Hungry Nation

This ambitious and engaging new account of independent India's struggle to overcome famine and malnutrition in the twentieth century traces Indian nation-building through the voices of politicians, planners, and citizens. Siegel explains the historical origins of contemporary India's hunger and malnutrition epidemic, showing how food and sustenance moved to the center of nationalist thought in the final years of colonial rule. Independent India's politicians made promises of sustenance and then qualified them by asking citizens to share the burden of feeding a new and hungry state. Foregrounding debates over land, markets, and new technologies, Hungry Nation interrogates how citizens and politicians contested the meanings of nation-building and citizenship through food, and how these contestations receded in the wake of the Green Revolution. Drawing upon meticulous archival research, this is the story of how Indians challenged meanings of welfare and citizenship across class, caste, region, and gender in a new nation-state.

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Food, Famine, and the Making of Modern India

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1 Ram Nath Puri’s “Photo of India” was printed in an Urdu-language magazine in 1905. Next to a fulminating poem and scenes of various colonial deprivations, it depicts the country as an emaciated prisoner, wasting away from hunger as British officials tuck into a sumptuous feast; it was this drawing that led to Puri’s long exile in California. page 2

2 The artist Chittaprosad Bhattacharya published his account of a voyage to famine-ravaged Midnapur district in November 1943 as *Hungry Bengal*, illustrating it with his harrowing sketches. Here, he depicts “the five corpses that I counted one morning in the short stretch of road.” (Credit: DAG Modern / Chittaprosad / Hungry Bengal) 38

3 The February 1946 issue of the Hindi newsweekly *Sansar* asks whether famine will return to India, displaying photographs of victims of the Bengal famine. At bottom, Jawaharlal Nehru is quoted decrying a world where “one man dies of hunger, and another drowns in food.” (Credit: author’s collection) 55

4 The Grow More Food campaign of 1949 reanimated the strategies and publicity efforts of its wartime antecedent. This film, *Grow More Food*, was directed by A. Bhaskar Rao and produced by Ezra Mir for the Department of Information and Broadcasting. Urging Indians to take up “kitchen gardening,” it depicts the expenses of purchasing food from the trader against a backdrop of scarcity. The husband’s skepticism about the kitchen garden his wife plants is overcome by the beautiful eggplant it yields. (Credit: Films Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India) 72
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7 Customers purchase wheat at a “fair price shop” in Delhi, 1959. (Credit: Photo Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India) 134

8 Mockup by American officials of the emblem to be used on grains distributed in India under Public Law 480. In the margins, an official has put forth different options and has given suggested breakdowns of the languages in which this emblem should be printed. The Hindi version reads “Strength from America to the Free World.” (Credit: United States National Archives, College Park, Maryland) 137

9 The cover of the Zamindar-Kisan Natak [Landlord-Peasant Drama], a short Hindi-language play on land reform written by two students in Varanasi in 1950. (Credit: University of Chicago Library) 153

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