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From “Grow More Food” to “Miss a Meal”: Hunger, Development and the Limits of Postcolonial Nationalism in India, 1947-1957*

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Charting the rise and fall of the Grow More Food programme in India, this article explores a set of tensions that characterised development policies in the first decade after independence in India. The postcolonial Indian state staked its legitimacy on securing economic independence for India, and, in particular, on being able to feed its citizens without resorting to importing food. The transition to food independence, however, was fraught and contested. In particular, this piece argues, the plans to get the nation to Grow More Food as part of this drive towards national self-sufficiency were marked by a conflict between the dream of providing the benefits of development to all Indians and the reality that independent India's resources were extremely limited. In addition, this transition also involved a transformation in the nature of nationalism. The ruling Indian National Congress struggled to formulate a postcolonial nationalism because it was torn between using the state for development and urging the people to shape their own destiny outside of the state. It was also deeply ambivalent about rural citizens, who were viewed both as a burden and as a potentially limitless public resource. This article suggests that one of the defining features of postcolonial development was the tension between scientific and democratic development.

This article examines the rise and fall of India's Grow More Food programme in light of existing scholarship on the regime of international development that emerged after the Second World War. In so doing, it explores a set of tensions in the postcolonial development regime that was supposed to secure the legitimacy of India's new rulers. Independent India was certainly incorporated into the post-war international political geography in which underdeveloped territories were to be helped on the path to modernity by international experts, foreign aid and the transfer of technologies.¹ Of course, the conception of India as an underdeveloped country predated the apotheosis of post-war development theory by nearly a

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¹ James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: the Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, (New Haven: Princeton University Press, 1995); Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard (eds.), *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

century.² But having taken over the reins of government in 1947, many of the leaders of postcolonial India accepted the conception of their country as underdeveloped, and most staked their legitimacy on their ability to improve the material conditions of Indians.³

This article questions the received wisdom that has assumed that independent India's first rulers successfully anchored their legitimacy by taking over and expanding upon the development regimes of the late colonial state. Scholars of the rise and fall of modernisation theory have long suggested that colonial and early postcolonial regimes grounded their legitimacy in their promise to bring development to their countries.⁴ Simultaneously, they have emphasised the continuities between late-colonial and postcolonial development regimes.⁵ Together, the focus on continuity and legitimacy has obscured our view of the transition period surrounding independence. In this time, although there were powerful forces of continuity, India's leaders felt the pressing need to be seen to take the country in new directions. While the country's leaders wagered their legitimacy on their ability to bring development to India, they did not always win this gamble. The research below demonstrates that India's transition to becoming a developmentalist state was trickier than has been acknowledged. The history of the rise and fall of the Grow More Food Programme reveals that this period was characterised by a series of tensions: those between popular action and state-led development; between targeting India's limited resources to a select few and providing the tools of development to all; and between regarding India's rural population as a burden, and seeing it as the nation's only hope for salvation. The difficult transition to economic independence in India was characterised by these conflicts.

Whilst independent India's first rulers inherited the structure of the colonial state, including its development programmes, the transition to independence did entail transformations in the form and function of nationalist politics, which had implications for the country's development programmes. Anti-colonial parties had achieved legitimacy through mass mobilisation against colonial governments, but postcolonial nationalism was

² Bipan Chandra, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India*, (Delhi: Anamika Publishers, 2004).

³ Akhil Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998); Sugata Bose, 'Instruments and Idioms of Colonial and National Development: India's Historical Experience in Comparative Perspective', in Cooper and Packard (eds.), *International Development and the Social Sciences*, pp. pp.45-63.

⁴ Ferguson, *The Anti-politics Machine*; Partha Chatterjee, 'Development Planning and the Indian State', in Partha Chatterjee (ed.), *State and politics in India*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp.271-297.

⁵ Cooper and Randall, 'Introduction', in Cooper and Packard (eds.), *International Development and the Social Sciences*, pp.1-41.

largely redirected through the channels of the state.⁶ However, the flow of nationalist action was diverted through the state neither instantaneously nor fluidly. Indeed, both Chatterjee and Kaviraj have underscored the ways in which the nationalist takeover of the state gave rise to contradictions between development and democracy in India: each has suggested that the resources needed for a 'rational' and 'unitary' development strategy often were diverted to reward particular groups, especially landlords, for their loyalty in democratic elections.⁷ These scholars highlight tensions that emerged over how best to use the resources of the state. This paper, in contrast, argues that the Indian National Congress Party, as well as opposition groups, were torn over the question of whether development ought to be pursued using the newly acquired instruments of the bureaucracy or through the old mechanisms of popular action outside of the state. The pages that follow chart the ways in which the ruling Indian National Congress Party ran up against the limits of postcolonial nationalism as the governments it controlled tried to straddle this divide.

In addition, existing scholarship on transnational development regimes has tended to regard the populations of developing countries primarily as the objects of discursive representations and top-down policy interventions by experts.⁸ This article, by contrast, highlights the distinct note of ambivalence found in the relationship between the developmentalist state and the population in India. The experience of the Grow More Food programme suggests that, rather than simply viewing the bulk of the rural population as a burden that had to be lifted into modernity, government officials and members of the urban educated classes had more complex views. At times, officials did indeed regard India's huge rural population as a 'static' multitude who would have to be dragged into modernity.⁹ Given India's limited natural and economic resources, however, 'the enthusiasm of the people' was simultaneously regarded as, 'the greatest, and some might feel disposed to say the only, asset which India can count on'.¹⁰ Thus, India's agricultural population was at once both an object

⁶ Srirupa Roy, *Beyond Belief: India and the Politics of Postcolonial Nationalism*, (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007).

⁷ Chatterjee, 'Development Planning'; Sudipta Kaviraj, 'Dilemmas of Democratic Development in India', in Adrian Leftwich (ed.), *Democracy and Development: Theory and Practice*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), p.123

⁸ Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-politics, Modernity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Joseph Morgan Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism*, (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2007); c.f. Michael Jennings, 'We Must Run While Others Walk': Popular Participation and Development Crisis in Tanzania, 1961-9', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 41:2 (2003), pp.163-187; Michael Jennings, 'A Very Real War': Popular Participation in Development in Tanzania During the 1950s and 1960s', *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 40:1 (2007), pp.71-95

⁹ *Report of the Grow More Food Enquiry Committee*, Delhi: Ministry of Food and Agriculture, 1952, p.8

¹⁰ *The Bombay Chronicle*, 3 April 1951, Editorial.

to be moulded and a seemingly limitless resource to be tapped. At the heart of this conflict was the question of India's limited resources; this was also at the centre of another tension evident in this period. Without well-developed indigenous educational institutions, a solid economic base, or the surfeit of foreign exchange reserves necessary to manufacture or purchase the human and technological elements essential for a modernising development programme that would cover the whole country, the Government of India was torn between targeting development at select groups, and the promises it had made to improve the life of every Indian. These conflicts shaped the Grow More Food Programme, which was designed as both a national movement and a scientific endeavour.

In order to explore these questions, this research turns to a relatively under-studied area of postcolonial Indian history: the first decade after independence. Until recently, historians had long ignored the first decade after independence.¹¹ According to the conventional historiography, it was only with the start of the second five year plan (1957), that Indian leaders, and in particular, India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, developed what Akhil Gupta has called, 'a coherent ideology and strategy of development', which included the establishment of a planned economy aimed at the rapid creation of heavy industries.¹² In this scholarship, the first decade after independence was merely an interregnum in which India waited for the full programme of Nehruvian planning to begin. Moreover, scholars studying the period before the Green Revolution of the late 1960s have tended to focus on the rhetoric and the promises of the five year plans.¹³ As a result, they have neglected to conduct a granular analysis of various programmes that touched the lives of Indians most directly, including land reform, the transformation of education through the state-sponsored promulgation of vernacular education, and the reordering of the lowest levels of government via the introduction of panchayati raj. Although recent works have begun to sketch pictures of early postcolonial health and sanitation initiatives or the inner workings of the planning apparatus, these scholars have not reached beyond these more narrow concerns

¹¹ cf. Subir Sinha, 'Lineages of the Developmentalist State: Transnationality and Village India, 1900-1965', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50:1 (2008), pp.57-90; Medha Kudaisya, "'A Mighty Adventure': Institutionalising the Idea of Planning in Post-colonial India, 1947-60', *Modern Asian Studies* 43:4 (2009), pp.939-978; Christian W. McMillen, and Niels Brimnes, 'Medical Modernization and Medical Nationalism: Resistance to Mass Tuberculosis Vaccination in Postcolonial India, 1948-1955', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 52:1 (2010), pp.180-209.

¹² Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments*, p.49; Bose, 'Instruments and Idioms', p.53; see also, Chatterjee, 'Development Planning and the Indian State'; Varshney, Ahutosh, *Democracy, Development and the Countryside: Urban-Rural Struggles in India*, Cambridge: CUP, 1995; Kaviraj, 'Dilemmas of Democratic Development'.

¹³ *Ibid.*; Benjamin Zachariah, *Developing India: an Intellectual and Social History, c. 1930-50*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

to ask what they reveal about the nature of the early postcolonial state or of early Congress rule more broadly.¹⁴ As a result, the scholarship to date has not captured the uncertainty and flux of these early years.

In an attempt to begin filling these gaps, the research below examines a food crisis that enveloped the country in the first five years after independence. Between 1947 and 1952 there was a perennial fear of shortages in India, and, in 1951 and 1952, real scarcity and the threat of famine in Eastern regions of the country. India suffered a long food crisis between 1939 and 1952,¹⁵ but historians have almost completely overlooked the latter half of this emergency. Whilst the Bengal Famine of 1943 has received a great deal of attention,¹⁶ the post-independence phase of the crisis has received none. Scholars have tended to accept the government of India's 1954 claim that, 'The really remarkable achievement of food administration since 1943 has been that even during the years of the worst crop failures and difficulties in obtaining supplies from abroad, fair shares for all have been ensured. There has been no recurrence of the Bengal famine'.¹⁷ Although it does not dispute it, this paper uncovers the reasons for the strong sense of relief that pervades this statement, and in so doing reveals just how fraught, contested, and sometimes chaotic the attempt to transition to economic independence and food stability was. It suggests that, far from creating the mollifying illusion of a competent state overseeing technological and economic progress, the move to planning India's food economy on a scientific basis threatened to undermine the government's legitimacy precisely because planning did not bring India's food supply under the command of those who so desperately wished to control it.

Food self-sufficiency and the transition to economic independence

India's food economy had long been fragile. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries different parts of the country had suffered a series of devastating famines as India

¹⁴ Kudaisya, 'A Mighty Adventure'; McMillen and Brimnes, 'Medical Modernization and Medical Nationalism'.

¹⁵ On the global food crisis during the war, see, Lizzie Collingham, *The Taste of War: World War Two and the Battle for Food*, (London: Allen Lane, 2011).

¹⁶ Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); Paul R. Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal: the Famine of 1943-1944*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1982); Bikramjit De, 'Imperial Governance and the Challenges of War', *Studies in History* 22 (2006), pp.1-43.

¹⁷ *Food Situation in India, 1939-1953*, (Delhi: Ministry of Food and Agriculture, 1954), p.vi.

completed the transition to a colonial economy.¹⁸ India's first generation of nationalists had cut their teeth during the scarcity of the late nineteenth century, declaring that the repeated famines of the period were proof that British rule had impoverished India in part by exposing it to the whims of the global economy.¹⁹ During the first four decades of the twentieth century, new concerns about population growth, urbanisation, and women's health combined to produce a more concerted interest in diets and nutrition amongst British policy makers in India.²⁰ Simultaneously, food became central to the new forms of solidarity and new understandings of the role of the state that Indian nationalists were cultivating: on the one hand, Gandhi formulated a new national diet, which would not only be more nutritious than existing diets, but would help break down existing caste barriers and build the nation; on the other hand, modernists, as Sunil Amrith terms them, drew up schemes for better state control of food production and distribution.²¹ As we shall see below, this division – between confidence in the ability to achieve progress through the state, and a belief in the necessity of people working outside the state – remained a central tension in nationalist thinking on the question of food.

The outbreak of the Second World War put severe strain on India's food economy, in part because the war cut India off from the world food markets on which it had become dependent. Fear of invasion and shortages led to hoarding; transport networks, burdened with the movement of war goods, were unable to bring food to market. When Burma fell to the Japanese in March 1942 the real crisis began. Since Burma had separated from India in 1937, India had imported a few million tons of rice each year from its eastern neighbour.²² This invaluable resource was instantly lost when the Japanese captured Burma. In the same year, rice crops in Bengal were lost due to both a cyclone and disease. Although the Government of India attempted to control prices and move food from surplus areas to deficit ones, these measures were unable to stem hoarding or redistribute grains across the country because many provinces banned the export of food. Inept procurement, misplaced propaganda, and

¹⁸ e.g. David Hall-Matthews, *Peasants, Famine and the State in Colonial Western India*, Houdmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005; Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts. El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World*, (London: Verso 2001), chs.1-2.

¹⁹ Darren C. Zook, 'Famine in the Landscape: Imagining Hunger in South Asian History, 1860-1990', in Arun Agrawal, and K. Sivaramakrishnan (ed.), *Agrarian Environments: Resources, Representation and Rule in India*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Chandra, *Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism*.

²⁰ David Arnold, 'The "Discovery" of Malnutrition and Diet in Colonial India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol.31:1, 1994, pp.1-26

²¹ Sunil Amrith, 'Food and Welfare in India, c.1900-1950', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50:4 (2008), pp.1010–1035.

²² *Report of the Grow More Food Enquiry Committee*, p.5

erratic control policies by the government Bengal helped to turn acute scarcity into a man-made catastrophe. The result was the Great Bengal Famine of 1943, in which as many as 4m people died of starvation.²³

In the same year, the first Grow More Food Programme was launched. It endeavoured to encourage more extensive and intensive cultivation. The first Grow More Food campaign was, in the words of one report, 'improvised in a hurry and under the pressure of compelling events it had naturally to be built up on such knowledge as was readily available and with such resources in trained personnel and material as could be hastily mustered.'²⁴ By the end of the war, therefore, after more than two years of extending cultivation, emergency irrigation works, manure schemes, seed distribution and other programmes, the government was unable to even proffer an estimate of the increase in production achieved due to the Grow More Food campaign. Indeed, where yields had increased, it was assumed that this was 'made possible largely by the mercy of Providence' in the form of favourable monsoon rains.²⁵

Growing more food was not the only element of the wartime food economy. During the war, governments had introduced procurement by levy, controls on prices and rationing, all of which were designed to acquire food, move it around the country, and ensure that poorer sections of the population had access to food at subsidised prices. However, the range of controls and rationing varied according to the needs of each province. Even in those provinces with extensive food-related bureaucracies, government did not command the entire food economy: rationing covered only food grains and was centred primarily on the most populated urban areas.²⁶ Even though India operated one of the largest rationing systems in the world, it reached less than one-fifth of all Indians.²⁷ For the rest of the food economy, there was the open market or the black market. Given that governments procured food grains at below-market prices, the black market boomed during the war.²⁸

By the end of the war, India's food situation had eased somewhat, but India's government feared that the country's food supplies were far from secure. Disruption caused by the post-war global slump in prices was worsened by Hindu-Muslim-Sikh unrest in

²³ Sen, *Poverty and Famines*, p.52, and pp.75-80. See also Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery*.

²⁴ *Grow More Food Campaign Progress*, (Delhi: Department of Education, Health and Lands, 1945), p.1

²⁵ *Grow More Food Campaign Progress*, p.2

²⁶ *Food Situation in India, 1939-1953*, p.xx. See also, Indivar Kamtekar, 'A Different War Dance: State and Class in India, 1939-1945', *Past and Present* 176:1 (2002), pp.187-221.

²⁷ Department of State, Funds Appropriated to the President, The Indian Emergency Food Aid Program, [undated], United States National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC (hereafter NARA), RG59/250/63/22/06/box3; NARA RG59/5392/box 3.

²⁸ William Gould, *Bureaucracy, Community and Influence in India: Society and the State, 1930s - 1960s* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

Punjab, one of the country's main centres of wheat production. When British India, along with the province of Punjab, was partitioned on 15 August 1947, Indian markets were cut off from lands producing a sizeable portion of food grains.²⁹ Independent India's precarious food situation sparked intense debate about how best to feed the population and about the merits of government control of the food economy. This debate notwithstanding, with the exception of a brief and unsuccessful experiment with decontrol over the period between December 1947 and September 1948, price controls and procurement measures were maintained, and rationing was extended for several years.³⁰ The Grow More Food Programme was extended in September 1946; the following year, as India's first independent government took power, the programme was re-launched and 'placed on a planned basis'.³¹

Primarily, placing India's food economy on a 'planned basis' meant fixing for each state and province, 'definite targets for the production of additional food'.³² Although there were real problems with these statistics, which will be discussed below, the numbers provided were indicating that the government of independent India would have to rely on imports to maintain supply. Buying food abroad was a drain on India's finances, however. Not only did importing food force the government to use scarce foreign currency reserves to buy goods, but imports were then sold at subsidised prices within India, amplifying the state's losses. Food subsidies alone cost the Government of India Rs20-25 crore per year between 1946 and 1949.³³ At the same time, the Government of India was struggling to control inflation and provide for partition's refugees, while spending nearly half of its budget (and even more of its foreign reserves) on defence as it prepared for war in Kashmir.³⁴

In an attempt to avoid exhausting its foreign reserves, the Government of India announced in mid-1949 that it would import no more food grains after the end of 1951. At the same time, it promised to escalate efforts to produce more food at home. Nehru warned the nation against losing its hard-won independence, telling the population in a radio address: 'If we do not produce enough food for our country, we become dependent upon other countries,

²⁹ *Food Situation in India*, p.iii.

³⁰ Ian Duncan, 'The Politics of Liberalisation in Post-Independence India: Food Deregulation in 1947', *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 33:1 (1995), pp.25-45.

³¹ *Report of the Grow More Food Enquiry Committee*, p.9

³² *Towards Self-Sufficiency*, (Delhi: Ministry of Food and Agriculture, 1951), p.7

³³ *Food Situation in India, 1939-1953*, p.xiii. One crore is ten million.

³⁴ For one estimate of India's defence expenditure see, State Department, Country Statement on India, [undated, c.1951], NARA RG469/UD 1233/box 2.

and in a matter like food we cannot afford to be dependent.’³⁵ By and large, the initiative was welcomed throughout the country. *Siasat*, an Urdu-language daily based in Hyderabad (Deccan), declared, ‘The kind of independence that cannot fill hungry stomachs is not true independence’.³⁶ Reminding its readers that the Congress Party had promised the people that after achieving *swaraj* (self-rule), ‘they would have no worries over food or employment’, the paper warned the Government of India that, ‘it should attend to fulfilling the basic needs of the people before the volcano of people’s growing unease and disappointment explodes’.³⁷ Food was thus inextricably linked to both the larger questions of economic prosperity and political stability. Food was not just the basic need of a human; it was the basic need of a nation.

It was with this knowledge that the Grow More Food Campaign was re-launched with the drive to self-sufficiency. But the Grow More Food programme was in fact not one but two campaigns: one deployed the tools of a self-styled scientific development planning and functioned through the bureaucracy; the other was conducted on the popular level and placed its faith in the collective power of the people to mould their destiny outside of the state. The division between the two was a symptom of the deep ambivalence at policy level and amongst urban educated classes about the peasants who produced India’s food. Announcing the self-sufficiency drive, Nehru had declared that it was not only ‘a war against poverty’, but also a fight against ‘ignorance’, a veiled reference to farming techniques that were regularly blamed for the country’s low production.³⁸ More explicitly, the editorial team of *Siasat* acknowledged that for the programme to succeed, ‘the people, the cultivators and the government will have to...cooperate more and more’. But in the same paragraph, the paper bemoaned that Indian cultivators were ‘ignorant’ and that they were still using the same ‘ancient’ farming methods that they had been practicing ‘since the time of the Great Ashoka’ in the third century BCE.³⁹ Indian cultivators, the majority of whom were scraping a living on small plots with little access to irrigation, let alone fertilisers or tractors, were paradoxically both a hindrance and one of the only tools at hand to solve India’s ‘food problem’.

A popular campaign for economic independence

³⁵ ‘A Crusade for Food Production’, All India Radio Address, 29 June 1949, in Gopal, S. (ed.) *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, Second Series* (hereafter *SWJN2*), (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1992), vol.12, p. 47.

³⁶ *Siasat (Hyderabad)*, 30 August 1949, Editorial (all translations are my own)

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ ‘A Crusade for Food Production’, All India Radio Address, 29 June 1949, *SWJN2*, vol.12., p.47

³⁹ *Siasat (Hyderabad)*, 20 November 1949, Editorial.

In some respects, the Grow More Food campaign was conducted in the manner the ruling Congress Party knew best: it was a nation-wide popular movement in which the people were to be marched into the battle for national self-sufficiency. Indeed, the idea that every citizen had a contribution to make and that the sum of these contributions would be sufficient to make up India's food shortages fell easily into nationalist paradigms. Nehru appealed to every Indian to join the 'crusade for food production', telling them, 'It is a war in which every citizen can be a soldier and can serve his or her country.'⁴⁰ Self-sufficiency in food grains readily dovetailed with nationalist concepts of *swadeshi* (*lit.* of one's own country, national manufactures), which had been in currency since the early nationalist movement.⁴¹ Nehru reminded the nation that Gandhi had urged people to spin their own cloth to fight for economic independence, 'If we can manage without depending on other countries for cloth', Nehru reasoned, 'why should we do so for food?'⁴²

As both national and provincial schemes were elaborated, all the tools of the nationalist movement were deployed in the cause. Thus, just as they had during anti-British campaigns, Indians (be they cultivators or not) were encouraged to take collective pledges that ran thus:

I shall fully follow in my day-to-day life the orders given by the Provincial Government from time to time in regard to the production of foodstuffs and their saving, and shall advise others to do the same.

...

I shall use coarse foodgrains [sic] in my daily meals

I shall use the least amount of rice conveniently possible

I shall regularly devote a part of my time in work, either connected with production of food or its saving;

I shall devote all my energies and resources in the production of foodstuffs, especially grains (this is only for those who cultivate land).⁴³

As they had been in anti-colonial campaigns, volunteers would be important in this movement too. They were 'to go into the villages, and take active measures' to see that the schemes for growing more food were 'taken up on as large a scale as possible.' The

⁴⁰ 'A Crusade for Food Production', All India Radio Address, 29 June 1949, *SWJN2*, vol.12., p.47

⁴¹ Manu Goswami, *Producing India: from Colonial Economy to National Space*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), ch.8.

⁴² 'Grow More Food', All India Radio Address, 6 August 1949, *SWJN2*, vol.12, p.74

⁴³ S.Y. Krishnaswamy, Joint Secretary to the Government of India to All Provincial Governments, Local Administrations and All States and States Union Governments, 13 September 1949, Andhra Pradesh State Archives, Hyderabad (hereafter APSA), Instalment no.81, list no.5, serial no.802.

Government of India believed that the existing machinery of the Congress Party would be particularly suited to this task.⁴⁴

At this time, governments across the country drew up a series of national days and weeks which were designed to mirror those established during the days of the campaigns against the Raj. In the 1920s and 1930s holidays such as ‘Political Prisoners Day’ had helped forge the Indian nation by bringing groups of Indians together to raise the Congress flag, sing national songs and remember the sacrifices of their compatriots. It was in this vein that the Food Ministry urged the country to participate in a week-long Vana Mahotsav (Forest Festival) in 1949, in which it was hoped ten million trees would be planted within one week. Shortly after taking up his post as Food Minister, K.M. Munshi endorsed the Vana Mahotsav and ‘drew attention to the very heavy destruction of trees which he feared might result in erratic monsoons and seriously interfere with the “Grow-More-Food” campaign.’⁴⁵ On a provincial level, the Government of Hyderabad organised ‘levy week’ to encourage procurement and reward districts which handed over the most food;⁴⁶ Madras celebrated ‘Compost Week’ in October 1950.⁴⁷

Imagining a nation, however, was not the same as feeding one. As most Congress leaders were more adept at pageantry than agriculture, many of these schemes were neither comprehensive nor coherent. For example, ‘compost week’ collapsed in the follow-through: although municipal corporations in Madras had spent much needed funds to make compost, cultivators refused to buy it because ‘the cost of transporting compost from the town to the farms in the villages was prohibitive.’⁴⁸ In neighbouring Hyderabad, the government made 91,000 maunds⁴⁹ of improved wheat, jowar and rice seeds available for sale in 1949 and 1950.⁵⁰ But wheat was not a popular crop in Hyderabad, as most of the population preferred to eat rice, and cultivators refused to pay cash for the new breed of wheat seeds. The government tried to give the seeds away on a loan basis,⁵¹ but even then not all of the available seed was distributed and the Government was compelled ‘to use the remaining

⁴⁴ S.Y. Krishnaswamy to All Provincial Governments and States Governments, 3 September 1949, APSA, Instalment no.81, list no.5, serial no.820.

⁴⁵ *Bharat*, 7 June 1950, NMML, Munshi papers, reel 124, f.410.

⁴⁶ L.C. Jain, Chief Secretary to Chief Civil Administrator, Government of Hyderabad, to M.K. Vellodi, Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of States, 21 June 1949, National Archives of India, New Delhi (hereafter NAI), Ministry of States (hereafter MoS), f.11(3)-H/49.

⁴⁷ *Mail (Madras)*, 6 October 1950, NMML, Munshi papers, reel 125, f.416.

⁴⁸ *Mail (Madras)*, 6 October 1950, NMML, Munshi papers, reel 125, f.416.

⁴⁹ One maund was the equivalent of around eighty pounds.

⁵⁰ A brief note on the activities of the Department of Agriculture for the Year 1949-50, [undated], NAI, MoS, f.1(5)-H/51.

⁵¹ L.C. Jain, Chief Secretary to Chief Civil Administrator, Government of Hyderabad, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of States, 1 December 1949, NAI, MoS, f.11(3)-H/49.

stocks for human consumption.’⁵² Similarly, the Vana Mahotsav, was not backed by sustained action: although nearly seven million trees had been planted in one week in 1949, ‘an overwhelming majority of them were neglected from want of care.’⁵³ The Vana Mahotsav was ‘celebrated’ for several years running, and a cartoon in *Siasat* in August 1952 captured public contempt at the wasted effort the Forest Festival represented:

[*Siasat* cartoon, 24 August 1952. The caption reads: ‘It occurs to me that I planted a tree in this very place last year’]

As one can see, some of these popular efforts were also ‘scientific’ in their orientation. Hence, hundreds of wells were drilled, fertilisers and improved varieties of seed were made available for purchase, and hundreds of thousands of rupees were loaned to farmers to help them buy these items.⁵⁴ It was at the intersection of the scientific and popular sides of the campaign that the tensions within it were most apparent. There was immense pressure on India’s new leaders to provide such scientific benefits to all cultivators, but the government did not have the funds to make them available to everyone. For their part, farmers were reluctant to spend what little funds they had on one element, such as improved seeds, without access to the other elements, irrigation and fertilisers. And they were wary of spending money to increase production only to have it taken away by the government levy, and so in many cases simply chose not to take up the schemes at all. Indeed, many of the endeavours undertaken between 1947 and 1952 had little appeal for the rural population. The pledge to ‘use coarse foodgrains in my daily meals’ and ‘fully follow in my day-to-day life the orders given by the Provincial Government’ promised neither the excitement of defying the law nor the drama of ‘do or die’ which had characterised the anti-British struggle.

Scientific efforts towards a planned food economy

The ostensibly more scientific, government-run aspect of the campaign was conducted by governments for citizens, cultivators and consumers. It was concerned with gathering information to be deployed by governments to make the best use of India’s limited food resources. This side of the Grow More Food programme was, therefore, supposed to be a

⁵² L.C. Jain to the Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of States, 22 January 1950, NAI, MoS, f.11(3)-H/49.

⁵³ *Bharat*, 7 June 1950, NMML, Munshi papers, reel 124, f.410.

⁵⁴ *Report of the Grow More Food Enquiry Committee*, p.11

symphony of coordinated programmes designed by both the centre and provincial and state governments. The man conducting India's food policy between May 1950 and May 1952, during the height of the food crisis, was the Government of India's Minister for Food, K.M. Munshi. Giving an indication of his competence as he left the post, Munshi noted that 'he had enjoyed writing books much more than being a Food Minister'.⁵⁵ Indeed, across the country, it proved difficult to find the technical personnel necessary to conduct research⁵⁶ or to survey existing storage infrastructure to assess where losses were being suffered due to infestation.⁵⁷

As the drive to put food production on a planned footing took shape, it necessitated the gathering and production of new types of knowledge. The centre thus demanded standardised weekly, fortnightly and yearly reports on various aspects of food production, from rainfall, and expected yields,⁵⁸ to the amount of food lost due to infestation of storage facilities.⁵⁹ As Grow More Food programmes got underway, the Centre called for standardised information on, for example, how many acres had been planted with improved varieties of seed.⁶⁰ For each crop, governments were asked to gather figures on the target for production, actual production, the increase in production, and the amount of surplus or deficit of the crop in the state.⁶¹

This type of data was designed to make India's food supply calculable and therefore controllable.⁶² This was, of course, a part of larger global changes in which knowledge about land use and food production began to be enclosed as a field for specialists, and these experts' understanding of food changed significantly.⁶³ These developments were accompanied by an increased demand for statistics for deployment in comparative analysis of provinces and nations, and for use in political arguments. New knowledge about calories and

⁵⁵ *Times of India* (New Delhi), 8 May 1952, NMML, Munshi papers, reel 125, f.416.

⁵⁶ Deputy Secretary, General Administrative Department, Hyderabad-Deccan, to the Secretary, Indian Council of Agricultural Research, 26 January 1949, APSA, Instalment no.81, list no.5, serial no.450

⁵⁷ Assistant Secretary, GAD (Political), Hyderabad Deccan to the Plant Protection Advisor, 7 May 1951, APSA, Instalment no.81, list no.5, serial no.834.

⁵⁸ W.R. Natu, Economic and Statistical Advisor and Deputy Secretary to the Government of India to all Directors of Agriculture, All Provinces, Administrations and States, 30 January 1948, APSA, Instalment no.81, list no.5, serial no.342.

⁵⁹ The Plant Protection Adviser to the Government of India to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Hyderabad (Dn) 11 November 1950, APSA, Instalment no.81, list no.5, serial no.834.

⁶⁰ Draft letter from Private Secretary to the Chief Civil Administrator to the Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, 31 December 1948, APSA, Instalment no.81, list no.5, serial no.636.

⁶¹ e.g S.Y. Krishnaswamy, Joint Secretary to the Government of India to All Provincial Governments and State Governments, 13 October 1949, APSA, Instalment no.81, list no.5, serial no.803. See also, S.T. Raja, Under Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India to the Chief Secretary, Hyderabad State, 13 August 1949, APSA, Instalment no.81, list no.5, serial no.802.

⁶² Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*.

⁶³ Amrith, 'Food and Welfare', pp.1022-3.

vitamins that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century was designed to detach food from its cultural context (at least in the minds of policy-makers), and transform it into a universal, 'material instrument of statecraft.'⁶⁴

Thus, a planned food economy meant knowing how much food was available, acquiring surplus produce and moving it into areas where there was a deficit before scarcity could strike. Reliable production statistics and an efficient procurement regime, it was believed, would provide the foundation for food planning. Throughout the duration of the re-launched Grow More Food Programme, however, the lament repeatedly arose that the statistics available to government were unreliable. The central government relied on provinces for data, and provinces received their information from *patwaris* (village-level revenue officials), who, in turn, asked farmers for their production levels. In this system, there was an intrinsic incentive for cultivators to deliberately under-report their food production. The system of government procurement at below-market prices, coupled with a vibrant black market, provided a strong incentive for farmers to avoid consigning their produce to government through the levy, and to sell it instead where they could earn the highest margins. And this was no secret. On the production side, in some sections there was sympathy with cultivators who resorted to the black market: 'life gets dearer day by day', *Siasat* noted, and 'the poor classes are prevented from gaining profits' by the system of procurement. 'They run to the black market not so that they might amass money and become rich', but rather, the paper explained, simply in order to 'fulfil their daily needs'.⁶⁵ On the consumption side, one estimate suggested that, 'It would be an understatement to say that nine out of ten persons who can afford it traffics in the black-market in foodgrains [sic].'⁶⁶ As a result, it was agreed that inaccuracy must have been a defining feature of food statistics at this time: Nehru believed, 'It may be taken for granted' that the reports *patwaris* submitted were 'incorrect'.⁶⁷ According to the Prime Minister, 'The result of all this is that we grope in the dark.'⁶⁸

Blame could not be pinned on cultivators and *patwaris* alone. Centrally, increased production was measured by assuming that applying manure to land, or planting improved varieties of seed would multiply yields by a fixed amount. Estimates for increased production were reached by multiplying, for example, the number of acres that were put under manure

⁶⁴ Nick Cullather, 'The Foreign Policy of the Calorie', *The American Historical Review* 112:(2) (2007), pp.337-364, p.338.

⁶⁵ *Siasat (Hyderabad)*, 23 September 1951, Editorial

⁶⁶ *The Bombay Chronicle*, 3 May 1951, Editorial, p.4

⁶⁷ Nehru to Jairamdas Doulatram, 1 July 1949, *SWJN2* vol.12, p.53

⁶⁸ Nehru to Premiers of Provinces, 1 July 1949, *SWN2* vol.12, p.57

for the first time by a constant that was calculated centrally, rather than measured in the field. In some cases extra yield was over-estimated; in others it was under-estimated.⁶⁹ Equally, provinces had no reason to report their real levels of food production, even if they did know them because the system of redistribution between surplus and deficit areas took the form of bargaining between the central government and provincial governments.⁷⁰ The English-language paper, *The Statesman*, described the annual Food Ministers' Conference as a 'curious struggle' in which 'States pitch their demands as high as possible while the Centre tries to bring them down'.⁷¹ Munshi acknowledged that because of this, 'the surplus units are not too anxious to disclose their real surplus nor are the deficit units anxious to disclose the real deficit'.⁷² The poor foundation of India's plan to end food imports was a subject of derision in the press. After Munshi's admission that statistics regarding production and consumption were 'not accurate', the *Hindustan Standard* mocked the plan to end imports: 'While thus our supply and requirement remain unknown quantities, we are planning to make the entire country self-sufficient in respect of food in course of another year. God save us!'⁷³

This system repeated many of the mistakes of government policy during the Bengal famine, even as the findings about what went wrong in 1943-4 were becoming public knowledge.⁷⁴ What was designed to be a symphony of efforts between central and provincial governments turned into a cacophonous row, with many provinces constantly pressing the Centre for a greater allocation of grains. Monthly announcements on the gap between food production and consumption encouraged hoarding, which in turn caused prices to rise. Even if no one had faith in the statistics published, a sense of crisis grew because the production of food ultimately depended on the one thing the government could neither command nor cajole, but which everyone could monitor: the weather.

Hunger, Anger, Doubt

Over the first five years after independence, the weather was not kind to India. In the south, the smaller winter rains known as the northeast monsoon failed five years in a row between 1947 and 1952. In 1950 India's east coast was hit by a cyclone that caused extensive damage

⁶⁹ *Report of the Grow More Food Enquiry Committee*, p.18

⁷⁰ e.g. R.S. Krishnaswamy, Ministry of Food, Government of India, to Vinayak Rao, Ministry for Supply, Government of Hyderabad, 4 August 1950, NAI, MoS, f.10(3)-H/50.

⁷¹ *The Statesman (New Delhi)*, 25 May 1950, NMML, Munshi papers, reel 124, f.406.

⁷² *The Deccan Chronicle (Hyderabad)*, 24 May 1950, p.2.

⁷³ *Hindustan Standard*, 25 May 1950, NMML, Munshi papers, reel 124, f.406.

⁷⁴ *Final Report of the Famine Inquiry Commission*, Madras: Superintendent, Govt Press, 1945.

to rice crops. In the same year, the Kosi river flooded, destroying crops in Bihar and Eastern UP. When the main summer monsoons failed in 1950 nearly 'the entire standing crop' in rice-growing districts of central India was lost.⁷⁵ The following year a flood in Godavari District of Madras caused much of the rice crop to be lost.⁷⁶ Weather conditions worsened between 1949 and 1952, harming food crops and fostering a fear of scarcity that encouraged hoarding. The biggest crises occurred in eastern India, in Bihar and Madras, in the build-up to the monsoon in the summer of 1951, but failed crops caused hardship in rural areas of Hyderabad, Kashmir and UP, and high food prices produced conditions of scarcity amongst the poorest from East Punjab to West Bengal. Whilst those who experienced hardship were scattered across India, these separate local shortages were understood as part of a single, national food crisis.

To be sure, there was not an absolute lack of food in India at this time: in Punjab and Western UP, surplus grain was produced. But citizens in several rural areas of eastern India could not afford to feed themselves in the face of rising prices, in part because many were landless labourers or families owning tiny plots of land.⁷⁷ The emergency was a crisis of already marginalised populations being pushed into a position where they could not afford to purchase food. A team from the Delhi School of Economics that visited Bihar in 1951 also concluded that the food crisis was not just a question of scarcity, but of the 'lack of purchasing power' of landless labourers and small farmers.⁷⁸

Whilst India had tried to adopt the latest mode of calculating food production, the hunger that spread through parts of the young country was not measured using the latest metric, the calorie. Instead, hunger was detected in older ways, by observing patterns of consumption, migration and public unrest. As the summer monsoon failed in 1950, Hyderabad's Raichur District witnessed 'two minor food riots' in June.⁷⁹ In August 1950, it was reported that 'people from certain parts of Aurangabad District are migrating...in search of food and employment.'⁸⁰ A delegation from the Journalists Association which travelled to Jammu found the conditions in Kishtwar were 'indescribably horrible,' as the people had been reduced to living on wild herbs and grass, whilst most of the cattle population had

⁷⁵ *The Leader (Allahabad)*, 15 November 1950, NMML, Munshi papers, reel 126, f.416.

⁷⁶ *Mail (Madras)*, 28 August 1951, NMML, Munshi papers, reel 126, f.417.

⁷⁷ *The Bombay Chronicle*, 25 April 1951, p.5

⁷⁸ *The Bombay Chronicle*, 21 May 1951, p.3. This assessment coincides with Amartya Sen's famous definition of famine, Sen, *Poverty and Famines*.

⁷⁹ Extract from letter from the Chief Secretary, Hyderabad, 26 August 1950, NAI, MoS, f.10(3)-H/50.

⁸⁰ Extract from Part I of the Daily Summary of Information of the DCIO, Hyderabad, 21 August 1950, NAI, MoS, f.10(3)-H/50.

perished.⁸¹ At the same time, on the opposite side of the country in Bhagalpur, Bihar, it was reported that middle class families were only managing to eat one meal a day whilst 'Poorer classes of people including labourers are finding it difficult to have one full meal in two or three days.'⁸² By August 1950, as many as thirty deaths due to starvation had been reported in Bihar.⁸³ By January the following year, starvation deaths were reported in eastern areas of India's largest state, Uttar Pradesh.⁸⁴

Whilst hunger was experienced by only marginalised groups scattered across the land, it was understood as a national problem, for, as one newspaper editorial put it, 'One part of India cannot feast while another part starves'.⁸⁵ And, as one year of scarcity rolled into another, the crisis was increasingly pinned on the government and its policies. K.M. Munshi, the Food Minister, attracted special ire. When, during the failed summer monsoon of 1950, Munshi urged people to eat only 'forest products' during the week of the Vana Mahotsav, the suggestion was greeted with derision. Lucknow's *Pioneer* newspaper wrote, 'Maybe bark... boiled...and seasoned with newspaper cuttings containing the Food Minister's speeches will be a better proposition...For dessert we must have wood - slabs of it - and a plateful of sawdust in honour of the master brain that conceived such a brilliant idea.'⁸⁶ In Bihar, the Legislative Assembly expressed its lack of faith in Munshi: Congress Party member, Murli Manohar Prasad charged the central Food Minister with 'persistently betraying Bihar by deliberately underestimating her needs and requirements', and the Assembly demanded the central government take action on scarcity in the state.⁸⁷

The Grow More Food Programme came under attack from all sides. The popular element of the campaign came in for ridicule: in its survey of the programme in Bombay, the Reserve Bank of India noted that, 'Artistically designed posters, radio talks and lectures...gave publicity and glamour to the campaign and also provided an outlet to the energies of fashionable social workers', but, the report concluded, this publicity appealed far more to consumers in urban areas than to agriculturalists in rural parts of the state.⁸⁸ A letter from one V.M. Saraiya to *The Bombay Chronicle* agreed: until irrigation, fertilisers and improved seeds were all made available, 'no amount of slogans or platitudes can help us'.⁸⁹

⁸¹ *Tribune*, 15 June 1950, NMML, Munshi papers, reel 124, f.406.

⁸² *Indian Nation*, 28 June 1950, NMML, Munshi papers, reel 124, f.406.

⁸³ *Shankar's Weekly*, 6 August 1950, NMML, Munshi papers, reel 124, f.408.

⁸⁴ *Times of India (Delhi)*, 3 January 1951, NMML, Munshi papers, reel 126, f.417.

⁸⁵ *The Bombay Chronicle*, 17 April 1951, Editorial, p.4.

⁸⁶ *Pioneer (Lucknow)*, 14 June 1950, NMML, Munshi papers, reel 124, f.406.

⁸⁷ *The Bombay Chronicle*, 14 April 1951, p.1

⁸⁸ *The Bombay Chronicle*, 24 February 1951, NMML, Munshi papers, reel 125, f.412.

⁸⁹ *The Bombay Chronicle*, 10 April 1951, p.4.

The more technical side of the Grow More Food Programme fared no better. An editorial in *Siasat* complained that, 'Every day new experiments are made' to try to solve the food problems of the country, but 'Before the good points and bad points of any scheme become fully evident, it is ended'.⁹⁰

But frustration was expressed not just by establishment institutions and newspaper editors. Citizens began taking to the streets. In Patiala, which is now part of Punjab, around one thousand people 'staged a hunger march' on 1 February 1951. Their slogan was simple: 'Give us bread or leave Office'.⁹¹ On the other side of the country in Cooch Behar, West Bengal, a hunger march consisting of five thousand people was staged at the Secretariat to demand full rationing, but demonstrators were met with police firing.⁹² The Socialist Party, headed by Dr Ram Manohar Lohia and Jayaprakash Narayan, led a popular agitation during the height of the food crisis. J.P. Narayan deemed the Grow More Food programme a 'farce', and declared, 'If the Government of India are unable to feed the people, which is their primary duty...they must then say so and resign. Let the people choose a new government'.⁹³ The Socialists drew up their own slogans, including 'ek ghanta desh ko', which called on every citizen to give an hour a day of labour to their country. Their plans included formation of a 'food army' of such volunteers who would build canals, irrigation tanks, and compost pits to increase food production. Perhaps fifty thousand people joined the Socialists on a demonstration in Delhi in early June 1951. Marching, they chanted, 'Hungry and Naked India Demands Bread Clothing and Houses' and 'A Government that cannot end blackmarketing [sic] and corruption has no right to exist'.⁹⁴

These popular criticisms not only appropriated the language and the mission of modernisation theory for themselves, as scholars of international development have often noted,⁹⁵ but they also replicated the ambivalence about the relationship between the government and its citizens found in official plans. Pleas for the nation's leaders to clothe and feed a 'hungry and naked India' were accompanied by appeals for citizens to act independently of the government by building their own irrigation and composting facilities. Together, the two sides of the critique of the Grow More Food Programme amplified the tension between government and popular action.

⁹⁰ *Siasat (Hyderabad)*, 23 September 1951, Editorial.

⁹¹ *Tribune (Ambala Cantt)*, 2 February 1951, NMML, Munshi papers, reel 126, f.417.

⁹² *The Bombay Chronicle*, 23 April 1951, p.1, 30 April 1951, p.5.

⁹³ *The Bombay Chronicle*, 4 June 1951, p.3

⁹⁴ *The Bombay Chronicle*, 25 April 1951, p.5

⁹⁵ e.g. Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments*.

From Miss a Meal to Import a Meal

In part, India's leaders responded to the crisis by appealing to national sentiments. Nehru urged provincial governments to start public works to increase the purchasing power of the poorest. The Prime Minister appealed over the radio for Indians who were not going short to 'help by giving up one meal a week' and donating what had not been used to scarcity-stricken areas, and he personally toured Punjab and Western UP asking for donations.⁹⁶ His entreaty became known as the Miss a Meal programme and was received with enthusiasm in some parts, especially where the Congress organisation was strongest. Students in the city of Bombay went house to house asking those with ration cards to fill in a form requesting their rations be reduced by one meal per week. Missing a meal for the people of Bihar and Madras was seen as the natural duty of citizens, as the President of 'Hum-Sub' (We-All), an organisation helping with the programme in Bombay affirmed, 'being Indians, it is our duty to see that we send them food'.⁹⁷ Villagers of Seyakuva (Sejakua), in the Baroda District of Bombay state promised to fast a full day each week to save food for those in Bihar.⁹⁸ The Indian Army donated ten thousand maunds of cereals to the cause.⁹⁹

Solving the food crisis was not just a matter of national solidarity, however, it was also a question of political legitimacy for the Congress Party. The food crisis came at the worst possible time for India's democratic leaders, as the country's first general elections were scheduled to begin at the end of 1951. Indeed, far before the elections were held, provincial governments were connecting the need to alleviate food shortages with the Congress' hopes of retaining power in the first elections.¹⁰⁰

In such circumstances, popular action had its limitations. And India's government was forced to turn to the outside world for help. Telling the international community that it needed 5.5m tons of grains in 1951, India secured barter deals with Russia, China and Argentina.¹⁰¹ Aid money from Australia and Canada helped it purchase wheat.¹⁰² Nehru's

⁹⁶ 'The War Against Famine', Broadcast to the Nation, 1 May 1951, SWJN2, vol16(I), p.39

⁹⁷ Letter from Prithviraj Kapoor, President, "Hum-Sub" to *The Bombay Chronicle*, 25 May 1951, p.4

⁹⁸ *The Bombay Chronicle*, 9 May 1951, p.5

⁹⁹ *The Bombay Chronicle*, 1 June 1951, p.6

¹⁰⁰ M.K. Vellodi, Chief Minister of Hyderabad, to N.M. Buch, Joint Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of States, 28 July 1950, NAI, MoS, f.10(3)-H/50.

¹⁰¹ Note by P.A. Gopalakrishnan, Ministry of Food & Agriculture (Food), 5 June 1950, NAI, Ministry of Food, Policy Division, f.PY(V)/2500(6)/50; Agreement between the Government of India and the Government of the USSR, 27 January 1949, NAI, Ministry of Food, Policy Branch, PY(V)-1557(1)C/49.

government had been soliciting the United States for help in various forms since 1949, and, although the US did send some advisors to help with the Grow More Food Programme, India had had little success persuading the Truman administration to give India more substantial assistance, whether in the form of direct aid, or in the form of a loan of wheat. As India's food situation became critical, Nehru's government appealed again to the United States. The question of loaning or granting wheat to India became entangled in the US Congress, however, where Nehru's emerging policy of non-alignment met with disapproval. Although the US disapproved of India's independent stance in the world of Cold War politics, the Truman administration eventually convinced the US Congress to loan up to US\$190m to India for the purchase of wheat from over-stuffed American silos.¹⁰³

With the arrival of a bumper crop of imports in 1951, the crisis began to abate, though 1952 was not an easy year because the summer monsoon failed again in many parts of the country.¹⁰⁴ However, securing an influx of imports did not end India's difficulties. India's ports and transport network were unable to bear the burden of a huge influx of goods: in many places, trucks could not be obtained to move imported wheat into the interior where it was needed most; in some cases grain was left uncovered on railway platforms as it awaited transport during the monsoon.¹⁰⁵ Where the grain did arrive, it was not always welcome: wheat, which was the preferred grain of international aid because Western nations had a surplus and it was easy to ship, was not an ordinary part of the rice-based diet in Madras and Eastern Hyderabad, and many refused to eat the imported food grains.¹⁰⁶

As a whole, according to the Government of India's figures, imports of food grains had been reduced to 2.1m tons in 1950, but they rose to 4.7m tons in 1951, and 3.9m tons in the following year. When the summer monsoon finally revived in 1953 and 1954, the Government of India was able to reduce imports to around 2m tons.¹⁰⁷ Thanks to an about-face in policy and merciful rains, India seemed to have wobbled back to its feet. Both the Grow More Food Programme and the plan to become self-sufficient in food, however, were

¹⁰² Commerce Department Summary based on article in *Indian Trade and Industry* (Published by the High Commission India, India House, Aldwych, London), 1 May 1953, NARA, RG469/UD 372/box 4.

¹⁰³ Dennis Merrill, *Bread and the Ballot: the United States and India's Economic Development, 1947-1963*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

¹⁰⁴ e.g. Government of Bombay, *Final Report on Scarcity of 1952-53* (Bombay: Director, Government Printing, Publications and Stationery, 1958).

¹⁰⁵ Proceedings of the meeting held at the Secretariat Bombay to consider the question of handling, clearance & movement of foodgrains from Bombay, 9 July 1951, NARA RG469/UD 1234/box 1.

¹⁰⁶ Frank R.J. Gerard, Food Aid Representative, to Paul M. Green, Controller, Washington, DC, 4 October 1951, NARA RG469/UD 1234/box 1.

¹⁰⁷ *Food Situation in India, 1939-1953*, p.xiii.

declared a 'failure', not only by the opposition and the press, but by sections within the Congress Party as well.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

Until the Green Revolution took hold two decades later, India's poorest citizens suffered food supply crunches whenever the rains failed or prices rose.¹⁰⁹ For many, and for many governments in India, the 1940s and 1950s did not witness a smooth transition to postcolonial legitimacy through the implementation of scientific planning. Rather, the first decade after independence marked the working out of several aspects of the same question: how should a postcolonial state pursue development in a democratic fashion? Even if the broad outlines of modernisation theory had been sketched out long before, the question of what it meant to develop democratically had not yet been settled. At this early stage of India's freedom, many voices insisted that in a democracy no one ought to be left out of India's anticipated advance.

There were, then, several sides to this issue. Firstly, how was India to make the best use of the state's limited resources? It was impossible, given the limited financial resources at the disposal of the state, to supply every cultivator with all the facilities prescribed by contemporary theories of modernisation. There was strong pressure to provide the benefits of scientific development to all, and equally strong arguments for limiting it to a targeted few. For much of the first decade after independence, India's first rulers attempted to straddle this contradiction through a mixture of state and popular action. The Grow More Food Enquiry Committee, which reported in 1952 on the nation-wide programme, found that during the Programme resources, such as manure or improved seeds, had been not only been 'spread too thinly', but efforts were not coordinated: 'it was not realised that all aspects of village life are inter-related and improvements could not be split up into a number of detached programmes operating independently.'¹¹⁰ The Committee recommended that future efforts focus on 'concentrating efforts in intensive areas'.¹¹¹ But the final version of the first Five Year Plan (1952), which replaced the Grow More Food Programme, abandoned the idea that

¹⁰⁸ *The Bombay Chronicle*, 24 February 1951, NMML, Munshi papers, reel 125, f.412; Resolution passed at the second annual session of the Hyderabad State Congress, [undated, 1950], NAI, MoS, f.1(10)-H/50.

¹⁰⁹ For the late 1950s see B.R. Tomlinson, *The New Cambridge History of India, Vol III.3: The Economy of Modern India, 1860-1970*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.199; for the 1960s see Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments*, pp.60-1.

¹¹⁰ *Report of the Grow More Food Enquiry Committee*, p.42

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.22

government resources ought to be concentrated in selected areas. Instead, during the first Plan government was to act as a ‘catalyst’ to modernising agriculture by providing seeds, fertilisers and credit to farmers, but ‘the very essence of the programme’ for agricultural development remained ‘people’s participation’.¹¹² The first decade after independence, therefore, was characterised by this tension between limited resources and providing for the whole nation. Because these limited resources were made available to all, but primarily for purchase, those cultivators that were already better off were able to take advantage of government assistance.

Secondly, there was the question of what would become of nationalist popular politics after the departure of the imperial power. The Congress Party had built up an enormously effective political machine over the course of the previous half century; Congress-led governments after 1947 saw this machine as a useful tool of statecraft. But how was a nationalist organisation that had been designed to oppose the state to be aligned with government bureaucracy? In the Grow More Food programme the two operated side-by-side as development was pursued both through the state and outside of it. Although opposition politicians blamed the government alone for jeopardising the prosperity of the nation, they too struggled to find a suitable medium for constructive postcolonial nationalism, as they placed responsibility for developing India jointly on government and popular action.

Finally, because India’s first development schemes relied upon popular participation, but were designed to transform rural lives, they evinced a deep ambivalence about rural citizens. Early development programmes in India viewed the rural citizen as both an obstacle and an asset. Cultivators were both a focus of efforts of reform and the nation’s best hope for true independence. This contradiction had been inherent in earlier nationalist programmes, but after 1947 it was placed at the centre of the postcolonial state.

¹¹² Quoted in Francin R. Frankel, *India's Political Economy: the Gradual Revolution, 1947-77*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), p.106.