

Key concepts

- Hinduism, being a pluralistic belief system, allows for varied responses to infertility. However, sanctity of life is a key principle in Hinduism along with karma. In traditional Hindu belief, having children is viewed as one of the most important aspects of marriage. Conception is seen as a Divine act.
- Infertility (IVF) is sometimes seen as a result of karmic factor and women often go through social, psychological and physical sufferings in varied degrees due to it.
- There are legitimate medical conditions in either parent that could be a possible cause of infertility. Once medical and emotional contributors are mitigated, persistent sterility is viewed by Hinduism as karmic or divine.
- Hinduism accepts scientific methods for assistive reproductive technologies. Infertility treatments are acceptable usually within certain guidelines. In Vitro Fertilization may be considered acceptable if the sperm and egg are preferably not donated. However, modern Hindus might be more open to anonymous donors.
- Even though surrogacy is seen as a medical treatment, Hindus do not use it commonly as an option to treat infertility.
- If a married couple have not managed to conceive after a reasonable time, they may then seek help. Artificial insemination with the husband's sperm should not be an issue, whereas the use of donated sperm may be seen as adultery even when the woman has not met the donor. Similarly, In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) may be considered acceptable if the sperm and egg are not donated. Some Hindus may have problems accepting any infertility treatment if they view it as interfering with the natural way of things and life's spiritual progress, even though this conflicts with the cultural drive to have many children.
- Crawford refers to an account in the Mahabharata, this time of Gandhari, the wife of the blind King Dhritarashtra. Whilst this story can be seen as being similar to the use of test tubes in IVF. Crawford uses it to suggest that this kind of technique implies that it is acceptable for couples to have children through IVF as a last resort.
- Dr Bhattacharyya points out that the central characters in the Mahabharata struggle with infertility and take action to evade their inability to have children.

Key quotes

"Infertility is an under-researched condition that is wrecking marriages and even people's lives ... Childbearing is considered an essential role in life and a yardstick by which women's worth is measured. So infertility invites social stigma. It is time we recognize it as a perilous personal and public health issue." **Dr Sama Bhargava, consultant IVF expert at Fortis Hospital, NOIDA.**

"To be mothers were women created, and to be fathers' men; religious rites, therefore, are ordained in the Veda to be performed (by the husband) together with the wife." **Manusmriti.**

"On failure of issue (by her husband) a woman who has been authorised, may obtain, ... the desired offspring by (cohabitation with) a brother-in-law or relation (of the husband)." **Manusmriti.**

"The Bhagavad Gita reminds Hindus to act while not being attached to the actions or to the fruits of actions." **Dr Bhattacharyya.**

Key words

pluralistic	karmic	infertility	donor	artificial insemination
Mahabharata	surrogacy	Dr Bhattacharyya	In Vitro Fertilization	S. Cromwell Crawford
conception	adultery	Divine act	sanctity of life	

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key arguments/debates

Some would argue that IVF is totally compatible with Hindu teaching.

Others would argue that IVF goes against the principle of ahimsa.

Some would argue that although IVF is generally compatible with Hindu teaching, it is not totally compatible.

Key questions

Are there any social or historical limitations of Hindu ethical teachings in relation to bioethics?

To what extent is the use of IVF compatible with Hindu teaching?

Is it acceptable or even relevant to compare modern issues with accounts found in the Hindu scriptures?