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Eligibilizing Certain Populations: Hindutva Politics Of UP Population Bill 2021

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DIPANITA MALIK, MAR 4 2022

Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state in India, announced its commitment to control the population growth of its state by introducing a two-child norm on the occasion of the World Population Day of July 11, 2021. The purpose of this intervention, framed within the Uttar Pradesh Population (Control, Stabilization, and Welfare) Bill 2021, is rooted in the promotion of economic growth and development in the violence-ridden state. However, the rhetoric of achieving sustainable development through demographic control does not deviate from its long history of state violence against religious minorities and marginalized communities.

This paper argues that the UP Population Bill (2021) serves as a tool to consolidate the focus of the state on Hindutva politics that deploys an aggressive policing of women and their reproductive capacities. Moreover, the exercise of this tool enables the state to not identify eligible populations, but validate certain bodies that meet the vision of such a state. Thus, this paper aims to confront and challenge the rhetoric of development that conceals and obscures the intricate processes employed by the state to express and determine its commitment to assert Hindutva politics, control the reproductive capacities of its population and regulate existing inequalities within its political discourses, material practices, and the appropriation of global neoliberal mechanisms within regional requirements.

The paper follows as the first section reflects on the initial reading of the UP Population Bill (2021), and its main provisions. The second section locates the Bill within the global discussions on neo-Malthusianism as a dominant approach to controlling population growth rates, and its alignment with regional state discourses on creating a better future of demographic certainty. The next section, divided into two primary subsections to contextualize the dynamics, within which the state operates, focuses on its commitment to Hindutva politics and gender-based violence, and their requirement to validate desired populations worthy of state benefits. Such a commitment employs the creation of demographic anxieties for future progress to create the space for state recognition of the deserving populations. The fourth section reflects on how the state legitimizes and perpetuates existing and created inequalities in society based on religion, gender, and class with the help of a neoliberal appropriation of state resources and public welfare policies. The final section concludes with a few limitations in the paper, and suggestions for future inquiries into the mutating forms of Hindutva politics within the current regime.

About the UP Population Bill (2021)

The Uttar Pradesh Population (Control, Stabilization, and Welfare) Bill 2021 outlines the objective of the state of Uttar Pradesh to implement the two-child policy “per eligible couple in the state by means of incentives and disincentives” (Live Law, 2021, 2). Among several incentives for small families, the Bill includes financial benefits such as subsidies for water and house tax, maternity and paternity leave for twelve months, and easier access to health care facilities (Live Law, 2021, 4). Moreover, there are greater incentives for families who voluntarily adopt the one-child initiative, such as free education of the child up to graduation level, and preference to single child in admission to public education institutions (Live Law, 2021, 5).

In addition, the Bill sketches the disincentives for families who violate the two-child policy. For instance, it limits their “ration cards units up to four” (Live Law, 2021, 6) and declares them “ineligible” to contest in any local body

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elections, avail any government jobs, and receive “any kind of government subsidy” (Live Law, 2021, 7).

The Bill further states its motivation behind such an intervention is rooted in the limited ecological and economic resources available in the most populous state of Uttar Pradesh in the country (Live Law, 2021, 1). Moreover, by drawing on internationally recognized human rights for all individuals (Johnson, 2020, 259), it lays out its objective to provide quality reproductive health services, and equitable distribution of the “basic necessities of human life” such as water, house, and food, to live a meaningful life of dignity (Live Law, 2021, 1).

The global and historical shape of the UP Population Bill

Scholars argue that there is a global resurgence of the historically-dominant approach from the nineteenth century to control the population growth rates across nations, namely neo-Malthusianism (Hartmann and Rao, 2015, 10; Wilson, 2017, 51), which claims that a demographic change in the future will lead to a “catastrophe” (Gökarıksel et al., 2019, 565). The “Malthusian legacy” of understanding population growth cautions state governments that if the birth rate does not go down, countries will run out of food and space (Gökarıksel et al., 2019, 565; Rao and Sarcar, 2021, 23).

Continuing its threat signals in the twenty-first century, neo-Malthusianism is further promoted and adopted by international institutions such as the World Bank, and International Monetary Fund as a promising theory to stimulate national economic growth rates (Rao and Sarcar, 2021, 23; Wilson, 2017, 51; Bracke, 2021, 4). At the same time, the role of such international institutions in supporting the preponderance of neo-Malthusianism not only secures an unchallenged legitimacy for such policies across the globe but further encourages state governments, particularly the developing countries, to introduce stringent disincentives for their populations, such as restricting the access to government welfare schemes and employment opportunities, to control their population growth rates (Rao and Sarcar, 2021, 24). Such a global discourse creates a hierarchized relationship among developing and developed nations (Tilley, 2020, 2) that posits the responsibility of controlling population growth rates and securing successful family planning programmes in the racially different, backward, and subordinate developing countries (Tilley, 2020, 10) trailing behind the progressive, civilized and mature developed countries who realized the global problem of population growth *for all*.

In this global push for neo-Malthusianism to salvage nations from a threatening future of demographic chaos, India, for example, became the first developing country to have adopted a national family planning programme in 1952 and was the first to have run a state-initiated birth control clinic in Mysore in 1930 (Maharatna, 2002, 971). However, experience does not always mean maturity in quality and conduct. Researchers argue that population control and family planning programmes in India have a history of involving less effective methods such as “actual contraceptive use and more of a sense of urgency in neo-Malthusianism” (Sarcar, 2021, 17). Moreover, the unmet need for family planning services, such as the use of contraceptives, access to counseling sessions around such services, and birth spacing methods (International Institute for Populations Sciences, 1995), contributes approximately 24.4 percent to the current population growth rate, among the highest globally (Rao and Sarcar, 2021, 23). Furthermore, the news about the abysmal and poor quality of care services is not recent in India’s focus on population control (Sharma, 2014).

Yet, the national population growth rate continues to decline with improved rates since the last few decades (Sharma, 2014). Several scholars further point at the lack of necessity for state governments to implement regional two-child policies that were earlier given more importance to meet the global pressures of adopting population control and family planning programmes. In addition, there is a shift in the stance by union government ministries, which “do not call for this approach” (Sharma, 2014).

Uttar Pradesh, however, celebrates the idea of a two-child policy with public “fanfare” (PTI, 2021). In its endeavor to achieve state development that aims for an equitable distribution of public resources for the stabilization and welfare of its population (Pradhan, 2021), the threat of a future devoid of such a vision due to an ever-growing and expanding population in the current state lies embedded in the Bill. Such a possibility of a future of demographic catastrophe (Gökarıksel et al., 2019, 565), however, does not align with the well-established demographic data. For instance, the

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Total Fertility Rate (TFR) in this most populous state remains high, but there is a “substantial and sustained fertility decline” underway from 3.8 in 2006 to 2.74 in 2016 (Rao and Sarcar, 2021, 23). Continuing research highlights that the population growth in the state has been declining with improved access to healthcare and increased economic opportunities (Kumar, 2021), which renders the need for any two-child policy as “demographically unnecessary” (Rao and Sarcar, 2021, 23). Such a focus on population detached from existing and established demographic data (Gökarıksel et al., 2019, 563) not only raises suspicions about the objective of the UP Population Bill (2021) to stabilize the population growth rate in the state but further prompts the examination of a framework that operates beneath.

Socio-cultural and political embeddedness of the Bill

Contextualizing state politics: The breeding ground for the Bill

The look away from scientific data re-centers the situation of the Bill within the sociopolitical discourses and material practices in Uttar Pradesh (Gökarıksel et al., 2019, 562). Such a context finds Indian politics marking a shift towards a Hindu state that is both rapid and expanding (Jaffrelot, 2017, 58). With the ascendance of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to the national governance of the country in 2014, the commitment of the state to Hindutva politics that privileges the majoritarian dominance of the Hindu identity and its affiliation with the implicit national integrity (Gökarıksel et al., 2019, 562) continues to consolidate (Heller, 2020, 6).

More specifically, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, Shri Yogi Adityanath, an aggressive Hindutva actor of the BJP, was elected to power in 2017 (Jaffrelot, 2017, 55). A breeding ground for the impoverishment and harassment of religious minorities, violence against marginalized communities such as Dalits and Scheduled Tribes, aggressive policy implementations for cow protection, and surveillance of women against the threatening, illegitimate, and inauthentic Muslim men (566, Gökarıksel et al., 2019), the state issues “fresh forms of dominance” to exercise its claim of a Hindu majoritarian state (Jaffrelot, 2017).

Neo-Malthusianism as a tool to perpetuate state agenda

It is amidst such regular practices of Hindutva politics (Kinnvall, 2019, 295) that the Bill locates itself. The current political regime in the state posits the necessity of the Bill in promoting the advancement of a better civil society (Pradhan, 2021). Such narratives of a better future evoke “deeply felt emotions” (Gökarıksel et al., 2019, 562) of a much-needed development, against corruption that has come to be seen as innate to Uttar Pradesh over the years (India Today Web Desk, 2021). In addition, these promises of progress for *all* to make “Apna UP No. 1” (“Our UP No. 1”) (2021) is marketed as a necessary transformation to realize the actual and true potential of the state that hosts the history of real India, of a Hindu Rashtra (PTI, 2021).

Such discourses, however, require a constant and consistent “need of maintenance” to legitimize their generated sense of truth in the circulated rumors (Gökarıksel et al., 2019, 566). With the help of this conceptual framework provided by Gökarıksel, Neubert, and Smith (2019), the paper examines the Bill as a maintenance drive of the right-wing regime to legitimize and continue on the path of Hindutva politics.

Moreover, given the nature of state-sanctioned incentives for all eligible families, some critics read the Bill as a mode of dispensing targeted and exclusionary welfare policies, more than controlling the size of the population (Rao and Sarcar, 2021, 23). To approach this commitment to Hindutva politics, its requirement of controlling reproductive capacities of the population, and the selective distribution of public welfare policies, the paper argues that the current regime of the Adityanath-led BJP government employs two particular processes of validating certain populations that allow the state to go beyond the purported objective of achieving sustainable development in the state:

1. Supporting certain deserving families for public welfare

The first process is the role of the state in legitimizing and supporting certain families, for the simultaneous exclusion of others. Studied based on the composition of the families, the UP Population Bill (2021) requires any “eligible”

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couple to be 'necessarily' (Rao and Sarcar, 2021, 24) heterosexual (Chacko, 2020, 204), that is, one "boy" and one "girl" comprising "an ideal family size.. with two children" (Live Law, 2021, 2-4) that embodies the "right sort of behavior" (Lenard, 2016, 73) for the state programme of creating opportunities for the equitable distribution of resources.

In addition, Chapter V of the Bill on the "Duties of Government" identifies the active role of the state in forming village-level societies and collaborating with non-governmental organizations to promote the benefits of small families (Live Law, 2021, 15-16). However, ground realities point to more nuanced experiences of activating such grassroots movements. The continuing mobilization of Hindutva-based regional movements, that aim at mobilizing the Hindu population in relation to the imagined threat posed by the Muslim Other (Natrajan, 2021, 1), played a crucial role in the introduction of the two-child policy in the state (Purohit, 2019).

For instance, local organizations such as the Population Resolution Foundation, affiliated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a paramilitary volunteer unit of the ruling BJP, have been reportedly holding mass public meetings to garner support for a two-child policy in the country (Purohit, 2019). Driven by what some critics call a "conspiracy theory" (Purohit, 2019), based on the belief that Muslim populations are conspiring to accelerate their population to overtake the majority of the Hindu population in India, such "Islamophobic" (Sanghera, 2021) movements engage with the spread of fake news both online and offline. Journalistic reports on the fake messages propagated by the hundreds of WhatsApp groups run by the Population Resolution Foundation alone claim that 'the Muslim population continues reproducing children, while the Hindu population pays the taxes' (Purohit, 2019).

Furthermore, the repeated claims by Adityanath that the share of Muslims in state welfare schemes, including government subsidies and employment opportunities, exceeds their population share are not unknown (Special Correspondent, 2021). The related rhetoric of the leadership of "*hum do humare do, woh paanch unke pachees*" ("we two, two of ours, five of *them*, and *their* twenty-five") refers to the ideal Hindu family of a married couple with two children, in opposition to "a Muslim man with four wives and twenty-five children" (Gökariksel et al., 2019, 573), cannot be removed from the positioning of the Bill introduced by the same leadership in power (Mehta and Jain, 2021; Strohl, 2018, 8).

Such "rhetorical moves" by the right-wing regime create an image of an unequal, unfair, and a 'could-have-been-better' future if the population crisis imposed by certain ill-willed and hypersexual populations committed to creating their surpluses in the threatened state is not met with an active intervention (Gökariksel et al., 2019, 565-566). Such a "population thinking" that finds a solution in the "Malthusian legacy" relies on the creation of a future as "demographically apocalyptic" for the dominating Hindus, who find themselves deprived of their due state benefits and attention (Gökariksel et al., 2019, 565-572). Hence, such a reliance on a future threat that justifies violence and aggressive policies today finds its repetition and maintenance in the mutation of continuing rhetorical discourses (Gökariksel et al., 2019, 561).

For instance, the recent expression of Adityanath on "people who say *abba-jaan* digest all the ration" (PTI, 2021) to refer to the Muslim population not only finds resonance in the Bill that limits the ration units for an eligible family up to four (Live Law, 2021, 6), but this rhetoric further packages the inauthentic Indian Muslim citizen in a "collection of simplistic demographic caricatures" to make it easier to identify those who are not inside the dominant population, and hence, worthy of dismissal from the development path (Gökariksel et al., 2019, 565-566).

Moreover, with the promotion of the Hindu society as the civilized society, as against an uncivilized reality of growing population growth that gives birth to ailments in the society such as terrorism, crimes, and poverty, neo-Malthusianism motivates the right-wing regime to shore up its threatened position in the face of Muslim virility (Gökariksel et al., 2019, 571). In attacking the Other as the cause of population growth, the right-wing discourse defends and even defines, the greater purity and suitability of the Hindu Self (Gökariksel et al., 2019, 578).

By locating the policy within such discourses of the state on its vision of the "model household" (Sarcar and Rao, 2021, 17), the policy secures its legitimacy of the idea of human necessities for *all* that anticipates, if not normalizes, the exclusion of religious minorities 'holding back' the aspiration for state progress in the future (Chacko, 2020, 204).

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With the lack of specificity in the Bill over the identification of public servants in charge of authorizing and validating the families upholding the two-child norm (Live Law, 2021, 4), the focus on legitimizing families from a particular dominant community, in relation to the other, becomes even more clear.

2. Validating and gendering individual roles within the family and its norms

To center the focus on the lived and gendered experience of the state-sanctioned deserving individual bodies (Gökarıksel et al., 2019, 564), this section unveils the second process employed by the state that legitimates the roles of individuals within the families and other traditional institutions at large (Heller, 2020, 15). Under the current right-wing regime of Uttar Pradesh, the constant assertion of the necessity to police Hindu-Muslim relationships is met with the surveillance of women's sexuality and reproductive capacities (Gökarıksel et al., 2019, 571). However, more specifically, the paper understands this need of perpetuating surveillance as a requirement of the commitment to Hindutva politics that impinges on the bodies of ordinary individuals (Gökarıksel et al., 2019, 563). In this effort, the exercise of supporting certain desirable bodies and families becomes critical.

For instance, the understudied idea of family planning gives a sense of conscious thinking by an individual couple to control their family size and reproductive behavior (Maharatna, 2002, 971). However, such a myopic view obscures the gendered implications of the voluntary acceptance of sterilization falling within the ambit of coerced conditions (Sarcar, 2021, 27). For instance, Chapter V of the UP Population Bill (2021) links the masculine individual to the advancement of the state in the way the government outlines its duty to encourage "male participation in the family planning matters" (Live Law, 2021, 16). The rollout of such a duty clarifies the role of the state as not only regulating the family size, but also its composition and functioning within.

Operating within the "patriarchal rigidities" (Wilson, 2017, 64) upheld by the Hindu right, the state both locates women in the household, in addition to marking their subservient position therein (Strohl, 2018, 3). This valorization of the Hindu nuclear, patriarchal family to promote the "dominant cultural codes" (Heller, 2020, 4) of the role of women as secondary in the household and the public reifies the Hindutva-sponsored violent moral policing of gender norms (Wilson, 2017, 65) that projects women as "'heroic mothers' and 'chaste wives'" (Chacko, 2020, 211), who are responsible, or rather responsibilized, to seek the benefits of sterilization for the eligible family.

Moreover, in the continued lived realities of women facing violence, and death in some cases, upon pressures from their families to reproduce sex-selective children (Pundir, 2021; Thapar, 2021), the burden of involuntary sterilization inevitably falls on women in the family, which is assumed to be a unit of equal individual members (Mehta and Jain, 2021). The popular notion of 'one family, one voice' subverts the expression of women and overlooks the power dynamics within a family unit. This, however, is further capitalized by the existing traditional Hindu patriarchal family norms (Wilson, 2017, 65), that propose the free and voluntary choice of sterilization in highly constrained conditions.

Such discourses on voluntary sterilization by *any* member of the family carry an embedded historical trace within the sociopolitical and economic context that promotes an unequal burden of family planning based on the careful marking of certain racial and gendered bodies as "threatening and fearsome", and finding its roots in the appropriation of reproduction as a strategy of further demographic invasion (Gökarıksel et al., 2019, 564-566).

Not only is the unequal burden on women, in particular, a feature of social practice, its inclusion, and legitimization in the written word of budget allocation and directions of conducting family planning programmes allow such inequalities to acquire state sanction. For instance, female sterilization remains the main method used in India's population control policies since the late 1970s (Wilson, 2017, 65; Hartmann and Rao, 2015, 10). Data suggests that over 4.5 million tubectomies have taken place every year in India since 2000 (Wilson, 2017, 63). More specifically, the official record of twelve deaths a month on average due to female sterilization between 2003 and 2012 only paves the way for an estimation of a greater number of deaths in reality. Wilson (2017) argues that such deaths occurred due to threats of the loss of ration cards, access to government welfare schemes, lack of informed consent (in the vernacular languages of different regions) (Srinivasan, 2016), and incomplete information about the operation.

The incorporation of such threats in the UP Population Bill (2021) not only acknowledges but further legitimizes the

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coercive conditions, under which the policy anticipates to be implemented. Records point to the general trend of 97% of all sterilization procedures being conducted on women, while 85% of the family planning budget is exclusively allocated for female sterilization (Gonsalves, 2017). Co-opted by the Bill (2021), the painfully limited space given to the discussion on population control measures beyond voluntary sterilization re-focuses on the dominance of female sterilization as observed previously in Uttar Pradesh.

In their comment on the Bill (2021), Rao and Sarcar (2021) discuss a study on the consequences of the implementation of the two-child norm on the local elections of Panchayat Raj Institutions of five Indian states. Considering that a violation of the norm results in debarment from contesting the local elections (Live Law, 2021, 6), the study found that women formed 41% of the total disqualified candidates, while Dalits, Adivasis, and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) formed 80% of the disqualified owing to the requirements of the policy (Rao and Sarcar, 2021, 24). Critics and several women's organizations call this provision of the Bill "unconstitutional" as it violates the foundational rights of electoral democracy (Special Correspondent, 2021). At the same time, the vision of the Indian polity today, under the right-wing regime of expanding majoritarian democracy, celebrates the consolidation of the norms regulating the surveillance of women's reproductive capacities within its ever-growing commitment to the traditional patriarchal Hindu society (Jaffrelot, 2017, 61).

Retrenchment of welfare policies

Thus, the repeated evocation of the trope of the Muslim population in relation to the Hindu majority behind the cause of increasing population growth combined with the "continuous incitement to genocidal gendered violence" against women, especially from the marginalized communities, creates a favorable, receptive and "hospitable climate" for the dominant yet myopic approaches of population control (Jaffrelot, 2017, 66). Through outlining the expectations of the state from eligible individuals, the process of responsabilization of the families can be read as a caution to not rely on the state for welfare policies, but themselves as worthy beneficiaries (Butler, 2016, 35). Such exclusionary norms, which draw on both the sketch of the Bill and its specific situation in the sociopolitical, economic, historical, and cultural grounding, regulate and create the fields of possible recognition by the state (Butler, 2016, 36), upon which any interaction of the state and society sustains.

Furthermore, the perpetuation of existing inequalities on the basis of religion and gender is complicated by other axes of social identities, such as class. An important study on the effectiveness of population control policies in Uttar Pradesh found that the level of unmet need for family planning was the greatest among women who were Muslims, illiterate, lived in rural areas, and belonged to Scheduled Tribes (International Institute for Populations Sciences, 1995). Another recent study supported the former findings and argued that poor women are "more likely" to use sterilization for birth control (Singh, 2021).

Operating on the "national politics of policing reproductive bodies of the subaltern population" (Rao and Sarcar, 2021), the current regime expresses its disregard for the poor in Chapter Two of the Bill, under section seven on the "special benefits" for families living below the poverty line (Live Law, 2021, 6). This provision takes on a more exclusionary stance to encourage such families to adopt a one-child policy and outlines a one-time payment of rupees one-lakh for a girl child, and rupees eighty-thousand for a boy child, to engage in the business of determining the worth and monetary value of gender in the highly class-based society (Sen, 2020). Such a one-time payment does not locate families below the poverty line as living in urban and rural areas, which plays a significant role in determining the lifestyle of any unit of a family. This attitude prompts the definition of birth control as provided by Margaret Sanger: "more children from the fit, less from the unfit" (Wilson, 2017, 66).

However, such a stamp on the 'fit' and the 'deserving' bodies requires to be situated within the politics of retrenchment practiced by the Hindu right. Heller (2020) argues that the turn to a more market-focused approach, as against the focus on social programmes by the previous governments, aims to dislodge the expanding welfare state and greater access to historically class-rationed institutions by the poor and marginalized communities. With the help of targeted interventions, such as the UP Population Bill (2021), that create layers of exclusion and eligibility to favor designated communities, the Adityanath-led government, in addition to other BJP regimes in the surrounding states, resurrect the Hindu right as urban, more educated, Brahmanical and upper class (Heller, 2020, 6).

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For instance, by laying out the provision of small families under the assumption of feasibility for all communities, the upper class, and urban moderns are projected as the “aspiring and achieving” (Heller, 2020, 13) families who follow and implement the state-prescribed norms. This idea of feasibility is important in the way it overlooks cultural and sociological conditions, within which large families emerge. Scholars argue that the specific presentation of the population growth by certain inauthentic and surplus populations both upholds the normative ideal of a desirable population and omits the undetachable correlation between family planning and the status of socio-economic development, levels of education and literacy, and “other marks of inclusion” that are difficult for religious minorities and marginalized communities to achieve (Gökarıksel et al., 2019, 572).

Growing research informs the paper that the increasing indicators of inclusion in the Hindu state today are dipping (Jaffrelot, 2017, 59). In the existing symbiotic relationship between neoliberal development of resource redistribution and the Hindu right (Wilson, 2017, 62), the “hurdle to [state] development” (Pradhan, 2021) is located within the behavior of the poor as the cause of their poverty (Chacko, 2020, 201; Wilson, 2017, 52). This can be understood in the way obstacles to state progress (Pradhan, 2021) are identified not in the accumulation of capital and resources by particular communities based on the dominance of class, caste, religion, and gender, but on the large family size of the poor who are regarded as immoral, irresponsible, and sexually deviant (Wilson, 2017, 51-62).

The resultant idea of poverty as emerging from the behavior of the poor secures its legitimacy from neoliberal ideas of development promoted by international organizations (Wilson, 2017, 52), as briefly discussed in the second section above. In the 1990s and the early decade of 2000s, the World Bank, for instance, advocated for measures to control the population not based on the reduced health spending by governments, but on the individual and cultural pathologies of marginalized communities (Chacko, 2020, 210). Furthermore, as we discussed India’s participation in neo-Malthusianism above, the continuing policies that overlook the current economic structures of inequalities playing a significant role in the distribution of resources among a given population, and instead predate on vulnerable and marginalized populations suggest the misinformation of providing human necessities to *all* through the UP Population Bill (2021).

Empirical observations further capture the experienced atrocities performed on the bodies of the poor in villages where sterilization camps of poor and abysmal conditions and distanced from mainstream Indian living are justified as a means to overcome the lack of qualified doctors and health care facilities (Sharma, 2014). Moreover, the promised supply of contraceptive services and medical facilities to *all* sub-health centers in the state (Live Law, 2021, 16) does not respond to the risks that continue to be posed by spurious drugs, adulterated antibiotics, and infection due to unhygienic healthcare conditions in such centers (Sharma, 2014; Gonsalves, 2017). The ever-threatening nature of such atrocities further compels vulnerable populations to access the “prohibitively expensive private sector” (Gonsalves, 2017).

Thus, the neoliberal appropriation of resource allocation, production of certificates, and employment opportunities fall within the vision of patriarchal Hindu nuclear families that are “the most enduring form of a state-sanctioned model of household” (Sarcar and Rao, 2021, 17), which is fixed for the urban, upper-caste and middle-class (Heller, 2020, 15). The state avoidance from solutions of greater and more focused investments in the social sector such as education, especially secondary schooling for girls, health care, increasing employment opportunities, old-age pension, and increasing the age of marriage (Thapar, 2021; Sen, 2020; International Institute for Populations Sciences, 1995; Gonsalves, 2017; Sharma, 2014) to “hasten the decline” (Rao and Sarcar, 2021, 23) in the population growth of Uttar Pradesh signals the state commitment to the “visceral stories of insecurity” (Homolar and Löffmann, 2021, 1) that UP claims to operate on, including the limited ecological and economic resources for the welfare of *all*. As we saw in the above discussion, the motivation behind the Bill (2021) focuses not on distribution but domination over and concentration of resources by not eligible but validated populations.

Conclusion

With the help of a discussion on the need to locate the UP Population Bill (2021) amidst the sociocultural discourses and practices of the region, this paper examined the critical value of demography as a political tool and mechanism to perpetuate and legitimize the commitment of the current regime to Hindu majoritarianism, and its requirement to

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regulate the reproductive capacities of religious minorities and marginalized communities for the retrenchment of welfare policies meant for *all*.

Moreover, by incorporating an analysis of the role of violence against women, and the regulation of their reproductive capacities, this paper contributes to the “understudied” aspect of gender within the populist regime that blankets India today (Chacko, 2020, 218).

Yet, the paper faced legitimate limitations. For instance, there are several undiscussed sections of the UP Population Bill (2021), such as the implications of the two-child norm on the practicing frameworks of polyandrous and polygamous relationships’ child adoption (Chapter III), differently abled populations (Chapter III) (Live Law, 2021, 8-11), that draw attention to critical linkages between the Hindu right and its retrenchment politics. Similarly, the role of neoliberalism can be further explored to trace its historical and continuing practices to understand its interaction with constitutional provisions of equality and secularism (Jaffrelot, 2017, 54).

Moreover, the focus of the paper on the UP Population Bill (2021) opens up new avenues of inquiry into the study of the nature of cooperation between the federal states and the Centre in upholding and promoting the Hindutva-supported retrenchment politics through the route of demographic anxieties and trace the patterns of convergence and divergence that are necessitated by specific regional requirements. As this paper demonstrates, the continuing shift to a Hindu state requires a constant assertion of Hindutva politics that is not only achieved by the roll-out of the UP Population Bill (2021) but also through its particular forms of implementation, practice, and mutation in the future.

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