

## 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*

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Prakash Kumar  
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CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS



Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India  
103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781009646581](http://www.cambridge.org/9781009646581)

DOI: 10.1017/9781009646598

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When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI 10.1017/9781009646598

First published 2025

Cover image: \_Isher Singh Poring Over his Yield of HYVs, 1966. Rockefeller Archives Center.

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Names: Kumar, Prakash, 1967- author

Title: A history of India's green revolution : a reign of technocracy / Prakash Kumar.

Description: Cambridge ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2025. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2025002721 (print) | LCCN 2025002722 (ebook) | ISBN 9781009646581 hardback | ISBN 9781009646628 paperback | ISBN 9781009646598 epub

Subjects: LCSH: Green Revolution—India, Northwestern—History—20th century | Agriculture—Political aspects—India, Northwestern—History—20th century | Technocracy

Classification: LCC S471.I32 .K86 2025 (print) | LCC S471.I32 (ebook) | DDC 338.10954/5—dc23/eng/20250404

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2025002721>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2025002722>

ISBN 978-1-009-64658-1 Hardback

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Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-1-009-64658-1 — A History of India's Green Revolution  
Prakash Kumar  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

For my mother, Kanti Sinha

## Contents

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<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>List of Tables</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xii
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xv
Introduction	1
1 Colonial Technocracy	27
2 Development through People's Participation	60
3 Making Tarai the Granary of the Province	95
4 A Decolonizing Perspective and Technocracy in Uttar Pradesh	128
5 Realization of Modernization Dreams?	159
Conclusion	193
<i>Bibliography</i>	207
<i>Index</i>	234

## Figures

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0.1 Green Revolution as a regional phenomenon (Courtesy: GeoGraphics Lab, Pennsylvania State University).	<i>page 6</i>
1.1 A map of Doab (with Punjab and Rohilkhand in the western UP marked out) (Courtesy: GeoGraphics Lab, Pennsylvania State University).	34
1.2 Expansion of well Irrigation in the UP (Administrative Report for Department of Agriculture, NWP, 1887).	38
2.1 Community and extension blocks in April 1955 (Government of India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting).	82
2.2 VLWs in training at Lakhua Camp, Etawah (Courtesy: University of Chicago).	85
3.1 Kumaun and Tarai across Uttarakhand and the UP (Courtesy: GeoGraphics Lab, Pennsylvania State University).	97
3.2 Nainital Tarai for settlement showing Kicha Tahsil and the Rampur State.	108
3.3 Major Sandhu with an American official (Courtesy: Ann Marrow).	117
4.1 Charan Singh, cabinet minister, UP, 1951 (Courtesy: Charan Singh Archives).	131
4.2 Five land grants and their designated operating areas (Courtesy: University of Missouri).	142
4.3 Dhyan Pal Singh on his visit to University of Illinois in 1968.	152
5.1 Wheat from Punjab being loaded on trains to take to other parts of the country (Courtesy: Rockefeller Archive Center).	189
6.1 Isher Singh's family in his Pucca house (1966) (Courtesy: Rockefeller Archive Center).	201

## Tables

---

2.1 Uttar Pradesh's twenty-seven community blocks on January 31, 1954	<i>page</i> 81
2.2 Land reclaimed in Bhadson	90
4.1 Number of fair price shops in Uttar Pradesh	138
4.2 States in India matched with respective American land grants	143
5.1 Wheat production in Punjab (including Haryana after 1966)	190

## Preface

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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.

## Acknowledgments

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Nathan Citino, John Krige, Jared Orsi, and Mircea Raianu read this manuscript from beginning to end and gave detailed feedback. Off and on, many others who also provided feedback are David Arnold, Clive Dewey, Akhil Gupta, Barbara Harriss-White, Doug Haynes, and Peter Robb. I have also gained from my long friendship and collegial conversations with Ravi Ahuja, Sana Aiyar, Tariq Ali, Sunil Amrith, Dwai Banerjee, Prathama Banerjee, Rachel Berger, Neeladri Bhattacharya, Debjani Bhattacharyya, Bhangya Bhukya, Neilesh Bose, Sugata Bose, Francesca Bray, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Indrani Chatterjee, Vinayak Chaturvedi, Prem Chowdhry, Arnab Dey, Vinay Gidwani, Navyug Gill, David Gilmartin, Ramachandra Guha, Pankaj Jha, Surinder Singh Jodhka, Indivar Kamtekar, Daniel Kevles, Deepak Kumar, Prabhat Kumar, Aakriti Mandhwani, Kama Maclean, Dilip Menon, Nikhil Menon, Projit Mukharji, Tore Olsson, Francesca Orsini, Vasudha Pande, Gyan Pandey, Shekhar Pathak, Sanjukta Poddar, Gyan Prakash, Amit Prasad, Sumathi Ramaswamy, Ravikant, Srirupa Roy, Tirthankar Roy, Suman Seth, Awadhendra Sharan, Taylor Sherman, Subir Sinha, Matthew Shutzer, K. Sivaramakrishnan, Suvobrata Sarkar, Ben Siegel, Charu Singh, Radhika Singha, Mrinalini Sinha, Nitin Sinha, Mytheli Sreenivas, Glenn Davis Stone, Ian Talbot, Stefan Tetzlaff, V. J. Varghese, Bharat Venkat, Pippa Virdee, and Benjamin Zachariah. At my two primary professional associations, the History of Science Society and Society for the History of Technology, I have engaged on the nuances of this subject with Itty Abraham, Jethron Akallah, Eram Alam, Stathis Arapostathis, Cleetus Burton, Elise Burton, Pratik Chakrabarti, Sohini Chattopadhyay, Sabine Clarke, Maria Paula Diogo, Fa-ti Fan, Yulia Frumer, Wendy Fu, Eric Gurevitch, Shireen Hamza, Rebekah Higgitt, Alix Hui, Sayori Ghosh, Gabrielle Hecht, Amanda Lanzillo, Lan Li, Gisela Mateos, Arwen Mohun, Suzanne Moon, Uponita Mukherjee, Lisa Onaga, Juno Salazar Parrenas, Ahmed Ragab, Lissa Roberts, Tiago Saraiva, Dagmar Schafer, Aleksandar Shopov, Asif Siddiqi, Jenny Smith, Gabriela Soto Laveaga,

## Acknowledgments

xiii

Tim Stoneman, Tara Suri, Erik van der Vleuten, Shellen Wu, and Thomas Zeller. Many fellow travelers in agrarian history, Meghna Chaudhuri, Sujeet George, Nikolay Kamenov, Azram Rahman Khan, Richa Kumar, Cheri Kuncheria, Karventha Kuppusamy, Amrita Kurian, Madhumita Saha, Ritam Sengupta, Divya Sharma, Kapil Subramanian, Preeti Thakur, Koyna Tomar, Arianna Tozzi, and Himanshu Upadhyaya, have helped improve this manuscript. My constant conversations with agricultural historians in the United States, Helen Curry, Deborah Fitzgerald, Courtney Fullilove, Shane Hamilton, Tom Oakie, Drew Swanson, and Albert Way, have been very useful in developing agricultural themes. Many scholars have invited me to talks and seminars that helped hone my understanding. Among them, Harald Fischer-Tine in Zurich, Rupa Viswanath at Gottingen, Sujeet George at Max Weber Forum in New Delhi, Matthias Heymann at Aarhus, Dagmar Schafer at Max Planck, and Gabriela Soto Laveaga at Harvard are notable. My research invariably led to questions raised by US diplomatic historians and among the latter group, Nathan Citino, Nick Cullather, David Engerman, Gary Hess, Daniel Immerwahr, and Nicole Sackley have been very generous in helping me put South Asia in conversation with US diplomatic history. I was fortunate to have research assistance off and on, especially during Covid times when Maanik Nath, Preeti Thakur, and Viswanathan Venkataraman in the UK and Megha Kunwar, Shivam Mogha, Rama Shanker Singh, and Gopi Swamy in India stepped up. In illustrating my research, some family members of my historical actors have provided invaluable help. Among them, I am foremost in gratitude to Harsh Singh Lohit, the grandson of Charan Singh; Ashok Thapar, son of Prem Nath Thapar; and Ann Marrow, widow of Harpal Sandhu's son. I am very sad that both Ashok Thapar and Ann Marlow did not live long enough to see this book in print. Many scholars in India provided precious help. The assistance of Shekhar Pathak and Ramachandra Guha in Uttarakhand, Prem Chowdhry and M. Rajivlochan in Punjab, and Satendra Kumar and Badri Narayan in Uttar Pradesh for research was immense. During my postdoctoral appointment at Yale in 2004–6, I interacted with James C. Scott of *Agrarian Studies*, and he left an indelible mark on my intellectual path. We stayed in touch and Jim was constantly a source of inspiration. It would not be an exaggeration to say that my interest and research in agrarian history were sustained by his encouragement and scholarship. Penn State is a great place to work and my friends and colleagues here including Jon Abel, Jessamyn Abel, Aditya Bahl, Jennifer Baka, Jyoti Balachandran, Kate Baldanza, Thomas Beebee, Jessica Birkenholtz, Trevor Birkenholtz, Michael Berube, Erica Brindley, Jonathan Brockopp, John Christman, Madhuri

xiv Acknowledgments

Desai, Carey Eckhardt, Greg Eghigian, Charlotte Eubanks, Martha Few, Amy Greenberg, Eric Hayot, Chris Heaney, Ronnie Hsia, Faisal Husain, Ritu Jayakar, Michael Kulikowski, Bryan McDonald, On-cho Ng, Aparna Parikh, Matthew Restall, Nina Safran, Kathy Salzer, Mary Shenk, Greg Smits, Amara Solari, Lior Sternfeld, Maria Truglio, Vineeta Yadav, Laskhman Yapa (retired), and Ran Zwigenberg have provided the type of collegiality one always wishes for. My conversations with doctoral students and postdoctoral associates, Eden Kinkaid, Saumya Vaishnava, and Stefan Tetzlaff, have been very enjoyable and mutually beneficial. Many archivists in different parts of the world helped me find materials for the book. The Penn State Inter Library System is truly a well-oiled machine and reference librarian Eric Novotny has answered more questions for me than I could ever keep count of. I also have to thank James Schafer and Tim Prestby in the Geography department of Penn State for drawing three maps for this book. The National Science Foundation's Scholars Award, a selection by the US Fulbright Commission, and the German Historical Institute's annual scholarship gave me the time to complete this book. As this book tried to live through the pandemic, Michael Kulikowski provided critical support for which I am in gratitude. My editor Lucy Rhymer has been invaluable in shepherding this book through refereeing and production, and Rosa Martin in the Cambridge University Press office has been meticulous in managing administrative matters.

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 Scheckler, Dawit Scheckler, 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

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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