

“Lies, Lies and More Lies” - GMOs, Poisoned Agriculture and Toxic “Scientific Rants”

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Theme: [Biotechnology and GMO](#), [Science and Medicine](#)

Have you ever read all of those pro-GMO scientists-cum-lobbyists professing their love of science? They are always talking about how science must prevail over ignorance and ideology then they play on the public's ignorance by using ideology and sloganeering to try to get their points across.

As has been well documented (see [here](#) and [here](#)), it is the pro-GMO lobby/industry that distorts and censors science, captures regulatory bodies, attacks scientists whose findings are unpalatable to the industry and bypasses proper scientific and regulatory procedures altogether.

You also see the same people [attacking and demonising credible scientists](#) because their research throws up some very uncomfortable findings for the pro-GM cause. And they try to debunk peer-reviewed science with unscientific polemics (see [this](#) on the criticisms of Professor Seralini and his team had to endure), while masking their own [conflicts of interests and industry links](#) (also see [this](#)).

They accuse people who have concerns about GM as being inept, politically motivated and liars. In doing so, they try (but fail) to divert attention from their own lies, misrepresentations and political agenda. It is a classic case of [psychological projection](#).

Shanthu Shantharam recently wrote the piece '[Lies, Lies and More Lies](#)' that was a textbook example of this. Laced with deception, bluster and insults, he attacked individuals, accused them of being bombastic and liars and claimed that the introduction of GM crops to India had been delayed due to anti-GM activists and Greenpeace.

Frustrated by the inability of the pro-GM lobby to get GM food crops commercialised in India, Shantharan begins by saying:

“It is again that time when the India's usually-in-slumber apex biotechnology regulatory body, the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) has woken up, dusting itself off to decide whether to approve genetically modified (GM) mustard, an oil crop of considerable economic significance to the country.”

By promoting a fallacious economic justification for embracing GM mustard, he is conveniently ignoring the [impact of trade](#) policies that destroyed much of the indigenous mustard industry in India after the mid-1990s. If, as a bio-technologist, Shantharam wants to discuss economics, he would benefit from a lesson in the neo-liberal trade policies outlined [here](#), which results in India now spending so much on buying in edible oil from

abroad.

Moreover, the higher yields often attributed to the GM mustard under discussion are not due to GM but to the hybridisation of normal crop genes (ie conventional breeding). Campaigner Aruna Rodrigues argues that the use of high-yielding hybrids is a deliberate ploy to camouflage the yield attributable to the hybrid and assign it to the GM crop instead.

Anti-GM malcontents or unremitting fraud?

Shantharam claims the delay in sanctioning GM crops is due to “anti-GM malcontents” and environmentalists who want to tie up “technology products in the regulatory quagmire, and hope that the whole technology dies off in due course of time” and who are “talking unscientific rubbish about GM crops just like many other anti-GM Luddites.”

The ‘Luddites’ slur is [standard, lazy PR spin](#) designed to try to denigrate valid concerns. It is nothing but a desperate [attempt to steer the debate away from the social, political and economic issues](#) that cause, hunger and poverty and promote GM as a proxy.

Like other lobbyists, Shantharam promotes the lie that the debate is over dusted where GM safety and efficacy are concerned. However, [GRAIN](#) challenges the myths that the pro-GM lobby likes to build its house of cards on, and [this article](#) illustrates how its cheap propaganda attempts to twist the debate for its own ends. Moreover, the book ‘[Altered Genes, Twisted Truth](#)’ highlights how GM is not based on sound science at all but on the systematic subversion of it.

Although Shantharam attacks bureaucracy and forwards his usual tirades about anti-GM ideologues for conspiring to prevent the introduction of GM, it is with good reason that this week the Supreme Court sought an explanation from the central government on its proposed move to introduce herbicide resistant mustard, cotton and corn in the face of a court-imposed ban on their introduction. The court asked the Attorney General of India to explain his stand on a contempt petition filed against the members of the committee which cleared the proposal.

The petition (read in full [here](#)), filed by Aruna Rodrigues, sought action against members of the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee for flouting court orders. Rodrigues says the government wilfully and deliberately not only conducted small-scale field trials but also large-scale field trials for commercial introduction of herbicide tolerant crops of mustard, cotton and corn in India for the first time.

The petition says: “These field trials have ignored fundamental bio-safety precautions as ordered by the court. Contamination during open field trials is specifically barred in the order of May 8, 2007.” It continued: “In the light of this specific order... regulatory adventurism... is particularly unconscionable as they expose India to undue and high risk of GMO contamination of our food crops.”

It adds that the risk of contamination from GM mustard and corn is of an unprecedentedly high order and proven in other cases involving Canada, Japan and Mexico (corn) and US (rice). The petition declares there is a collective irresponsibility displayed by the regulators, ministries concerned and institutions of GMO governance, demonstrating a clear agenda to push GMOs into India’s agriculture.

Rodrigues argues the approval of large-scale trials is undisguised malfeasance and

regulatory delinquency. The members of the GEAC are said to be in contempt of court because: they have failed to provide public access to information, including full bio-safety dossiers, meeting minutes and safety dossiers, thus side-lining court orders, and they have failed to implement bio-safety measures during open field trials to ensure no contamination, which for GM mustard is a serious issue, as the petition makes clear.

The claim is that no active testing for contamination with validated protocols was done to demonstrate regulatory commitment to contain risk under the supervision of named scientists. Furthermore, as a herbicide-tolerant crops have been advised against and brings about various [health and environmental dangers](#) (see [this](#) and [this](#) too). It is thus with good reason that the final report of the Supreme Court-appointed Technical Expert Committee report of June-July 2013 specifically recommended a ban on HT crops.

The petition goes on to state:

“The regulatory vacuum constitutes deliberate malfeasance and fraud, putting us at infinite and irremediable and irreversible risk.”

And driving home the point, the petition adds:

“... what we are now confronted with, in the specific matter of Mustard DMH 11 and also LSTs (large-scale trials) of corn and flex cotton, all of them HT crops, is more corrupt and even sinister because we have brazen and repeated contempt including ‘underground’ approvals to keep the bio-safety fraud of these approvals secret and promote a clear agenda to promote GMOs into Indian Agriculture. The Regulators and our Institutions of GMO governance are ‘serial offenders’ without compunction.”

The conclusion is that there seems to be no room for transparency in this process. Rodrigues describes the push for GM in India to be based on “unremitting fraud” and is [right to be concerned](#) about contamination. But that doesn’t seem to bother some, like Shantharam.

They seem to think it is fine to bypass proper procedures, ignore the [various high-level reports](#) advising against GM in India, draw a veil of secrecy over processes and misrepresent the case for GM crops in a rush to get GM into India at the [behest of their transnational agribusiness](#) masters.

Of course, a strategy of [deliberate contamination](#) to render the GM/non-GM debate meaningless should not be dismissed lightly and is part of the overall agenda.

The scientific consensus on GM is a big lie

Shantharam has long specialised in attacking scientists whose findings challenge his agenda by depicting them as mavericks and standing outside the ‘scientific community’. This time, he argues that critics of GM rely on a “parallel science” created by a handful of anti-GM scientists. According to Shantharam, these scientists’ negative researches have been rigorously reviewed by the mainstream scientists and leading regulatory bodies and have been declared invalid.

This is simply not true. Shantharam seems to think public relations techniques and falsehoods will suffice. What he offers is personal opinion and PR masquerading as fact, which he hopes will be taken as truth, not least because he dangles a science doctorate before the public. He is [not the only one](#) who adopts this tactic. Forget the spin and look at the reality.

Food & Water Watch states that biotechnology seed companies, aided by advocates from academia and the blogosphere, are using their substantial resources to broadcast the myth of a 'scientific consensus' on the safety of GMOs, asserting that the data is in and the debate is over.

In its [report of September 2014](#), the group dismisses the so-called scientific consensus that Shantharam uses to forward his agenda.

The report notes:

"The "scientific bodies" that purportedly are part of the "consensus" are few in number and are by no means representative of the entire scientific community. They have not signed on to a specific "consensus" statement nor have they, in most cases, actually developed policy positions on the subject. By and large, the GMO-consensus campaign has misquoted or misrepresented these scientific bodies to falsely assert that they are part of a "consensus" on GMO safety."

It goes on to state that the GMO-consensus campaign points to the Royal Society of Medicine and the Royal Society of London as part of the scientific 'consensus', but neither organisation has an official policy on GMO safety. The report notes the positions of several other leading scientific institutions and academies across the world that the pro-GM consensus campaign has used to forward its case. It concludes that the campaign uses a mix of cherry-picked quotes, industry-backed sources and misrepresentations of positions held to feed its spin.

One only has to look at Steven Druker's [open letter to the Royal Society](#) in Britain to also appreciate just how prestigious institutions (or their members) engage in campaigns and tactics to push through a pro-GM agenda that has nothing to do with science. Moreover, [hundreds of independent scientists](#) – almost all of them holding advanced degrees in relevant fields – have come forward to condemn the GMO-consensus campaign, explicitly saying that there is "no consensus" on the safety of GMOs. Readers may also be interested in [this article](#), which also highlights just who has said what about the safety of GM and puts paid to the big lie of a 'scientific consensus'.

Shantharam claims all that anti-GM people do is propagate lies in the hope that if they are repeated often enough, people will believe them. With no sense of irony or indeed shame, he claims that all credible science is on the side of GM and only a few incompetent maverick scientists indulge in anti-GM "parallel science."

Perhaps he thinks that by propagating a falsehood time and again, people will believe it.

Aside from there being no consensus among scientific institutions, the Food & Water Watch report dismisses claims that there is an overwhelming consensus in the scientific literature and again points to the case being misrepresented via a mix of industry-supported sources

and listing studies that do not claim there is safety regarding GM and which are not independent of the bio-tech industry, although the campaign depicts them as such.

Shantharam accuses critics of GM, whether scientists or campaigners, of indulging in invalid parallel science, bombast and lies. The reader can form their own conclusions on just whom is engaging in what.

Lies, lies and more lies

His article is a blend of smears, falsehoods and deceit, which continues into the area of GM cotton. He claims Bt cotton in India has been a runaway success and churns out the myth that farmers have overwhelmingly adopted it. For good measure, he argues that if it were not for cutting edge technology of the green revolution, millions would have died in South Asia.

This is more spin. It has been highlighted time and again that GM cotton in India is not the success he claims it to be (for instance, see [this](#) and [this](#)), that farmers do not necessarily actively choose GM (contrary to what Shantharam's neo-liberal ideological underpinnings would like us to believe, the actual reality is set out [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) and that the green revolution has caused [immense damage to agriculture, farmers and ecology](#) in India, not least in terms of [soil and health](#). Even its perceived successes are overstated and must be placed into a [wider context](#), including the closing off of alternative approaches as a result of the rush towards and prioritising of export-oriented petro-chemical agriculture, [which has been used](#) to create food deficit areas across the world.

According to Shantharam, genetic engineering is an extension of classical plant breeding technologies and a lot more precise set of tools to manipulate gene-coding DNA. Wrong again. There is enough evidence to show that GE is not an extension of classical plant breeding techniques and enough evidence to indicate a lack of precision that should merit concern (for example, see section one of [this report](#), [this](#) and [this](#)). Such claims have become standard among the pro-GM lobby and are in part designed to try to remove GM from regulatory processes and procedures to get them onto the market.

Finally, as if to gloss over all of the corruption and the capturing of regulatory agencies by global agribusiness and their compliant officials and politicians, Shantharam attempts to dismiss such concerns by implying critics of GM conveniently see conspiracy everywhere. Simply more spin and at odds with the [actual political reality](#).

He finishes by saying it is essential to stop a bunch of anti-GM campaigners with commercial interests in what he perceives to be grossly inadequate organic farming (another baseless claim: see [this](#) and [this](#)) from creating a controversy over GM where none exists.

Such deluded wishful thinking. There is a massive and genuine controversy about GM, and the public as consumers, not just organic farmers, are very concerned. Or is everyone to be dismissed as liars and fools and their concerns brushed aside?

If we are to discuss commercial interests, consider the financial position of the biotech industry (consider Monsanto's [profits](#) and its [value as a company](#)) and the massive influence it has over science, governments and policies (see [this](#), [this](#), [this](#) and [this](#)) – not to mention the \$100 million spent to prevent labelling GMOs in the US and the amount spent on lobbying, advertising and campaign donations (see [this](#) spending by Monsanto for the US

alone). And its massive influence in India should not be discounted (see [this](#) and [this](#)), although it is clear some wish it could.

It puts into perspective the ludicrous assertion that activists are driving the debate, brainwashing people and determining policy. But why bother with any of this when a good old unhealthy dose of twisted truths, pro-GM bluster and psychological projection will do? After all, this is what Shantharam has been engaging in for years.

“The long winded toxic argument by Dr Shantharam is not meant for any scientific discussion. It is to discredit all the independent studies done in India in order to bring pressure on GEAC to renew the permission to Monsanto... Bravo Dr Shantharam, you have done a yeoman service to your masters but on the day of judgement in a future not so far away, scientists like you will be remembered as “Enemies of the People”.” [P V Satheesh](#) in response to a piece by Shantharam from some years ago.

Some things never change.

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