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Feeding Bodies, Nurturing Identities: The Politics of Diet in Late Colonial and Early Post-Colonial India

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*Introduction: Feeding Bodies, Nurturing Identities: The Politics of Diet in late colonial
and early postcolonial India*

HARALD FISCHER-TINÉ, JULIA HAUSER and ASHOK MALHOTRA

This special theme issue will delineate the ways in which late colonial India and the newly independent nation-state of India provided a space for various actors, including nutritional and agricultural scientists, philanthropists and (non-)governmental organisations, to intervene in multi-layered discourses and practices pertaining to foodstuffs and their effects on the nutrition and health of the Indian population. In doing so, it builds on various strands of existing research.

Ever since the effects of the cultural turn and ‘history of the everyday’ became palpable in the historiography of South Asia during the late 1980s and the 1990s, and increasingly in recent years, there has been a flourishing of historical scholarship on the conflictual role of food and diet in the colonial encounter.¹ Of late, the exclusive focus on the subcontinental ‘contact zone’ has additionally been supplemented by studies situating the South Asian food practices in broader imperial and global frameworks.² Mrinalini Sinha and David Arnold, as far back as the 1990s, convincingly argued that the creation of knowledge on Indian diets contributed to the

¹ For an excellent introduction to the main historiographical strands and debates revolving around food and dietary practices in South Asia see Rachel Berger, ‘Alimentary Affairs: Historicizing food in modern India’, *History Compass* vol. 16 no. 2, e12438.

² For some recent examples see Andrew J. Rotter, *Empires of the Senses: Bodily Encounters in Imperial India and the Philippines* (Oxford: OUP, 2019) pp. 233-263; Benjamin Siegel, “‘The Claims of Asia and the Far East’’: India and the FAO in the Age of Ambivalent Internationalism’ *The International History Review* vol. 4 no.2 (2019): pp.427-450.

Sunil Amrith and Patricia Clavin, ‘Feeding the World: Connecting Europe and Asia, 1930-1945’, in *Past & Present*, vol. 218 issue suppl_8, 1 (2013), pp.29-50; and Krishnendu Ray and Tulasi Srinivas, (eds), *Curried Cultures: Globalization, Food, and South Asia*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

establishing of colonial hierarchies that structured Indian society along gendered and regional differences.³ Thus, a number of studies has elucidated the ways in which the private intersected with the political in the creation of a nationalistic cooking culture and the propagation of ‘Home Science’ among South Asian middle class women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴ The surge of dietetics in early twentieth century India introduced alleged regional differences in grain consumption, as colonial scientists declared that diets which included wheat were superior to those relying on rice.⁵ Dietetics supposedly provided the colonizers with an explanation for the alleged effeminate nature of Bengali men on the one hand, and the physiological superiority of the male members of certain ethnic and social groups in the North of India, classified as the ‘martial races’ on the other hand.⁶

Turning to the ‘alimentary tract’ as a contact zone in (post)colonial India, Parama Roy, too, has strengthened the claim that food was a central element of the colonial encounter.⁷ In her chapter

³ David Arnold, ‘The “Discovery” of Malnutrition and Diet in Colonial India’, in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* vol. 31 no. 1 (1994), pp.1-26; and Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The ‘Manly Englishman’ and the ‘Effeminate Bengali’ in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995).

⁴ Ishani Choudhury, ‘A Palatable Journey through the Pages: Bengali Cookbooks and the “Ideal” Kitchen in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century,’ in *Global Food History*, 3 (1), 2017, pp. 24–39; Jayanta Sengupta, ‘Nation on a platter: The culture and politics of food and cuisine in colonial Bengal’, in *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 44 no. 1 (2010), pp.81-98; and Mary Hancock, ‘Home Science and the Nationalization of Domesticity in Colonial India’, in *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 35, No. 4 (2001), pp.871-903. The construction of a pan-Indian ‘national cuisine’ in independent India through the writing of cookbooks, has earlier been analysed in Arjun Appadurai, ‘How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India’, in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 30 (1), 1988, pp.3-24.

⁵ David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Building and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth Century India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), pp.112-13.

⁶ For a typical example of such colonial pseudo-scientific arguments, see Norman Chevers, *A Commentary on the diseases of India* (London: J. & A. Churchill, 1886), p.23.

⁷ Parama Roy, *Alimentary Tracts. Appetites, Aversions, and the Postcolonial* (Durham; NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2010). One of Roy’s central arguments is that Gandhi partly subverted gender stereotypes by making self-abnegation a central part of his dietary ethics, while also re-affirming them in forcing abnegation on others in his role as a patriarch. For twentieth-century Bengali literature, Ira Raja likewise explores self-abnegation as an ambivalent means of agency in the description of male characters. Ira Raja, ‘Can the Subaltern Eat?: Modernity, Masculinity, and Consumption in the Indian family’, in *South Asia. South Asian History and Culture* Vol. 4 no. 3 (2013), pp.278—290.

on the Sepoy rebellion of 1857, Roy illustrates how colonial insensitivity to Indian food practices invoked feelings of repulsion. Roy also builds on research by scholars such as E. M. Collingham and Mary Procida who have observed shifting attitudes of the British with regards to vegetarianism in India. This strand of scholarship highlights that whereas Nabob habitus had previously entailed an acceptance of vegetarianism, the British increasingly turned to a menu centred on beef to accentuate their distance from their colonial subjects.⁸ Roy's findings also tie in with the research of Joseph Alter and Nico Slate who both have persuasively demonstrated that diet was central to Gandhi's anti-colonial agenda, which was based on the assumption that social and political transformation had to start with the body as a site of physical and moral reform.⁹ Leela Gandhi has further elaborated on this point and additionally emphasized that Gandhi's views on vegetarianism emerged in transcultural dialogue with late Victorian British non-conformists and radicals in the metropole.¹⁰ Whereas this literature clearly focuses on the cultural aspects of the Mahatma's lifelong preoccupation with food and dietary practices,¹¹ Sunil Amrith's magisterial study on 'food and welfare in India', by contrast,

⁸ E. M. Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, c. 1800-1947* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001); Idem, *Curry: A Tale of Cooks and Conquerors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Mary Procida, 'Feeding the Imperial Appetite: Imperial Knowledge and Anglo-Indian Discourse', in *Journal of Women's History*, Volume 15, Number 2, 2003, pp.123-149. That the market for 'European' cookbooks for India was not restricted to the proverbial British 'mehsahib' is obvious from Tanfer Emin Tunc, 'Louise Spieker Rankin's Global Souths: *An American Cookbook for India* and Culinary Imperialism', in *Journal of Social History*, shaa024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shaa024>.

⁹ Joseph S. Alter, *Gandhi's Body: Sex, Diet and the Politics of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Roy, *Alimentary Tracts*, pp.75-115; and Nico Slate, *Gandhi's Search for the Perfect Diet: Eating with the World in Mind* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019).

¹⁰ Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities. Anticolonial Thought, Fin-De-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham, NC : Duke University Press, 2006); This dialogue has been the subject of earlier studies that have not received the same attention. See, for instance, Stephen Hay, 'The Making of a Late-Victorian Hindu: M. K. Gandhi in London, 1888-1891', in *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (1989), pp.74-98.

¹¹ The thematic differentiation of 'food as culture' and 'food as nutrition' has famously been made by the anthropologist R.S. Khare. See R.S. Khare, 'Food as nutrition and culture: Notes towards an anthropological methodology', in *Social Science Information*, 19 (3), 1980, pp.519-42.

shows that Gandhi had also internalized the contemporary sober scientific jargon of dietetics and ‘nutritionism’,¹² which tended to reduce food to its quantifiable nutritional value.¹³

Few foodstuffs have received a similar degree of attention as beef. For one, scholars of cultural and literary studies have analysed the transgressive violation of the beef-eating taboo by radical reformers in nineteenth century Bengal.¹⁴ Secondly, and more importantly, there is a vast body of research on the cow protection movement that originated in the 1880s and includes contributions by renowned scholars such as Gyan Pandey, Anand Yang, Cassie Adcock and others. Their studies have revealed that the agitation to ban cow slaughter became a popular ‘ritual of provocation’¹⁵ that not only sparked a rise of communalism in the late nineteenth century,¹⁶ but also continued to foster communitarian identity politics in the postcolonial era.¹⁷

¹² For a general introduction with a focus on Western countries see Gyorgy Scrinis, *Nutritionism: The Science and Politics of Dietary Advice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); and Harmke Kamminga and Andrew Cunningham (eds), *The Science and Culture of Nutrition, 1840-1940* (Amsterdam: Brill Rodopi, 1995).

¹³ Sunil Amrith, ‘Food and Welfare in India, c. 1900-1950’, in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 50 no.4 (2008), 1010–1035.

¹⁴ Rosinka Chaudhuri, *Freedom and Beef Steaks: Colonial Calcutta Culture* (Delhi: Orient Blackswan 2012).

¹⁵ The concept has been popularised by the French political scientist Christophe Jaffrelot. See, for example, Jaffrelot, Christophe. ‘Pèlerinage et nationalisme hindou: les limites de l’interprétation instrumentaliste’, *Politix*, vol. 77, no. 1, 2007, pp.79-104.

¹⁶ Kenneth Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th-Century Punjab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp.168-174; Gyanendra Pandey, ‘Rallying Around the Cow: Sectarian Strife in the Bhojpuri Region, c.1888–1917’, In Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies II: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, pp.60–129 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983); Therese O’Toole, ‘Secularizing the Sacred Cow: The Relationship between Religious Reform and Hindu Nationalism’, in Anthony Copley (ed.), *Hinduism in Public and Private: Reform, Hindutva, Gender, and Sampraday* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.84-109; C. S. Adcock, ‘Sacred Cows and Secular History: Cow Protection Debates in Colonial North India,’ *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30, no. 2 (2010): pp.297–311; and idem, ‘“Preserving and Improving the Breeds”: Cow Protection’s Animal-Husbandry Connection’, in *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol 42, No. 6, 2019, pp.1141-1155.

¹⁷ For a *longue durée* perspective, see, for instance, Shabnum Tejani, ‘Cow Protection, Hindu Identity and the Politics of Hurt in India, c.1890–2019’, in *Emotions: History, Culture, Society*, 3 (1), 2019, pp.136-157. Rohit De, ‘Cows and Constitutionalism’, *Modern Asian Studies* 53 (1), 2019, pp.240-277. A helpful overview of the copious literature on cow protection is offered in Cassie Adcock and Radhika Govindrajana, ‘Bovine Politics in South Asia: Rethinking Religion, Law and Ethics’, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 42 (6), 2019, pp.1095-1107.

These studies demonstrate that colonial attempts at controlling food was by no means a marginal but indeed a deeply political and politicized aspect of British colonialism in India. It is only very recently, however, that scholars have begun to explore in greater detail how questions of food and dietary practices were negotiated on the ground, and how local bodies, the colonial government, and global food companies with their advertisement campaigns interacted in shaping alimentary policies. Thus far, more often than not, the scarce literature taking such an approach is regionally focused on Bengal. Utsa Ray's work stands out from the existing literature in that it pays due attention to how caste, class, region, religion and gender. In this respect, it elucidates the ways in which attempts to both establish and perpetuate social distinctions with 'others' shaped a heterogeneity of dietary regimes.¹⁸ Similarly sophisticated are the interventions made by Rachel Berger, whose research on the interplay between dietary choices and nationalist mobilisation focuses on the Hindi belt, thus providing us with one of the few fine-grained food studies not focussing on the Bengali *bhadralok* milieu.¹⁹ In like vein, Berger and other scholars have scrutinized the conspicuous obsession of Indian middle classes with the actual or imagined 'adulteration' of foodstuffs such as ghee or milk and the related anxious debates about breastfeeding.²⁰ Such anxieties revolving around issues of purity and contamination, in turn, are closely related to the issue of actual 'toxic foods' that has first been

¹⁸ Utsa Ray, *Culinary Culture in Colonial India. A Cosmopolitan Platter and the Middle-Class* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2015). See also her earlier articles 'The body and its purity: Dietary politics in colonial Bengal', in *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* Vol. 50 no. 4 (2013), pp.395-421; and 'Eating 'Modernity': Changing dietary practices in colonial Bengal', in *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 46 no. 3 (2012), pp.703-730.

¹⁹ Rachel Berger, 'Between Digestion and Desire: Genealogies of food in nationalist India', *Modern Asian Studies*, 47 (5) 2013, pp.1622-43.

²⁰ Rachel Berger, 'Clarified Commodities: Managing Ghee in Interwar India,' in *Technology and Culture* vol. 60 no.4 (2019), pp.1004–1026; and Surabh Mishra, *Beastly Encounters of the Raj: Livelihoods, Livestock and Veterinary Health in North India, 1790–1920* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015). See especially Chapter 5, entitled 'Food Adulteration, Public Health and Middle Class Anxieties', pp.102-22). On breast-feeding see Ranjana Saha, 'Milk, "race" and nation: Medical advice on breastfeeding in colonial Bengal', in *South Asia Research* Vol. 37 no. 2 (2017), pp.147-165; and the same author's 'Milk, mothering & meanings: Infant feeding in colonial Bengal', in *Women's Studies International Forum*. Vol. 60 (2017), pp.97-100.

raised by David Arnold. In a recent article, Arnold has explored, among other things, the phenomenon of surrogate foods that were regularly consumed by the poorer segments of the Indian population during food crises and famines. As Arnold shows, many of these so-called ‘famine foods’ turned out to be actively toxic and considerably ‘increased the soaring number of deaths from starvation and disease.’²¹

Another strand of research, or rather a bundle of closely related research strands, has examined the emergence of early twentieth century nation-state sponsored nutritional sciences and explored the subsequent proliferation of internationalist and US-led developmental discourses that aimed at improving food security in the ‘third world’ in the post-World War II era. The Indian subcontinent has featured prominently within these narratives on several levels. First and foremost, it was represented as a region in which famines occurred periodically and whose poorest inhabitants suffered from constant under- or malnutrition. As the discussion of surrogate foods has already indicated, the role of famine and food scarcity for the debates on foodstuffs and diets can hardly be overestimated. Indeed, Sunil Amrith has even argued that the ‘government of food in modern India developed alongside an imagination of hunger’.²² Given the prominence of hunger, famine and malnutrition in perceptions of and debates on the sub-continent, it is hardly surprising that India has been intensely studied as a space where nutritional research was undertaken by British colonial and Indian scientists, and as a postcolonial nation which received food aid from international organisations and US-funding

²¹ David Arnold, ‘The Good, the Bad and the Toxic: Moral Foods in British India’, in Angela Ki Che Leung and Melissa L. Caldwell (eds), *Moral Foods: The Construction of Nutrition and Health in Modern Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2019), pp.111-29, p.114.

²² Amrith, ‘Food and Welfare’ p.1012. See also Santanu K. Das, ‘Caste Prejudice and Survival Strategies among Famine Victims: A study of Ganjam 1888-89’; in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 68 (1), 2007, pp.697-707; and Darren C. Zook, ‘Famine in the Landscape: Imagining Hunger in South Asian History, 1860-1990’, in Arjun Agrawal and K. Sivaramakrishnan (eds) *Agrarian Environments: Resources, Representations, and Rule in India* (Raleigh, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2000), pp.107-31.

bodies. Several notable scholars have made major contributions in this field. James Vernon has unearthed how nation states increasingly saw one of their key responsibilities to keep their citizens adequately fed, which would in turn enable them to maximize their economic productivity and increase the levels of fitness of the soldiers serving in their respective armies.²³ Sunil Amrith and Patricia Clavin have argued the 1930s interwar period was crucial in laying the foundations for forging internationalist networks and have further demonstrated the centrality of efforts to improve the nutritional health of Asia in developmental discourses of the Cold War era.²⁴ Nick Cullather, Taylor S. Sherman, and Benjamin Siegel all have engaged in research regarding how the newly independent India in the Cold War period sought to manage its food distribution shortages. Cullather, Sherman and Siegel have examined the ways in which Nehruvian India deployed Soviet-style scientific state planning to agricultural development to tackle its food shortages, whilst at the same time being forced into accepting US-led aid.²⁵ Cullather, Nicole Sackley and Corinna Unger have further discussed the interventions made by supranational agencies such as the WHO, the FAO and US-based development agencies such as the Rockefeller foundation and the Ford Foundation regarding improving India's food security, as well as delineated the ideological objectives, which undergirded such aid packages.²⁶ Siegel has also scrutinized attempts by the newly independent

²³ James Vernon, *Hunger: A Modern History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

²⁴ Amrith and Clavin. 'Feeding the World'.

²⁵ Taylor S. Sherman, 'From "Grow More Food" to "Miss a Meal": Hunger, Development and the Limits of Post-Colonial Nationalism in India, 1947-1957', in *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 36 no. 4 (2013), pp.571-588; Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle Against Poverty in Asia*. Cambridge: Harvard, 2010); pp.975-108; Benjamin Siegel "'Fantastic Quantities of Food Grains": Cold War Visions and Agrarian Fantasies in Independent India', in Leslie James and Elisabeth Leake (eds) *Decolonization and the Cold War: Negotiating Independence*. London: Bloomsbury (2015), pp.21-42; and the same author's *Hungry Nation. Food, Famine, and the Making of Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

²⁶ Cullather, Nick, 'Hunger and Containment: How India Became "Important" in US Cold War Strategy', in *India Review* vol. 6 (2), 2007, pp.59-90; Corinna R. Unger, *Entwicklungspfade in Indien. Eine internationale Geschichte, 1947-1980* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2015); Corinna R. Unger, 'Towards global equilibrium: American foundations and Indian modernization, 1950s to 1970s', *Journal of Global History*, 6 (1), 2011, pp 121-142; and Nicole Sackley, 'Foundation in the Field: The Ford Foundation New Delhi Office and the Construction of Development Knowledge, 1951-1970'; in

Indian state to encourage Indians to replace rice with other grains, to both offset shortages in rice and to encourage the eating of other healthier alternatives.²⁷ He further argues that the Indian state, by directing its inhabitants either to forgo a meal or to substitute other foodstuffs for staples in their diet, sought to inculcate values of self-sacrifice and patriotic duty into its citizens. Implementing disciplinary regimes with regard to the dietary habits of Indians was thus imbricated with the objective of creating a moral national identity.

Despite the growing literature on food in colonial and independent India, there are still some gaps in research. Most notably, there are very few studies on Dalits and food, and the few that do exist come from disciplines other than history. Stefan Binder, a scholar of religion, analyses the ambivalences of atheist public beef and pork consumption as a means of disavowing caste in Andhra Pradesh since the 1970s.²⁸ Anthropologist Joel Lee sheds light on the dynamics of ‘environmental casteism’, showing that urban geographies are sensory geographies, with Dalits being forced to reside near those places in the city that are characterized by bad odours. In passing, Lee mentions that Dalits have been considered malodorous also because of the kind of food and drink they consume.²⁹ In another article, Lee and Sukhdeo Thorat show that Dalits are often discriminated against in the context of government food aid.³⁰ Caste, thus, has shown itself as remarkably persistent, and food and nutrition, because of their close connection to the concepts of purity and pollution, in many respects mirror and actually perpetuate caste distinctions and inequities.

Ulrich Herbert and Jörn Leonhard (eds), *American Foundations and the Coproduction of World Order in the Twentieth Century*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012, pp.232-60.

²⁷ Benjamin Siegel, “‘Self-Help which Ennobles a Nation’ Development, Citizenship, and the Obligations of Eating in India’s Austerity Years’ in *Modern Asian Studies*, 50 (3), 2016, pp.975-1018.

²⁸ Stefan Binder, “‘Let us become human through beef and pork’”: Atheist Humanism and the Aesthetics of Caste’, in *Südasiens-Chronik - South Asia Chronicle* 6, 2016, pp.205-277.

²⁹ Joel Lee, ‘Odor and Order: How Caste is Inscribed in Space and Sensoria’, in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 37 (3), 2017, pp.470—490.

³⁰ Joel Lee and Sukhdeo Thorat, ‘Caste Discrimination and Food Security Programmes’, *Economic & Political Weekly*, 24.09.2005, pp.4198—4201.

Due to the lack of historical research on Dalits and nutrition, the only way of accessing this topic is through Dalit autobiographies. Dalit autobiographical writing started to emerge in the 1960s, and since the early 2000s, some of these autobiographies have been translated into English. Sharmila Rege's anthology of Dalit women's autobiographical writings even puts a special focus on memories of food.³¹ Dalit autobiographies, despite the diverse background of their authors, feature common tropes. For instance, most writers vividly describe hunger as their 'constant companion' since childhood, and their forced reliance on food rejected, left over, and discarded by members of the high castes – beef, pork and other types of meat, stale food, putrid food, food that sometimes had to be fought over with birds and dogs.³² It is thus not coincidental that Omprakash Valmiki titled his autobiography *joothan* (leftovers): leftovers were, for a long time, the very symbol of Dalit existence.³³ While in recent years we have seen excellent historical studies on the discourse around Dalits as well as research on the history of charitable food giving, historians have so far neglected to explore the material conditions of Dalit existence.³⁴ The present volume can, alas, only approach the topic very marginally. It is certain, however, that researching the history of Dalit nutrition would broaden our knowledge of the mechanisms of power in twentieth-century India, and work against the Eurocentrism and classism that characterizes much of the field of food studies.

³¹ Sharmila Rege, *Writing Caste/Writing Gender. Reading Dalit Women's Testimonios* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2006).

³² ,Janabai Kachru Girhe (1958): Marankala', *ibid.*, p.430. 'Baby Kondiba Kamble (1929): Jinne Amuche', *ibid.*, pp.260—303. What Rege's anthology shows as well, however, is that not all Dalits experienced the same lack of food, or described their memories of food in terms of lack exclusively, even though they all shared the experience of being othered and discriminated against, *inter alia*, by means of food. 'Urmila Pawar (1945): Aaidan', *ibid.*, pp.345—415.

³³ Omprakash Valmiki, *Joothan. A Dalit's Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

³⁴ Charu Gupta, *The Gender Of Caste: Representing Dalits in Print* (Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2015). Rupa Viswanath, *The Pariah Problem. Caste, Religion, and the Social in Modern India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). Richard S. Weiss, *The Emergence of Modern Hinduism. Religion on the Margins of Colonialism* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2019), pp.27—51.

This special theme issue builds on this existing scholarship by identifying how discourses pertaining to nutrition in India facilitated the construction of stereotypes about Indian peoples and intersected with elitist interventions that aimed to modernize and to improve India from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1960s. Yet at the same time, our case studies will unearth ruptures and counter-currents to nuance existing narratives that have overstressed the continuity between nutritional research and policies pursued in colonial India, and the subsequent internationalist/US-led nutritional discourses regarding Indian food security in the postcolonial age. Indeed, the issue will demonstrate British colonial nutritional researchers working in the subcontinent faced major obstacles in securing official backing from the colonial state and had to manoeuvre carefully within the fragmented state structure to secure financial support of their nutritional research. British colonial scientists working in the subcontinent such as Robert McCarrison operated with very limited access to international or US-led funding in the 1920s and early 30s, depending on local donors. It was, hence, the local Indian city council in Madras who in the 1920s sought to improve the nutrition of local schoolchildren without the support of the British colonial administration or internationalist or US-led frameworks. As the volume will identify the fragmented nature in which colonial public health was administered in India and stress the role of regional initiatives undertaken by local Indian administrations to improve nutrition, it will provide a corrective to scholarship which has hitherto tended to somewhat overemphasise the internationalist trends during the latter two decades of British colonial rule in India.

Another central concern for this volume will be more broadly to consider how diet and the foods we ingest are means by which identities are imagined and formed, as well as how distinctions between 'self' and 'other' can be both accentuated or eroded by nutritional choices.

Thus, this issue will identify the ways in which US/internationalist and nation-state assumptions concerning the nutritional choices of Indians and the subsequent interventions undertaken by these macro institutions, were often contested, negotiated or resisted at a micro level by Indians living in different regions of India.

The issue commences with two articles that examine nutritional science and policy initiatives that emerged in British colonial India in the 1920s and 30s. Catriona Ellis' and Ashok Malhotra's articles consider the ways in which British colonial scientific research in the subcontinent proposed that diet shaped the physical, moral and intellectual capacities of South Asian populations. Moreover, they both suggest that nutritional scientists such as Robert McCarrison and Wallace Aykroyd, promulgated the notion that the varying inadequacies found in the subjects of their experiments could be compensated for by altering their diet. At the same time, both these articles demonstrate that the colonial administration's sponsorship of initiatives was not straightforward.

Malhotra argues that McCarrison had to strategically play off differing branches of an uncoordinated colonial administration to secure funding for his institute. The colonial scientist further had to appeal to Indian nationalist aspirations that were asserting themselves during this period, which sought greater opportunities for Indian scientists and research institutes. Ellis underlines Indian efforts to study and combat malnutrition during the 1920s. On the one hand, she decentres notions of the Coonoor research center as a British establishment by emphasizing the pathbreaking contributions of Indian scholars at the institute. Considering children the citizens of the future, they stressed the need of improving their nutrition in order to enable them to succeed at school. On the other hand, Ellis' analysis of the Midday Meal Scheme in Madras, established a few years prior to the Coonoor studies examined by her, shows that practical

efforts were both ahead of science and of contemporary notions of childhood by taking into account children's own perspective.

The last three papers shift to the postcolonial period to examine how Indian state officials sought to manage food resources and to inculcate prescriptive notions of national identity through dietary reform into Indian citizens. They further explore the ways in which India aroused the attention of international and US-led organisations with regard to its food security situation, as well its perceived dietary and agricultural practices.

Julia Hauser's article analyzes how participants of the Fifteenth World Vegetarian Congress in 1957 in India used the occasion for the fashioning of national identities in the newly independent state, and for making a claim for moral superiority in a new global order shaped by the Cold War. It does so by investigating the ways in which the congress provided a forum for Indian actors to argue that there was a longstanding 'national' trend within the subcontinent of vegetarianism, and that Indian reengagement with their diet would lead the nation back to moral virtue. Western participants of the conference, on the other hand, hoped to learn from the supposedly spiritually enlightened vegetarianism of India. They also sought to exert pressure on the Indian government through the congress' resolutions on behalf of animals.

Joanna Simonow's article traces the invention and promotion of a food supplement known as 'Indian Multi-Purpose Food' to shed light on the creation of development discourses pertaining to food and nutrition in early postcolonial India. Invented first in the laboratory of the California Institute of Technology in an effort to provide Americans with a cost effective source of protein, Multi-Purpose Food was subsequently reinvented in India in 1956 to meet the nation's nutritional needs and tastes. The article both examines the role of nutritional science in India's quest for sustenance and offers new insights into Indo-US entanglements in the post-war era by looking beyond the cooperation of high-ranking politicians and development experts.

The issue concludes with Prakash Kumar's contribution, which focuses on a visit by a US congressional delegation to India in 1966. The article highlights that whilst the US food aid programme aimed to direct the Indian nation state to adopt a technology-intensive solution to offset its difficulties in maintaining food security, such efforts were underscored by western culturalist assumptions. Hence, the delegation paid special attention to the Hindu 'superstitious' veneration of the cow and the 'irrational' practice of vegetarianism which prevented the necessary culling of older cattle within farms, which the delegates saw as essential for agricultural development and progress. Kumar argues that the correlation of India's supposed backwardness in agricultural development to its religious practices was imbricated in a broader critique by the US of seeing India's culture as responsible for the country's supposed "backwardness".

To conclude, it is the aim of this collection of essays both contribute to, and complicate, the global turn in South Asian history by demonstrating localised Indian responses to macro nation-state and internationalist interventions regarding nutrition in the subcontinent. Given the broad range of topics covered and the pioneering use of hitherto untapped sources by the authors, the editors hope that our anthology will not only arouse the interest of South Asianists. Indeed, we hope that articles will resonate with scholars interested in such diverse fields as Global History, British imperial history, medical history, food studies, the history of development and the history of US Cold War interventionism.