerless. Mothers carry the ideological burden of glorification. Being a mother is considered a virtue because of its sacrificing character. The 'mother role' is used in Indian society as an example of ideal behaviour.

The ideology of motherhood in Indian society explains why fertility is so important to define womanhood and motherhood. In the context of the way feminine identity is defined and the ideology of motherhood, being fertile is important and infertility is a huge problem. Women get gratification from mothering and this is strongly
internalised and psychologically enforced. Women earlier had been and even now are denied opportunities for creative expression and have only motherhood as an expression of social utility.

Being a mother is an important social role, though mothers do not have power, control over material resources or rights over their procreative capacities. But the idea of power or emancipation should not be an idea of freeing women from reproduction but having an emancipated ideology of motherhood.

Motherhood has been "institutionalised". There are strong patriarchal norms within which women produce children. There is a tremendous ideological burden which the individual woman has to bear and act out but sometimes there is also discontent by some against such role-constructs. Motherhood is a compensatory mechanism used to manipulate and control women. The Indian mother has internalised the cultural and "psycho-biological" myths about motherhood. There are dual images of the woman, the cultural image of female authority and the material image of powerlessness.

Therefore, motherhood in a society like India defines a woman's identity even before marriage because the preparations for a self-sacrificing life begin much before she is married. And if she cannot reproduce due to whatever reasons, she is the subject of ridicule and abuse. Children, especially males, give the woman status within the patriarchal family (be it joint or nuclear), define her identity, give her psychological
and emotional security and strengthen kinship bonds.

The responsibility of women to 'mother' in India excludes them from public life and most importantly from power and authority. Motherhood as Michelle Stanworth said, needs to be "deconstructed" in order for it to be experienced as creative. For that, the social structure has to be changed, as motherhood is socially and culturally constructed. Motherhood should be seen as just one aspect of women's identity and they should be seen more as 'persons' than as 'mothers'. Motherhood gives women status in India, but mothers are powerless even in a land where the mother goddess is revered.

Lineage is still very important and some women who were interviewed for this study did not want to use donor sperm or did not want their husbands to know that donor sperm was being used fearing that they would not allow it. Male infertility is not considered as problematic as female infertility in a patrilineal society like ours, where property is inherited by male heirs and passed on in the male line even though, legally, women have a share. Therefore, male children are desired. Women have to bear the social and psychological consequences of being infertile irrespective of whether they or their partner are infertile. Nevertheless, it is a blow to the male ego if he discovers that he is impotent or infertile. It does not fit into the man's concept of malehood and virility.
When a bride gets married she is not seen just as a reproductor of sons but is also expected to contribute to productive labour. If the woman happens to have any 'flaw' (like infertility), she is sometimes ill-treated, as some women who were interviewed for this study have been. Besides, the threat of the spouse marrying again, there are threats regarding the woman's claim to property. Therefore, the woman besides wanting to become a mother to feel 'complete', has greater access to resources.

When women get married they have a sense of a lack of identity in the house they marry into. They are often victims of violence and abuse and have nobody to talk to or share their pain with. The childless woman is considered inauspicious and feels unworthy and unwanted.

Adoption within the family is encouraged more than adoption of a child of unknown origin. But, it is resisted for a long time and used as a last resort for most, because the couple and the child do not get societal legitimacy. Some women do not want to adopt because they have feelings of inadequacy and want to 'prove' their fertility. Independent decisions regarding adoption are difficult to take in a joint family. Lineage is so important that some couples prefer that a child is especially conceived for them from within the family.

If the couple remains childless, it mostly has a negative impact on their marriage though some husbands are supportive and defend their wives against family pressure.
or criticism. There is a feeling that the extended family takes advantage of the situation of childlessness. Most couples who are childless, centre their lives around trying to conceive or coping with not being able to conceive. Since women reproduce, they feel responsible for their childlessness and if something goes wrong during a pregnancy they tend to blame themselves and feel guilty. This guilt, though self-imposed, has an obvious relation to the societal belief that women are completely responsible for reproduction and are to blame if something goes wrong.

Motherhood is still the most important goal for a woman. The blood-bond between mother and child overtakes the one with the husband. Maternal instinct is perceived to be an individual urge. Couples believe that their sons will take care of them in their old age. Having a son gives women greater negotiating space in the household and some women are open to the idea of pre-selecting the sex of their child as that can be done as part of the procedure of some ARTs. The focus for the Indian woman in a patriarchal context is not so much the experience of pregnancy or childbirth but the feeling of security she gets as a result of having a child, especially a male child. She is willing to even go through invasive procedures like IVF to achieve that.

In the next chapter I shall discuss social implications of the use of ARTs in India.