

IMPOSING AMERICAN MODEL

Monsanto is a Monster

ASHA

Monsanto is an American company, which has become the world's largest seed company by employing many devious strategies and tactics. Its annual gross profit is around 22,500 crores of rupees—which is more than the GDP of at least 48 countries! One can imagine the power of this corporation. Monsanto is notorious across the world for a variety of misdeeds and crimes—polluting natural resources, killing and maiming humans with its products, bribing officials for approvals, falsifying safety reports to show the most dangerous chemicals like dioxin as safe, colluding with regulators through revolving doors between the company and government, false advertising etc.

What Indian farmers should know is that Monsanto is also a company which has sued and jailed farmers for the “crime” of saving and using seeds that have been purchased by the farmers from the company, to protect its patents. Can anybody imagine farmers not being allowed the right to save seed from their own crop, when it is farmers who have bred thousands of crop varieties over the centuries?

‘No food shall be grown that we don't own’—that is Monsanto's reported objective. This diabolical ambition comes from realizing that growing food is obviously a perpetual business as long as humankind exists. Monsanto seeks to own that food through patents and IPRs, using hybrids and Genetically Modified seeds, to prevent competition and force farmers return to the company perpetually for seeds. Even on its most friendly turf USA, Monsanto is now facing an anti-trust investigation.

MONSANTO'S MISDEEDS

A few indications about the dangers of Monsanto and the extent of its control:

- Mahyco-Monsanto used its Bt cotton seed monopoly to set exorbitant prices. The AP government had to use the MRTS Commission, Essential Commodities Act and then a special Act to finally push its price from Rs 1800 per packet to Rs.750.
- Monsanto actually sued AP and Gujarat state governments that they have no right to control seed prices— with Congress leader Abhishek Singhvi as its lawyer! How can individual farmers protect themselves from its legal machine?
- Monsanto entered into licensing agreements with most seed companies so that out of 225 lakh acres of GM cotton, 210 lakh acres is planted with its Bollgard. During 2002-2006, Monsanto earned Rs 1600 crores just in the form of royalties.
- Monsanto is on the Board of US-India Knowledge Initiative in Agriculture, under which bio-safety reprocessing to marketing, reflecting the corporate strategy of controlling the entire value chain.

It doesn't need much to guess where this drive towards corporatization will take India—one has to only need to look at American agriculture. Small and medium farmers in the US were pushed out decades ago and only 1% of the people in the US are engaged in agriculture. The objective shifted from supporting the interests of farming households to the “Food Industry”. The company lawyers became policy-makers and passed laws prohibiting farmers from saving seeds, and citizens from criticizing the food industry. Big supermarket chains purchase only from large factory farms of thousands of acres; even a 50-acre farmer cannot sell his produce to the supermarket.

“Learning” from the “American model”, the Indian policymakers are already talking about reducing the farming population in India from 60% to 10%. Where will the rest go? What will happen to rural and urban economies? Meanwhile, large tracts of land are being amassed by a few companies. It is not just the farmers who should worry; as consumers, everybody's access to safe, diverse, nutritious food is at risk. □