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Framing Farmers: The Case of GM Crops and Transnational Activist Networks in India

Introduction

This paper analyzes a period of contention about Genetically Modified (GM) crops, specifically Bt Cotton, in India over the last six years. In this paper I aim to further understanding of the role of transnational activist networks (TANs) in helping to construct new forms of interest representation in the developing world. Specifically I argue that we should be alert to the interests that are helped or hindered by these networks and how styles of discourse come to predominate that may be harmful to the interests of farmers.

The paper is structured as follows: I begin with an outline of the issues surrounding Bt Cotton in India, drawing on a variety of secondary literature and personal interviews with farmers. The aim of this section is to demonstrate what we might expect the 'real interests' of small cotton farmers in India to be in a world of ideally transparent political mediation. Secondly, I show how a transnationally well connected anti GM coalition has emerged in India, drawing on and contributing to a global anti GM discourse. I also try to demonstrate the effect the coalition has had on regulation policy in India and on the general terms in which the debate is framed. Thirdly I disaggregate the coalition, showing how behind the constructed narrative of farmers and activists united against multinational corporations there is a more conflictual politics shaped by the different world views and local interests of the actors involved: these varied actors respond to transnational opportunities differently: some depend on them for their existence, others try to preserve their own world view with difficulty. Finally, I argue that the kind of mediation needed by Indian farmers on GM crops is unlikely to be provided by the 'transnational marketing politics' exemplified by the anti GM coalition. Therefore the case provides reasons to be skeptical about the role of TANS in making a more inclusive politics for the poor in the global South.

What are the Interests of Indian Cotton Farmers on Bt Cotton?

In theory plant biotechnology could be at the forefront of a 'Gene Revolution' that will provide economic gains for poor farmers in the South along the same lines as the Green Revolution in the 1960s and 70s. Lipton (2007) argues that GM technologies have the potential to raise factor productivity and thus incomes; are environmentally friendly as they increase productivity intensively rather than by expanding land area under agriculture, and are pro biodiversity as the technology can be used to add diversity to existing varieties (in contrast to the monocultures created by the Green Revolution). In addition, others (Herring 2005) point out that small and marginal farmers (and cotton farmers in India fall into this category) have the greatest need of the insurance policy that insect resistant technologies such as Bt Cotton provide, since the alternative of getting hold of pesticides at a time of infestation opens the poorest up to exploitation. Lipton suggests, however, that these gains could be bolstered by greater public sector steering of the research and development priorities of the biotechnology sector which tends to respond to rich country and rich farmer preferences.¹

Bt Cotton is a Monsanto patented technology that attacks the American Bollworm pest, thus, in theory, requiring fewer sprays of expensive pesticides that are known to be harmful to the health of farmers. The effect should be an increase in the yield of the cotton crop. Bt Cotton was first released for commercial use in India in 2002 and sold through Monsanto-Mahyco – Monsanto's Indian partner and since then sold by up to 60 companies through licensing arrangements with Monsanto. Since 2002 there have been multiple studies of the agronomic outcomes of Bt in various locations. These studies are the object of intense controversy, since the majority have been published under the aegis of either corporations or non governmental organizations (such as Kuruganti, 2006). Some neutral studies (Narayanamoorthy and Kalamkar 2006; Naik 2005) show gains from the adoption of Bt Cotton so far, but with important regional qualifications.

¹ Specifically, the public sector could pay a 'fee for service' to corporations like Monsanto for research into bio stress, drought resistance, etc, which would impact the poor most. The state should also encourage research into biotypes based on more than single genes (Bt Cotton is based on one gene) because the poorest farmers would suffer most and have fewer alternatives if pests developed resistance to this single gene, as in Bt Cotton. Poor farmers, according to Lipton would prefer moderate resistance with more enduring power, built on multiple genes, but this kind of product would require more expensive development.

The crude table below is an attempt to summarize some of these studies. It shows that cotton farmers fortunate enough to have access to irrigation have strongly welcomed Bt. This is for various reasons: Bt seems to require more water than non Bt hybrids; the gene has been inserted into hybrids that thrive most in irrigated conditions; and, complicating this, those areas that are irrigated also tend to have more effective commercial networks uniting farmers with seed dealers and spreading technical know how about types of cotton and how to treat Bt cotton in the fields (Shah 2003 and various personal interviews).

This higher social capital in northern Indian cotton areas was also demonstrated in the spread of ‘illegal’ Bt seeds in Gujurat (Herring, 2007), which were the product of farmer experimentation aiming to find the appropriate hybrid for the Bt gene, and showed impressive cooperation between bottom up science, seed dealers and farmers. This cooperation also extended into successful farmer agitation for the legalization of these black market seeds. In other states , with lower social capital, this has not been the case, with farmers being cheated by dealers selling seeds that proved to be non Bt. These differences, occluded both by the coalition against Bt Cotton and by its industry supporters, are crucial for understanding the dissemination of anti Bt discourse in India.

Table One: Preference of Indian Farmers on GM Crops

Type of Cotton Farmer	Preferences on Bt Cotton	Preferences on future GMOs	Other preferences on agri culture policy
Irrigated / high social capital: mainly Gujurat / Punjab	Strongly Pro	Access to existing products / less regulation	As below, but more satisfied with market as it is
Rain Fed / low social capital: mainly Andhra Pradesh Maharashtra, Karnataka	Moderately Pro / neutral / arguably hostile in small pockets of “failure”; Lower seed price	Bio stress products / multi gene resistance to prevent resistance developing in pests; Bt varieties	Higher min. sales price, irrigation investment, government credit facilities, tariffs on imported cotton,

	wanted	rather than hybrids	more varieties in market
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The data on increasing yields of cotton in the years since the introduction of Bt seem to support these intuitions. A Centre for Science and the Environment (2006) compilation of state by state data shows that productivity has increased dramatically in Gujarat and Punjab post Bt Cotton, and more moderately in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka.

The above study also points to the major problems facing cotton farmers in India, which are the crucial background to understanding why Bt Cotton has gained purchase as an issue. Indian farmers face falling world cotton prices and import competition from American cotton buttressed by the USA's substantial cotton subsidies. At the same time the few state support measures that protected cotton farmers, especially minimum purchase prices have been diminishing, with the most generous state, Maharashtra cutting its support in 2005.

In general we can assume that cotton farmers, essentially exposed to market forces and farming an inherently 'risky' crop, favour the kinds of interventions that India's mass based farmers' movements fought for in the 1970's and 80s (Varshney 1988). In other words, greater minimum support prices, investment in irrigation and generous state credit provision. In this context it is ironic then that the Indian farmers' 'movement' best known around the world in the last few years has been the campaign to oppose GM crops. The rest of the paper addresses this puzzle and asks the following questions: to what extent is the campaign a 'farmers' movement' at all? Why might farmer activists choose to campaign on GM crops even if the issue seems antagonistic to farmer interests as described above? To what extent have transnational networks made a difference to the terms on which the debate takes place?

The Campaign Against Bt Cotton In India: Existing Literature and Approaches

The existing small literature on the campaign against GM crops in India tends to fall into two categories. Some authors (Featherstone 2003 and Croeser 2006 on India and Heller and Escobar 2006 and Schurman and Munro 2006 on the global

campaign including India) see the campaign as part of the construction of an alternative world view. This world view entails the reframing of a 'productivist' model of agriculture toward the goals of local production severed from dependence on international markets. More broadly, these authors frame their arguments against the background of the literature on transnational advocacy networks (TANs) begun with Keck and Sikkink (1998). This literature describes flexible networks of actors working at an international level within a shared discourse to promote the interests of members of the network who would otherwise find it difficult to apply pressure to their states (the 'boomerang effect'). Though initially emphasizing human rights campaigns the literature has expanded to cover environmental, indigenous rights and agricultural issues. Borrias et al (2008) even refer to transnational agrarian movements (TAMs), including the anti GM campaign, as a new type of network in its own right

On the other side of the debate, some authors frame the anti GM campaign critically against the hard science that its rhetoric claims to defy and against the expressed preferences of Indian farmers who are purchasing Bt Cotton seeds in increasing numbers (Herring 2005, 2007a). Likewise, on the ground, many of my interviewees among seed companies and the scientific community explain the discrepancy between the anti GM campaign and farmer preferences by suggesting that it must be the result of self interested NGOs furthering their own organizational interests, or even being funded by the threatened pesticide industry.

In this paper I bear in mind Guadalupe and Rodrigues' comment that "failure to elaborate on the tensions and cleavages that emerge among civil society groups, both locally and transnationally, may hinder the methodological relevancy of transnational advocacy networks" (2004, p 10). I avoid the tendency to idealize or demonize the campaign by disaggregating its members spatially and ideologically. In doing so I also draw on the recent work of Clifford Bob (2005) who has tried to treat transnational civil society robustly as a domain in which the instrumental interests of actors count. For Bob, the advantages of 'going transnational' with a campaign entail the trade-off of adjusting pre existing aims to chime with an international audience of supporters and with the agendas of 'gatekeeper' NGOs who control the flow of resources toward local organizations.

The case study I outline below is part of this attempt to 'bring interests' back in to the study of TANs and transnational social movements more generally,

without reducing actors' choices to mere calculations over funding sources. My interviews revealed a complex picture, very different from Western media reports on this case, in which transnational discourses resonated with some strands of local Indian opinion, especially elite 'romantic ruralism' and grassroots Gandhian groups, but also were creatively adopted by populist movements with more materialist agendas. This selective adaptation to transnational opportunities arises mainly from the weakness of India's mass based farmer movements post economic reform and, I argue, may not help mediate farmers' interests vis a vis the state.

Overview of the Anti GM Movement in India: Targets, aims, modes of action and transnational linkages

In this section I will provide a brief outline of the targets, modes of action, and aims of the coalition's campaign and then discuss whether it has succeeded in achieving any of these aims.

There have been two broad phases in the anti-GM movement in India: the first from 1998 to 2003, mainly aimed at field testing of Bt Cotton by Monsanto-Mahyco in Karnataka; the second, from 2003 to the present day, based mainly in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra and aimed at rallying farmers against adoption of Bt after it was cleared for sale by the GEAC (Genetic Engineering Approval Committee), India's biotechnology regulatory committee in 2002.

The targets / venues of these campaigns have been varied:

- The GEAC as India's main regulatory body on GM crops
- The supreme court in Delhi, as recipient of various legal challenges to regulatory decisions authorising Bt Cotton
- The Union health ministry, as recipient of claims about allergenic effects
- State governments (AP, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu) and their relevant ministries
- National media, especially English language newspapers and magazines

- International media, for example the Guardian and Independent newspapers in the UK who have published numerous articles critical of GM crops in the global south
- International fora, especially the World Social Forum and World Trade Organization
- Monsanto in India and its international offices worldwide

Modes of action of the campaign have included:

- Mass rallies of farmers in 'affected' districts (especially before 2004)
- Press Conferences held through 'umbrella' groups such as Andhra Pradesh Coalition in Defense of Diversity, to which newspaper editors and government officials are invited and informed about failures of Bt Cotton
- Dissemination of information to farmers through village meetings at which videos are shown criticising Monsanto's alleged propaganda about the success of Bt Cotton
- Spectacular actions (Greenpeace) with activists dressed as 'mutant' vegetables
- Court cases filed with the supreme court (especially by Devinder Sharma) to challenge regulatory decisions about Bt Cotton
- The putting together of data compiled through local NGOs showing the relative success of organic agriculture and failures of Bt Cotton

The aim of the campaign initially was to block the sale of Bt Cotton seeds in India. When this failed with the GEAC's 2002 decision, the aims became more varied:

1. To continue the effort to ban Bt seeds
2. To force regulatory authorities to include NGO representatives on committees and to include the widest possible definition of 'socio-economic factors' in decisions about allowing new crops.
3. To highlight a causal connection between the sale of Bt cotton and farmer distress, including the increased suicide rate among farmers

4. To highlight a causal connection between Bt Cotton and various allergic responses among farmers and fatal diseases among grazing animals that have eaten cotton plants
5. To promote, fund and market 'alternative' forms of agriculture without GM crops, pesticides and fertilizers and aim at 'sustainable' farming practices that free farmers from dependence on world markets
6. To critique and help create global norms connected to GM crops, i.e Intellectual property regimes (IPR) and bio safety regimes.

I will return later to the potential contradictions between these aims and between this set of aims as a whole and the broader background demands of farmers' organizations in India.

Has the Campaign achieved its aims?

Bt Cotton continues to be grown in India and increasing numbers of farmers are buying Bt seeds. In this sense the campaign's first aim has not been a success, although it won a brief battle in Andhra Pradesh in 2004 by having Monsanto's seeds temporarily banned from the state after allegations of widespread 'failure' that may have been cases of 'bad seeds'. However there are still up to forty NGOs actively campaigning on the issue. Menski (2005) argues that the Indian state has selectively incorporated many of the NGOs claims, but it has done so in order to strengthen its own hand, in bargaining with transnational corporations² and in order to give the regulatory authorities more leeway. In 2006 the GEAC decided to move in future to a 'gene event' model of giving permission for new GM crops. This should mean a considerably shorter time between first field trials and permission for sale. So aim number 2 has also failed, although many interviewees claim that in the absence of the campaign the regulatory process would have been streamlined much sooner.

Aims 3 and 4 have been partially successful, as is clear from any internet search involving Bt Cotton and India. Farmers themselves, even those uninvolved with NGOs have also heard these causal claims, although around 70-80% of those I spoke to were skeptical of their authenticity.

² For example, NGO talk of 'biopiracy' was incorporated into the 2001 Seed Act's provisions, but in a form that ensured NGOs would not have mediating between farmers' and corporations.

Arguably the greatest impact of the campaign has been to establish as plausible certain causal explanations and categories in the public sphere. As Roy (2006) shows, there is no reason a priori, why the categories of organic and genetically modified cannot overlap, and this is how 'organic' farmers she interviewed in Gujarat operated, seeing Bt Cotton as a useful tool in organic agriculture that helps reduce pesticide consumption. One of the implicit purposes of the campaign is to make the categories of 'organic' and GM mutually incompatible (aim 5) and the campaign has been fairly effective in doing this via the project oriented NGOs that are running organic cotton programs with foreign assistance and trying to market the cotton as 'non GM' for a Western market.

Finally, aim 6 has also been partially achieved: metropolitan NGOs in Delhi, especially GRAIN, India, have shifted from debating Bt's success or failure to contributing to global norms about the ownership of the seed. However, while NGOs have used their 'moral capital' acquired by association with farmers' movements to enter this field of debate, issues of intellectual property are not uppermost for most Indian farmers, especially since patent rules are de fact unenforceable in India and bio safety regulations come replace them as protections for investment.³

The Transnational Component to the Anti GM Coalition

In this section I begin by outlining the type of transnational linkages seen during the campaign in the last ten years, and then try to theorize the possible effects these linkages have had on the coalition's methods.

From the beginning, the campaign has been marked by transnational linkages. The Karnataka Rajya Ryota Sangha (KRRS)⁴ led by Professor Nanjudaswamy developed links with Via Campesina and Peoples' Global Action Against Free Trade (PGA) in the mid 1990's. In `1999 a KRRS selected delegation of farmers

³ This puts NGOs in the awkward position of defending tougher bio safety laws which disproportionately help large corporations like Monsanto defend themselves from local competition.

⁴ Ironically the KRRS is one of the successful farmers' movements whose ability to take collective action is based on gains made during the Green Revolution. Most of its members are middle / rich farmers who gained economically from new hybrids introduced in the 1960's and 70's, enabling them to undertake collective action.

attended an Inter Continental Caravan (ICC) which toured Europe, meeting with other farmers' groups associated with the Via Campesina and PGA and holding various rallies and theatrical demonstrations against GM crops (Madsen 2001, Featherstone 2003). Back in India the KRRS was also engaged with transnational activists, in its Cremate Monsanto Campaign of 1998-2001, which aimed to eliminate GM crop trials from India. This campaign attracted foreign activists who were present at the burning of the first GM field trials of Monsanto's cotton in Karnataka in 1998. However, in this latter case, some (e.g Scoones 2008) claim that the KRRS was ahead of the curve, since the attacks on trial sites took place *before* the comparable well known incidents in the United Kingdom.

While the KRRS concentrated on incursions into Monsanto property and large carnivalesque demonstrations, Vandana Shiva with her research foundation (RFSTE) in Delhi has been a key player in the global anti GM network from its inception. She was one of the transnational intellectual 'core' (Schurman and Munro 2006) who laid the foundations for the global movement in the 1980's. Also in Delhi, Suman Sahai of Gene Campaign and Devinder Sharma, an independent activist and journalist have created a web of transnational links to European NGOs in the former case and to international media for the latter. Arguably, these well known figures have more political influence abroad than in India, with Sharma for example, being invited to lecture Britain's international development minister about the perils of globalized agriculture for India at a recent dinner party.⁵

While these 'celebrity' activists have been influential in the media sphere, it is Greenpeace India that has been most influential in developing everyday linkages between Indian actors and the transnational campaign against GM based in Europe. Greenpeace had been instrumental in the anti GM campaign in France, Brazil, Thailand and South Africa (Scoones 2008). In India it has been a key 'nodal agency' (see table below), responsible for bringing together local actors in short term coalitions. Interviews with Greenpeace workers in India revealed how the 'marketing' methods that have been successful in Europe in uniting diverse groups around the anti-GM cause have been applied to India. Greenpeace sees itself as an expert in brokering short term alliances between groups whose longer term interests may be contradictory⁶. The Greenpeace project officer I

⁵ Personal interview with Devinder Sharma

⁶ For example between wealthy textile manufacturers trying to market organic cotton, consumer groups representing upper middle class urban consumers and NGOs

spoke to acknowledged this as a search for 'lowest common denominators'. When analyzing transnational influence it is important to take account of how these 'styles' of activism as well as particular discourses and 'frames' (next section) are imported and exported across borders.

The content of the anti GM coalition's discourse clearly owes much to a transnational discourse thirty years in the making (Schurman and Munro 2006). Activists in India have applied two main types of discourse:

- A risk discourse: threats to farmers' health, animals' health and biodiversity
- A Socio-economic discourse: GM crops as part of a corporate led attack on 'traditional' ways of farming that will lead to dependence on multinational corporations and 'de-skilling' of farmers.

In practice both these discourses are used by most participants in the coalition. Both were also utilised to great effect in the European campaign. In the next section I formulate some hypotheses about how the transnational aspects of the anti GM campaign might have shaped its discourse and methods.

Theorizing Transnational Connections

Bob (2005) and DeMars (2005) have helped to theorize the way that transnational opportunities can shape the priorities of regional social movements. Bob, in his study of transnational alliances between insurgent movements and northern activists, suggests that in order to gain and maintain transnational support southern groups have to 'frame' their case according to the following criteria (Bob, pp 30-32). In each case I provide an illustration in italics drawn from the anti GM campaign in India:

- Emphasis on Manichean imagery: *either GM or non GM*
- Emphasis on bodily harm as something instantly recognisable across borders (here echoing Keck and Sikkink (1998): *allegations of allergies in farmers and animal deaths*)
- Targeting of single culprits with international resonance: *focus on Monsanto*

representing cotton farmers.

- The construction of ‘global public goods’ that potentially resonate across borders: *emphasis on preserving biodiversity by attacking GM*
- The ability of southern organizations to lower the transaction costs of northern INGOs, by providing resonant imagery and ‘data’ for northern campaigning points: *the dissemination of video and interviews with Indian farmers in Northern NGO campaigns on GM*

For Bob, these criteria ensure a “homogeneity of humanitarianism” in which powerful broker organizations within transnational networks exercise a pull over weaker southern partners, causing them to frame their case in ways that silence more politically contentious or materialistic claims.

De Mars echoes some of these themes. He argues that transnational networks have the following characteristics, again with illustrations from the Indian GM case in italics:

- A claim of ‘circumscribed causality’ that means an issue is autonomous from “the contingencies of the local political and social context” (p 9): *connecting Bt cotton with farmer suicides*
- A modular technique that can be applied to diverse contexts, fixating on the ‘circumscribed causality’ above and applying solutions that are ‘portable’ : *proposing organic / non GM agricultural development projects as a solution to farmer distress*
- A claim to represent global norms, in the absence of local legitimation from a ‘base’: *referring to global biodiversity and Euro-centric biosafety norms as justification*

Bob and DeMars’ ideas clearly converge on the idea of a homogenizing global opportunity structure that focuses local groups away from a potential ‘base’ and towards framing ideas in ways that resonate with transnational opportunities, even at the cost of facing the real causal complexity of the issues or the need to accept conflictual politics.

Does this type of critique apply to the anti-GM Coalition? Below, I present three tables that highlight the spatial and ideological diversity of the Indian anti GM coalition and which point to the various ‘uses’ these diverse groups make of transnational opportunities. These tables outline differences in organizational

type, world view and region. I disaggregate the coalition in order to attempt a more nuanced view of how transnational opportunities shape southern social movements than is found in Bob's and Demars' trenchant critiques. It is important to show how these opportunity structures do not have a homogeneous effect on movements, but may in fact strengthen certain aspects and silence others in predictable ways.

Table Two, below, outlines the spatial diversity of the coalition. Apart from the 'vertical' diversity of the groups in terms of their closeness to metropolitan centres, the concentration of organizations in just a few locations (Vidarbha District of Maharashtra, Warangal District of AP and rural Karnataka near Bangalore) should be noted. I will address this later.

Of these groups, elite metropolitan groups in New Delhi such as Vandana Shiva's RFSTE and Suman Sahai's Gene Campaign are clearly dependent on inflows of foreign support and on the networks of intellectuals, interns, foreign journalists and INGOs that donate to and provide media attention for their views. Nodal organizations, as I term them, are either INGOs themselves, such as Greenpeace India, or funded by a mixture of northern donor groups and state government grants for organic agriculture research. Regional groups are project oriented NGOs that mainly rely on foreign funding from sources such as Oxfam UK, HIVOS in the Netherlands, German church groups opposed to GM and various smaller European and US organic agriculture promoters, such as the UK's Soil Association. Finally, the 'base' organizations: Leftist farmers' unions; Gandhian grassroots groups and populist farmers' groups, get relatively little in the way of direct funding from abroad and are more tangentially connected to transnational networks, not least because their members tend to have lower English language skills and levels of higher education. In the case of small grassroots Gandhian organizations, they have consciously eschewed looking for foreign support and instead receive assistance from local ashrams.

The metropolitan organizations, apart from Vandana Shiva's organization, have emerged since the campaign began since their *raison d'être* has been anti GM. The other three 'types' of organization pre existed the anti-GM campaign in one form or another, but those I spoke to in the nodal and regional categories have clearly benefited from the international interest around the GM issue, even if the

level of interest has waned slightly in the last two years.⁷ Organizations that previously did small scale work in villages or with tribal people and women in the countryside (two important INGO target categories) have been able to participate in a network that garners headlines all over the world and access funding for organic agriculture projects, by integrating their concerns for tribal people and women into the project design. These latter projects have mushroomed since the late 1990's and although it is hard to establish a direct causal relation between the anti GM movement and support for organic NGOs, the campaign has clearly helped to differentiate their 'product' from 'ordinary' agriculture.⁸ For example, the influential CSA (Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture) in Hyderabad which has been a focal point for the campaign was an offshoot from a 'family' of rural oriented NGOs, but since it was founded, has become by far the best resourced.

Table Two: Spatial Diversity of members of the coalition

Level of Organization	Names of main actors	Type of Transnational Engagement
Metropolitan: based in Delhi	Gene Campaign; GRAIN, Research Foundation for Science; Technology and Ecology; Devinder Sharma	Funding; Conferences; Attendance at World Social Fora; Providing Data to global anti GM networks (garnered from regional NGOs); creating global norms on IPR and biosafety regulation
Nodal : organizing networks (concentrated in Hyderabad, AP , Vidarbha, Maharashtra and Bangalore	Greenpeace India; Centre for Sustainable Agriculture (CSA);Deccan Development Society (DDS); Chetna Organic	Funding; Introducing market style of political engagement from Europe; engaging with global NGO networks such as 'South against GE' (SAGE),

⁷ For example Greenpeace India has demoted GM from first place to second in its priorities: arguably still an extraordinarily high placing given the vast problems India faces with less 'marketable' issues such as urban air pollution, pesticide use, large dam developments and climbing Co2 emissions.

⁸ As many respondents pointed out the irony of promoting organic agriculture in India is that India has one of the lowest levels of pesticide and artificial fertilizer use in the world, even in South Asia (compared to Pakistan and Bangladesh).

Regional: running projects (rural AP, esp, Warangal area, Vidharba Maharashtra and rural Karnataka near Bangalore)	MARI (AP); Green Foundation (Karnataka); 20+ NGOs running organic projects	Funded from abroad; attending training / conferences abroad; providing field data and video segments from villagers to INGO campaigns
Base: mass membership organizations?	KRRS (Karnataka); Shektari Sangatana (Mah); Left Farmer Unions (AP); Gandhian groups (esp Maharashtra)	Participation of members in foreign delegations; very limited funding for attending coalition meetings

Table three below shows the world views of the anti GM organizations, taking these to be Weberian 'ideal types' that may overlap, rather than rigid categories. The table addresses the question of how transnational opportunities shape the relative strength of different types of rural organization. It should be born in mind that we cannot ask hypothetical questions such as 'in the absence of transnational opportunities what would the representation of farmers' interests look like?' Instead, we can only address how transnational opportunities shape actually existing organizations. Nevertheless, the clear 'winners' from transnational opportunities have been 'romantic ruralists', 'technocratic' NGOs and 'market environmentalists' as I term them here.

The first category (romantic ruralists) have a long history of social movement activity in India going back to the Chipko Movement of the 1970s (Rangan 2000), in which Vandana Shiva was a key activist, through to the anti dam movements of the 1990s. The philosophy of these movements blends Gandhian self reliance with urban nostalgia for a rural past. Their stated aim is to shift away from high productivity, technologically driven models of agriculture towards cooperatives, seed sharing and production for local consumption. All of the activists I met who belong to this category are based in large cities (Delhi, Bangalore, Hyderabad), are fluent in English and highly educated. Few if any have been involved in farming, which marks a difference from their European equivalents such as Jose Bove in France. The romantic view of the 'peasant farmer' has received a boost from transnational conceptions of autonomous farmers fighting against the encroachment of the market. The Inter Continental Caravan (ICC) of 1999 is an

example of this: as described by Madsen (2001) the caravan, led by the KRRS⁹, celebrated 'traditional' conceptions of the peasant farmer, with often wealthy farmers dressed up in peasant outfits more likely to be worn by much poorer peasants. Madsen points out that there has been a long tradition of rural conservative politics in India, in which conservationist values ("a fortress guarding local folk ways") shroud more contentious political issues of land reform (in the past), money lending or unequal rewards to laborers and owners of land. Rangan (2000) on Chipko and Baviskar (1995) on the Narmada Dam conflict also provide evidence of this longstanding strand of Indian rural politics. Madsen's account of the ICC suggests that transnational linkages might strengthen this strand, by making a constructed and nebulous identity of 'Indian farmer' more viable. Similarly, Vandana Shiva, who has long been an advocate of the romantic conception of agriculture (Shiva 1988) has been heralded as a champion of the 'Indian farmer' by northern NGOs. Nanda (2003), who also cites the anti GM campaign, argues that this is a long run trend: southern metropolitan intellectuals with a romantic conception of the countryside combine with rural elites and transnational 'postmoderns', as she terms them, to forge a 'reactionary modernism'. This world view favors well connected elites: metropolitan activists receive foreign funding and acclaim while rural elites can use a 'holistic' ideology to maintain their traditional privileges, for example by claiming that women have certain 'traditional' roles in the economy, threatened by corporate technology.¹⁰

'Market Environmentalist' organizations, such as the CSA and Chetna Organic in Hyderabad and Greenpeace itself¹¹, are dependent on transnational links for their survival. The former two run organic cotton projects as well as being key 'nodal' players in the anti GM coalition, organizing meetings and bringing actors together in short term coalitions. The Chetna Organic officer whom I interviewed argued that in the absence of a 'base' the best path for an NGO was to create ethical marketing linkages with the north and with middle class consumers in India. This involves advertising campaigns based on making clear the origins of

⁹ The KRRS was a mixture of two 'ideal types' – its leadership under Professor Nanjundaswamy was 'romantic ruralist' but some of its 'base' more populist. The leadership's quest for transnational publicity is one reason why the KRRS has since split, with some segments taking a pro Bt position more compatible with economic concerns.

¹⁰ I am not endorsing this theorization: Nanda blurs too many distinctions – especially between populist and romantic types of rural politics.

¹¹ These organizations are also bound together by familial ties with senior project officers related to each other.

cotton in organic, non GM villages. Northern fashion companies can use images and video of farmers and link the particular village to the finished product on the shelves. The downside to this kind of transnational connection is that farmers become dependent on the patronage of the NGO that provides marketing for their crops, and in return may feel obliged to adopt a particular stance on GM crops for brochures / in videos, etc, or attend rallies under NGO banners. The other negative is that intense competition arises for access to the right transnational connections: some smaller regional project oriented NGOs I spoke to explicitly complained about how the more market savvy NGOs, like Chetna and CSA had refused to share their marketing connections.

Most of the 'technocratic' or 'managerial' organizations existed before the anti GM campaign¹² but the most prominent: Gene Campaign and GRAIN (Genetics Resources Action International) in Delhi and the largest organic farming NGOs in the countryside have received funding and publicity for their contributions to the campaign. The metropolitan technocratic organizations demand insertion into the official regulatory committees of the Indian state, and a voice at international fora debating bio safety and IPR norms. These issues are outside the scope of this paper, but one important trend has been a shift in the metropolitan NGOs away from debating Bt Cotton per se and toward questions of ownership of intellectual property and the precautionary principle on bio safety. In the Indian context these issues are arguably theoretical given the lack of practical enforcement for property rights, meaning that stringent bio safety regimes are de facto guarantors of corporate profits (Murugkar et al 2007) and there is a lack of personnel for enforcing bio safety measures such as refugia of non Bt cotton plants. Some in the scientific community expressed disappointment that the technical knowledge of some of these groups, especially Gene Campaign had not been deployed to debate the pertinent problems of steering research toward poor focussed technologies; creating geographically appropriate hybrids and varieties and the practical problems of bio safety at the local level; some also pointed out that Suman Sahai of Gene Campaign had not seemed hostile to GM technology in her earlier career, arguing that transnational opportunities had created a rigidity in the attitudes of these organizations. Lipton (2007) describes the danger that "a boring struggle against pseudo-environmentalist public

¹² Suman Sahai of Gene Campaign has been campaigning on biotechnology issues since the early 1990s when very little funding was available. The question is more why she and other activists *continue* to pursue particular causal arguments about Bt Cotton despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

relations" waged by scientists and corporations might distract the policy community from engaging in more important debates about how to encourage poor focused technologies. Other interviewees with moderate views expressed similar feelings that the public relations machines of NGOs and Monsanto were using up valuable space in the public sphere.

It is the populist organizations in the countryside who have had the most ambiguous relationship with transnational networks. The reasons for this are fairly clear: the need for mono causal explanation (DeMars) and emphasis on 'global public goods' (Bob) in transnational campaigns is both an opportunity and a threat for populist organizations. This is partly because, if taken to a logical conclusion populist demands would conflict directly with the Northern agricultural subsidies that many anti GM farmer groups in Europe, such as Jose Bove's network depend on and also because the local political conflicts that populist organizations address have low resonance in transnational networks.

These mass membership groups were at their peak in the 1980s, when their demands were for a realignment of what they perceived to be pervasive urban bias. They demanded tariff protection from imports, institutionalized credit and debt relief among other material goals (Lindberg 2005, Omvedt 2005). In the 1990's their capacity to mobilize declined for a number of reasons; a harsher economic climate with falling world prices post liberalization meant farmers had fewer resources to engage in contention and this accompanied a general decline in social capital in the countryside with family members increasingly moving between rural and urban locations seasonally (Jodhka 2007).

I have touched on the tensions that the KRRS experienced in the first stage of the anti GM campaign with its leadership turning to transnational connections and discourses that emphasized a 'romantic' conception of the farmer. This was the main reason for a split which took place in the KRRS, with more populist-minded members becoming skeptical about the loyalties of Prof. Nanjundaswamy and unable to maintain a hostility to Bt Cotton as they saw it bring material benefits.

Another type of populist organization in the anti-GM coalition are the Left farmer unions, associated with the Communist Party of India. They saw in the anti GM issue a cause that might resonate with their previous anti corporate stance. I interviewed leaders of these unions in Andhra Pradesh where their influence is

greatest. They have been pursuing a populist struggle at the local level against seed dealers whom they accuse of 'cheating' farmers. Talking to other sources, including local agricultural journalists painted a picture in which the Left Unions' local contention with 'class enemies' had been co-opted by NGOs working with the coalition. Union leaders seemed unsure about the Bt Cotton issue and relied for information on leaflets created by nodal NGOs such as CSA and DDS in Hyderabad. The unions, though depleted, still have mobilization capacity at the local level (especially in Warangal where many anti GM NGOs are located) and I got the impression that NGOs had retrospectively claimed as their own various actions against seed shops that had nothing to do with Bt Cotton per se and more to do with local class conflict. (Herring 2007a)

The Vidarbha Jan Andolan Samiti, (VJAS) in Western Maharashtra, led by Kishor Tiwari is the most interesting case of populist organizations' relation with transnational networks. This part of Maharashtra has a 30 year history of producing strong populist movements. The Shektari Sangatana was India's most powerful such movement in its heyday. The political background to the VJAS' participation is the complaint that cotton farmers in Maharashtra have been marginalized in that state by powerful sugar lobbies in the West of the state and a pervasive urban bias to Mumbai. The VJAS has appropriated the anti Bt theme in the last four years, accusing Bt Cotton use of being behind a spate of farmer suicides. Ironically this theme may have originated with a Canadian NGO in the late 1990's at a time when 'suicide seeds' summoned up the (non-existent) threat of 'terminator' seed technology from Monsanto. Tiwari has campaigned about suicides in the Vidarbha District with great skill, participating in the anti GM coalition occasionally but organizing his own Indian level publicity campaign that has seen him featured on the cover of India Today magazine and successfully getting the former President of India, Abdul Kalam, to visit his part of the district in 2007. In interview Tiwari expressed contempt for the NGOs in the coalition, accusing them of being elitist, anti Indian and in league with corporations. His priorities were strictly material ones of relieving indebtedness and providing some form of insurance to protect cotton farmers from fluctuating prices and the dumping of American cotton exports. Why did the VJAS adopt the anti GM campaign, given that almost all farmers in the district were now adopting Bt Cotton seeds? I believe the explanation is that the Bt issue had salience in the English language media and provided a wedge with which to raise the economic agenda that interested the VJAS most. In the short term this seems

a case of strategic intelligence. However, the decision to utilize this discourse is also a sign of underlying weakness and geographical isolation. Farmer debt and lack of economic insurance are real threats to farmers' livelihoods but to resonate in influential media markets these issues need to be spliced with the dubious causal claim that Bt Cotton was causing farmer suicides.¹³ This kind of tactic may bring short term gains but most local commentators expressed frustration about the VJAS' inability to create horizontal linkages with other farmers' groups around India.

Table Three: Diversity of Worldviews and Transnational Linkages

World View of organization	Examples of organizations	World view	How do transnational linkages affect?
Romantic ruralist	RTSFE (Vandana Shiva), Devinder Sharma; Grassroots Gandhian Groups, KRRS under Nanjudaswamy	Anti market, aim to create self sufficient autonomous villages; "Neo Luddism" (Jones 2006)	Via myth of international 'peasant farmer': buttresses romantic conception
Market Environmentalist	Chetna Organic, Centre for Sustainable Agriculture, Greenpeace	To promote organic products in the north and Indian middle class	Creates new marketing opportunities
Populist	Vidarbha Jan Andolan Samiti, Left Unions in AP	To make claims on the state over min sale price, lack of irrigation, highlight farmer distress	Mixed: rare opportunity to connect populist message to

¹³ In fact the suicide story itself has its critics – with a local newspaper editor suggesting that the VJAS was manipulating the families of suicide victims by turning a complex set of causes into a single narrative about economic stress. At the same time this editor acknowledged the political skill of the VJAS and its ability to get big name politicians from both Maharashtra and the Centre to pay attention to farmers' issues.

		post liberalization	new discourse but at cost of distorting message
Technocratic / managerial	Gene Campaign, project oriented NGOs, CSA (in capacity as project manager), GRAIN, Delhi	To oversee projects or achieve official status in transnational and national governmental networks	Can only function via transnational links / funding. Legitimacy depends on transnational governance community on IPR and bio safety norms

The final table, shows the particular regional politics in which transnational influences operate. I have described the VJAS in Maharashtra and the local politics associated with it above. Gujarat clearly rejected all transnational linkages as farmers pursued a pro biotech agitation (Herring 2007b, Shah 2003). In the other states local political conditions were crucial for making organizations receptive to the transnational discourse. In Andhra Pradesh the Warangal area hosts almost all the anti GM NGOs. This area was also the focus of Congress Party rallies against the alleged anti farmer bias of the previous Telegu Desam Party government, and has long been a center for Maoist / Naxalite activity. Some local activists I interviewed had begun their political careers with Naxalite affiliated groups. However, the local class conflicts in this region, as they get 'translated' upwards through nodal and metropolitan NGOs to an international audience, take on a very different coloring as romantic movements against corporate technology.

Table Four: Regional Configurations

State	Organizations	Particular political configuration in which transnationalism
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		operates
Andhra Pradesh	Left Farmer Unions, cluster of NGOs in Warangal area	Left unions trying to find issue to mobilize after decline in capacity; 2004 election centers on allegations that Telegu Desam Party has neglected countryside in favour of Hyderabad
Maharashtra	Populist rural groups in Eastern cotton area: VJAS and anti liberalization wing of Shektari Sangatana	Populist groups try to counter western sugar lobbies' influence and recover what was highest govt. min. Purchase price in India
Karnataka	KRRS	Struggle for direction of populist politics between romantic ruralist / materialist factions of KRRS
Gujurat	Pro biotech coalitions including farmer groups and seed companies	In context of synergy between seed dealers and pro tech farmers – mass movement to demand legalization of 'illegal' Navbharat Bt seeds.

Conclusions: Limits of Network Politics?

Above, I have tried to outline the differing responses to transnational opportunities among the varied organizations in the anti-GM coalition according to type of organization, world view and region.

This case confirms many of the causal hypotheses put forward by critics of transnational activist networks such as Bob and DeMars. Certainly, the 'marketing' strategies described on pages 9-10 above have all been present in the anti GM coalition in India. More crucially, in this paper, I have tried to show how pre existing organizations (and most of them did pre exist the anti GM movement) have adapted to transnational opportunities and how this adaptation favors certain world views and certain modalities of action over others. I believe this kind of analysis could be applied to many environmental and agricultural movements in the global south. In India, Baviskar's (1995) study of the Narmada Dam social movement echoes many of these points¹⁴. Shadow cases could also be developed across other southern countries where anti GM movements have arisen. Scoones' (2008) analysis of the Brazilian case shows how there too a mixture of mass-based populist groups (the MST landless organization) and elite 'romantic ruralists' along with Greenpeace have forged a short term coalition, with mixed outcomes.

The critique of 'transnational marketing politics' only has trenchancy if alternatives can at least be imagined that would serve farmers better. In India at least one contentious episode points to such alternatives. In 2006 the Andhra Pradesh state government challenged Monsanto's pricing policy for seeds, taking them to the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) commission because they were charging far higher for a packet of Bt cotton seeds in India than in China. This move was successfully imitated by the other cotton growing states and resulted in a drop in seed price per packet of around 50%. Some (Murugkar et al 2007) argue that this might only discourage private investment, but the move certainly came closer to responding to farmers' preferences for cheaper inputs, than anything in the transnational coalition's playbook. The NGOs soon tried to claim credit for pushing the AP government to act, but my research found no evidence of NGO input into this decision¹⁵, which was based on the AP Congress party's own cadres reporting farmers' opinions and on Congress' recent campaign against the previous government which had been

¹⁴ The 'level' of village opposition to forced removal and demands for adequate compensation gets translated at the transnational and metropolitan levels to a 'conservation' movement, even though the villagers being forced out did not follow 'sustainable' environmental practices, as Baviskar reports, to her initial disappointment.

¹⁵ I spoke to the AP agriculture minister who was highly critical of the 'anti technology' stance of local NGOs. Indeed NGOs in the coalition would have found it very hard to attack the pricing policy since that would seem a tacit endorsement of the technology itself.

fought over standing up for farmers' rights (see table 4 above). This incident usefully highlights the differences between a network politics that can quickly form short term coalitions but has no legitimacy to represent the interests of farmers to the state or corporations and a party politics (when it works)¹⁶ that can negotiate directly with opponents on behalf of large numbers of people.

The problem for Indian farmers however, which is also a problem for analytical leverage in this case, is that the forms of political mediation available to them in the heyday of farmers' movements in the 1970's and 80's are no longer viable. Mass protests, road blocks, etc, required levels of social cohesion and economic surplus which post liberalization cotton farmers in rain fed areas do not have access to. This means that populist farmers' groups have to make forced choices to engage with transnational organizations if they want to raise their profile and publicize other, more materialistic issues. While there has for decades been a struggle between 'romantic ruralists' and economically minded populists in agricultural politics in India the opportunity structure of transnational networks might have shifted the balance of power towards the romantics.

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¹⁶ AP has a better history of state-farmer synergy than Karnataka or Maharashtra. This incident of effective mediation may have been an exception, based on a confluence of unlikely factors: a new agricultural commissioner appointed in 2004, the support of Indian seed companies angry at Monsanto's effective monopoly of the market and the Congress Party's campaign promises on farmers' issues.

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