**Gendered Rage: A Postcolonial Reading of Commercial Gestational Surrogacy in India**

**Abstract**

This article brings the concept of anger, particularly gendered anger, to bear on a postcolonial and intersectional reading of the apparent ragelessness of working-class Indian women who act as surrogates in the international commercial gestational surrogacy (ICGS) industry in India. We explore how rage – the robust expression of the primary emotion of anger – can be silenced, how anger can be disallowed out of existence. Despite being given little information and say over the surrogacy process from start to end, taking high risks with their immediate and long-term mental and physical health (as well as risking social stigmatisation and the welfare of their own families), and the lack of rights they are permitted during pregnancy over their own bodies and lives, Indian surrogates are not usually seen as either articulating or experiencing anger, resentment, or outrage over the situation. They seem to be singularly ‘rageless’ at their victimisation. This article frames the silencing and suppressing of rage within a postcolonial context where Indian surrogates are the thrice-colonised, and concludes that anger i) can be cowed, if not correctly cultivated, ii) is not available to all, even when justified, iii) requires a narrative and hermeneutic framework for expression, iv) requires (role) modelling and cultural and linguistic inclusion and fluency before it can be even experienced in some cases, let alone resorted to, and v) anger as a weapon can be blunted by hierarchies and vertical structures of power.

**Introduction**

Most women have not even been able to touch this anger, except to drive it inward like a rusted nail.

Adrienne Rich

Framed within postcolonial feminism, this article unpacks how the twice-colonised – by imperialism and patriarchy – women of India have become *thrice*-colonised by the international commercial gestational surrogacy industry (ICGS) in the subcontinent, as working-class surrogates who are primarily the women exploited. This article flags how these women are not just financially victimised but also culturally subalternised in not being given an avenue, or even cultural permission, to rage when they are exploited. It aims to tackle the causes and impacts of Indian working-class surrogates’ seeming absence of anger from a global postcolonial perspective. The global, transnational case study of ICGS in India demonstrates the replication of a colonial logic in the twenty-first century. The workings of ICGS manifest how working-class Indian women’s bodies continue to be exploited in colonising ways, which are heightened by today’s transnational, global flows. Many studies on ICGS have already established how Indian women’s bodies are used as exploitable resources; this article's novel angle is in unpacking how these women seemingly do not express justifiable anger at their exploitation. The reasons for this include the way this industry is represented as altruistic (as women-helping-women) and the opportunity-of-a-lifetime, and because the surrogates are kept ill-informed of risks, especially long-term health risks. The absence of anger – because disallowed culturally and contextually, which this article scrutinises reasons for – is deafening and, in itself, oppressive and exploitative.

Focusing on the absence of rage in a postcolonial context where rage should be rife, this article explores why Indian surrogates, particularly those serving in the international commercial gestational surrogacy (ICGS) industry, which has been booming in India since 2002, seem to lack rage at or resistance to their conditions of exploitation. Considering the situation of working-class surrogates in India’s ICGS industry, it appears that anger does not seem universally accessible to all whose rights have been transgressed. Using an intersectional feminist lens to address this collective experience, this article considers the outward absence of rage at two levels: the situation as specific to the surrogates and the broader cultural context of gendered rage. Rage needs to be culturally emplaced before it can be validated. As such, a hermeneutical framework is required to be present to support both the experience of anger and the articulation of anger (the act of raging) as a valid reaction and emotion. A cultural context which does not facilitate such an outward expression of anger (as rage and outrage), or at least enable it by granting it the validity of existence, a language in which it can be articulated, and space for it to be performed, silences and drives anger underground, to the detriment of those experiencing it. This article examines the societal frameworks and power differentials that seem to coerce women into accepting exploitation where they should be outraged, into being silent where protest is called for, and passive where the absence of rage further disadvantages them.

**Framing ICGS in a Postcolonial Context**

Legalised in 2002, the ICGS industry in India is a form of biocapitalism (Shetty), worth USD 2.3 billion at its height. It regarded surrogates as ‘surplus biocapital’ (Majumdar 24), with their fees being the lowest and most compromised in the commerce of reproductive tourism and international commercial surrogacy industry. Laura Harrison reads ‘the Indian surrogate body as a site of consumption for white intended parents’ (150); Johanna Oksala submits gestational surrogacy to a rigorous Marxist-feminist analysis which concluded that ‘it becomes difficult to understand [gestational surrogacy] as a form of labor’ (3), particularly given that surrogates not only do the ‘carework’ of gestating for a nine-month pregnancy period but must hand over, in the end, a healthy living baby as a commodity.

Historically, the site of regulation of the colonised woman has always been intimately tied to the body (Sue 110). Working-class Indian women’s bodies have long been targeted for population control. Although under the guise of family planning, women were the primary focus of population control. The 1952 National Family Welfare Programme began by targeting male sterilisation with compulsory vasectomies to achieve targets nationwide rapidly (Patel; Rao), but after 1977, in the period of post-Emergency when there was a marked resistance to sterilisation among males with compulsory vasectomies, the focus shifted towards female sterilisation (tubectomy) and contraception monitoring (Basu 422), once again, placing the onus on women’s bodies as sites of struggle. In the twenty-first century, in the context of new forms of labour, women’s bodies are subjected to state-of-the-art medical technologies and utilised to contribute to the reproduction of upper-middle-class families, not just in India but internationally.

ICGS adheres to a colonising logic, rooted in colonial histories, presenting itself in new manifestations, in new spaces. The framing of ICGS disadvantages and, even more damagingly, discounts Indian surrogates. Lau argues that this positionality is brought about by the postcolonial legacy that twice colonises Indian women through patriarchy and imperialism, with far-reaching and harmful effects. She points to the systemic orientalist setup of India’s ICGS industry, which subalternises and peripheralises the surrogates. Furthermore, the Indian surrogates are not just twice-colonised but often re-orientalised: the ICGS industry is class-based and geographically enabled, outsourcing the risks and harms from the global north to the global south to be borne by the exploitable (Mendes and Lau).

**The Medical Imperialisation of Indian Surrogates**

Kalindi Vora’s work has been instrumental in setting out how ICGS in India is a living legacy of its being orientalised and imperialised; her research brings together ‘the role that medicine and medical education have played in India’s colonial and postcolonial history with the origins of the notion of the instrumentalised uterus … [which] helps explain the way that surrogacy and those who perform it in India become devalued economically and legally’ (100). Vora situates the twenty-first-century ICGS within the *longue durée* of imperial science and medical history: ‘A relationship of power between the Indian middle and upper-middle classes, here the doctors running the clinic and elite Indian commissioning parents, and the rural, less-educated, less-connected, and much lower-resourced women they hire to act as gestational surrogates represent in part a continuity with India’s colonial past’ (80). The unequal power relationship between the global north and south that colonisation has pre-established is hence recast anew: ‘The body and discourse about the body have historically been a site of colonisation, conquest, and contestations of power in Indian history’ (90). On the colonial remnants of the economy of gestation services in India, Vora points out that ICGS practices come from a history of medicine which is a legacy of British rule, ‘where the historical role of Western medicine was as a tool of colonial subjectification and the British civilising mission’ (89–90), and used for extracting resources and disciplining bodies. When commissioning parents engage with fertility clinics, when they travel to India, and when they employ Indian surrogates, they are complicit in exploiting a global unevenness of resource distribution as well as a long-standing power imbalance.

**Contexts: Gendered rage**

Given that Indian surrogates have more than enough reasons for raging at the conditionsunder which ICGS in India is carried out and their mistreatment at so many levels, the starting point of our inquiry is this relatively placid acceptance of conditions, an absence of indignant reaction or backlash, and the seeming lack of anger experienced and expressed. It is not the contention of this article that Indian surrogates may not be privately upset, distressed by, indignant, vexed, dissatisfied, annoyed, or unhappy over their experience of surrogacy conditions. It does not intend to posit Indian working-class women as without agency, unassertive, or ignorant of their rights. However, given the consistent and remarkable absence of protest, outward resentment, and rage, Indian surrogates do not seem aware that they have a right to anger, whether individual or collective, which would indict institutions and agents that use their bodies callously and trample on their rights, risking their mental and physical health, short and long term. They struggle with even identifying the structures which have systematically and comprehensively exploited and victimised them, and therein lies the greatest injustices perpetrated in Indian surrogates – that anger is seemingly kept out of their reach.

Even if, as Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak has observed, women in India have been doubly effaced ‘as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency’ (82), Raka Ray’s and K. Kannabirān and R. Menon’s pioneering work on Indian activist women demonstrates the long and effective trajectory of the women’s movement in India. More recent research on, for example, Dalit women in India and their right to self-determination (such as Anandita Pan’s on the need for understanding Dalit women as ‘a new social organism’) attests to the strong presence and political impact of female rage in the subcontinent. In the current climate of the #MeToo movement and women’s vociferous protests against sexual harassment, gender and caste discrimination, and institutionalised misogyny, Indian surrogates appear increasingly outlandish in their *lack* of anger. This absence of Indian women’s anger against ICGS is even more singular given that Kim Sue, together with other scholars and psychologists, has pointed out that anger has been identified as one of the five universal emotions (the other emotions are fear, happiness, sadness, and disgust), and not an entitlement. Soraya Chemaly in *Rage Becomes Her* even contends that anger is a *moral* emotion, which people not only have the right to claim but which is an ethical obligation.

Anger is intersectional and should be interrogated as such. Sue substantiates this contention by debunking the popular conceptions of anger as merely individual or personal when it is so often relational and social, collective and intersubjective, political and historical. She calls these kinds of anger ideological and institutional, where ‘structures of race, gender, neo-colonialism, capitalism, and byzantine bureaucracies produce feelings of frustration and anger that we often do not know how to process’ (Sue 5). This argument readily applies to Indian surrogates’ outward absence of rage, particularly as their historical context or tradition of raging against female oppression or exploitation, and even of anger against men (particularly their own menfolk, even in cases when they may be the perpetrators of gender injustices), is mainly restricted to the cultural elites. Chemaly (“Why Women”) reminds us that roles and responsibilities frame our anger – and therefore could equally render them invalid and void: ‘While we experience anger internally, it is mediated culturally and externally by other people’s expectations and social prohibitions … Relationships, culture, social status, exposure to discrimination, poverty, and access to power all factor into how we think about, experience, and utilize anger.’

Anger, as Audre Lorde warned in the early 1980s, can be fallible and misguided or misdirected, running the risk of incorrect agency attribution, of blaming the wrong parties. In this instance, as in so many, there is a failure to hold vertical power to account, lashing out horizontally instead of at those in the same oppressed positions. Drawing on Lorde, it is vital to correctly identify the intersecting exploitative systems responsible for the disparagement of women’s dignity and interests – including capitalism, the patriarchy, racism, classism, and homophobia – rather than blame fellow victims, such as brokers or agents who were themselves former egg donors and/or surrogates, horizontally in the same fraught positions. Because the latter are peers, they are more accessible and softer targets to be angry at, less frightening to reproach than the high-classed, prestigious doctors of ICGS clinics, or the commissioning (often Western) parents, with their authority and immunity of distance, difference, and affluence.

Different communities exhibit different combinations and diverse configurations of social dynamics, translating into distinct behavioural patterns and anger reactions. The anger profile of Indian surrogates appears singularly flat, which testifies to the depth and extent of ongoing gender inequity and inequality. Female rage would be one strategy for readdressing these imbalances.

Moreover, the distinct socio-spatial formations that result in the profoundly intersectional situation of Indian surrogates – as women in a highly patriarchal society, as working-class women, as women whose identities are relational in no small degree and dependent on their menfolk and families, as women who are lacking higher education (even literacy, as demonstrated by Shiv P. Katiyar) and political representation – makes it all the harder for this group even to entertain the notion of the righteousness of their rage. This intersectional perspective undermines the idea that rage is a global phenomenon: even if anger is considered a ‘universal’ emotion, it is not universally articulated. In this respect, the following section investigates some of the reasons why women’s anger has been disallowed by cultural narratives and social conventions, juxtaposing these with the situation for the Indian surrogates.

**Reasons and Ramifications: Anger Disallowed**

Anger confounds women and girls, who no longer know what to do with this surging, overwhelming response; Chemaly writes: ‘As girls, we are not taught to acknowledge or manage our anger so much as fear, ignore, hide, and transform it … [because it is] unfeminine, unattractive, and selfish’ (*Rage*, xvi). Even in the West, where there has supposedly been far more leeway for women’s rage, there has still been a long history of regarding anger as divorced from reason (Sue). Studies have repeatedly pointed out that women’s anger has turned upon itself and been framed as a threat, conjuring ‘a lineage of threatening archetypes: the harpy and her talons, the witch and her spells, the medusa and her writhing locks’ (Jamison). From childhood, male anger is perceived as more acceptable; at the same time, even young girls imbibe the notion that female anger is unnatural and ugly, and hence to be avoided and even reviled, playing into patriarchal traditions of anger being unfeminine.

Feminist thinkers have long argued for the transformational power – or at least potential – of women’s rage in political and epistemological terms (Sue 45). They see rage as a feminist resource that should be mobilised, underscoring that it has been labelled as unfeminine, downright unbecoming, irrational, hysterical, and neurotic because it has the power to challenge the very structure of social systems. It is precisely rage’s potential as antinormative and antisocial that makes it anti-systemic in theory. As Leslie Jamison argues, ‘We are most comfortable with female anger when it promises to regulate itself, to refrain from recklessness, to stay civilized.’ Lorde writes in turn, ‘For women raised to fear, too often anger threatens annihilation.’ It is a patriarchal strategy to deny women not just the right to rage, but the corresponding disobedience, rebellion, defiance, power, and revolution that could come with it, given that anger is ‘the seed of aggression and collective action’ (Chemaly, “Why Women”). And so, even when a woman has been wronged, she is still not permitted anger because the possible harm her anger can cause others ‘threatens to rob her of the social capital she has gained by being wronged’ (Jamison).

Women learn to de-escalate situations and tensions, put aside anger, and lower temperatures of conflicts and encounters: ‘We understand that abandoning our anger is a necessary adaptation to a perpetual undercurrent of possible male violence’ (Chemaly, *Rage*, xix), which is always a possibility. Samuel Reis-Dennis also appreciated the same, noting that the anger of the weak may render them even more vulnerable to social and physical risks. Women learn that being angry is dangerous as it can upset the status quo, break the circle of relationships, and result in pejorative labelling leading to alienation and even abandonment and social estrangement. Stifling anger is a method of averting negative consequences – anger ‘must go underground again’ (Thomas 510).

The multiple intersecting gender double standards of anger make this emotion acutely exclusionary. Hence, it is an automatic violation of received gender norms when women show anger in public settings, particularly political and professional ones. Chemaly (*Rage*) points out that if a man shows anger in an argument or debate in the workplace as a leader, people are more likely to defer to him. Still, the same behaviour from a woman will elicit quite the opposite response, which results in only men finding anger to be power enhancing. Anger is not just gender-determined but also class-determined: ‘men, and people in positions of power more generally, can safely express anger in situations where less powerful others cannot’ (Reis-Dennis, 11). It is not just women’s anger that is disallowed, dismissed, or suppressed. The anger of the middle classes is also discouraged because ‘[t]he middle-class defines and identifies itself through ‘control’ of emotions and against the uncontrolled emotions of both the wealthy and the poor’ (Sue 1). Similarly, global north anger is also seen as more justified and acceptable – more ideologically valid – than the anger of the ‘Third World’, with ‘minorities in the West and Third World people’ characterised as ‘pathological, volatile, and irrational in their anger’ (Sue 49).

It is essential to observe that women themselves adhere to the self-suppression of anger. Reis-Dennis highlights that to be roused to anger, there must be a perception that one has been disrespected, one’s rank compromised, and there must first be an understanding that transgressions have occurred. This situation does not arise if women do not perceive they have a reason for rage, given their acculturated self-effacing, or perception of being so far down the societal pecking order that injustice is the norm. Moreover, anger is about saying ‘no,’ Chemaly (*Rage*) notes, in a world where women are preconditioned never to do so. In the case of Indian surrogates, it is apparent that many are not even fully aware – and would probably be anything from bewildered to sceptical – if it were pointed out to them that their bodies are sites of neo-colonial and patriarchal othering and subalternising.

The failure to recognise the appropriateness of anger as a response is one of the key reasons women fail to rage. Chemaly observes that being indignant is ‘a powerful emotional response to insults and to threats against dignity,’ a precondition of which is ‘a secure sense of your worth and an equally strong sense that some valuable standard or norm has been violated’ (*Rage*, 30). Many Indian women act as surrogates willingly because they perceive this form of exploitation as serving a valuable purpose to their families’ interests, but as Chemaly notes, seeing oneself mainly in terms of usefulness compromises one’s ability to gauge wrongs done to oneself. There is no expectation of recognising one’s rights and dignities: ‘No expectation means no violation, and no violation means no anger in response’ (Chemaly *Rage*, 30).

However, even trusting that she is worth respecting, a woman still needs the courage to be angry. Angry emotions communicate ‘a willingness to fight’ (Reis-Dennis 6), or ‘fight back.’ This realisation may be frightening for women, who may find that fighting back can be intimidating at best, and self-destructive at worst. Not entirely trusting in their self-worth, rights, or dignities because their gender and social, cultural, and familial narratives have not provided the language or conceptualizations of such, Indian surrogates and women all over the world end up suppressing instead of expressing rage:

You swallow it. It’s a choice made by millions of women throughout time: the decision that the best strategic approach is to take the anger you feel and stuff it way down deep. Because to let it out is going to do more damage to you than it’s going to damage the person or forces you’re angry at. (Traister 81)

And, right there, the crucial feature of anger, as Reis-Dennis defines it – ‘its promise of *action* should the imbalances that led to the anger persist’ (8) – is lost.

There are other patriarchal placebos long used to distract women from righteous rage or bribe them into obedience – benevolent sexism is one example. By selecting an elite group of women to treat as special and unique, paternalism, condescension, and control are disguised as protection and care (Chemaly *Rage*, 169). This ‘chosen’ group of women trade autonomy for better treatment than other women will routinely receive, accepting being limited to roles as nurturers and supporting acts to their men, admittedly often resulting in high life satisfaction interpersonally, but at the cost of giving up peer support for other women’s experiences of injustices (169). Yet another strategy of this patriarchal subjugation of women and women’s anger at discrimination is the notion of ideal motherhood, which also serves to effectively disenfranchise women’s protests by conflating sacrifice for the good of the family with the feminine ideal.

Already discouraged, or instead disallowed, from being angry, women struggle most to be angry with the key perpetrators of their injustices: ‘Regardless of culture or geographical location, the most difficult arena for effective anger expression appears to be intimate relationships with men’ (Thomas 513). In the case of India’s ICGS, given the intersectionality at play, in particular the class issues, it would appear the surrogates’ male relatives are less the direct oppressors than the system, the (post)colonial history of power imbalances, and the uneven playing field between impoverished (and extracted) East and affluent (and agent of extraction) West, which collude to inflict structural and epistemic violence and orientalisms on the surrogates. As ICGS is part of a colonising logic, unsurprisingly many orientalisms are projected onto the bodies of the Indian surrogates as working-class women of the global south – twice or thrice colonised. It is convenient for the affluent Western commissioning parents to misrepresent the body of the Indian surrogate, stressing the tradition of the ‘Oriental’s body’ as excessive, particularly in sexuality and fecundity, to compensate for Western infertility (Harrison 150–151). This misrepresentation is ironic because, as Fixmer-Oraiz notes, ‘infertility itself is disproportionately suffered by low-wealth communities and communities of color and inextricably tied to a range of social-justice issues, such as lack of access to adequate health care’ (136). Together with the impact of the cultural conditioning of Indian women, the lack of rage, or absence of anger, in part also stems from external sources that continue the othering and subalternising that the surrogates have been consigned to in India.

**The ‘Rageless’ Indian Surrogate**

Indian women have not passively always accepted all the injustices visited upon them. Indian women – including working-class women – have a long history of participation in public protests, sit-ins, and struggles where they have taken to the streets to voice their anger. They have spoken against colonial rule and fought for political independence; they have loudly denounced dowry taking and sexual and domestic violence against women; they have been active in grassroots struggles in farmers’ movements, and so on – which have even led to significant legislative changes. Participating vigorously also in NGOs such as AIDWA and SEWA, working-class women actively support fights against injustices and galvanise others as they do so.

However, where ICGS is concerned, the odds are somewhat stacked against the working-class surrogates; not only are their bodies and labour and positionalities requisitioned and exploited, but the systemic exploitation includes a silencing and subalternising of the surrogates, almost as part of the contract. A study of the power imbalance in an ICGS relationship between Indian women of the global north (i.e., diasporic Indians) and Indian women of the global south (i.e., located in India) concluded that issues of affluence, class, and geography largely determine where the balance of power lies (Mendes; Mendes and Lau). In such cases, even if the Indian surrogate is not a passive agent and has aims, agendas, and opinions of her own, nevertheless, it is usually the commissioning parents who call pretty much all the shots. Seemingly compliant women are favoured as potential surrogates over assertive women. Drawing on fieldwork conducted in 2009-10, Sheela Saravanan observed how, for clinics, ‘[c]ourteous and submissive conduct was an important criterion in selecting surrogate mothers’ (105). The way the system is set up empowers the commissioning parents at the expense of the surrogate. This situation is facilitated by the clinics and medical staff in India, which renders ICGS potentially and exceptionally exploitative.

And thus, in 2018, India’s parliament passed the Surrogacy Regulation Bill (2016) banning commercial surrogacy for foreign applicants, supposedly to protect Indian women from predominantly foreign rent-a-womb exploitation. This is a period of uncertainty and tension in this industry, and possibly legal ambiguity. How the ban is enacted, and its impact on clinics, surrogate mothers, and intended parents in selected ICGS hotspots remains to be assessed. Many scholars, including Ray, have voiced concerns that this ban will drive the market underground, making it harder to police and regulate and more dangerous for surrogates, as well as passing the buck in outsourcing ICGS to other countries where surrogates will be just as vulnerable and poorly protected. In this respect, Sharmila Rudrappa observes: ‘Country-specific bans do nothing to alleviate the vulnerability of working-class women across poor countries. Instead, these bans create situations where women may be exposed to far deeper mistreatment and exploitation’ (“India Outlawed”).

The ban is problematic and even questionable because it does not seem to be aimed at protecting the rights of surrogate women, donors, and all the other vulnerable parties involved in the industry; instead, it appears to be pursuing some imperceptible ethical principles involving restricting access to surrogacy depending on political issues such as citizenship and social status. (It is worth noting that this policy is opposed to the one adopted by the Indian government for intercountry adoptions from India for foreigners. While the government statutorily fosters inter-country adoptions, irrespective of the candidates’ marital status for adoption, it has now placed a ban on gestational surrogacy.) Central and state agencies will issue eligibility certificates to intending parents and surrogates; the proviso is that intending parents must be Indian citizens married for at least five years with at least one of them being infertile, while the surrogate must be a close relative (close not being defined) who is a married woman with a child of her own. It is unclear why only such parties are permitted legally to engage in surrogacy, which cannot be paid, except for the medical expenses being met by the intending parents. What the ban does not do is express anger at the exploitation of surrogates’ bodies, rights, health, and needs, or change the very system which drove (and still drives) Indian women to desperate enough economic straits through lack of viable work alternatives, to egg donation and commercial surrogacy.

**Conclusion**

This article demonstrated how Indian surrogates’ non-articulation of anger – its nearly complete public absence, and as far as we know (from studies containing interviews with surrogates), private existence – is politically disempowering, victimising working-class women by enforcing patriarchal conventions of the unfemininity of rage and the feminine ideal of self-effacement and silent suffering. Educating women to self-restrain from rage-response insidiously normalises their exploitations, even in cases as extreme as ICGS imposes. If the legislating of ICGS as an industry in India provoked no angry responses regarding the callous utilisation of its surrogates, the ban on ICGS has correspondingly also provoked little angry backlash for driving this industry underground or into the black market with the continued (and perhaps worsened) exploitation of surrogates. As Sharvari Karandikar, Lindsay Gezinski, and Sarah Huber note, ‘Should the new legislation be ratified, even though Indian women will no longer be able to be surrogate mothers for foreign couples, they will continue to be surrogates for Indian couples living all across the world. Thus, women will continue to suffer from similar stressful situations’ (1439).

However, surrogates remain apparently rageless, slow to anger because they may not necessarily ‘perceive themselves as victims or as people brutalized in their employment in markets in life’; they may be operating in states of denial, given ‘it is an almost inherent human condition to make do with what one has’ (Rudrappa *Discounted Life*, 169). Moreover, having ‘chosen’ surrogacy, Indian women can be seen as complicit in creating ‘bodies of deference,’ in Chemaly’s terminology, and deference is incompatible with anger. Chemaly (*Rage*) views anger as a forward-looking emotion. Anger identifies injustice and responds in ways that mark it as unacceptable; it entails hope and leads to agency. The expression of anger could enable the establishment or re-establishment of ‘social standing and self-respect,’ bringing ‘transgressors back into the moral fold’ (Reis-Dennis 1–2). Anger, both personal and political, could lead to change. Anger is often the necessary trigger for change. But studies have also cautioned that anger is frightening, not only threatening the status quo by allowing those who have been downtrodden to stand up for themselves but to do so in ways that potentially contain violence, which women have often shied away from.

Culturally demarcated gender roles deny Indian surrogates’ permission to appropriate anger. This article has identified many reasons for the lack of anger as resistance on the part of these women: the erroneous perception that they have real choices and the lack of perception of disempowerment; the lack of tradition, models, context, and culture for protest, which also means lack of knowledge of how to collectively rage and resist; an entrenched cultural conditioning whereby surrogates perceive their needs as secondary to those of their family, equating self-effacement and suffering with appropriate femininity and good motherhood; the perception of rights as relational rather than individual; and the colonial hangover of the twice colonised, where surrogates would be slow (and highly unlikely) to dare rage against the dual authorities of qualified, higher-classed medical staff, and Western commissioning parents.

We are aware that Indian surrogates (or a significant proportion of them) may not even wish to rage at their conditions at this point. It may well be that given the patriarchal framework in which they self-identify, rage may seem unfeminine, selfish, unbecoming, and even unjustifiable. Some may even be angered at any threat to ICGS or their ‘opportunities’ as surrogates because it removes seemingly attractive options for lump-sum payments that can be used for family welfare, accruing high social status by performing altruistic deeds. However, it is well known that many victims have clutched closely at the very chains that bind them. This lack of surrogates’ anger expression is damaging – significantly and insidiously so, to them individually and to the inequity of their conditions. Studies on anger warn against the seeming gains for the fabric of a harmonious society undisturbed by rage where appropriate. Reis-Dennis states that where the expression of anger is fitting and virtuous, anger communicates a laudable fighting spirit; its converse, the banishment of anger, would be a severe loss: ‘life without the angry attitudes … would be impoverished, depriving us of the ability to fight for our relationships and respect with dignity and authenticity’ (9). Moreover, a society that fails to respect women’s anger fails to respect women. Anger goes beyond being a response to singular instances of injustice; it is ‘a related cluster of issues … related to many other considerations beyond the realm of emotions’ (Sue 69). Hence, the outward absence of anger of the surrogates involved in ICGS should be interrogated using a postcolonial, feminist, intersectional lens, albeit not necessarily a Western lens, and not necessarily under Western eyes (Mohanty).

This article began by providing some of the contextual coordinates of ICGS as a case study to advance the external lack of rage or resistance of Indian surrogates in the face of their exploitation by this industry. We conclude that female anger is not a readily available affective mode, for all its supposed universality, and is deliberately kept thus out of some women’s reach. Our case study shows that this complex, intersectional, multi-layered, intensely patriarchal, and (neo)colonial situation for women conspires to maintain the status quo, disempowering them and silencing their rage entrapping them in the continued exploitation. Not everyone is empowered to become angry. Working-class Indian women who become involved in the ICGS industry have long been dispossessed, culturally silenced, subalternised, and othered in many inventive ways, while their bodies have been sites of struggle and sites of wealth production. Anger may not yet be an emotion they can experience or express, even when fully justified, or one they would even want or welcome at present.

Anger requires conducive and facilitating social structures and cultural conditions, historical narratives, and hermeneutical frameworks before being experienced, expressed, and utilised. Anger needs to be enabled by being modelled emulated before it can be experienced and performed. The ragelessness of Indian surrogates is a curious, rather than mysterious, phenomenon. The quote by the poet Adrienne Rich which preceded this article talks of anger driven inwards as a rusted nail; there is a concern that the ragelessness of Indian surrogates at victimisation – which goes beyond that of the surrogacy industry, testifying eloquently to their twice colonisation by patriarchy and imperialism – could fester and poison their lives, identities, and psyches, their cultural and social development – indeed, like that rusted nail driven inwards into the bloodstream.

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