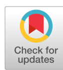

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Kitchen Hinduism: Food politics and Hindi cookbooks in colonial North India

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Abstract
This article deliberates on the entanglements between politics and the history of food, health, and gender in Hindu middle-class households of early twentieth-century North India, through the genre of printed cookbooks in Hindi. While cookbooks became important nodes through which to construct an ideal Hindu housewife and kitchen, they were also a place where educated, middle-class women's voices came to be heard, recorded, and published. The article shows how and why cookbooks are an important source for writing gendered social histories of the Hindu middle classes in modern India. Simultaneously, reflecting on the larger politics of food, the article focuses on the social identities embedded in these culinary texts, and the multiple meanings they embodied, as they strengthened gender, caste, and religious boundaries, constructed a past golden culinary age, upheld ayurvedic knowledge, bemoaned the present state of culinary sciences, used food to overcome the malaise of the middle classes, fashioned an ideal Hindu upper-caste palate as synonymous with a vegetarian diet, and imagined a healthy family and a strong Hindu nation through culinary idioms.

Keywords: Ayurveda; culinary recipes; domesticity; women; Yashoda Devi

Introduction

> In this land of Bhima and Arjuna, these flabby (*pilpile*), dry mouthed, bony mass of three-and-a-half-foot men are certainly embodiments of our deplorable present condition … To remove this blight on the country and to show how to gain physical strength through food, I have compiled this book on account of a desire to see my countrymen wear a rosy visage (*gulabi chehra*) … All the methods in this cookbook have been written considering religion and society. There is no custom of cooking meat here. It only has things of our Hindu religion (*hindu dharm ki vastuen hain*).[1]

[1]Maniram Sharma, *Pak Vidya va Bhojan Banane ki Vidhi* [Cookery education and method to prepare food] (Prayag: Ramnarayanlal Bookseller, 1915), Introduction, pp. 1–2.

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> Preparing food not based on the principles of culinary science (*pak shastra*) … causes many diseases. This is the main reason why in every household, women, men, elders, and children are falling sick … There is a saying that 'food alone kills and food alone makes us live' (*ann hi maare, ann hi jilave*) … If women are masters of culinary knowledge, they can prepare perfect food in accordance with the disposition of their family members and the seasons. These foods are enough for women to protect themselves and their family from all kinds of illnesses on an everyday basis. However, until now there has been no such book [of culinary recipes]. The present book has been prepared to remove this deficiency. — Wisher of health to all sisters (*sab behnon ki aarogyakaankshi*), Yashoda.[2]

These quotations from two influential cookbooks written in Hindi in the early twentieth century by Maniram Sharma and Yashoda Devi, a man and a woman respectively, embody various messages and meanings. Claiming to be masters in the art of culinary sciences, the authors intimately connect food practices to illness, disease, and weak bodies—a result of modern, dystopian times, in contrast to a 'golden past' of strong men. Resting on a gendered politics of the body, they see food as a kind of medicine, offering dietary therapies that connect cooking with healthy bodies, and also as the basis for producing the 'right' citizen and a strong (Hindu) nation. Maniram Sharma projects vegetarianism as a mark of distinction of Hindu food, contributing to the construction of a culinary Hindu nationalism. Going beyond everyday knowledge, Yashoda Devi sees the art of cooking as a definitive science to be used to educate women systematically. Relying on ayurveda, vernacular knowledge, and tragic ailment narratives, she reveals an elemental relationship between seasons, dispositions, food practices, illnesses, and health. Addressing herself to a functionally literate middle-class housewife, and justifying a gendered division of labour, she holds women exclusively responsible for the hard work required in kitchens and for the health of their families and, by extension, of the nation. Finally, while strengthening normative constructions of the 'good wife', her cookbook relies on sharing between women and attempts to create bonds of sisterhood.

These reflect some of the central concerns of this article. Through the genre of popular cookbooks and printed culinary recipes in Hindi, I try to conceptualize the entanglements of histories of food, health, and gender in Hindu middle-class urban households of early twentieth-century Uttar Pradesh (colonial United Provinces, hereafter UP). With the coming of print, cookbooks in the vernacular became one of the important ways of constructing an ideal housewife; they also constituted an arena where educated middle-class women's voices came to be heard, recorded, and published. Women emerged not only as consumers but also as authors of recipes, personifying prosaic, gendered, authorial spaces and new ways of sharing quotidian knowledge. This article puts a spotlight on the nature of culinary guides (*pak vidhi*) and cookbooks printed in Hindi. Since these cookbooks also denoted religious identities, caste hierarchies, and class status, the article reflects on their intrinsic

[2] Yashoda Devi, *Grhini Kartavya Shastra arthat Pakshastra* [Manual of housewife's duty meaning the art of cookery] (Allahabad: Sriram Sharma, 1913), Preface. This book was a commercial hit and its second, third, and fifth editions appeared in 1915, 1924, and 1932 respectively. I have mostly used the first edition of 1913, unless otherwise stated.

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Hindu, upper-caste, and middle-class character, which was tied up with political and nationalist alignments in the region. Further, the article argues that in spite of some of the authors being female, the overwhelming argument in these cookbooks signified a male, patriarchal understanding of (Hindu) nationalism that was wounded by colonial critique.

The article is divided into four interconnected arenas. The backdrop to the burgeoning of cookbooks in the region was the politics of food in UP, which forms the first section. The next section conceptualizes cookbooks and culinary recipes as a distinct genre of Hindi print cultures. The subsequent two sections consider class, religious, caste, and gender identities as embedded in the culinary texts, with particular attention given to Maniram Sharma's and Yashoda Devi's writings on food.

The politics of food in colonial UP

In colonial India, cookbooks written in the vernacular were in conversation with wider discussions on food present in British, reformist, and nationalist literature. These cookbooks not only mirrored but also reinforced the prevailing ideological currents, constituting a genre inseparable from a societal context immersed in ongoing debates about food. Hence, this section explores the overarching politics of food during this period.

Histories of food, showing its relationship to identity, power, subversion, urbanity, and global cultures, have emerged as an important field of studies in India.[3] In the course of the colonial period, food became an arena for the assertion of British superiority, the negotiation of nationalist politics, claims to autonomy, the display of notions of femininity and masculinity, and a means for strengthening middle-class, caste, gender, and religious identities.[4] The British articulated their difference and supremacy through dietary manuals, even while negotiating their ambivalent craving for and loathing of Indian tastes and spices.[5] They pondered at length on their health and diet in an alien environment.[6] They brandished the dietary cultures of Indians to supplement their representations of manly and superior Englishmen cast among effeminate and misbegotten natives, particularly Bengalis, in the early days of

[3]For example, David Burton, *The Raj at the table: A culinary history of the British in India* (London: Faber and Faber, 1993); Michelle King (ed.), *Culinary nationalism in Asia* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019); Cecilia Leong-Salobir, *Food culture in colonial Asia: A taste of empire* (London: Routledge, 2011); Utsa Ray, *Culinary culture in colonial India: A cosmopolitan platter and the middle-class* (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Krishnendu Ray and Tulasi Srinivas (eds), *Curried cultures: Globalization, food, and South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

[4]For an overview of food historiography in colonial India, see Rachel Berger, 'Alimentary affairs: Historicizing food in modern India', *History Compass*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2018, pp. 1–10; Harald Fischer-Tiné, Julia Hauser and Ashok Malhotra, 'Introduction: Feeding bodies, nurturing identities: The politics of diet in late colonial and early post-colonial India', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2021, pp. 107–116.

[5]Gitanjali Shahani, *Tasting difference: Food, race, and cultural encounters in early modern literature* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2020).

[6]David Arnold, *Colonizing the body: State medicine and epidemic disease in nineteenth-century India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 36–43; Burton, *The Raj at the table;* Mark Harrison, *Public health in British India. Anglo-Indian preventive medicine, 1859–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 9–10, 14, 40–41.

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colonialism.[7] At the other end of the spectrum they connected diets to their notion of 'martial' Indian races.[8] They disparaged native kitchens and cooks as markers of filth and usually belittled a vegetarian diet.[9] Some Indians responded to this construction of a gastronomic hierarchy by arguing for the consumption of meat as a symbol of muscular nationalism.[10]

After 1857, food acquired further meanings for North India's Hindu middle classes.[11] The meteoric growth of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Arya Samaj sharpened the narratives of Hindu nationalism. Alongside the hardening of Hindi-Urdu linguistic identities, cow-protection movements between 1880 and 1920 contributed to cantankerous debates on vegetarianism and meat eating, with the former seeming to prove itself in the ascendant. Vegetarianism became tied to celibacy (*brahmacharya*), to the moral values of selflessness, and to notions of the purity and strength of the nation. Simultaneously the consumption of meat, particularly beef, became a way for vegetarian Hindus to pinpoint their differences with the British, Muslims, and Dalits, all three being considered gluttonous, cruel, and impure, with the broader argument that eating flesh led to a propensity for sex, alcohol, and violence.[12] Grouping together meat eating with alcohol consumption and smoking, Gangaprasad Upadhyaya, a leading Arya Samajist of UP, offered a vociferous defence of vegetarianism. Selectively quoting scientists from the West, he posited a distinction between meat eating, which caused excitement of the senses (*uttejit karne vale*), and vegetarian food, which generated physical strength and energy (*shaktivardhak*).[13] Most famously, fasting and vegetarianism also became part of the ensemble of ingredients with which Gandhi challenged colonialism, advocated non-violence, and projected the body as a site in need of reform.[14]

Such food discussions were often accompanied by a nostalgic invocation of a supposedly 'golden' ancient Indian past, particularly emphasizing the resplendence

[7]Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial masculinity: The 'manly Englishman' and the 'effeminate Bengali' in the late nineteenth century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

[8]E. M. Collingham, *Imperial bodies. The physical experience of the Raj, c. 1800–1947* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).

[9]Mary Procida, 'Feeding the imperial appetite: Imperial knowledge and Anglo-Indian domesticity', *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2003, pp. 123–149; Jayanta Sengupta, 'Nation on a platter: The culture and politics of food and cuisine in colonial Bengal', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2010, pp. 81–98, esp. 85–86.

[10]Parama Roy, *Alimentary tracts: Appetites, aversions, and the postcolonial* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

[11]For an overview of the middle classes in colonial North India, see Sanjay Joshi, *Fractured modernity: Making of a middle class in colonial North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001); Markus Daechsel, *The politics of self-expression: The Urdu middleclass milieu in mid-twentieth century India and Pakistan* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

[12]C. S. Adcock, *The limits of tolerance: Indian secularism and the politics of religious freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 54–55, 169; Julia Hauser, *A taste for purity: An entangled history of vegetarianism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023).

[13]Gangaprasad Upadhyay, *Hum Kya Khaaven: Ghaas ya Maans?* [What should we eat: Vegetables or meat?] (Prayag: Kala Press, 1945), p. 101.

[14]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; Nico Slate, *Gandhi's search for the perfect diet: Eating with the world in mind* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019).

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of the indigenous medical science of ayurveda. The influence of ayurveda on India's food history, as evidenced in texts like *Charaka Samhita, Susruta Samhita*, and *Kashyapa Samhita*, has been acknowledged by various scholars.[15] They demonstrate that in early twentieth-century UP, ayurvedic knowledge was a vital part of Hindu household life. Besides signifying a fusion of culinary practices with traditional medical knowledge, the rhetoric of ayurveda was deployed to project an ancient culture of hygiene, where people were strong and healthy, ate wholesome food, and lived virtually forever, 'uncorrupted' by the influences of Muslims and British colonial rule.[16]

Food became a marker not only of religious but also caste hierarchies.[17] Connecting private bodily practices to social forces of caste supremacy, altercations increasingly arose around inter-dining and purity-pollution taboos. The Arya Samaj made some half-hearted attempts to share food and water with Untouchable castes, with these efforts often couched in a problematic language of caring, correction, and self-control.[18] A reformist tract *Bhojan tatha Chhut-Chaat* gave voice to firm opinions against meat-eating, propagated inter-dining, a preachy take on cleanliness, and a belief that it was the 'duty of *shudra*s (lower-castes) to cook in the house of *savarna*s (upper-castes)'.[19] At the same time, counter-currents of Dalit food cosmologies began their articulation of a distinct culinary identity, challenging *savarna* domination.[20]

Comestibles also became a hot topic in the public life of the military, factories, railways, and bazaars, with worries over what might have been touched, what was to be eaten, who had cooked it, and who had served it.[21] Modern developments such as the railways and restaurants boosted public eating, making it difficult for the upper castes to maintain food taboos in terms of *kaccha* and *pukka*.[22] Rumours also abounded that foods processed in unknown factories might contain traces of meats and other unclean substances. The demand by railway passengers for separate refreshment rooms for the high castes, and fresh food in line with dietary

[15]Lizzie Collingham, *Curry: A tale of cooks and conquerors* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 7–8; K. T. Achaya, *Indian food: A historical companion* (Delhi: Oxford University Press,1994).

[16]For the changing contours of ayurveda in colonial UP, and its relationship to food and Hindu nationalism, see Rachel Berger, *Ayurveda made modern: Political histories of indigenous medicine in North India, 1900–1955* (New York: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 49, 93; Madhuri Sharma, *Indigenous and Western medicine in colonial India* (Delhi: Foundation Books, 2012); Saurav Kumar Rai, *Ayurveda, nation and society: United Provinces, c. 1890–1950* (Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2024).

[17]Alter, *Gandhi's Body;* Salobir, *Food culture*; Ray and Srinivas, *Curried cultures.*

[18]Charu Gupta, *The gender of caste: Representing Dalits in print* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2016).

[19]Janmejay Vidyalankar, *Bhojan tatha Chhut-Chhaat* [Food and pollution taboos] (Kanpur, 1925).

[20]Gupta, *The gender of caste*, pp. 159–161.

[21]Douglas Peers, '"The habitual nobility of being": British officers and the social construction of the Bengal Army in the early 19th century', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 25, no. 3, 1991, pp. 545–569, esp. 551–552; Chitra Joshi, *Lost worlds: Indian labour and its forgotten histories* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), pp. 241–242, 253–254.

[22]*Kaccha* is food cooked with water, or boiled; it usually comprises the everyday meal and must be consumed right away. *Pukka* is food cooked with ghee or milk, often fried, and can be stored for a longer time. According to Hindu caste commensality rules, the upper castes can accept uncooked and raw food items from the lower castes, and at times *pukka* food (as it is believed that ghee gives the food protection from spoiling and other forms of ritual pollution), but *kaccha* food is to be accepted only from one's own or equivalent or 'superior' castes.

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caste restrictions, encouraged a diverse food market for, of, and by Indians. Indian entrepreneurs, for example, established 'Hindu hotels' and refreshment arrangements catering exclusively to Hindus.[23] The 1931 census of UP noted that 'No less than 73 per cent of workers in trade are concerned with food-stuffs, and if to these we add those employed in hotels, cafes, etc., and hawkers of drinks and foodstuffs the figure rises to 75 per cent.'[24]

Some of the greatest worries over food arose among the Hindu middle classes. A mercantile culture had developed in many towns of UP, but there were growing economic insecurities. A substantial increase in the population of the region compounded a crisis of jobs for the educated classes, and by 1935 the unemployment problem had become acute.[25] Bemoaning the loss of a hypothetical glorious past, *kaliyug* became a trope for the dystopian present, connoting unhealthy and weak bodies, the loss of manliness, an increase in illnesses and epidemics, contaminated food, adulterated ghee, and the rise in prices.[26] The problems of middle-class ill-health were compounded by 'bad' dietary habits. Markus Daechsel argues that in colonial North India 'being middle class assumed the character of a medical condition that strangely replicated the pathological political situation this constituency found itself in'.[27] The consumption of nutritious food became a way of overcoming the malaise. It came to be connected not only with taste but also with health, self-control, hygiene, and the medicalization of the family.[28] Food cravings, for example, were frowned upon and restrictions were imposed on the widow, the *brahmachari* (celibate), and the *akhara* (gymnasium) wrestler—such people having been deemed most in need of countering sexual desires and the stresses of modern life. Middle-class nourishment came more and more to consist in a new domesticity and modern conjugality, where an 'ideal' housewife ensured scientific household management and tasty, healthy food.[29]

In the household economies taking shape, food was the most significant component of middle-class expenditure.[30] A combination of price rises, financial hardships, low salaries, unemployment, and the high cost of living brought about an insistence on thriftiness, frugality, efficiency, providence, and temperance.[31] Middle-class women

[23] Aparajita Mukhopadhyay, *Imperial technology and 'native' agency: A social history of railways in colonial India, 1850–1920* (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 141–147.

[24] A. C. Turner, *Census of India, 1931: UP, Vol. XVIII, Part 1, Report* (Allahabad: Printing and Stationery, 1933), p. 402.

[25] Turner, *Census of India, 1931*, p. 24; *Report of the Unemployment Committee, UP, 1935* (Allahabad: Printing and Stationery, 1936), pp. 19–20, 24–27, 33–37, 261–273, 391–394.

[26] Douglas E. Haynes, *The emergence of brand-name capitalism in late colonial India* (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), pp. 71–73, 182.

[27] Daechsel, *The politics of self-expression*, p. 94.

[28] Ibid., pp. 99–106; Haynes, *The emergence of brand-name capitalism*, pp. 177–184; Srirupa Prasad, *Cultural politics of hygiene in India, 1890–1940: Contagions of feeling* (New York: Palgrave, 2015), pp. 23–32.

[29] Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu wife, Hindu nation: Community, religion and cultural nationalism* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), p. 36; Charu Gupta, *Sexuality, obscenity, community: Women, Muslims and the Hindu public in colonial India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001); Mytheli Sreenivas, *Wives, widows and concubines: The conjugal family ideal in colonial India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); Judith Walsh, *Domesticity in colonial India: What women learned when men gave them advice* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[30] Haynes, *The emergence of brand-name capitalism*, p. 173.

[31] Gupta, *Sexuality, obscenity, community*, p. 141.

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were seen as responsible for the domestic economy; they were meant to keep an account of household purchases, be careful in their budgeting, be tight with their savings, and prevent waste. In one way or another, this went hand in hand with the preparation of food for the family.[32] There were, moreover, 'serious hesitations of middle-class families to subject their digestive systems to industrial capitalism', so they resisted mass-produced commodities and showed a distinct preference for fresh, unbranded items.[33] As against products like Horlicks and Ovaltine, ghee and milk continued to hold sway as the chief sources of good health.[34]

Denied an autonomous political existence, domesticity and conjugality, along with indigenous culinary habits, came to be expressed as the terrain of middle-class Indian sovereignty, even superiority, vis-à-vis the British. As has been stated, 'a new autonomy over the body was the only site where a distinct sense of middle-class identity could be established'.[35] In this context printed culinary recipes became important in the battle to overcome a sense of loss and inadequacy, to uphold a professed ancient wisdom, to push for a Hindu nationalist food discourse, and to claim a degree of superiority.

Hindi print culture and cookbooks

The rise of printed cookbooks and culinary recipes in early twentieth-century UP was closely linked not only to food politics but also to the substantial expansion of the popular Hindi print industry and a growing demand for literature on cooking and health. Print democratized information on culinary and medical practices, transforming food into a public matter. From the late nineteenth century, the commercialization of print led to a steady growth of presses and publishing houses in urban North India, resulting in a concomitant proliferation of vernacular language publications.[36] By the early twentieth century, Hindi had become the dominant print language for a large section of the Hindu middle classes in UP, with an explosion of prose in distinct genres. The political and cultural moment was conducive to the growth of non-fiction and non-literary prose and genres in novel ways, which exploded through newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets, and books, and included cookbooks and culinary recipe columns.[37]

[32]Joshi, *Fractured modernity*, p. 71.

[33]Haynes, *The emergence of brand-name capitalism*, pp. 177–179.

[34]Rachel Berger, 'Clarified commodities: Managing ghee in interwar India', *Technology and Culture*, vol. 60, no. 4, 2019, pp. 1004–1026; Ray, *Culinary culture*, pp. 158–159. Many Hindi texts were full of praise for milk. For example, Thakurdutt Sharma, *Dugdh aur Dugdh ki Vastuen* [Milk and milk products] (Lahore: Amritdhara Aushadhalaya, 1926).

[35]Daechsel, *The politics of self-expression*, p. 99.

[36]Gupta, *Sexuality, obscenity, community*, pp. 30–34; Shobna Nijhawan, *Women and girls in the Hindi public sphere: Periodical literature in colonial North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012); Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi public sphere 1920–1940: Language and literature in the age of nationalism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002); Ulrike Stark, *An empire of books: The Naval Kishore Press and the diffusion of the printed word in colonial India* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007), pp. 1–28.

[37]Gupta, *Sexuality, obscenity, community*; Nijhawan, *Women and girls;* Shobna Nijhawan, *Hindi publishing in colonial Lucknow: Gender, genre, and visuality in the creation of a literary 'canon'* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018); Orsini, *The Hindi public sphere.*

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Arjun Appadurai says there was an 'informal, fragmentary, and minor' tradition of cookbooks in India because food was historically embedded in moral-medical Hindu beliefs and inscriptions.[38] However, with mass print technologies combining with the commercial and symbolic economies around food, cookbooks came to be written in diverse ways—for example, in English for white memsahibs and in the vernacular for Bengali housewives. Largely a modern genre, cookbooks in Hindi came into their own in early twentieth-century UP. Moreover, a majority of indigenous authors of ayurveda and food chose Hindi, not English or Urdu, as their primary language. Besides feeding into the politics of food, this also intersected with linguistic politics, Hindu community identity, and urban middle-class discourse.[39] Recognizing the demand for gastronomic literature, prominent commercial publishing houses, such as the Chand Karyalaya of Allahabad and the Naval Kishore Press and the Ganga Pustak Mala based in Lucknow, took the lead with cookbooks, and culinary recipe columns appeared in women's magazines like *Chand* and *Sudha*.[40] In the Hindi print realm, culinary guides flooded the market, blurring the conventional boundary between household recipes and everyday health advice in vernacular literature. Primarily intended to be read and followed by the modern housewife, culinary recipes were designed for and by women. While often comprising part of vernacular didactic guides and domestic science books, and layered with caste, religious, and moral connotations, recipes were also seen as practical repositories and guides for everyday cooking knowledge. In middle-class domestic management they gained significance for their quantifiable, brief, precise, simple, user-friendly, and scientific character—discursive virtues to which every reader could easily relate. These recipes reinforced Hindu middle-class images of the ideal housewife, while also allowing women to voice a specialist terrain of knowledge in print. Female contributors of recipes were named, giving them an authorial identity and a new sense of respect. Male publishers understood that women's long-standing knowledge as cooks was difficult to displace; they could profit by reproducing women's authority within the world of cooking and recipes.

Rachel Berger examines the relationship between food, digestion, desire, and embodiment by studying early twentieth-century Hindi cookbooks and guides to health. She shows these publications conceptualizing an ideal Indian nation and subject through dietary choices.[41] More recently, Saumya Gupta has studied popular Hindi cookbooks, particularly *Pak Chandrika*, highlighting how they reshaped the culinary landscape of urban, middle-class Hindu families, contributing to the emergence of nationalism in early twentieth-century North India.[42] This article takes their arguments forward, embedding them further in Hindu food politics and gendered kitchen discourses. Food recipe columns started appearing in leading women's magazines. 'Pak

[38]Arjun Appadurai, 'How to make a national cuisine: Cookbooks in contemporary India', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 30, no. 1, 1988, pp. 3–24, esp. 11–12.

[39]Sharma, *Indigenous and Western medicine*; Berger, *Ayurveda made modern*; Rai, *Ayurveda*.

[40]Nijhawan, *Hindi publishing in colonial Lucknow*, pp. 182–184.

[41]Rachel Berger, 'Between digestion and desire: Genealogies of good in nationalist North India', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 47, no. 5, 2013, pp. 1622–1643.

[42]Saumya Gupta, 'Culinary codes for an emergent nation: Prescriptions from *Pak Chandrika* 1926', *Global Food History*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2023, pp. 175–193.

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Shiksha' (Cookery education) was often carried in the magazine *Chand*,[43] and *Sudha* ran a regular column called 'Pak Shastra' (Culinary science) from February 1930, which was later renamed 'Bhojan' (Food) (Figure 1).[44] Women like Rajrani, Satyawati, Prakash Devi, and Damyanti Devi Chaturvedi authored food recipes in *Chand*, for example of coconut barfi, potato cakes, jackfruit rice and raw banana vegetable, though the lead was taken by Maniram Sharma.

With cookbooks becoming marketable, a substantial number came to be penned by men who projected themselves as culinary pedagogues. Some of the early ones were Bhakt Bhagwandas's *Ras Vyanjan Prakash*, Karthik Prasad's *Pakraj*, Ramlal's *Nutan Pak Prakash*, and Pandey Ramsharanlal Verma's *Pakprakash*.[45] The most popular were a series of culinary texts by two men. One was by Pandit Maniram Sharma, a resident of Daraganj, Allahabad, who wrote books like *Adarsh Parivar* and *Maharani* but became most famous for his cookbooks.[46] After Sharma's death, Ramrakh Sehgal, the editor of *Chand*, commissioned a compilation of his recipes to be carried out by his wife Vidyawati Sehgal—she was also the manager of the publishing house—as *Pak Chandrika*.[47] Consisting of 568 pages, its contents list ran to 39 pages. The book was extensively advertised in the pages of *Chand*, and Sharma's recipes became an integral part of the magazine's food column (Figure 2).

The second was Mataprasad Gupt, a sweet vendor of the Vaishya caste from Pratapgarh. He opened a sweetshop in 1908, eventually expanding to three branches, all of them engaged in selling sweets and dried fruits. He came to be regarded as among the best confectioners in the region.[48] The 1931 UP census recorded a remarkable increase in sweetmeat dealers.[49] A member of the Arya Samaj, Mataprasad Gupt was also involved in caste reform and acquired substantial wealth. He wrote at least two cookbooks, *Gud-Pak-Vigyan Mithai* and *Pakprakash aur Mithai*. These contained various food recipes with a special focus on sweets. The latter was compiled by Ramakant Tripathi 'Prakash' and both were published by the Naval Kishore Press.[50] *Pakprakash aur*

[43]For the column 'Pak Shiksha', see, for example, *Chand*, November 1922 to April 1923, pp. 227, 314, 402, 519; November 1923 to April 1924, pp. 105, 203, 384, 306, 470; May to October 1924, pp. 94, 172, 274, 358; May to October 1925, pp. 426, 516.

[44]For example, for the column 'Pak Shastra' and 'Bhojan', see *Sudha*, August 1930 to January 1931, pp. 125, 272, 409, 531, 701, 845; February to July 1931, pp. 121, 261, 414, 533, 659, 760. For further details, see Nijhawan, *Hindi publishing in colonial Lucknow*, pp. 182–184.

[45]Bhakt Bhagwandas, *Ras Vyanjan Prakash* [Light on delicious dishes] (Bombay: Venkateshwar Press, 1902); Kartik Prasad, *Pakraj* [King of cuisine] (Benares: Friend and Company, 1908; 2nd edn); Ramlal, *Nutan Pak Prakash* [New cooking wisdom] (Mathura: Sukh Sancharak Company, 1909); Pandey Ramsharanlal Verma, *Pakprakash* [Art of cooking] (Allahabad: Indian Press Ltd, 1919).

[46]Maniram Sharma, *Kanya Pakshastra* [Cooking for girls] (Prayag: Onkar Press, 1915); Sharma, *Pak Vidya*. For a brief note on Maniram Sharma, see N. Mitra, *The Indian literary year book and authors' who is who* (Allahabad: Panini Office, 1918), p. 85.

[47]Maniram Sharma (late), *Pak Chandrika* [Culinary moonlight], (ed.) Vidyavati Sehgal (Allahabad: Chand Karyalaya, 1926). A fourth edition of the book was published in 1934. In this article I have used the 1926 edition, unless otherwise stated. For a lucid analysis of *Pak Chandrika*, see Gupta, 'Culinary codes'.

[48]Sweetmeats emerged as a major profession. A magazine called *Halwai* was published quarterly from Allahabad by Raghunath Prasad Halwai in the 1940s: 'Newspapers and Periodicals published in the United Provinces during 1940', F-53, 1, 41, KW, Part 7, 1941, NA, Home Political I, National Archives of India.

[49]Turner, *Census of India, 1931*, p. 402.

[50]Mataprasad Gupt, *Pakprakash aur Mithai* [Knowledge of cuisine and sweets], (ed.) Ramakant Tripathi 'Prakash' (Lucknow: Naval Kishore Press, 1937; 2nd edn); Mataprasad Gupt, *Gud-Pak-Vigyan Mithai* [Jaggery

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Figure 1. Illustrations from recipe columns. *Sources:* 'Pak Shiksha', *Chand*, September 1929, p. 120; 'Pak Shastra', *Sudha*, September 1930, p. 272; 'Bhojan', *Sudha*, March 1933, p. 188.

knowhow and culinary desserts] (Lucknow: Naval Kishore Press, 1940). An earlier version of *Pakprakash aur Mithai* was published in Pratapgarh in 1929. For this article I have used the 1937 edition. For a brief sketch of the life of Mataprasad Gupt, see Gupt, *Pakprakash aur Mithai*, pp. 1–6.

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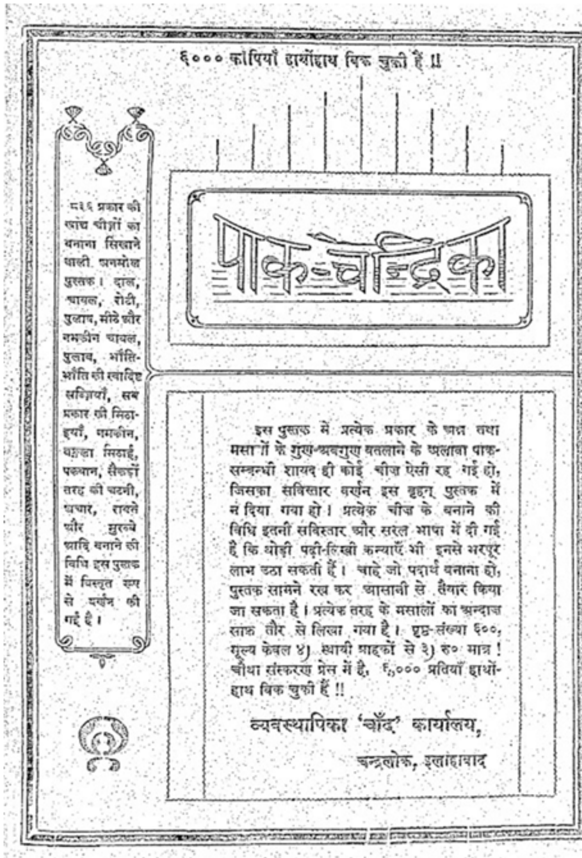

Figure 2. Advertisement for *Pak Chandrika* in *Chand. Source: Chand*, July 1930.

Mithai was divided into 14 chapters spread over 415 pages and included many pictures. Other culinary texts written by men in the 1930s–1940s included Jagannath Sharma's *Pak Vigyan*, Hanumanprasad Sharma's *Aahaar Vigyan*,[51] Mohanlal Bhargav's *Vyanjan Prakash*,[52] Girish Chandra Joshi's *Adarsh Pak Vidhi*,[53] Chotelal Trivedi's *Vyanjan Prakaar*,[54] and Pandit Nrisinghram 'Shukl's *Vrihad Pak Vigyan*[55] (a revised edition of which was published as *Adhunik Pak Vigyan*) (Figure 3).

[51]Hanumanprasad Sharma, *Aahaar Vigyan* [Science of food] (Benares: Mahashakti Sahitya Mandir, 1931).

[52]Mohanlal Bhargav, *Vyanjan Prakash, arthat Sab Prakaar ke Bhojan Banane ki Vidya* [Recipe knowledge, meaning the method of preparing food of all kinds] (Lucknow: Naval Kishore Press, 1938; 3rd edn). A second edition of the book came out in 1924. I have used the 1938 edition, unless otherwise stated.

[53]Girish Chandra Joshi, *Adarsh Pak Vidhi* [Ideal cooking method] (Kashi: Hind Pustak Agency, 1938).

[54]Chotelal Trivedi, *Vyanjan Prakaar* [Types of dishes] (Agra: Hakim Ramchandji, 1941).

[55]Pandit Nrisinghram 'Shukl', in *Vrihad Pak Vigyan: Vegetarian and non-vegetarian, yaani Niraamish Aur Aamish* [Comprehensive cooking guide: Vegetarian and non-vegetarian] (Mathura: Hindi Pustakalya, 1938).

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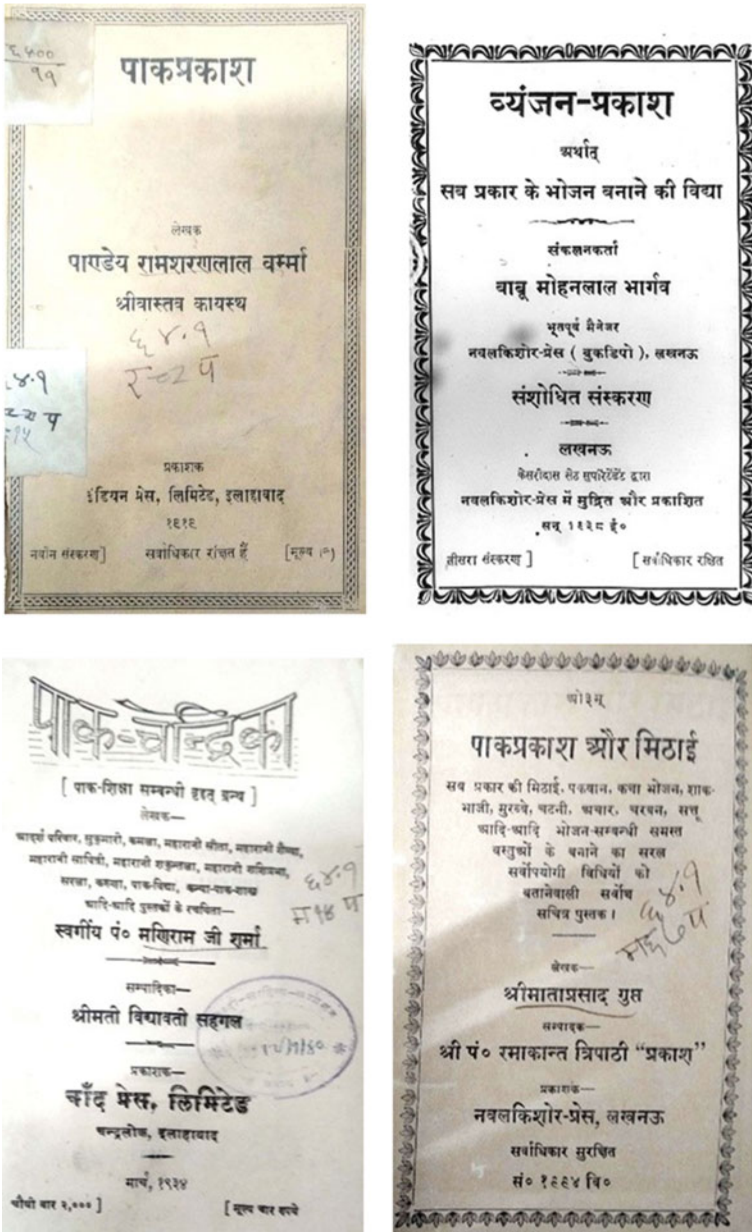
पाकप्रकाश

लेखक

पाण्डेय रामशरणलाल वर्म्मा

श्रीवास्तव कायस्थ

प्रकाशक

इंडियन प्रेस, लिमिटेड, इलाहाबाद

नवीन संस्करण] सर्वाधिकार रक्षित हैं

व्यंजन-प्रकाश

अर्थात्

सब प्रकार के भोजन बनाने की विद्या

संकलनकर्ता

बाबू मोहनलाल भार्गव

भूतपूर्व मैनेजर

नवलकिशोर-प्रेस (बुकडिपो), लखनऊ

संशोधित संस्करण

लखनऊ

केसरीदास सेठ सुपरिंटेंडेंट द्वारा

नवलकिशोर-प्रेस में मुद्रित और प्रकाशित

तीसरा संस्करण] [सर्वाधिकार रक्षित

पाक-चन्द्रिका

[पाक-शिक्षा सम्बन्धी वृहत् ग्रन्थ]

लेखक—

स्वर्गीय पं० मणिराम जी शर्मा

सम्पादिका—

श्रीमती विद्यावती सहगल

प्रकाशक—

चाँद प्रेस, लिमिटेड

चन्द्रलोक, इलाहाबाद

मार्च, १९३४

ओ३म्

पाकप्रकाश और मिठाई

सब प्रकार की मिठाई, पकवान, कच्चा भोजन, शाक-भाजी, मुरब्बे, चटनी, अचार, चरबन, सत्तू आदि-आदि भोजन-सम्बन्धी समस्त वस्तुओं के बनाने का सरल सर्वोपयोगी विधियों को बतानेवाली सर्वोच्च सचित्र पुस्तक।

लेखक—

श्रीमाताप्रसाद गुप्त

सम्पादक—

श्री पं० रमाकान्त त्रिपाठी "प्रकाश"

प्रकाशक—

नवलकिशोर-प्रेस, लखनऊ

सर्वाधिकार सुरक्षित

Figure 3. Inside covers of some cookbooks. *Sources:* Verma, *Pakprakash*; Bhargav, *Vyanjan Prakash*; Sharma, *Pak Chandrika* (1934; 4th edn); Gupt, *Pakprakash aur Mithai*.

Not to be outdone, women were busy writing cookbooks, sometimes with a distinct flavour. One such early fun cookbook was Anant Devi's *Vyanjan Prakash*, which often resorted to the use of *dohas* (couplets) to narrate its

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Figure 4. Covers of some cookbooks by women in the early twentieth century. *Sources:* Devi, *Vyanjan Prakash*; Tiwari, *Pak Prabhakar*; Chaturvedi, *Navin Pak-Shastra*; Thakur, *Gharelu Shiksha*; Devi, *Grhini Kartavya Shastra* (1924; 3rd edn); Devi, *Achaar ki Kothri*.

recipes.[56] Then there was Shailkumari Chaturvedi's *Navin Pak-Shastra* and Rama Devi Tiwari's *Pak Prabhakar.*[57] The latter was a collection of recipes of 200 'swadeshi, Bengali and English' desserts, which included chocolate and toffee. Another prolific woman writer was Jyotirmayi Thakur of Kanpur who wrote many domestic manuals, including the cookbook *Gharelu Shiksha tatha Pakshastra*.[58] Finally, there was Yashoda Devi who, although specializing in writing ayurvedic medicinal home remedies, also wrote cookbooks. Her big hits included *Grhini Kartavya Shastra arthat Pakshastra* (hereafter *Pakshastra*), which went into several editions and impressions.[59]

[56] Anant Devi, *Vyanjan Prakash* [Cuisine wisdom] (Kanpur: Lala Pooranmal Bookseller, 1910).

[57] Shailkumari Chaturvedi, *Navin Pak-Shastra* [Novel culinary science] (Mathura: Adarsh Hindu Pustakalaya, 1939); Rama Devi Tiwari, *Pak Prabhakar* [Cooking insights] (Prayag: Surendra Mani Tiwari, 1939; 2nd edn).

[58] Jyotirmayi Thakur, *Gharelu Shiksha tatha Pakshastra* [Home remedies and cooking] (Prayag: Sahitya Niketan, 1945; 3rd edn).

[59] Devi, *Pakshastra*.

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She also wrote *Achaar ki Kothri*, a collection of recipes for making pickles, marmalades, and chutneys.[60] Her journals *Stri Dharma Shikshak* and *Stri Chikitsak* regularly carried culinary recipes (Figure 4).[61]

Menu for a Hindu nation

In line with what Utsa Ray demonstrates in her work on culinary cultures in colonial Bengal,[62] the Hindi cookbooks of the early twentieth century embodied upper-caste, middle-class, and Hindu identities, often functioning in tandem with dominant assertions in North India. Hindi cookbooks, authored by both men and women, shared an almost identical project of nostalgically exalting Hindu culinary traditions while claiming their roots in ancient indigenous cuisines. Simultaneously, they adapted their recipes to fit the needs of modern middle-class urban households. These cookbooks celebrated the ancient civilization for providing abundant, the best, and purest food, and as the harbinger of health, physical strength, and longevity. They sometimes fabricated or repurposed the genealogies of Hindu gastronomy to foster a Hindu nationalism embedded in the kitchen. Yashoda Devi's *Pakshastra* constructed a golden culinary age when people were healthier and lived for an eternity:

> People have abandoned their ancient greatness and forgotten their scriptural statutes (*shastrokt vidhaan*), because of which much effective advice is disappearing. Our ancestors took great measures to protect their bodies … They thus lived for thousands of years. For hundreds of years, no signs of old age were visible on their bodies.[63]

In hypothesizing a Hindu masculine ethos, *Pak Chandrika* viewed ancient food practices as the main contributor to the physical strength of Bhim, Bhishma, and other mythological rulers.[64] Tying this up with eugenics, another cookbook stated: 'Those who eat good food, their sons are healthy, strong and pious (*balishth, balvaan aur pavitra*)'.[65]

These authors frequently cited ayurveda as the source of inspiration for their recipes, employing it in broad and popular strokes in their recommendations for ingredients, cooking methods, and dietary guidelines to promote both physical and mental well-being. Ayurveda functioned metonymically as a unifying banner for various kinds of printed culinary recipes by and for Hindus, thus shaping their gastronomic landscape. For instance, writing the introduction of *Pakprakash aur Mithai*, Ramshankar Shukl 'Rasal' posited an organic connection between culinary sciences

[60]Yashoda Devi, *Achaar ki Kothri arthat Achaar, Murabba, Chutney Banane ki Vidhi* [Room of pickles, meaning a guide to making pickles, marmalades, chutneys] (Allahabad: Stri Aushadhalya Press, 1929; 2nd edn).

[61]For more details on Yashoda Devi, see Charu Gupta, 'Procreation and pleasure: Writings of a woman Ayurvedic practitioner in colonial North India', *Studies in History*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2005, pp. 17–44; Charu Gupta, 'Vernacular sexology from the margins: A woman and a Shudra', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 43, no. 6, pp. 1105–1127.

[62]Ray, *Culinary culture.*

[63]Devi, *Pakshastra*, pp. 28–29.

[64]Sharma, *Pak Chandrika*, pp. 3, 9–10.

[65]Verma, *Pakprakash*, p. 2.

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and ayurveda. Hanumanprasad Sharma upheld the central importance of ancient ayurvedic knowledge in relation to food.[66] The principles of ayurveda guided Yashoda Devi in far more central ways than any other cookbook of the time, as she blended information on the nutritional value of fruits, vegetables, pulses, and spices with ayurveda, arguing that this combination was both wholesome and aligned with the Indian temperament. Such invocations enabled the receptivity of her recipes within a plural and quotidian terrain of popular food, strongly associated with traditional domestic wisdom.

Exaltations of the ancient were accompanied by laments over the present state of food knowledge and cooking abilities that were making men weak and lethargic. Maniram Sharma deplored what he had noticed—that 90 out of 100 men were emaciated (*ksheenkay*).[67] 'Natural' and freshly prepared Indian food was praised, while alien and debilitating Western culinary methods, as well as canned foods, were disparaged. Kaviraj Pratapsingh, the superintendent of the Ayurvedic Pharmacy, Kashi Hindu Vishwavidyalaya, in his preface to Hanumanprasad Sharma's *Aahaar Vigyan* stated:

> See animals and birds. Their food is often simple and in its natural form, which is why they fall sick much less than humans. Our ancient culinary science mainly rested on this principle, and the form of substances was changed very little … Today's new civilisational ethos takes very little care of these things … Most of the food in Western countries has been prepared since months and sometimes since years … Those who think that Western countries are storehouses of all knowledge and science make a big mistake.[68]

Sharma's *Pak Chandrika* too bemoaned that due to the impact of 'aliens' (*vijatiyon*), the pride in cooking of pure Hindu castes was being destroyed.[69] A case was made for home cooking: as well as being more economical it was far removed from the adulteration rampant in the market. Introducing Rama Tiwari's *Pak Prabhakar*, a recipe book on desserts, it was pointed out that with the book, housewives could prepare a wide variety of sweets at home at less expense, using everyday ingredients easily available in middle-class households, and escape the adulterated ghee in sweets sold in the market.[70] Sharma's *Pak Chandrika* too valued thrift and buying and cooking according to the seasons, which made ingredients less costly.[71] Mataprasad Gupt's *Gud-Pak-Vigyan* had its foreword written by Baba Ramchandran, the famous peasant leader from Awadh. Claiming a domain of autonomy for indigeneity, Ramchandran declared that the book was unique in upholding the benefits of jaggery versus sugar, and in showing that sweetmeats prepared with the former were cheaper, purer (*pavitra*), swadeshi, and beneficial for the poor peasants of India.[72] Gupt reiterated that jaggery had far more

[66]Sharma, *Aahaar Vigyan*, p. 21.
[67]Sharma, *Pak Chandrika*, p. 21.
[68]Sharma, *Aahaar Vigyan*, pp. 6–8.
[69]Sharma, *Pak Chandrika*, pp. 9–10.
[70]Tiwari, *Pak Prabhakar.*
[71]Sharma, *Pak Chandrika*, p. 27.
[72]Gupt, *Gud-Pak-Vigyan*, foreword by Baba Ramchandran, pp. 1–3.

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vitamins than 'the useless' sugar, and for the workers and peasants of India, jaggery was the go-to dessert (*mohanbhog*).[73]

At the same time, even though many Hindus thoroughly enjoyed eating meat, most recipe books were refashioning the ideal Hindu upper-caste palate as synonymous with a vegetarian diet, thereby marking Dalits, Muslims, and the British as the 'other' of this normative culinary nationalism. Some cookbooks like Verma's *Pakprakash*, Joshi's *Adarsh Pak Vidhi*, and Shukl's *Vrihad Pak Vigyan* had meat recipes, but these were missing in most other Hindi cookbooks of the time, which conceived of vegetarianism as the mark of distinction of Hindu food.[74] While all Hindi cookbooks claimed that they were written in simple language, accessible to all, those containing vegetarian recipes used a more Sanskritized *khari boli* Hindi, while those with meat recipes incorporated a more free-flowing dose of Hindustani-Urdu words. For example, Verma's *Pakprakash* often contained Urdu words like *garz* (purpose), *maafik* (compatible), *munasib* (suitable), and *aitraaz* (objection). But vegetarianism was the order of the day for most Hindi cookbooks. Be it Maniram Sharma's *Pak Vidya* and *Pak Chandrika*, Bhagwandas's *Ras Vyanjan Prakash*, Gupt's *Pakprakash aur Mithai*, Bhargav's *Vyanjan Prakash*, Anant Devi's *Vyanjan Prakash*, Yashoda Devi's *Pakshastra* and *Aachaar ki Kothri*, Shailkumari Chaturvedi's *Navin Pak-Shastra*, or Jyotirmayi Thakur's *Gharelu Shiksha tatha Pakshastra*, all (many actively) made the choice to present their texts as synonymous with vegetarianism. Sharma's *Pak Chandrika* argued that since India was a 'hot' country, meat was unsuitable for consumption there.[75] Saumya Gupta cogently argues that 'the exclusion of meat from its huge recipe repertoire was a political statement for *Pak Chandrika*'.[76] Announcing that food should be cooked according to the nature and disposition of the (Hindu) nation, Yashoda Devi advocated vegetarianism. Wrote Chaturvedi: 'This [cooking] is for the common people, so there is no description of those substances which are not used among common people like non-vegetarian food.'[77] Hanumanprasad Sharma's *Aahaar Vigyan* drew bodily distinctions between self and other, spiritual and material, to argue that the sole reason for the destruction of the life-force that made a man a man was meat-eating (*maansaahaar manushya ki jivan shakti ko nasht karne ka ekmatra upaay hai*), human teeth were never meant for meat-eating, and the consumption of meat had a direct correlation with heightened sexual arousal and alcoholism; in brief, therefore, forsaking meat would end communal and caste discord in India.[78] While perceived non-Hindu foods hardly found any mention in most Hindi cookbooks, there was an obsession with milk and recipes that featured it as the main ingredient, with most cookbooks having a separate section devoted to milk. It was repeatedly stated that there was nothing like cow's milk to keep the body disease free; it was the nectar of life; the lifeline of Indian food; and one could live a healthy life based on consuming

[73]Ibid., p. 6.

[74]Verma, *Pakprakash*; Girish Chandra Joshi, *Adarsh Pak Vidhi* [Ideal cooking] (Kashi: Hind Pustak Agency, 1938); Shukl, *Vrihad Pak Vigyan.* For details on the vegetarian nature of *Pak Chandrika*, see Gupta, 'Culinary codes', p. 180.

[75]Sharma, *Pak Chandrika*, pp. 13–14.

[76]Gupta, 'Culinary codes', p. 180.

[77]Chaturvedi, *Navin Pak-Shastra*, preface.

[78]Sharma, *Aahaar Vigyan*, pp. 9–14.

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cow's milk.[79] Sidelining the rich Mughlai and Awadhi cuisine of North India, these culinary texts were set within the limits of a specious Brahmanical ayurvedic discourse: this was a form of Brahmanism disguising and enlarging itself as Hinduism by speaking of the best diets that needed to emanate from a supposedly 'Hindu' kitchen.

While written in an avowedly straightforward manner, embedded in the politics of most cookbooks was a class and caste discourse couched in a vocabulary of cleanliness and purity: 'The cook should not be dirty. He should be clean and pure, should not be ugly, should not have any infectious (contagious and airborne) diseases … Do not let an impure person serve food as it results in a recoil and guilt in the person eating it.'[80] Another noted:

> The vision of some people is such that when they eye the food, it does not get digested properly, and one starts having diarrhoea. Such people are none other than the poor and the lowly (*neech*) with vile vision … Words, features, flavours, touch, and smell (*shabd, roop, ras, sparsh aur gandh*)—all things should be such that they please the mind.[81]

Borrowing from Western colonial notions, the discourse of cleanliness, purity, hygiene, and organization became a part of the domestic-science agenda in culinary texts.[82] Hindi cookbooks stressed four central modules—the space of the kitchen, the utensils to be used, the clothes to be worn while cooking, and the aesthetics of serving. Almost all cookbooks had a section, often at the beginning, on the importance of cleaning the kitchen daily and assiduously, keeping it and the food storage space impeccably organized, rubbing the utensils to a shine and arranging them systematically, taking a bath and changing into a freshly washed saree before cooking, and serving food immaculately and lovingly with different pots and spoons.[83]

In her discussion of household-maintenance texts in Britain, Andrea Adolph says they combined household, medical, and culinary recipes to rhetorically indicate an equation of household goods with embodied inhabitants.[84] As the vehicles of a Hindu urban middle-class identity, recipes were meant to carry collective meanings that could be replicated in all kinds of middle-class households. The middle-class character of these recipe books is revealed in detailed contents lists. All of them had different sections on varied food items. Bhargav's *Vyanjan Prakash*, like many other cookbooks of the time, divided his recipes into fortified foods *(nikhara ya pukka bhojan*), sugary or raw foods (*sakhra ya kaccha bhojan*), fruitarian or vegetarian (*falahaar ya shakahaar*), and ended with pickles, marmalades, and chutneys. Most books had

[79] Joshi, *Adarsh Pak Vidhi*, pp. 184–195; Sharma, *Pak Chandrika*, pp. 383–395; Devi, *Pakshastra*, pp. 609–627.

[80] Bhargav, *Vyanjan Prakash*, pp. 3–4.

[81] Sharma, *Aahaar Vigyan*, pp. 17, 20, 28.

[82] Ishani Choudhury, 'A palatable journey through the pages: Bengali cookbooks and the "ideal" kitchen in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century', *Global Food History*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2017, pp. 24–39.

[83] Bhargav, *Vyanjan Prakash*, p. 3; Chaturvedi, *Navin Pak-Shastra*, p. 5; Devi, *Vyanjan Prakash*, p. 2; Sharma, *Pak Chandrika*, pp. 29–30, 35–39; Thakur, *Gharelu Shiksha*, pp. 52–54.

[84] Andrea Adolph, *Food and femininity in twentieth century British women's fiction* (England: Ashgate, 2009), p. 52.

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Figure 5. The ideal kitchen. *Sources:* Gupt, *Pakprakash aur Mithai*, inside page; Bhargav, *Vyanjan Prakash*, cover.

recipes for a wide variety of *roti*s (breads), *dal*s (lentils), *chawal*s (rice), *shak*s (vegetables), *raita*s, and *mishthans* (sweets). For example, *Pak Chandrika* contained 12 ways to prepare the humble potato, six for tara root vegetable, six for bitter gourd, and four ways to make pigeon pea lentils. These recipes signalled aspirations of upward mobility. Some recipes adopted modern and international practices of measurements and weights, used botanical names of herbs, and gave English translations of food items, as, for example, in Hanumanprasad Sharma's *Aahaar Vigyan.* Yashoda Devi's *Pakshastra* showcased its middle-class character via outlining men working in courts, with women learning knitting, stitching, and handicrafts from home-schooling teachers, and servants employed for household work.[85] The pictures accompanying food recipe columns in magazines narrated a middle-class story.[86] The kitchen interiors, utensils, foodstuffs, and goods described in these recipe books were markers of a middle-class lifestyle: neatly arranged kitchen contents, matching jars, and almirahs for storage (Figure 5).

These recipes were not meant only to result in delicious meals—a large moral condiment was also inserted to make for wholesome indigenous food that would ensure a healthy family and a strong nation.[87] Limits came to be placed on the desire for various foods and gorging in excess, while eating stodgy, oily, and spicy food was frowned upon.[88] Rachel Berger notes that Yashoda Devi 'introduced a logic behind food that wove together questions of embodiment, economy, and environment, and

[85]Devi, *Pakshastra*, pp. 13, 34, 60–61.
[86]Nijhawan, *Hindi publishing in colonial Lucknow*.
[87]Sharma, *Pak Chandrika*, pp. 15–16, 25; Joshi, *Adarsh Pak Vidhi*, p. 4.
[88]Devi, *Pakshastra*, pp. 27–28.

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synthesising eating, cooking, and caring as stalwarts of efficient modern living'.[89] Yashoda Devi herself wrote:

> There is enormous ignorance regarding food and diet … On account of such illiteracy, thousands of people are nearly in the jaws of death or suffer as patients. Just as medicine prepared by an *anadi* (inept) ayurvedic doctor, without complete knowledge of its science, aggravates many diseases in the body, making it difficult to get rid of them, so does food prepared without knowledge of *pak shastra* generates various illnesses in our bodies.

Each of Devi's recipes detailed its benefits and advantages, and when to use or not use them.[90]

Ingredients of gendered embodiments

The gendered nature of these cookbooks was central to their formulation. When women from the West first began coming to India, a spate of cookbooks and housekeeping management guides catering to their needs were published. They were geared to assist the white memsahib in running her household even as they suggested to their readers a culinary imperialism—an assertion of the superiority of the Western kitchen over the Indian.[91] Examining Bengali culinary texts and the space of the kitchen, Jayanta Sengupta argues that vernacular recipe books became vibrant sites of everyday resistance: they ridiculed the gastronomic excesses of gluttonous British officials and empowered Indian middle-class housewives through a politics of femininity, authenticity, and contradistinctions drawn with European cuisine. He sees this kitchen literature as a vehicle for the cultural politics of *bhadralok* (Bengali upper class) nationalism.[92]

Hindi culinary texts were markedly gendered in nature too. Though several of them paid due obeisance to Maharaja Nala for writing the oldest known ayurvedic treatise on culinary science, this ur-text did not associate the task of cooking with women. In fact, the descriptions of cooks distinctly rendered them male.[93] However, most Hindi cookbooks, especially those written by men, considered the kitchen a domain reserved for women. Bhargav's *Vyanjan Prakash* opened thus: 'Cooking food is a woman's religious duty (*bhojan banana stri ka dharma hai*). It is excellent to place the burden of cooking exclusively on women's shoulders, as they stay at home all the time.'[94] Equating the biological with the social, Maniram Sharma proclaimed: 'Just like feeding breast milk to children is the prime duty of the female community, it is their main duty to prepare food and feed their family members.'[95] Bhagwandas's *Ras Vyanjan Prakash*,

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[89]Berger, 'Between digestion and desire', p. 1631.

[90]Devi, *Pakshastra*, pp. 144–146.

[91]Procida, 'Feeding the imperial appetite'.

[92]Sengupta, 'Nation on a platter'.

[93]Maharaja Nala, *Pakadarpanam* [Culinary mirror], (ed.) Vamacarna Bhattacarya (Varanasi: Chaukhambha Sanskrit Sansthan, 1983; 2nd edn), p. 5.

[94]Bhargav, *Vyanjan Prakash*, p. 1.

[95]Sharma, *Pak Vidya*, p. 3.

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Brahmanical in its orientation, carried a series of pictures depicting the kitchen as an exclusively female domain, while the place for eating was entirely peopled by men.[96] Women cooked, men ate; women served, men were satiated. In time this expanded into a decree (Figure 6).

The golden Hindu culinary past could be replicated in the present only if women accepted that they were not just born to be supportive handmaidens for their men, but that their highest destiny lay in being kitchen maidens perpetually stirring cauldrons and doling out dishes. When women chose not to be so, it exposed the laziness, ignorance, and wastefulness to which their entire sex was genetically prone—their lack of care indicated most particularly in their reliance on cooks! This 'charming' view of women and their abilities was pithily voiced by Sharma's complaint that 'out of 100, 75 women are ignorant in cooking. And women are getting stupider day by day.'[97] This was reiterated in his *Pak Chandrika*:

> In the past women exhibited great faith and effort in culinary education. It is a matter of deep regret that this has drastically declined in the recent years … The woman is the Lakshmi of the house. Like the goddess of food (*annapurna*), she cooks with her own hands, and feeds her husbands, sons, and relatives with great love. The happiness and joy this brings to her cannot be described in writing … In the homes of our Aryan race, through the woman's ambit, this most sacred feeling (*param pavitra bhaav)* was everlasting, like a non-earthly property (*aparthiv sampatti*) … But I have to ask with deep sorrow … why do they have such contempt towards this science today?[98]

Yashoda Devi too followed the mythography that moulded women's role as cooks in the idealized ancient past:

> Draupadi and Damayanti were both queens. They were very hardworking and intelligent. Thousands of maids were in their service, yet both would prepare food for their family members with their own hands, according to their disposition and the seasons … Women should devote themselves to all the household chores.[99]

Cooking as science and art had to be formally taught to women; therefore, every home needed a cookbook. To inculcate gender-appropriate morals, it was argued, cookery should be made compulsory for girls in schools for, like any other subject, it had to be formally taught and practised.[100] *Pakprakash aur Mithai* illustrated what was necessary by showing one woman reading and another cooking, making it clear that its audience comprised literate, middle-class women (Figure 7).

[96]Bhagwandas, *Ras Vyanjan.*
[97]Sharma, *Pak Vidya*, p. 4.
[98]Sharma, *Pak Chandrika*, pp. 4–6. For a similar argument, also see Bhargav, *Vyanjan Prakash*, pp. 1–2.
[99]Devi, *Pakshastra*, p. 65.
[100]Gupt, *Pakprakash aur Mithai*, p. 3; Chaturvedi, *Navin Pak-shastra*, p. 5; Devi, *Pakshastra*, pp. 27–28; Sharma, *Pak Chandrika*, Introduction by Vidyawati Sehgal.

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Figure 6. A series of illustrations showing women serving and men eating. *Source:* Bhagwandas, *Ras Vyanjan Prakash*, pp. 4–7.

Most cookbook writers disapproved of employing cooks and servants in the kitchen. While the Western memsahib relied on them, the Hindu middle-class housewife did not delegate labour to paid domestic workers; she cooked with her own hands and relished

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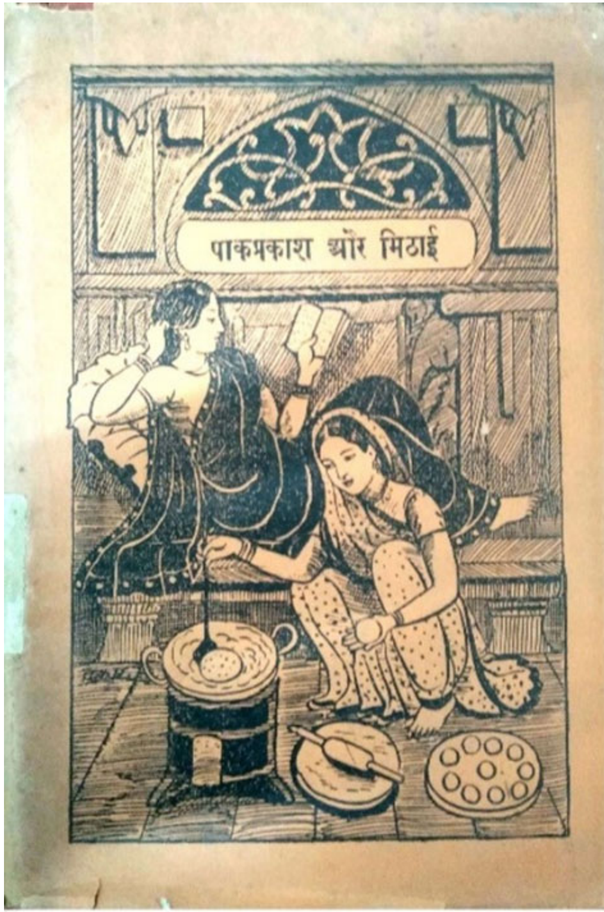

Figure 7. Reading recipes, following recipes. *Source:* Gupt, *Pakprakash aur Mithai*, cover.

her work in the kitchen. One cookbook said: 'The way Aryan women prepare food with innermost effort … can never be expected from a paid woman cook.'[101] Weaving this into an idea of male happiness, another said that even if a paid cook were intelligent and expert in the art, she could never satisfy or bring joy to the husband who, after a whole day's hard work, badly needed to return home to a good meal made by the hands of a loving wife.[102] As Haynes has noted, advertisers of food products in colonial India constantly adjusted their techniques to cater to various market segments: servants featured regularly in advertisements geared to Europeans but were invisible in those aimed at middle-class Indians.[103] These cookbooks thus became quasi conduct

[101]Sharma, *Pak Chandrika*, p. 6.
[102]Chaturvedi, *Navin Pak-Shastra*, pp. 4–5.
[103]Haynes, *The emergence of brand-name capitalism*, p. 49.

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manuals, showing the educated middle-class Hindu housewife what was normative and ideal.

Needless to say, a celebration of women's unpaid domestic labour and inequality was built into the cookbooks. It is well recognized that the deification of women and valorization of their contributions as sacred are patriarchal strategies in the creation of hegemonic notions that serve—completely contrary to what they assert—to subordinate women. These covert forms of coercion are clear from what underlies their rhetorical justifications of constant physical work as good for women's health.[104] The drudgery of day-long cooking, the endless and enormous tasks required of women enslaved in kitchens, the back-breaking physical labour involved in churning out several meals daily—none of this can be mentioned because all of it must metaphorically be swept under the kitchen carpet. Yashoda Devi's typical and idealized middle-class kitchen has daughters and mothers cutting vegetables, grinding spices, lighting stoves, and cooking lentils.[105] There is no room here for the fundamental and inescapable material fact of sweat, fatigue, and lungs decayed by smoke.

While adopting similar vocabularies, some of the cookbooks written by women had additional features. I wish to discuss some of these, with a particular focus on Yashoda Devi's *Pakshastra.* While acknowledging the primacy of women in the art of cooking, Shailkumari Chaturvedi declared: 'In olden times, not only women but also men were experts in culinary knowledge, and the example of Maharaja Nala is a proof of this. In fact, this science is such that both men and women must have knowledge of it, but it is an ornament that especially graces women.'[106] It is to be noted that unlike most cookbooks authored by men, the prefaces, introductions, and endorsements of both Rama Tiwari's *Pak Prabhakar* and Shailkumari Chaturvedi's *Pak-Shastra* were written by educated women. Satyavati, a graduate member of the Legislative Assembly from Meerut, wrote one of the prefaces of *Pak Prabhakar*. Another was written by Laxmi M. Nagar, described as the 'Assistant Inspectress of Girls' Schools, Allahabad'. Similarly, Chandrakumari Vidushi introduced Chaturvedi's *Navin Pak-Shastra*.

Yashoda Devi's *Pakshastra* contained 613 recipes. Claiming gendered authority, this was the central text in making Devi a key popularizer of ayurvedic-inspired cuisine.[107] This cookbook is distinct from the bulk of those written by men in showcasing women as agents, actors, and participants. The discursive technique by which this is achieved is the figure of the *bhabhi* (elder sister-in-law). Popular histories of the *bhabhi* show her as both object and subject of erotic desire and sexual fantasies.[108] But another facet of the *bhabhi* figure that emerged, embellished in part by the recipe book, was the idealized maternal, knowledgeable, and experienced woman friend: it is in this sense that Devi deployed the *bhabhi* figure—in fact, this persona was modelled on, and came to embody, Devi herself. Through a married and mentoring *bhabhi*, recipes were imparted as female morality to a younger unmarried woman.

[104]Sharma, *Pak Chandrika*, p. 7; Bhargav, *Vyanjan Prakash*, pp. 1–3.

[105]Devi, *Pakshastra*, pp. 10–11.

[106]Chaturvedi, *Navin Pak-Shastra*, p. 4.

[107]Devi, *Pakshastra*, p. 5.

[108]Gupta, *Sexuality, obscenity, community*.

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The cookbook was designed as a kitchen conversation between these two women—a *bhabhi*, cleverly named Gyanvanti (lit. the knowledgeable woman), and Roopvati, the beautiful but inexperienced younger woman. Their conversations were sometimes formatted as questions and answers that offered informed guidance and prescriptions. Interrogating the credentials of men in kitchen matters, Devi indicated her superiority and authority over the medium through her own construction of the ideal *bhabhi*, whom she made the voice of expertise and sanity on food, cooking, and health issues. The technique of sharing and exchanging recipes between women across familial circuits also signalled self-reliance, women-centred networks, and domestic female alliances that fostered bonds of sisterhood. A similar technique was deployed by Chaturvedi, who wrote her recipes through the medium of letters between two sisters, with the elder, knowledgeable sister relaying culinary codes in an authorial voice to the younger sibling.[109]

Another narrative method in the cookbook by Yashoda Devi was her constant use of tragic narratives of illnesses and death, fictional or actual, to substantiate the value of her recipes. These food tragedies included everyday stories of and from family members, cases from next-door neighbours, and testimonies of intimate 'known' people. All these cases were apparently witnessed by the *bhabhi* and her woman pupil 'with their own eyes' (*ankhon dekhi baten*). The examples included food habits that had led to the death of a mother, a severe stomach ache in a brother-in law, and near-incontinence of the bowels in a sister's son.[110] The narration of bodily ailments caused by the 'wrong' food helped establish authorial intimacy and authority when giving advice.[111]

The cornerstones of Devi's recipes were the therapeutic qualities of food based on permitted and proscribed products, regimes of temperance and self-control, and a balanced diet. Codifying kitchen knowledge, her cookbook was divided into two sections: the first part began with topics like *rogon ke karan* (reasons for diseases), *virudh bhojan se haani* (the harm done by inimical food), and *pratyek ritu aahaar vihaar* (seasonal diet), each discussed through kitchen conversations followed by nutritive values, uses, and the medical benefits of different kinds of food, including vegetables, fruits, pulses, grains, and spices.[112] The second part contained healthy food recipes for children, older people, and those suffering from various illnesses. The recipes moved seamlessly between food and ayurveda, each constantly adjusted according to disposition, nature, time, season, and place. While imparting recipes, the cookbook and the kitchen were enlarged into a woman's space, a domain of survival and sisterhood where women could sometimes practise and expound on their ideas of health, nutrition, and culinary knowledge.

Despite occasional displays of creativity and difference in female writings, the predominant voice in Hindi cookbooks reflected the perspectives of mainstream upper-caste Hindu nationalism, as they sought to construct the 'perfect' woman, kitchen and nation.

[109]Chaturvedi, *Navin Pak-Shastra*.
[110]Devi, *Pakshastra*, pp. 30–45.
[111]Ibid., pp. 74–77.
[112]Ibid., pp. 74–121.

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Conclusion

This article has attempted to demonstrate that vernacular culinary print recipes and cookbooks offer insights into how traditional knowledge and practices were given a modern tilt. It shows how these practices were adapted and transformed over time in response to and as a consequence of a flourishing print industry and changing sociopolitical contexts. A wealth of recipes combined the science of taste and nutrition, conceived of as beneficial to the health of women and men. The Hindi cookbooks assembled a vernacular archive of cooking that collectively constituted a nation's culinary epic in so far as they glorified ancient food cultures and contributed to the imagination of a Hindu nation. This domain shows us a fusion of Hindu biological bodies with an assertively Hindu social, a world that stratified and mapped caste hierarchies, class status, and religious identities through food. Wafting out of stoves, culinary recipes became the arbiters of kitchen Hinduism in this period.

The gendered character of the cookbooks shows that serious attempts were made to domesticate the middle-class housewife through the art of culinary science. Nested in a moral framework of the ideal traditional-modern woman, these cookbooks often strengthened the cosmology of domesticity and patriarchal inequality, as they celebrated the drudgery of everyday cooking and constructed stereotypes of the good wife, lauded images of the perfect kitchen, raised expectations of domestic life, and strengthened gendered divisions of labour. At the same time, the functionally literate middle-class housewives were not only consumers but also authors of these cookbooks. While tying them more into normative boundaries, the authoring and printing of cookbooks also sometimes allowed women to claim a degree of creativity, credibility, and autonomy that could allow them to wriggle out of the grasp of colonialism.

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