

Society



Single Mothers

IN TODAY'S world of single mothers who have attained that status only because they lost their husbands prematurely, there is another small group emerging. This is the group of women who are professionals or women in careers who have not yet found the 'right man' with whom they would like to spend their entire lives. They know that their biological clock is ticking away and they are also aware that if they do not plan a

pregnancy by the age of 35 years, their having a baby may become a distant dream. Freezing of eggs has become a wonderful choice to preserve their fertility, but sometimes they choose these options a little too late. This small group also consists of women in same sex relationship.

It is very easy for single women to produce a child, all they need to do is to go to an IVF clinic and request for Donor Insemination. Sperm donors are selected as per their

specifications from a sperm bank, and this is one of the easiest procedures to get a woman pregnant.

We have had quite a few requests by single women to either have a child through donor insemination or through the use of surrogacy, which is more tedious. Single women in our country are unwilling to carry the pregnancy due to social reasons, hence they use surrogates and then declare that they have adopted a child when they take their babies home. These are the sociocultural compulsions which

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prevent a single woman from getting pregnant and having a child, which she so desperately wants. But, over and above all these are the legal issues surrounding these pregnancies. In today's world of empowered women, it is difficult to understand why there is a fuss to register a birth with the official Birth Registry without adding the father's name? What can a single woman, who has used an anonymous sperm donor, add in the column of 'father's name' in the birth certificate? Obviously, she leaves it blank, or writes unknown, but that is not acceptable by society or the authorities concerned. A same sex couple, under my care, had to move heaven and earth to get their baby's birth registration done only because they did not have the father's name!

I was pleasantly surprised to see a headline 'Kids of single moms may not need father's name on forms' in the *Indian Express* in the year 2013. The Women and Child Development Department of the Maharashtra government has taken up this issue under the women's policy. The draft of the policy says that in the government forms, children of single mothers will have the option of mentioning the name of the father or mother or both. Hopefully, the school authorities will step back and respect this new policy change and will not insist on the father's name whenever a child goes to a school for admission.

If single moms have problems, so do single men! Single men, who have male preferences as their sexual partners, also desire children. It is difficult for single men to have a baby because they need an egg donor to obtain eggs which are fertilised by their sperm, and they also need a surrogate to carry the pregnancy through nine months. Surrogacy in India has catered to a large number of single men who wish to be parents. I am thrilled when I see them with their babies, how beautifully they look after them, how dedicated they are and it should make all of us banish the thought from our heads that they would not make good parents. They nurture their babies as well as women do, but face the same cultural problem of parenting an infant as a single parent.

In this modern era, it is time for a change. We should respect the wishes of single parents, of having a child without having to go through marriage which many a times do not go in the direction they were meant to.

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