

Monsanto's Violence in India: The Sacred and The Profane

By [Colin Todhunter](#)

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Foreign capital is dictating the prevailing development agenda in India. 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 food production. The aim is to replace current structures with a system of industrial (GM) agriculture suited to the needs of Western agribusiness, food processing and retail concerns.

The aim here is not to repeat what has been [previously written on this](#). Suffice to say that the long-term plan is for an overwhelmingly urbanised India with a fraction of the population left in farming working on contracts for large suppliers and Walmart-type supermarkets that, going on current evidence (see 4th paragraph from the end [here](#)), will offer a largely monoculture diet of highly processed, denutritified, genetically altered food based on crops soaked with chemicals and grown in increasingly degraded soils according to an unsustainable model of agriculture that is less climate/drought resistant, less diverse and unable to achieve food security.

Thanks to its political influence, Monsanto already [illegally](#) dominates the cotton industry in India with its GMOs. It is increasingly shaping agricultural 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 [compromised and riddled with conflicts of interest](#).

Monsanto is hard at work with its propaganda campaign to convince us all that GM food is necessary to feed the world's burgeoning population. Its claims are hidden behind a flimsy and cynical veil of humanitarian intent (helping the poor and hungry), which is [easily torn away](#) to expose the self-interest that lies beneath.

With an obligation to maximise profits for shareholders, Monsanto seems less concerned with the impacts of its products on public health (whether in [Argentina](#) or the [US](#)) or the conditions of Indian farmers due to its [failed GM cotton](#) and more concerned with roll-outs of its highly profitable [disease-associated](#) weed-killer (Roundup) and its GM seeds.

To ensure it remains 'business as usual', part of the relentless message is that there is no alternative to the chemical-intensive/GMO treadmill model of farming (which by now, any informed person should know is nothing but [a lie](#)). Monsanto has done [every foul thing](#) possible (including [bribery](#) and [fakery](#)) to ensure its business model dominates and that critics are smeared or crushed. As a result, we have an increasingly dominant model of

unsustainable industrialised food and agriculture dominated by green revolution ideology and technologies (and [wedded to and fuelled and driven by powerful commercial and geopolitical interests](#)), which involves massive [social, environmental and health costs](#).

Rejecting Monsanto's neocolonialism

In 2015, trade and agricultural policy analyst [Devinder Sharma asked](#) the following questions during a debate on Indian TV about rural population displacement and farming:

"Why do you want to move the population just because Western economists told us we should follow them? Why? Why can't India have its own thinking? Why do we have to go with Harvard or Oxford economists who tell us this?"

His series of questions strike at the heart of the prevailing development paradigm in India. It is a model of development being dictated by the World Bank and powerful transnational agribusiness corporations like Monsanto and Cargill.

Monsanto's mindset is based on the conquering and control of nature.

Let us turn briefly to [Raj Patel](#):

"Modern farming turns fields into factories. Inorganic fertilizer adds nitrogen, potassium, and phosphorous to the soil; pesticides kill anything that crawls; herbicides nuke anything green and unwanted—all to create an assembly line that spits out a single crop... ."

Contrast this with the ethos and principles of agroecological approaches to farming, which works with nature, as set out [here](#).

Monsanto's business model thrives within a system of capitalism and a system of agriculture propped up by the blood money of militarism ([Ukraine](#) and [Iraq](#)), 'structural adjustment' and strings-attached loans ([Africa](#)) or slanted trade deals ([India](#)) whereby transnational agribusiness drives a global agenda to suit its interests and eradicate impediments to profit. And it doesn't matter [how much devastation](#) ensues or how unsustainable its model is, 'crisis management' and 'innovation' fuel the [corporate-controlled treadmill](#) it seeks to impose.

Devinder Sharma is thus right to ask why can't India have its own thinking.

And India does have its own thinking. Environmental scientist [Viva Kermani](#):

"It can quite easily be said that Hinduism is the world's largest nature-based religion that recognises and seeks the Divine in nature and acknowledges everything as sacred. It views the earth as our Mother, and hence, advocates that it should not be exploited. A loss of this understanding that earth is our mother, or rather a deliberate ignorance of this, has resulted in the abuse, and the exploitation of the earth and its resources."

Kermani notes that centuries before the appearance of the modern-day environmental movement and Greenpeace, the shruti (Vedas, Upanishads) and smriti (Ramayana,

Mahabharata, Puranas, other scriptures) instructed people that the animals and plants found in India are sacred; that like humans, our fellow creatures, including plants have consciousness; and, therefore, all aspects of nature are to be revered. She adds that this understanding of and reverence towards the environment is common to all Indic religious and spiritual systems: Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism.

According to Kermani, the Vedic deities have deep symbolism and many layers of existence. One such association is with ecology. Surya is associated with the sun, the source of heat and light that nourishes everyone; Indra is associated with rain, crops, and abundance; and Agni is the deity of fire and transformation and controls all changes. So much importance was given to trees, that there was also Vrikshayurveda – an ancient Sanskrit text on the science of plants and trees. It contains details about soil conservation, planting, sowing, treatment, propagating, how to deal with pests and diseases and a lot more.

On the other hand, Kermani notes that the Western religions, especially Christianity, viewed this nature worship as paganism, failing to recognise the scientific and spiritual basis of the relationship between man and nature and how this is the only way to sustain ecological balance. Christians were made to turn all their love and adoration for nature towards their one and only god, who was a jealous god. The elements of nature then became devoid of all divinity and were left to be conquered by man.

Whereas the Christian belief is that nature is destructive and therefore has to be conquered, according to Kermani, the Dharmic view propagates conservation of the nature and advises man to live in harmony with nature without indulging in exploitation. Hindus strongly believe that the world is one family and thus the divine is also seen in animals and are protected. The deification of animals, therefore, has led to the protection of many species of animal. The recognition that every animal played a role in creating an ecological balance, allowed people to live in harmony with animals.

Kermani concludes by saying:

“Today’s environmental crisis demands a response. The world is grappling to find solutions to multiple crises of the environment. Technology is considered the panacea. For Hindus, the environment is not protected because of the selfish urgency to save biodiversity and hence save human future, but because it is the Dharmic way of life and hence a righteous duty that all humans are obliged to perform.”

And before critics say this is all well and good, but how can India possibly feed itself without chemicals, without Monsanto or Bayer, without agritech inputs? Such people should know that India is [self-sufficient in many staples](#) and was traditionally [more productive](#) prior to the imposition of green revolution ideology and technology. Moreover, such ideology and technology has undermined an indigenous farming sector that once catered for the diverse dietary needs and climatic conditions of India and it has actually [produced and fuelled](#) drought, [degraded soils](#), [illnesses and malnutrition](#), farmer distress and many other issues.

Playing god

Similar processes that destroyed the essential link between humans and nature played out

in the West long ago. Many of the ancient pagan rituals and celebrations (that early Christianity incorporated and co-opted) helped humans come to terms with some of the most basic issues of existence (death, fertility, good, evil, love, hate, etc.) and served to sanctify their practical relationship with the natural environment and its role in sustaining human life. The planting and harvesting of crops and various other seasonal activities associated with food production thus became central to various beliefs and customs.

For example, Freyfaxi marks the beginning of the harvest in [Norse paganism](#), while [Lamma](#) or [Lughnasadh](#) is the celebration of the first harvest/grain harvest in [Paganism](#) and [Wicca](#) and by the ancient Celts.

Humans celebrated nature and the life it gave birth to. Ancient beliefs and rituals were imbued with hope and renewal, and people had a necessary and immediate relationship the sun, seeds, animals wind, soil and rain and the changing seasons that nourished and brought life.

Discussing Britain, [Robert W Nicholls explains](#):

“The cults of Woden and Thor were superimposed on far older and better-rooted beliefs related to the sun and the earth, the crops and the animals, and the rotation of the seasons between the light and warmth of summer and the cold and dark of winter. These ancient beliefs were so well established that whatever the name of the great god who for the moment was favored by the state rulers, whether Mithras or Woden – or Christ – the old practices, so essential for the fertility of the crops and for good luck in life, were maintained in farming communities until Christian decrees and the feudal system led to their final attrition.”

Nicholls reaffirms the importance of agriculture in these beliefs by adding:

“Little is known about the religious beliefs that sustained the rural population of pre-Christian Britain... The range of pagan deities – earth, water, fire, the sun, stone, and wood – supported as they were by agrarian production, suggests a religion that had a sound practical base. Two illusive figures appear as a backdrop to rural beliefs and demonstrate a male-female, winter-summer bipolarity: an ancient Earth Mother, who preceded the rise of later goddesses and grain deities, and a horned god of the hunt, who was the pivotal focus of a totem cult of stag masqueraders.”

In the 1950s, Union Carbide produced a [series of images](#) that depicted the company as a ‘hand of god’ coming out of the sky to ‘solve’ some of the issues facing humanity. One of the most famous images is of the hand [pouring agrochemicals](#) on Indian soils. As Christianity co-opted traditional pagan beliefs to achieve hegemony, corporations steeped in the Western mindset that Kermani speaks of have also sought to depict themselves in a god-like, all-knowing fashion.

But in more modern times, instead of using spiritual/religious ideology to secure compliance, they have relied on neoliberal economic faith and dogma and have co-opted science and scientists whose appeals to authority (not logic) have turned them into the [high priests of modern society](#).

Whether it is [fueled by Bill Gates](#), the World Bank's [neoliberal-based rhetoric](#) about 'enabling the business of agriculture' or The World Economic Forum's '[Grow](#)' strategy, the implication is that the India's and the world's farmers must be 'helped' out of their awful 'backwardness' by the West and its powerful corporations – all facilitated of course by a globalised, corrupt system of capitalism.

The same farmers who Viva Kermani says have "legitimate claims to being scientists, innovators, natural resource stewards, seed savers and hybridisation experts. Instead, they were reduced to becoming recipients of technical fixes and consumers of the poisonous products of a growing agricultural inputs industry."

The same farmers whose seeds and knowledge was [stolen by corporations](#) to be bred for proprietary chemical-dependent hybrids, now to be genetically engineered.

And what is the result of the war on nature, farmers, traditional agriculture and the environment?

We see the [capturing of markets and global supply chains](#) for the benefit of transnational corporations involved in food production. We see the destruction of natural habitat in Indonesia to produce palm oil. We see the use of [cynical lies](#) (linked to palm oil production) to corrupt India's food system with genetically modified seeds. We witness the [devastating impact on farmers](#) and [rural communities](#). We see [the degradation](#) of soils, health and water resources.

And we see Monsanto making huge annual profits, and its CEO Hugh Grant and VP Robb Fraley being amply rewarded. Grant brought in just under [\\$12m](#) in 2015. Fraley raked in just under [\\$3.4m](#). In January 2015, Monsanto reported a profit of [\\$243m](#) (down from \$368m the previous year). Greed and ego trump all else. Farmer suicides are little more than collateral damage. And environmental degradation is a price worth paying.

In India today, we have a BJP-led government that espouses politically expedient Hindu nationalist sentiments. And yet it is selling out the nation to foreign interests whose beliefs and actions are opposed to much of what traditional Hinduism stands for in terms of its ecological heritage. Where is the logic?

The logic is fairly easy to decipher: what is happening has little to do with Hinduism or nationalism, however defined, and everything to do with a [Wall Street backed](#) Indian political elite suffering [a severe bout](#) of Stockholm syndrome, in awe of its captors.

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Articles by: [Colin Todhunter](#)

About the author:

Colin Todhunter is an extensively published independent writer and former social policy researcher. Originally from the UK, he has spent many years in India. His website is www.colintodhunter.com
https://twitter.com/colin_todhunter

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