

# It's never too old to enjoy motherhood

Embryo Adoption Offers Infertile Women A Chance To Experience Pregnancy, Say Docs

Photo: Hemant Shirodkar

Malathy Iyer | TNM

**Mumbai:** When Patricia Bohanon, an American teacher, flies home to Colorado on Sunday, she will carry a precious made-in-India baggage: an embryo. This embryo, which was born in a petri-dish out of anonymous donor and an Indian sperm referred to Bohanon, who will deliver the Indian baby as her own in the first week of December.

Welcome to an assisted reproduction technique that is fast gaining popularity in a world where fewer children are available for donation, and adoption norms are getting more stringent. Not surprisingly, this method is called embryo adoption or embryo donation, depending on which side one looks at it from.

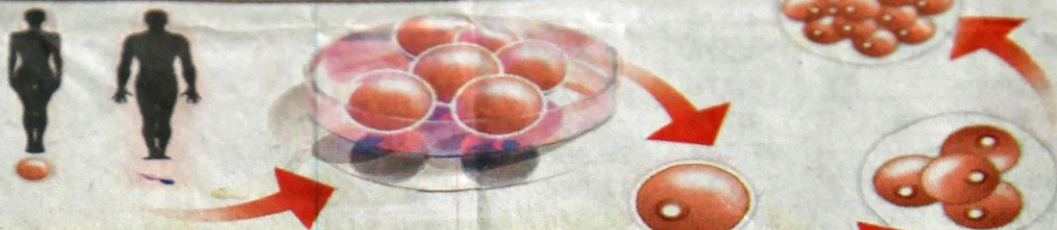
Dr Anjali Malpani, an infertility specialist who treated Bohanon, now performs about three to four embryo adoptions a month as opposed to the random annual procedure, which was the case until a few years back. Says Dr Malpani, "With availability of bet-embryo adoption/donation is becoming popular of late across the world." In the US alone, where embryo adoption is about a decade old, over 1,000 babies have been born using this method.

"Adopting an embryo allows a woman, who is infertile, to experience motherhood, complete with labour pains, as against rearing an adopted child," says another infertility expert Dr Indira Hinduja.

Bohanon, a 51-year-old single mother of two 30-plus women, had literally yearned for a houseful of children. "But being a single mother without a fancy income, it was impossible to adopt." The English teacher enrolled as a foster-mother, but couldn't find a young child she could adopt. When her work took her to Vietnam and China, she explored adoption norms in those countries as well. "Vietnam closed adoption for foreigners except those who are based there for a long period. China doesn't allow single mothers to adopt. Cambodia closed adoption after corruption charges were levelled," says Bohanon. That is when she turned to embryo donation in Colorado.

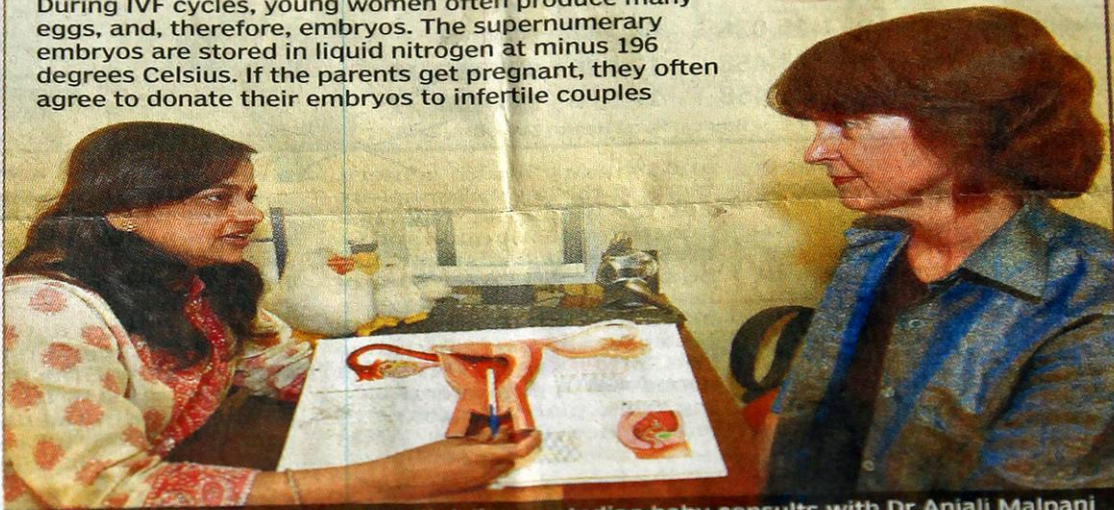
But the charges were high—an embryo alone would work out to over \$10,000 (Rs 4.64 lakh) with a similar amount for running infertility treatment cycles. "I went online and came across the Malpani Infertility

## ADOPTION OF A DIFFERENT KIND



### Where Do You Get Embryos From

During IVF cycles, young women often produce many eggs, and, therefore, embryos. The supernumerary embryos are stored in liquid nitrogen at minus 196 degrees Celsius. If the parents get pregnant, they often agree to donate their embryos to infertile couples



Patricia Bohanon (right) who will deliver an Indian baby consults with Dr Anjali Malpani

ic," says Bohanon, who landed in Colaba on January 26 for the e-adoption costing less than Rs 1.25 lakh all inclusive.

Ever since the birth of the first test-tube in England 32 years ago, embryos have been grown in petri-dish. As technology improved, more and more eggs were harvested from infertile women and more embryos grown per couple. It is this glut of sorts of embryos that has, in a way, resulted in the popularity of embryo donation.

Says Dr Malpani, "We are living in a world driven by technology. On the one hand, technology has given us contraception, that has meant fewer babies in general and fewer still for adoption. On the other hand, technology in infertility treatment has allowed us to freeze embryos." In other words, embryos can be adopted years after they were made. There are also better techniques available to allow women, even those who have undergone menopause,

to carry a child. "Within two weeks, we can ensure—with tablets and a single-injection every day—that the woman's endometrium, the inner lining of the uterus, is thick enough to sustain a pregnancy," says Dr Malpani, who feels embryo adoption is best option for elderly women. Apart from technology, Dr Indira Hinduja, who is credited with India's first test-tube baby born in KEM Hospital 20 years ago, cites an emotional reason contributing to this newfound popularity of embryo donation. "If you adopt an embryo, the whole world sees you pregnant.

You don't have to publicise that it was someone's egg and sperm. The law says that you are the biological mother as you have delivered the child. Moreover, you get to feel the baby kick, you go through labour as well as breastfeeding." Women, she adds, thus get to go through a complete motherhood experience.

Whenever a couple comes up for in-

### ■ What is Embryo Adoption?

It is among the latest methods of family-building, which combines assisted reproductive technology with adoption. So, instead of adopting a baby, infertile couples can instead adopt an embryo

### ■ Confidentiality

Embryo donation is usually treated like a closed adoption. There is no contact between the donating couple and the recipients. The recipient couple is under no obligation to inform the obstetrician that the pregnancy has been achieved through embryo adoption

### ■ Benefits

Unlike in traditional adoption, there is no legal process. The couple "biologically adopts" the embryo. For infertile couples, embryo adoption offers the unique opportunity to experience pregnancy

### ■ It's Not Surrogacy

In surrogacy, a woman carries the child for the infertile couple. In embryo adoption, the child that the couple carries is the child they will parent

fertility treatment, doctors treat I medically to harvest the maximum number of eggs. Says infertility specialist Dr Hrishikesh Pai, "We create many embryos per couple on the presumption that a couple may need to undergo many cycles to get pregnant. I many couples get pregnant in the first attempt and that too with twins, instead of throwing their other embryos; they allow us to donate them to other childless couples." Dr Pai, who is vice-president of the Indian Society Assisted Reproduction, feels it is a glut of embryos in infertility clinics that is adding to the popularity of embryo-donation. His clinic in Lila Hospital, Bandra, alone has nine couples of embryos store in liquid nitrogen

But patients like Bohanon are complaining—even though she receives an Indian baby will be difficult to pass off as her own. "I may let the doctor know as soon as possible that it is an adoption—albeit in a different manner