

New Zealand India Research Institute

'Emergency Contraception: Neo-Malthusianism, Neoliberalism, and India's Reimagined Family Planning Project'

By Dr. Nayantara Sheoran Appleton

Abstract: i-pill, the one dose Emergency Contraceptive Pill (ECP henceforth) became available as a non-prescription pill in India in 2005. It was the first of many ECPs that were subsequently launched in the Indian market. While ECPs had previously been available in India with prescriptions, it was once that they were labelled non-prescription drugs and made available at most pharmacies, that the sales for these pills increased exponentially – both in the lifestyle drug and contraceptives category. By mid-2010, ECPs had outsold both condoms and other oral-contraceptive pills and roughly 200,000 units of the drug sold each month. In India, where the state and international players have been heavily involved with women's reproductive lives with a view to curtailing population growth, the ECP was viewed as another option in the "basket" of available options. However, this time, it was being made available, without prescriptions in the market. Drawing on fieldwork in India, I examine the perceptions about and the socio-cultural implications of ECPs in contemporary urban India. In a country where family planning and reproductive health have been visible conversations in public and policy debates, these pills and their advertisements do not exist in a historical vacuum. I examine this latest pharmaceutical intervention in women's bodies by first highlighting how these pills and their advertisements fit in with India's family planning initiatives and second, by situating them within the larger discourse of neo-liberalization in India. I posit that ECPs and their advertisements utilize a neoliberal discourse of "choice" and "empowerment for women" to forward rather than break from historically problematic neo-Malthusian projects of population control in India.

Dr. Nayantara Sheoran Appleton is a lecturer in cultural anthropology at Victoria University of Wellington. Prior to this, she was a post-doctoral fellow in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva. Her research and teaching areas of interest include: feminist medical anthropology and Science and Technology Studies (STS); cultural studies and media anthropology; reproductive and contraceptive Justice; ethics and governance; regenerative medicine; and ethnographic research methodologies. Her interest in biomedical interventions and burgeoning biotechnologies are reflected in her two key projects based in India: first on the feminist politics of health and reproduction and second on the regulatory and ethical implications of emerging stem cell biotechnologies. This research and writing has been supported by the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Grant in the Science, Technology, and Society (STS) Program (Award No: 1026682) and a post-doctoral research fellowship under a grant from the European Research Council (ERC) (Project ID: 313769, PI: Dr. Aditya Bhardwaj).

EVENT DETAILS: **Friday 22 September, 4.00-5.30pm**
Wood Seminar Room (OK 406)
History Programme, Old Kirk Building Level 4
Kelburn Campus

Please RSVP to india-research@vuw.ac.nz