

India: We Must Reclaim Our Freedom from Monsanto Like We Did From the British

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Later this month I will be travelling to England, to take part in the 'One Earth One Humanity One Future' festival in Oxford, which will celebrate 50 years of the UK's flagship environmental magazine, [Resurgence](#).

This 'Resurgence 50' festival will be bringing together leading figures from the world's social justice and environmental movements to share ideas for bridging a more equitable and sustainable world. A world that would be imminently fairer and more sustainable without the transnational agrochemical giant Monsanto and its GMO crops.

Meantime, In India we are celebrating 70 years of our Independence, and last month we also celebrated the anniversary of the [Quit India movement of 1942](#). That was also the year of the Great Bengal famine which killed 2 million Indians because of the extortionist revenue collection by the British. It was clear that we had to reclaim our freedom because British rule was pushing people to starvation while maximising its revenue extraction, Lagaan, from land.

Today we are suffering a similar tragedy related to seeds, as Monsanto extracts super profits from our farmers in the form of illegal royalties as 'seed Lagaan', trapping them in debt and pushing them to suicide.

Seed Sovereignty cannot coexist with Monsanto's failed technologies and false claims. Monsanto's withdrawal threat is empty. Indian law does not allow a patent on seed, and Roundup Ready crops are not approved for cultivation.

In fact, the Technical Expert Committee advising the Supreme Court in the GMO case has categorically advised that there should be no herbicide resistant GMO trials or commercialisation in India because India is a land of small farms and rich biodiversity. Herbicide resistant crops like Monsanto's Roundup Ready cotton would lead to spraying of the broad spectrum herbicide, which would kill all other crops in the field except the plant genetically engineered to resist Roundup. Not only would this destroy biodiversity, it would rob the poor of rich sources of nutrition in the biodiversity, and aggravate India's food and nutritional insecurity.

Instead of focusing on farming systems, biodiversity, seeds, farmer's rights and national laws, Monsanto, through its massive PR machine keeps repeating three lies to cover up its failures and false and unreasonable PR claims.

First, it claims that the Government is trying to issue compulsory licences for Bt cotton seed.

This is false because when there are no patents on seeds, there can be no compulsory licensing. The Government Licensing guidelines have merely clarified the law about exclusion of seeds and plants from patentability. Contrary to what was falsely claimed by Christi Dixon, a spokeswoman for Monsanto, who said in an e-mail that the application was withdrawn because of 'regulatory uncertainties and ongoing discussions', there is no regulatory uncertainty. It is just that our laws do not suit Monsanto's seed monopoly aims.

Second, Monsanto and its spokespeople claim their GMO Bt seeds have increased yields and cotton production by controlling pests. This too is false.

Bt cotton is now resistant to bollworm which it was supposed to control. New pests like Whitefly have devastated the cotton crop in Punjab. Bt cotton area has dropped by 27 per cent from 10.3 lakh hectares in the 2015-16 crop year (July-June) to 7.56 lakh hectares in the 2016-17 crop year because of the failure of Bt cotton to control pests.

Maharashtra and Telangana also saw a reduction of cotton sowing from 87.83 lakh hectares to 67.88 lakh hectares.

The national cotton acreage has come down by 8 per cent from 128 lakh hectare to 118 lakh hectare between 2014-15 to 2015-16, as revealed by the latest Cotton Corporation of India statistics.

A third totally false claim is that the Roundup Ready trait would help overcome the bollworm resistance that has emerged in Bollgard II. As Mayank Bhardwaj writes in Mint: 'Bollgard II Roundup Ready Flex would have been the first technological breakthrough since the launch of Bollgard II, potentially pushing up crop yields at a time when some farmers have said the existing variety was losing its effectiveness. Bollgard II, introduced in 2006, is slowly becoming vulnerable to bollworms, experts say, and, as any technology, has a limited shelf life.'

These are scientifically fraudulent and misleading statements. If emergence of pest resistance is the problem, spraying Roundup won't solve it. Herbicides are supposed to kill weeds, not pests. And Monsanto's Roundup Ready crops are failing in controlling weeds also. Instead they have led to super weeds resistant to Roundup, just like bollworm has become a super pest resistant to Bt.

But the most outrageous phrase is that seeds have a 'limited shelf life'. True seed is Bija - that which rises again and again and again. Our seeds have evolved for 10,000 years. Living seed does not have a 'limited shelf'. Otherwise, we would have starved to death as a species centuries ago. Seeds are called heritage and heirloom seeds because they don't have a limited shelf life like Monsanto's GMO seeds. Living seed does not become obsolete. It renews. It has the potential to live and evolve forever through dynamic change, including contributions of farmers breeding. And as our three decades of work in Navdanya shows, living seeds have more nutrition, higher overall food output, more resilience to pests and diseases, and to climate change. Monsanto does not just force farmers to buy seed every year to collect royalties, it also owns the patent for the 'terminator technology' to create sterile seed. This technology has been stopped from commercialisation by the UN Convention on Biodiversity.

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must compel Monsanto to Quit India, like we compelled the British 70 years ago

When the Government regulates seed prices, and clarifies India's patent law that excludes seeds and plants from patentability Monsanto tries to threaten the government by saying it is withdrawing a new GMO Bt cotton seed Bollgard II Roundup Ready Flex which contains 2 Bt toxin genes and a gene for resistance to Monsanto's herbicide.

Roundup Ready crops are resistant to Roundup, so Monsanto can sell more Roundup as well as collect royalties from seeds it would like to patent. We cannot allow a corporation which has no understanding of biodiversity or what a seed is, but only knows how to extract royalties from farmers and create a monopoly control over our seed supply through its illegal, unscientific attempts at patent on seed.

Seed freedom is our birthright. To defend our seed sovereignty and food sovereignty, we must compel Monsanto to Quit India, like we compelled the British 70 years ago.

Vandana Shiva is a scholar, environmental activist and anti-globalization author.

She will be talking at the One Earth One Humanity Future festival in Oxford in celebration of [Resurgence](#) magazine's 50th anniversary on Thursday 22nd September and again on Friday 23rd September. For booking and further information, visit: resurgence.org/R50event

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