

Beyond Bt Brinjal

Faced with opposition from different quarters the Centre finally decided not to introduce Bt Brinjal commercially at the moment. In truth 11 state governments including some Congress governments opposed Bt Brinjal and no scientific consensus emerged from any public-hearing, albeit the moratorium was confined to Bt Brinjal only while the longer issue of genetic engineering and biotechnology in agriculture remained uncovered. The so-called public hearing on Bt Brinjal was at worst a mockery of what they call democratic consensus. It makes little sense to arrange such jamboree when the decision has already been taken elsewhere under the veil of secrecy. Though Union Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh faced flak from NGOs, concerned farmers, doctors and scientists who made a bold case against Bt Brinjal at the Bangalore public hearing, he managed to save face simply by dismissing all allegations as “false rumours” which they were not.

That Monsanto, the notorious seed giant and global monopolist of GM food chains, is coming in a big way to ruin Indian agriculture is a fact of life. It requires a vigorous campaign against Monsanto’s conspiracy but the political left looks satisfied by issuing harmless statements and sometimes reacting to spontaneity.

Meanwhile, Monsanto’s own data points to severe health danger of its three commercialised GM maize.

In what is being described as the first ever and most comprehensive study of the effects of genetically modified (GM) foods on mammalian health, researchers have linked organ damage with consumption of Monsanto’s GM maize.

All three varieties of GM corn—Mon 810, Mon 863 and NK 603—were approved for consumption by US, European and several other national food safety authorities.

Made public by European authorities in 2005, Monsanto’s confidential raw data of its 2002 feeding trials on rats that these researchers analysed is the same data ironically that was used to approve them in different parts of the world. The data “clearly underlines adverse impacts on kidneys and liver, the dietary detoxifying organs as well as different levels of damages to heart, adrenal glands, spleen and haematopoietic system”, reported Gilles-Eric Seralini, a molecular biologist at the University of Caen.

India’s GM food lobby is virtually inviting catastrophe for the poor who are already at the receiving end because of limited commercialisation of agriculture involving heavy doses of chemicals and fertilisers. The raw data from all these GM crops reveal among other things that novel pesticide residues will be present in food and feed and may pose grave health risks to those consuming them.

Human health apart ecological effects are also in play. 99 percent of GMO crops either tolerate or produce insecticide. This may be the reason one sees bee colony collapse disorder and massive butterfly deaths. If GMOs are wiping out Earth’s pollinators, they are far more disastrous than the threat they pose to humans and other mammals.

It is not only in areas like arms, drugs, chemical pesticides, automobiles and the banking or insurance sector that dirty games are played by big business. Food and agriculture has now emerged as an area where the role of business and industry, and the kind of takeover and acquisitions that are taking place needs serious attention.

The Associated Press has done quite a good expose on how Monsanto is trying to expand its Empire and 'empire-building' is always associated with evil design. Monsanto has literally established its monopoly control over global seed market by forcing smaller seed companies in America and elsewhere to wind up. If in the US, smaller seed companies are being eaten up by the big fish—Monsanto—what will happen to the seed supply in developing countries including India can be imagined. It's now the question of Bt Brinjal but it is a matter of time that Bt rice will get currency. Controlling the food chain by way of controlling seed business means controlling the society. □□□