

PRELUSION



I AM a pre-globalisation child; you could argue that I am a child of deglobalisation. It was 1977; I was a teenager in school, when India's firebrand socialist leader and then industry minister George Fernandes threw out Coca-Cola from the country as it was a foreign brand. It was a dramatic moment and we learnt the word 'multinational'. After this, for years we drank Thums Up—the Indian variant of Coca-Cola. This was the victory for all things *swadeshi*. This is not to say that when I was growing up—in the 1960s—there was much influence of western products in our life. In the post-independence era, India's dream was to become a manufacturing hub. But when I think about it, my memories are, frankly, mixed. On the one hand, I

had cravings for things that I read about in books (we did not have internet or television then). On the other hand, I vividly remember my mother's grand-uncle sitting under a tree, spinning his cloth till the day he died.

I am also the generation that was taught about self-reliance much before it became fashionable. The story often repeated was how in 1966, India was at the brink of mass starvation following a crippling drought, and yet ships coming from USA, laden with foodgrain sanctioned under the Public Law (PL)- 480 or the food for peace programme in 1954 started by president Dwight D. Eisenhower, were turned back. The then us President Lyndon B Johnson stopped sending the foodgrain, and it took a humiliating call from then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to get the ships of food delivered. This was India's moment of shame. Never again should India need to beg for food, it was said repeatedly. Food sovereignty is critical—and this was drilled into me. This is why, unlike many of my colleagues in the Indian environmental movement, I cannot condemn the Green Revolution because it helped the country overcome a desperate shortage of food. It was what was needed then; the shortcomings of the intensification of agriculture were, of course, to be fixed by later generations of scientists.

I was also taught—and I am not sure if I either understood or appreciated this message—the value of frugality. My sisters and I would be told during