

Monsanto's Looting of India's Agriculture: Political Backing of GMO. Hypnotic Trance in Delhi

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We are about to enter August. And that's a special month in India. Each year, on the 15th, the country commemorates the anniversary of independence from Britain.

To mark the occasion, official public celebrations take place in Delhi with flag waving and fly-pasts, and the corporate media is awash with patriotic sentiments.

Behind the scenes, however, agriculture, the very heart and soul of the nation, will continue to be restructured for the benefit of foreign interests, raising the question:

just where does the notion independence sit with such a policy?

In India, small farms account for 92 percent of all farms and occupy around 40 percent of all agricultural land. They form the bedrock of food production. Indeed, small farms produce most of the world's food [see [this](#)]. Facilitated by an appropriate policy framework, smallholders could easily feed the global population.

Throughout the world, however, there is a concerted effort to remove farmers from the land. Smallholders are squeezed onto less than a quarter of the world's farmland, and the world is fast losing farms and farmers through the [concentration of land](#) into the hands of big agribusiness, institutional investors and the powerful moneyed classes. If nothing is done to reverse this trend, the world will lose its capacity to feed itself.



Hundreds of thousands of farmers in India have taken their lives since 1997 and many more are experiencing economic distress or have left farming as a result of debt, a shift to (GM) cash crops and economic liberalisation [see [this](#)]. Facilitated by the WTO and the US-India Knowledge Initiative on Agriculture, there is a [deliberate strategy](#) to make agriculture financially non-viable for India's small farms, to get most farmers out of farming and to impose a World Bank sanctioned model of agriculture. The aim is to displace the current model and replace it with a system of industrial (GM) agriculture suited to the needs of Western agribusiness, food processing and retail concerns.

If you want to see the kinds of impact this could have, look no further than what has happened in Mexico on the back of NAFTA, in terms of rising [food security, bad health and poisoned agriculture](#) (not to mention a devastated economy with former workers driven into [the arms of drug cartels](#) to make a living).

It's not difficult to see where policy makers' priorities lie in India. Trade and food policy analyst [Devinder Sharma](#) has highlighted such priorities:

Agriculture has been systematically killed over the last few decades... because the World Bank and big business have given the message that this is the only way to grow economically... 60 percent of the population lives in the villages or in the rural areas and is involved in agriculture, and less than two percent of the annual budget goes to agriculture... When you are not investing in agriculture... You are not wanting it to perform...

There is a huge con-trick taking place in India: support given to agriculture is portrayed as a drain on the economy and is reduced, while the genuinely massive drain of tax breaks, bail outs, sops, tax avoidance and evasion that benefit industry and the rich are afforded scant attention. Despite these advantages, industry has failed to deliver. And yet regardless of the gross under-investment in agriculture, it still manages to deliver bumper harvests year after year.

Sharma continues:

In the last 10 years, we had 36 lakh crore going to the corporates by way of tax exemptions. Where are the jobs? They just created 1.5 crore (15 million) jobs in the last ten years. Where are the exports? ... The only sector that has performed very well in this country is agriculture. Year after year we are having a bumper harvest. Why can't we strengthen that sector and stop the population shift from the villages...?" (36 lakh crore is 36 trillion rupees: 64 rupees = 1 USD)

Corporate-industrial India has failed to deliver in terms of boosting exports or creating jobs, despite the massive hand outs and tax exemptions given to it [see [this](#) and [this](#)]. The number of jobs created in India between 2005 and 2010 was 2.7 million (the years of high GDP growth). According to International Business Times, 15 million enter the workforce every year [see [here](#)].

With GDP growth slowing and automation replacing human labour the world over in order to decrease labour costs and boost profit, where are the jobs going to come from to cater for hundreds of millions of agricultural workers who are to be displaced from the land or those whose livelihoods will be destroyed as transnational corporations move in and seek to

capitalise industries that currently employ tens of millions?

India's development is being hijacked by the country's wealthy ruling class and the multinational vultures. Meanwhile, the entrepreneurs who work the fields and have been custodians of the land and seeds for centuries, are being sold out to corporate interests whose only concern is to how best loot the economy. (Over the past decade or so, Monsanto has [appropriated \\$900 million](#) from small farmers in India.)

Thanks to its political influence and removal of choice, Monsanto already dominates the cotton industry in India with its GMOs. It is increasingly shaping agri-policy and the knowledge paradigm by funding agricultural research in public universities and institutes. Its practices and colonisation of institutions have led to it being called the '[contemporary East India Company](#)', and regulatory bodies are now severely [compromised and riddled with conflicts of interest](#) where decision-making over GMOs are concerned.

It should be made clear, however, that the Monsanto enterprise in India is a corrupt one, something that the pro-GMO lobby conveniently ignores. Just like it chooses to ignore the [fraudulent way](#) by which GMOs were placed onto the commercial market in the US.

In a recent piece, [Vandana Shiva](#) spells out the fraudulent nature of Monsanto in India in some detail. First, she notes that on a global level Monsanto imposed the false idea of 'manufacturing' and 'inventing' seeds in order to slap patents on them, or in India's case extract massive royalties. Second, its collection of these royalties as 'trait value' or as a 'fee for technology traits' is an intellectual property rights category that does not exist in any legal framework. It was concocted by Monsanto lawyers to work outside of the laws of the land and is thus illegal. Third, the introduction of GMOs without approvals, and thus Monsanto's original entry into India, was a violation and subversion of India's biosafety regulations.

To compound the deceptions, Monsanto forwards the myth that GM food is necessary to feed the world's burgeoning population. Its claims are always hidden behind a flimsy and cynical veil of humanitarian intent (helping the poor and hungry), which is [easily torn away](#) to expose the hypocrisy and self-interest that lies beneath. The world does not need GM to feed itself. GM and these humanitarian sentiments are little more than a Trojan horse aimed at securing greater control of food and agriculture.

The [International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge and Science for Development Report](#) stated that smallholder, traditional farming (not GMOs) can deliver food security in low-income countries through sustainable agri-ecological systems. Moreover, the roots of hunger and food poverty result from structural factors, including trade, distribution problems, lack of personal income and the increasingly globalised and exploitative system of industrialised agriculture and food production [for instance, see [this](#), [this](#) and [this](#)]. The companies behind the GM project are part of that system: they [fuel it and profit from it](#). Through patents and royalties, GM ensures greater profits and greater control over food and agriculture.

India's Standing Committee on Agriculture unequivocally concluded that GM seeds and foods are dangerous to human, animal and environmental health and directed the former Government of Manmohan Singh to ban GMOs. Despite this and the recommendations to put a hold on open field GM trials by the Supreme Court-appointed Technical Expert

Committee, such trials are being green-lighted.

The GM biotech sector should not be trusted, however. The issues raised in Shiva's recent piece aside, as the sector's largest player, Monsanto is responsible for knowingly damaging people's health and polluting the environment and is guilty of a catalogue of decades-long deceptive, duplicitous and criminal practices [see [this](#)]. It has shown time and again its contempt for human life and the environment and that profit overrides any notion of service to the public, yet it continues to propagate the lie that it has humanity's best interests at heart because its so-called GMO 'frontier technology' can feed the hungry millions.

The sector attempts to control the 'science' around its product, places restrictions on any independent research into its products and censors findings that indicate the deleterious impacts of its products. It also attacks scientists who reach conclusions not to its liking [see [this](#)]. It cannot demonstrate that yields are better, nutritional values are improved, health is not damaged or that harm to the environment does not occur with the adoption of GMOs. Independent studies and evidence, not inadequate industry funded or back ones, have indicated yields are often worse and pesticide use has increased, health is negatively impacted, soil is damaged and biodiversity is undermined, among other things.

Agriculture used to cement US global hegemony

Around 56 percent of Russia's agricultural output comes from family farms which occupy less than 9 percent of arable land. A remarkable achievement that is mirrored in many countries across the world. Russia does not need or want GM crops, which the Russian Prime Minister has described as amounting to little more than a form of [biological warfare weapon](#). And Russia is correct to regard agriculture in this way because the US has for many decades used it as a means of subjugating other nations.

The oil-rich Rockefeller family set out to control and profit from global agriculture via the petrochemical-dependent 'green revolution'. Along with other players, such as Cargill Grain Company, Rockefeller interests set out to destroy family farms in the US and the indigenous agriculture and food security of other countries (and also to depopulate the 'third world' and ensure the US population remained ignorant, apathetic and easy to control). This hegemonic strategy was actively supported by their stooges the US government [for a summary of what occurred, see [this](#)] and facilitated globally through 'free' trade agreements, the IMF, World Bank and WTO. Thanks to the Trojan horse agritech corporations, GMOs now represent the ultimate stranglehold of US interests over food via 'terminator' seed technology, seed patenting and intellectual property rights. (And let it not be overlooked that Monsanto now 'owns' the Epicyte 'sterility' gene.)

Despite compliant politicians and officials in high places in India who seem hell-bent on capitulating to Monsanto and facilitating US hegemonic interests, many recognise the dangers associated with GMOs and are working hard to resist their introduction. However, they are attacked and accused of slowing down growth because of their resistance to GMOs. Certain activists and civil organisations are also [accused of working against the national interest by colluding with foreign interests to undermine 'development'](#). The hypocrisy is blindingly obvious: the state itself has for a long time been colluding with foreign interests to undermine the basis of traditional agriculture.

This is similar to the [type of cynical attack](#) experienced by opponents of GM the world over, whose resistance to GM is portrayed as robbing food from the bellies of the poor and as

‘anti-human’. While espousing [fake concern](#) for the poor in order to help line the pockets of big agribusiness, the pro-GMO lobby says nothing about the [structural violence](#) waged on rural communities thanks to agri-business-backed IMF/World Bank/WTO policies or the [devastating effects](#) of GMOs in places like South America.

While dodging these issues, it sets out to denigrate opponents and to portray the real solutions (as opposed to the bogus GM solution) its critics offer for hunger and poverty as being ‘anti-capitalist twaddle’ or some other uniformed, cheap slur. This lobby has been unable to win the debate on GM, so slick PR, dirty tricks and smears are thus the order of the day.

The [political backing](#) for GMOs by the US State Department, the strategic position of the US GM biotech sector in international trade agreements (from TTIP to the US-India Knowledge Initiative on Agriculture) and at the WTO and the push to get GMOs into India and to contaminate agriculture via open-field trials with the compliance of key officials and official bodies does not bode well.

The impending GMO onslaught in India is ultimately part of a [US-led neoliberal invasion](#) (and part of a [global war on working people](#) – whether they are smallholders in India or workers in Greece or the US), resulting in the selling off to private concerns of seeds, retail, water, airports, land, industry, energy, telecommunications, etc.

If the beneficiaries are not always India’s ruling class, then they are its senior associates in the [interlocking directorate](#) of state-corporate interests in the West who have plundered their own economies and are now plundering the rest of the planet under the guise of ‘globalisation’. Those behind this project regard the folk whose lands are taken, wealth appropriated and livelihoods stripped away as ‘collateral damage’.

Part of the strategy involves convincing ordinary people that all of this is necessary and that it represents progress. And Part of it involves convincing everyone that the ability to flag-wave, do fly-pasts and express patriotic sentiments in Delhi on 15th August somehow constitutes ‘independence’.

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