

BT Cotton: A Debt Trap For Farmers

At last, under the pressure of an MNC, Monsanto, the Government of India has permitted the cultivation of BT cotton. At the same time govt. has made it mandatory to follow some norms regarding environment protection. According to these norms 20% of the field around the BT cotton field must be sown by non BT cotton seeds. Can a common farmer follow these Norms exactly? Does the state agricultural department have the capacity to examine and control or punish those who are not following the above mentioned conditions? Besides all these unanswered questions the fact remains about the growing number of suicides of the farmers and growing debt upon them.

Shetakati Sanghatana searched for the answers to these questions and I am its activist. “Sow hybrid seeds and Goddess Laxmi (money) will come to you” was the slogan given by the government via zilla parishads. But even the base activist like me predicted that the technology will increase the yield but it will not increase the income of farmers. After the year 1980, we from the platform of shetakari Sanghatana argued that the government says “Sow hybrid for more money and more money”, but instead of making more money the farmers are being loaded by burden of debt. Today it is clear from the suicides of farmers.

Green revolution has increased the yield per acre, market price could also be controlled, but at the same time increased the debt on farmers. We ourselves as activists of Shetkari Sanghatana made people aware of the government policies of – suppressing the price of farm produce deliberately – in the camps organized by Shetakari Sanghatana. Our activists were educated regarding: 1. Technology, 2. Infrastructure, 3. Price. Price is most important in all the three, it was told. But today price of all the agriculture produce are depressed. ‘Export will increase and farmers can produce good produce in free market’ remains an unfulfilled dream. Today the price the farmer gets per quintal of cotton is not at all remunerative is the fact. From the year 1994 to the year 2000 price of cotton per quintal was Rs. 2000 to Rs. 2400 in the international market. One pound of processed cotton was being sold for 1 dollar 10 cents. Today Rs. 1500 to Rs. 1700 is the price of cotton per quintal. Processed cotton is 35 to 40 cents per pound. If BT cotton is used, looking at today’s price of cotton, will that increase the profit of farmers? Not at all!

When one technology fails another technology takes its place. Ex chief minister of Maharashtra Shri Manohar Joshi created the hype of cotton cultivated by Israel technology. I had warned him that its nothing but a mirage. Why has this big budget project of Panjabrao Krushi Vidyapeeth failed? Why is not this failure talked about?

Even the reports submitted by GEAC (Genetic Engineering Approval Committee) says that if the price of cotton is more than Rs. 2200 per quintal and yield is about 6.5 quintal per acre, only then can the profit per acre be Rs. 5000. The committee has published a chart which gives the estimate of input as well as output of BT cotton per acre.

Input/Output	Quantity	Cost
Seeds	450 gm	Rs. 1500
Chemical fertilizer	5 bags	Rs. 1200
Pesticides	5 sprays	Rs. 950
Labour charges for sowing, irrigation		Rs. 4160
Total cost		Rs. 8760
Yield per acre at the rate of Rs. 2200 per quintal	6.46 quintal	Rs. 14229
Profit		Rs. 5470

Observing the above chart it is clear that if cotton is sold at Rs. 1700 per quintal, profit per quintal will be only Rs. 2000 per acre. Other most important fact revealed from the above chart is that the irrigation as well as pesticides spray is needed for BT cotton. It means that the propaganda that BT does not need pesticides is misleading. It is clear that pesticides of worth at least Rs. 1000 have to be used. Input/Output cost of non-irrigated land is not given in the above chart. Leaving aside Panjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, 80% cotton farming all over the country is not irrigated. What is the guarantee that yield per acre will be 6.50 quintal per acre in the non irrigated farm?

Green revolution technology has given more yields but more input cost and lower prices per quintal. Use of BT cotton will not do any better. Use of pesticides has increased the resistance of worms. Worms will develop resistance even for *Bacillus thuringiensis* and this fact is not denied by government, environmentalists as well as the company itself. Generation of ball worm will become *Bacillus thuringiensis* resistant and that will again fail BT, but until then Monsanto company will have made lots of profit.

As the political parties opposed and approved Enron, the same way they are dealing with Monsanto. Agriculture minister of Maharashtra state government and senior Congress (I) leader Shri. Rohidas Patil is speaking for BT, but Ex MLA Shri. Vijay Naval Patil from the same Congress (I) is speaking against BT. BJP lead government approves of this technology but Bharatiya Kisan Sangh, Swadesi Jagaran Manch opposes it.

Economy of Maharashtra is about to collapse because of Enron, that's clear now. BT cotton will not at all reduce the burden of debt on farmers. Because of the extra production of wheat, agriculture price commission had suggested the government not to increase the support price of wheat and therefore increase the support price by only Rs. 10 per quintal. The same may be repeated for cotton. ***Produce more and go to hell, thus remains the truth for the farmers.***

- **Vijay Jawandhia**

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