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**Title of the Thesis** : **Issue of Infertility in Contemporary India:  
A Sociological Study of Indigenous Practices and  
New Reproductive Technologies (NRTs) in Orissa**  
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### **Abstract**

Fertility is about control, power, hierarchy, purity, and sanctity. Conceptually this idea permeates social fabric of Indian society. Achieving of these or certain combinations of the ideals gives people emotional, religious and individual superiority. Hence, infertile women treated as the ‘Others’ in Indian society. Worldwide research in the issue of infertility and its treatment practices is booming in the medical arena. But a related concern is the lack of sociological research on infertility as a matter of [legitimate] reproductive health. Therefore, such a focus will unravel the experiences of infertile women in their socio-cultural context.

The present research demonstrates how diverse cultural settings in India mediate the experiences of those engaging with infertility treatment practices: indigenous healing and NRT (new reproductive technology) both as ‘users/seekers’ and ‘providers’. The study looks at the development of indigenous healing and NRT and how they encounter its user/seekers at the local level. The study also looks at the ways in which infertile women deal with both kinds of treatment and use to achieve, potentially, an ‘identity’. The study, focusing on diverse geographical locations in Odisha, is based on theoretical insights gained from ethnographic investigation comprising in-depth interviews with user/seekers and providers ranging a period from 2011-2014.

Four research questions guide the entire study: (1) how the self-identity of (infertile) women is negotiated through the existence of new technological knowledge? (2) What are the alternative therapies the woman employs for conception (e.g. visiting indigenous healers)? (3) What does the emergence/institutionalization of new social forms (e.g. motherhood by NRT) tell us about the possibilities and limits of human relationships? (4) What are the ethical issues associated with NRTs among the medical practitioners? Based on these questions, the large objective of the study is to understand the socio-cultural implications of infertility and coping strategies while undertaking treatment. Besides, the other objectives of the study are to:

1. sketch the development of health services and the history of indigenous healing as well as the emergence of NRT industry in Orissa
2. understanding perceptions of infertility among women
3. explore the kind of (infertility) treatment-seeking behaviour among women
4. describe the socio-cultural, economic and ethical aspects of infertility treatment in Orissa

The *second* chapter describes the methodology and the tools used to gather, and interpret data. The *third* chapter deals with the treatment practices i.e., both NRT and indigenous healing which determine infertile women's health-care choice and decision. The *fourth* chapter explores women's reasons for resorting to infertility treatment through NRTs. The growth of NRTs brings strength and encouragement from concepts which are deeply embedded in the tradition and culture of Orissa i.e. prevailing patriarchal stereotypes (or values), and the notion that motherhood is an essential part of woman. The *fifth* chapter presents the experience of women who sought indigenous healing. The healing narratives provide examples of specific rituals used during indigenous healing encounters by women. The narratives reveal that indigenous healing is still paramount in contemporary Oriya society. The *sixth* and *seventh* chapter shows the analysis and conclusions of the study respectively.