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UNTOUCHABLE HUNGER: FRAMING OF CHILDHOOD POVERTY IN INDIA,

MAY 2012-APRIL 2014

by

AMBER WELCH

Under the Direction of Leonard Teel

ABSTRACT

The effects of childhood poverty and hunger in India are systemic. Almost half of the country's children are classified as malnourished—and 47 percent of those under the age of three are underweight (UNICEF, 2014). This thesis analyzes how Indian's English-language press has portrayed this widespread health issue during the past two years. This thesis also examines how the framing in the English-language press relates to the frames in the Hindi-language press. In light of framing theory, the study has found that the press used three principal media frames to portray child hunger. One frame focused on socioeconomic disparities, a second on geographic differences, and the third on government interventions. These frames, however, did not address more complex realities identified by developmental studies literature as contributing to the seemingly untouchable crisis of childhood poverty and hunger.

INDEX WORDS: Framing, Developmental journalism, Sensationalism, India, Child hunger

UNTOUCHABLE HUNGER: FRAMING OF CHILDHOOD POVERTY IN INDIA,

MAY 2012-APRIL 2014

by

AMBER WELCH

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2014

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2014

UNTOUCHABLE HUNGER: FRAMING OF CHILDHOOD POVERTY IN INDIA,

MAY 2012-APRIL 2014

by

AMBER WELCH

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Office of Graduate Studies

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Georgia State University

August 2014

## DEDICATION

I was blessed with an abundance of support as I completed this thesis, and to these supporters, I dedicate this work. To my partner Nicolas Vaughan, thank you for encouraging me to continue learning and for helping me in all of my efforts to do so. I look forward to continuing to share in each other's achievements and feel blessed that you understand that sharing aspirations is the quickest way to achieve them. I am grateful to have someone who inspires me toward new challenges with all that you do. To my parents, Audrey and Gordon Welch, your love and pride in my accomplishments have always been my biggest motivation. To Eva, thank you for giving me a good excuse to play and have fun whenever I see you. To Dylan, you are the smartest person I know, and your strength has taught me that I can do anything. To my grandmother Mittie Thomas and my late grandfather Tyrus Thomas, the wisdom you have shared and your belief in me has been my driving force.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

India is a vast country, a nation that is home to the world's biggest democracy. In a territory only one-third the size of the United States and divided into significantly different geographical areas separating its population of 1.2 billion people, India has numerous local languages and other sociocultural cleavages in religion and politics. The gap between the rich and the poor is also vast. This “scourge of inequality” (Shenk, 2014)—familiar to those in the United States in terms of the Occupy Movement and the 1 percent—is a matter of critical economic scholarship by authors such as Thomas Piketty, and India is a prime example of the chronic effects of the unequal distribution of wealth. Numerous activists, authors, and organizations have made efforts to help close India's gap in development, yet many Indian citizens, dissatisfied with the lack of progress, yearn for change as they approach this year's general elections.

In this thesis, I examine the attention given to a subgroup of the poor: children. I focus on an examination of the conversation in the press and elsewhere about India's poor and deprived children. In some parts of my research, I examine Indian poverty in general rather than childhood nutritional deprivation. As Gragnolati, Bredenkamp, Shekar, das Gupta, and Yi (2006) explain, “the prevalence of both underweight and severe underweight increases as household wealth falls” (p. 13). For the purposes of this thesis, I use the term “poverty” as it applies to the underlying condition from which child hunger springs forth. My research focuses mainly on the English-language press and its framing of childhood deprivation due to poverty. In this study, I use Robert M. Entman's (1993) definition of framing as the process of taking one aspect of a perceived situation and making that aspect the most salient part of a given text (p. 51). In addition to the English press, I also examine a balanced set of Hindi-language articles and find a significant difference in the frames used in each language's press. In the process of my research,

I seek to identify how the media frames childhood poverty and deprivation. I also aim to offer some conclusions from the press account about its role in the serious issue of child hunger.

The gravity of child hunger, and the poverty that drives it, is particularly evident as India prepares for its 2014 general elections. The election, as seen by the Indian scholar Ram Mashru, is “the largest democratic event in history” (*The Diplomat*, 2014). With 814 million registered voters, the outcome of this democratic event has captured international attention. On April 8, 2014, a *New York Times* front-page story was headlined: “Wish for change animates voters in India election” (Barry, p. A1). This thesis considers the basis for this desire for change—with respect to conditions of inequality and, particularly, with concern for the deprivation of India’s children.

## **1.1 Significance**

India has been, since the time of its independence in 1947, an interesting study of democracy amid diversity. Can democracy continue to thrive if the people governed by it are experiencing vast poverty? The future of any nation is its children, so what will India’s political future look like given the fact that one in every three malnourished children in the world lives in India (Unicef, 2014)? The effects of malnutrition in early childhood impair cognitive, motor, and social development, as well as other lifelong consequences such as underperformance in school and an increased likelihood for adult malnutrition (The World Bank, 2011a). Malnutrition in India is more common than in sub-Saharan Africa (Unicef, 2014), a troubling comparison since that region of Africa is often cited as a global outlier in terms of its rates of poverty (The World Bank, 2011a). Nearly 30 percent of newborns are born underweight, increasing vulnerabilities for further disease, and infant mortality is as high as 63 per 1,000 births (Unicef). In reports about the 2014 general elections, many news outlets are stating that the poor and the working

class in Indian are ready for radical changes. As Barry stated on the front page of the *New York Times* in April of this year, 814 million citizens are “weary of corruption,” a feeling that is especially strong among people from the lower classes (p. A1).

In a nation with so many inhabitants, there are bound to be differences in lifestyles, but the scope and severity of the poverty that affects the Indian people is hard to comprehend. As of July 2012, the CIA estimated that India’s population was 1,205,073,612, the second largest population in the world behind China (CIA, 2014). India’s annual population growth rate is about 1.3 percent and is ranked eighty-ninth in comparison to the rest of the world (CIA, 2014). Another demographic factor to consider is that India’s land mass is only slightly larger than one-third the size of the United States of America, leaving the country prone to overpopulation (CIA, 2014). Its large population, coupled with the country’s geographic makeup, further complicates the cultural and socioeconomic divisions within India. Factoring in the large population and the overcrowded conditions, sheer probability would indicate that poverty and its effects such as malnutrition would reach some people, but the statistics in India paint a devastating picture. South Asia has the highest rates of poverty in the world, even higher than countries in Africa (Khalid, Javied, & Arshad, 2012). This poverty devastates everyone affected, but perhaps the most severely impacted group is small children, with an estimated 46 percent of children under the age of six classified as malnourished (Perappadan, 2013).

## **1.2 India’s Current Economic Context**

Despite India’s systemic poverty and child hunger issues, the country boasts a growing economy. In 2012, India had the fourth largest in the world according to international rankings (Gupta, 2012, p. 3). The explosive economic growth India has experienced in recent years can be credited in part to its embrace of economic liberalization (Gupta, 2012, p. 4). In fact, the

widespread embrace of economic liberalization tactics such as industrial deregulation has contributed to India's growth of more than 7 percent per year since the late 1990s (CIA, 2014). India's primary industries are agriculture and the service industry, with the latter accounting for nearly 75 percent of India's economic output (CIA, 2014). In late 2012, India reacted to a slight decline in the country's economic growth by announcing deficit reduction plans; however, projected medium-term growth remains positive for the country (CIA, 2014).

As India's economy grows, however, so does the gap between the rich and the poor. A consequence of this poverty is the continuing state of deprivation and undernourishment that affects many Indian children. India ranks among the lowest countries, near Yemen and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, on the Global Hunger Index produced by the International Food Policy Research Institute ("Not enough on the plate," 2012). Almost half of the children are impacted from the complications of malnutrition, a condition used to label the effects of "both protein-energy malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies" (Gragnolati et. al, 2006, p. xvii). According to a University of Oxford study, even among its neighbors such as Nepal and Bangladesh, India is falling behind as much as one-third the rate of poverty alleviation compared to these other countries. Even in its best-performing states, India is still reducing poverty at around half the rate of the other countries ("Nepal reducing poverty faster than India, says Oxford study," 2013).

Because of the country's growing wealth inequalities, the differences in social strata, and state-level governance, life in India can be isolating for some parts of the population. Because the differences affect India's poorest citizens by robbing them of some types of civic participation—such as watching cable TV or accessing the Internet (Yin, 2009, p.390)—gaining a real understanding of Indian poverty is a difficult task. With a contentious political

environment to boot, there is a complicated accounting of childhood poverty in the nation's press. This year's election has been an interesting snapshot of just how volatile the class disparities are making some Indian citizens, with the top candidates for prime minister themselves partially symbolizing the wealth gap. On one side of the divide is the "common man," Narendra Modi, representing the poor and working people of India in a race against the other side, Rahul Gandhi, a member of the Gandhi political dynasty<sup>1</sup> and an embodiment of the English-speaking, Western-educated upper class.

In this economic and political context, it is important to examine the economics and ownership behind India's news media. According to Rao (2010), vernacular newspapers struggle to keep up with the funding given to English-language newspapers in general (p. 7). He states that commercialization, particularly of English-language papers, has given Indian newspapers independence from political financing, thus providing more freedom in reporting (p. 3). With the much politicized climate of the Indian press in the midst of the monumental elections of 2014, is this an accurate appraisal? In the course of my research, I concluded that his appraisal of press freedom from political influence is not especially accurate. With respect to the newspapers accessed online in this study, there are some publications that have dubious ties to political interests.<sup>2</sup> Much like in the United States, if you combine a politically influenced press with media frames that conceal or exaggerate particular dimensions of a national issue, the results can be dangerous if no one studies or challenges these practices.

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<sup>1</sup> For the first 50 years after its independence, the Congress Party was the dominant political force at the federal level in India (Freedom House, 2013). Beginning with India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, the Gandhi family has produced three prime ministers in the Congress Party. Rahul Gandhi is currently in a bid to continue this political legacy as he faces his opponent from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Narendra Modi (Harris, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Freedom House (2013) states that "close relationships between politicians, business executives, lobbyists, and some leading media personalities have dented public confidence in the Indian press in recent years."

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

This study sets out to understand how the English-language Indian press coverage of the nation's child deprivation crisis frames the topic. I focus my analysis on determining what framing strategies are used by Indian reporters in various English-language newspapers as they cover the crisis at both the national and the state levels. This qualitative assessment of the English-language press coverage of child poverty in India explores how the causes and implications of child poverty are presented to the many Indians who read the English-language press. This thesis also draws from a balanced sample of Hindi-language newspapers to contrast the use of frames in each press. By looking at how the English-language press applies framing in the current press discourse, this study seeks to offer an assessment of how such an endemic issue—one that has left an estimated 46 percent of children under the age of six malnourished (Perappadan, 2013)—is characterized by a press that is accessible only to a particular demographic of Indians: English speakers or readers.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. Does the English-language Indian press account employ framing devices in their reports of the country's childhood hunger problem?
2. If so, how accurately do the frames reflect current statistics on India's child hunger issues?
3. How does the theory of framing explain the differing levels of coverage about child hunger on a national level and on a state level?
4. What underlying conditions do the broad frames bring to light regarding the issue of child hunger in India?

5. From a limited sample of Hindi-language press articles, what are the differences between Hindi press frames and English press frames on the topic of childhood hunger?



## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Frames and the Coverage of Indian Child Deprivation

In my review of the literature on framing, the foundational author I consult is Robert M. Entman. He (1993) states that framing is the act of “select[ing] some aspects of a perceived reality and mak[ing] them more salient in communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment or recommendation for the item described” (p. 51). Frames first define a problem by making particular aspects of the problem more salient or meaningful to the audience. It is only from the starting place of a definition can framing theory go on to do the other work that Entman outlines: identify causes, evaluate the issue, and prescribe solutions (p. 52).

Given that frames first define a problem, the work of Tversky and Kahneman (1981) is useful here to understand the psychology behind how an issue’s frame impacts a person’s decision-making processes surrounding that issue. The authors point out that the perception of the possible outcomes of a given issue will shift when the same issue is framed in different ways (p. 453). Further, when an outcome is framed as having a potential loss value (such as that of the loss of human lives), the decision-maker has been shown to display reversals of preference for a particular outcome (pp. 453-456). The authors classified the deviations of an outcome as either positive or negative from a neutral reference, and the explanation of how this system of gains and losses is given value by the decision-maker is called “prospect theory” (p. 454). In this light, the ways in which child poverty and malnutrition are framed in the news media have important outcomes on those who read these media accounts. Using this theory, Williams (2013) concludes that, when exposed to metaphorical loss frames, individuals attribute responsibility differently and make altered economic decisions as a result.

To eliminate some of the theoretical vagueness behind framing theory, some authors elaborated on the previous scholarship to provide more defined categories and models for framing theory. Scheufele (1999) situates framing as a theory of media effects. Scheufele's (1999) distinguishes between media-level and individual-level frames, the type of frame that I concern myself with in this study is the media-level frame—the “central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events” (Gamson and Modigliani, 1987, qtd. in Scheufele, p. 106). (Scheufele goes on to present a four-step process model of framing I discuss in more detail in the conclusion). Similarly, Levin, Schneider, and Gaeth (1998) subcategorize types of framing according to three types of valence framing effects: risky choice framing where two options are presented and only one choice may be made; attribute framing where one attribute of an issue is described in terms of either a positively valenced proportion or an equivalent negatively valenced proportion; and goal framing which encourages subjects to engage in a particular activity.

Specific to the politically, socially, and emotionally charged issue of widespread child malnutrition, a discussion of how these frames impose negative or positive associations on the same core issue is helpful. Their discussion of valence framing effects explains how the negative or positive light in which the same information can be presented impacts the perception of the topic depending on what frame is employed (p. 150). Each of these three factors contributes to the media-level frames that I examine in this paper. Discussed in further detail in my findings, here are broad examples of how each of these three frames factor into press discourse on child deprivation:

1) *Risky choice framing*: Citizens are told that one political party should be chosen over another because only one of them truly cares and can help reduce the issues of poverty and its effects.

2) *Attribute framing*: A proposed piece of legislation is presented in one source as very good for the future of India's food production, while the same legislation is presented in another source as an unrealistic and deceptive measure that will only complicate the food scarcity issue

3) *Goal framing*: Women are told that if they would seek out more prenatal care that the rates of child mortality would be much lower.

## 2.2 Developmental Studies Scholarship and Current Press Accounts

Due to the complicated relationships between India's poverty, its recent economic stagnation, and its lagging reduction rates for childhood death and malnutrition, it is difficult to comprehend the scope or the causes of the problem. As Nagaraj (2012) writes, "the relationship between economic growth and poverty reduction is not unambiguous and proportional...[so] how does one understand these patterns?" (p. 1). He goes on to write that in modern economic conditions, we often rely on "stylized facts" (p. 2). But even the presentation of the most current statistics cannot present the interplay of the factors that contribute to the continuing inequalities that exist in India. As a case in point, even though absolute poverty "has nearly halved in the last quarter of the twentieth century... [this] reduction in poverty has not lessened the nutritional deficiency proportionately...as widespread food deprivation persists, especially among women and children (p. 4). Further, framing theory tells us that even when referring to the same facts, the valance effects may be positive or negative depending on the frame. With this complexity in mind, an examination of the both the developmental studies literature and the press accounts reveals three broad frames that recur and can help manage the primary areas of concerns that arise in this discussion.

The first broad frame that appears to emerge from the literature is the socioeconomic frame. This frame manifests in many ways and highlights different socioeconomic issues. The

role of women in society as contributors to child hunger is addressed, both in terms that implicate (Hemalatha, 2012) and empower (Ghildiyal, 2013) them as agents of change in the fight against childhood deprivation. The unequal distribution of wealth is another often-cited socioeconomic frame. Two vastly different economic circumstances can be found in the lives of many Indians in the state Uttar Pradesh, India's second richest state (PR Log, 2011). There, wealthy service industry staffers drive wealth (PR Log, 2011) while their neighbors, poor farmers, frequently experience economic devastation and personal loss due to malnutrition and disease (Aradhak, 2013). According to The World Bank (2011a), the level of education is another socioeconomic factor that has a large impact on India's income inequalities. As the statistics show, there is a 20 percent rise in income inequality between those with and without a graduate education (The World Bank, 2011a, p. 25).

In my research of childhood poverty from both primary and secondary sources, another pattern that appears to repeat itself is that of geographic disparities. One article examined the 2013 Planning Commission's report on poverty, stating that poverty is on the rise despite government efforts to combat the problem through a series of welfare programs that have been in place for years (Satapathy, 2013). This article interprets the failure of these programs as simply a by-product of various disparities that arise due to the diversity among India's regions (Satapathy, 2013). Regional differences are also highlighted in secondary analyses of India's childhood poverty issue. The fact that there exists so much diversity among India's twenty-eight states and seven territories, many of which have unique languages and dialects (CIA, 2013), is a frequently cited obstacle to ending the nation's poverty. The frame of geographic distinctions can also be found in data on India's poverty; the World Bank (2011a) charted the growing divergence of

mean income across 23 Indian states (p. 26). The chart that displays this data rightly proclaims that “Spatial Differences Have Grown” in the distribution of mean income (p. 27).

When regional disparities appear, they are often discussed as a matter of urban versus rural locales and can include discussions of the types of work that are done in these regions.

Nagaraj explains some of the economic background that gives rise to this regional dichotomy in India:

Workforce transformation—the defining character of ‘modern economic growth’—that was stalled during much of the twentieth century, finally commenced in the 1980s, with a fall of about 15 percentage points in the workforce engaged in agriculture. But the output composition has moved rapidly in favour [sic] of services since 1990, without a corresponding shift of the workforce. Thus the economy has acquired a dual face: it is rural and agrarian with 68 percent of the population living in villages, and with 56 percent of the workforce still subsisting on agriculture; yet it is a services economy, contributing 55 percent of the domestic output. The dichotomy implies growing inequality between town and country, as the services have created modest additional jobs. (p. 4)

Among the most common frame that primary coverage and secondary literature both tend to include is that of government intervention. Whether a report is hopeful about government agents and actions or critical of them, articles that bring the government to the forefront of India’s child hunger problem are prevalent in the literature. Some of these articles—such as one entitled “Ajit Pawar on one-day fast to repent his ‘urinating-in-the-dam’ remarks,” 2013—critique specific government officials (and in this case, one official’s insensitive remarks to those suffering from a drought). Other articles examine the progress of certain government programs

such as 2011's proposed, yet ultimately failed, federal food security bill (Anklesaria, 2013; Aiyar, 2013).

As Kohli (2012) stated in his book *Poverty Amid Plenty in the New India*, "economic changes in Indian states continue to diverge along several dimensions" (p. 14). In Uttar Pradesh, a state that Kohli describes as "a complex regional polity with considerable internal diversity," there is a chronic performance problem in terms of the state's development including factors such as growth and poverty (p. 160). Kohli attributes this diversity to corrupt government structures (p. 161) as well as "the pervasiveness of ascriptive politics, especially the politics of caste" (p. 15). This statement, of course, draws a connection between two of the frames: government interventions and socioeconomic factors. The common categories that seem to emerge in the discussion of child deprivation are, in this case, more intertwined than they initially appear. Deeply ingrained issues such as practices of social exclusion, based in India's caste system, appear to enable poverty to continue to exist even among periods of tremendous economic growth. As the 2011 World Bank (2011b) report explained "when inequality is based on income rather than consumption measures, India is not so different relative to the inequality levels recorded in countries such as Brazil and South Africa, countries commonly singled out as global outliers" (pp. 1-2). So what contributes to such vast levels of inequality? The World Bank (2011b) attributes the discrepancies between those who have and those who do not to social exclusion unique to India and the "ramifications on employment, education, and the rules of social...exchange" of its caste system (p. 2). While India is not alone in having social groups that face caste exclusion, "the structure of the caste system and its ramifications on employment, education, and the rules of social and economic exchange are distinctive...[and] rooted in a philosophical tradition that justifies these [inequalities]" (The World Bank, 2011b, p.2).

By recognizing and amassing articles that demonstrate how the English-language Indian press frames the issue of child deprivation and hunger for its readers, this research joins the conversation by first identifying which frames have been the most commonly used in the discussion from May 2012 to April 2014. Next, this study examines the discourse for instances when counterframes assert themselves in unique ways and offer some analysis of what we can learn from both the frames that recur often and the ones that have started to emerge between India's 2012 presidential elections and its historically large 2014 general elections. As Entman (1993) states, "the frame in a news text is really the imprint of power—it registers the identity of actors or interests that competed to dominate the text" (p. 55). Since this research covers a time period leading up to a major political milestone for India and its democracy, this study will identify how one of the most problematic aspects of Indian life is framed by those with enough agency to dominate the press—and how it is challenged by the fact the majority of press frames can also betray a lot about an issue by what they do not show.

### 3 METHODS

In my analysis, I examine the Indian press to determine what frames are used to discuss the nationwide child hunger problem. Based on the patterns that emerge, I offer some conclusions to explain how these frames present international statistics and drive social attitudes toward the issue of India's undernourished children. The decision to analyze press accounts of Indian child hunger by focusing on how the topic is framed is grounded in Entman's theories on framing. I use framing as a tool to examine the media effects on public perception and policy decisions caused by the broad categories that are applied to the issue. Once I have identified and categorized articles depending on which frames are emphasized the most, I then conduct a qualitative content analysis of these news articles' text (and in the case of a few Hindi articles, the pictures) to examine how these frames function surrounding the complex issue of child deprivation related to poverty.

#### 3.1 Framing Theory

In order to recognize journalistic frames, I rely on Entman's (1993) discussion of the concept. As he explains, the frames used in mass media reports of a phenomenon shape public thinking and discourse about the issue. Entman goes on to explain the processes that allow framing to function, stating that frames "define problems...diagnose causes...make moral judgments..., and suggest remedies" (p. 52). In the case of Indian childhood hunger and deprivation, the press contributes to each of these steps as they report on the news and developments surrounding the issue. In my study, I use Entman's explanation of framing to guide a qualitative content analysis of the current media account of child deprivation. First, I establish if there are frequently used frames used in the press about child hunger. Next, I explore how the media's organization and release of information about child poverty may impose



distorted ideas about the agents that contribute to child hunger. Finally, I offer some conclusions about how the frames actually obscure or simplify some of the causes and complexities surrounding this issue.

### **3.2 Data Selection**

In the selection of my data set, I qualified English-language online Indian press accounts as sufficiently representative of Indian poverty discourse because the Constitution of India allows Parliament the option to use English for official purposes (*Article 343*). Although it is the subsidiary language with respect to Hindi, English is regarded as the “most important language for national, political, and commercial communication” (CIA, 2014). Having established that I would examine English-language online Indian publications, I employed search terms—some of which included *India*, *child*, *poverty*, and *malnutrition*—to review a wide sample of articles on child poverty from a number of different English-language newspapers. Using the database Factiva, I was able to filter my results by country, and once I set India as a filter, I was able to further divide results by major cities and regions within the country in order to select articles from many different Indian states.

Though English is a frequently used language, more than 41 percent of Indians speak Hindi, making it the most common tongue in the nation (CIA, 2014), and an additional 22 languages are recognized by the Constitution of India (Government of India, 2014). One limitation to my data set is that it does not include extensive example of Hindi-language press coverage and provides no examples of the various other recognized languages. Indians who read and write in English will have very different journalistic frames of reference than those who only speak indigenous languages, and as a result, how the English-speaking journalists frame stories and how the English-language readers select and receive their news will provided a somewhat

limited viewpoint since the linguistic differences among each group shapes their views of truth, objectivity, journalism educational standards, and cultural and socioeconomic points of reference.

In India, the national Constitution grants each state the ability to select which language will be used for internal administration and education (*Article 343*). For this reason, my research presents a more limited picture of state-level press on child hunger, but since the majority of Indian states either use English as a co-language or speak Hindi, I include a very small selection of Hindi-language articles that cover the issue of child hunger. These few Hindi press accounts will, I hope, provide possibilities for further research and help contrast the use of frames between the English and Hindi press account of child hunger. In order to understand these articles, I used Google's translation services. By translating frequent keywords or phrases that are prominent in my English-language samples into Hindi, I entered the following translated words into the customized search boxes on a number of Hindi-language online newspaper websites to identify relevant articles:

child: बच्चा

malnutrition: कुपोषण

poverty: गरीबी

infant: नवजात शिशुओं

As I searched for Hindi-language articles, I had to occasionally add the additional step of “reading” any images that would accompany the articles I received in my search results. Since there are several different ways to phrase the issues surrounding child hunger and deprivation, the terminology above did not always yield the most pertinent results. By examining the photographs that accompanied each article on the list of search results, I used commonly held

visual communication principles<sup>3</sup>—such as the explanation by Roland Barthes (1977) that photographs convey connotative messages in addition to their denotative qualities—to refine search terms as needed and hone in on the terms that resulted in the articles with the most relevance. (See *Figure 1* and *Figure 2* for examples of the visual images that informed that helped me determine the relevance of the Hindi-language articles).

### 3.3 Circulation Figures for Selected Newspapers

This study's combined data set of English and Hindi press is designed to provide the most representative sample of the types of child deprivation articles that could reach an Indian citizen since I examine press from both the most universally spoken language and the language with the highest percentage of speakers per capita. In addition to this step, I have also been careful to select publications that are based in various parts of the country and that have high to moderate circulations. The circulation figures that I now list are for the top six most frequently cited English-language publications and for the top four most frequently cited Hindi-language publications in this research.

Nielsen's (2013) Indian Readership Survey reports that of all of the news publication in India (of any language and of any periodicity), the *Dainik Jagran* is the most read and circulated paper in all of India. The *Dainik Jagran* is a Hindi-language daily, and it has an average issue readership of 15.526 million (p. 9). Nielsen's survey goes on to list the circulation of the *Navbharat Times*, a daily out of Mumbai, Maharashtra with a 2.480 million circulation. The final two Hindi newspapers that I sample are the *Rajasthan Patrika* which has 7.665 million in circulation and the *Dainik Bhaskar* which attracts an impressive circulation of 12.855 million readers per issue on average (p. 9).

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<sup>3</sup> For a more in-depth treatment of the visual communication principles at play in news media, see *Image bite politics: News and the visual framing of elections* by Grabe, M. E., & Bucy, E. P. (2009).

Nielsen's (2013) figures on the English-language dailies put the *Times of India* in the top spot, with an average issue readership of 7.253 million read and circulated among the English-language dailies (p. 10). The prevalence of this newspaper is reflected in my sample selection inasmuch as the *Times of India* is the English-language source from which I drew the largest share of English articles. Two other top dailies, the *Hindustan Times* and the *Hindu*, are also used with frequency in my research. *The Hindustan Times* attracts a per-issue readership of 4.335 million. *The Hindu* receives an average of 1.473 million readers per issue.

For an idea about the size of India's readership for the languages other than English and Hindi, Nielsen ranks other high circulation dailies into a category labeled the top "language dailies" (p. 11). In 2013, the total circulation of these top ten language dailies was 54.902 million readers per issue per day (p.11). These ten news publications ranged from 8.565 million in average issue readership to 3.707 million, and only six of India's other 22 official languages are represented by these publications (p. 11). According to this Nielsen report, the third most frequently read language in the Indian press (behind Hindi and English) is Malayalam, followed closely by Gujarati<sup>4</sup> (p. 11).

### 3.3 Presentation

This paper represents my findings and is organized first by the broad frames that I identified in my review of the literature: socioeconomic disparities, regional or state disparities,

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<sup>4</sup> These numbers indicate that Gujarati is the fourth most frequently read language used by the Indian press, just behind Hindi, English, and Malayalam. It is interesting to note the prevalence of the Gujarati language here. Gujarati is the language of Narendra Modi, the BJP candidate whose popularity over his opposition, Rahul Gandhi, has been linked in part to the alienation felt by many of India's less affluent citizens who view English-speaking and Western-educated Gandhi as out of touch with their lives. Further, the language choice between English and Gujarati has even been described as a "weapon" in this election. During a visit to Gujarat to ask people to vote for her (and her son Raul's) Congress party in 2012, Sonja Gandhi spoke briefly in the Gujarati language, criticizing Modi's leadership of Gujarat (Indo-Asian News Service, 2012). The importance of language is a topic worth exploring as it relates to Indian press coverage, politics, and the serious issue of child deprivation and the impoverished.

and government interventions. Next, I subcategorize my findings based on the most frequently noted stratifications within these broader categories. For example, socioeconomic disparities will be analyzed with an eye toward education and employment status; regional or state disparities will subdivide the country at least along the commonly accepted line of poverty that separates the northern states from southern areas of development and wealth; and government interventions will be sorted according to the frames of blame and, less frequently, praise of the specific intervention or government official. I then summarize my findings as they relate to common benefits and challenges of the various emerging frames that work together to present the picture of childhood poverty in India.

### 3.4 Images Used with Hindi-language Child Poverty Articles



**Figure 1: "Child Rights" can be seen on the banner in the background. The women and children demonstrate proactive involvement in this photograph from: 38 percent of girls malnourished. (2014, April 4).**



**Figure 2: Women dressed in green and blue represent the Child Development Project as they lead a meeting with women and children in this photograph from: Waging a campaign against malnutrition. (2014, April 12).**

## 4 RESULTS

### 4.1 Geographic Frames

One of the frames I found in my research is that of geographic disparities. While some Indians enjoy a life of comfort—many with the elite status of a Western academic education—far too many others live in poverty. The Indian sub-continent is composed of markedly diverse regions—twenty-eight states and seven territories in total—many of which have unique languages and dialects (CIA, 2013). The development of so many languages in this region was due in part to the varying degrees of historical influence wielded by foreign cultures over particular areas, and in fact, the legacy of foreign cultures contributed to much of the societal diversity found among and even within each state (Kasbekar, 2006, p. 1). However, the poverty in India is not contained to a specific region, and even citizens of the same area can experience pronounced economic disparities while living alongside one another.

Two disparate economic pictures, for example, are found in the Indian state Uttar Pradesh, India's second richest state (PR Log, 2011). People who staff the service industry that supports that region's thriving tourism-based economic institutions are driving this wealth (PR Log, 2011). In stark contrast, a farmer in Uttar Pradesh recently submitted an affidavit to the country's president seeking his permission to commit suicide because of the economic devastation of his entire family and the death of his young daughter from malnourishment (Aradhak, 2013). These two examples represent two ends of the economic spectrum in modern India, and while extreme, unfortunately the dichotomy presented by these two articles is not rare in India.

Since India's independence, the country has often used developmental journalism to help with its monumental task of nation building, and the use of geographic frames often coincide

with articles that fall under the developmental journalism umbrella. The role of developmental journalism in India in particular is to “discuss issues that are important for a civil society, such as democracy, social and economic justice, national integration, and economic progress” (Yin, 2009, p. 390). It is primarily the last two goals which can be seen as the object of emphasis in the following English-language Indian press articles about poverty. While the articles often have to present some dire facts and statistics, there is still an emphasis on what progress *has* been made, and, through this exploration, the importance of developmental journalism becomes evident in how it impacts the English-language coverage’s geographic framing. In contrast to the English-language press, one Hindi-language article that I examined emphasizes that the locality of poverty is more urban than rural while the English-language accounts focus on rural poverty and its effects. The article entitled “With urbanization, the number of slums are increasing” (2012) from the Hindi-language press also adds a dimension I did not come across in my exploration of the English-language press when it states that violence is a frequently reported factor that can exist as a comorbid condition with malnutrition.

In late 2012 and the spring of 2013, India suffered from a devastating drought that severely cut into the nation’s grain production, thus exacerbating the effects of malnutrition. The articles that cover this natural disaster display elements of developmental journalism such as promoting the national good by keeping morale up surrounding the drought. One such way that the press maintained morale in the face of dire drought conditions was by carefully selecting the language used in the articles. In an article that presented the rain deficit statistics for late 2012, the language used to describe the drought crisis included the phrases “drought-like situation,” “drought situation,” and “water scarcity” when referring to a discussion of what the Agricultural Minister Sharad Pawar and financial chief Ajit Pawar proposed to do with the drought-relief



budget (Joshi, 2012). While the headline stated, “May have to prune budget to fund drought relief: Ajit,” the word “drought” in the headline appeared with the word “relief” immediately following, and nowhere in the body of the article stated that there was an out and out “drought” (Joshi, 2012). Another example of boosting national morale by carefully selecting the language used to cover national crises comes from a *Times of India* article entitled “Oommen Chandy reviews drought situation” (2013). Again, the label of “drought” is avoided in favor of “drought situation,” a term with more positive connotations since “situation” implies a sense of temporariness.

This type of developmental journalism distorts the reality that India’s high levels of food insecurity are closely tied to situations such as the drought of 2013. In fact, the International Food Policy Research Institute’s 2013 report states that India qualifies as one of the countries with the least resilience to weather shocks due to its poor Global Hunger Index score combined with its high incidence of weather disasters such as drought (p. 20). The report accounts for this rate of resilience by examining a country’s food and nutritional insecurities prior to a weather shock, and the conclusion is that India’s food and nutritional supplies greatly suffer from drought and other weather shocks (p. 19).

Highly selective uses of statistics reflect the developmental journalistic trend toward “strengthening democracy and guiding society” (Yin, 2009, p. 390). One article quoted a recent census finding that 68 million Indians live in slums (“68 million Indians living in slums, says census,” 2013). While this may seem like a message that could prevent progress, a closer look reveals that the percentage of the overall population to which the headline refers amounts to about five percent, a number that may be true depending on the definition of “slum,” but nonetheless, five percent is a much smaller figure to put on some aspect of Indian poverty when

compared with the statistic that states that 46 percent of Indian's children are severely malnourished (Perappadan, 2013). The article also lists a number of what it called "interesting" qualifiers early in the body of the text such as comparatively positive statistics including a 90 percent availability of electricity in the slums and about 70 percent each availability of televisions and telephones ("68 million Indians living in slums, says census," 2013). By selecting what statistics to include in the article, this author dulled the impact of finding out the number of Indians in slums by pairing this information with statistics that seem to counter the traditional image of slums such as the number of electronics that are present in the area.

Carefully ordering the release of information is one feature way to employ developmental journalism, and the use of strategic ordering is evident in the coverage of Indian poverty. This tendency is represented in articles that reported on serious issues such as infant mortality rates and United Nations Development goals. One article that outlined a 2013 survey's depiction of the concerning state of poverty in the Odisha region quickly completed a shift in tone soon after the lead paragraph, and the troubling information presented in the lead was followed by more extensive explanations that outline the upside of the region's "high growth trajectory" and "low cost of living" (Satapathy, 2013). Many articles followed a similar pattern of qualifying bad news with positive statistics. Emphasizing economic growth and national integration, one article praised a new plan to combat malnutrition by stating that signs such as stunting and wasting were on the decline, and in reference to these statistics, a UNICEF-India nutritionist "termed the improvement a game changer and attributed it to an overall improvement in feeding practices and hygiene" as well as the program's focus on diminishing regional disparities in poverty conditions in favor of a more unified, national outcome ("A New Mission Against Malnutrition," 2012). This article exemplifies the idea of developmental journalism and serves

as a vivid contrast for an article published just a month earlier that called the reduction of infant mortality rates are “a distant dream” (Botekar, 2012).

A contrast to the geographic frames that sometimes lend itself to developmental journalism, certain Hindi-language press articles present a more incorporated picture of the realities of both urban and the rural spaces of India. One Hindi-language article, even in the midst of reporting the newest statistics of country-wide malnutrition in 2014, presented a thorough description of the role of agricultural regions in the nation’s developmental gap. In the article titled “35 million people in the country are malnourished” (2014), the author states that scientists should look for solutions that rely less on the importation of grain for the country and focus on programs such as the one at Punjab Agricultural University to increase the yields of India’s existing natural land resources.

#### **4.2 Socioeconomic Frames**

The first type of socioeconomic frame in the press was one that emphasized type of employment. With the presentation of certain socioeconomic frames, the English-language press often presents elements of sensationalism, particularly with respect to agricultural workers in a discussion of the socioeconomic frame of employment. Sensationalism is widespread in Indian media, and this feature of news coverage is a major contributor to the distorted picture of the country’s poor. According to Yin (2009), as the Indian press experienced amazing periods of growth due to increasing financial revenue from advertisers, this growth also brought with it the trend toward sensationalistic reporting. Yin reported on articles that contain criticism of the Indian press for covering weddings more frequently than rapes (p. 351), but even years later, the trend toward Indian press sensationalism in the service of commercialism can still be seen in the

news. The coverage of the recent rape epidemic (and the press reaction when the Prime Minister honestly addressed the issue as discussed later) is but one example of continued sensationalism.

The way that the Indian press covers personal stories of poverty's consequences is another illustration of sensationalism. The farmer who petitioned his state's president for permission to commit suicide did so after losing three family members to disease and malnutrition. His son and daughter-in-law had already committed suicide, "while his 14-year-old daughter, who had a heart disease, died when her condition worsened due to malnutrition" (Aradhak, 2013). The farmer stated that he knew suicide was a culpable crime, and he stated, "In my struggle to win back my land, I have lost three family members. My second son's wife left him as she was unable to deal with poverty. This drove him to suicide, while my daughter-in-law immolated herself. My daughter died of a heart attack" (Aradhak, 2013). After trying to commit suicide, the farmer received and served a 14 day jail sentence (Aradhak, 2013).

The scourge of farmers' suicides has plagued India for approximately twenty years. Raj Patel's 2008 book *Stuffed and Starved*, he examines the inequalities and hardships of trying to make a living in the modern global agricultural system and terms it an epidemic (in its Indian manifestation and including stories from farmer suicides around the globe). The high incidence of poverty among those who make their living in the agricultural business has contributed to a rash of suicides among farmers, an epidemic that was first noticed by journalists in Maharashtra in the early 1990s (Stephenson, 2013). In recent Indian press coverage of poverty, the issue of farmer suicide has crept back into the fore, especially over the last eighteen months to two years. This topic has become such a concern that Agricultural Minister Sharad Pawar has voiced his alarm over the issue (Stephenson, 2013).

The articles that deal with personal stories of the impact of poverty trend toward these extreme and tragic cases. The English-language press is dominated by sensationalistic stories such as that of a man who recently attempted self-immolation as a result of being “forced to live in poverty” after not being able to find work in the agricultural field (“Man detained for attempting self-immolation,” 2013) and the family of five from the rural Gujarat city of Wankaner that attempted mass suicide by laying down in front of a speeding train (“Poverty drives 5 of Wankaner family to suicide,” 2013). The Wankaner family’s suicide attempt killed the father and his two sons while his two daughters survived but sustained severe injuries (“Poverty drives 5 of Wankaner family to suicide, 2013”). In each of these three cases and as well as in the rash of suicides that prompted the first round of media coverage, the sensationalism of the story must not be overlooked as a factor that contributes to the selection of these human stories of poverty while coverage of other human-impact stories is more limited.

Another socioeconomic frame that is prevalent in the Indian press is the coverage of the role of women in the child hunger issue. In recent years, India has become widely scrutinized for failing to protect its women, and this lack of women’s rights is reflected in press coverage that frames child deprivation by blaming Indian women and family structures as causes for the poverty crisis. Highly publicized incidences of gang rape have dominated headlines, and in 2011, the Bureau for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor published a report that was critical of India for the level of rights violations of women and children. As reported by Ghildiyal (2013), the country’s Prime Minister Manmohan Singh addressed the human rights inequalities being faced by Indian women and children by stating the following:

Women deserve a better deal. . . .Poverty is India’s greatest problem. Social evils cannot be dealt with in short time and India is taking steps to raise the level of living by

returning to high growth rate and by ensuring that fruits of development are distributed equitably. India is well-functioning democracy... an open society and an open book which is committed to values of democracy though it is not always easy when we have to deal with low per capita incomes as we have. (2013)<sup>5</sup>

The fact that Prime Minister Singh addressed the inequality of women's rights in India as important, but most significantly, PM Singh made the link between poverty and the nation's societal injustices clear and inextricable. The political move of linking poverty to social injustice gained Narendra Modi a large following in the 2014 general elections, and as one Hindi-language article expressed, Modi's political rhetoric emphasizes that his level of honesty about the state of India, particularly that today's conditions are the worst they have been for the poor, should be "feared" by the parties who currently hold power ("Fear the honest man," 2014).

While Singh's remarks acknowledged that women's rights cannot be overcome without first addressing poverty, there is a trend in English-language press to be more critical and less empowering of women when discussing their role in childhood malnutrition. In fact, Singh's remarks were the subject of criticism in an article by Subrahmaniam (2013). The author stated that the prime minister's comments at the Indo-German Inter-Governmental Consultations were embarrassing because they happened in full view of the world and that German Chancellor Angela Merkel might now reconsider her opinion about India's gains toward lessening its women's human rights violations issues (Subrahmaniam, 2013). In contrast, one Hindi-language article, "38 percent of girls malnourished," places female rights in the spotlight and defies the English-language trend of women-blaming. In this article, the author's focus is on the fact that

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<sup>5</sup> Singh's speech directly followed and responded to a speech presented by German Chancellor Angela Merkel. In her speech, Merkel stated that "scientific and economic cooperation in agriculture and other sectors [with India] was aimed as long-term solution to lifting people out of poverty that was at the heart of poor state of women *and children* [emphasis added]" (Ghildiyal, 2013).

girls are harmed by malnutrition at a higher rate than boys and that this is an important issue that warrants serious discussion.

The Indian press sometimes frames child poverty as an issue beyond the responsibilities of the government. Sometimes critics conflate poverty with a perceived inadequacy within Indian women. Women, who also face the daily burdens of poverty, have become objects of blame in the conversation surrounding this issue. One article began with a doctor's prediction that if children in the most severe stages of malnourishment are not treated by two years of age, they can become permanently stunted, but that article trended away from the consequences and ends by chastising the actions of mothers in the fight against malnutrition, stating that "many pregnant mothers [afraid of side effects] refuse to take iron... tablets...result[ing] in children being born underweight" (Hemalatha, 2012). The author described the women's fear of iron alongside mothers' consumption of the spice tamarind as two examples of the cultural and psychological factors inherent in women from which malnourishment in children results (Hemalatha, 2012). In the Hindi-language account, one article entitled "Waging a campaign against malnutrition" (2014) details how an all-female branch of the Child Development Project are sharing their knowledge with women and children who are still recovering from a politically motivated bombing carried out by "Naxalite" insurgents of the Communist Party of India in May of 2013. Rather than portraying women as fearful contributors to child deprivation, this Hindi account depicts proactive Indian women.

Another facet of blaming women manifests with the trend toward criticizing women for being uneducated about certain aspects of female health. Some articles presented possible solutions to poverty as being rooted in family planning and education efforts. One media account included a discussion of sterilization as a way to alleviate child poverty. The article reported an

account of a government official from Bhopal who was so displeased with the pace and low interest in the government program of sterilization that he incentivized program workers to exceed the target of enlisting five couples per month to receive sterilization operations (“Bhopal Collector takes health officials to task,” 2012). In a panel organized to discuss the Food Security Bill that continues to be debated in parliament as of March 2013, Planning Commission deputy chairman Ahluwalia blamed malnourished children on Indian women’s misinformed attitudes about the cleanliness of breast milk during the first few days after giving birth and their trend toward marrying at a young age (“Republic of hunger,” 2013).

More deeply rooted problems in the civic structure of Indian life are another target of blame for the issue of malnutrition in children. Clearly there are differences among how different states interpret national nutritional guidelines and mandates about the role of local government in relief programs. Gadkari (2013) wrote that the Pune Municipal Corporation “seems to be oblivious to the fact that there are almost 80,000 malnourished children aged below six years in the city, of whom the state of 1,055 is critical,” and the health officials there stated that they were not aware of those numbers. One official stated that the lack of communication regarding data on malnourished children makes the problem hard to track, but as Gadkari (2013) pointed out, the information is uploaded monthly to the government’s Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) website. Officials from Pune emphasized that services such as the ICDS are the state’s responsibility, but comments like this seem to indicate that Pune Municipal Corporation is failing to remember a “state mandate that says local bodies should contribute at least two per cent of their budget to the women and child welfare department on child malnutrition issues” (Gadkari, 2013).



The press also blames social problems within Indian for the prevalence of poverty, and these stories about social issues tend to serve as an alternative locus of blame than the more standard economic explanations of poverty. One news article examined the Planning Commission's 2012-2013 Economic Survey which notes that poverty is on the rise despite government efforts to combat the problem including a series of welfare programs that have been in place for years (Satapathy, 2013). The article interprets this chronic poverty as simply a by-product of "social disparities" among regions and groups (Satapathy, 2013). Another news article concludes, with regards to social disparity, that just because some people live below the poverty line, a lack of food is not always the main issue in these people's lives (Gadkari, 2013). In interviews with two mothers living below the poverty line, Gadkari (2013) reported that both women agreed that the issue is not a lack of access to food that contributes to their micronutrient malnutrition, but rather that their children prefer to eat junk food. According to one woman, the children are given "four meals a day...but they refuse to take the regular *dal*, rice, *chapatis* and vegetables [and opt instead for] wafers, chocolates and *Kurkure*" (Gadkari, 2013).

Other accounts of poverty highlight the problematic power relations that exist within India's social structure. One article that exposes the power given to certain members of the social order such as police officers was entitled "Top cop shocked to see poor boy eating crow" (2013). In this account, the officer stated that it was heartrending and repulsive to see such a child eating a crow ("Top cop," 2013). This story occupies a curious place in the press coverage of Indian child poverty. The cop's account of the story places this article within a guilt-redemption cycle that leaves the cop looking like the hero (and as a person of power) because he gave the boy money and food at the scene. At the same time, the cop also downplayed the severity of child hunger and the material conditions of those who are in a different social class by reporting that

the boy stated he was only eating crow “in order to be fit and healthy” because villagers told him doing so would keep diseases at bay (“Top cop shocked to see poor boy eating crow,” 2013). By including this apparent justification of the child’s decision to eat crow, the police officer in this article is denying the possibility that the child may be eating the crow out of necessity.

Although officially abolished, the caste system still has some lingering implications in modern India<sup>6</sup>. Though the articles about this are rarer than the other socioeconomic frames, the effects of social exclusion via the caste system on the continuation of economic inequalities and child deprivation are mentioned in the English-language press. As reported in *The Hindu*, one solution for child malnutrition is high-protein meat. However, writer Devanur Mahadeva said at a seminar called ‘Food, tradition, and health’ that the government in the southwestern state Karnataka does not propagate the consumption of meat due to “religious and caste bias” and that the food habits of certain castes are still exercised today (“Caste politics evident in food: Mahadeva,” 2014). According to *The Times of India* (“Caste biases witnessed in *anganwadis*, says study,” 2013), the southern state Tamil Nadu contains cases of caste bias between *dalit* and Hindu children, with the poorer *dalit* children showing higher enrollment rates in child-care centers because Hindu parents see these centers as little more than mid-day meal centers for poorer children and not child development centers which are their stated purpose.

### 4.3 Governmental Frames

A prominent feature in articles about poverty and the resultant childhood malnutrition from the last two years is the trend of blaming, and a frequent subject of this blame frame is the government. Given the complexities of India’s languages, geography, and social striations, many

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<sup>6</sup> For further reading on the impact of the caste system in India, see the shadow report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination entitled *Hidden Apartheid: Caste Discrimination against India’s “Untouchables.”*

people or entities receive the blame for child hunger, and depending on the frame used to present the issue, the same statistic about child hunger can be repackaged in a multitude of ways yet manage to spread the blame to a different party each time. The effect of blame frames has been demonstrated in studies such as Williams, Davidson, and Yochim (2011) which found that such frames can intensify audience members' responsibility attributions. As child hunger in India remains such a scourge amid an otherwise booming growth, the wealth inequalities that led to poor living conditions has caused many to rally against perceived government corruption in the 2014 general elections (Barry, 2014, p.A1). It is against this political backdrop that I examine how blame frames can skew the information in the news stories that employ them.

One of the biggest recipients of blame, the Indian government, is a favorite target, and since so many people and programs are agents of the government, there is often no shortage of blame to go around. Growing concern about the multitude of malnourished children in India does not always seem shared by the Indian government. Indeed, blaming the government is a prevalent theme of the Indian press. Some critics allege that top government officials are not even fully aware of the scope of the poverty and child hunger crisis. An article in the *Pune Mirror* condemned government officials as "oblivious to the fact that there are almost 80,000 malnourished children aged below six years" in that city of more than three million on the Deccan Plateau (Gadkari, 2012). Another article characterized an allegedly incompetent government policy regarding food stores as a symbol for the bureaucratic red tape that exacerbates child hunger, stating that current food stores are at twice the government-mandated levels, yet what would be "a matter of celebration except that even as food grain stocks keep piling up, hunger and malnutrition continue to haunt a quarter of the population, over 200 million people, according to various international estimates" (Varma, 2013).

In the discussion of poverty, opponents disagree about the significance of government studies and statistics and about the efficacy of proposed legislation. Proposed legislation in the form of the United Progressive Alliance's food security was widely criticized in the press. One article contends that the bill does not have sound economic standing and is only "illogical populism" (Anklesaria, 2013). Another author tackles the bill by stating that "as an idea, there can be no quarrel with food security. India ranks 66 among 88 countries," but he then characterizes the bill as a "disaster," an unachievable goal, and legislation with arbitrary figures that provides no incentive for farmers to produce more food stuffs. Further, some critics maintain that the bill actually damages the private market (Aiyar, 2013). In the Hindi-language press, however, the discussion of government programs such as the mandatory mid-day meal for public school children was presented as a good first step even within an article that was written as a specific critique of the 45 percent malnutrition rate among children who attend government-funded public schools ("Childhood malnutrition," 2012). The governmental blame frames, of course, present an account of child deprivation that is oversimplified and serves to further alienate those who have knowledge of the complexities of the issue.

Among the most extreme government blame frames, government motives are questioned in its attempt to alleviate dangerous child malnutrition. Some articles allege not only gross incompetence but also sinister government actions that are presented as actual efforts to cover-up its ineptitude. In an article by Ramanath (2013), the government of one Indian state was criticized for repeatedly citing incorrect and different sets of data when reporting on the same time period in official poverty surveys. Ramanath (2013) also reported that questions about the government's statements on irrigation data have emerged, and the government's account of this data has been characterized as "misleading." One congressional official who did speak publicly

about his perception of alleged government deception said that “it seems the [current state] government has no information about how many poor people live in the state despite being in power for...thirteen years,” and the article concluded by stating that from all appearances, the government is cheating the people in the state by not living up to its election promises, especially those that were directed at improving farmers’ quality of life (Ramanath, 2013). Since these allegedly misleading data were used to determine Odisha’s budget for providing subsidies to farmers, the article implies that this may undercut farmers’ productivity, thus exacerbating malnutrition.

The fallout over allegations that Odisha’s government purposely supplied false data to national-level budgeting committees was substantial. Due to the outcry that resulted from the widespread press coverage of this issue, prominent state officials such as Union Statistics Minister Srikant Jena have attempted to distance themselves from the reports of “fixed” surveys. Jena responded to the specific allegation that the resulting poverty survey results were distorted in order to keep incumbents competitive in the 2014 elections by contending that even though the survey was under his administrative control he had “no role to play in furnishing the data” to the federal National Sample Survey Organization (“No role in giving poverty data: Srikant Jena,” 2013).

Another form of government blaming asserts that officials may be engaged in efforts to thwart aid distribution. In an article from *The Hindu*, population issues are brought into stark focus as the author related the grievance between the National Commission for Protection of Children’s Rights and the government committee that left out the commission’s aid recommendations for India’s malnourished children from a draft of the proposed Food Security Bill (Perappadan, 2013). A spokesperson for the children’s rights commission voiced concern

over the government's motives for omitting relief recommendations, stating that government officials not only ignored the commission's recommendations but also wrote a provision in the bill to deny existing relief entitlements to the third born and higher order babies in order to encourage the "stabilisation [sic] of population" (Perappadan, 2013).

Among the harshest critics of the government's role in India's poverty and child malnourishment crises are those who hold the viewpoint that the devastating effects of poverty such as malnutrition and death could be entirely prevented by the government. According to the article "Not enough on the plate" (2012), around 5,000 children below five years would have died in India, not because of any killer disease(s) but largely due to preventable causes...[such as] lack of food" and an unbalanced diet. Some commentators even asserted that the effects of poverty in India are entirely preventable, and that when death occurs, it is the result of a "direct and culpable form of killing made possible by state politics" (Gupta, 2012, p.5). This sentiment is squarely echoed in some press coverage that pointed to bureaucracy as a major contributor to Indian child poverty issues (see Aiyar, Gadkari, and Gohain for some examples).

Another type of blame frame is one that criticizes the structure of party politics. In a very recent manifestation of this trend, one particular politician has come under fire for his remarks concerning the 2013 drought in India. At a time during which UNICEF representatives state that unsafe water carrying infection is one of the main causes to India's malnutrition and growth stunting rates for children being higher than sub-Saharan Africa's rates (Sharma, 2013), Congress Party member and the Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra remarked of the drought crisis: "There is this person from Solapur, on a hunger strike for 55 days, demanding that water be released from the [Ujani] dam. But where are we going to get water from? Should we urinate? And how will we do that when there is no water to drink?" ("Opposition bent on demand for

Ajit Pawar's resignation," 2013). His remarks were made during the same week when emergency steps were called into effect to distribute drinking water ("Drought: Council pushes for emergency steps," 2013), so, with evidence that the drought was an emergency, the press and members of Pawar's opposition party pointed to this incident an example of how out-of-touch the Congress Party is from the Indians who suffer<sup>7</sup> from drought and the resultant increase in poverty and malnutrition that stem from this natural disaster.

More deeply rooted problems in the structure of Indian politics are another target of blame for the issue of malnutrition in children. Clearly there are differences among how different states interpret national nutritional guidelines and mandates about the role of local government in relief programs. Gadkari (2013) wrote that the Pune Municipal Corporation "seems to be oblivious to the fact that there are almost 80,000 malnourished children aged below six years in the city, of whom the state of 1,055 is critical," and the health officials there stated that they were not aware of those numbers. One official stated that the lack of communication regarding data on malnourished children makes the problem hard to track, but as Gadkari (2013) pointed out, the information is uploaded monthly to the government's Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) website. Officials from Pune emphasized that services such as the ICDS are the state's responsibility, but comments like this seem to indicate that Pune Municipal Corporation is failing to remember a "state mandate that says local bodies should contribute at least two per cent of their budget to the women and child welfare department on child malnutrition issues" (Gadkari, 2013).

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<sup>7</sup> Though Ajit Pawar's remarks did little to improve the drought conditions, an article from *The Hindu* entitled "Residents block road demanding water" (2013) demonstrated yet another scene of civic action on the part of Indian women. In this case, the women, empty water jars in tow, participated in a sit-in, blocking a major road as they demanded water.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

In my study, I noted recurring frames used in the English-language press coverage of child deprivation and poverty. The three broad frames that I found were: socioeconomic frames, governmental frames, and geographic frames. The socioeconomic frame highlighted issues such as education, the role of women, and employment. The governmental frame tended to present information about government programs from the viewpoint of their critics and often blamed specific politicians for the continuation of poverty and child deprivation. The geographic frame presented differences among the various regions and states in India and often emphasized the poverty and want of rural or agricultural areas more so than the poverty of urban areas.

These three broad frames do an inadequate job of presenting the complexities of the problem of poverty when compared to developmental literature which does a far better job of conveying the complexities behind inclusive growth. One example of such literature is Nagaraj's (2012) book which acknowledges a confluence of factors that must be present to close the developmental gap. His book expounds upon the need for social protection policies, growth redistribution policies tailored to urban and rural spaces, and governmental overhauls that focus on state-specific policies that recognize the lingering effects of caste differences and implement better social policy (2012).

An overreliance on the geographic frame obscures the existence of both urban and rural poverty, each presenting unique challenges. For example, the scarcity of stories in the English-language press about urban poverty provides a false impression about where the most impoverished are living; and, while the English-language accounts do mirror the general poverty line that places the most impoverished areas in the rural North, the issues of urbanization in areas such as Delhi are minimized using this geographic frame. Further, a misrepresentation of



geographic needs can be seen in an article which criticizes the latest food security scheme for being announced without any infrastructure in place to deliver the grains to “the hinterlands” (Vyas, *The Times of India*, 2014). Although this article from the *Times of India* points out that there is a lower percentage of the population *above* the poverty line in urban areas (45 percent above) than in rural areas (76 percent above), the article goes on to place the primary concern for infrastructure on the rural regions, despite there being a lack of critical food storage areas in both the urban and rural areas (Vyas, 2014). By showing less concern for urban food storage options, the article reinforces the idea of rural poverty as the bigger threat to the nation’s children even though, as the Hindi press addressed, poverty and food instability is a growing concern in urban areas.

The socioeconomic frames that highlight women or enforce power and status differences are potentially detrimental to the realities of these two socioeconomic factors. For example, the English-language press tended toward a characterization of women as helpless or uninformed regarding poverty. In fact, that frame is contrasted by evidence in Hindi-language newspapers. There I found images and accompanying stories about women who are active participants in poverty and child hunger relief efforts such as the Child’s Rights and You (CRY) organization.

The governmental frame complicates the issue of poverty because of differences in governance at the state or local level. Depending on whether the politicians (or the programs instituted by specific political parties) are of state or local origin, the English-language articles paint a picture of government that is, at best, inept, and, at worst, malicious in its treatment of the problems surrounding child deprivation. The shortcomings of this frame can be seen in the article that describes the government’s proposed food security bill as “illogical populism” (Anklesaria, 2013).

Each of these frames present an account of child deprivation that is oversimplified and serves to further alienate those who have knowledge of the agents preventing inclusive growth from those who do not. As one example, the socioeconomic frame of criticizing women's education about nutrition could serve to obscure the more complex factors that play out in relation to women's access to prenatal and post-natal nutritional education. As Gragnolati et. al, (2006) point out, while the Integrated Child Development Services—India's primary federal policy response—does target the needs of the poorest and most undernourished, “the mismatch between the program's intentions and its actual implementation” often results in “not enough attention [being] given to educating parents about how to improve childcare behaviors and feeding practices” (pp. xx-xxi). For those who are unfamiliar with the ways in which even the primary program can allow women and children to fall through the cracks, the frames that oversimplify this topic may cause an education inequality on the causes and interventions of child hunger on top of the existing economic inequality.

My study of the English-language press also revealed two common journalism techniques—old-style “developmental journalism” and sensationalism—both of which help facilitate the use of the three frames I found in my analysis. And both techniques contribute to the murky picture of India's poverty and the health of its children. The *developmental journalistic* style highlighted small gains and downplayed the severity of poverty and the shortage of resources. For those who sought to promote or boost their cities' growth, development journalism using the geographic frame manifests that *urban* poverty is not mentioned as often as *rural* poverty. The stories about urban poverty—such as the story about Delhi slums from the Hindi newspaper the *Navbharat Times* —were not prominently discussed in the English-language stories.

The second disturbing trend that serves to distort the picture of India's poverty is the sensational journalism combined with socioeconomic framing. Sensational coverage of farmers who commit suicide because of malnutrition and poverty was not balanced with coverage of the on-the-ground efforts made by Indians trying to improve the conditions of malnutrition. Unbalanced, as such, the sensational stories left readers of the English-language press with an unrealistic picture of the effects of deprivation. Further, studies such as Niederkrotenthaler et al.'s (2010) demonstrate that, in the case of print media reports of suicide, repetitive reporting of a suicide is positively associated with suicide rates. Thus, the likelihood of copycat suicides in India may be exacerbated by this sensational reporting of the suicides that have resulted from these individual's despair over poverty and the loss of children due to malnutrition. By contrast, the selection of Hindi-language articles that I examined pointed to less sensational narratives surrounding child hunger by reporting on proactive community involvement in combating the effects of malnutrition such as the children's rights organizations that are currently in operation.

Understanding the effect of the three general framing techniques in the English-language press is vital to engaging the press in reasonable coverage of the problem of poverty. By understanding the limitations of the three frames that contributed to the distorted portrayal of India's poverty in specific ways, this research demonstrates how some of the causes of childhood deprivation would benefit from an in-depth understanding.

The identification of the three frames leads to three fundamental considerations that the press should try to emphasize:

- 1) No government official or program can ever be responsible for either the continuation or the elimination of poverty without other forces at play.

2) No single state or natural resource or geographic location predestines children to a life of abundance or a life of scarcity, and

3) No socioeconomic factor such as education can, in isolation, explain the causes of child deprivation and the development gap in India.

With a broader perspective of the types of press coverage of Indian poverty and by troubling the existing modes of coverage, a broader social awareness can begin to emerge both locally and abroad. The curse of “poverty amid plenty” should no longer be a term that Indians apply in relation to their fellow citizens.

### **5.1 Methodological Limitations**

A significant methodological limitation that I faced as I designed this study was how to reliably obtain and translate Hindi-language articles on the topic of child hunger and deprivation. As I considered this limitation, I realized that, from a methodological standpoint, the decision to include Hindi was a valuable counterpoint to the English-language articles. At the same time, however, I recognized that my examination of Hindi would carry with it certain parameters for the scope of my research.

For my study, I was primarily reliant on Google Translation services in order to explore Hindi-language coverage of the child hunger issues. The Hindi-language articles referenced in my research were clear in their connection to the topic of child hunger, however, my lack of familiarity with the Hindi language did limit my ability to provide the best search phrases on the newspapers’ websites. As an example, Google translates the word “poverty” into several different Hindi-language words (listed below), but the current Google Translate software does prioritize *one* version of the word by putting that word into the “output” search box that is analogous to the user’s “input” search box. Here is the Hindi word that Google prioritizes,

followed by the definition that Google provides for this version of “poverty”: निर्धनता, meaning “poverty, impecunity, indigence, narrow circumstances, neediness, and penuriousness” (Google Translate, 2014). The fourth alternative Hindi word that Google provides in a list below each search’s “output box” was: गरीबी, meaning “scarcity, deficiency, lack, poverty” (Google Translate, 2014). With assistance from a speaker fluent in both Hindi and English, I discovered that fourth Hindi synonym for poverty was a better choice than others given the context of my project, but any connotative Hindi words for poverty or any combinations of the Google translation variants with additional Hindi word or phrase would return a more complete selection of articles.

Additionally, in an effort to collect a balanced sample of Hindi-language papers, one of my methods was to access any images that accompanied a Hindi article. The Hindi-language news sites almost always had photographs to accompany their stories. It is important to note that this difference arose from the databases I had to utilize to access the content and not a universal difference in how the two types of press present their news. As I mentioned above, I primarily accessed the English-language articles through the database Factiva. The most comprehensive list of Hindi-language papers that I could find was compiled by the not-for-profit organization *Indiapress*. Since this organization links you to each newspaper automatically, I was able to see the Hindi-language articles that I searched for in the format their publication intended rather than in list form as is the case with Factiva’s results. If given the same access to the number of Indian English-language news publications outside of Factiva, one benefit from searching for articles by each individual English-language news site is that some of these websites do also have images to accompany their articles.

## 5.2 Suggestions for Future Research

One option for future framing studies of childhood deprivation and malnutrition would be to conduct an analysis of the press coverage surrounding this issue by examining the visual framing used by English-language and Hindi-language press. From my experience of visiting the English-language websites outside of the Factiva databases, articles on this serious topic tended toward either not having images displayed along with them or perhaps only having a headshot photograph of whichever prominent politician happened to be quoted in the article.

In general, the trend toward more entertainment-driven news seems stronger on English-language websites than Hindi ones, and the tone of English-language coverage seemed to rely more often on blaming. For this reason, future researchers may want to consider audience studies approaches to this topic. As I found in my research, elements of sensationalism were more readily evident in the English-language press. Although I did not use as many search terms on Hindi-language sites or sample as many Hindi articles as English ones, Hindi websites, in general, seemed to have fewer images of celebrities *and* fewer blocks for advertisements than did the English-language websites. Any examination of these formatting departures may be of interest, particularly if the researcher was able to survey or interview Indian citizens who read both Hindi-language and English-language publications to explore what effects these various frames have on the reading audience. For this type of study, Scheufele's (1999) four-step process model would be a useful guide into the complex relationship between frames, the audience who receives them, and the journalist who creates them. In this study, the author breaks down the interplay among frame building, frame setting, individual-level framing effects, and a link between individual frames and media frames (pp. 114-115).

Similarly, research into how the blame frames impact audiences—and the sense of responsibility in particular—could be important to explore for a topic as widespread and critical as this. The exploration of blame frames is discussed by Williams, Davidson, and Yochim (2011) in their analysis of death metaphors in the coverage of corporate failures. Their findings demonstrate that if a corporation is anthropomorphized through the use of a death metaphor in coverage of its collapse, audiences likely assign blame on external factors rather than on the executives and managers themselves and that the level of blame is, in general, more intense when death metaphors are used (Williams, Davidson, and Yochim, 2011). (For more examples of studies that explore blame frames and responsibility, *see Cho & Gower, 2006; Holt & Major, 2010; and An, 2011*).

Finally, an examination of the relationship between wealthy parties and the distribution of ownership in the English-language press may reveal an economic basis for the disproportionate coverage of India's poor. If there are any social movements that have or might spring up surrounding the economic inequalities in India and the resultant exacerbation of child hunger, the study of the mobilization of this economic dimension in Indian society could be an interesting one. Much like the Occupy Movement in the United States, prolonged economic inequalities impact voting and news consuming audiences. If a similar social movement, rooted in economics, were to be studied in India, the Benford and Snow (2000) article on collective action frames and the constant restricting of such frames that take place during the evolution of a movement would be a useful resource for further study.

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