Reproductive Restraints



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"Reproductive Restraints" traces the history of contraception use and population management in colonial India, while illuminating its connection to contemporary debates in India and birth control movements in Great Britain and the United States. Sanjam Ahluwalia draws attention to the interactive and relational history of Indian birth control by including western activists such as Margaret Sanger and Marie Stopes alongside important Indian campaigners. In revealing the elitist politics of middle-class feminists, Indian nationalists, western activists, colonial authorities and the medical establishment, Ahluwalia finds that they all sought to rationalize procreation and regulate women while invoking competing notions of freedom, femininity, and family. Ahluwalia's remarkable interviews with practicing midwives in rural northern India fills a gaping void in the documentary history of birth control and shows that the movement has had little appeal to non-elite groups in India. Finding that Jaunpuri women's reproductive decisions are bound to their emotional, cultural, and economic reliance on family and community, Ahluwalia presents the limitations of universal liberal feminist categories, which often do not consider differences among localized

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目录:
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subjects. She argues that elitist birth control efforts failed to account for Indian women's values and needs and have worked to restrict reproductive rights rather than liberate subaltern Indian women since colonial times.