

FRAMING THE POOR: POPULATION, ELITE INTERESTS, AND THE PERSISTENCE OF POPULATION CONTROL IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines why, despite a rhetorical shift towards a developmental approach to population issues in India, Malthusian ideology continues to dominate and influence the often heavy-handed efforts of the state to control population growth – largely among vulnerable social groups. An examination of Indian population policies, program implementation, and the population debate represented in the mainstream print media demonstrates that Neo-Malthusian population control measures in India are supported by influential external organizations and elites in India as a way to advance their own sectional interests. Malthusian arguments in India exploit or contribute to the deepening of long-standing social and religious divides. Though often using the language of development, population programs shaped by Malthusian ideology have harmed poor Indians – especially women – by directly abusing them and by diverting resources from initiatives for broad socio-economic improvement that would promote positive demographic change without coercion.

Keywords:

India; population policy; population programs; middle class attitudes; population control; neo-Malthusianism; Malthusianism; reproductive health; population in media; population and poverty; population and development

*For Celestina, who teaches me
the value of sharing the world with others;
And for Sarah, her children, and the Stranger
who thought there were too many,
for helping me to start thinking about the difference
between people and numbers*

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INTRODUCTION

In 2000, India announced a new National Population Policy (NPP), which in some of its language at least, moved away from major population control elements such as demographic targets that had been in place for decades, and instead seemed to embrace a program privileging individual needs and voluntary participation. In this, the 2000 NPP reflected the discursive shift that had taken place several years earlier at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo, where reproductive rights became the new agreed-on emphasis for population policies, rather than the achievement of demographic goals. The ICPD Program of Action affirmed the “basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so,” and “the right to make decisions concerning reproduction free from discrimination, coercion and violence”.¹ India, a signatory to the Cairo Program of Action, seemed to be following up on its commitments at Cairo with the introduction of a Reproductive and Child Health Program in the late 1990s followed by the new NPP in 2000.

However, despite the removal of targets and the adoption of reproductive rights language in the NPP, it is clear that those with power in India – that is, its

¹ UNFPA, “International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action,” in (Cairo: UNFPA, 1995).

governments and the influential members of the upper strata of its society – are still committed to an agenda of population control, focused on poor populations. There are indications of this in the way reproductive health programs are formulated, perceived and implemented in the country. Policies and programs that follow a demographic agenda continue to be funded in part by foundations, governments and institutions originating in the global North, which have historically supported population control but have more recently adopted the language of reproductive rights in line with Cairo. India, then, presents a case where the apparent discursive shift of Cairo has not been fully realized as a change in the predominant ideology, which continues to frame the fertility of the poor as the primary problem for the country's development. Why this should be so, and what the consequences are for Indian citizens – especially the poor and marginalized – are the key concerns of this paper.

Historically, India has been central to the modern framing of population discourse. It has long been a country where population size and growth rates have been a source of concern and an area for policy action. In 1952, India became the first country to have an official population policy aimed at lowering fertility², and it has had one ever since.³ The main concern of successive Indian governments has been about the negative impact of population growth on India's development as a modern nation. As such, this concern is fed by various population discourses that have in common the central narrative of population

² Matthew James Connelly, *Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 168.

³ For a critical historical overview of India's population policies, see Mohan Rao, *From population control to reproductive health : Malthusian arithmetic* (New Delhi ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2004), chapter 1.

growth as a threat to society in some way, be it food shortage, hindering economic growth, over-consumption of resources, environmental degradation, or some other perceived danger. These variants of the population threat narrative have at their roots the ideology of Malthusianism, named after Thomas Malthus, the 18th century Englishman who first put forth the idea that population increased at faster rate than food production, meaning that without a check to its growth, population would outstrip food production.⁴ India's predominant population discourse has been shaped and framed by Malthusian ideology, as has been the dominant population discourse globally for most of the latter half of the 20th century. Thus India's interest in curbing its population growth has dovetailed with neo-Malthusian⁵ concerns in Western developed nations about the growing populations of the "Third World," and much funding, research and technical support has been focused on India by foundations and foreign government aid delivery departments.

To be sure, India, the second most populous country in the world with growing population of close to 1.2 billion people⁶, continues to face enormous challenges in looking after its numerous inhabitants in a sustainable way. It is not surprising that considerable public resources are expended on addressing these challenges. This is undoubtedly sound policy. What is questionable is not the fact

⁴ T. R Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population: Text, Sources and Background, Criticism*, Norton critical edition (New York: Norton, 1976).

⁵ Neo-Malthusianism, which shares Malthusianism's concern with reducing fertility especially amongst the poor, differs primarily in that it arose from a concern in the developed world to control the increasing population in the "Third World", and that it promotes birth control technology instead of abstinence.

⁶ "UNFPA - Country Profiles," n.d., http://www.unfpa.org/public/cache/offonce/_ns/YWRleGVyby1mZC1wb3J0bGV0OjpkZXhlc m8tZmQtcG9y dGxidDo6LTYyYTZhNDI5OjEyOTk2MDgxYzg3Oi03ZmYxfGVhY3Rpb249MT12aWV3RGF0YVZpZXc_/c ache/bypass/appid/310297_1/home/sitemap/countries;jsessionid=7E723CE0C8EC422A6138696FA844E A66.jahia01.

that there are significant problems associated with India's population growth, but how they are framed in the dominant discourse and consequently addressed in public policy and practice.

For several decades there has been an ongoing debate among experts from various fields – most notably economics and demographics – about the most effective policy choices for addressing rapid population growth. Generally speaking, on one side of the debate are those who argue for family planning programs as the key instrument in reducing fertility rates. Advocates for this position argue that lowering fertility rates will have economic and social benefits that justify active promotion of fewer births, and that there is a large unmet demand among women and couples for access to contraception – that is, they want to have fewer children, but do not have the means to control fertility. Even those who do not advocate for direct coercion point to examples of cases where well-designed, voluntary family planning programs have been effective in lowering fertility rates.⁷ On the other side of the debate are those who argue that population programs have very little effect on birth rates, which are influenced far more by broad economic and social factors than contraception education and availability.⁸

It is not the intention in this paper to revisit this debate, but it is worth noting that the position I take emphasizes development while recognizing the relevance of family planning. A couple of points here are relevant to this discussion. First, the

⁷ See for example John Bongaarts and Steven W. Sinding, "A Response to Critics of Family Planning Programs," *International Perspectives on Sexual & Reproductive Health* 35, no. 1 (March 2009): 39-44.

⁸ See for example Lant H. Pritchett, "Desired Fertility and the Impact of Population Policies," *Population and Development Review* 20, no. 1 (March 1994): 1-55.

mainstream contingent from both sides presents their preferred policy instrument – family planning or general development in areas that correlate with fertility decline – as one that is empowering for people, especially women, to make choices that benefit themselves and their communities. This, then, seems to be an important consideration in evaluating India’s approach. The second point is that proponents of the developmental approach tend to point to the concept of “demographic transition”, whereby currently developed countries experienced fertility declines as a product of increasing health, education, and prosperity without the existence of family planning programs.⁹ The proponents of the family planning approach do not contest this theory substantially, but suggest that because of the greater pressures of current population growth trends, family planning promotion is needed to speed the transition.¹⁰ There is evidence to show that family planning programs do contribute to fertility decline, but only weakly except where other factors also encourage fertility decline as well.¹¹ It would seem, then, that family planning is complementary to the developmental approach, and that there is evidence to suggest that development in certain key areas is the primary driver of fertility decline.¹²

⁹ See Lori S. Ashford et al., “Transitions in World Population,” *Population Bulletin* 59, no. 1 (March 2004): 6; and Geoffrey Gilbert, *World population*, 2nd ed. (ABC-CLIO, 2005), 10-11.

¹⁰ Bongaarts and Sinding, “A Response to Critics of Family Planning Programs.,” 40-41.

¹¹ Nancy Birdsall, “Chapter 12: Economic Approaches to Population Growth,” in *Handbook of Development Economics*, ed. H. Chenery and T. N. Srinivasan, vol. 1 (Elsevier Science Publishers B. V., 1998), 520.

¹² For example, Gregory Chow argues that the most significant drop in China’s birthrate was in urban areas during a period of moderate family planning policy prior to the one-child policy. He attributes this to a higher number of women in urban employment. Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen suggest something similar in the Indian states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, where birth rates fell as significantly as in China with its one-child policy, attributing this to women’s access to education and political participation, along with a voluntary approach to family planning. See Gregory C Chow, *China’s Economic Transformation* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 185, 191-193; and Jean Drèze and Amartya Kumar Sen, *India: Development and Participation*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 137-140.

The contention of this paper is that in India, Malthusian ideology, which is predominately concerned with reducing numbers of people in relation to resources, has led to a widespread perception that population growth is the primary cause of poverty and lack of development in the country. The preferred policy instrument for addressing this problem has therefore been to institute programs that seek to control fertility rates, even at the expense of programs that would support social and economic development in a broader sense, such as investments in primary health. This is in spite of a lack of evidence globally that population growth is a major cause of poverty or hindrance to development¹³, and in the face of evidence that shows a high correlation between fertility decline and factors such as an increase in women's education, for example – particularly when supported by the availability of birth control information and a wide range of options.¹⁴ In India, this obsession with a reduction in numbers and control of fertility – particularly in poor populations - has led to a mistreatment of the very people who proponents of family planning programs are seeking to empower. It has turned the narrative of development from one that attempts to address inequality and provide social and economic opportunities for all citizens to one that disproportionately emphasizes fertility rates among the poor as the primary cause of poverty and lack of development in India. In the predominant Malthusian discourse, population growth is the cause of poverty. This has had the tendency to narrow the policy options in the public mind to those that control numbers,

¹³ Dennis A Ahlburg, Allen C Kelley, and Karen Oppenheim Mason, eds., *The Impact of Population Growth on Well-Being in Developing Countries*, Population economics (Berlin: Springer, 1996), 20-21.

¹⁴ Amartya Kumar Sen, "Population Policy: Authoritarianism versus Cooperation," *Journal of Population Economics* 10, no. 1 (April 1997): 3-22.

rather than a suite of policies aimed at broader development, complemented by family planning information and access to a wide range of contraceptive choices. Because India serves as a kind of nexus for the coming together of national and global concerns about population growth, it may serve as a case study through which to examine why policies for population control have persisted nationally and continue to be supported by external actors, and how the dominant Malthusian ideology that underpins these policies leads to discriminatory action against the poor and marginalized in society. Malthusian ideology appeals to powerful and elite groups in modern society because it carries with it the assumption that in order for them to preserve their lifestyle, security and resource base the numbers of the poor must be carefully managed, even controlled. A major consequence of population policies framed by this ideology is that not only is there a justification for disregarding poor people's rights and freedoms in the name of a higher good, but also that the poor or marginalized group is blamed for the failure to achieve fully the higher good envisioned – that is, a modern society modeled on the interests of the elite and powerful.

In India, there has been an overarching concern amongst the leaders and elite groups to modernize the country and its citizens by following an enlightened Constitution and a development agenda. In this regard, the nation exists in tension between the Constitution, which promotes and protects the democratic rights of all its citizens, regardless of gender, class or caste, and an imperative to uplift a predominantly uneducated, rural peasant population into a modern, rational, industrial society. This tension has long been manifest in the deep

division between the elite and poor classes in Indian society. There has been a tendency for the elite to blame the poor majority for the backwardness of India and its failure to achieve the goal of becoming a modern nation. The high population growth of India is seen as a drag on the development of the nation, and predominately a problem created by the fertility of poor populations.

Population control has been justified as an efficient and rational way of pursuing state-led development, supported by the elite and middle classes. The division between the middle class and the poor has deepened in recent years, with an elite backlash against the political upsurge of the lower classes and a more visible antagonism towards the poor, who are seen as infringing on the society of the wealthy. While the state has made some efforts to manage poverty through such mechanisms as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, the predominant middle-class attitude towards the lower classes continues to reflect the Malthusian idea that the supposed undisciplined fertility of the poor is a drag on the development of India into a modern, well-off nation.

The other significant tension in Indian society is that of religious-cultural identity. Constitutionally, India is secular, not discriminating between religious communities and even offering legal protection of the rights of minority religious groups. By the numbers, India is mostly a Hindu nation, and the Hindu Right in India have made the philosophy of *Hindutva* – India as a nation defined by “Hindu-ness” – into a political platform and justification for discrimination and violence against minority communities, including both Muslims and Christians. A major component of the rhetoric of the Hindu fundamentalist groups is the

alleged threat that Muslims will begin to outnumber Hindus. This, linked to the dominant idea that large families keep India in poverty, makes for inflammatory calls to curb the Muslim population, both by violence and birth control. That the Muslim community in India is also mostly poor provides a convenient link between Malthusianism and *Hindutva* ideologies to justify discrimination against the marginalized.

The basic outline of this paper will be to examine both external – that is, global – and internal influences on India’s population policy to show how the discourse on population growth is framed and how that shapes the way policy is enacted “on the ground”. My contention is that the population control agenda persists in India because the ideology behind it supports and justifies the interests of the influential and powerful groups within the country – namely the elite and middle classes – and outside it in the West. Even though India’s population policies and programs are presented and defended as being for the good of Indians and the Indian nation, the ideology of Malthusianism contributes to a discriminatory stance towards the poor that is articulated by the elite and middle classes of India who are the main implementers of the policies and programs. This is manifest in the relative lack of opposition to – and even defense of - population policies and activities that clearly discriminate against the poor and marginalized, both in the institutions of the state system (such as the courts) but also in public opinion. The poor clients of India’s population programs are often demeaned, ill treated, and corralled into options that suit demographic goals rather than being offered choices that meet their real needs, or given opportunities (such as employment,

health services, or education) through development initiatives that would create incentives for them to moderate their own fertility.

This paper, then, is primarily an exploratory study of the discourses and attitudes of the elite and middle classes about population growth and the poor in India, with reference to policy outcomes and also to the consequences for the poor themselves. To this end, I will examine a number of examples from policy and program documents, scholarly analyses of population programs and policies, ethnographic studies, articles in the Indian press and journalistic accounts. From these texts, I hope to make the case that Malthusian attitudes are prevalent and do influence India towards a persistent population control agenda focused on the poor, and that these attitudes are consistent with, and even contribute to, existing tensions between social groups in the country. While these conclusions are not the result of field research or a discourse analysis based on deep immersion in a multitude of “texts”, they do emerge out of a kind of triangulation from various sources, strongly enough, I think, to afford the argument plausibility. It may be that further field research could be done to substantiate the persistence of a Malthusian frame that contributes to discrimination against the poor in India, and perhaps elsewhere as well. I hope at least to suggest here that such research would be in the right direction, and help increase our understanding of how systems of thought may exist “below the surface” and continue to support the mistreatment of the less powerful of the world.

1: CONSTRUCTING THE POOR AS A PROBLEM: MALTHUSIANISM AND INDIA'S DEVELOPMENT

The population dilemma in India's development project

The ideological discourse of Malthusianism in India was primarily wedded to the national goal of becoming a modern nation. Nehru's vision for a modern industrial India prevailed over the more traditional ideas of Gandhi¹⁵, and he, along with the other founders and leaders of the new independent Indian nation, embarked on a great project of modernity: "For Nehru, the *raison d'être* of government in modern India, independent India, was to liberate the minds and bodies of ordinary Indians by purposeful acts of economic and social transformation."¹⁶ From the outset, this project of transforming Indian society into a modern form was influenced at the highest level by Malthusian ideology. John Caldwell notes that the ideas of Malthus about the limits of food production relative to growing populations were influential in the Indian civil service among both British and Indian members prior to Independence. They believed "that the huge and growing Indian population threatened India's food supplies and progress", and other elites shared this view, including Nehru, who "had often been heard to say that 'India would have been a

¹⁵ Gandhi favoured a rural, village-based republic that fended off the taint of commercial and technological interests, which he felt had undermined the moral values and strength of modern civilizations. Nehru favoured industrial development and a secular society, built on scientific knowledge and technology. See Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, "Modern Civilization on Trial: Gandhi and Nehru Contest Development," in *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essays* (US: Oxford University Press, 2006), 21-27.

¹⁶ Stuart Corbridge and John Harriss, *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism And Popular Democracy* (Malden, Mass: Polity Press, 2000), 20.

much more advanced nation if its population were about half its actual size.”¹⁷

Even for Gandhi, who was clearly opposed to modernization, the issue was the method by which Indians should reduce their fertility, not the need for smaller family size in India.¹⁸ It is clear then, that for most of India’s ruling elite, both prior to Independence and after it, part of the project of modernization was to induce Indians to reduce their number of births and help slow population growth.

As a developing country with a large and growing population, India was also the focus of much attention from those promoting a population control agenda from outside the country. Historian Matthew Connelly states that India attracted initial efforts from British and American birth control activists to establish clinics, invited the first United Nations advisory missions in demography and family planning, and hosted the founding conference of the International Planned Parenthood Foundation (IPPF). “Indeed,” writes Connelly, “the phrase ‘countries like India’ became shorthand for poor countries with high fertility.”¹⁹

Outside studies and efforts to promote birth control and slow population growth amongst the Indian population reinforced the concerns of the upper and middle classes about population growth. In 1958, Coale and Hoover²⁰ used Indian data to demonstrate empirically with an economic model that rapid population growth in “countries like India” would eat into national savings and slow investment and thus economic growth. This apparent confirmation that population growth was a

¹⁷ John C. Caldwell, “Malthus and the Less Developed World: The Pivotal Role of India,” *Population and Development Review* 24, no. 4 (December 1998): 687.

¹⁸ Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 100.

¹⁹ Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 11; See also Rao, *From population control to reproductive health*, chapter 2.

²⁰ Ansley J Coale and Edgar Malone Hoover, *Population Growth and Economic Development in Low-Income Countries: A Case Study of India's Prospects* (Princeton, N. J: Princeton University Press, 1958).

hindrance to economic growth²¹ was not only vigorously espoused by external actors, but taken up quite seriously within India as well, as the words of one prominent Indian family planning official illustrate:

If the assumption that there are too many people in relation to the total available resources in the present technological set-up is granted, birth control must be fostered as an integral part of an overall plan of economic development. Family planning implies a planned family in a more or less planned economy.²²

However, despite the convictions of the elite about the necessity of population control, early attempts to implement family planning programs highlighted the difficulties – and divisions – inherent in the modernization project. The Khanna Study (1971)²³, undertaken in rural Punjab over several years, was designed to introduce villagers to birth control methods and anticipated a drop in fertility as a result – a result the study failed in the end to produce. Mahmood Mamdani's²⁴ critical review of the Khanna Study concluded that the economic realities of many of the villagers at the time of the study were such that they perceived a benefit in having large families, and so using birth control to restrict the number of children made little economic sense to them. Most interesting in Mamdani's analysis is his insight into the biases of the Khanna Study. Mamdani's interviews with the project staff show that their bafflement over the villagers' failure to see the obvious benefits of birth control was an outcome of the ideology of modernity,

²¹ Coale and Hoover's model, along with models developed from similar premises, have been subsequently criticized for having incorrect assumptions. For a summary of the critiques, see Birdsall, "Chapter 12: Economic Approaches to Population Growth," 490.

²² S. Chandrasekhar, *Population and Planned Parenthood in India*, 2nd ed. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1961), 113.

²³ J. B. Wyon and J. E. Gordon, *The Khanna Study: Population Problems in the Rural Punjab* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

²⁴ Mahmood Mamdani, *The Myth of Population Control: Family, Caste, and Class in an Indian Village*. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973).

which they had absorbed because of their urban, educated, middle class background.²⁵ Their characterizations of the villagers as “illiterate” and “prejudiced”, and as needing “basic education” or “demographic education” reflects a middle-class view of the rural poor as too ignorant for their own good, and in need of education in order to transform themselves into modern citizens with a correct understanding of their fertility practices as a “problem.”²⁶ The project of modernization as formulated by Nehru and the Indian elite was being carried out here by the Khanna study workers, who were attempting to accomplish social transformation among the rural poor by enlightening them on the practice of birth control as a progressive social and economic good. Mamdani’s assertion that having large families was in the economic interests of the villagers, however, was not borne out. As Robert Cassen pointed out, “hundreds of thousands of Punjabi couples [took] to family planning” in the years that followed Mamdani’s work.²⁷ However, Mamdani’s observations about people’s *perceptions* of the economic benefit of large families were probably accurate at the time of his study. In their ethnographic study in the southwestern Indian state of Karnataka, Caldwell, Reddy and Caldwell state: “There is consensus that 50 or even 30 years ago, no one worried or complained about the economic implications of a large family. There is nearly as strong agreement that the large families prospered most.”²⁸ What Caldwell *et al* suggest is that over time there has been a shift in fertility behaviour, facilitated by the technology of

²⁵ Ibid., 48.

²⁶ Ibid., 47-48.

²⁷ Robert Cassen, *India--Population, Economy, Society* (London: Macmillan, 1978), 73.

²⁸ John C. Caldwell, P. H. Reddy, and Pat Caldwell, “The Causes of Demographic Change in Rural South India: A Micro Approach,” *Population and Development Review* 8, no. 4 (December 1982): 696.

birth control to be sure, but mainly driven by deeper socioeconomic changes, which have increased people's uncertainty about the value of large families. Key amongst these changes was the cost of schooling, which was seen as important for children in order to take advantage of new urban job markets and help diversify family income away from farming alone. As the economic returns to children diminished even while the cost of their schooling, health and upkeep increased, there was less motivation to have large families.²⁹

An interesting observation in Caldwell *et al*'s study is that while underlying economic forces diminished people's certainty about the advantage of large families, these forces were the result of policy decisions in line with modernizing India, *and* they were supported by an ideology about what constituted responsible modern fertility behaviour. Caldwell *et al* point out that there was "a model of social behavior and relationships at hand toward which the society might move spontaneously or have been directed by its leadership, *for there is little difference between the two.*"³⁰ Here again one can see the elite project of modernization at work, as the ideology of modernity – in this case advocating for the use of birth control – operates as a kind of push and pull on people's decisions.

In Mamdani's account of the Khanna study, the "push" operation was obvious. Possibly because it was in an earlier period and the underlying forces of change described by Caldwell *et al* were not yet as strong, it was not very effective in changing people's thinking or behaviour. However, a decade or so later, Caldwell

²⁹ Ibid., 715-717.

³⁰ Ibid., 720 emphasis added.

et al also note elements of this type of push in their work: “When the multipurpose health worker ... or the lady health visitor, a woman of above-average education and with an official position, suggests the operation [sterilization] for the first time to a young woman with two or three children there is little overt pressure on her and her family, but rejecting such advice (which is sometimes supported by the doctor as well) perhaps 20 or 30 times over a two-year period is much more difficult.”³¹ This pressure has been brought to bear more broadly than just in the client-worker relations, notably in the public stance of the elites:

The rural elites, always a little apprehensive of the growth of the large poor section of society, have been convinced of the need for fertility control both because it is government policy and because of the worldwide debate on the population explosion. The need for fertility control is often expressed by officials and village leaders in public places and on public occasions, while opposition or doubts are voiced only privately. Indeed a majority of the elite believe that the expression of opposed views should be prevented on public occasions.³²

Particularly interesting is the fact that these rural elites consider it their duty to promote the official line *regardless* of their own personal views.³³ Also significant is the rural elites’ nervousness about the growth of the poor population and their awareness of the global “population explosion”. These are related themes for the privileged, both in India and in the developed world, in which population growth – and in particular the growth of the poor population – is perceived as a threat by

³¹ *Ibid.*, 712.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Here is a striking example of what Satish Deshpande refers to as the middle class “articulating the hegemony of the ruling bloc”. See Satish Deshpande, *Contemporary India: A Sociological View* (Viking Books, 2003), 139.

elites, and they recur repeatedly in the context of India's population issues, through to contemporary times.

It is difficult to escape the sense in all this that in India's development project the poor have been "herded" towards the conclusion that family planning – and sterilization in particular – is the best solution to the problems of poverty. This was perhaps most notable in the emphasis in India's family planning program on setting targets for acceptors of sterilization – an approach which was not abandoned until 1996.³⁴ A target-setting approach created perverse incentives for health workers to promote sterilization aggressively, a practice that occurred in India, particularly during the period of the Emergency, when Sanjay Gandhi intensified the program.³⁵ Equally disturbing are the limited options for birth control that were actually provided to the poor. Caldwell *et al* note in their study that most people in the rural communities were offered sterilization and nothing else. Intra-uterine devices (IUDs) and condoms were available, but not widely used. IUDs in particular were only used by "the wives of salaried government employees, the doctor, the engineer, the veterinary surgeon, school teachers, and policemen, and ... all their associates, educated large landowners and bank officials."³⁶ That is, only the middle class, who "are also usually apprehensive about the effect of sterilization, but they do not say so to the rest of the population."³⁷ Thus India's family planning program, as aimed at the poor, has

³⁴ Peter J. Donaldson, "The Elimination of Contraceptive Acceptor Targets and the Evolution of Population Policy in India," *Population Studies* 56, no. 1 (March 2002): 97.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 105.

³⁶ John C. Caldwell, P. H. Reddy, and Pat Caldwell, "Educational Transition in Rural South India," *Population and Development Review* 11, no. 1 (March 1985): 712.

³⁷ Caldwell, Reddy, and Caldwell, "The Causes of Demographic Change in Rural South India," 712.

been characterized not only by pressure from above to use birth control, but also by a limitation of the method of birth control to an irreversible surgical procedure that is avoided by the elites themselves.

Just as Nehru and his contemporaries were influenced by the Malthusianism of their colonial masters, so were the post-WWII Indian leaders and elites influenced by foreign advocates of neo-Malthusian ideology. In the decades following WWII, there was great enthusiasm for population control in the so-called “Third World”, led primarily by the International Planned Parenthood Foundation (IPPF), the World Bank, and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), and funded largely by major American corporations and population interest groups. The US government began to draw connections between global insecurity and population growth, and sought to fund population control activities through USAID and the World Bank. Although funding from foreign donors never exceeded a tenth part of the total health budget of India, the influence on Indian population policy of the World Bank and USAID, along with American foundations such as the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, was quite large, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, during the third, fourth and fifth Five-Year Plans. The World Bank in particular put pressure on India (and other developing countries) to strengthen their population control measures as a condition for loan assistance.³⁸ The predominant development thinking, as articulated by the World Bank, was that “rapid growth of population has become a major obstacle to social and economic development” and “[f]amily planning

³⁸ Rao, *From population control to reproductive health*, 35-37.

programmes are less costly than conventional development projects.”³⁹ India was a major focus for the attention of neo-Malthusians, and the development and growth concerns of India’s leadership, already connected to their efforts to control the population, was strongly reinforced by external actors.⁴⁰

Foreign funding of, and influence on, India’s population programs and policies continues in recent decades. As of 2001, USAID continued to fund sterilization camps in Uttar Pradesh under its State Interventions in Family Planning Services (SIFPSA) program⁴¹, and the American population consultancy firm the Futures Group assisted several Indian states in drafting their population policies.⁴²

The movement in the 1980s and early 1990s to liberalize India’s economy⁴³ did not change the predominant anti-natalist agenda. Philosophically, economic liberalism goes hand in hand with Malthusianism. Malthus argued that hunger among the poor should be allowed as a “natural” check on an overlarge supply of labour. The idea of “excess” labour in a market system dovetails with the idea of “overpopulation” in relation to finite resources. As Larry Lohmann points out, in a Malthusian system, the poor become the scapegoats of an economic structure that victimizes them in the name of the “natural” order of things, “preserving the idealistic image of the self-regulating market.”⁴⁴ Thus, the shift towards neo-

³⁹ cited in *Ibid.*, 112.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁴¹ Sreelatha Menon, “State-of-the-Art Cycle Pumps,” in *The Unheard Scream: Reproductive Health and Women’s Lives in India* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2004), 21-44.

⁴² Rao, *From population control to reproductive health*, 222-223.

⁴³ Atul Kohli, “Politics of Economic Growth in India, 1980-2005,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 13 (April 1, 2006): 1251-1259, 1361-1370.

⁴⁴ Larry Lohmann, “Malthusianism and the Terror of Scarcity,” in *Making Threats: Biofears and Environmental Anxieties*, ed. Betsy Hartmann, Banu Subramaniam, and Charles Zerner (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 95.

liberalism in India bolsters the Malthusian rhetoric by adding market-based arguments for controlling population – the population of poor labourers in particular.⁴⁵

The poor as a threat to middle class interests

The elite construction of the poor as a general “problem” in India has a long history. Nandini Gooptu’s work on urban poor policy in Uttar Pradesh in the 1930s shows that the propertied classes were worried that the migration of large numbers of labouring poor to the cities threatened the development of clean and orderly middle class neighbourhoods. Authorities, influenced by the concerns of their privileged constituents, enacted “poor policies” that characterized the poor as the source of unrest, ill health, and uncleanness. Like self-fulfilling prophecies, these policies exacerbated the disadvantaged situation of the urban poor, contributing to an increase in the negative characteristics among the poor that had been used to justify the policies initially.⁴⁶ More recent middle class action to protect their interests is the use of public interest litigation (PIL) to clear urban slum areas for middle class property development, as examined by Gautam Bhan.⁴⁷ In India, litigation may be brought to the courts on any matter that is deemed to be in the public interest. This particular feature of the Indian legal system was conceived in order to allow the less powerful to access justice in the courts. Prior to 2000, court-ordered evictions and slum clearance

⁴⁵ See also Imrana Qadeer, “Population Control in the Era of Neo-Liberalism,” *Health & Development* 1, no. 4 (December 2005): 35.

⁴⁶ Nandini Gooptu, “The ‘Problem’ of the Urban Poor Policy and Discourse of Local Administration: A Study in Uttar Pradesh in the Interwar Period,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 31, no. 50 (December 14, 1996): 3245-3254.

⁴⁷ Gautam Bhan, “‘This is no longer the city I once knew’. Evictions, the urban poor and the right to the city in millennial Delhi,” *Environment and Urbanization* 21, no. 1 (April 2009): 127-142.

judgments contained an acknowledgement of the imperative of the government to provide proper housing to the poor. However, with the new millennium a shift in PIL judgments took place. Bhan examines how PILs began to be used in Delhi by middle-class residential organizations to evict the poor and clear slums for upscale development. He argues that the perceived failure of the state's development project and the advent of neo-liberal policies paved the way for an increased perception of the poor as encroaching on the interests and the space of the middle-class. The court judgments that ruled in favour of the Delhi slum evictions reflected this middle-class attitude, following a logic where rights are tied to property ownership, justifying the removal - without compensation - of those living in informal settlements. One Delhi High Court judgment specifically identified the large numbers of poor as a problem. The judge stated outright that those who could not afford to live in the city should not be in the city.⁴⁸ These PILs further demonstrate the antagonism of the elite class in India towards the poor, who are seen as a threat due to their encroaching numbers, and who must be dealt with by removal.

Satish Deshpande argues that the middle class has always taken on the role of representing the Indian nation, first as a kind of "proxy" during the era of developmental central planning when the dominant fraction of the middle classes filled the role of articulators of the modernizing project of the state, and now as the "portrait" of the nation during the globalization era. The middle class has

⁴⁸ Ibid., 135.

come to think of itself as *being* the nation.⁴⁹ Population issues, such as the fertility rate among the poor, are perceived to threaten this middle class model of India, and are therefore considered by the middle class to threaten the nation – their nation - itself.

Some of the promotional and educational material produced for the Indian government's family planning program serves to illustrate the conflation of middle class interests with national interests. One very typical poster produced by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare⁵⁰ shows contrasting scenes of family poverty and relative affluence side by side, with the number of children being the key difference between the contrasting pictures. The first family has a large number of children and is obviously poor, with ragged clothes and a house with broken walls. Both the fields around the house and the tree behind it lack green vegetation, and there is a general feeling of anxiety and despair in the posture and expressions of the couple and their children. The caption beneath the image reads: "Big family: Problems all the way." The opposite image is of a couple with only two children, a girl and a toddler in his mother's arms. Symbols of prosperity and education are evident in the well-kept house and yard, the book satchel by the girl's side, the father reading to his daughter, and the mother in attractive traditional dress. There is a tractor in the green fields beyond the house and the tree overhead is lush with shady leaves. The family looks happy and well nourished, and the chicken in the yard and the sturdy door and barred window of

⁴⁹ Deshpande, *Contemporary India*, 150.

⁵⁰ 1992. Figure 1 in Nilanjana Chatterjee and Nancy E. Riley, "Planning an Indian Modernity: The Gendered Politics of Fertility Control," *Signs* 26, no. 3 (Spring 2001): 814.

the house give the impression of value and wealth. For those who have missed the obvious connection, the caption below the second image reads: “Small family: Happiness all the way.” Quite obviously, there is a clear relationship being posed here between fertility and poverty. On the negative side, having many children (i.e. more than two) is portrayed as the cause of poverty and a lack of well being for the Indian family. The converse is also promised – that having fewer children will result in a better life, including relative prosperity, happiness, and opportunities for education and investment in modern means of production. The implication of this type of message is that the poor are responsible for their poverty, and by extension, for the poverty of the nation. Poor parents who have many children fail to fit in with the national ideal of a modern, developed India, and thus fail both themselves and their country.⁵¹

While materials such as the poster discussed above are widely disseminated to all levels of the population, “[i]t is also clear that a large part of the family planning promotional material has been aimed at those groups (classes, castes, and religious communities) already favorably positioned socially, economically, and politically, and where they are receptive to the rhetoric of modernization and aspire to its associated advantages.”⁵² This reinforces the blame that is directed towards the poor by the upper sections of Indian society. For the middle class audience, the family planning material presents the very poor as “cautionary figures of reproductive irresponsibility and failure.”⁵³ The message of many of the

⁵¹ Ibid., 832.

⁵² Ibid., 830.

⁵³ Ibid.

promotional materials for family limitation is that the ability to enjoy material wealth and greater consumption – to experience upward class mobility – is dependent on the ability to limit the number of offspring. The ads feature the symbols of material accumulation – such as the tractor, above, or a television set – that show a family on its way towards joining the middle class, the desirable goal of Indian society.⁵⁴ Thus, the ideal family – and the ideal India – is seen as middle-class, upwardly mobile and consumerist. The enemies in this modern vision of India are the over-breeding poor, who by their own irresponsible fertility behaviour, fail to achieve the ideal, contributing to their own poverty and creating a drag on the resources of others.

However, one must confront the possibility that this perception of the middle class, as represented in the material above, is valid. One common justification for the intervention of fertility control programs is that the social cost of additional children exceeds their private costs.⁵⁵ Cassen makes this argument in his comprehensive 1978 volume on population in India. His data suggests that the cost of children is higher than what one can reasonably expect to gain from their economic output.⁵⁶ Poor couples, then, because of their circumstances and their perception that more children will provide them with additional benefits, “[feel] themselves forced to procreate largely in their own selfish interests.”⁵⁷ Not only do they do a disservice to their children in this, by diluting the resources available for their proper nurture, but they do a disservice to their country as well: “So,

⁵⁴ Ibid., 835-836.

⁵⁵ For a detailed discussion of the issue of externalities in family decisions, see Birdsall, “Chapter 12: Economic Approaches to Population Growth,” 523.

⁵⁶ Cassen, *India--Population, Economy, Society*, 63-73.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 74.

even if [India] would be better off with everyone having smaller families, parents ... will not themselves limit their fertility as long as they believe large families are valuable to them personally.”⁵⁸ Poor Indian parents, in Cassen’s view, choose to have large families because they are not sufficiently aware of the dubious personal gains and actual social costs of high fertility. Their fertility choices are a kind of desperate gamble that is unlikely to pay off, forced on them by poverty, which precludes other options.

There does seem to be some substance, then, to the middle class perception that the poor are behaving irresponsibly with respect to the larger nation. However, a considered response to this would account for the fact that their fertility choices stem largely from the fact that they lack other assets or options. In some cases, they may lack knowledge of, or access to, contraception methods that will allow them to delay, space, or reduce births. However, as we have seen in Mamdani’s analysis above, this alone may not provide the incentive to change fertility behaviour. Caldwell *et al* show that underlying economic and social forces, such as changes in employment or education opportunities, ultimately motivate fertility behaviour change. It is worthwhile to note that the poor do show a tendency to adjust their fertility behaviour when they are provided with appropriate and meaningful options. The Matlab project in Bangladesh is widely held up as an example of how providing poor populations with a wide range of birth control options and good follow up support can greatly assist them in

⁵⁸ Ibid., 75.

managing their own fertility reduction.⁵⁹ Trials with instructing poor women in natural fertility awareness methods, such as the Billings method, have also shown that with the right support, poor women can take charge of their fertility decisions using practices that empower them without requiring a high cost.⁶⁰ Evidence from Kerala and Tamil Nadu in India shows that where women, especially, are empowered through education and social and political participation, they transition to lower fertility rates without coercion.⁶¹ These examples suggest that the poor are not somehow fixedly “irresponsible” when it comes to decisions about fertility and family size.

This points toward policy intervention that is primarily focused on development, which would provide the poor with better economic and social options, and complemented by a family planning program that provided a wide range of contraceptive choices. The population problem faced by India, and indeed by the poor of India themselves, given its nature, does not seem best confronted by a nearly single-minded obsession with reducing numbers and effectively restricting birth control options to those that are terminal. These are the characteristics of a program influenced by Malthusian ideology, which accepts unquestionably the idea that population growth is the main cause of poverty, and views the fertility of the poor as a threat to be suppressed, rather than a social and economic challenge that can be addressed through targeted development.

⁵⁹ Bongaarts and Sinding, “A Response to Critics of Family Planning Programs.,” 40.

⁶⁰ R. E. J. Ryder, ““Natural Family Planning”: Effective Birth Control Supported By The Catholic Church,” *BMJ: British Medical Journal* 307, no. 6906 (1993): 723-726.

⁶¹ See Betsy Hartmann, *Reproductive Rights and Wrongs: The Global Politics of Population Control*, Rev. ed. (Boston, Mass: South End Press, 1995), 298-299; and Sen, “Population Policy,” 14.

Population policy and the “elite revolt”

In more recent years, middle class fears about growing numbers among the poor are not only related to development and social issues that threaten their “portrait” of India, but also to political threats. The increasing political participation of the lower class and lower caste sections of Indian society have sparked what Corbridge and Harriss refer to as an “elite revolt”⁶², a withdrawal of the middle classes from a benevolent national project of development into a more defensive position, protecting their own particular interests. Partha Chatterjee, in his discussion of civil society, argues that while constitutionally all the inhabitants of India are full, rights-bearing citizens, in practice most are not, and they are not therefore members of “civil society” in the way they are regarded by the institutions of the state. Civil society, he says – and one could arguably substitute “middle class” here – is “restricted to a small section of culturally equipped citizens, [and] represents in countries like India the high ground of modernity” who “must descend from that high ground to the terrain of political society in order to renew their legitimacy as providers of well-being and there confront whatever is the current configuration of politically mobilized demands.”⁶³

Despite the fact that India, in its Constitution and founding values, strives to uphold democratic rights and representation for all, regardless of caste, class or creed, population growth has been constructed as such an immanent danger to the middle class vision of India that restrictions on those rights are seen as justified. Indian institutions – the courts and government authorities – transmit

⁶² Corbridge and Harriss, *Reinventing India*.

⁶³ Deshpande, *Contemporary India*, 41.

this ideological position through policy, regulations, and legal process. For example, several state population policies have barred those with more than two children from contesting as candidates in local council elections, and the courts have upheld these policies, citing the pressing threat of population as a justification.⁶⁴ Policies and decisions like these are hand-in-glove with middle class attitudes, and it is not surprising, as Rao observes, that the Supreme Court decision in one of these cases “came in for widespread middle class approbation.”⁶⁵ The dominant Malthusian ideology, which has been accepted by much of the middle class, co-exists easily with their unease about the newly politicized lower class. Population policies that effectively restrict the poor from political representation are justified as being in the best interest of the nation. This hides an underlying assumption that it ought to be a “middle class” nation, which should not be threatened by the “over-breeding” poor who perpetuate poverty and eat into the resources of more “responsible” citizens, nor by the “democratic upsurge” of poorer social groups.

Discourse theory suggests that this representation of “what is good for the middle class” as “what is good for the nation” is one of the key features of an ideological discourse, whereby “sectional or specific interests are represented as universal interests.”⁶⁶ Frank Furedi calls this a “silent discourse”, in which a relatively small, privileged section of humanity hides its fear of too many “Others” under a display of concern for the problems of all humanity, while proposing solutions that favour

⁶⁴ For a more detailed discussion of these policies and court decisions, see Chapter 2 below.

⁶⁵ Mohan Rao, “Abiding Appeal of Neo-Malthusianism: Explaining the Inexplicable,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 39, no. 32 (August 7, 2004): 3599.

⁶⁶ Purvis and Hunt (1991), cited in Rachel Simon-Kumar, *'Marketing' reproduction? : ideology and population policy in India* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2006), 15.

its own specific interests.⁶⁷ The causal connection between the fertility of the poor in developing countries and the threat it poses to the society of the privileged is implicitly drawn, rather than stated outright.⁶⁸ In the next chapter, we will examine in greater detail how this “silent discourse” is manifested in Indian institutions and state policy, and in middle class attitudes displayed during the implementation of population programs and in positions stated in the press.

⁶⁷ Frank Furedi, *Population and Development: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1997), 25-31.

⁶⁸ See Betsy Hartmann, “The Changing Faces of Population Control,” in *Policing the National Body: Race, Gender, and Criminalizations*, ed. Jael Silliman and Anannya Bhattacharjee (Cambri: South, 2002), 259-289.

2: DEEPENING DIVISIONS: MANIFESTATIONS OF MALTHUSIANISM IN CONTEMPORARY POLICY AND MIDDLE CLASS THOUGHT

The ICPD in Cairo saw a significant coming together of protest movements – including some from the developing world - arguing against the predominant neo-Malthusian ideology that had given population policies and programs a discriminatory bias against the rights and needs of women and the poor.⁶⁹ The groundswell of feminist and rights activists that influenced the discussion at the ICPD were influential in India as well.⁷⁰ However, despite the resonance of the new discourse of reproductive rights coming from Cairo, it has not replaced Malthusianism in India, which remains the dominant ideological discourse of the state, its institutions, and its constituents in the middle class. Malthusianism continues to manifest itself in the context of deep divisions in Indian society between the elite and the poor, and between the Hindu majority and the Muslim minority.

Population control as a continued state objective

As noted earlier, the emphasis on reproductive rights that was evident at Cairo saw some reflection in India's 2000 National Population Policy (NPP). The stated key objectives of this policy are to address unmet needs for contraception and health care services in the areas of reproductive and child health, by – among

⁶⁹ Rao, *From population control to reproductive health*, chapter 4.

⁷⁰ Donaldson, "The Elimination of Contraceptive Acceptor Targets and the Evolution of Population Policy in India."

other aims – reducing maternal and child mortality, delaying marriage age for girls, and achieving universal access to information on fertility regulation with a wide range of contraceptive choices.⁷¹ The policy states, in a significant departure from the contraceptive acceptor targets used and abused in past programs, that the Government of India is committed “towards voluntary and informed choice and consent of citizens while availing of reproductive health care services, and continuation of the target free approach in administering family planning services.”⁷² However, despite the emphasis on a target free approach and avoiding coercion, the policy set a goal of replacement level fertility (each couple having no more than two children) by 2010 and population stabilization by 2045. In addition, incentives such as social insurance for couples below the poverty line with two or less children who undergo sterilization were recommended by the policy.⁷³ These are indications that even with the doing away with targets and language that reflects the ICPD Program of Action (“voluntary” and “informed choice”), the Indian state retained its long-standing commitment to fertility reduction as a primary goal.

The government documents that outline the objectives of the Family Welfare Program and the Reproductive and Child Health Program (RCH) further support the claim that a primary objective of these programs is to reduce fertility. One of these documents states: “the main objective of the Family Welfare Programme for the country has been to stabilise population at a level consistent with the

⁷¹ Simon-Kumar, *'Marketing' reproduction?*, 105.

⁷² cited in Mohan Rao and Devaki Jain, “National Population Policy 2000: Re-Examining Critical Issues,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 36, no. 16 (April 21, 2001): 1299.

⁷³ Rao, *From population control to reproductive health*, 215-216.

needs of national development”.⁷⁴ Another document emphatically underlines the point that the “objective of the Family Planning Programme is to reduce the birth rate”.⁷⁵ The program focus on reducing maternal and infant mortality, as stated in an official memo from the Deputy Director of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, is “for bringing about reduction in the desired level of fertility” and is “one of the most important objectives during the Ninth Plan.”⁷⁶ A key program document for the RCH clearly positions the attainment of demographic goals as the most important reason for RCH service provision:

... the RCH Programme will seek to provide relevant services for assuring Reproductive and Child Health to all citizens. However, RCH is *even more* relevant for obtaining the objective of stable population for the country. The overall objective since the beginning has been that the population of the country should be stabilised at a level consistent with the requirement of national development.⁷⁷

The right of individuals to make informed and voluntary choices about fertility is put in the context of national goals for reducing fertility. There is an implicit assumption here that fertility decline is necessary for development. Thus, the rights-based approach of the reproductive health paradigm is potentially in conflict with the demographic objectives of the Indian state, which are conflated with development objectives.

The tension between the agenda for population control and the agenda for agency and rights, apparent in these Indian government documents, was also

⁷⁴ Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, New Delhi, “Reproductive and Child Health Programme: Schemes for Implementation” (Government of India, 1997); cited in Simon-Kumar, *Marketing' reproduction?*, 143.

⁷⁵ cited in Simon-Kumar, *Marketing' reproduction?*, 143-144.

⁷⁶ Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, New Delhi, “Memo from Deputy Director of MoHFW officially marked as No. M. 14015/7/97-RCH (DC)” (Government of India, 1997); cited in Simon-Kumar, *Marketing' reproduction?*, 144.

⁷⁷ Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, New Delhi, “Reproductive and Child Health Programme: Schemes for Implementation”; cited in Simon-Kumar, *Marketing' reproduction?*, 144 emphasis added.

noted by some observers of the ICPD. Almaric and Banuri point out in their analysis of the Cairo document that the apparent contradiction between the two main principles “– to stabilise world population and to respect people’s rights – is never acknowledged.”⁷⁸ Even though there was a significant adoption of the language – and perhaps even some of the spirit – of a rights-based approach at Cairo and following, the agenda of population control through family planning programs was never really overcome. The World Bank, in a follow-up policy document for India’s Family Welfare program after the ICPD, outlined the use of reproductive health programs as a primary way to attain demographic goals. It even used language, such as “population explosion” and “control of population”, that had supposedly been put out of use by the discursive shift of Cairo.⁷⁹ In a similar way, the Government of India, while adopting some of the language of reproductive rights in its policy documents, mutes the impact of the rights-based discourse by subordinating it to the dominant discourse of population control as a key instrument for reducing poverty and promoting development.

At the state level, several population policies that were announced before the NPP show even less inclination to move away from a neo-Malthusian stance. Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra all drafted population policies that linked population growth to problems in economic development, resource availability, and environmental damage, playing on various themes of the neo-Malthusian narrative. These policies

⁷⁸ Franck Amalric and Tariq Banuri, “Population: Malady or Symptom?,” *Third World Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (December 1994): 702.

⁷⁹ Rao, *From population control to reproductive health*, 189.

introduced various incentives and disincentives to encourage fertility reduction. Among these are cash rewards for accepting sterilization, debarring individuals with more than two children from contesting local panchayat (council) elections, performance-based assessment of health workers with respect to their delivery of reproductive services and meeting of targets, and basing community level funding on performance in achieving targeted reproductive service delivery.⁸⁰ These policy measures reflect an interest in getting the population numbers down rather than an interest in the health and well-being of people. It is perhaps no coincidence that many of these policies were drafted with consultancy from the US-based Futures Group, a consultancy firm with a history of presenting high fertility as the cause of almost every social ill.⁸¹

Despite the objection from Indian critics that state population policies that prevent those with more than two children from contesting local elections run counter to the spirit and practice of democracy, Indian courts have upheld these policies. The judgments in related cases display again the Malthusian preoccupation with population growth as the primary danger to Indian society. In a 2002 Rajasthan High Court decision, the bench argued that such population policies “have been enacted by the legislature to control the menace of population explosion”⁸² In 2003, the Supreme Court of India upheld similar legislation in Haryana, stating in its ruling: “disqualification on the right to contest an election for having more than two living children does not contravene any fundamental right, nor does it cross

⁸⁰ Ibid., 215-222.

⁸¹ Hartmann, *Reproductive Rights and Wrongs*, 195.

⁸² cited in Rao, “Abiding Appeal of Neo-Malthusianism,” 3599.

the limits of reasonability. Rather, it is a disqualification conceptually devised in the national interest.” The decision also referred to the “torrential increase in population”.⁸³ The language chosen – “menace”, “explosion”, “torrential”, “national interest” – draws on the Malthusian narrative of the threat of population growth to society and nation. In the view of the courts, it is justifiable to debar some from the democratic political process if doing so helps to keep at bay a trend that threatens the life and well-being of the nation. This is a version of the “social cost of private behaviour” justification explored above, which has some validity, but is too simplistic in its prescriptions, focusing on reducing numbers rather than providing people with positive options for making fertility choices that can benefit the wider Indian community.

This message continues to be produced and disseminated by the leadership of India. The incoming Union Progressive Alliance government in 2004 introduced as part of its Common Minimum Program (CMP) – agreed with its coalition partners, and the left parties - a call for “a sharply targeted Population Control Programme” in “150-odd high fertility districts”.⁸⁴ The CMP was followed up with a strategy paper from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare that called for a large increase in sterilizations in the “high fertility” states of Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan. More recently, the *Times of India* reported that the Supreme Court responded to a public interest litigation by ordering the Government to explain why the demographic targets set out in the

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ T.K. Rajalakshmi, “New paradigm, old strategy,” *Frontline* 21, no. 21 (October 9, 2004), <http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl2121/stories/20041022003509400.htm>.

2000 NPP have not been met “and the country [is] saddled with five crore [50 million] more mouths to feed at a time when crop failure is looming large”.⁸⁵ Another newspaper in 2009 reported a speech of the Karnataka State Health Secretary, in which he advocated a one-child policy along the lines of the Chinese approach, and spoke of the urgent need to address the “population explosion and environmental degradation ‘for the survival of civilization.’”⁸⁶ Also in 2009, the *Times of India* reported the Health Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad as having “said that India’s population was putting tremendous pressure on depleting natural resources.”⁸⁷ A brief look at the current Ministry of Health and Family Welfare website demonstrates that the connection between the well being of India and keeping families small has remained a powerful idea. Slogans flash on the screen: “Have fun with one!!! ... Control Population!!! ... Rising numbers, limited resources!! ... Let’s grow in quality, not in numbers!!!”⁸⁸ It is apparent in policy and rhetoric that the leaders of India continue to frame the discourse on population in terms of Malthusian ideology, presenting population control, rather than broad-based development, as an urgent matter in the national interest.

⁸⁵ “SC asks panel to explain why National Population Policy not implemented,” *Times of India*, October 1, 2009, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/news/india/SC-asks-panel-to-explain-why-National-Population-Policy-not-implemented/articleshow/5073375.cms>.

⁸⁶ The Hindu, “Karnataka / Bangalore News : Official favours tough birth control law,” *The Hindu*, July 12, 2009, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/2009/07/12/stories/2009071254010400.htm>.

⁸⁷ Times of India, “Azad favours late marriages to curb population growth,” *The Times of India*, July 12, 2009, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Azad-mantra-Marry-late-to-curb-population/articleshow/4767269.cms>.

⁸⁸ “Department of Family Welfare,” *Department of Family Welfare*, n.d., <http://mohfw.nic.in/dofw%20website/dofw.htm>.

Support for population control among middle class practitioners

The emphasis by the institutions of the Indian state on taking strong measures to control population – with poorer populations as the implied target group - is echoed by the middle class practitioners who implement India’s population programs. Rachel Simon-Kumar’s study on the implementation of the RCH program in Kerala, in which she interviewed several program staff and officials, provides valuable insight into the objectives of the program as they are interpreted “on the ground.” Particularly interesting is the fact that Simon-Kumar’s interviews took place in Kerala, a state that has been lauded as a “model” for voluntary acceptance of birth control and reduction of fertility through women’s education and empowerment.⁸⁹ Of all the states in India, one might expect that Kerala would be the exception to the predominant pattern of adhering to neo-Malthusian ideology. Simon-Kumar’s research shows that this is not the case. As we saw above, individual freedom and a wide range of options to assist people in determining the number and spacing of their children in the Indian NPP and RCH program is understood as a secondary good, relative to the primary goal of fertility reduction. An excerpt from Simon-Kumar’s interview with a senior official with Kerala’s Department of Family Welfare, suggests that what is inherent in policy is also present in the views of program workers:

As far as Kerala is concerned, what we believe is that it [*fertility decision-making*] is an option that can be safely left with women ... the earlier style of advocacy and persuasion is prescribed only for two districts – that’s Malappuram and Kasargode. In the rest of the

⁸⁹ See Robin Jeffrey, *Politics, women and well-being : How Kerala became 'a model'*. (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Eng.): Macmillan, 1992); Drèze and Sen, *India*, 137-140; Hartmann, *Reproductive Rights and Wrongs*, 298-300.

place, all that we will do in the new RCH is to have the information available to them. Let them make the choices. But in *Malappuram and in Kasargode* where we believe that fertility rates are unnaturally high, the advocacy would still go on.⁹⁰

The two districts mentioned, according to the Government of Kerala website, are as recently as 2008 among the three districts with the largest population growth. They are also the two poorest districts in the state in terms of per-capita income.⁹¹ Individual freedom is only permitted where it does not contradict the agenda of population control, and this control is specifically targeted towards the poor. Also implicit in this statement of the Kerala official is the narrative that combines poverty and high fertility in a causal relationship, which was manifest in the government family planning poster analyzed above.

A related theme in the comments of Simon-Kumar's interviewees is their definition of proper fertility behaviour. The interviewees' comments make it clear that to them, acting "responsibly" means "in line with state goals of fertility reduction".⁹² One interviewee (a family welfare provider with a non-governmental organization) even equated the failure to limit one's family to two children – the norm defined by the state - with irrationality:

... in that concept, having that many children will have many problems. But if you want to have all that you can't be normal. We went to one place and there was a woman there with 6 children. She told us, "it is an asset to me."⁹³

⁹⁰ Simon-Kumar, *'Marketing' reproduction?*, 146 emphasis in Simon-Kumar.

⁹¹ Government of Kerala, "Economic Review 2008," *Official Website Government of Kerala*, n.d., http://www.keralaplanningboard.org/html/eco_2008/2008_cont_index.htm.

⁹² Simon-Kumar, *'Marketing' reproduction?*, 151-152.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 153.

The choice of a woman to have many children (because she finds that the children are assets) does not fit in with the official's modernist concept of rational behaviour, nor is it in line with the state's demographic goals. There is no consideration given to the idea that perhaps given the constraints she experiences in the current system, children may actually be assets to a woman like this. As we saw in Cassen's analysis, what appear to be relatively selfish or irrational choices are likely born of desperation and the trap of poverty, yet this woman is ridiculed for not doing the "rational" thing, and no support other than for birth control is offered to assist her in overcoming her poverty.

Despite the apparent contradiction between freedom of individual choice and the constraining influence of demographic goals, officials of the RCH program maintain that it fosters individual choice. A gender researcher for the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare portrays the program as one that gives the client – the woman – the information and freedom to "decide what [method] she should use, [and] whether she should control her fertility."⁹⁴ However, at the level of service delivery, two ANMs describe the process quite differently:

I#10: What ever they [the couple] are willing to do, whatever is acceptable for them, that we have to encourage. [...] The mothers with one child we encourage mostly to accept a Cu-T [Copper-T], a CC [Condoms] or OP [Oral Pills]. Within those three which ever they like, we leave it to their wish. [...] After that, those who have two children, we let them have a choice of mini-lap, laparoscopy – it is their wish. What ever they like, we encourage that.

I#15: ... when we interact directly with the public, we have to provide according to their need. We won't compel them. Now those with two children we don't need to compel. Only if there is three or

⁹⁴ Ibid., 231.

more – four or more we should compel them – we should direct them and bring them around.⁹⁵

Birth spacing methods are only offered to those with one child - or two children at the most – but after that terminal methods are the only choice offered. It is not so much a wide range of choices that is encouraged but the “correct” choice, the one that is compatible with the dominant understanding of normative fertility behaviour and the goal of population stabilization for national development. If the correct choices are not made, or if they have not been made previously (i.e. the woman or couple already have more than two children), people must be “directed” and “compelled” to make them.

The perspective of the ANMs in Kerala is remarkably similar to the attitudes of the rural leaders in Caldwell *et al*'s study in Karnataka. Both groups have sought to shape the fertility choices of people towards smaller families and terminal methods. The fact that such a mindset persists in different states across and over a decade in time suggests that it is deeply ingrained. Even more recently, Sreelatha Menon, finds a similar mindset in interviews with ANMs working for a reproductive health project in Uttar Pradesh.⁹⁶ The ANMs admit that despite program rhetoric about offering a full range of reproductive health services, they do not offer birth spacing methods to the women they refer to as “cases”. One ANM is quoted as saying, “If we promote Copper T [barrier contraceptive device], how would we get enough women for sterilizations?”⁹⁷ The health rights advocacy organization Healthwatch has carried out studies that conclude that

⁹⁵ Ibid., 235-236.

⁹⁶ Menon, “State-of-the-Art Cycle Pumps.”

⁹⁷ Ibid., 23.

this single-minded focus on completing as many sterilizations as possible is widespread practice in the RCH program in Uttar Pradesh.⁹⁸

Saroj Pachauri, former director of the Population Council in India, says that the major obstacle to training health workers in the new paradigm of reproductive rights “is the mindset that has, over decades, built all arguments to promote demographic goals for dealing with human issues.”⁹⁹ However, in light of policy and program documents, it is apparent that this mindset is not simply slow to change amongst the workers, as Pachauri’s comments suggest, but is still ingrained in the formulation of policy goals, which are then articulated by middle class practitioners.

Malthusianism in the media

In the mainstream press, the dominance of the Malthusian framing of population issues is also evident, along with some representation of an oppositional development discourse. A survey of articles on population in the publications of the two major English language daily newspapers – *The Hindu* and *The Times of India* – over the past ten years reveals two broad perspectives on the topic.¹⁰⁰

One of these reflects the Malthusian frame, with an emphasis on the urgent need for population control, even to the point of disregarding democratic rights. There is also some implied or explicit blame on the poor for the negative consequences of their fertility to the rest of the nation. In the other view, the neo-Malthusian

⁹⁸ Rao, *From population control to reproductive health*, 244-245.

⁹⁹ Menon, “State-of-the-Art Cycle Pumps,” 24.

¹⁰⁰ Using English-language publications gives the selection a decidedly middle-class bias, so one should be cautious about inferring anything about the public mind in general from these samples. However, one can argue that they give a good sampling of middle-class perspectives on the population subject, which is a specific concern of this paper.

policies and programs examined above are criticized for focusing primarily on population as a problem and control of fertility as a solution, and ignoring socioeconomic and structural issues. Many of these articles were published at times when there were significant announcements of policy and programs, court decisions, or studies released on population related matters. The picture they paint of the population issue in India is of a middle class mostly pre-occupied with the idea of controlling population for the good of the country, with a vocal minority of the same class arguing for broad-based development and better services for all.¹⁰¹

The critics in the press of neo-Malthusian population agendas tend to argue along the lines of a common theme of development versus population control.¹⁰²

One article provides an example of this line of reasoning:

It would be futile to talk of a population policy without improving the social indices. For this purpose, it was imperative that attention should be focused on generating more employment, providing food security to the people and ensuring better health and education facilities.¹⁰³

Articles that take this line refer to the emphasis on rights in the documents of the ICPD, and call the population policies of several Indian states “anti-women, anti-

¹⁰¹ A note on methodology: I searched the online archives of the two publishing houses for articles on population, then divided all of the articles found into those advocating for population control and those critical of it. Merely descriptive articles often quoted public personalities who took one of these two positions. After this first division, I examined each set of articles and listed the reasons or justifications given to support each position. This gave a picture of two views, each of which broadly shared a set of justifications.

¹⁰² These articles share the viewpoint of prominent population control critic, Betsy Hartmann, who sees evidence that structural inequalities and institutional shortcomings are more substantial contributors to development problems than population growth. See Betsy Hartmann, “Population, Environment and Security: A New Trinity,” *Environment and Urbanization* 10, no. 2 (October 1998): 113-127.

¹⁰³ The Hindu, “The Hindu : National : ‘Population policy should be replaced by policy on development’,” *The Hindu*, July 12, 2004, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/2004/07/12/stories/2004071204021200.htm>.

adivasi, anti-dalit and anti-poor” and “profoundly violative of democratic rights.”¹⁰⁴ One such piece claims that the outcome of a “singular obsession with population” by the government has been a lack of attention to much-needed development concerns of the population, particularly the vulnerable.¹⁰⁵ Another article points out that where there has been a focus on development and the rights to basic services, population growth has decreased.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, a writer critical of the 2000 Maharashtra population policy argues that “States which have succeeded in bringing down their population growth rates have done so by improving public access to pre- and post-natal healthcare, and, above all, by making women’s education universal.”¹⁰⁷ The same article also argues that the Maharashtra policy has several elements that will discriminate against the poor, and accuses the elite and middle classes of complicity and of supporting “the coercive regime that Maharashtra is putting place [which] specifically targets the worst off sections, seeking to restrict their numbers by any means.”¹⁰⁸ The motivation for this, the writer claims, is the desire for the elite to safeguard “Mumbai’s secular and cosmopolitan culture” from urban unrest caused by “[m]assive migration from poor Bihar and Uttar Pradesh”.¹⁰⁹ According to the writer, the significant contribution of Mumbai’s poor planning and lack of services to the problems of unemployment and mass poverty has been ignored.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Rajalakshmi, “New paradigm, old strategy.”

¹⁰⁶ Kalpana Sharma, “The Hindu : Magazine / Columns : This volcano need not erupt,” *The Hindu*, July 26, 2009, sec. Magazine, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/mag/2009/07/26/stories/2009072650050300.htm>.

¹⁰⁷ Praveen Swami, “The poor as a problem,” *Frontline*, October 30, 2000, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl1720/17200410.htm>.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

These critical articles demonstrate both the continued emphasis in India on methods of population control that discriminate against the poor, and the lack of attention to development issues that would improve people's lives as well as help reduce fertility rates as a consequence. They suggest that the elite of India are more concerned with protecting their own society from the encroachment of the poor than in assisting in their development. The middle class elites, seeing their society as the "real" India, are dismissive of the poor.

Articles on population growth in the mainstream press that reflect the Malthusian ideology bolster this perception of the middle class, and draw attention to the "problem" of population with specific reference to the poor. These articles demonstrate how Füredi's "silent discourse" operates. Taken as a whole, they show how the "fear of being outnumbered" and "the sentiment that the 'wrong' kind of people are reproducing too fast" are often presented in the language of development and economic concerns, health concerns, environmental concerns, and women's empowerment and reproductive concerns.¹¹⁰

In keeping with India's long-standing interest in development and economic growth, many of these articles refer to the economic consequences of population growth. One article makes a connection between population growth and lower incomes, higher unemployment, and less capital:

The fundamental law of population [...] is that the lower the population size the higher the per capita income, and the higher the ratio of effective employment to population. The lower the

¹¹⁰ Füredi, *Population and Development*, 25.

population size, the greater the deepening of human and physical capital.¹¹¹

The article advocates for a one-child policy similar to that of China. Another article series examines the “demographic performance” of each state, and concludes that the states with high fertility rates cannot wait for socio-economic development to bring down population growth: “A direct attack on the population problem as per the old Malthusian doctrine is probably more relevant in the Indian case.”¹¹² A 2001 *Business Line* article critiques a World Bank *World Development Report*, commenting that more attention should have been paid to reducing population. The author argues that “the absolute number of poor [in India] is rising” and looking after them places “a considerable financial burden on the government.”¹¹³ A 2008 article by the eminent Indian judge, V. R. Krishna Iyer, also argues for population control for a variety of reasons, including because it is “indispensable for the economic good of the Indian people.”¹¹⁴ Iyer’s descriptors of population are unequivocally negative: “pathologically over-populated”, “menace”, “excessive”, “alarming”, “problem of population explosion”. His prescriptions are Malthusian – in fact, he refers to Malthus’ theory in support of his case. His final comments advocate for “drastic disincentives, even penal actions” for those who violate small family norms, as is the practice in China:

¹¹¹ P. R. Brahmananda, “Issues on optimum population size,” *Business Line*, May 17, 2000, Internet edition, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/businessline/2000/05/17/stories/041720aa.htm>.

¹¹² Business Line, “States’ demographic profile -- Development not the best contraceptive,” *Business Line*, August 5, 2000, Internet edition, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/businessline/2000/08/05/stories/040520ma.htm>.

¹¹³ M. Y. Khan, “Poor prescriptions for poverty eradication,” *Business Line*, January 4, 2001, Internet edition, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/businessline/2001/01/04/stories/040420mk.htm>.

¹¹⁴ V. R. Krishna Iyer, “Population policy and legal prescriptions,” *The Hindu*, August 8, 2008, sec. Opinion - Leader Page Articles, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/2008/08/13/stories/2008081354931000.htm>.

“complacency [in population control measures] in the name of democracy could impose a heavy price.”¹¹⁵

Another often-repeated narrative is that of the environmental consequences and resource drain of population growth. Quoting figures that mark increases in the garbage accumulation of major urban centres, and noting that “our lifestyle and consumerism” have aggravated these increases, one article concludes: “So waste generation is clearly related to the population.”¹¹⁶ The author calls for NGOs and government to devote energy and resources to educate “the masses” about the environmental benefits of “population control”, and refers to population growth as a “menace”.¹¹⁷ Another article in *The Hindu* warns of increased pollution, and water and food shortages, expressing doubt that there will be enough for a growing population. The author also advocates for population control along the lines of the Chinese policy, saying that even the two-child norm is “suicidal” and Indian democracy should not be used an excuse for complacency and allowing “the nation to drift towards disaster.”¹¹⁸ Another recent article reports on a speech on World Population Day by the Karnataka Health Secretary, who implored his audience to take an oath not to have more than two children and “underlined the need to immediately address the problems of population explosion and environmental degradation ‘for the survival of civilization.’” A letter to the editor in 2002 blamed pollution on “the hungry millions

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ P. P. Sangal, “Stop population-growth to save environment,” *Business Line*, April 17, 2000, Internet edition, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/businessline/2000/04/17/stories/04172502.htm>.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Arcot Easwaran, “Population challenge,” *The Hindu*, July 8, 2003, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/op/2003/07/08/stories/2003070800090200.htm>.

for burning cowdung and firewood”, the “population explosion of the poor countries and the consumerism of the developed”.¹¹⁹

The linking of population to economic development and environmental concerns is characteristic of neo-Malthusian arguments for population control. There is very little reference to which populations in India are to blame for the apparent “population explosion”, but references to educating “the masses” give some hint. Rao points out that despite studies that show the inadequacy of the blanket term “poor” as an analytical category for the causes of high fertility, “the most frequent trope we hear is that the poor – through folly, ignorance, or irrationality – breed incontinently and that this is what is responsible for their own poverty and the poverty of the nation as well.”¹²⁰ Rather than pay heed to indications that fertility behaviour is influenced by social and structural factors – and inequalities – the focus is on the numbers of the poor and the assumption that they are the population causing the various problems outlined above. The cited letter to the editor puts this attitude more baldly, directly blaming “the hungry millions”.

The ugly face of the demographic preoccupation with reducing the numbers of the “wrong” kind of people is the pseudo-science of eugenics. Although both the term and the popular movement associated with it went out of fashion after the Nazi eugenic experiments of the 1930s, the idea re-surfaces in the context of neo-Malthusian agendas.¹²¹ This theme comes out particularly strongly in one article, with some echoes in others, expressed in the notion that the quality of

¹¹⁹ B. S. Murthy, “Population to blame,” *The Hindu*, August 8, 2002, sec. Opinion - Letters to the Editor, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/2002/08/30/stories/2002083000081004.htm>.

¹²⁰ Rao, *From population control to reproductive health*, 154.

¹²¹ Qadeer, “Population Control in the Era of Neo-Liberalism.”

society – and of people in society – diminishes with population growth. The feature article, entitled “Spotlight on Population Problem”¹²², classifies the Indian population into three groups. First are “the large ignorant masses of illiterate and semi-literate people who remain unconscious of the alarming consequences of the multiplications and additions.” Second are the educated, but “communally inclined” people who follow “personal, religiously or socially fashioned ideas of what the ideal size of family ought to be”. Finally, there is the “elitist class”, which “does not over-breed, no doubt, but in this it helps the quality of our population to develop in ways not ideally suited to India’s advantage.” Here are the barely disguised sentiments – and the quandary - of the eugenicist. The elite, who are of “quality”, are to be commended for not “over-breeding”, but for this very reason, they face the danger of being overwhelmed by the ignorant, illiterate, or “communally inclined” masses, whose birth-rate threatens to dilute the overall quality of the population. The article advocates for an educational program “to control the kind of people who are to be sardined into the can called ‘India’.” A similar sentiment comes through, though not so bluntly, in another article: “the lower the population size, the better the civil society and civic society levels.”¹²³ As Chatterjee has noted, the inhabitants of civil society in India are the elite classes. The “better” Indian society envisioned here is almost certainly a society of middle class elites.

¹²² Lakshmi Raj Sharma, “Spotlight on population problem,” *The Hindu*, October 23, 2001, sec. Features, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/2001/10/23/stories/13230374.htm>.

¹²³ Brahmananda, “Issues on optimum population size.”

The perceived threat of large poor populations to the society of the better off is highlighted in a 2007 article by *The Hindu* columnist, Bhaskar Ghose, entitled “Population Bomb”¹²⁴. Ghose notes the difference between the Indian South and the North in both fertility and economic performance. The South has achieved low fertility rates and its economic growth is increasing, while the North continues to have high fertility rates and is economically stagnant. Again, we see the narrative that implicitly connects population growth with economic stagnation, and here it is presented as creating a divide between the “haves” and “have-nots”:

We are seeing then a division in the country. One region is going to have, if it does not already have, a stable population and in addition increased economic development. And the other is going to have a population growing at a rate that is virtually out of control and which is economically backward, providing little in terms of employment and wealth.

Ghose worries that migration from the poor states to the wealthy ones will cause conflict, fragmentation, and insurgencies. In the face of this “disaster” which threatens to “engulf the country”, he calls for “concentrated, unremitting work” in “the target areas” to “slow the explosive growth rate.” Ostensibly, Ghose’s concern is for the nation, but on a close read it becomes apparent that it is the society of the wealthy (the South) that he wants to protect from the growing numbers of poor. Population control measures, targeted at the poor areas, are his prescription. Here neo-Malthusianism, often applied to poor countries by

¹²⁴ Bhaskar Ghose, “Population bomb,” *The Hindu*, May 10, 2007, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl2419/stories/20071005506509300.htm>.

people in developed ones, is applied within the developing country to poor areas in defense of the more developed and well-off regions.

Ghose's article is interesting in light of a previous article he wrote in 2003, in which, while insisting on the need to stabilize population growth, he took a more measured stance, calling for the building of education to harness the large population as a resource.¹²⁵ This idea is also reflected in a report in *The Times of India* the following year, in which former Health Secretary A. R. Nanda is cited cautioning against coercive population control measures and emphasizing the building of health and family planning services in aid of India's large population as a resource. However, the article, entitled "Rising Population Splits Opinions", also stated that "Nanda was talking in a vacuum since minister of state for health and family welfare Panabaka Lakshmi launched a 'special focused intervention' programme in the 150 high fertility districts to control population growth."¹²⁶ A 2009 article in *The Times of India* draws attention to the projected two billion headcount for the country in 2011 as a matter of concern, then quotes Nanda as saying the problem is the lack of a holistic approach, which would include "economic growth, education for all, and empowerment of women."¹²⁷ These articles draw attention to the concerns related to population growth, but tend towards development solutions, rather than birth control solutions, as the primary way of addressing these concerns. One gets the sense that perhaps the

¹²⁵ Bhaskar Ghose, "Population as a resource," *The Hindu*, January 14, 2009, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl2003/stories/20030214002910200.htm>.

¹²⁶ Times of India, "Rising population splits opinions," *The Times of India*, July 11, 2004, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/774415.cms>.

¹²⁷ Saxena Shobhan, "How India's family planners lost the plot - Special Report," *The Times of India*, July 19, 2009, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/4794280.cms>.

“oppositional discourse” of a developmental approach has seeped somewhat into the public consciousness, but there is still an overarching concern with controlling numbers. Despite some articulate challenges, the Malthusian mindset remains dominant in India, supporting the tendency to target and blame the poor for the country’s ills.

Converging discrimination: Malthusianism and Hindu nationalism

Just as Malthusian ideology has allowed the elite of Indian society to naturalize the deep social and economic divisions in the country, and to justify discrimination against the poor in population policies and programs, so too has it been used by Hindu nationalists in their fear mongering about a communal divide between the Hindu majority and the Muslim minority. Hindu nationalists adhere to the ideology of *Hindutva* – that India should be a nation predominantly of Hindus, excluding those whose religion is foreign to Indian geography. The proponents of this ideology – the various groups in the *Sangh Parivar*, with the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as the political representation of the movement – have enjoyed growing influence and power in recent decades. Accompanying this rise has been a proliferation of “saffron demography”¹²⁸, which makes use of the widespread concern with population growth amongst the poorer sections of the country to highlight the higher levels of fertility amongst the Muslim community in particular. Saffron demography, then, takes advantage of the dominant Malthusian framing of population growth as the primary problem for

¹²⁸ This term comes from Patricia Jeffery and Roger Jeffery, *Confronting Saffron Demography: Religion, Fertility, and Women’s Status in India* (Gurgaon: Three Essays Collective, 2006).

India in order to advance its own interest in constructing the Muslim population as a threat to their ideal of a Hindu nation.

The concerns of the Hindu Right with Muslim fertility goes back even before India's independence, generated by British censuses that drew attention to the headcount in religious groups.¹²⁹ During the last decade, coinciding with the political power of the BJP at the head of the national government, the publication of *Religious Demography of India*¹³⁰ in 2003 gave the appearance of academic certification to the view that Muslim population growth threatened to outstrip Hindu population in the country. Despite the fact that the book was written by physicists rather than demographers, and the publication of several critiques that exposed its unfounded premises and poor technical basis¹³¹, the view it represents seems to have strong support in influential sections of Indian society. The release of unadjusted 2001 Census figures in 2004 sparked further fear mongering by the Hindu Right about the supposed "population explosion" of Muslims. The lack of data in the 1991 Census for two states with relatively large Muslim populations (due to security restrictions in the region) gave the appearance of massive Muslim population growth in the 2001 Census, which included data for those states. Adjusted data revealed a decline in fertility in all communities, including Muslim communities.¹³² However, even after the adjustment had been made, the national vice-president of the BJP, in an interview with *Frontline* magazine, continued to promote the idea of a large

¹²⁹ Ibid., 2.

¹³⁰ A. P. Joshi, M. D Srinivas, and Jitendra Bajaj, *Religious demography of India* (Chennai: Centre for Policy Studies, 2003).

¹³¹ For a summary of the criticisms, see Jeffery and Jeffery, *Confronting Saffron Demography*, 3-4.

¹³² Ibid., 4.

increase in the Muslim population: “The first report was correct and natural. For some political reasons it was altered. [...] I feel that there has been a 20 per cent underestimation of the population growth, especially of Muslims.”¹³³ According to Dibyesh Anand, this denial of good scientific evidence in favour of the “common ‘knowledge’/myth of overpopulating Muslims” is widespread, as is made “clear when one participates in conversations with many Hindus in middle class drawing rooms, university cafes, tea stalls, and other public gatherings.”¹³⁴ Jeffery and Jeffery confirm this finding in their ethnographic research in Uttar Pradesh.¹³⁵

The construction of Muslims as a threat to the Indian nation involves a portrayal of the Muslim male as one with uncontrollable lust. In part, this is linked in Hindu nationalist rhetoric to the supposed relationship between the Islamic allowance for polygamy and high Muslim fertility, as evidenced in the parody of the government’s family planning slogan - “ham do, hamare do” (we two, our two) – changed to “ham panch, hamare pachis” (we five, our twenty-five) in reference to the allowance for Muslim men to have four wives. This plays on the (unsubstantiated) notion that while Hindus comply with the two-child norm, the “lusty nature” of Muslim men, combined with their practice of polygamy, drives up the Muslim population.¹³⁶ The caricature of the Muslim male with an uncontrollable sexual appetite is presented as a threat to Hindu women, an

¹³³ Frontline, “‘The first report was correct and natural,’” *Frontline*, October 25, 2004, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl2120/stories/20041008005301800.htm>.

¹³⁴ Dibyesh Anand, “The Violence of Security: Hindu Nationalism and the Politics of Representing ‘the Muslim’ as a Danger,” *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 94, no. 379 (2005): 208.

¹³⁵ Jeffery and Jeffery, *Confronting Saffron Demography*, 26.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

image that has been used by Hindu nationalist leaders to incite Hindu men to sexual violence against Muslim women in a kind of masculine aggression to defend “Mother India”.¹³⁷ As Christophe Jaffrelot points out in his analysis of the Hindu-on-Muslim violence in the 2002 Gujarat riots, “[t]he widespread practice of gang rape in the course of clashes in Gujarat” reflects “the desire to dishonour and destroy an entire community by raping and torturing its women, which of course aims to destroy their reproductive capacity.”¹³⁸ Thus, the threat of Muslim overpopulation is literally attacked with this type of horrible violence against Muslim women, let alone the more sanitized activities of population control.

In Füredi’s analysis above, we saw how population control advocates often mask their fears about differential fertility – the numbers of the “Other” – and legitimize what might otherwise be condemned as racist views by linking their efforts to limit the fertility of other groups with a concern that is politically more acceptable. The *Hindutva* movement’s main fear is that Muslims will use their numbers to overpower Hindus and even invite a Pakistani invasion to take over India.¹³⁹ However, the BJP, during its ascent to political power, has had to swing away from the radical stance of the movement, and at times present itself to a wider constituency as a more moderate, centrist party.¹⁴⁰ In this mode, the BJP links the Hindu nationalist fear of Muslim overpopulation to the dominant neo-Malthusian narrative of how overpopulation is a drag on the development of the

¹³⁷ Anand, “The Violence of Security,” 208-209.

¹³⁸ Christophe Jaffrelot, “The 2002 pogrom in Gujarat: The post-9/11 face of Hindu nationalist anti-Muslim violence,” in *Religion and Violence in South Asia: Theory and Practice*, ed. John R Hinnells and Richard King (London: Routledge, 2007), 185.

¹³⁹ Jeffery and Jeffery, *Confronting Saffron Demography*, 6.

¹⁴⁰ Amrita Basu, “Chapter 7: The dialectics of Hindu Nationalism,” in *The Success of India’s Democracy*, ed. Atul Kohli (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

nation and an obstacle to the well-being of Indian citizens in general. The statements of Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, the national vice-president of the BJP in 2004, are an example of this strategy:

When we talk about population control, we do not talk about any particular community. Some people are reacting on religious grounds. [...] This [population growth amongst Indian Muslims] is very dangerous for the Muslim community itself. The way their population is increasing coupled with socio-economic and educational backwardness is not good for any country.¹⁴¹

Notice that the initial statement that population control is not targeted towards any particular community is qualified – even contradicted – by later comments about the Muslim community. As we saw in the quotation above, taken from the same interview, Naqvi is speaking out of his conviction that the unadjusted 2001 Census figures are correct about the population growth of Muslims. There is a subtle shift from concern for the well being of Muslims to concern for the well being of the nation that has so many uneducated and poor Muslims in it. Said almost in the same breath, the two concerns sound as if they are compatible and the speaker cares about India in general and Muslim Indians specifically. Yet in reality, the two concerns are quite different. Population control, it is implied, is particularly necessary in Muslim communities because lower fertility will make them better off. This idea relies completely on the narrative that lower fertility equals prosperity, and its converse, that high fertility equals poverty. There is no discussion of improving the educational and socio-economic conditions of Muslims by any means other than reducing their numbers. The power of the “population equals poverty” narrative in India carries enough weight to remain

¹⁴¹ Frontline, “The first report was correct and natural’.”

unexamined as Naqvi jumps to his final conclusion: that too many of the Muslim “kind” of people are not good for India. The real agenda of population control is not to assist the disadvantaged group, but to reduce the numbers of the unwanted group. However, for Hindu nationalists, this agenda relies on an audience that accepts *a priori* the premise that population and poverty are causally linked in order to give its prejudiced cause wider legitimacy.

Thus, the ideology of neo-Malthusianism and support for population control of the poor and minority groups in India finds fertile ground in the divisions of Indian society between elite and vulnerable and between majority and minority. The construction of the “Other” as a threat justifies and sanctions population control measures targeted at the poor and marginalized, often with the claim that these are in the best interest of all. However, the evidence suggests that population control activities are more an example in Indian society of discrimination against the poor in the name of their betterment, than the most effective and sustainable way to address real issues of population and development. The final chapter turns to examine this evidence.

3: MISTREATING THE MARGINALIZED: THE CONSEQUENCES OF MALTHUSIANISM

Structural factors in population stabilization

Despite the widespread policy focus on methods of direct population control to bring down fertility rates, in the more measured academic literature there is acknowledgement – even amongst those who advocate family planning programs – that fertility decline is primarily correlated with structural factors. The causal connection that is commonly drawn between population and poverty, as we have seen in India, is not supported empirically. The most measured conclusion from the available evidence is that population growth may be a contributing factor to poverty, but not its primary cause. It is further accepted amongst scholars that policies that encourage socio-economic development and reduce poverty will likely also reduce fertility, given the accessibility of birth control. Robert Cassen sums up this consensus amongst scholars in the introduction to his edited volume on population and development. Listing several policy prescriptions for improving access to health, education and employment for all, and particularly for women, he says: “This volume’s final message is that virtually everything that needs doing from a population point of view needs doing anyway.”¹⁴²

¹⁴² Robert Cassen, ed., *Population and Development: Old Debates, New Conclusions*, U.S.-Third World policy perspectives no. 19 (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 23.

Within India itself, there is evidence that upholds this correlation between broad-based socio-economic development and fertility decline, particularly when women are able to gain greater opportunities. An extensive study of 296 districts in 16 states, published by Jean Drèze, Anne-Catherine Guio, and Mamta Murthi in 1995, found that “the only variables ... [that] have a significant effect on fertility are female literacy and female labour force participation.”¹⁴³ The success of the Indian state of Kerala in this regard has already been noted.¹⁴⁴ This indicates that there is a strong case to be made for providing people – women, in particular – with the tools and freedom to come to their own conclusions with regards to their reproductive behaviour. Thus, it would seem that the emphasis of population policy – even in a country concerned with population – should be on socioeconomic development and poverty reduction rather than on simply reducing fertility.

However, despite slogans like “development is the best contraceptive” being coined and quoted in India¹⁴⁵ the actual focus in policy and programs has been to reduce fertility directly. This is most often to the further detriment of the poor and marginalized, in part because the poor end up becoming the victims of population activities rather than the beneficiaries, and also because a lop-sided focus on a demographic solution fails to deal with structural issues of access to the basic services and opportunities that could help reduce both poverty and fertility rates.

¹⁴³ Mamta Murthi, Anne-Catherine Guio, and Jean Drèze, “Mortality, Fertility, and Gender Bias in India: A District-Level Analysis,” *Population and Development Review* 21, no. 4 (December 1995): 772.

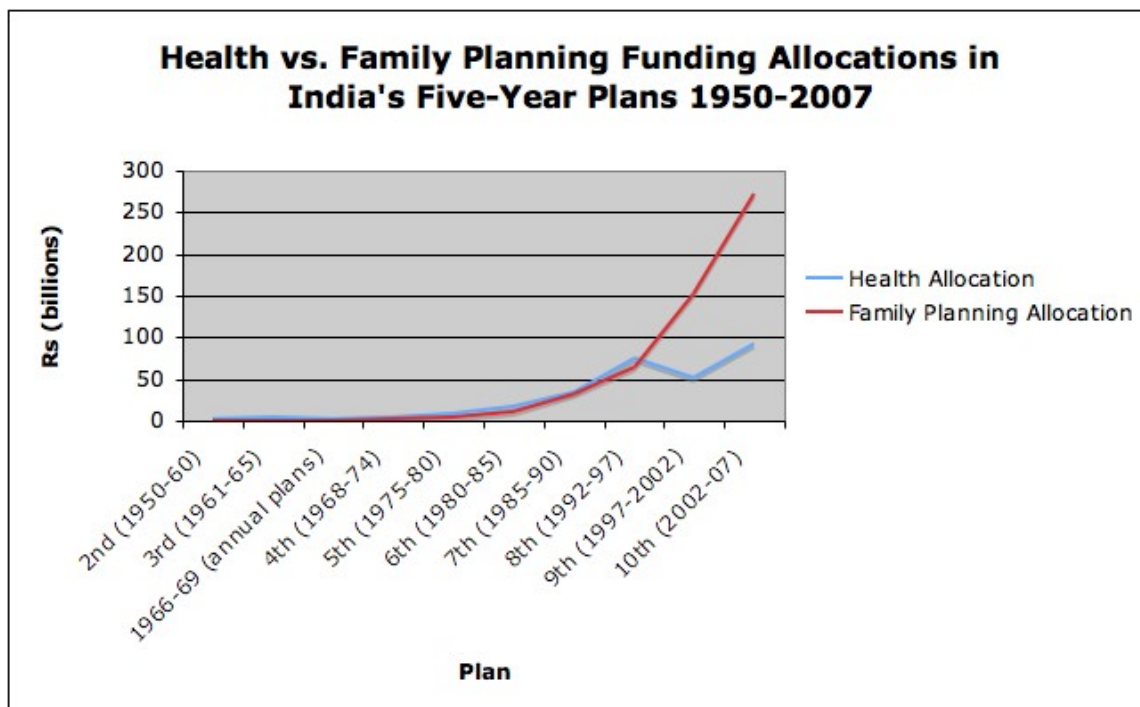
¹⁴⁴ See Chapter 1, note 61

¹⁴⁵ This often-quoted phrase was first used by Karan Singh, the Indian Health Minister. See Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*, 316.

Fertility control: a harmful “solution”

The main intention of India’s population policy is not to address the structural problems underlying poverty and the high fertility and poor health associated with it, but rather to use fertility reduction as a quick-fix solution to the “problem” of the poor. One clear indication of the lop-sided nature of India’s approach to its population challenges is given by a comparison of government funding allocations to health and family planning in India’s five-year plans (Figure 3.1). Although initially the health allocation is higher than that given to family planning, the allocations become roughly equal until the 9th and 10th plans, when the funds for family planning far outstrip those for health. A further comparison of these

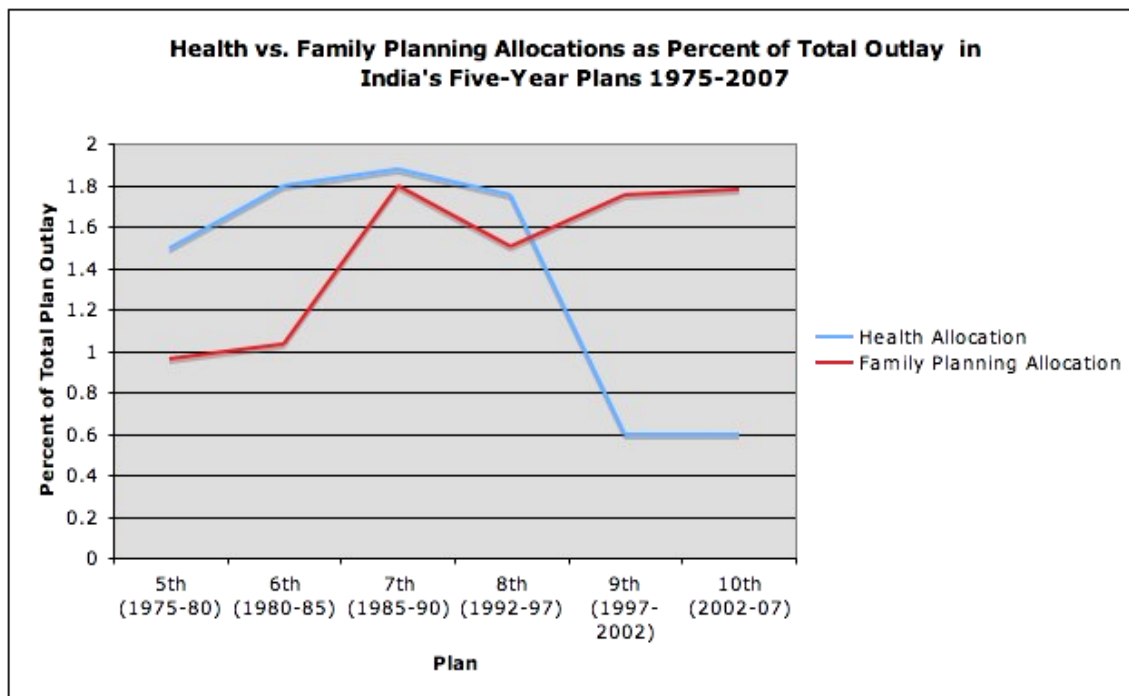
Figure 3.1: Health vs. Family Planning Funding Allocations in India’s Five-Year Plans 1950-2007



Source: Rao 2004, Government of India 2008

allocations as percentages of total plan outlays from 1975 to 2007 shows a similar trend, but also demonstrates that while government spending on health has declined proportionally overall, the proportion spent on family planning has actually increased (Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2: Health vs. Family Planning Allocations as Percent of Total Outlay in India's Five-Year plans 1975-2007



Source: Rao 2004, Government of India 2008

The economic reforms and shift to a neo-liberal economic policy that took place in the 1990s saw cuts in government spending on welfare services and a greater focus on user-pay systems and technological solutions in the health sector. Thus, rather than providing a more comprehensive basket of health services to those who needed it most, the new policies have excluded the poorest users and

promoted the use of birth control technology as the fix for a wide-range of health problems.¹⁴⁶

Even the new primacy given to reproductive health is misplaced in the context of the greater health needs. Rao shows that among the causes of women's mortality, those that stem from reproductive problems are a small percentage.¹⁴⁷

This is not to belittle the importance of reproductive health, but rather to put it into perspective. From a public health perspective, there is a need to approach the issue of health systematically, rather than symptomatically, to "address the underlying social, economic, and political causes of ill-health and diseases."¹⁴⁸

India's reproductive health program makes noises about addressing these problems, but in fact pays little attention to them, further entrenching the disadvantages of the poor. Qadeer and Visvanathan push the point further, arguing that reproductive and child health services have essentially been transformed into instruments of population control.¹⁴⁹ This suggests that the influential elite of India have a Malthusian interest in both "kicking away the ladder" of government investment in development and poverty reduction, and using population control to reduce the threat of large numbers of people climbing up from poverty towards their privileged society.

¹⁴⁶ Imrana Qadeer and Nalini Visvanathan, "How Healthy Are Health and Population Policies? The Indian Experience," in *Unhealthy Health Policy: A Critical Anthropological Examination*, ed. Arachu Castro and Merrill Singer (Walnut Creek, Calif: AltaMira Press, 2004).

¹⁴⁷ Rao, *From population control to reproductive health*, 194-196.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁴⁹ Qadeer and Visvanathan, "Unhealthy Health Policy," 145.

Discrimination (and worse) in population policy

Besides claiming but failing to address the problems of systemic poverty, population policies like the state legislations of a two-child limit for contestants in *panchayat* (village and district council) elections also have the effect of adding to the discrimination against weaker sections of society. Studies of the effects of these laws have shown that they disproportionately disqualify poorer women and dalits (very low caste members) from acting as political representatives in their communities.¹⁵⁰ This is counter to the democratic impulse of the 73rd Amendment of the Indian Constitution, which sought to increase political representation of weaker sections of society, and in fact did so. As we saw above in the court decisions about these policies, the restriction on democratic politics is justified as necessary to create a demonstration effect, whereby the example of the leaders of the poorer sections would influence their constituents to reduce their fertility. This plays into the popular idea that the poor are over-breeding irresponsibly and disincentives are necessary to make them stop. However, a number of higher caste and wealthier contestants in these elections also have more than two children in violation of the policy, but have the resources to enable them to circumvent disqualification. Further, women are discriminated against in a number of ways. The man who contests the election can send his pregnant wife away to hide the birth and the child, while the pregnant mother must step down from the contest. Dismissal or divorce of pregnant wives by elected men is

¹⁵⁰ See Nirmala Buch, "Law of Two-Child Norm in Panchayats: Implications, Consequences, and Experiences," *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 24 (June 2005): 2421-2429; and Leela Visaria, Akash Acharya, and Francis Raj, "Two-Child Norm: Victimizing the Vulnerable?," *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 01 (January 7, 2006): 41-48.

another strategy used to get past the legislation, one that leaves women (and their children) in a disadvantaged position. In addition, the prevalence of son preference and the availability of sex discovery through ultrasound technology have meant that women who stand for election are often pressured by her husband and in-laws to step down if the baby *in utero* is male and urged to abort if it is female. A major conclusion of these studies is that the imposition of this legislation has not demonstrated much of an effect on fertility rates, and better results could be achieved if efforts were made for reducing poverty and increasing public health and access to education. Rather than doing anything about the problems of underdevelopment – let alone about fertility rates - these policies serve only to consolidate the political control of the powerful and undermine any gains for the poor and marginalized.

Aside from their failure to address the systemic problems of poverty and their contribution to anti-poor discrimination, the fact that population control measures are targeted at poorer districts and states in India suggests that they represent an effort to reduce the number of poor people in the nation.¹⁵¹ The focus on sterilization in reproductive health programs for poor areas also has a distinctly Malthusian bias. A. R. Nanda, a former Secretary of the Department of Family Welfare commented: “Will any rich person allow his wife or daughter to undergo tubectomy or sterilisation?”¹⁵² The implication here is that these programs are

¹⁵¹ For example, Uttar Pradesh, listed in the CMP as a state of concern with regards to high fertility, has the lowest per capita GDP of all Indian states according to Indian government statistics from 2006-2007. See Directorate of Economics & Statistics of respective State Governments, and for All-India - Central Statistical Organisation, “Statement: Gross State Domestic Product at Current Prices” (Government of India, 2007), http://mospi.nic.in/6_gsdp_cur_9394ser.htm.

¹⁵² cited in T.K. Rajalakshmi, “Growing concerns,” *Frontline* 21, no. 17 (August 14, 2004), <http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl2117/stories/20040827002208900.htm>.

meant to stop the poor from having any more babies – to prevent them surgically and irreversibly from doing so, even if they want to. It does not seem too far out of place to note the tendency towards eugenics in this.

Abuse of the poor in population control activities

Perhaps the most disturbing indication of this tendency in India is the mistreatment of the poor in population reduction programs and initiatives. Deepa Dhanraj's 1991 documentary *Something Like a War*¹⁵³ shows Indian men telling of their experience during the Emergency in the 1970s, when population control was at its most coercive. They were rounded up by the army and police, and trucked to camps for forced vasectomies. After the political backlash against these measures, Indian government population policy has backed away from such forceful techniques, and focused on women to a greater extent, but the impulse to dehumanize and misuse the poor has remained. The film shows images of mostly poor and illiterate women lined up in cramped conditions at a clinic, literally labeled with numbers on their foreheads and brought one after the other into the surgery for 45-second laparoscopies. Afterwards, they are carried out, still queasy with anesthetic, to be laid for recovery, packed next to one another on the floor. The surgeon is interviewed and likens this operation to an industrial production; increased production is beneficial for the country, he says. Program workers talk about needing to offer incentives of cash, guarantees of land, or other promises in order to convince "cases" to come and be sterilized.

¹⁵³ Deepa Dhanraj, *Something Like a War* (Distributed by Women Make Movies, 1991).

The women that come are given few options other than sterilization, and very limited explanations about side effects and other concerns.

Other more recent accounts show that this type of treatment continues. Sreethla Menon's article about the USAID funded reproductive health program in Uttar Pradesh documents the same obsession with sterilization and lack of options for other types of birth control.¹⁵⁴ Women are treated with little regard for their comfort or safety. Clinic workers use bicycle pumps to inflate the abdomens of the women in preparation for surgery, despite the health risks this poses. Women who do not qualify for sterilization are turned away without assistance. In one case the doctor discovered after he made the incision that his patient was not eligible for the procedure, and he stitched her up and sent her away without painkillers, because "medicines were only for cases and not non-cases"¹⁵⁵. Other staff indicated that this was not the first time this had happened. Despite the new target-free approach, ANMs still face pressure from their superiors to bring in a quota of "cases". Jeffery and Jeffery make similar observations from their work in Muslim communities. They say that medical staff, often from high caste Hindu backgrounds, were disdainful with respect to poor Muslims (and Hindus), chiding them for their childcare practices and repeated pregnancies. They also note that health services were of poorer quality in Muslim-dominated villages as compared with Hindu-dominated ones.¹⁵⁶ Rajashri Dasgupta documents the use of Quinacrine to sterilize women in India, even though the World Health

¹⁵⁴ Menon, "State-of-the-Art Cycle Pumps."

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁵⁶ Jeffery and Jeffery, *Confronting Saffron Demography*, 40.

Organization has said that the drug is not approved by any national drug regulatory authority in the world, and has proven to have very negative effects on women's health.¹⁵⁷ The drug is promoted by two Americans associated with a non-governmental organization in favour of population control in the developing world, and given to Indian women by a network of "doctors" in makeshift surgeries. The harmful side effects are not explained before the women's consent to the treatment is given. The Indian Council of Medical Research, while officially not in support of Quinacrine use, has also not made any effective effort to stop it. Rajashri concludes that the professional authorities and "the entire middle class of the country" are "deeply complicit" in this poor treatment of women, and that "elites don't care what happens to poor women as long as their fertility is controlled."¹⁵⁸

In the failure of policy to find effective solutions to the problems of poverty, in the systemic discrimination against the poor and marginalized, and in the disregard for the health, comfort, rights and dignity of the poor – especially poor women – the policy and practice of population control exhibit the deeply harmful consequences of a Malthusian ideology to the health, equality, and unity of Indian society. Perhaps the most poignant summary of this comes in the words of Gyarsi Bai, a woman who is interviewed in Dhanraj's film:

I keep asking myself what the government is up to when it tells us get operated ... get injected ... insert this. What lies behind the government's interest in this? We have no land and they're not

¹⁵⁷ Rajashri Dasgupta, "Quick-fix Medical Ethics: Quinacrine Sterilizations and the Ethics of Contraceptive Trials," in *The Unheard Scream: Reproductive Health and Women's Lives in India* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2004), 279-309.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 305.

going to even things up to allow us any. In these conditions our poverty is not going to disappear. They're killing the poor, not poverty.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ Dhanraj, *Something Like a War*.

CONCLUSION

Despite a rhetorical shift towards the language and concerns of an oppositional developmental, rights-based discourse, the dominant ideology shaping the population discourse continues to be Malthusian. This is true in India as much as it is true in the organizations and institutions that focus their efforts and funds on limiting population growth in developing countries like India. The case of India demonstrates that many population activities – whether they are called reproductive health services or something else – have as their primary end the control of population growth, and not necessarily the well being or rights of people. Malthusianism has deeply entrenched this phenomenon in India because it is an ideology that justifies and naturalizes the power and supremacy of elite groups over the poor and marginalized, and therefore appeals to elites who can promote their own interests as national interests. In doing so, it plays on the existing divisions and inequalities in Indian society and further deepens them rather than helping to reconcile and reduce them. As a result the poor and marginalized, when characterized as “high fertility” groups, are treated as a kind of threat or enemy to the nation, and attempts to contain or restrict them in their fertility practices often disregard their dignity and freedom, and may even become abusive and dehumanizing.

While India presents a case where this has played out over decades in the domestic context, it is also clear that external and international groups adhering

to neo-Malthusian ideology and intent on protecting the interests of the global elite in developed nations, have supported and urged population control activities in “countries like India”, with similar justifications and ultimate disregard for the consequences in the lives of many people in those countries. This paper has examined these connections in one such country, but the power and influence of international institutions informed at some level by neo-Malthusianism suggests that further research may unearth similar connections in other countries, albeit nuanced by the particular nature of social divisions and inequalities in each.

The conclusions of this paper are important considerations in the formulation of the project of development that has occupied much of the globe in the last century and continues to this day. A recent paradigm of development theory, informed largely by the work of Amartya Sen¹⁶⁰, has it that true development results in greater freedom for all people to access the resources they need to realize their potential within their society. Population control as informed by Malthusianism is more about protecting the society of the powerful than it is about development in this sense, despite being accompanied by rhetoric that borrows the language of rights, choice, and freedom. On the other hand, the most carefully considered evidence seems to indicate that development programs that strive to increase equality of access to resources for all people also have the result of greatly contributing to desirable population stabilization. If the most desirable end of development is to improve the lives of the great majority of the world’s people – that is to say, the poor – then projects towards

¹⁶⁰ Amartya Kumar Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1999).

this end should be based on an ideology consistent with that. As this study of India demonstrates, Malthusianism, regardless of its guise or rhetoric, is not such an ideology. It may actually be detrimental to development, and it is certainly detrimental to the well being of the poor.

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