

**Population Policy in India:
The Role of the Rockefeller Foundation and the Population Council**

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My research investigates how India came to be imagined, both by Indians and in the West, as an overpopulated place. Beginning in the nineteenth century and continuing into the twentieth, fears of overpopulation haunted Indian political culture, thereby shaping state policy and civil society debates. Curiously, however, this fear was for many years independent of the actual size of India's population or its rate of growth. In other words, concerns that India was overpopulated actually predated -- by close to a hundred years -- any large or significant increase in population size. This apparent disjuncture prompts my inquiry into the role that concepts of population have played in colonial and postcolonial projects of governance in South Asia. My research examines population not as a neutral category, concerned objectively with numerical measurement, but as a politically fraught concept that underpinned claims of power, privilege, and citizenship. More broadly, I hypothesize that projects of managing population -- indeed of creating "population" as a target of administration -- shaped the development of modern technologies of rule.

I focus my research in three broad areas: the colonial management of famine in the nineteenth century; debates on contraception and reproductive technologies in the early twentieth century; and policies of population control in the post-independence period. My work at the Rockefeller Archive Center was focused primarily on this last area, and I examined the following collections: the John D. Rockefeller 3rd papers in the Rockefeller Family Archives, the Rockefeller Foundation Archives, and the Population Council Archives. My discussion here represents a preliminary assessment of this material, and I expect to elaborate upon these ideas as I continue my archival research in India in 2010-2011.

The Rockefeller Foundation (RF) has a very long history of involvement in India, and its earliest grant in 1920 predated Indian independence. These early efforts focused on public health, specifically hookworm eradication.^[1] Consequently, by the 1950s, when both the Indian government and international organizations began to develop population control policies in earnest, the RF already had people and programs in place in India. I was curious to see whether

the foundation's experience in public health shaped its involvement in population policy in any way, especially since the Indian government's initiatives linked its population campaigns to its public health infrastructure. However, working through the RF's records from the 1920s to the 1970s, I found no clear connections between the earlier public health work and the post-independence support for policy and research on population growth. Instead, like other key international organizations -- the Ford Foundation, USAID, and the U.N. -- the Rockefeller Foundation funded a series of studies geared towards motivating individuals to accept family planning methods. Although some of these studies referenced overall public health concerns, for the most part an attention to numbers of "acceptors" of contraceptive methods overshadowed any attention to the health impact on any one individual or on the community as a whole.

Perhaps the most famous of these studies of contraceptive use is the so-called Khanna Study, conducted by John B. Wyon and John E. Gordon of Harvard University, and funded in part by the Rockefeller Foundation. Based on fieldwork in Punjab from 1953-1960, the Khanna study sought to investigate the success of contraceptive programs in reducing what they termed "population pressure." The RF's archives contain periodic reports about the progress of the study, and thus help us to contextualize Wyon's and Gordon's conclusions as they were published. These conclusions -- which documented villagers' unwillingness to adopt contraception -- were seen as a key reference for subsequent research on population policy. Yet at the same time, the Khanna study's research and methodology came in for strong critique, most notably by Mahmood Mamdani, who argued that despite all of the vast resources expended, Wyon and Gordon had failed to understand the socio-economic factors motivating villagers' decisions about family size.^[2]

In the world of population policy, as represented in the archives of both the RF and the Population Council, the critique of someone like Mamdani represented a minority view through the 1950s and 1960s. A number of field reports, diaries by RF officers, and Population Council-funded studies focus instead on numbers: numbers of individuals contacted, numbers of IUDs inserted, numbers of vasectomies completed, numbers of "births prevented."^[3] Yet amidst these attempts to quantify the results of population policy, there are also notes of concern. For instance, several Population Council reports document potential problems with IUD insertions.^[4] Others note that a relatively high percentage of men who had vasectomies would not recommend the procedure to others, a trend which they feared could have a long-term negative effect on attempts to prevent births in India.^[5]

Another source of concern for the Population Council and the RF alike was how the efforts of Americans and other Westerners would be viewed by Indians. Several writers emphasize that work on population needs to include Indians so that these efforts are not seen as a Western and/or imperialist imposition. The files document efforts to work with Indians, typically either by offering fellowships or by working alongside the Indian government's initiatives. However,

these concerns about how Americans would be perceived seem to exist alongside a tendency to represent overpopulation as a problem primarily of the "non-Western" world. For instance, in the Population Council archives, I found a brochure from Planned Parenthood's section on World Population. The brochure advertises a series of "visual resources" available for purchase by affiliated organizations for "do-it-yourself posters, exhibits, brochures." The images seeking to illustrate overpopulation are almost entirely from either non-white or non-Western groups. Thus, a photograph with the caption "Unplanned Family" shows an exhausted, pregnant, presumably non-American mother gazing out at three poorly clothed and crying children; another, "A Child's Reproach" shows a brown-skinned child looking balefully at the camera. By contrast, the images of white mothers caressing their white children represent "Reverence for Life" as does another entitled, simply, "Wanted." Many other texts in the RF and Population Council records illustrate a similar tension between attempts to collaborate and assumptions that Asian, African, and South American populations need to be targeted by Western donors.

The Rockefeller Family Archives, including the John D. Rockefeller 3rd papers, offer a useful supplement to the materials found in the RF and Population Council records. In addition to documenting JDR 3rd's interest in population issues and involvement with the Population Council, these files contain useful press clippings and copies of speeches and press releases on population issues. I was especially interested in several family planning pamphlets, magazines, and advertisements that were published in India during the 1950s and 1960s. These texts shed light on the nature of the collaboration between Indian and international efforts on population policy, and I hope to find additional examples in Indian archives.

After 1972, the Indian government began to reduce its collaboration with international agencies and donors, preferring instead to rely more exclusively on its own resources. This shift is visible in the records, as reports of ongoing projects and grants decline in number and detail during the 1970s. At the same time, several internal Population Council reports detail an overall reassessment of the organization's work, including reconsideration of how resources should be used.

Overall, the records I examined at RAC offer a detailed glimpse into the structures of ideology and funding that shaped international interventions in Indian population policy. Along with my research in Indian materials, I hope these texts will illuminate how and why "population" emerged as a critical site intervention in the post-independence era, and the tensions and conflicts that marked population policy.

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ENDNOTES

1. R.B. Watson, "Historical Notes on Rockefeller Foundation medical and public health work in India," February 9, 1953, folder 5, box 1, series 460, RG 1-2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.
2. Mahmood Mamdani, *The Myth of Population Control: Family, Caste, and Class in an Indian Village*. New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1972.
3. There are numerous examples, for instance: Parker Mauldin officer's diary, May 2, 1960, folder 293, box 18, Population Council Archives, RAC; E.M. Holmes, "Suggestion for the reorganization of the Kurali-Ballabgarh Training District," September 11, 1961, folder 1003, box 139, series II, RG 6.7 Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.
4. The Medical Committee of the Planned Parenthood Federation, "The Intrauterine Contraceptive Devices- Supplemental Report #1," July 30, 1965, folder 1997, box 107, Population Council Archives, RAC.
5. Institute of Rural Health and Family Planning: Gandhigram, "A brief report on the study of persons who have undergone vasectomy in the Institute area," undated, box 19, Population Council Archives, Accession II, RAC.
6. Planned Parenthood-World Population, undated, folder 1997, box 107, Population Council Archives, RAC.