

*‘Self-Help which Ennobles a Nation’:
Development, citizenship, and the obligations
of eating in India’s austerity years**

BENJAMIN SIEGEL

Department of History, Boston University, United States of America

Email: siegelb@bu.edu

Abstract

In the years immediately following independence, India’s political leadership, assisted by a network of civic organizations, sought to transform what, how, and how much Indians ate. These campaigns, this article argues, embodied a broader post-colonial project to reimagine the terms of citizenship and development in a new nation facing enduring scarcity. Drawing upon wartime antecedent, global ideologies of population and land management, and an ethos of austerity imbued with the power to actualize economic self-reliance, the new state urged its citizens to give up rice and wheat, whose imports sapped the nation of the foreign currency needed for industrial development. In place of these staples, India’s new citizens were asked to adopt ‘substitute’ and ‘subsidiary’ foods—including bananas, groundnuts, tapioca, yams, beets, and carrots—and give up a meal or more each week to conserve India’s scant grain reserves. And as Indian planners awaited the possibility of fundamental agricultural advance and agrarian reform, they looked to food technology and the promise of ‘artificial rice’ as a means of making up for India’s perennial food deficit. India’s women, as anchors of the household—and therefore, the nation—were tasked with facilitating these dietary transformations, and were saddled with the blame when these modernist projects failed. Unable to marshal the resources needed to undertake fundamental agricultural reform, India’s planners placed greater faith in their ability to exercise authority over certain aspects of Indian citizenship itself, tying the remaking

* I would like to thank Sunil Amrith, Sugata Bose, Rebecca Chang, Emma Rothschild, and Joshua Specht for their incisive comments on earlier drafts of this article. Feedback from audiences at the Harvard Center for History and Economics, the Yale Modern South Asia Workshop, and the Feast and Famine Seminar at New York University was instrumental in refining these arguments, as were the comments offered by the two anonymous readers for *Modern Asian Studies*.

of practices and sentiments to the reconstruction of a self-reliant national economy.

Three years after independence, in the summer of 1950, India's third food minister, Kanaiyalal Maneklal Munshi, travelled from Delhi to Bihar, where famine was rumoured to be breaking out once more. Across the province, Biharis were said to be subsisting on jute leaves, and in poorer villages, tree branches were being ground into sawdust to pad empty stomachs.¹ In his visit, dismissing talk of a famine to rival Bengal's, seven years earlier, as 'baseless', Munshi had repeated a call that he and other Indian bureaucrats and politicians had been repeating since independence. In order for India to avoid famine, Indians would need to transform their diets, eschewing the wheat and rice that kept the country wedded to the import of foreign grain. Women, Munshi noted, should take the lead on this front, observing one day a week as a cereal-less day, and helping their families wean themselves from an expensive diet subsidized by foreign exchange. Only then, Munshi held, would India be fed and free, and rid of the food controls loathed by most Indians.

Munshi's tone-deaf exhortation met a hostile reception. Hearing word of the familiar call for Indians to change their diets, a *Times of India* editorial sarcastically wondered if the starvation deaths in Bihar were the victims' 'own fault, because they refuse to change their food habits, [and refuse] to eat grass and leaves?' Was it right, the journalist

¹ 'Jute Leaf Days', *Times of India*, 29 July 1950. For a critical account of Munshi's visit, see Jayaprakash Narayan, *Jayaprakash Narayan: Selected Works, 1950-1954*, Bimal Prasad (ed.), vol. 6 (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2000), 39-40. A narrative of the beginning of the 1950-1951 shortage is Dennis Merrill, *Bread and the Ballot: The United States and India's Economic Development, 1947-1963* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 62. Munshi, a former lawyer at the Bombay High Court, made for an unlikely food minister. A social reformer with a religious predilection, Munshi was well known for his Gujarati novels and religious writings, as well as his founding of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, a nominally apolitical cultural organization with a Hindu nationalist bent. Munshi would later throw in his lot with the conservative Jana Sangh and Swatantra parties. On Munshi, see Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, 1925 to the 1990s: Strategies of Identity-Building, Implantation and Mobilisation (with Special Reference to Central India)* (London: Hurst & Co., 1996), 84-85; on his literary politics, see Shvetal Vyas Pare, 'Writing Fiction, Living History: Kanhaiyalal Munshi's Historical Trilogy', *Modern Asian Studies* 48, no. 3 (2014): 596-616.

wondered, ‘that the Biharis should die in this unpatriotic manner when their ears should be attuned to Ministerial sermons?’ The nation could learn much from Bihar, the author continued, by adopting Tuesday as a day for all Indians to have meals of jute leaves. These fasts in the name of economic self-reliance would ‘prepare the stomach for the remaining five cereal-less days of the week’. The satirical journal *Shankar’s Weekly*, a regular and withering critic of government food policy, ran a caricature of a smug K. M. Munshi surveying skeletal Biharis as they gnawed on trees, clutching a proclamation to ‘eat more vegetables’.²

In the years immediately following independence, India’s political leadership, assisted by civic organizations and a network of women’s groups, sought to transform what, how, and how much Indians ate. These campaigns, this article argues, embodied a broader post-colonial project to reimagine the terms of citizenship and development in a new nation facing enduring scarcity.

Drawing upon wartime antecedent, global ideologies of population and land management, and an ethos of austerity imbued with the power to actualize economic self-reliance, the new state urged its citizens to give up rice and wheat, whose imports sapped the nation of the foreign currency needed to forward a plan of industrial development. In place of these staples, India’s new citizens were asked to adopt ‘substitute’ and ‘subsidiary’ foods—including bananas, groundnuts, tapioca, yams, beets, and carrots—and give up a meal or more each week to conserve India’s scant reserve of grains. And as Indian planners awaited the possibility of more fundamental agricultural advance and agrarian reform, they looked to food technology and the promise of ‘artificial rice’ as a means of making up for India’s perennial food deficit. India’s women, as anchors of the household—and therefore, the nation—were tasked with facilitating these dietary transformations, and were saddled with the blame when these modernist projects failed.

Indians were being asked, through an appeal to their diets, to embrace notions of rights contingent upon the completion of duties, helping to actualize the economic self-reliance representing ‘real’, and

² ‘Quick Results! [Cartoon]’, *Shankar’s Weekly*, 6 August 1950. India’s Food Ministers were regular targets of K. Shankar Pillai’s ire: his magazine routinely portrayed Munshi’s predecessor, Jairamdas Daulatram as obese and patronizing, as in one cartoon wherein the food minister lectured a peasant to miss more meals until the latter wasted into a supplicating skeleton. ‘Bright Future [Cartoon]’, *Shankar’s Weekly*, 1 January 1950.

not merely formal, independence.³ India's nationalist leaders had ascended to power with the promise of sufficient food for the nation's citizens, yet the actualization of self-rule found those same leaders unable to deliver upon the promise of material well-being. Unable to marshal the resources needed to undertake fundamental agricultural reform—particularly prior to the first Five-Year Plan period—India's planners placed greater faith in their ability to exercise authority over certain aspects of Indian citizenship itself, tying the remaking of practices and sentiments to the reconstruction of a self-reliant national economy.

By 1951, as India's new Planning Commission came to exert greater authority over national development, the state began to retreat from this model: undertaking projects of land reform and agricultural improvement, India's leadership transferred a smaller share of the burden of national development onto its citizens, reanimating these schemes only at moments of acute scarcity. These schemes perennially antagonized opposition politicians, dissenting Congressmen, and citizens themselves, and by the advent of the 'new agricultural strategy' in the mid 1960s, the project of reengineering citizenship had been entirely eclipsed by schemes for technological advance. But for a key period immediately after independence, India's national leadership saw in changed diets and artificial foodstuffs the possibility of renegotiating the terms of post-colonial citizenship and development itself.

In recent years, historians and anthropologists have sought to situate the changing meanings of food and nutrition in modern South Asia, drawing upon foundational studies of Indian foodways, ecology, and religion.⁴ This work, in turn, led to a later series of investigations which identified the rise of nutrition as a governing heuristic for colonial administrators in between the two World Wars, giving a

³ On this framework, see Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 10–11.

⁴ See, for example, Arjun Appadurai, 'Gastro-Politics in Hindu South Asia', *American Ethnologist* 8, no. 3 (1 August 1981): 494–511; R. S. Khare, *Culture and Reality: Essays on the Hindu System of Managing Foods* (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1976); R. S. Khare, 'Hospitality, Charity, and Rationing: Three Channels of Food Distribution in India', in R. S. Khare and M. S. A. Rao (eds), *Food, Society, and Culture: Aspects in South Asian Food Systems* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1986), 277–96; R. S. Khare, *The Eternal Food: Gastronomic Ideas and Experiences of Hindus and Buddhists* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992); and Francis Zimmermann, *The Jungle and the Aroma of Meats: An Ecological Theme in Hindu Medicine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

new language for those administrators to address the interlinked concerns of population growth, health, labour, and food supply.⁵ An influential call to interrogate the formation and boundaries of Indian 'national cuisine' has seen a proliferation of studies of the transformation of cuisines and the cultural boundaries of food.⁶ Much of this work has centred around culinary transformations in Bengal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, demonstrating how the rise of nutrition and transformations to the region's food economy helped produce the Bengali Hindu middle class, facilitate *bhadralok* nationalism, and articulate cultural difference.⁷ A smaller proportion of this work has focused on North Indian regional contexts, looking to the rise of commensality in urban India, and examining how an inchoate public conversation about food in the Hindi public sphere underwrote the conceptualization of an idealized and Hindu nation.⁸ Most promising are those recent studies which have sought to demonstrate how the subjects of food, hunger, and nutrition underwrote conversations about welfare, political life, and national development.⁹ Broadly, this work has posited a basic continuity in the

⁵ David E. Ludden, 'The "Discovery" of Malnutrition and Diet in Colonial India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 31, no. 1 (1994): 1–26; Michael Worboys, 'The Discovery of Colonial Malnutrition between the Wars', in David Arnold (ed.), *Imperial Medicine and Indigenous Societies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 208–25.

⁶ Arjun Appadurai, 'How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30 (1988): 3–24.

⁷ Utsa Ray, 'Eating "Modernity": Changing Dietary Practices in Colonial Bengal', *Modern Asian Studies* 46, no. 3 (2012): 703–29; Utsa Ray, 'The Body and Its Purity: Dietary Politics in Colonial Bengal', *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 50, no. 4 (1 October 2013): 395–421; and Jayanta Sengupta, 'Nation on a Platter: The Culture and Politics of Food and Cuisine in Colonial Bengal', *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. Special Issue 1 (2010): 81–98. See also E. M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c. 1800–1947* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).

⁸ Benjamin Siegel, 'Learning to Eat in a Capital City: Constructing Public Eating Culture in Delhi', *Food, Culture and Society: An International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 13, no. 1 (2010): 71–90; Rachel Berger, 'Between Digestion and Desire: Genealogies of Food in Nationalist North India', *Modern Asian Studies* 47, no. 5 (2013): 1622–43.

⁹ Sunil S. Amrith, 'Food and Welfare in India, c. 1900–1950', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50 (2008): 1010–35; Taylor C. Sherman, 'From "Grow More Food" to "Miss a Meal": Hunger, Development and the Limits of Post-Colonial Nationalism in India, 1947–1957', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 36, no. 4 (December 2013): 571–88; Darren C. Zook, 'Famine in the Landscape: Imagining Hunger in South Asian History, 1860–1990', in Mahesh Rangarajan and K. Sivaramakrishnan (eds), *India's Environmental History: Colonialism, Modernity, and the Nation*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2012), 400–28.

terms of the food debate, from Indian economic thinkers' critiques of the colonial state and its neglect of human welfare in the late nineteenth century to the idioms of national development in the decades surrounding independence, and the debates over the 'right to food' in contemporary India.¹⁰

While affirming the many continuities in India's development discourses over time, this article posits a fundamental shift in paradigms of welfare and development in the years surrounding independence, as Indian nationalists assumed control of state institutions and retained the 'instruments', but not the 'idioms', of national development.¹¹ A recent treatment of food policy in these same years has identified a set of fundamental developmental tensions in independent India's food planning efforts; this article suggests that those tensions are best explained by the independent state's appeal to new paradigms of post-colonial citizenship.¹²

These paradigms, this article proposes, owed much to the promises made by Indian nationalists in the closing decades of colonial rule, and to the shift in developmental thinking which accompanied those same nationalists' assumption of power in 1946–1947. Saddled with the need to reconstruct India's economy, forward a plan of industrial development, and rid itself of the need for foreign imports, India's leadership proposed a vision of citizenship wherein rights derived from the completion of responsibilities, and wherein preferences were to be subsumed in the name of development.¹³ Jawaharlal Nehru captured this paradigm succinctly when he asserted that India's citizens would 'have to feel that they are partners in the great enterprise of running the State machine [...] sharers in

¹⁰ This work underscores what David Ludden has described as the consistent 'cognitive terrain' of developmentalist thought in India from British rule to the present day. David E. Ludden, 'India's Development Regime', in Nicholas Dirks (ed.), *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 247–87.

¹¹ Sugata Bose, 'Instruments and Idioms of Colonial and National Development', in Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard (eds), *International Development and the Social Sciences* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 52–53.

¹² Sherman, 'From "Grow More Food" to "Miss a Meal"'.
¹³ Sudipta Kaviraj contends that Nehru's India was characterized by a "pure statism", without a strong redistributive expectation. It was literally a poor people's version of the welfare state, which had too little revenue to provide them with normal everyday welfare, but came to their rescue in a desperate mitigation of crisis situations.' Sudipta Kaviraj, 'On the Enchantment of the State: Indian Thought on the Role of the State in the Narrative of Modernity', in K. Sivaramakrishnan and Akhil Gupta (eds), *The State in India after Liberalization: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* Routledge Contemporary South Asia Series 31 (London: Routledge, 2011), 36.

both the benefits and obligations'.¹⁴ Nehru, and the state's, implicit framework owed much to earlier contractualist models of citizenship, beginning with the colonial formulation of William Lee-Warner, and subsequently refined by jurists such as Srinivasa Sastri.¹⁵ It affirmed a communitarian reconfiguration of citizenship, wherein a citizen's rights exist dialectically alongside responsibilities to co-citizens, rejecting the libertarian notion of citizenship holding rights to exist without attached and inherent responsibilities.¹⁶ And its representatives frequently adopted a religious or ethical idiom, drawing from precepts like that in the Bhagavad-Gita which suggested the right to perform a duty, but rejected a right to the fruit of that action.¹⁷

The residents of independent India were indeed, as Srirupa Roy has argued, 'infantile citizens', in need of 'state tutelage and protection in order to realize the potentials of citizenship', and offered rights only conditionally by the new nation-state.¹⁸ Yet the category of

¹⁴ W. H. Morris-Jones, 'Shaping the Post-Imperial State: Nehru's Letters to Chief Ministers', in Michael Twaddle (ed.), *Imperialism and the State in the Third World: Essays in Honour of Professor Kenneth Robinson* (London: British Academic Press, 1992), 233.

¹⁵ Niraja Gopal Jayal, 'Pedagogies of Duty, Protestations of Rights', in *Citizenship and Its Discontents: An Indian History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013), 109–35. From a small body of Hindi literature on post-colonial citizenship, see Amba Datt Pant, *Bharatiya Savidhan Tatha Nagarikta [The Indian Constitution and Citizenship]* (Allahabad: Central Book Depot, 1959), particularly 97–117.

¹⁶ This formulation and the tension between the two models is found in Upendra Baxi, 'The Justice of Human Rights in Indian Constitutionalism', in V. R. Mehta and Thomas Pantham (eds), *Political Ideas in Modern India: Thematic Explorations* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006), 263–84. Baxi's second bibliographic note offers a comprehensive overview of the literature on rights and their genealogies in South Asia; of particular note is G. S. Sharma, *Essays in Indian Jurisprudence* (Lucknow: Eastern Book, 1964). For a related discussion, with references to these categories in a more formal, legal sense, see Marc Galanter, 'Introduction', in Rajeiv Dhavan (ed.), *Law and Society in Modern India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), xiii–c. On rights, citizenship, and labour, see Silas Webb, "'Pet Ke Waaste": Rights, Resistance and the East Indian Railway Strike, 1922', *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 51, no. 1 (1 January 2014): 71–94. A recent ethnographic account of how rights may be vernacularly mediated in the South Indian context is Ajantha Subramanian, *Shorelines: Space and Rights in South India* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009).

¹⁷ See Bhagavad-Gita 2:47–51. On post-colonial ethics and connections to religious imperatives of ordinariness and abnegation, see Leela Gandhi, *The Common Cause: Postcolonial Ethics and the Practice of Democracy, 1900–1955* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014). On the state's use of Gandhian conceptions of citizenship, see Ornit Shani, 'Gandhi, Citizenship and the Resilience of Indian Nationhood', *Citizenship Studies* 15, no. 6–7 (October 2011): 659–78.

¹⁸ Srirupa Roy, *Beyond Belief: India and the Politics of Postcolonial Nationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 20. Elsewhere, Dipesh Chakrabarty suggests that

citizenship itself in early independent India drew creatively upon pre-existing social and economic debates, and carried with it an increased appeal to ‘public service’, virtue, and the maintenance of national order.¹⁹ These appeals were increasingly linked to larger questions of national development.²⁰ And it was in the state’s campaigns for dietary transformation, this article argues, that the connections between the responsibilities of citizenship and the burden of national development were made most explicit.²¹

Global population, national planning, and wartime experimentation

India’s mid-century efforts to remake the national diet drew inspiration from a broad range of late-colonial antecedents, from the rise of population as a global and a colonial problem to the idioms of nationalist planning and wartime experiments in food policy.

this qualified package of rights was situated within a broader, ‘pedagogical’ idiom of post-colonial politics. Leaders of Asian and African countries broadly ‘thought of their peasants and workers simultaneously as people who were already full citizens—in that they had the associated rights—but also as people who were not quite full citizens in that they needed to be educated in the habits and manners of citizens’. Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘The Legacies of Bandung: Decolonization and the Politics of Culture’, in Christopher Lee (ed.), *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2010), 53–54.

¹⁹ See Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘“In the Name of Politics”: Democracy and the Power of the Multitude in India’, *Public Culture* 19, no. 1 (2007): 35–57; William Gould, ‘From Subjects to Citizens? Rationing, Refugees and the Publicity of Corruption over Independence in UP’, *Modern Asian Studies* 45, no. Special Issue 1 (2011): 33–56; Eleanor Newbigin, ‘Personal Law and Citizenship in India’s Transition to Independence’, *Modern Asian Studies* 45, no. Special Issue 1 (2011): 32. On the complex genealogy of post-colonial citizenship, see also Joya Chatterji, ‘South Asian Histories of Citizenship, 1946–1970’, *The Historical Journal* 55, no. 4 (2012): 1049–71.

²⁰ ‘Particularly in the years 1946 to 1956,’ Stuart Corbridge argues, ‘the war on poverty in India was conceived in terms that proposed a close link between the remaking of India and the making of modern citizens.’ Stuart Corbridge, *Seeing the State: Governance and Governmentality in India* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 52. Anand Pandian suggests that rural citizens, in particular, have since independence been identified as ‘subjects of development, [who] must submit themselves to an order of power identifying their own nature as a problem’. Anand Pandian, ‘Devoted to Development: Moral Progress, Ethical Work, and Divine Favor in South India’, *Anthropological Theory* 8, no. 2 (1 June 2008): 159.

²¹ This argument draws inspiration from the essays in C. J. Fuller and Véronique Bénéï, *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India* (London: Hurst & Co., 2001).

In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, Indian economic thinkers transformed India's pervasive hunger from a Malthusian inevitability into a trenchant critique of colonial rule.²² Yet as famine and hunger emerged as political concerns—threatening colonial administrators not only with death and disease, but with shocks to labour and revenue collection—these administrators began to abstract the idea of India's 'population' as a problem of governance.²³ These developments dovetailed with a broader, global perception of the world's population and its anticipated 'overpopulation': in the first decades of the twentieth century, experts across the world began to interlink the planetary problems of 'land, migration, territory, soil, density, emptiness, arability, colonization, and settlement'.²⁴ In

²² Sugata Bose, 'Pondering Poverty, Fighting Famines: Towards a New History of Economic Ideas', in Kaushik Basu and Ravi Kanbur (eds), *Arguments for a Better World: Essays in Honor of Amartya Sen*, vol. II: Society, Institutions, and Development (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 425–35. On colonial famine policy and vernacular visions of dearth and hunger, see Ravi Ahuja, 'State Formation and "Famine Policy" in Early Colonial South India', *Indian Economic Social History Review* 39, no. 4 (2002): 351–80; S. Ambirajan, 'Malthusian Population Theory and Indian Famine Policy in the Nineteenth Century', *Population Studies* 30, no. 1 (1976): 5–14; David Hall-Matthews, 'Colonial Ideologies of the Market and Famine Policy in Ahmednagar District, Bombay Presidency, c. 1870–1884', *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 36 (1999); and David Hardiman, *Feeding the Baniya: Peasants and Usurers in Western India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996).

²³ Questions of population growth and 'overpopulation' were never fully removed from questions of national food planning. The interlinked nature of these two problems was perceived acutely by Indian economic thinkers in the 1930s, as evidenced in Gyan Chand, *India's Teeming Millions: A Contribution to the Study of the Indian Population Problem* (London: G. Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1939); D. G. Karve, *Poverty and Population in India* (London: H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1936); Bhalchandra Trimbak Ranadive and C. N. Vakil, *Population Problem of India*, Studies in Indian Economics 4 (Calcutta: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1930); and P. K. Wattal, *Population Problem in India* (Bombay: Bennet Coleman, 1934). Independence would see a proliferation of publications tying the two problems together in a national context, particularly in the writing of the Indian demographer Sripati Chandrasekhar. See Shri Omprakash, *Hamari Khurak Aur Aabadi Ki Samasya [Our Food and Population Problem]* (Delhi: Rajkamal Publications Ltd., 1947); Baljit Singh, *Population and Food Planning in India* (Bombay: Hind Kitabs, 1947); S. Chandrasekhar, *Hungry People and Empty Lands: An Essay on Population Problems and International Tensions* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1954).

²⁴ Alison Bashford, 'Nation, Empire, Globe: The Spaces of Population Debate in the Interwar Years', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, no. 1 (1 January 2007): 173–74. Bashford has, in a major recent intervention, interrogated the paradigm of 'global population' through the international and interdisciplinary Anglophone experts who first met in and around the 1927 World Population Conference, among them Radhakamal Mukerjee and John Boyd-Orr, discussed below. Alison Bashford, *Global Population: History, Geopolitics, and Life on Earth* (New York: Columbia

the colonial context, the questions of land, populations, and their diets, health, and productive capacity for labour grew increasingly interconnected, frequently through the new scientific language of nutrition.²⁵ In India, these concerns began to take institutional form in the 1920s: the founding of the Nutrition Research Laboratories in Coonoor, and the subsequent publication of India's first nutrition textbooks, demonstrated how the legitimacy of colonial sovereignty had grown sutured to the improvement of lands and human health. And studies like American anthropologist and missionary Charlotte Viall Wiser's influential five-year survey of food habits in a United Provinces village suggested how Indians' putatively fixed habits—a colonial bogey since at least the turn of the twentieth century—might be rebuilt along scientific lines.²⁶

Indian nationalist planners, by the 1930s, had begun to conceptualize an increasingly bounded Indian economy, proposing the need for 'national food planning' in the name of self-sufficiency.²⁷ As Indians increasingly began to perceive the nation as a body whose national development would be predicated upon 'morally and physically healthy citizens', they looked to the promise of 'reconstruction' to restore that body to health.²⁸ Reconstruction would

University Press, 2014). Elsewhere, Samantha Iyer has suggested that colonial ideas of population forged in this period served as the foundation for later Cold War development theories. Samantha Iyer, 'Colonial Population and the Idea of Development', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55, no. 1 (2013): 65–91.

²⁵ Ludden, 'The "Discovery" of Malnutrition'; Worboys, 'The Discovery of Colonial Malnutrition between the Wars'.

²⁶ 'Note on the Work of the Nutrition Research Laboratories, Coonoor', 1940, Mysore Residency—Mysore Residency Bangalore—598-D, 1940, National Archives of India; Robert McCarrison, *Food: A Primer for Use in Schools, Colleges, Welfare Centres, Boy Scout and Girl Guide Organizations, Etc., in India* (Madras: Macmillan, 1928); Charlotte Viall Wiser, *The Foods of a Hindu Village of North India*, Bureau of Statistics and Economic Research, United Provinces 2 (Allahabad: Superintendent, Printing and Stationery, United Provinces, 1937), 115–16. The 'unchangeable' character of Indian diets fuelled at least one colonial fiction in the form of Rudyard Kipling's 1896 short story 'William the Conqueror', wherein a sympathetic but misguided administrator from the Punjab sends wheat and millet to famine-stricken, rice-eating Madras. Disaster is averted when an enterprising engineer feeds the grain to goats to give milk to starving children, instead.

²⁷ Sunil Amrith and Patricia Clavin, 'Feeding the World: Connecting Europe and Asia, 1930–1945', *Past & Present* 218, no. suppl. 8 (2013): 38.

²⁸ Benjamin Zachariah, 'Uses of Scientific Argument: The Case of "Development" in India, c. 1930–1950', *Economic and Political Weekly* 36, no. 39 (2001): 3689–3702. The project of reconstruction as a palliative to India's economic stagnation had been clearly articulated as early as 1920, with the publication of engineer Mokshagundam Visvesvaraya's *Reconstructing India*; fourteen years later, his *Planned Economy for India*

not only plan for food production to meet India’s growing needs, but would repair the structural defects of India’s food economy: beyond problems of production, the nation’s food stores were further lessened by a deficient transportation system and poor storage facilities which condemned supplies to rot and consumption by rodents and insects. Gandhian thinkers further decried the waste of industrial food practices, from the milling of rice to the manufacture of *vanaspati* [vegetable oil]—but they and modernist planners alike agreed that nearly 10 per cent of India’s food was wasted annually.²⁹ The imperatives of national food planning were most powerfully expressed by Radhakamal Mukerjee, the Lucknow-based polymath who tied together the concerns of population, land use, and food planning in a series of influential publications in the 1930s and early 1940s, most notably his 1938 *Food Planning for Four Hundred Millions*.³⁰ Among his proposals was a forceful call to promote ‘a mixed diet based on several staples’ in place of rice and wheat, promoting beans, pulses, and edible roots as salutary for national health, and invaluable ‘insurance against the shortage of staples’.³¹

India’s nationalist planners and their incipient institutions began to echo the call for a transformed diet: in 1935, the nationalist

forwarded a plan for increasing the productivity of Indian agriculture. Mokshagundam Visvesvaraya, *Reconstructing India* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1920); Mokshagundam Visvesvaraya, *Planned Economy for India* (Bangalore: Bangalore Press, 1934).

²⁹ Joseph Cornelius Kumarappa, *Our Food Problem* (Wardah: All-India Village Industries Association, 1949), 3–4; M. R. Masani, *Your Food, a Study of the Problem of Food and Nutrition in India* (Bombay: Padma Publications for Tata Sons Ltd., 1944), 66; Singh, *Population and Food Planning in India*, 85–88. On rice milling, see David Arnold, ‘Technology and Well-Being’, in *Everyday Technology: Machines and the Making of India’s Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 121–47. The question of waste would endure through the Green Revolution to the present day: advertisements for metal boxes in the late 1960s would tout India’s waste as the structural defect necessitating the ‘necessary evil’ of rationing, while later advocates of foreign direct investment in food continue to use waste and inefficiency to legitimize their investment proposals. Metal Box, ‘Necessary Evil? [Advertisement]’, *Eastern Economist*, 7 January 1966; Amy J. Cohen, ‘Supermarkets in India: Struggles over the Organization of Agricultural Markets and Food Supply Chains’, *University of Miami Law Review* 68 (2013): 19–323.

³⁰ Radhakamal Mukerjee, *Food Planning for Four Hundred Millions* (London: Macmillan, 1938). A complex discussion of Mukerjee’s thought and career is in Bashford, *Global Population*, *passim*.

³¹ Radhakamal Mukerjee, *The Food Supply*, Oxford Pamphlets on Indian Affairs 8 (London: Oxford University Press, 1942). See also Mukerjee’s later discussion of the use of ‘inferior food grains’ with reference to population pressures in Radhakamal Mukerjee, *Race, Lands, and Food: A Program for World Subsistence* (New York: Dryden Press, 1946), 52–53.

physicist Meghnad Saha began underwriting, through the National Institute of Science, the publication of *Science and Culture*, a journal which emerged as the primary vehicle for debates over the future course of national reconstruction.³² In an early issue, Subhas Chandra Bose submitted to the journal a list of key questions about national planning, asking whether it would be desirable to plan a national diet for India.³³ The question of a 'standard diet' did not presuppose the flattening of culture in the name of national unity, but it did animate discussions over systematic agricultural planning with India's food needs in mind. When the Congress Working Committee, headed by Jawaharlal Nehru, met that same year to formalize a plan of national reconstruction, it recommended that such planning be coordinated with the new Central Nutrition Board.³⁴ Yet Congress's planning agenda was interrupted in 1939, when Britain's declaration of war against Germany on behalf of India led to the party's mass resignation from its provincial ministries.

The experience of the Bengal Famine of 1943 underscored the fundamental insecurity of diets deriving their weight from cereal staples, and the need to fashion a national diet more resilient to inevitable disruptions. In the wake of famine, India's colonial

³² A discussion of Saha's influence on India's nationalist leadership and its embrace of planning, see Deepak Kumar, 'Reconstructing India: Disunity in the Science and Technology for Development Discourse, 1900–1947', *Osiris* 15 (1 January 2000): 241–57; on Saha's later critique of the use of science in independent India, see Abha Sur, 'Scientism and Social Justice: Meghnad Saha's Critique of the State of Science in India', *Historical Studies in the Physical and Biological Sciences* 33, no. 1 (2002): 87–105.

³³ Subhas Chandra Bose, 'Some Problems of Nation-Building', *Science and Culture* 1, no. 5 (October 1935): 258. *Science and Culture* explored the potentialities of such a transformation in its pages, delivering a broadly affirmative response at a Science News Association meeting in August 1938. 'Improvement of National Diet', *Science and Culture* 2, no. 2 (August 1936): 95–96; D. Dutta Majumder, 'Subhas Chandra and National Planning', *Janata: A Journal of Democratic Socialism* 47, no. 2 (23 February 1992): 11–17. On Bose's political ideology more broadly, see C. A. Bayly, 'Subhas Chandra Bose and "World Forces"', in *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 325–29.

³⁴ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Report of the National Planning Committee, 1938* (New Delhi: Indian Institute of Applied Political Research, 1988), 154. An incisive assessment of Nehru's experience with the Congress Planning Commission is Bidyut Chakrabarty, 'Jawaharlal Nehru and Planning, 1938–41: India at the Crossroads', *Modern Asian Studies* 26, no. 2 (1992), 275–87. Two influential interpretations are Bose, 'Instruments and Idioms of Colonial and National Development'; and Partha Chatterjee, 'The National State', in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 200–19. On the Central Nutrition Board, see Jyoti Bhusan Das Gupta, *Science, Technology, Imperialism, and War* (New Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2007), 140.

administrators relinquished moral authority over the food question, leaving nationalists with a potent claim to legitimacy. Yet those nationalists would take many cues from the colonial government's embrace of austerity, and a new set of economic paradigms linking individual behaviour to national outcomes. In the face of nationalist ferment, the British government relied increasingly upon the putatively neutral idioms of economics to express wartime imperatives.³⁵ And it was under the auspices of the permanent economic adviser to the Government of India, Sir Theodore Gregory, that the transformation of individual consumption was formally sutured to the promise of national strength. Gregory, a confidant of John Maynard Keynes, had served in this position since 1938, exerting a heavy influence over India's wartime economic planning.³⁶ His 1941 treatise, 'Problem of Personal Economy in War-Time', posited an intensified connection between individual behaviour and macroeconomic outcomes during wartime: even if India's scarcity conditions allowed for only minimal reduction of consumption, Gregory asserted, guidance, exhortation, and 'sumptuary legislation' were well suited to Indian economic and cultural contexts.³⁷ Gregory's oversight of many food committees suggests his influence on later state projects. As chair of the 1943 Foodgrains Policy Committee, Gregory moderated a dispute between Debi Prasad Khaitan, a Calcutta jute merchant representing the Indian Chamber of Commerce, and W. H. Kirby, rationing advisor to the Government of India.³⁸ To Khaitan's

³⁵ Benjamin Zachariah, *Developing India: An Intellectual and Social History, c. 1930–50* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 97.

³⁶ Gregory would leave India briefly in 1944 to help plan the Bretton Woods Conference; in 1946, he left India to serve in the same position in Greece. In 1960, Gregory would return to India at the invitation of the Associated Chambers of Commerce to deliver a critical assessment of India's third Five-Year Plan. Theodore Gregory, *India on the Eve of the Third Five-Year Plan* (Calcutta: Thacker Spink, 1961).

³⁷ Theodore Gregory, 'Problems of Personal Economy in War Time', 13 February 1941, MSS Eur D1163, British Library.

³⁸ 'Strictly Confidential—Foodgrains Policy Committee (Item 40), 30th Session, 10:30 AM to 1 PM, on 26 July 1943 Evidence of Mr. W.H. Kirby, Rationing Adviser to the Government of India, on Rationing. Chairman, Sir Theodore Gregory, D.Sc.', 26 July 1943, IOR/L/E/8/7236, British Library. Kirby, a grain merchant, had spent five years in Karachi between 1919 and 1924 as a merchant, before leaving India for Rhodesia and South Africa, where he had worked as a representative of the Swiss grain company Louis Dreyfus & Co. When war broke out, Kirby had been on leave in London, and became a deputy assistant to Britain's wartime rationing efforts, from where he had arrived in India. On Khaitan, see Joya Chatterji, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932–47* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 137.

suggestion that, in the new Calcutta rationing programme, individuals be granted some mechanism for choosing their preferred grain, Kirby and Gregory affirmed the notion that choice should be 'entirely subsidiary' to 'keeping the people off the starvation point'. The notion that preference should be subsumed to national ends would grow increasingly important as nationalist food planners took control of policy-making bodies.

Wartime events would bring this notion to new prominence in the Food Department. The fall of Burma in 1942 prompted a memorandum within the department suggesting that the public should be encouraged to replace rice with other grains, since a preponderance of India's rice stores were alleged to come from Burmese imports.³⁹ By early 1944, Delhi's Lady Irwin College, the premier institution of home economics in India, had been tasked with planning wheat and *kambu* [pearl millet] dishes for South India's 'habitual rice-eaters'; in Hyderabad, a thousand people were reported to have attended a cooking demonstration at the War Services Exhibition.⁴⁰ The import of Australian wheat in September led the Madras government to add wheat in place of some of its rice ration, with a 'wheat propaganda officer' appointed to help popularize its use. And along the Malabar coast, 93 public and private 'Civic Restaurants' were set up to showcase new recipes. Yet the alleged beneficiaries of these schemes chafed at the notion that their diets were composed of interchangeable calories. Bombay's nationalist *Free Press Journal* decried its citizens 'being made to swallow barley' in place of regular grains.⁴¹ 'Who are the people whose food is barley,' it grouched, 'and for whose benefit was this barley ordered?' Rationing officers had looked favourably upon the deployment of wheat and

³⁹ 'Fixation of Age Limit for Children for Proposal of Control on Food Grains and Rationing on the Recommendation of the Central Food Advisory Council', July 1944, Food—Policy—R-1008/39/1944, National Archives of India. The memorandum was predicated upon the assumption that India was largely dependent on the import of Burmese rice, a popular assertion that was nonetheless ungrounded in reality; at the time of the famine, Bengal imported a small proportion of coarse Burma rice while exporting higher-quality grains.

⁴⁰ 'Food Situation in India: General Circulars Issued by the Food Department', 1944, External Affairs—War Progs., Nos. 59(49)-W, 1944 Secret, National Archives of India.

⁴¹ 'In Defence of the Wild Grass-Seed', *Free Press Journal*, 7 January 1944, IOR/L/1/1103, British Library. The continuing effort to foist barley upon Bombay's rice-eaters was a source of enduring frustration; see 'Barley Again for Bombay?', *Bombay Chronicle*, 22 January 1947.

tapioca in India's South.⁴² But in Cochin, famine relief workers with experience in distribution noted that tapioca could only be deployed in dire emergencies to pad 'those parts of the stomach which the ration is not enough to fill'.⁴³

Indians' putatively unchangeable dietary preferences—particularly those of rice-eaters—were occasionally used to exculpate colonial officials for its late colonial failings. Beverley Nichols's *Verdict on India*, a popular apology for British rule in India, recounted a train ride spent with an Indian officer in the Food Administration in the wake of the 1943 famine. 'Food', Nichols recounted the officer declaring, in an exoneration of British famine policy 'means [rice], and nothing else. It doesn't mean meat, nor fish nor eggs nor potatoes; it doesn't mean corn, nor millet, nor even *bajri* [pearl millet] which bears many resemblances to rice. [...] If you gave [Bengalis] anything else, most of them wouldn't know what to do with it.'⁴⁴ Yet in the final years of colonial rule, the Department of Food increasingly touted the possibility of Indian dietary reform. In late 1944, W. R. Aykroyd—the influential nutritionist and director of the government's Nutrition Research Laboratories in Coonoor since 1935—noted that wartime efforts had 'shown that it is possible to exercise a considerable degree of control over the diet of the people', and that popular canteens staffed by women might be useful in promoting 'socially inferior' grains in peacetime.⁴⁵ Ground-level administrators debated the quantity of millets, maize, or other grains which could be substituted in rations

⁴² Aubrey Dibdin, 'Diary of a Tour of Inspection of Food Supplies and Rationing in India by Aubrey Dibdin, India Office 1920-45', 1945, MSS Eur D907, British Library.

⁴³ K. G. Sivaswamy, J. Ananta Bhat, and Tadepally Shankara Shastry, *Famine, Rationing and Food Policy in Cochin* (Royapettah, Madras: Servindia Kerala Relief Centre, 1946).

⁴⁴ Beverley Nichols, *Verdict on India* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1944), 203.

⁴⁵ W. R. Aykroyd, *Notes on Food and Nutrition Policy in India* (New Delhi: Manager of Publications, Government of India Press, 1944). On Aykroyd's career in India, see Kenneth J. Carpenter, 'The Work of Wallace Aykroyd: International Nutritionist and Author', *The Journal of Nutrition* 137, no. 4 (1 April 2007): 873-78. Among Aykroyd's younger colleagues in Coonoor was M. Swaminathan, widely seen as the progenitor of the Green Revolution in India. W. H. Kirby, too, noted that wartime rationing had 'proved a ready and good medium for popularising the use of unfamiliar foodgrains, [providing] alternative food in place of the foods in acute short supply'. Bureau of Public Information, Government of India, 'Necessity for Food Control Measures: Rationing Adviser on Benefits of Food Rationing', 5 October 1945, IOR/L/E/8/7236, British Library.

before courting public disaffection.⁴⁶ But so, too, did they follow the example of the Madras Food Department, which in early 1946 appointed a permanent public relations officer charged with a press, radio, poster, pamphlet, and cinema campaign designed to explain rationing and austerity schemes, and to popularize unfamiliar foods in the hungry south.⁴⁷ These eleventh-hour campaigns hinted at the more ambitious reengineering of citizenship and diets in tandem that India's nationalist leadership would soon attempt.

Independence, national reconstruction, and the food question

The post-war ascension of the Indian National Congress to power saw a fundamental transformation to the orientation of development planning. The nationalist leadership, prior to the war, had 'intended to accomplish what they had critiqued the colonial state for not being able to do, i.e., to bring about the benefits of material progress through scientific means to be shared equitably among all citizens'.⁴⁸ Yet its post-war assumption of centralized state power saw the Congress '[lose] sight of the vision of eradicating poverty, morbidity, and illiteracy that had inspired the debates on national development in the colonial era': the 'instruments' of national development came to enjoy primacy over its 'idioms', drawing greater inspiration from colonial bodies like the Department of Planning and Development rather than Congress's National Planning Committee.⁴⁹

Famine in Bengal and enduring post-war shortages had underscored the calls for a transformed national diet: the National Planning Committee, meeting in 1945 and 1946, affirmed that wartime experiences had 'woken up Government to its wider sphere of duty: [meeting] the food requirements of the people'.⁵⁰ Another

⁴⁶ 'Inclusion of Millets, Gram and Maize in the Cereal Group Rations: H.M.'s Meeting with Bombay Food Advisory Council', 1 March 1946, Food—Rationing—RP-1000/62/1946, National Archives of India.

⁴⁷ H. K. Matthews, 'Letter to F.W. Brock', 12 April 1946, IOR/L/I/11104, British Library.

⁴⁸ Medha Kudaisya, "A Mighty Adventure": Institutionalising the Idea of Planning in Post-colonial India, 1947–60, *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no. 4 (October 2008): 940.

⁴⁹ Bose, 'Instruments and Idioms of Colonial and National Development', 52–53.

⁵⁰ Col. S. S. Sokhey, 'Planning for a New India: Food of the People', in K. T. Shah (ed.), *Report of the Sub-Committee on National Health*, National Planning Committee Series (Bombay: Vora & Co., 1948), 135–39. From a voluminous literature on the Bengal Famine, see Paul R. Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal: The Famine of*

sub-committee on national priorities, chaired by Jawaharlal Nehru, affirmed that in 'any well-conceived plan of national Development, the provision of adequate food must be the most important item with the highest priority'.⁵¹ As world food prices soared, provincial rations were slashed, and India's representatives petitioned for an increased allotment of grains at the Combined Food Board in Washington DC, the formation of India's interim government in September 1946 saw control of India's food policy shift into the hands of veteran Congressman Rajendra Prasad, designated minister of Food and Agriculture.⁵² Yet as the incipient government forwarded the imperatives of economic self-reliance, shifting the object of development from human welfare to national autarky, it looked increasingly to citizens themselves to undertake the burden of that task.⁵³

As nutritionists and economists continued to draft plans for the reconstruction of India's food economy and national diet, customers voiced resentment at the substitutes for wheat and rice which continued to appear in their rations.⁵⁴ India's Bureau of Public Administration, recognizing 'the difficulty of persuading the people to consume [coarse] grains such as maize and barley', suggested that shops appeal to consumers' sense of national sacrifice when distributing them.⁵⁵ The Congress leadership increasingly framed the

1943-1944 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Iftexhar Iqbal, 'Between Food Availability Decline and Entitlement Exchange: An Ecological Prehistory of the Bengal Famine of 1943', in *The Bengal Delta Ecology: State and Social Change, 1840-1943* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 160-93; and Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

⁵¹ K. T. Shah, *National Planning Committee: Priorities in Planning (Food, Education, Housing)* (Bombay: Vora & Co., 1946).

⁵² It is unclear why Prasad was given control of this particular ministry; Prasad's autobiography and his collected works reveal little previous interest in the subject. In the former, Prasad recalls a more involved role in the food conservation campaigns of the era than the historical record suggests, referencing 'my appeal to consume less cereals and to save food grains by missing one meal a day', and gives no hint as to the influence of other nationalist thinkers. Rajendra Prasad, *Autobiography* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2010), 570-72.

⁵³ The influential economist and planner Ashok Mehta would recall that India's leadership embraced self-reliance 'because, in our view, it was the most rational course', given that India was seen as having no inherent deficit of natural or human resources. Sanjaya Baru, 'Self-Reliance to Dependence in Indian Economic Development', *Social Scientist* 11, no. 11 (1 November 1983): 36.

⁵⁴ Gopal Chandra Pattanayak, *Planned Diet for India* (Allahabad: Kitabistan, 1946).

⁵⁵ Government of India, 'Draft Reply', 9 December 1946, IOR/L/E/8/7236, British Library.

food crisis as a matter best solved through individual or household-level action, affirming in a December 1945 meeting that ‘everyone should realize his personal duty [regarding food] and perform it to the best of his ability, believing that if everyone acted likewise India will be able to surmount all difficulties with courage and confidence and be able to save thousands of poor lives’.⁵⁶ A Congress Working Committee meeting in March 1946 contended that the responsibility for conserving scarce foodstuffs fell at the level of the household.⁵⁷

Simultaneously, Indian scientists were envisioning new technologies by which individuals and households might actualize their duty to conserve. Addressing the 1946 Indian Science Congress in Bangalore, the agricultural scientist M. Afzal Husain called for the establishment of a ‘National Institute of Food Technology’ to incubate synthetic foodstuffs: beyond promoting the consumption of yeasts, tapioca, and tubers, reducing cereal consumption and freeing land for valuable cash crops, the institute would promote ‘synthetic rice’ to free India from the ravages of Malthusian logic.⁵⁸ Later in the year, the chair of the Indian Institute of Science’s biotechnology department, V. Subrahmanyam, wrote to the Ministry of Food to propose that a new Food Conservation Board include in its mandate the promotion of ‘less commonly used food materials’ like groundnuts, soybeans, sweet potato, and tapioca, which had been given new priority in planning.⁵⁹ A year later, the scientist would publish an extensive article in *Science and Culture* outlining his plan for an organization in New Delhi that would undertake this task.⁶⁰ The journal’s editors responded approvingly, contending that ‘that which appears to be a strange method of getting food today may become the usual method tomorrow’.⁶¹

⁵⁶ A. M. Zaidi and S. G. Zaidi (eds), ‘Congress Working Committee, Bombay, 12–15 March 1946’, in *The Encyclopaedia of Indian National Congress, vol. 12: A Fight to the Finish* (New Delhi: S. Chand/Indian Institute of Applied Political Research, 1981), 495–96.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ M. Afzal Husain, ‘Food Problem of India (1946, Bangalore)’, in K. Kasturirangan (ed.), *The Shaping of Indian Science: 1914–1947* (Hyderabad: Universities Press, 2003), 548–71.

⁵⁹ ‘Correspondence with Prof. Subramanian re: Formation of Food Conversation Board at the Centre’, 1946, Mysore Residency—Mysore Residency Bangalore—25(8)-W, 1946, National Archives of India.

⁶⁰ V. Subrahmanyam, ‘A Practical Approach to the Food Problem in India’, *Science and Culture* 13, no. 6 (December 1947): 213–18.

⁶¹ ‘Food’, *Science and Culture* 13, no. 6 (December 1947): 211–13.

The arrival of independence in August 1947 saw India's citizens looking expectantly to the state to make good on its promise of sustenance. The depth of India's food crisis had grown even more pronounced by partition: the bulk of British India's arable land was now across the border, in Pakistan. The refugees who streamed into camps in West Bengal needed massive quantities of foodgrains, and those who arrived in cities strained India's already-overburdened rationing system.⁶² Beyond its immediate human toll, communal violence also frequently saw the looting and burning of urban grain stores.⁶³ Days after independence, the new nation's Department of Information and Broadcasting asked press members to help stave off food riots, warning that 'India's political freedom must not be allowed to prove illusory by a complete collapse on her food front.'⁶⁴ 'Until now,' the author of a Hindi booklet, *Our Food Problem*, wrote a few months before independence, 'we have blamed the British for the food problem. But now, as they prepare to depart, we are confident that our own, people-loving government will reach out to farmers, increase our national production, and increase the prosperity of the people through the proper distribution of food.'⁶⁵ A Congress organizer, introducing the book *Our Food and Population Problem*, affirmed that same nationalist promise a few months later. 'If a country cannot give its citizens the right food,' he asked, 'and enough of it, are not its economic arrangements useless?'⁶⁶

Indian industrialists, eager to free the Indian economy from imports and increase its citizens' purchasing power, asserted a

⁶² Two contemporary accounts of the difficulties of feeding and clothing of refugees are Press Information Bureau, Government of India, 'Political Freedom and Battle Against Hunger/Planned Withdrawal from Controls/Difficulties of Transition Period', 15 August 1948, IOR/L/E/8/7230, British Library; and *Millions on the Move: The Aftermath of Partition* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1949). On rapid urbanization in the wake of partition, see Viswambhar Nath, *Urbanization, Urban Development, and Metropolitan Cities in India* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2007), 3 and passim.

⁶³ Writing in June 1947, the *Eastern Economist* warned that the wanton destruction wrought on grain stores by 'communal fanatics' was even greater than the losses incurred by insects and rodents, urging the Central Government to secure markets, lest 'starvation deaths [put] the casualty list of riots into shade'. 'Food Wastages', *Eastern Economist*, 6 June 1947, 996.

⁶⁴ Department of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 'Guidance for Food Publicity', 8 August 1947, IOR/L/I/1/1104, British Library.

⁶⁵ Jagdish Chandra Jain, *Hamari roti ki samasya [Our Food Problem]* (Bombay: National Information and Publications Limited, 1947), 44.

⁶⁶ Omprakash, *Hamari Khurak Aur Aabadi Ki Samasya [Our Food and Population Problem]*, 3.

distinct influence over the nation's economic arrangements. Two of the authors of the 'Bombay Plan', the textile magnate Lala Shri Ram and industrialist Purshottamdas Thakurdas, quickly assumed control of two major food planning bodies.⁶⁷ Shri Ram, who would soon be placed in charge of the subsidiary food campaign, reached out to representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture's 'Grow More Food Campaign' in June 1947.⁶⁸ Predicting the agricultural losses of partition, Shri Ram encouraged the Ministry to promote the production of potatoes, yams, beets, carrots, and tapioca. The Indian consumer should 'turn to maize, bananas, and date palms, and above all, grow food in every free area of land. [Not] doing so should be considered an unpatriotic act.' Rajendra Prasad soon appointed a Foodgrains Policy Committee with Thakurdas as its chair. Thakurdas—who had previously chaired Bombay's Provincial Food and Commodity Advisory Board and the Central Foodgrains Policy Committee of 1943—echoed Shri Ram in recommending the inclusion of subsidiary foods in rations to lessen the demand for cereals.⁶⁹

The recommendation of these industrialists prompted loud objections. Bombay's supply commissioner wrote to the Committee to protest, noting that 'bananas, sweet potatoes, carrots, turnips are *supplementary* and not *substitute* foods'.⁷⁰ P. C. Joshi, general secretary of the Communist Party of India, lambasted the 'reactionary recommendations of the [committee] dominated by representatives of Big Business and rich growers', which had eschewed discussion of agrarian reform.⁷¹ Yet objections like these were soon drowned out by state representatives who increasingly linked the question of diet to citizens' responsibility for national unity and development. In March

⁶⁷ On the Bombay Plan, see Purshotamdas Thakurdas et al., *A Plan of Economic Development for India* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1944); and Vivek Chibber, *Locked in Place: State-Building and Capitalist Industrialization in India, 1940–1970* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 85–109.

⁶⁸ 'Note by Sir Shri Ram Containing Suggestions for Meeting the Food Shortage in India', 1947, Agriculture—G.M.F.—8–152/47—G.M.F., National Archives of India.

⁶⁹ Purshotamdas Thakurdas, *Final Report, Foodgrains Policy Committee, 1947* (Delhi: Manager of Publications, Government of India Press, 1948). Thakurdas and Shri Ram's enthusiasm for these plans might be seen in light of the Bombay Plan's emphasis on increasing Indians' purchasing power rather than boosting agricultural production itself.

⁷⁰ V. S. Patvardhan, *Food Control in Bombay Province, 1939–1949* (Poona: D.R. Gadgil, 1958), 128.

⁷¹ Letter from P. C. Joshi to Rajendra Prasad, 25 October 1947, reprinted in Communist Party of India, *India's Food Crisis, Analysis and Solution: Memo of the CPI to the Government of the Indian Union* (Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1947).

1947, Rajendra Prasad presided over a 'Food and Nutrition Exhibition' in Delhi, showcasing alternatives to wheat and rice through lectures, films, and cooking demonstrations to female guests.⁷² In December 1948, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting requested media outlets to join the campaign for changed diets, appealing 'to the upper class people to avoid and discourage all activities involving waste of food, and to urge on them the need for a minimum use of cereals in their diet, [enabling] the less rich classes to get more cereals'.⁷³

In the months after independence, Nehru and the Congress's left-leaning modernizers' national food planning schemes were assailed by Mohandas Gandhi, who, with the support of influential businessmen, successfully campaigned against food controls.⁷⁴ Yet Gandhians and modernists found common ground in asking citizens to steward the project of self-sufficiency in food. Decrying the 'centralisation of foodstuffs' in an October 1947 prayer meeting, Gandhi asked citizens to grow food at home and undertake regular fasts. 'If the whole nation realized the beauty of [religious] partial self-denial,' he contended, 'India would more than cover the deficit caused by the voluntary deprivation of foreign aid . . . If many must die of starvation, let us at least earn the credit of having done our best in the way of self-help, which ennobles a nation.'⁷⁵

Votaries of a village-centred model of India's economic reconstruction would lose out to the modernizing vision of the Nehruvian state. But on the food front, Jawaharlal Nehru and other bureaucrats would frequently use the Gandhian language of self-reliance, denial, and cooperation to express the imperatives of state-driven development.⁷⁶ As prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru's endorsement was materially and symbolically essential in the campaign for Indians

⁷² 'Food and Nutrition Exhibitions', 1947, Home—Public—157/47, National Archives of India.

⁷³ Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 'Directive on Food Publicity', 9 December 1948, Home—Public—51/469/48-Public, National Archives of India.

⁷⁴ Controls were removed in December 1947 and reinstated after major price spikes in September 1948. R. N. Chopra, *Evolution of Food Policy in India* (Delhi: Macmillan, 1981), 52–56.

⁷⁵ M. K. Gandhi, 'The Problem of Food [6 October 1947]', in Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Delhi Diary* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1948), 65–68.

⁷⁶ As Ornit Shani notes, the new state 'was able to appropriate aspects of the Gandhian citizenship notion and its political vocabulary as a means of justifying some key policies of resource allocations. This gave Indian governments a mantle of

to practise austerity and transform their food habits. In public, Nehru cast these tasks as fundamental responsibilities of post-colonial citizenship, framing personal transformation and individual responsibility as a critical instrument for national development.⁷⁷ Privately, Nehru brooded over the nation's foundering agricultural schemes and Indians' unwillingness to cooperate with these plans in what Judith Brown had described as his characteristic 'exasperated paternalism'.⁷⁸

The prime minister's support underwrote new scientific initiatives: the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research had called, at independence, for a laboratory to advance food technology in the service of the nation, and Subrahmanyan was tasked with establishing it on land donated by the Mysore government.⁷⁹ Nehru inaugurated the All-India Institute of Food Technology in late 1948. 'We are eating wrong things,' Nehru declared in his address, 'and we are eating too much of them.'⁸⁰ Nehru exhorted the Institute to help India conserve foodstuffs by developing 'new types of composite foods which will be useful in times of emergency'.⁸¹ The veteran Congressman C. Rajagopalachari—long a foe of centralized planning on Gandhian grounds—would later defy the prime minister by unilaterally removing food controls in 1951, as chief minister of Madras. But at the inauguration, the then-governor general of India echoed the prime minister in a second address. 'If the cow or the goat,' Rajagopalachari asked, 'can build her own body and make and give beautiful milk out of the simple grass or leaves she eats, why

legitimacy and the ability to resist contestation and dissent in the early formative decades.' Shani, 'Gandhi, Citizenship and the Resilience of Indian Nationhood', 661.

⁷⁷ On Nehru's modernizing philosophy, see Bhikhu Parekh, 'Nehru and the National Philosophy of India', *Economic and Political Weekly* 26, no. 1 (5 January 1991): 35–39, 41, 43, 45–48.

⁷⁸ Judith M. Brown, *Nehru: A Political Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 192.

⁷⁹ D. P. Burma and Maharani Chakravorty (eds), *History of Science, Philosophy, and Culture in Indian Civilization*, vol. XIII Part 2: From Physiology and Chemistry to Biochemistry (New Delhi: Centre for Studies in Civilizations, 2010).

⁸⁰ Sugata Bose, *His Majesty's Opponent: Subhas Chandra Bose and India's Struggle against Empire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011),

125.

⁸¹ 'Importance of Food Technology (Speech on the occasion of taking over of Cheluvamba Mansion at Mysore from the Government of Mysore for the Central Food Technological Research Institute on 29 December 1948)', in Jawaharlal Nehru, *Jawaharlal Nehru on Science and Society: A Collection of His Writings and Speeches*, Baldev Singh (ed.) (New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 1988), 70–71.

should man with all the science available to him relegate grass and leaves to the realm of inedible things?’⁸²

Returning to Delhi, Nehru directed the Ministry of Food and Agriculture in February 1949 to examine whether Delhi’s open spaces—including the length of New Delhi’s imposing Rajpath, in particular—could be used to plant food crops, as an example of the importance of citizens growing their own food.⁸³ On the same day, inaugurating a planned township several hours from Delhi, the prime minister reported that he had begun subsisting on a mixture of wheat and sweet potato flour, and urged citizens to emulate his example. ‘The people’, he warned, ‘should understand their duties and responsibilities [...] in making the motherland great. They talk of rights and privileges—and forget all about duties.’⁸⁴ Nehru’s timing was not incidental: privately, the prime minister was lamenting the failure of the Grow More Food campaign, complaining about Food Minister Jairamdas Daulatram’s mediocre performance in a letter to C. Rajagopalachari, and urging a redoubling of the effort to promote new foods as staples.⁸⁵ Addressing the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Nehru estimated that the 10 per cent food deficit India faced in a bad year could be compensated for only through increased output, more land, or inducing Indians to change their food habits en masse.⁸⁶

The advisory visit of John Boyd-Orr to India in April and May lent new credence to Nehru’s exhortations. The former secretary of the Food and Agriculture Organisation had long viewed India as one of the world’s most important battlegrounds in the world’s struggle for more food: Boyd-Orr had contributed a foreword to Nagendranath Gangulee’s 1939 primer on nutrition in India, and the Food and Agriculture Organisation chief’s proclamations were cited reverentially in

⁸² C. Rajagopalachari, ‘Inaugural Speech at the Central Food Technological Research Institute, Mysore’, 21 October 1950, C. Rajagopalachari / V Inst. / Speeches and Writings by Him / 11, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

⁸³ ‘Utilisation of Land: Note to Food and Agriculture Ministry and to Ministry of Works, Mines and Power, 6 February 1949 (File No. 31 (41)/49-PMS)’, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, Second Series*, S. Gopal (ed.) (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1984–2006), vol. 9, 70. Henceforth *SWJN*.

⁸⁴ ‘Self-Sufficiency in Food’, *SWJN*, vol. 9, 70.

⁸⁵ ‘Letter to C. Rajagopalachari’, *SWJN*, vol. 9, 71–72.

⁸⁶ Jawaharlal Nehru, ‘We Should Pull Together [A Speech Delivered at the Meeting of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (22nd Annual Session), New Delhi, 4 March 1949]’, in *Independence and after: A Collection of Speeches* (New York: Day, 1950), 193–95.

Hindi texts on food and population.⁸⁷ Boyd-Orr spoke at Teen Murti, the prime minister's residence, to urge 'a war-like psychology and drive on the part of the people and Government alike' with regard to the food problem.⁸⁸ Several days later, Nehru delivered an address on All India Radio, insisting that 'there must be no waste and there must be no feasting while we fight for every ounce of food'.⁸⁹ Nehru repeated the call in several addresses over the following weeks, exhorting every Indian to think of him or herself as a 'soldier on the food front', planting food crops and stamping out waste.⁹⁰ Media across the political spectrum rallied behind the prime minister's suggestions.⁹¹ Nehru wrote to India's chief ministers in summer 1949 to encourage them to replace the rice or wheat in their province's rations with a substitute starch once a week, and to grow subsidiary foods on their estates.⁹² Nehru did so himself in July, having the lawns of his residence planted with groundnut, millet, maize, and sweet potatoes, in addition

⁸⁷ Nagendranath Gangulee, *Health and Nutrition in India* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939); Rameshwar Gupta, *Aaj ka Manav Jivan Uski Samasyen [Today's Population Problem]* (Bombay: Chetna Prakashan Vibhag, 1952), 32. A rich discussion of Boyd-Orr's career and its contexts is in Bashford, *Global Population*, passim.

⁸⁸ In private, there was a major debate raging between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Food: the former, with the prime minister's support, was holding to the goal of self-sufficiency by 1951 and hoped to use Boyd-Orr's authority to underwrite their claim, while the latter were using the estimates of the current FAO director, Norris Dodd, to suggest that India would perhaps be able to reduce its food imports to 1.5 million tons annually. 'Though they share one Minister,' a British observer noted, 'the ministries are situated two miles apart, and their approach to the common problem about as wide apart, too.' Office of the Adviser in India to the Central Commercial Committee, 'Adviser in India's Report No. 18', April 1949, DO/133/108, National Archives (United Kingdom).

⁸⁹ 'Need for All-Out Food Drive: Pandit Nehru's Call to Nation', *Times of India*, 30 June 1949.

⁹⁰ 'Popularise Grow Food Campaign', *Times of India*, 4 July 1949; 'Sober Rejoicing Throughout India', *Times of India*, 17 August 1949.

⁹¹ 'There is practically nothing new in the Prime Minister's broadcast on food', the *Indian Express* opined after one broadcast, affirming Nehru's call for sweet potatoes and tapioca to replace wheat and rice. '[If] Pandit Nehru felt called upon to emphasise the obvious, the inference is that the people as a whole have not yet reconciled themselves to the austerity standards recommended.' 'Nehru's Broadcast', *Indian Express*, 1 July 1949. Bombay's free-market *Commerce* noted that Nehru's call 'is meant for everyone who has a tendency of treating such appeals as those meant for everybody else but himself—a tendency which has been responsible, to an appreciable extent, for several of our economic ills to-day'. 'India's Food Problem: Pandit Nehru's Appeal', *Commerce*, 9 July 1949, IOR/L/E/8/7230, British Library.

⁹² Jawaharlal Nehru, 'Letter dated 1 July, 1949', in Jawaharlal Nehru, *Letters to Chief Ministers, 1947–1964*, vol. 1 (Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund; distributed by Oxford University Press, 1985), 415. In August, Nehru wrote to R. K. Patil, the

to bananas, tapioca, bitter gourd, and aubergines—harking back to the Second World War, when the viceroy and several governors and princes replanted their own estates as vegetable gardens.⁹³ Indira Gandhi gave tours to visitors, and Nehru proudly proclaimed that his household was free of rice, subsisting instead upon sweet potato.⁹⁴

Aware of the impropriety of public feasting in the face of widespread shortage, India’s food ministers met in Delhi in August 1949 to discuss the imposition of new food austerity measures. Extending wartime legislation, the Ministry of Food enacted a uniform, national Guest Control Order structuring the types and quantity of food legally permissible at gatherings, allowing for unlimited attendees at events where non-rationed food would be served, and capping the number at 25 for those serving wheat or rice.⁹⁵ (Provincial governments, however, balked at the enforcement of these rules, and even ministerial gatherings saw them flouted.)⁹⁶

These enforcement failures did little to shake Nehru from his belief in the possibilities of remaking Indian notions of national responsibility through dietary transformations. Britain’s high commissioner reported on these campaigns with anxiety,

government’s food commissioner, to see if Teen Murti could be supplied with boxes for growing food. File No 31(71)/49-PMS, *SWJN*, vol. 13, 75.

⁹³ Among other booklets issued, see Indian Council of Agricultural Research, *Vegetable Growing in the Delhi Province*, 2nd ed., ICAR Booklet 5 (New Delhi: Imperial Council of Agricultural Research, 1946).

⁹⁴ ‘Compound Lawns Become Farm’, *Times of India*, 25 July 1949. In 1942, a confidante had written of Nehru’s embarrassment at the indulgent, Western tastes he had inherited from his father, Motilal, contending that the only ‘weakness’ he indulged was an ‘an occasional demand for mashed potatoes’. In 1943, at the height of the Bengal Famine, Indira and Jawaharlal exchanged several letters on the need to plant wheat and rice at Anand Bhavan, their family residence in Allahabad. See Krishnalal Shridharani, *Warning to the West* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1942), 259; and ‘Letter from Nehru from Ahmadnagar Fort Prison, 23 September 1943’, in Indira Gandhi (ed.), *Two Alone, Two Together: Letters between Indira Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru 1940–1960* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992), 273–74.

⁹⁵ Ministry of Food, ‘Food Policy—Austerity Measures—Guest Control’, 1 November 1949, Home—Public—51/373/49, National Archives of India.

⁹⁶ Unable and often unwilling to undertake the burden of monitoring transgressions, particularly as the decontrol of foodgrains outpaced the Order’s withdrawal, individual states began to flout these regulations, forwarding alternate Guest Control Orders at the provincial levels or sometimes discarding them altogether. Within several years, the Order had been effectively withdrawn throughout the country. ‘Food Austerity Measures’, 1957, Agriculture—Basic Plan—86(1)57 BP II, National Archives of India; ‘Food Austerity Measures Adopted by the Assam Government’, 12 July 1952, Food—Basic Plan—BP.II/1085(36)/50, National Archives of India.

worrying that directives like Nehru's were inadequate palliatives for India's serious food problem.⁹⁷ Yet Nehru expressed a deepening commitment to the notion that Indians must remould their diets in the name of national development. In a letter to Jairamdas Daulatram in late October, Nehru encouraged the food minister to cut out rice from the rations allotted to wheat-eating areas. 'We must take this risk in regard to rice,' Nehru wrote, 'and I believe that the country would be prepared for it, if only we set about it in right earnest and tell them what we are doing and what we expect them to do. If certain pinch is felt here and there, we need not be afraid.'⁹⁸ When West Bengal's chief minister, B. C. Roy, wrote to Nehru to appeal for increased provision of foodgrains, the prime minister tied his support to a demand that Roy persuade Bengalis to change their food habits. 'It is dangerous', Nehru warned, suggesting that Bengalis might take to tapioca, 'for us to be subservient to a particular type of food which may not be available tomorrow. We live on the verge of a world war, and no one knows what will happen.'⁹⁹ Implicit in Nehru's order was the notion that adherence to regional tastes was an impediment to establishing the type of citizenship that would forge national unity through national self-reliance.¹⁰⁰

'Miss a meal', subsidiary foods, and the Indian ersatz

In the wake of independence, public officials and institutions were increasingly expected to embody emerging notions of citizenship and

⁹⁷ United Kingdom High Commissioner, New Delhi, 'Extract from Opdom #26 for the Period 23-30 June 1949', 30 June 1949, IOR/L/E/8/7237, British Library.

⁹⁸ 'Letter to Jairamdas Daulatram', *SWJN*, vol. 13, 82-83.

⁹⁹ 'Letter to B.C. Roy, 13 July 1950', *SWJN*, vol. 14, 218.

¹⁰⁰ The question of standardizing diets and recipes across regions, however, was never entertained seriously by the state: from the earliest nutritional research, it was clear that there was too much in the way of entrenched cultural preferences to even attempt such a project. In 1968, a government committee attempted to assess the possibility of standardizing recipes and nutritional values in government-run canteens nation-wide. But by this period, the primary concern was one of nutritional standardization. 'There is a big chance,' one committee member wrote, 'of the weight, size, and composition of the recipe for a samosa varying between the article sold at Etawah and that sold at Ghaziabad. But a doughnut purchased at Boston differs very little in size and composition from the one purchased at Baltimore.' *Report of the Sub-Committee on Standardizing Dietary Patterns, and Menus to Be Served in Restaurants and Other Eating Establishments of the National Nutrition Advisory Committee* (New Delhi: Ministry of Health, Family Planning, Works, Housing, and Urban Development, Government of India, 1968), 44.

service, and representatives of civic society similarly took this task upon themselves.¹⁰¹ Accordingly, the state-driven efforts to transform diets through an appeal to the responsibilities of citizenship were matched by a parallel effort from civil society. In September 1949, a group of Indian leaders—including representatives of the Congress, the Constituent Assembly, the All-India Harijan Sevak Sangh, the Servants of India Society, All-India Refugee Association, All-India Women’s Conference, the All-India Hindu Mahasabha, and the All-India Anglo-Indian Association—signed their support for the ‘Miss a Meal Movement’, organized by Jag Parvesh Chandra, a Lahore refugee turned Delhi politician, consumer advocate, and Congress worker.¹⁰² The group asked Indians to pledge to give up one meal a week, contributing the grains saved to a national fund, and in so doing, foster ‘the national habit of uniting and striving jointly at a time of crisis and emergency’.¹⁰³

Rajendra Prasad and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur—a founder of the All-India Women’s Conference, and independent India’s new health minister—gave early support, prompting bureaucrats and politicians nationwide to affirm their own approval.¹⁰⁴ The governor of Punjab’s pledge of drawing only six days’ rations was followed by the Bombay premier’s announcement that he would be skipping two meals a week; Bengal’s minister of civil supplies declared that he had given up rice altogether.¹⁰⁵ Citizens were urged to make food pledges, like that asked of non-cultivators in Bombay to ‘reduce my consumption of food grains by using non-cereal foods and to avoid wastage of food in the kitchen and on the table’.¹⁰⁶ Ration shops in Uttar Pradesh began

¹⁰¹ Gould, ‘From Subjects to Citizens?’.

¹⁰² Jag Parvesh Chandra, *Miss a Meal Movement: An Experiment in Voluntary Errors and National Co-Operation* (New Delhi: Constitution House, 1949). Chandra would later become Delhi’s chief minister.

¹⁰³ ‘Miss a Meal a Week: Leader’s Appeal’, *Indian Express*, 12 September 1949.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Miss a Meal Movement: Dr. Prasad’s Support’, *Sunday Indian Express*, 4 November 1949; ‘Miss a Meal a Week: Health Minister’s Call’, *Indian Express*, 11 November 1949.

¹⁰⁵ Governor of East Punjab, ‘Letter to Jag Parvesh Chandra’, 21 December 1949, Jag Parvesh Chandra / Subject Files / 2, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library; ‘Bombay Premier Sets an Example’, *Sunday Indian Express*, 21 December 1949; Prafulla Chandra Sen, ‘Letter to Jag Parvesh Chandra’, 18 November 1949, Jag Parvesh Chandra / Subject Files / 2, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Making Citizens Food-Conscious’, *Times of India*, 23 November 1949. Elsewhere, the pledge involved a promise to miss Friday lunch, ‘leave my plate clean of leavings’, and return extra ration cards to the ration depot. B. P. Pathak, ‘Letter to Jag Parvesh Chandra’, 16 December 1949, Jag Parvesh Chandra / Subject Files / 2,

to stock pledge forms, and representatives of government godowns announced that they would reduce grain supply to stores in proportion to the number of pledges received.¹⁰⁷

In early 1950, Chandra spoke about the movement to a gathering of businessmen and bureaucrats in Hyderabad, estimating that the movement would make up for 7 per cent of India's estimated 10 per cent total food deficit, saving approximately 400 crores rupees each year—'the total sum of the amount spent by the nation on 52 meals a year'.¹⁰⁸ Yet more than killing the black market and freeing India from the yoke of foreign imports, missing a meal would

train you in the art of self-discipline, for control of the palate, as Gandhiji taught us, was the basis of self-discipline . . . A country become a great nation, when the people living in that country are not just human beings but think, behave, and act like true citizens, ready to discharge their duties willingly and gladly. A true citizen is he who thinks more of his duties and less of his rights; for in the final analysis, rights flow from duties well performed. Rights divorced from the performance of duties, is a contradiction in terms and a mockery of democracy.

Chandra's speech neatly linked together the project of dietary transformation and the reimagination of rights in post-colonial India. Yet his movement was not infrequently lambasted as misguided and ineffectual. One former prince wrote to Chandra to gripe that 'Out of the 300 and odd millions [in India], His Highness thinks not more than one million could profitably miss a meal. The other 300 million

Nehru Memorial Museum and Library. The choice of Friday as a preferred fast day appears to have been influenced by Gandhi's assassination on a Friday four years prior. 'Miss a Meal Movement Explained', *Sunday Indian Express*, 26 December 1949.

¹⁰⁷ 'Miss a Meal Per Week', *Times of India*, 6 November 1949. The movement also inspired a number of poems, essays, and other creative ventures designed at garnering support. One Lucknow resident composed a short doggerel on the movement:

Men sacrifice in times of need,
In every way have shown this deed
Stop a meal in a fortnight please.
Save your Country, roll your sleeve.
Make in daily meal this sure,
Eat less rice or rice no more.
Ask your people waste no food.
Love your Country love your food.

S. Asghar Ali, 'Letter to B.G. Kher', 21 December 1949, Jag Parvesh Chandra / Subject Files / 2, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

¹⁰⁸ Jag Parvesh Chandra, 'Untitled Speech Delivered at Hyderabad', 1949, Jag Parvesh Chandra / Subject Files / 2, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

are so under-nourished that they should get an extra meal and not miss a meal.¹⁰⁹ Orissa’s law minister concurred that ‘more than half of the population do not get two meals a day. . . To such a population I feel diffident to suggest the campaign of fasting.’¹¹⁰ Yet the ethos resonated in official publicity. Addressing the nation over All-India Radio on the food crisis and the perils of foreign aid, Nehru urged Indians to take up the Movement’s signature act. ‘Each one of us,’ he enjoined, ‘should demonstrate active sympathy and desire to help by giving up one meal a week.’¹¹¹ Nehru proposed sending surplus foodgrains to famine victims, and the Ministry of Food began to devise mechanisms for collecting and distributing them.¹¹²

As public institutions and representatives of civil society urged an austerity ethos, the Central Food Technological Research Institute and the government’s Subsidiary Food Production Committee worked to provide the institutional and scientific mechanisms for the transformation of Indian diets. In early 1949, as scarcity loomed once more, the Ministry of Health had inquired of state governments whether banana roots were eaten by the poor in their respective provinces, looking to promote them in daily diets and scarcity crises alike.¹¹³ The Ministry of Food examined a similar proposal to distribute imported Iraqi dates in place of rationed cereals.¹¹⁴ These schemes grew more concrete with the creation of the Subsidiary Food Production Committee, chaired by industrialist Lala Shri Ram, and staffed by the senior Madras bureaucrat Sonti Ramamurty and the secretary of the Ministry of Food. Shri Ram reported directly to Rajendra Prasad, and asserted ‘that meeting the shortage of food is not merely the business of the Governments but of the 330 million people

¹⁰⁹ ‘Letter to Jag Parvesh Chandra’, 6 January 1950, Jag Parvesh Chandra / Subject Files / 2, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

¹¹⁰ Nityanand Kanungo, ‘Letter to Jag Parvesh Chandra’, 16 November 1949, Jag Parvesh Chandra / Subject Files / 2, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

¹¹¹ ‘Broadcast to the Nation, New Delhi, 1 May 1951 [AIR Tapes, NMML]’, in *SWJN*, vol. 16.1, 39–42.

¹¹² ‘Letter to Food Secretary, Ministry of Food, New Delhi, 2 May 1951 [File No. 31(125)/51-PMS]’, in *SWJN*, vol. 16.1, 43–44.

¹¹³ ‘Banana Roots as Human Food and Assessment of Their Nutritive Value’, 25 June 1949, Rajputana Agency / Political / Food / P-183, National Archives of India.

¹¹⁴ ‘Exploration of Possibility of Utilizing Dates from Iraq to Rations in Scarcity Areas in Order to Avoid Famine’, 9 February 1949, Food—Basic Plan—BP-201(96)/49, National Archives of India. The proposal appears to have only been accepted in 1951, when dates were distributed in ration packages in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar; see ‘Dates Given Away in Bihar’, *Aaj*, 12 February 1951; ‘Distribution of Dates’, *Aaj*, 15 February 1951.

of the country'.¹¹⁵ Taking as its mandate the promotion of bananas, sweet potatoes, tapioca, groundnut flour, and synthetic cereals, the Committee met throughout the following year, building upon the work of the 1947 Foodgrains Policy Committee. The Committee's report posited that a 'substantial reduction in the consumption of cereals in this country' could be effected through the production and consumption of alternate foodstuffs, beginning by appointing development officers to foster the expansion of each crop.¹¹⁶

The campaign offered, at least in theory, the possibility of feeding more citizens at no cost to the state. And as one British intelligence offer reported, the 'attempt to persuade the public to change their diet by eating more "substitute" foods like potatoes and sweet potatoes is discernible in all statements by government officials about food self-sufficiency.'¹¹⁷ One such statement came from Governor General C. Rajagopalachari, who called in a radio address for a 'fanatical zeal' for the food campaign. 'The fashion must be set,' he said, 'for greater consumption of *ragi*, *cholam*, maize and millet... Like jail-going, hobnobbing with outcastes, spinning, [and] wearing Gandhi-caps, millet food must be made a patriotic high class fashion.'¹¹⁸ In August 1949, Shri Ram petitioned India's provincial food members to embrace the campaign, through publicity and by bringing subsidiary foods into the ration as soon as production targets were met.¹¹⁹ The Ministry of Food similarly asked provincial ministries to consider distributing subsidiary foods in place of wheat and rice, requesting rationing administrations to estimate 'how far [their] increased consumption

¹¹⁵ Valmiki Choudhary (ed.), 'Letter from Shri Ram to Rajendra Prasad, 20 May 1949', in *Dr. Rajendra Prasad: Correspondence and Select Documents*, vol. 11 (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1988), 69. Later, Shri Ram would pressure Prasad into planting banana shrubs and sweet potato vines at his Delhi residence. Valmiki Choudhary (ed.), 'Letter from Shri Ram to Rajendra Prasad, 17 September 1949', in *Dr. Rajendra Prasad: Correspondence and Select Documents*, vol. 11 (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1988), 160.

¹¹⁶ No copies of the final report appear to exist in print; a resumé is 'Summary of Conclusions of the Subsidiary Food Production Committee (1950)', in *Reports of the Estimates Committee 1960-61* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1961), 70-72.

¹¹⁷ 'Bombay Weekly Political Report No. 21/49 for the Period 23 to 29 May 1949', May 1949, IOR/L/E/8/7230, British Library.

¹¹⁸ C. Rajagopalachari, 'The Food Problem [All-India Radio, 6 July 1949]', in *Speeches of C. Rajagopalachari, Governor-General of India, June 1948-January 1950* (New Delhi: Superintendent, Governor-General's Press, 1950), 251.

¹¹⁹ 'Letter from the Ministry of Food, 1949: Subsidiary Food Production Committee, Shri Ram, Vice Chairman—Sent to Food and Agriculture Ministers of All Provinces / States', 1949, Agriculture—Rationing—RP-1084(14)/54, National Archives of India

can be popularised’.¹²⁰ By the end of the year, a glut of bananas and sweet potatoes were being made available at cooperative stores and ration shops in Bombay Province; in the new guest control and public austerity measures enacted across India the following year, subsidiary foods would continue to be permitted in unlimited quantities.¹²¹

Encouraged by the drive for subsidiary and substitute foods, the Central Food Technological Research Institute revived earlier, futuristic proposals for an ersatz grain to replace rice and wheat. The Institute’s director, V. Subrahmanyam, had pledged to underwrite Nehru’s promise of food self-sufficiency by 1951, promising that a quarter of the nation’s grain consumption could be replaced by that date with sweet potatoes or tapioca.¹²² ‘Artificial rice’ would be a key component of that campaign. As early as 1945, the nationalist agricultural scientist M. Afzal Husain had postulated that since ‘chemists have produced rayon, nylon, [and] plastics’, there should ‘be no reason why they cannot produce artificial rice from tuber starch’.¹²³ And a decade earlier, Sonti Ramamurty of the Subsidiary Food Production Committee had witnessed a Travancore maharajah importing tapioca into the state during the war. The schoolchildren fed on tapioca alone, Ramamurty recalled, were ‘rickety’, but the civil servant continued to tout the possibility of a rice substitute based on tapioca supplemented with groundnut flour for protein.¹²⁴ In 1948,

¹²⁰ ‘Banana Roots as Human Food and Assessment of Their Nutritive Value’.

¹²¹ ‘Subsidiary Foods’ Output’, *Times of India*, 29 December 1949; ‘Concurrence of the Central Govt. to the Withdrawal of Food Austerity Measures Adopted by Kutch Govt. 1950’, July 1950, Agriculture—Rationing—RP 1085/26/50, National Archives of India. Indians’ putatively unchangeable preference for rice over any other grain worried administrators of international aid, as well. During the shortages of 1950–1951, American representatives fretted over Indians’ apparent unwillingness to change their diets during times of crisis. In one of his dispatches as the Indian supervisory officer of the Economic Cooperation Administration, Frank R. J. Gerard wrote that ‘In Madras and Travancore-Cochin, there is much concern and complaint over the shortage of rice. This situation cannot be greatly relieved as there is a general shortage of rice throughout India. The maximum quantity of rice is being imported from the rice-producing countries of Asia but additional imports (say from USA) would cost more than the Government of India can afford to pay. With the limited funds at their disposal they must use them to procure the greatest possible quantity of food. Rice is too costly.’ Frank R. J. Gerard, ‘End-Use Report No. 2’, 5 September 1951, RG 469/UD 1234/Box 1/End Use and General Reports, United States National Archives.

¹²² ‘Achieving Self-Sufficiency in Food by 1951: Mysore Research Body’s Proposals’, *Times of India*, 1 July 1950.

¹²³ Husain, ‘Food Problem of India (1946, Bangalore)’, 569.

¹²⁴ Sonti Venkata Ramamurty, *Looking Across Fifty Years* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1964), 117. Ramamurty had served on the 1946 mission to the Combined

Ramamurty had contracted a manufacturing firm in Coimbatore to formulate a prototype, and on the Subsidiary Food Production Committee, he took charge of the ‘artificial rice’ project, while Lala Shri Ram steered the production of ‘a flour mixed from tapioca and wheat flour to make chapattis in North India’. Publicly declaring his intent to manufacture a substitute cereal that would satisfy ‘the psychology of people accustomed to eat cereals’, Ramamurty asked the Central Food Technological Research Institute’s V. Subrahmanyam to undertake pilot trials for the rice in Kerala.¹²⁵ A pilot plant was established in Mysore, and the Committee set to work formulating distribution plans for South and North India.¹²⁶

The project captured the imagination of the bureaucrats whose more staid agricultural schemes were stagnating. In April 1951, Rajendra Prasad sampled chapattis and halva made from tapioca in the Central Food Technological Research Institute laboratories.¹²⁷ In the summer, Subrahmanyam was called to speak to ministers in Travancore-Cochin about the possibility of scaling up consumption of synthetic rice.¹²⁸ In Delhi, one minister surprised colleagues with the announcement that the rice they had eaten at lunch was in fact the Institute’s ersatz version.¹²⁹ ‘The grains that we now make are round,’ V. Subrahmanyam proclaimed at the pilot plant in Mysore, but ‘we can make beautiful, white rice-shaped grains which can satisfy even the most fastidious consumers’.¹³⁰

Fastidiousness aside, Indian consumers took poorly to these ersatz grains, evidencing scant demand. An early, critical assessment from

Food Board in Washington DC, where he petitioned for increased grain donations to India.

¹²⁵ ‘Difficulty in Ending Food Imports: Sir Sonti Ramamurti Urges Attention to Non-Cereals’, *Times of India*, 16 May 1949.

¹²⁶ Ramamurty, *Looking Across Fifty Years*, 149.

¹²⁷ Valmiki Choudhary (ed.), ‘Notes on Mysore Tour’, in *Dr. Rajendra Prasad: Correspondence and Select Documents, vol. Presidency Period* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1984), 198–200.

¹²⁸ B. S. Bawa, ‘From a Deficit to a Surplus State’, *The Punjab Farmer* III, no. 2 (June 1951): 58.

¹²⁹ ‘Synthetic Rice and Curds’, *Times of India*, 7 October 1952.

¹³⁰ V. Subrahmanyam, ‘Planning for Food Emergency’, in *Food and Population and Development of Food Industries in India* (Mysore: Central Food Technological Research Institute, 1952), 133. The CFTRI’s efforts gained the attention of observers overseas; ‘Two Other Artificial Products: Synthetic Rice and Milk’, in *Indian Horizons*, vol. 1 (New Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1952), 340–41. V. Subrahmanyam and M. Swaminathan—the father of India’s ‘Green Revolution’—published an optimistic early report in *Nature*, touting the promise that artificial rice held to obviate India’s food problem. V. Subrahmanyam et al., ‘Rice Substitutes’, *Nature* 174 (1954): 199–201.

Madras pointed to the reluctance of producers to switch to tapioca from proven cash crops, and the dim potential for the ‘dietetic habits of a nation [to] be altered by propaganda, persuasion or fiat’.¹³¹ The conclusion was not unwarranted. Artificial rice was deployed to a small famine in Southern India in 1952, but there was little interest outside of famine conditions.¹³² The first artificial rice factory in Trivandrum was shuttered shortly after its inauguration.¹³³ Save for a small number of famine victims in Rayalaseema, producers in Mysore, and enthusiastic bureaucrats in Delhi, few Indians ever tasted the much-touted artificial rice.¹³⁴ Before production could be adequately scaled up, the state had grown reluctant to ask citizens to reimagine their rights, their responsibilities, and their diets in tandem.¹³⁵

‘A work suited primarily to the genius of women’

As male bureaucrats and scientists forwarded the twinned imperatives of austerity and alternate foodstuffs, Indian women, the ‘anchors of the household’, were saddled with the burden of remoulding the diets of their husbands and children, and in so doing, recasting the relationship between the household and the nation.

¹³¹ Balasubrahmanya Natarajan, *Food and Agriculture in Madras State* (Madras: Director of Information and Publicity, Government of Madras, 1951), 125–27.

¹³² ‘Centre to Open Research Units in Villages’, *Times of India*, 29 May 1953.

¹³³ E. Ikkanda Warriar, 13 November 1970, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

¹³⁴ In 1957 Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to the Director of India’s Council of Scientific and Industrial Research to ask what had happened to the project. Informed that no production was taking place, Nehru testily brought up the issue of the project’s seeming failure several days later with Food and Agriculture Minister A. P. Jain. The last mention of the artificial rice project seems to have come in 1960, when administrators in Kerala constituted a propaganda team to promote it before an unceremonious disbanding in 1960. ‘Letter to M.S. Thacker [28 May 1957]’, *SWJN*, vol. 38, 112; ‘Letter to A.P. Jain, 2 June 1957’, *SWJN*, vol. 38, 115; *Administration Report of the Civil Supplies Department for the Year 1961–62* (Trivandrum: Kerala Civil Supplies Department, 1962), 14.

¹³⁵ The CFTRI nonetheless played an important role in the development of India’s modern food processing and preservation industries. In 1951, a government work looked expectantly to the CFTRI for its projects for ‘the processing of coarse grain to render it acceptable to rice eaters . . . and new and improved methods of processing pulses without affecting their nutritive value’. Yet over the next several decades, the Institute’s work was dedicated to more mundane matters of canning, preservation, and the prevention of adulteration. *Progress of Science* (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1951); *Abstracts of CFTRI Papers* (Mysore: Central Food Technological Research Institute, 1966).

Colonial planners and nationalist organizations had cast women as essential agents of India's national development, interweaving the aims of household health and national well-being.¹³⁶ One of the earliest primers on 'domestic science' in India linked the promulgation of the field to the advancement of national health and hygiene.¹³⁷ W. R. Aykroyd would nonetheless lament, a decade later, that 'the women of India have not yet been enlisted in the campaign for improved nutrition'; the National Planning Committee's 1938 sub-committee on 'woman's role in planned economy' suggested that women would play a key role in constructing a national diet after independence.¹³⁸ During the Bengal Famine, the left-wing Mahila Atmaraksha Samiti—the 'Women's Self-Defence League'—had affirmed repeatedly that women's duties towards the nation were split equally between self-defence and the provision of food.¹³⁹ The connection between the maintenance of the home and the uplift of the nation grew more explicit after independence. Social worker Rameshwari Nehru would write, shortly after independence, that 'the home is the foundation

¹³⁶ On the intersections of nationalism and domesticity in colonial India, see Mary Hancock, 'Gendering the Modern: Women and Home Science in British India', in *Gender, Sexuality and Colonial Modernities*, Antoinette M. Burton (London: Routledge, 1999), 148–60; Mary Hancock, 'Home Science and the Nationalization of Domesticity in Colonial India', *Modern Asian Studies* 35, no. 4 (2001): 871–903; and Judith E. Walsh, *Domesticity in Colonial India: What Women Learned When Men Gave Them Advice* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004). More broadly, see Durba Ghosh, 'Gender and Colonialism: Expansion or Marginalization?', *The Historical Journal* 47, no. 3 (1 September 2004): 737–55; and Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation, Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001). On the complex interplay of women's organizations and the 'politics of consumption' beyond India, see the analysis in Matthew Hilton, 'The Female Consumer and the Politics of Consumption in Twentieth-Century Britain', *The Historical Journal* 45, no. 1 (2002): 103–28. The intersections of female politics and food control policies is dealt with elegantly in the American context in Amy Bentley, *Eating for Victory: Food Rationing and the Politics of Domesticity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998); as well as in the German context in Belinda J. Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). For an exemplary treatment of women and home economics in China's nationalist era, see Helen M. Schneider, *Keeping the Nation's House: Domestic Management and the Making of Modern China* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011).

¹³⁷ Mabel A. Needham, *Domestic Science for High Schools in India* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1929).

¹³⁸ Aykroyd, *Notes on Food and Nutrition Policy in India*; Indian National Congress and K. T. Shah, *Woman's Role in Planned Economy, Report of the Sub-Committee* (Bombay: Vora & Co., 1947).

¹³⁹ Geraldine Hancock Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, *New Cambridge History of India*, V.2, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 210–11.

on which the structure of society is built’, and that its improvement would ultimately underwrite national development.¹⁴⁰

The All-India Women’s Conference, well connected to the mainstream Congress leadership, emerged as the dominant voice of nationalist women after independence.¹⁴¹ One of the Conference’s presidents would declare that ‘our aim is to make the woman a healthy and useful member of society; a good mother, self-reliant, and a responsible citizen conscious of her rights and responsibilities’.¹⁴² Those rights and responsibilities quickly converged around the provision of food to the home and the nation. In 1946, the Conference declared that the 14th of every month was to be designated a ‘Special Food Day’, tasking each chapter with teaching its members ‘the duty of the people to cooperate’ in the tasks of avoiding waste and using substitute foods.¹⁴³ A second resolution in 1949 saw the All-India Women’s Conference ask its members to begin growing substitute foods in kitchen gardens; soon, the group organized mobile demonstrations and canteens to promote the same.¹⁴⁴ One member asserted that the conservation of food and the promotion of new foodstuffs ‘is a work suited primarily to the genius of women. Let it not be said that women have failed in a task of such supreme national importance.’¹⁴⁵

Yet even as the Conference affirmed, through its initiatives, the state’s contention that ‘women, more than men, could effectively help Government in the solution of food problem’, India’s bureaucrats assigned to women the burden of failure for their modernist schemes.¹⁴⁶ Nehru was particularly damning in his twinning of female agency and the food crisis. Visiting the Gujarati village of Gandhinagar, he contended that women should not complain about grain shortages, but instead, ‘carry on with what they get’. Noting India’s expenditure on food imports, he asserted that it had

¹⁴⁰ Rameshwari Nehru, *Gandhi Is My Star: Speeches & Writings* (Patna: Pustakbhandar, 1950).

¹⁴¹ Jawaharlal Nehru nonetheless complained in 1936 that the AIWC was ‘superficial’ since it did nothing to examine the ‘root causes’ of the social issues it championed. Forbes, *Women in Modern India*, 81.

¹⁴² All India Women’s Conference Cultural Section, *Education of Women in Modern India* (Anudh: Anudh Publishing Trust, 1946).

¹⁴³ ‘Food’, *Bulletin of Indian Women’s Movement*, July 1946.

¹⁴⁴ ‘Resolutions Passed at the Meeting of the Standing Committee of the AIWC at Bombay, August 1949’, *Roshni*, September 1949.

¹⁴⁵ Kitty Shiva Rao, ‘Grow More and Eat Wisely’, *Roshni*, September 1949.

¹⁴⁶ ‘Housewives Can Help Change Food Habits’, *Times of India*, 9 September 1949.

been women's desire for sugar which had forced the government to purchase it from abroad; their propensity for black market purchases of rationed commodities had further undermined government food control efforts.¹⁴⁷ The failure of women to keep up the new imperatives of post-colonial citizenship was seen as underwriting India's continued dependence.

All-India Women's Conference members nonetheless continued to view their efforts as instrumental in modelling domestic solutions to the food crisis. In July 1949, a month after Jawaharlal Nehru delivered a series of speeches on citizenship and the food problem on All India Radio, Indira Gandhi convened a meeting that led to the formation of the Women's Food Committee, Delhi, seeking to popularize subsidiary foods among women.¹⁴⁸ In Bombay, Lilavati Munshi, outgoing All-India Women's Conference president and wife of food minister K. M. Munshi, organized several state-funded substitute food exhibitions.¹⁴⁹ A year later, in the wake of the Subsidiary Foods Production Committee's report, the Ministry of Food announced that it would be turning over the task of substitute food promotion to a new All-India Women's Council for Supplementary Foods, funded by the Ministries of Food and Agriculture and comprising 'representatives of all-India Women's Organisations and prominent women active in public, social and Parliamentary life'.¹⁵⁰

The Council soon organized a series of exhibitions in Bombay and Delhi demonstrating recipes without rice and wheat. Rajendra Prasad inaugurated the Delhi exhibition, where Lilavati Munshi contended that the nation's food problem 'had baffled the greatest of our men', but that women would no doubt find a solution, given that 'it is their province to handle food'.¹⁵¹ The Council's first booklet, touting substitute foods costing eight annas or less, was soon

¹⁴⁷ 'Carry on with Food You Get: Pandit Nehru's Call to Women', *Times of India*, 20 September 1950.

¹⁴⁸ 'Popularising Subsidiary Foods: Women to Carry on Propaganda', *Times of India*, 30 July 1949.

¹⁴⁹ 'Subsidiary Foods Education', *Roshni*, November 1949.

¹⁵⁰ Ministry of Food, Government of India, 'All India Women's Council for Supplementary Foods: Measures for Increased Production and Consumption', 5 August 1950, IOR/L/E/88/8698, British Library.

¹⁵¹ 'Supplementary Food: Exhibition in Delhi', *Times of India*, 4 December 1950. See also Rajendra Prasad, 'The Food Problem' (Translation of speech delivered in Hindi at the opening of the Food Exhibition at the Town Hall, Delhi, on 1 December 1950), in Verinder Grover, *Political Thinkers of Modern India, Volume 23: Dr. Rajendra Prasad* (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1993), 488–90.

supplemented by an ambitious two-volume cookbook.¹⁵² And after two initial schemes for cafeterias in Bombay fell through, the Council opened the Annapoorna restaurant in Delhi in January 1951. India's 'most democratic restaurant' was staffed by women and served a buffet of substitute foods, quickly becoming an important political pilgrimage site. Beyond 'thousands of middle class and poor customers', the cafeteria drew a steady stream of parliamentarians and diplomats, in addition to catering the 1951 Indian National Congress in Delhi. Appealing to women as the 'food ministers' of their own households, the All-India Women's Conference continued to expand the Annapoorna chain nationwide, establishing 32 branches by 1955.¹⁵³

Even as the state continued to fund and subsidize the All-India Women's Conference and its Annapoorna chain of restaurants, the nation's bureaucratic leadership continued to saddle women with the blame for Indian households' putative inability or unwillingness to change their food habits. As late as the mid 1950s, Nehru was proclaiming that on the matter of food, 'women will justify themselves [*sic*] not so much by making demands but by the part they play in the building up of new India'.¹⁵⁴ If rights, in post-colonial India's emerging conception of citizenship, stemmed only from the proper completion of duties, that compact was expected even more acutely of the nation's women.¹⁵⁵

Against the backdrop of a worsening food crisis, and India's continued inability to meet the targets of the renewed Grow More Food

¹⁵² A. R. Vyas, 'Annapoorna: India's Democratic Restaurants', *March of India* IV, no. 2 (December 1951), 29–31; All India Women's Food Council, *Annapurna Recipes of Supplementary Foods*, 2 vols. (New Delhi: All India Women's Food Council, 1951). On cookbooks in India, see Appadurai, 'How to Make a National Cuisine'; and Berger, 'Between Digestion and Desire'.

¹⁵³ *The Fourth Annual Meeting of the All India Women's Food Council, West Bengal Branch, 1954–55* (Calcutta, 1955). The Council began to shift its objectives throughout the 1950s, distributing seeds for kitchen gardening, and working to establish a catering college in Bombay with FAO funding. By 1958, the Council had fallen into a bitter squabble with the Central government over the restaurant's tax status; the restaurant hobbled on until its shuttering a decade later. 'Sales Tax on Annapoorna', 1958, Home—Judicial—II—26758, National Archives of India.

¹⁵⁴ 'Food Problem and the Role of Women', *SWJN*, vol. 40, 276.

¹⁵⁵ A review of recent sociological approaches to the intersections of gender, citizenship, and the welfare state is Ann Shola Orloff, 'Gender and the Social Rights of Citizenship: The Comparative Analysis of Gender Relations and Welfare States', *American Sociological Review* 58, no. 3 (1 June 1993): 303–28. See also Manuela Ciotti, "'The Bourgeois Woman and the Half-Naked One": Or the Indian Nation's Contradictions Personified', *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 4 (2010): 785–815.

Campaign, legislators, writers, and satirists inveighed against the calls to miss meals and transform diets, their objections an implicit rejection of the new state's transferral of developmental responsibilities. These critiques linked substitute foods to the historical deprivations of famine, and rejected the modernist notion that, in the name of nation-building, one calorie might be just as readily taken as another.¹⁵⁶

The earliest, most trenchant critiques came from the Communist Party of India, which accused the Congress of promoting subsidiary foods and austerity at the expense of real agrarian reform. The Communist Party of India broadsheet *People's Age* reported frequently upon the callous statements of India's food officials. A 1948 report lambasted the Foodgrains Policy Committee's emphasis on substitute foods, and took Jairamdas Daulatram to task for asking a group of villagers, as they waited outside a ration depot, 'why after getting political freedom they have made themselves slaves of taste?'¹⁵⁷ Two years later, as scarcity broke out nationwide, a party circular doubled down on these charges. 'They advise the starving people to "miss a meal a week",' it read, 'who are not getting even one full meal a day!'¹⁵⁸ These partisan critiques soon dovetailed with a broader assault on India's food ministers and bureaucrats, like the jabs at K. M. Munshi which appeared in the *Times of India* and *Shankar's Weekly*.

Increasingly, legislators and politicians voiced their own objections to the state's quixotic projects. Later in 1950, Madras parliamentarian and physician A. L. Mudaliar—later director of the World Health Organization—deplored that 'when such suggestions are made to people who miss not only a meal in a week, but a meal every day, and who have neither vegetables nor anything else to consume, we ask: "What is the competence of the honourable Minister for Food to give

¹⁵⁶ Various jungle roots, yams, sago palm, and other foodstuffs, for instance, were common famine foods among the Mizos, when rats, a 'preferred' scarcity staple, was unavailable. Sajal Nag, 'Bamboo, Rats and Famines: Famine Relief and Perceptions of British Paternalism in the Mizo Hills', in Mahesh Rangarajan and K. Sivaramakrishnan (eds), *India's Environmental History: Colonialism, Modernity, and the Nation*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2012), 389–99.

¹⁵⁷ 'You Are Slaves of Taste! Food Minister Admonishes Starving Kisans of South', *People's Age*, 6 June 1948.

¹⁵⁸ Communist Party of India, 'The Catastrophic Food Situation and Our Tasks: People's Solution and Demand of the People [P.B. Circular (New Series) No. I, to All Party Units]', 10 August 1950. P.C. Joshi Archives on Contemporary History.

such advice?"¹⁵⁹ An internal Ministry of Agriculture review assessed India's various Guest Control Orders as ineffective as they were unpopular, useful 'mainly for the psychological value'.¹⁶⁰ Nehru's estranged secretary, M. O. Mathai, would recall the prime minister's faith in the Subsidiary Food Production Committee as akin to a 'drowning man clutching at a straw'.¹⁶¹ And C. Rajagopalachari drafted a private memorandum in January 1952 decrying state efforts to manage the minutiae of food production and consumption as an affront to personal liberty and a source of India's enduring hunger—presaging his unilateral lifting of food controls in Madras six months later.¹⁶² Assessments from overseas were no more sympathetic. 'The tragedy,' an *Eastern World* correspondent wrote of the Miss a Meal campaign, 'is that millions of Indians have no choice of forgoing a meal, but are savagely dieted by poverty.'¹⁶³ Implicit in these rejections lurked the notion that India's efforts to remake personal practice and sentiment represented the desperate campaigns of a weak state unable to actualize the promise of sustenance which had animated the nationalist struggle.

The completion of India's First Five-Year Plan at the end of 1951 saw an assertive revision of India's agricultural planning. The prime minister had fended off internal political challenges from Sardar Patel and Purshottamdas Tandon—conservative voices whose antipathy towards socialist planning may have rendered the transformation of Indian citizenship, rather than that of agrarian structure, a more palatable shared goal.¹⁶⁴ Beyond an emphasis on industrial development, the Plan concentrated on the coordinated transformation of rural India's social and economic conditions, affirming food production as a primary national goal. (These schemes were far more ambitious than the Grow More Food Movement, which had sought to induce production through

¹⁵⁹ A. L. Mudaliar, 'On the Governor's Address (4 August 1950)', in *Searchlight on Council Debates: Speeches of Sir A.L. Mudaliar in the Madras Legislative Council* (Bombay: Orient Longmans, 1960), 167.

¹⁶⁰ Ministry of Agriculture, 'Austerity Measures—Guest Control Order', Agriculture—Basic Plan—86(1)/57 BP II, National Archives of India.

¹⁶¹ M. O. Mathai, *My Days with Nehru* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1979), 18.

¹⁶² C. Rajagopalachari, 'Amateurish Experiments and Imperial Food Production: An Article', January 1952, C. Rajagopalachari/VI to XI Insts./Speeches and Writings by Him/114, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

¹⁶³ J. F. Stirling, 'The Background to Famine', *Eastern World* V, no. 12 (December 1951): 14.

¹⁶⁴ A comprehensive discussion of the internal dynamics of planning is Francine R. Frankel, *India's Political Economy, 1947–2004: The Gradual Revolution* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 71–112.

relatively small monetary investments.) ‘Unless the food problem is handled satisfactorily,’ the Plan held, ‘economic conditions in the country will not be stable enough to permit the implementation of the plan.’ Its overwhelming focus on increasing agricultural output rendered the goal of transforming Indian diets a ‘valuable supplement to the food supply.’¹⁶⁵

Yet the campaign to remould citizens’ diets and their relationship to the state in consort never fully receded from the national conversation. In years of higher agricultural production, when imports waned, the discussion of subsidiary foods, ersatz foodstuffs, and austerity receded from the limelight—only to reemerge forcefully at moments of crisis.¹⁶⁶ It was often industrialists and businessmen who continued to press for these ends. A year after the publication of the First Five-Year Plan, the Andhra Chamber of Commerce heard the state’s outgoing industrial and development commissioner outline a scheme for a private subsidiary foods lobby.¹⁶⁷ He, like the industrialists who had spearheaded the first subsidiary foods campaigns, was likely motivated by the aim of freeing up agricultural land used for cereals for the increased cultivation of exportable goods.

Officials joined industrialists in reviving the language of citizenship, rights, and responsibility to urge dietary transformations at moments of crisis. The 1957 Foodgrains Enquiry Committee, chaired by Ashok Mehta in the wake of a failed monsoon, lamented the turn away from subsidiary foods, which the economist held was ‘an unfortunate result of the feeling that our food problem [was] purely transitory’.¹⁶⁸ Mehta urged the Ministry of Food and Agriculture to establish a new department to promote the production and consumption of substitute foods. In June, a new Congress resolution reaffirmed the need for their

¹⁶⁵ Planning Commission, *The First Five-Year Plan: A Draft Outline* (New Delhi: Manager of Publications, Government of India Press, 1951), 67. For an analysis, see Frankel, *India’s Political Economy*, 94–106.

¹⁶⁶ In spite of passing references to subsidiary foods and the transformation of diets in the Third and Fourth Five-Year Plans, presented in 1961 and 1966, these operational documents made little reference to the sorts of transformations that Nehru and allies had once framed as national imperatives. ‘A Nutritionist’s View of Third Plan’, *The Hindu*, 29 August 1961, 71; and G. R. Madan, *India’s Developing Villages* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1990), 131.

¹⁶⁷ ‘Suggestions for Solving the Food Program by Shri V. Ramakrishna, ICS, Ret’d., Formerly Industrial and Development Commissioner, Government of Madras’, 1952, Agriculture—G.M.F.—10–5/52-GMF(Eng), National Archives of India.

¹⁶⁸ Ministry of Food and Agriculture, *Report of the Foodgrains Enquiry Committee, November 1957* (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1957), 103.

consumption; the year afterwards, Lala Shri Ram would resurface to urge the creation of a ‘Ministry for Non-Cereal Foods’—proposals which earned the praise of the *Eastern Economist*.¹⁶⁹ By the end of 1957, the prime minister had revived the language of personal transformation, exhorting Indians to ‘change your food habits in accordance with the needs of the country’.¹⁷⁰ Nehru’s ‘exasperated paternalism’ remained in evidence. ‘I am very worried,’ the Prime Minister declared as the crisis continued, ‘about this habit which seems to be growing of everybody asking somebody else to feed him, [of] everybody going to the State Government and saying, give us this, give us that . . . Somehow, mind [*sic*] has become so perverted that we must have so much rice, and not take the other things which are better than rice, and in fact prefer starvation. I do not understand it.’¹⁷¹ Indians’ failure to remake their diets, Nehru proposed, was a fundamental defect in their understanding of rights and responsibilities.

The most iconic revival of the campaign came in the mid 1960s, with the outbreak of war with Pakistan presaging India’s most significant food crisis since independence in the form of the Bihar Famine. The new prime minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, took up the call to ‘miss a meal’ once more. Newspapers echoed Shastri’s call, at rallies, for weekly ‘dinnerless days’, with the new slogan ‘*Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan*’—‘Long live the soldier and the farmer’—braiding together the aims of food and national defence.¹⁷² Congress rallied behind the prime minister, asking party workers to go door-to-door in support of a new food austerity campaign.¹⁷³ The Federation of Indian Chambers of

¹⁶⁹ ‘AICC Resolution on Food Production (1 and 2 June 1957)’, in Sunil Guha, *India’s Food Problem* (New Delhi: Indian National Congress, 1957), 15; ‘A Plea for Non-Cereal Foods’, *Eastern Economist*, 15 August 1958, 218.

¹⁷⁰ ‘Yoga and Food Habits: Speech while inaugurating the annual celebrations of Vishwayatan Yogashram, New Delhi, 17 November 1957’, *SWJN*, vol. 40, 251.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 797.

¹⁷² ‘The Threat of Famine’, *Time* 86, no. 23 (3 December 1965), 52. A discussion of the symbolism of Shastri’s call, and its representation in visual media, is ‘Yogendra Rastogi: Visualizing Modernity’, in Christopher Pinney, *Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (London: Reaktion, 2004), 168–74.

¹⁷³ ‘Congress Working Committee, New Delhi, 7 November 1965’, in A. M. Zaidi (ed.), *INC: The Glorious Tradition: Texts of the Resolutions Passed by the INC, the AICC and the CWC* (New Delhi: Indian Institute of Applied Political Research, 1989), 495–97. The movement also enjoyed a revival in the form of new support from India’s trading community, which embraced the conceit of voluntary self-regulation in food consumption as an alternative to federal and provincial legislation. See Ambalal Kilachand, ‘Letter to Mr. Dhirajlal Maganlal, President, Indian Merchants Chamber’, 28 July 1964, Indian Merchants’ Chamber, Bombay / 797 / Food Situation, Nehru

Commerce and Industry urged its members to refrain from receptions or dinner parties for the duration of the war, mooted a proposal to grow sweet potatoes in vacant factory lots.¹⁷⁴ And as war ended, the central government sponsored a conservation campaign showing two chapattis separated from a third. ‘Every third chapati you eat,’ it proclaimed, ‘is made from imported wheat. Let’s not eat it.’¹⁷⁵

These calls for austerity, restraint, and the subjugation of preference were of little concrete value, yet they tapped into a familiar idiom born of the immediate post-independence years. In January 1966, riots broke out in Kerala over the absence of rice in the rationing system, with protestors rejecting wheat sent from Punjab. As she jailed the Communist leaders said to be organizing the riots, Indira Gandhi tapped deeply into that idiom. ‘I pledge,’ she told the rioters, ‘to surrender my rice ration for the people of Kerala. I also pledge not to eat or serve rice until the food situation there is normal.’¹⁷⁶

Conclusion

‘Adversity,’ Education Minister Maulana Azad stated on India’s first anniversary, ‘is part of this independence package. The government needs courageous citizens. We have to lift burdens like strong, real men.’¹⁷⁷ An analogous advertisement for a major bank ran a month after India’s independence, carrying the words of a nationalist financier, T. A. Pai, who would later become first president of the Food Corporation of India. ‘No food minister can give us food,’ Pai wrote, ‘and no finance minister can give us economic stability and independence, unless and until every man and woman in the country helps them.’¹⁷⁸

The language of adversity, austerity, and sacrifice suffused public institutions and public speech throughout India’s early independent

Memorial Museum and Library; and Ambalal Kilachand, ‘Letter to C.L. Gheevala’, 14 August 1964, Indian Merchants’ Chamber, Bombay / 797 / Food Situation, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

¹⁷⁴ Kilachand, ‘Letter to C.L. Gheevala’; L. N. Birla, ‘Letter to G.L. Bansal’, 28 October 1965, Indian Merchants’ Chamber, Bombay / 800 / Food: Interim Scheme Of State Trading, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

¹⁷⁵ ‘Every Third Chapatti [advertisement in Save Food for Self-Sufficiency campaign]’, circa 1965–66.

¹⁷⁶ ‘A Particular Hunger’, *Time* 87, no. 6 (February 1966), 44.

¹⁷⁷ Roy, *Beyond Belief*, 105.

¹⁷⁸ ‘Canara Industrial & King Syndicate, Limited [Advertisement]’, *Indian Express*, 7 October 1947.

years, structuring the efforts of state institutions and national leaders to remake Indian diets. This ethos built upon a diverse range of late colonial antecedents, from the international Malthusian debates over population, land, and people and the economic writing of early Indian nationalists to the colonial language of nutrition and the schemes for reconstruction proposed by Indian planners.¹⁷⁹ Independence brought the nationalist concerns of human welfare and the amelioration of India's agriculture to the fore of national planning efforts, but the need to forward a plan of economic self-reliance and free up resources for industrial development saw India's leadership transferring the burden of food planning to citizens themselves, appealing to the qualities of virtue, shared burden, and sacrifice sutured to notions of post-colonial citizenship. In the years between independence and the First Five-Year Plan, in particular, that leadership could frame enduring scarcity as an incomplete assumption of the obligations of citizenship. 'If you cannot give up your sugar, your wheat or your rice for a while,' Nehru contended in an emblematic parliamentary debate in 1950, 'then the biggest army will not be able to protect you, because you lack inner strength.'¹⁸⁰

The government of early independent India, Sunil Khilnani has argued, 'was transformed from a distant, alien object into one that aspired to infiltrate the everyday lives of Indians. . . . The state thus etched itself into the imagination of Indians in a way that no previous political agency had ever done.'¹⁸¹ The campaign to remake Indian diets exemplified this transformation, and the ways in which a state initially unable to actualize fundamental social and economic change attempted to restructure the sentiments and behaviours of its citizens themselves, casting them as a fundamental obligation of post-colonial citizenship. Over the next decade, India's post-colonial leadership would grow more confident in the state's ability

¹⁷⁹ Undoubtedly, it also harkened back to the idioms of *Swadeshi* nationalism, which, Manu Goswami notes, 'radicalized and generalized the nationalist critique of colonialism on multiple, overlapping sociocultural terrains and in a deeply passionate idiom of autonomy, self-reliance, and sacrifice'. Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 243.

¹⁸⁰ Jawaharlal Nehru, 'The Growth of Violence: Speech in Reply to a Debate on Foreign Affairs in Parliament, New Delhi, 7 December 1950', in *Jawaharlal Nehru's Speeches*, vol. 2, 3rd ed. (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1963), 259–73.

¹⁸¹ Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998),

to undertake fundamental structural reform, and the 1950s were a high-water mark in the state's 'romance with developmental planning'.¹⁸² The remaking of diets, however, remained a convenient idiom for a state at moments of scarcity and developmental uncertainty.

By the time the technological advances of the Green Revolution began to take root in India in the form of the 'new agricultural strategy' of the mid 1960s, the focus of development planning had wholly shifted. If, in the earliest years of independence, the new state had looked to citizenship as an opportune site for transformation in the name of development, the relative inattentiveness of the state to the agrarian unrest and concentration of incomes wrought by the Green Revolution spoke to a paradigm of development that had become radically disjunct from questions of citizenship and shared sacrifice.¹⁸³ The connection between citizenship and agricultural development would be left, in years to come, to representatives of the 'new farmers' movements' whose populist narrative suggested that earlier nation-building efforts had been inimical to agrarian citizenship.¹⁸⁴ For a crucial period, however, India's public institutions and figures asked citizens to reimagine their relationship to the new state and their co-citizens, saddling Indians, and women in particular, with the bodily transformations that would help realize the goal of national self-reliance. As India's institutions and politicians charged citizens themselves with responsibility for their own sustenance, so, too, it charged them with the burden of the nation's development.

¹⁸² Kudaisya, "A Mighty Adventure".

¹⁸³ On this paradigm, see Francine R. Frankel, *India's Green Revolution: Economic Gains and Political Costs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971); Ashutosh Varshney, 'Ideas, Interest and Institutions in Policy Change: Transformation of India's Agricultural Strategy in the Mid-1960s', *Policy Sciences* 22, no. 3/4 (1 January 1989): 289–323; and Benjamin Siegel, 'Independent India of Plenty: Food, Hunger, and Nation-Building in Modern India', Ph.D. thesis, Harvard University, 2014. A prescient contemporary account is Wolf Ladejinsky, *The Green Revolution in Bihar, the Kosi Area: A Field Trip & the Green Revolution in Punjab: A Field Trip* (New York: Agricultural Development Council, 1976); the official perception of these transformations is reflected in Research and Policy Division, Ministry of Home Affairs, *The Causes and Nature of Current Agrarian Tensions* (New Delhi: Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, 1969).

¹⁸⁴ See Tom Brass (ed.), *New Farmers' Movements in India* (Ilford, Essex: Frank Cass, 1995); Akhil Gupta, 'Agrarian Populism in the Development of a Modern Nation (India)', in Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard (eds), *International Development and the Social Sciences* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 320–44.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.