

A History of India's Green Revolution

In the mid-1960s, India's "green revolution" saw the embrace of more productive agricultural practices and high yielding variety seeds, bringing the country out of food scarcity. Previous accounts have investigated the international and national political context and the contingency of a raging famine for the launch of the green revolution and debated its impact on yield enhancement, social and economic differentiation, and on ecology. This book contextualizes the "green revolution" to show the contingencies and pitfalls of agrarian transformation through a historical lens. Prakash Kumar unpacks its contested history, tracing agricultural modernization in India from colonial-era crop development, to land and tenure reforms, community development, and the expansion of arable lands. He also examines the involvement of the colonial state, postcolonial elites, and American modernizers. Over time, all of these efforts came under the spell of technocracy, an unyielding belief in the power of technology to solve social and economic underdevelopment, which, Kumar argues, best explains what caused the green revolution.

Prakash Kumar is Associate Professor of History at Pennsylvania State University. He is the author of *Indigo Plantations and Science in Colonial India*.

“This is a compelling and thoughtful study of the agrarian modernisation in India. It dispels the idea of the Green Revolution as a unitary process and demonstrates how US-inspired global visions were reworked by local initiatives from below to shape the contours of the Green Revolution in different regions. Combining historical research with fieldwork, Kumar offers a nuanced and complex exploration of the reign of technocracy in India’s agrarian modernisation.”

**Neeladri Bhattacharya, Visiting Professor,
Ashoka University**

“While much ink has been spilled on India’s Green Revolution, Prakash Kumar has done the legwork to provide subtle new view. Deeply researched and broadly conceived, *A History of India’s Green Revolution* moves deftly between the local and the global to offer timely new lessons on agrarian reform. An essential read for those interested in rural India’s past, present, and future.”

**David C. Engerman, Leitner International
Interdisciplinary Professor, Yale University**

“In the ever-verdant fields of green revolution research, Prakash Kumar has sown important ideas. Through a historical taproot reaching down a century, he has chosen to expose the balance between agricultural policy as a conflictual terrain replete with unintended outcomes and the development of a powerful problem-solving agricultural technocracy. This persistent balancing act between political and technocratic forces and their yields and between Indian and foreign institutions tends policy to this day – and in fields far removed from agriculture. Prakash’s insight and his themes are as widely relevant as his adroit historian’s navigation of a minefield of competing theories and his conjuring of the detail of individual lives.”

**Barbara Harriss-White, Emeritus Professor of
Development Studies, Oxford University**

“Kumar’s history of the Green Revolution looks both backwards and sideways, insisting that both colonial genealogies and American influence shaped this storied episode of postcolonial Indian modernity. The book is a testament to what rigorous archival work across continents can reveal. A must read for anyone interested in modern Indian history.”

**Projit Bihari Mukharji, Professor of History,
Ashoka University**

A History of India's Green Revolution

Reign of Technocracy

Prakash Kumar

Pennsylvania State University



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For my mother, Kanti Sinha

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Preface

Going through the state archives in New Delhi and in the capitals of three green revolution states, I did not initially see an avalanche of discrete references to encounters and contests that might reflect the deep presence of American actors, ideas, and technologies and their entanglements with colonial and postcolonial India. Those who may follow my tracks can also be excused for their sense of puzzlement at not finding documents at conventional archives that would help make the case for the thick engagement between Americans and Indian state officials, politicians, scientists, and bureaucrats that this book alleges transpired. But then I had a contrary experience after I returned to the United States and scoured the special collections repositories of Public Land Grant universities in the United States. These repositories empirically suggest a wide-ranging scale of interactions between the US agents of knowledge and India's practitioners who also brought ideas of their own to the table. I returned to the government archives in India, this time with a clearer factual picture in mind, and looked in more targeted areas across scattered archives and journals and spoke to human actors whose families lived through the early postcolonial decades. I also went after local libraries that stored contemporaneous books. The resources in local libraries afforded commentaries on statist developments. While state archives in India are notoriously incomplete for anything after the mid-1950s, the absence of information on American participation is conspicuous. Some of this paucity can be explained with regard to the young nation's and Nehru's attitude toward participation of foreign experts. Nehru, though widely known for his anathema to American capitalism, appreciated American science and technology. But he was politically vulnerable to attacks from communists, socialists, Gandhians, and others both inside and outside the parliament for being soft on the "imperialists" just after the nation had won its freedom after almost two hundred years of colonial rule. He walked a thin line. While his administration invited American experts, it was careful not to highlight it. Nehru's sensitivity and the sensitivity of his administration found reflection in scantiness of records pertaining to this important era of Indo-US engagements.

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My children grew up, with son Yukt graduating from college and moving out and my daughter Manasi entering high school, as this book took shape. They mean so much to what I do that I think they must shine in the book in some way. In my home in India, Shilpi Singh and Manish Sinha, Arti Sinha, Bakul Dua and Nikhil Sinha, Rohini and Saurav Chawla, Dibya Prakash, Saurav Thakur, Pallavi and Mohit Gupta, Ravindra Shahi, Gaurav Thakur, and my larger family are always a source of joy. My US-based family comprising of Chaitanya Mitash, Kannupriya, Rishav and Rupa Sinha, and Puja and Anand Sharma are also owed gratitude for their pleasantness. My friends, Ratna and Pratyaya Amrit, Shantenu Jha, Niraj Kumar, Vandana and Pankaj Rag, Sandeep Shahi, Annette Sheckler, Dawit Sheckler, and Ashwarya and Alok Sharma, are pillars of support. My neighbors the Baileys, Breedloves, Corrados, and Krols always provided much-needed laughter. But above all, my wife Vidushi stood through the thick and thin and understands the pains and pleasures of writing a book as much as I do. Without her support and camaraderie, I could not have completed this book.

Abbreviations

CDP	community development project
HYV	high yielding variety
FPS	fair price shops
GMF	Grow More Food campaign
IADP	Integrated Area Development Program
NAS	New Agricultural Strategy
NES	National Extension Scheme
PAU	Punjab Agricultural University
PL 480	Public Law 480
UPAU	Uttar Pradesh Agricultural University
VLW	village level workers
ZALR	Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms