

**Transnational Romantics: The Case of Opposition to  
Genetically Modified Crops in India and its Implications for  
Transnational Activism**

Richard Antony Bownas

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## **Abstract**

### **Transnational Romantics: The Case of Opposition to Genetically Modified Crops in India and its Implications for Transnational Activism**

**Richard Bownas Ph.D**

**Cornell University 2012**

This dissertation explores in detail the case of one transnational advocacy network (TAN). The purpose of the case study is twofold: firstly to propose a new category of advocacy network, which I term 'romantic' and contrast this category with other kinds of activist/advocacy network, and secondly to contribute to the broader literature on TANs and critically assess the hopes some have had for bottom up transnational mobilization. The dissertation argues that a type of activist network has developed, across various issues areas and various locations that is neither a bottom up movement of the dispossessed and marginalized nor a facilitator of the smooth functioning of global governance. Rather, what is seen in these 'romantic activist networks' is the growth of a transnationally oriented elite of professional activists, bound together, firstly by the imperatives of organizational growth through linkages with global media and donor groups, and secondly, by a 'world view' that can broadly be characterized as 'romantic', that is a world view that emphasizes threats to an imagined harmonious community, outside of modern institutions, markets and technologies. The dissertation takes the anti GMO network in India as exemplary of transnational romanticism, showing how domestic activists have forged linkages with global media and elite organizations around a narrative that emphasizes romantic themes about rural India and excludes 'modernist' or 'developmentalist' alternatives. The network could be said to 'select' for certain types of activism, therefore altering the field of contention in rural India in ways that may not benefit the agriculturalists the network claims to represent.

## **Biographical Sketch**

Richard Bownas received his BA from Cambridge University, UK, in 1995. After a period working with NGOs in Nepal he returned to the UK and received an MSc in Development Management from the London School of Economics in 2000.

For his PhD in Government at Cornell University he undertook extensive field research in India. He is currently teaching as assistant professor of political science at the University of Northern Colorado.

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## **Table of Contents**

<b>Chapter One: Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter Two: Transnational advocacy and missing alternatives on biotechnology in India</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Chapter Three: How the Anti GMO Network Couples with other Organizations</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Chapter Four: Rural Romanticism, the Anti GMO network and the Global Protest Imaginary</b>	<b>153</b>
<b>Chapter Five: Comparing Farmers' Movements: Why did the KRRS take the Transnational Route and not the Shetkari Sanghatana?</b>	<b>191</b>
<b>Chapter Six: Romantic Activist Networks: The Future of Advocacy?</b>	<b>228</b>
<b>Appendix of Field Interviews</b>	<b>273</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>276</b>

## List of Tables

1.1	Heins' classification of TAN categories	14
2.1.	Number of stories about 'Bt Cotton'	46
2.2.	Opinions expressed about Bt Cotton in The Hindu: 2001-10	48
2.3.	Sources of positive stories in order of prominence	49
2.4.	Sources of negative stories in order of prominence	50
2.5.	Negative memes about Bt Cotton in order of prominence	53
2.6.	First 100 page hits on 'Bt Cotton in India'	57
2.7.	Sources of positive stories on google	57
2.8.	Origin sources of negative stories on google	58
2.9.	Negative memes about Bt Cotton on google	59
2.10.	Lok Sabha questions on Bt Cotton	61
2.11.	Summary of impacts of activism on GMO policy	66
2.12.	Rates of growth in yield for major Indian crops	72
2.13.	Farmers' suicides and suicides in general population	81
3.1.	Technocratic metropolitan organizations	101
3.2.	Charismatic cosmopolitan organizations	103
3.3.	Nodal Organizations	105
3.4.	Nodal Service Organizations	106
3.5.	Regional Organizations	107
3.6.	Mass based and grassroots organizations	108
3.7.	Main actors in biotechnology policy	122
3.8.	Luhmann's media analysis applied to the case	130
3.9.	Transactions between project NGOs and donors	143
3.10.	Left organizations and the network	149
4.1.	Summary of ideologies in the campaigns	185
6.1.	Governance oriented TANs	264
6.2.	Romantic TANs	265
6.3.	Grassroots TANs	266
6.4.	Global democratic TANs	267

## List of Figures

3.1.	Diagrammatic overview of the network	113
3.2.	GMO application process	123
3.3.	Greenpeace's representation of challenges it faces	133
6.1.	Overview of framing processes concerning agriculture	257

## Chapter One: Introduction

“The global countermovement nurtures a paradigm shift. Transcending the politics of “underdevelopment” it draws attention to the choice facing the world’s peoples: between a path of exclusion, monoculture, and corporate control or a path of inclusion, diversity, and democracy.”

McMichael (2005: 589)

“We have to come to terms, once and for all, with a society without human happiness and, of course, without taste, without solidarity, without similarity of living conditions. It makes no sense to insist on these aspirations, to revitalize or to supplement the list by renewing old names such as civil society or community. This can only mean dreaming up new utopias and generating new disappointments in the narrow span of political possibilities.”

Luhmann (1997: 69)

“Predicting general professionalization and institutionalization of social movements, then, implies that opportunities for genuinely new issues, groups, tactics, and targets will diminish.....closing out claimants who are not part of the social movement establishment”

Tilly (2004: 156)

### **The Purpose of this Dissertation**

This dissertation explores in detail the case of one transnational activist network (TAN)<sup>1</sup>. The purpose of the case study is twofold: firstly to propose a new category of activist network, which I term ‘romantic’ and contrast this category with other kinds of activist/advocacy network, and secondly to contribute to a broader literature on ‘global civil society’, and this literature’s arguably over optimistic hopes for bottom up transnational contention.

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<sup>1</sup> I use generally use ‘activist’ in the dissertation although some scholars prefer ‘advocacy’. Since organizations in the network have sometimes engaged in mass rallies and run projects in villages as well as doing lobbying work, the more encompassing term ‘activist’ is used.

In summary, this dissertation argues that a type of activist network has developed, across various issue areas and in various locations that is neither accurately described as a bottom up movement of the dispossessed and marginalized, as in the quote from McMichael above, nor as contributing to the smooth functioning of global governance, as in certain liberal accounts of global civil society (Smith 2008). Rather, what is seen in these 'romantic activist networks' is the growth of a transnationally oriented elite of professional activists, bound together, firstly by the imperatives of organizational growth through linkages with global media and donor groups, and secondly, by a 'world view' that can broadly be characterized as 'romantic', that is a world view that emphasizes threats to an imagined harmonious community, outside of modern institutions, markets and technologies. This dissertation places these two aspects (the functional linkages and the ideational attitude) of the chosen transnational network in ironic contrast. While appealing to romantic perspectives on rural life, with a long history dating back to colonial administration and prior social movements this network also demonstrates an organizational 'will to expansion' that includes new and old media, domestic political parties, markets for niche products, European INGOs and states, and depends on professional brokerage activities that threaten to exclude the very people the network claims to represent.

Herein lies the principle puzzle that this dissertation seeks to uncover: chapter two points to the various ways the network fails to represent the interests of those it claims to speak for, but nonetheless the network organizations endure and attract participants from older social movements as well as donor funding and media attention. This endurance has become particularly obvious and politically important as the network's resources have geared up in the last two years to oppose Bt egg plant (brinjal) using similar arguments as utilised against Bt Cotton.

To properly address this puzzle the dissertation aims to innovate a new methodology for studying transnational networks. Where most studies have concentrated on 'snapshots' of activist networks, sometimes focusing on the grassroots, sometimes on the transnational 'head' of networks, and

often focusing on just one or two organizations within a given network, the method taken here is to try and map the 'ecology' of a network in its entirety. The aim is not to assess the 'success' or 'failure' of the network according to its own stated policy objectives, but rather to produce a sociologically rich analysis of the network's context. This involves asking under what social conditions 'romantic' framings of issues are likely to thrive, and asking how older forms of social movement organization such as farmers' movements and unions responded to new transnational opportunities. In the methodology section I summarize this approach as an 'ecological' perspective on activist networks – analyzing their strategies and linkages in the same way a biologist might study the strategies of and selective pressures on organisms within a rapidly changing ecology.

The next section addresses existing literatures on transnational activism and global civil society, clarifying the ways this dissertation critiques and complements that literature.

### **Studying Transnational Politics: What is missing in the paradigms and how this dissertation addresses the gaps**

The rise of transnational collective action has been described as “the most dramatic change we see in the world of contentious politics” (Della Porta and Tarrow, 2005: 6). The anti GMO network has been hailed as one important example of the sometimes nebulous concept of 'global civil society' (GCS). This is not the place for an extended review of that voluminous and somewhat dated literature, but some key claims can be crystallized from strands of that literature, which can be broken down into (sometimes overlapping) 'liberal' and 'radical' varieties.

Liberal GCS theorists, draw theoretically on a classical tradition dating back to Adam Smith and Tocqueville, sometimes incorporating Habermas' (1962) more recent account of the bourgeois

public sphere in enlightenment Europe<sup>2</sup>. In the 1990's this body of theory either concentrated on Eastern European opposition to communism or engaged in speculative hopes for a future civil society - "the image of ourselves" (Keane 2003:1), on a global scale.

While the seeming 'return to realism' following 9/11, Afghanistan and Iraq proved difficult for GCS theorists to assimilate, Keck and Sikkink's (1998) seminal work on TANS<sup>3</sup> offered a new outlet for GCS type theorizing, picturing a more concretely described global 'space' which is relatively free from the 'distortions' of political interference from the state, from market forces and from various 'traditional' forms of discrimination and prejudice. This space can then be utilised for the amplification of unheard voices (the 'boomerang effect' as Keck and Sikkink term it) and the dissemination of information and repertoires of contention. In this strand of more cautious, institutionalist theorizing some criteria for the democratization of global economics and politics are set out<sup>4</sup>. Smith (2008: 129-30), representing this more cautious tradition, lists five elements of a democratic global civil society, summarized below:

1. A better flow of information from local to global, allowing for transparent debate
2. The empowerment of marginalized groups through transnational resources
3. Expanded capacities for communication allowing for greater accountability
4. The generation of global ideas of fairness
5. Increased effectiveness of global institutions due to the attention paid in the transnational sphere

When applied to the study of transnational activist networks this 'liberal' version of global civil society emphasizes the '*governance oriented*' aspects of these networks – their ability, as in Smith's list above, to improve the applicability and transparency of existing norms and institutions.

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<sup>2</sup> Though obviously Habermas' point in that book was that the public sphere had been 'refeudalized' in the era of mass media and industrial state-capitalism – an insight more in line with the argument of this dissertation.

<sup>3</sup> Albeit ignoring their cautionary advice (1998: 213) that the new transnationalism is actually a set of non determinate "interactions" and that aggregating those interactions into a global civil society is likely to be misleading.

<sup>4</sup> See Wapner (2003) for this type of argument applied to global environmental politics.

Governance oriented activist networks work in partnership with international governmental organizations, focusing on detailed policy questions with hard data, such as Amnesty International's gathering of multiply reviewed data on torture and wrongful imprisonment (Foley 2008).

'Radical' GCS theorists<sup>5</sup> are more heterogeneous, and although most would probably agree with Smith's points 2 and 4 above they would certainly distance themselves from point 5. For these theorists the emphasis is not on the smooth functioning of global institutions but on the innovation of new forms of organization *outside* of 'global governance'. A seminal essay in this tradition is Graeber (2002), where he argues for a 'prefigurative politics' embodied in the new activist networks (70):

It is not opposed to organization. It is about creating new forms of organization. It is not lacking in ideology. Those new forms of organization *are* its ideology. It is about creating and enacting horizontal networks instead of top-down structures like states, parties or corporations; networks based on principles of decentralized, non-hierarchical consensus democracy. Ultimately, it aspires to be much more than that, because ultimately it aspires to reinvent daily life as a whole.

In this fashion, scholars of radical GCS often turn what seems to be the weakness of GCS – the sheer diversity of interests involved and the loose networked nature of participation, into strengths; as Hardt (2002) argues (in deliberate opposition liberal versions of GCS), the new transnational public sphere will not be a fixed or institutionalized place but rather a 'multitude' of 'nodes' in an 'expansive network', rhizomatically emergent and without a hierarchical force (political parties, the UN or the state) stabilizing and normalizing them<sup>6</sup>. Less exuberant scholars stress culture, cultural difference and the formation of new hybrid transnational identities as the focus of a new GCS.

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<sup>5</sup> Here I am omitting, for brevity's sake, more traditionally Marxist or Polanyian versions of radical GCS theories such as Cox (1999) or Munck (2004, 2006), where a counter mobilization against the power of capital is modeled on the nineteenth century mobilizations of labor. As Graeber puts it (2002) such theories depend on battle being fought primarily in the economic field, whereas the radical theories we are considering here, argue that in current circumstances opposition will begin in the political or cultural spheres.

<sup>6</sup> Echoed in more mainstream accounts such as Oleson (2005), where the diversity of networks under the slogan 'One no, many yeses' is taken as a strength. For the philosophical origins of this enthusiasm for rhizomatic networks in Deleuze and Spinoza see Sellars (2007).

Gupta's (1998) analysis of the KRRS and the global peasant identity discussed in chapter five and Borras' (2008) account of Via Campesina would fall into this category, as would Reitan's assertion (2007: 238-39) that the new GCS will place "cultural recognition" and "identity solidarity" at the centre of its program. Reitan's work is arguably exemplary here (as argued in the next section), and culminates in the claim that "global interpretive transformative frames" (235) may be able to bind together multiple identity and survival struggles into a coherent global movement with a vision for what might lie beyond capitalism and the nation state.

This radical version of GCS leads to an emphasis on transnational activist networks that work from the bottom up; these are *grassroots activist networks*, of which Mexico's Zapatistas are often taken to be exemplary (Oleson 2005).

### **Drawing on Existing Critiques to Specify a Further Type of Activist Network**

The literature described above points to the existence of two types of transnational activist network – the governance oriented and the grassroots. But this dissertation proposes a third type, often overlooked in the literature, but whose characteristics have been mentioned by several scholars. This third type is referred to under the label 'romantic'. This new typology can be justified with the help of existing critiques of transnationalism.

As the opening quotations from sociologists Niklas Luhmann and Charles Tilly show, there are doubts both about the political content and the institutional form that transnational activism takes. On content, Luhmann provocatively raises the question of the Utopian tone of global civil society activism, with the implication that demands framed in moralistic or romantic ways are ill adapted to engaging with the technically minded, functionally differentiated institutions of a globalizing world. Scholars such as Bob (2005), DeMars (2005), Brooks (2005), Chandler (2009) and Mamdani (2009), although coming from very diverse theoretical positions, add their voices to this type of critique,

questioning the tendency of the new transnational activism to reduce complex political situations to rigidly modular, even Manichean renderings of good versus evil, science versus nature, innocent versus guilty.

In terms of institutional form, Charles Tilly (2004: 121) warns about the potential negative side effects of the internationalization of protest: organization at this level depends on an increasingly professional elite of highly educated, well resourced activists, who are often educated in the global north or focused exclusively on discourse emerging from northern activists. According to some scholars, a new class of individuals rises up devoted to brokering and marketing complex campaigns which often coalesce around 'choke points' (Herring 2009) where international governance has reached a conflict point, around international summits, WTO meetings and World Social Forum events (Smith 2004), or to take strategic advantage of funding opportunities from donor organizations, with their constantly shifting agendas (Cooley and Ron 2002; Bob 2005). In each case, professional skills become paramount for those wanting to participate in social movement activity to the detriment of the radical and populist claims social movements have made on the state (in Charles Tilly's historiography) over the last two hundred years.<sup>7</sup>

These twin critiques form the basis of the conceptualization here of new types of 'romantic activism'. In *romantic activist networks* moralistic, Manichean and nostalgic framings of issues combine with professionalization 'away' from a grassroots base – with the lack of grassroots interaction in turn allowing further romantic framings of the issues. In addition, unlike in the 'governance' oriented networks described above, which are tied closely to the demands of technocratic organizations or global legal norms, romantic networks are more promiscuous in their choice of institutional partners, choosing especially to link with the media and with donor

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<sup>7</sup> Of course, one could argue that the 'content' critique is wrong even though the 'institutional' critique is right, and this has generally been the strategy of scholars who have criticised TANs from within the mainstream of the literature, for example Munck (2004; 2006). One contribution this dissertation aims to make is to show how the two critiques are interconnected: it is precisely the institutional dominance of romantically inclined elites in TAN activism that leads to the content of these movements tilting toward a romantic 'modularity'.

organizations that favour their romantic narratives and which do not require rigorous data checking of claims. These categorizations are returned to at the end of chapter six, where more detailed lines are drawn between the three 'types' of TAN introduced in the dissertation.

### **Anti GMO Activism in India as an exemplary case of global civil society and activist networks?**

The case of biotechnology in India has been a center-piece in several monographs and articles produced by scholars defending the radical potential of global civil society: for example Reitan (2007: Ch 5); Featherstone (2008: Ch 7), Scoones (2003; 2008) and Schurman and Munroe (2006). These scholars use aspects of the anti-GMO campaign to illustrate their key theme of global justice through transnational politics.

Schurman and Munro's recent monograph about anti GMO activism (2010) illustrates some of these key arguments, distilling in their discussion of the anti GMO network elements of both 'grassroots' and 'governance oriented' activism. For these authors the "inherently transnational" (xxiv) anti-GMO campaign achieved several crucial pro democratic goals: "wresting agricultural biotechnology into the public sphere"; "broadening the conversation [about GMOs]"; helping create a "multilateral regulatory regime" and "challenging the twin hegemonies of science and profitability" (xiii-xiv). The network can therefore be seen (in liberal terms) as a paradigm of Smith's (2008) "democratic globalizers": balancing out the unfair dominance of global business networks through open and transparent debate and reforming international norms and institutions in ways that make them more responsive to popular pressures. From a radical/grassroots perspective the network stands up to profit oriented corporations, aligning and framing itself alongside other anti corporate actors. For Schurman and Munro the network represents an example of how new, anti-establishment

transnational identities emerge as a result of transnational ideational labor and the linking of previously isolated intellectual domains.

But what are the specific mechanisms proposed by which an activist network can become truly global and achieve the normative goals proposed by global civil society theorists? Ruth Reitan's (2007) account of the mechanisms by which TANs operate is used as a launching point to show how the GMO debate in India might be seen as an exemplary case of new transnational advocacy. Reitan is an impassioned advocate of grassroots global justice movements, but her account also includes aspects (on implementing biosafety norms for example) more applicable to the governance oriented types of activism. Her account tells the following story:

- Neoliberal policies incite local actors to organize to defend their communities from an assault by global market forces
- After efforts at *scaling up* protest to the state and national levels ,locals decide to 'go global' to oppose neoliberal globalization at its source in the form of transnational corporations and international institutions.
- Through *diffusion* processes local activists learn organizational techniques and discourses from their global partners
- Through *frame alignment* processes, the new allies construct a common ground for fighting neoliberal globalization with common targets of grievance, such as transnational corporations or international institutions.
- Transnational *solidarity* develops through three mechanisms: through northern NGOs deeming southern partners worthy of support; through identifying with each others' struggles against common targets and, most important and most hard to achieve, through the construction of *new global identities* such as 'peasant', 'debtor' or 'worker threatened by neoliberalism'

- The above processes are examples of *scale shift* as the level of activism moves from the local to the national to the transnational arena, culminating in fora such as the World Social Forum.

The Indian GMO case would appear at first glance to accord well with these ideal-typical characteristics proposed by Reitan:

- The target of the movement has been a model of corporate (Monsanto) oriented agriculture that allegedly raises input costs on a group of small cotton farmers already under stress in an age of freer trade, reduced protection and the withdrawal of the state from the countryside (Bhargava 2003; Shiva et al 2004).
- The other main target has been a state bureaucracy (federal and local) accused of complicity in the aims of corporations and laxity on regulation.
- The movement seeks to establish strict regulation or preferably abolition of this new technology to prevent the degradation of environmental standards, the exposure of vulnerable people to risks and the long term risk of 'monoculture' (Kuruganti 2006)
- The movement seeks an 'alternative path' of organic agriculture with low input costs and an emphasis on rebuilding local communities against the threats of social fragmentation, 'de-skilling' (Stone 2005) and the commodification of rural life.

Secondly, the mechanisms by which the movement has operated resonate with the literature on how local movements 'scale up' to transnational spheres of contention:

- From the mid 1990's the anti-GMO networks in India appear to have adopted discursive frames from European activists (biosafety, biodiversity) as well as particular tactics (burning trial crops of GMOs).

- Processes of diffusion are apparent, in which broker organizations like Greenpeace help previously diverse local groups to 'align' frames and targets.
- The anti-GMO movement takes on a 'network' form of mobilization, adept at utilizing the mass media and the internet to link up diverse constituencies around a single target.
- A neoliberal network of corporations and sympathisers (in the form of farmers' groups and market-libertarian lobbyists) appears to have sprung up at the same time to promote GMOs and oppose these 'democratic globalizers', in accord with Reitan's schema.
- New forms of solidarity are exemplified as northern groups based in Europe frame Indian activists as worthy recipients of aid; as both European and Indian activists construct common targets and aims and, arguably, as new forms of identity, for example the 'global peasant farmer' (Borras et al 2008), get constructed through the campaigns and through appearances at global fora.

This dissertation aims to interrogate this understanding of the anti-GMO movement in India by providing a political sociology of the actors involved, deepening the scholarly understanding of TAN's and specifying a type of romantic TAN that does not conform to the optimistic models of either grassroots or governance oriented activism. The next section highlights the main critical contributions that the dissertation makes.

### **Theoretical Contributions of the Dissertation**

Inevitably, the theoretical contributions described below have evolved from the case studied, so included with each is an overview of how field research has contributed to its formulation. While this may clash with the strictly positivist demand that theory and empirics be kept in isolation, this is how most scholarly literature on TANs proceeds. With only a few rich cases to work from, and with

TANs from different issue areas involving the same kinds of actors and relations, the hope is that conclusions reached in one case will illuminate other cases.

These contributions are the overriding themes of the dissertation which are explored in chapters two through six, with each chapter containing discussion relevant to all of them. As chapter six and the preceding discussion made clear, the arguments are aimed at one type of TAN, albeit one which may be ubiquitous across many issues areas – the ‘romantic TAN’. Governance oriented and grassroots networks (to the extent that they actually exist) will have different logics, purposes and will be much less susceptible to some of the arguments made below.

**Contribution One:** Many TANs, and in particular ‘romantic TANs’, frame issues in a *modular* fashion, with causal theories about harm and harmers that belie social complexity. Claims that they represent a direct and organic response to neoliberal globalization are exaggerated.

**Contribution Two:** Romantic TANs tend to reinforce, through their modular framing of events, certain ‘world views’ and ‘silence’ others that fit poorly with those modular claims. They do so via the material and ideational resources they bring to the social fields they enter. In other words we need to add the following questions to the insights of Snow and Benford (1988) and Tarrow (1992) who argue that activist frames must resonate with the social and cultural beliefs of their ‘clients’: Which clients? Which beliefs? Who benefits?

**Contribution Three:** The scholarly literature on frame alignment and diffusion of frames underestimates the degree to which southern elite activists are *strategic transnational thinkers* able to take advantage of resources from the transnational sphere and shape that sphere intellectually *before* northern activists and donors ‘reach out’ to them. A corollary of this process is that southern activists may divert their efforts from building organizations or support at the national or regional grassroots level into transnational networking activities.

**Contribution Four:** Though activists in transnational networks may well be driven by strong principled commitments they are also part of *functional* networks, in which the NGOs and movements they build serve functions for other organizations to which they are coupled. For example NGOs with claims to grassroots authenticity become crucial sources for both newspapers in India and for international donor organizations. Such ‘structural couplings’ and the professional *brokerage* that accompanies them can explain why networks survive and prosper even in the absence of their ‘truth’ claims being validated.

In what follows I try to explain my reasons for making these four key claims, drawing on the relevant literature and pointing out how my empirical chapters address each claim.

### 1. Modular Transnationalism

By ‘modularity’ I mean a mode of addressing issues and framing grievance that can be replicated in diverse contexts according to an implicit or explicit *grammar* of causal and moral claims. The concept of modularity in social science has a rich history, which we can trace back to Anderson’s (1991) account of the spread of a modular template for nationalism through a burgeoning print media, and then to Tarrow’s (1998: 37-41) use of modularity to describe the capacity of modern social movements to replicate certain repertoires of contentious action. However, my use of the term here, in contrast to Tarrow’s, refers more to the implicit grammar or ‘master narrative’ of a movement’s claims, its manner of parsing issues into villains and victims for example, rather than to the diffusion of tactics. In other words, modularity pertains as much to the *content* of TAN claims as to the diffusion of tactical repertoires.

Highlighting the role of these modular claims is intended as a challenge to the radical/Polanyian argument<sup>8</sup> that TANs associated with the anti-neoliberal globalization movement are spontaneous

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<sup>8</sup> See McMichael (2005) for a Polanyian take on counter globalization.

popular responses to market forces. The causal argument in this tradition (Reitan 2007; Evans 2008; Juris 2008; Smith 2008) runs from global market forces threatening communal life to a ‘survival’ response launched with the aid of TANs. However, this case study argues that rather than representing a spontaneous survival response, TANs are social actors that categorize suffering according to a limited repertoire or ‘grammar’ of options – a grammar that arguably pre existed the current period of globalization. Such an argument can help answer Tarrow’s (2002: 242) pointed question:

If the attribution of the threat of global inequity were sufficient to explain transnational action, we ought to find that equally threatened actors across the globe organize equally effectively against the institutions that govern the global economy. But they do not. Why not?

Volker Heins (2005: 117) provides a useful table, in an attempt to summarize a hypothesized modular repertoire for activists. The table is intended to describe the modular logic of advocacy NGOs in general, but, as Heins himself has suggested<sup>9</sup>, his arguments are especially pertinent to transnational advocacy groups, which rely on easily transposable modalities of issue framing:

Table 1.1. Heins’ classification of TAN categories.

Harmers	Victims	Acts	Conventions
The state, war	Humans, animals,	Killing, torturing, neglecting	Prohibit
Business	Minorities	Stigmatizing	Regulate

Heins’ argument about modular framing of issues can be combined with contributions from Bob (2005) and De Mars (2005)<sup>10</sup>. All three of these scholars, though coming from very different

<sup>9</sup> In a conference devoted to his work at Cornell University, April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2009

<sup>10</sup> These are book length studies: articles which support this strand of argument include Brooks (2005) on the Bangladesh garment industry controversy where an over emphasis on childhood innocence in the campaign led to a failure to envisage a chain of consequences including unemployment for vulnerable children, and

theoretical traditions, try to describe the limited repertoire of moves that transnational activists make. All three come to conclusions similar to the above table, while examining cases as diverse as Shell Oil in Nigeria and the Zapatistas in Mexico (Bob) to the Victorian anti slavery movement and northern humanitarian interventions in Africa (De Mars).

For Bob, (30-32) transnational alliances have to have single culprits to target, preferably with international resonance; a Manichean moral argument; an emphasis on clear cut bodily harms and the promise of achieving 'global public goods'. For DeMars, the modular nature of transnational activism centers on its theories of causality, in particular (9) a claim of "circumscribed causality" which makes an issue "autonomous from the contingencies of the local political and social context". In response to these limited causal claims, "magic bullet solutions" are proposed by NGOs along with claims to be representing global norms in applying these magic bullet solutions.

According to DeMars, these delimited causal claims seem more plausible to the extent that the victims of harm are portrayed as innocents, usually exposed to unwelcome global market intrusions. In other words, this process involves an element of cultural construction, as the identities of the supposed victims are depicted in such a way as to make the causal claims cohere; those threatened are depicted as innocent, pre-modern victims of processes outside their control, rather than, say, active manipulators of global connections. So the modularity to be addressed in this dissertation involves both causal claims and identity claims about the types of people who are harmed.

Revealingly, both Reitan (2007) and Schurman and Munro (2010) display these tendencies toward modular content in their own favorable accounts of TANs. Reitan, for example (256) points out, rightly, that "the identity of "peasant" has proved tenaciously resonant.....in forging strong solidarity bonds in a way that "trade unionist" and much less "worker" as of late has not". But she does not subject this to any critical analysis, let alone question whether the 'peasant' category has

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Widener (2007), who argues that the transnationalization of community – oil company disputes in Ecuador made negotiated settlements between the two sides harder to achieve.

much meaning for those it is meant to represent in say, rural India (as Gupta (2000; 2004; 2009) and others have forcefully argued is not the case)<sup>11</sup>. Schurman and Munro also seem to be unaware of a contradiction between global civil society as a transparent forum for alternative ideas and the deep modularity of the claims that emerge from TAN activism. Within a few pages, for example, they try to claim that activism has opened up new possibilities and understandings, so that GMOs are to be seen just as “one strategy among several” (187) but they also praise the capacity of the network to frame GMOs according to a strict binary/Manichean opposition between GMOs and ‘not’ GMOs (185):

The binary opposition between GMO and non-GMO had a classificatory effect that allowed activists to present genetic engineering as an *inherently* [their emphasis] unacceptable approach to the social and technical challenges of agricultural productivity

And while they claim that in the global South anti corporate framings were more prominent than bio-safety concerns, they nevertheless claim as a ‘success’ story (186) the maintenance of the conceptual boundaries between rigid categories. This kind of contradiction in the argument belies their attempt to see the ‘lifeworld’ of activists in a purely cognitive way, as the product of open debate and shared ideas in an ideal public sphere. Rather, it suggests that ‘success’ in GCS campaigns may rely on conforming to content modularities that are *prefabricated*, *unspoken* and *pervasive*. If this is true then it represents a more serious challenge to both the liberal and radical versions of global civil society described above than merely unevenness in access to transnational gatekeepers. In fact an analogy with the fate of ‘reality television’ and its reception might be to the point here: while early media commentators were keen to make the case for the democratizing aspects of reality television in the late 1990’s, arguing that this was the first time lower income participants had real, unmediated agency on television screens, it soon became clear that the action on “reality” television follows strictly modular forms – effectively ‘scripted’, even if unconsciously by the participants, who are keen to ‘couple’ with the expectations of the medium in order to gain fame

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<sup>11</sup> Her long concluding chapter is also full of key modular terms such as ‘threat’, ‘victim’ and ‘precarious’ identities.

and fortune. Ironically of course, these self-produced stereotypes are far more rigid and patronising than portrayals in 'elite' dramas of twenty years previously.

Of course, modular political organizing is the very stuff of modern politics (Anderson 1991) and claims of 'circumscribed causality' are hardly new for social movements trying to summon popular support, so this claim needs some specification. Can we construct criteria or test through empirical research what counts as 'good modularity' as opposed to bad<sup>12</sup>?

The case study in this dissertation cannot hope to prove such broad evaluative claims, but there are ways to show that the modular logic of transnationally oriented groups opposing GM crops may fail to represent their supposed clients or reflect the complexity of the issues involved and that this narrowness has pernicious consequences. In making this case, the dissertation is not just engaging in external critique, but draws on the views of those interviewed for field research, including scientists, journalists and farmers' leaders immersed in the issues on a daily basis. The aim is to show how 'farmers' distress', 'farmer suicide', 'rural crisis' and 'impacts of globalization' may be real, but that attempts to link these phenomena with GM crops in a narrative influenced by modular conceptions fall short.

This approach draws on, but also contrasts with the work of political scientists such as Herring (2005) and Paarlberg (2008), who tend to frame the politics of GM crops as 'science versus vested interests' or even 'science versus irrationality'. Rather than take the views of biotechnologists and agronomists as a base line against which to judge the accuracy of the particular claims of anti GMO activists, this dissertation aims to illustrate the range of opinions about the causes of farmers'

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<sup>12</sup> For Heins (2008 *passim*) the move to a politics that focuses on the goodness and badness of *acts* rather than of good and bad *classes or groups* of people represents moral progress, even though as he admits these distinctions are made from a 'distant' perspective in TANs and prone to reinventing sacred distinctions of pure and impure. I would argue that the real danger of a focus on particular acts, is the abstraction away from local political context.

distress in India<sup>13</sup> and contrast this spectrum of views with the circumscribed arguments of the anti-GMO network. There are many ‘paths not taken’ on the politics of biotechnology and one aim of this dissertation is to show how transnationalism may create new opportunities for protest but also biases the field against alternatives that do not fall into a ‘pro’ or ‘anti’ perspective, and perhaps even forces the spectrum of opinion into Manichean alternatives<sup>14</sup>.

## 2. Specifying the modularity of TAN claims: Romantic TANs

If the kind of TAN studied in this dissertation tends to frame issues via a modular discourse, this discourse may benefit some actors over others or be taken up by actors and groups whose views resonate with the ‘circumscribed causality’ championed through the TAN. This is the point of departure for this part of the argument of the dissertation and from the point of view of disciplinary boundaries is where a scholarly focus on the mechanisms internal to TANs typical of the existing literature can be brought into dialog with an historical survey of rural politics in India .

Clifford Bob provides a methodological model for this section. Bob makes this type of argument both diachronically (with actors changing their views to match the TAN ‘grammar’ over time) and synchronically (with actors being ignored or championed depending on whether they match the TAN ‘grammar’ at a particular time). In the former case, for example, activist Ken Saro Wiwa learned how to champion the Ogoni cause in Nigeria via “romantic notions” of ethnic primordiality (Bob 2005: 89) in order to attract international donor support for their cause. In the latter case, (Bob 2005: Ch 4 passim) the non media savvy EPR guerrilla force in Mexico, making less ‘marketable’ class based demands, fell under the radar of transnational attention while the EZLN (better known as the Zapatistas) flourished in the transnational limelight as defenders (according to Bob) of a

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<sup>13</sup> Including land fragmentation, irrigation corruption, ‘brain drain’ to the cities and poor quality agricultural extension services. The tally of factors cannot be neatly categorized into pro and anti globalization or pro and anti market views. See CENTAD (2005) for a summary.

<sup>14</sup> For this insight I have to thank my attendance at a conference on the economics and politics of GM crops, at the University of Hyderabad, (Interview number 55)

romanticized indigenous identity, in particular *after* their political project for institutional inclusion in the Mexican state had failed.

In applying this approach to the Indian anti-GMO case (primarily in chapters four and five) the dissertation first lays out the ideological and organizational terrain of activists, NGOs and farmers' groups that have an opinion on the introduction of GM crops into India. Following the methodology of Weberian 'ideal types' (see methodology section) two broad groups are constructed as below:

- **Romantic ruralists:** committed to a quasi-Gandhian, or 'Gandhian socialist' vision of Indian agriculture<sup>15</sup>, in which villages opt out of producing for global markets, or at least obtain crucial inputs (seeds, fertilizers, etc) from cooperative and preferably organic sources. They have tended, in the words of one scholar interviewed<sup>16</sup>, to concentrate fire on individual capitalists rather than the structural or administrative problems associated with particular types of capitalism, such as the current withdrawal of the state from providing services to farmers. Their prescriptions focus on new technologies as essentially disruptive to settled ways of life.<sup>17</sup> The Indian activists and scholars associated with this ideological strand have been writing about this vision for many decades as part of a project that was always transnational, both influencing and being influenced by Japan, Europe and the United States. Romantic ruralists rarely have a constituency at the local level whom they represent politically. They are mainly, and perhaps ironically, an urban based group, with strong transnational ties, who operate through intellectual influence, writing of reports, the control of NGOs and easy access to the media. The exemplary romantic ruralist in India would be Vandana Shiva, a key player in the anti-GMO movement.

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<sup>15</sup> For the deep historical routes of this vision of autonomous village life in both colonialist and anti-colonialist discourse see Inden (1990), Metcalf (1994) and Jodhka (2007), all discussed further in chapter four

<sup>16</sup> Prof Assadi (Interview number 77)

<sup>17</sup> I use Jones' (2006) history of Luddism and neo-Luddism in chapter four to put Indian rural romanticism in context with the global history of technophobic activism.

- **Modernists (or Materialists):** by 'modernist' are meant those activists who have campaigned on mainly economic grounds, for the interests of a particular group or coalition of rural people. The exemplary movement of this kind would be the Shetkari Sanghatana ('Cultivators' Association') of Maharashtra, which began its agitations in the early 1980s over the price of onions, and enlarged its focus to condemn more broadly what its leaders felt to be the parasitic role of urban India in relation to rural agriculturalists<sup>18</sup>. The demand for 'fair price' or 'scientific price' for produce and for a reduction in heavy handed regulation of where and when farmers could sell produce was echoed in other farmers' movements such as the KRRS (Karnataka Peasants and Farmers' Association) of Karnataka. In this dissertation I take these forms of *bottom up populism demanding more inclusive institutions or markets* to be a different category of politics than the elite, romantic strain described above<sup>19</sup>. Modernist mass movements tend to be organizationally distinct from romantic ones: they have a leadership which is engaged on a regular basis in 'give and take' interactions with that base, and they rely on a mixture of 'traditional' and 'modern' forms of mobilization (as opposed to post-modern or networked forms), whether Gandhian civil disobedience, sabotage, mass rallies and in some cases violence. 'Modernist' politics today also takes a more technocratic form, as argued in chapter two, where various modernist suggestions for reforming agriculture from Indian academics and farmers' leaders are contrasted with the romantic world view.

For the purposes of the dissertation the tension between romantic and modernist ways of framing rural politics is essential and is dealt with at length explicitly or implicitly in chapters two, four, five and six.

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<sup>18</sup> As explained in Chapter Four, Sanghatana activists, when interviewed, strongly resisted Western academic arguments that emphasize the 'cultural' aspect of their campaign (especially Youngblood 2005). For them their social movement was about economic exploitation and neglect above all else.

<sup>19</sup> See Chapter five on the differences between the farmers' movements in Karnataka and Maharashtra.

Having formulated these ideal types of organization the dissertation addresses the question of what happens when they come into contact with the political opportunities and resources offered by TANs and their gatekeeper organizations. It asks the questions: which of these pre existing groups and organizations fit best with the circumscribed, modular discourse of the TAN against GM crops, and which find themselves to be an awkward fit? Those that fit are able to make use of the material and cultural resources of TANs to reinforce their view of the world at the expense of others. They adopt the particular discourse about GM crops as exemplary of their broader ideological perspectives. Metaphorically one could say that romantic TANs represent a *filter* for domestic groups: they siphon out discourse which does not resonate with transnational requirements and act as an 'invisible' influence on the choices domestic activists make.<sup>20</sup>

One of the key empirical supports for this argument come from a pair wise comparison of farmers organizations in Maharashtra and Karnataka in chapter five. It is apparent that the leadership of the KRRS in Karnataka was predisposed toward largely symbolic campaigns targeting transnational capital, even as far back as the mid 1980s (Assadi 1997), whereas the Shetkari Sanghatana of Maharashtra followed a more strictly modernist/materialist line in the 1980s, making it less susceptible to joining forces with the TANs that emerged in the 1990s, although some individual activists in the Sanghatana broke ranks to join the anti GMO networks (as described in chapter five).

While Clifford Bob finds evidence of pre existing groups changing their ideologies, or at least their points of emphasis, to attract TAN support (the diachronic story), this case study, as the pair wise comparison described above makes clear, concentrates mainly on the synchronic side of the story: in other words, out of the wide range of groups active on agricultural politics, why did only some of those groups get closely involved with the TAN against GM crops? However there is also evidence of

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<sup>20</sup> Though an alternative hypothesis to be debated in the dissertation is that materialist / populist groups were losing ground already by the time transnational opportunities came on the scene. In fact both factors: the 'push' of transnationalism and the slow decay of rural populism may be involved. The two arguments are not competing causal explanations, but rather the decline in materialist populism represented an opportunity for transnational activists to invade territory previously controlled by populist movements.

activists shaping their world views over time (diachronically) in order to make themselves amenable to TANs, as argued in chapter six - for example poorly resourced, leftist farmers' unions in Andhra Pradesh appropriated the 'romantic' critique of GMOs and Monsanto from local NGOs, arguably at the expense of more 'modernist' alternative policy positions concerned with price and distribution of seeds.

The theoretical aim of this aspect of the dissertation is to add flesh to the bones of the oft stated idea (initially Snow and Benford 1988) that social movement framing needs to resonate with pre existing cultural beliefs and discourses. While this is clearly (perhaps too obviously) true, scholars should also be asking about the distributional and class consequences of activist framing: it might be that groups whose political themes are eclectic, too local in resonance, or out of keeping with the circumscribed causality of the new romantic TANs will fail to obtain resources for mobilization. If so, that is an important qualification to enthusiasm about the promise of 'global civil society'.

### **3. Southern actors in the global imaginary**

This theme of the dissertation expands on the ideas of Schurman and Munro (2006 and 2010), who address the role of thinking and thinkers in the pre mobilization phase of social movement activism. While they rightly remind us of the importance of intellectual resources, they emphasize the northern part of the story in their own account of the anti-biotechnology movement.

In contrast, this dissertation describes the complex history of transnational engagement in which key players in the anti-GMO movement in India have been involved. For activists like Vandana Shiva and the late Professor Nanjundaswamy of the KRRS, the anti-GMO struggle was a battle in a larger war for which they devised many of the tactics. From the late 1970s these figures, and others, played an important role in creating a tableau of southern farmers, hostile to transnational capitalists and fighting for a return to traditional forms of agriculture. While much of the technical discourse about

biotechnology and biosafety emerges from the north, in particular from activists like Jeremy Rifkin in the USA in the 1980s, it was the ideological construction of a ‘global anti capitalist peasantry’ that proved resonant in the ‘global protest imaginary’. The ability to link to this transnational imagined identity is one reason why the anti GMO movement has lasted so long, despite the rapid uptake of GM crops in the global South. This construction was the work of mainly southern actors and is described in more detail in chapters four and five.

Figures like Prof. Nanjundaswamy and Vandana Shiva could be termed ‘strategic transnational thinkers’ to show how they are anything but passive beneficiaries of transnational resources. In fact, the European part of the anti-GMO network needed the input of activists such as these, as much as they needed northern resources. Information gleaned from networks in India has been a crucial resource for these European groups in their campaigns, in an organizational coupling described in chapter three. In this regard, the Indian case differs somewhat from Clifford Bob’s picture of northern activists ‘fishing’ for southern clients and might help illuminate similar cases of northern and southern actors coming together, where southern (elite) actors are just as much co-creators of transnational frames as their northern allies.

#### **4. The ‘functional’ face of TANs and their work of brokerage**

This contribution addresses a large body of scholarship concerned with the organizational impact of NGOs and TANs on activists from the south. In the words of Indian sociologist D.N.Dhanagare<sup>21</sup> there seems to be a trend toward an “NGO-ization of social movements and a projectization of NGOs”. This process of professionalization<sup>22</sup> changes the nature of activism. But is this a positive

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<sup>21</sup> At a conference at Osmania University, Hyderabad, January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2009

<sup>22</sup> The need for higher education qualifications to work for an NGO, the universal requirement for fluent English skills to network with donors and a background either in science or public relations, typical of NGOs working in this area.

development for southern activists who now have access to new resources or does it bring with it unwelcome changes in the domestic political scene in the global south?

To help answer this question Volker Heins suggests the illuminating metaphor of “benign parasitism” (Heins 2008: 38). Heins argues that NGOs are “active intermediaries” (39), subtly or not so subtly altering the behaviour of their ‘hosts’, who could be individual activists, pre-existing social movements or government agencies. Heins intends to move the debate on NGOs and TANs away from normative arguments that either portray NGOs as right wing agents of neo-colonialism, depoliticizing potentially radical movements in the south (Petras 1999) or as bearers of a civilizing mission and catalysts of global civil society (Wapner 2002).

The case study in this dissertation can add empirical detail to the ‘parasitism’ / ‘symbiosis’ concept by examining how new interests are created by the existence of TANs, and can also help explain the puzzle of why TANs persist, even when, as in the anti-GMO case, the battle over a particular issue seems to be lost on the ground (as farmers universally opt to buy Bt Cotton seeds).

Symbiosis takes place when resource rich NGOs that are part of the activist network attach themselves, through professional brokerage activities, to other sources of power, or other social systems in mutually advantageous arrangements. Below are some of these symbiotic relationships:

- With government ministries that use NGO information and arguments in international negotiations over patent regimes and biosafety policy. (Menski 2005)
- With the EU and European NGOs, who see India as a vital battleground in the debate over biosafety regimes and the global future of GM crops.
- With Indian state governments that see NGOs as a useful means to be ‘seen to be doing something’ about organic agriculture or rural crisis more generally, as well as sources of information about the activities of the central government and TNC’s, about which they are often unaware.

- With European and North American retail and fashion companies, to supply organic cotton from farms not using GMOs.
- With the Indian and transnational media, looking for dramatic stories of corporate malfeasance and rural suicide and suffering, with easily identifiable causes.
- With Communist party affiliated unions, looking for data to back them up in local disputes with seed dealers.

Along with these symbiotic linkages TANs helps shape the domestic political scene spatially, in terms of the 'elongation' of the network of NGOs, farmers' groups and rural activists that it mobilizes. The 'levels'<sup>23</sup> involved are roughly as set out below:

- Metropolitan : the 'elite' professional NGOs mostly based in Delhi and communicating with the central government, international organizations and elite media
- Nodal: including gatekeeper NGOs like Greenpeace and transnationally well connected NGOs in large cities such as Bangalore and Hyderabad, communicating with national / international media and acting as broker agencies deciding which lower level groups with which to affiliate or fund
- Regional: Project oriented NGOs based in cities or smaller towns, coordinating with nodal and metropolitan groups and doing both agricultural projects and advocacy work
- Grassroots: activists working part time for NGOs and keen to become professionally involved.

Campaigns such as the anti-GMO coalition add differentiation to these levels, bringing resources in the form of international funding, which are in practice fungible and can be used for projects or for campaigns focused on biotechnology or advocating for organic crops. However, such differentiation

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<sup>23</sup> See Oleson (2005: 7) for a similar spatial account of a movement, divided into macro, meso and micro levels comprising the 'transnational', 'informal transnational' and 'social movement organization' levels of the Zapatista movement.

through new resources also threatens to exclude groups at the lowest levels – for example traditional (as opposed to elite) Gandhians have had little or no role in the anti-GMO campaign, even though they oppose the technology and speak with frustration of the professionalization of NGO activity and the way this excludes long term commitments at the village level. Resources also shape the career trajectories of people involved in rural politics, as they seek to ‘upgrade’ to those levels most integrated into transnational networks.

These processes comprise ‘elongation’, in which the relative prestige and resources of transnationally connected activists and groups increase relative to those not so well connected. This process is familiar from the copious literature on NGOs in domestic politics but less often addressed by scholars of TANs.

This section of the dissertation, including chapters three, five and six includes case studies of individual activists to try and illustrate these processes. Interviewees include mid level leaders in farmers groups such as the KRRS and Shetkari Sanghatana; a school teacher with aspirations to work for a regional NGO in Andhra Pradesh; a journalist working for a regional English language newspaper; a leader of a relatively weak agricultural union in Andhra Pradesh; an academic asked to write a research report on behalf of an INGO and a European academic asked to audit an NGO involved in the TAN. These case studies illustrate various important mechanisms by which TANs change the patterns of incentives and aspirations of individuals working on agricultural issues, for example:

- *Emulation mechanisms*: by which successful activists such as Vandana Shiva and Prof. Nanjundaswamy become role models for mid level activists who aspire to their level of transnational linkage and media renown. This influences choices of career path and affiliation, with transnationally affiliated groups being seen as offering access to better career opportunities

- *Epistemological mechanisms*: by which certain types of information (those concerned with TAN issue areas) get transmitted to ‘higher’ levels and to national and international media because they are deemed more newsworthy whereas reports that do not fit the transnational frame, get ignored. For example, a report which sets out the multiple local causes of farmer suicide never gets published by Oxfam, whereas information that is framed in terms of ‘agriculture and globalization’ gets disseminated to the media through INGOs.

The overall aim of this section is to add flesh to the bones of rationalist critiques of NGOs such as that of Cooley and Ron (2002), who make a strong case in the abstract for seeing NGOs and TANs as self-interested actors, but without explaining the social mechanisms by which they square normative commitment with organizational self-interest.

This analysis of the work of brokerage also feeds back into the critique of TAN romanticism – as argued in chapter six. Romantic TANs, more so than governance oriented or grassroots TANs, tend to broker relationships with multiple elite organizations in a kind of ‘tree with upside down roots’ pattern. Unbound by either a strong grassroots base or a close functional relationship with a global governance institution, romantic TANs are ‘mesomobilizers’ (Steinberg 1998), focusing their brokerage on the media, donors, and global niche markets. Chapter six explores further the class implications of this upside down model.

### **Why the Politics of Biotechnology?**

The politics of biotechnology is important in its own right and can be seen as a harbinger of a twenty-first century politics about nature, the environment and corporate power. The study of biotechnology politics lies at the intersection of important scholarly and activist debates. These

debates will be examined throughout the dissertation, through the lens of this particular case study of activism.

From the perspective of political economy, development sociologists such as Lipton (2007) and political scientists such as Paarlberg (2008) argue that biotechnology *could* be a transformative and beneficial force in the developing world, especially if states are able to harness technologies best suited to poor farmers. For Lipton, the key political battle is not 'for or against' biotechnology, but finding ways to promote technologies that would have pro-poor potential, such as drought resistant crops. For Paarlberg transnational activism represents one of the crucial barriers to accessing this pro poor potential.

For environmental scholars and activists, biotechnology and GMO's have also become a crucial arena for debate about the future of ecological thinking. In particular, a new type of 'eco-pragmatism' (Brand, 2009) has taken up the cause of biotechnology as a potentially 'green' weapon in the battle against global warming and excessive pesticide and fertilizer use. This pragmatic outlook is in sharp contrast to more 'romantic' forms of ecological thought hostile to most biotechnology and exemplified in the writings of Vandana Shiva or the activists described by Schurman and Munro (2003; 2010) for whom biotechnology represents an uncontrollable and threatening incursion on nature.

For scholars concerned with new agrarian and 'peasant' movements such as Edelman (2005), McMichael (2007) and Borras (2008) opposition to corporate biotechnology is one of and symbolic of threats to food sovereignty and small-scale, 'sustainable' farming. For these writers campaigns against biotechnology exemplify an important backlash against agricultural corporate capitalism (Kloppenber 2004). Biotechnology signifies larger processes and is distinguished from the positive alternatives of 'real food' (Bove and Dufour 2002) and organic agriculture.

Finally, from the perspective of international relations theory (Drezner 2007; Pollack and Shaffer 2009) biotechnology and GMOs represent an exemplary case of failed cooperation within international regimes. As these authors show, this failure occurs precisely where transnational activists find a niche in which to operate, often as proxies for groups of states such as the European Union. Here, Herring's (2009) conceptualization of 'choke points' and Tarrow's metaphor of 'coral reefs' (2005: 27) suggest that episodes of transnational contention are likely to emerge where international politics provides the fuel, in the form of disputed norms, conflictual summit meetings, covert lobbying via the non governmental sector and intense media interest. Biotechnology, with its complex overlapping and competing regulatory regimes (USA versus Europe) is a paradigm for this kind of new politics.

### **Methodological Considerations**

This section discusses the methodological choices made in this dissertation. It begins with a discussion of the dissertation's place between international relations and comparative politics then discusses the study as a 'case study' in the light of 'mainstream' (or 'positivist') political science literature, and finally discusses those elements that do not fit into the standard categories of political science methodology.

### **Crossing Subfields**

This new literature on transnational politics crosses the border between international relations and comparative politics<sup>24</sup>. If the stronger claims of exponents of transnationalism are true then we may

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<sup>24</sup> The literature began in earnest with Keck and Sikkink's (1998) exposition of the 'boomerang effect', in which civil society in closed states reaches out to transnational forces to put pressure on states over human rights.

be witnessing a sea change in the very structure of world politics, in which domestic and international spheres are no longer clearly separable<sup>25</sup>. If domestic and transnational actors are now joining forces ideationally and materially, then comparativists should be analyzing what difference these transnational resources make: who are the potential winners and losers domestically and are transnational opportunities disproportionately captured by some groups to the disadvantage of others? International relations scholars, on the other hand, should be aware of the complex domestic terrain into which transnational forces enter, one which belies any simple logic of normative diffusion or homogeneous increases in civility or respect for human rights.<sup>26</sup>

One of the purposes of this dissertation, then, is to bring to bear the detailed field experience at which comparative politics excels to an area of study hitherto within the purview of international relations scholars. There is a substantive, as well as an academic motive for this. There is a tendency within the transnationalism literature, which draws on political process theories, to focus exclusively on the dynamics of *how* networks are formed and by which mechanisms they scale up contention, whether this is done in a value neutral manner (Tarrow 2005) or as engaged advocates of those networks (Reitan 2007)<sup>27</sup>. What has less often been attempted (but see Bob 2005), is to assess how transnational activist resources might alter the parameters of domestic contention. As transnational resources become available, the dimensions of what is seen as possible and impossible change, including the types of issues that are emphasized and the types of people who can get involved in

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However, more recent volumes describe the growth of transnationalism in relatively open societies over environmental issues (Guadeloupe and Rodrigues 2004; Khagram 2004), agriculture (Borras et al 2008) and economics (Della Porta et al 2006; Della Porta 2007; Featherstone 2008; Evans 2008)

<sup>25</sup> Even a popular, mainstream introductory text to international relations, commonly used in undergraduate classes, states without debate that organizations like Greenpeace represent a “genuine global civil society” (Mansbach and Rhodes 2003: 10)

<sup>26</sup> See Tsing (2000) for an anthropological critique of incautious teleology in the scholarship around globalization and global movements.

<sup>27</sup> I would argue that this applies both to the cautious claims of those, following Keck and Sikkink, who focus on particular issues and mechanisms, avoiding generalizations about ‘global civil society’ per se: the ‘splitters’ in Tarrow’s (2002) terms, as well as to Tarrow’s ‘lumpers’, who have an overarching normative commitment to global transnationalism. Neither of these groups of scholars tend to dwell on the domestic consequences of transnational resources, being focused on whether transnational activists achieve their aims, as defined by those selfsame activists.

social movements and get heard in the media. These subtle and not so subtle impacts on the dimensions of domestic politics are part of the subject of this dissertation.

### **One case study or many?**

India is one country but many cases. This is a big advantage for any comparative research project, enabling researchers to multiply the observations without analyzing more than one country<sup>28</sup>. The research contained in this dissertation covers three large states (Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh) and each can be counted as an independent case due to the administrative priority given state governments on agricultural issues in India and the varied histories of state-farmer relations in those three states. Apart from its inherent importance and its being often referenced in the literature (as described above), the particular issue area chosen is analytically fertile for several reasons:

- The structure of the anti-GMO coalition spans many different *levels* of institution, from metropolitan elites to local farmers' union leaders and 'grassroots' NGOs. This large span enables interesting comparisons between attitudes and motivations across class and geographical divides.
- The NGOs and farmers' groups involved in the coalition are not one bloc, funded and organized centrally, but comprise various sub-networks with their own transnational linkages. There are around 40 NGOs and farmers' groups highly active in this area, and many others occasionally active. When we observe similar processes and dynamics across these financially and organizationally separate groups we have more reason to suppose those processes are relevant beyond one issue area.

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<sup>28</sup> See King, Keohane and Verba (1994: 213-217) on the virtues of multiplying observations within 'one' case.

- The groups and activists interested in GMOs have usually been active on several other issues over the last thirty years (for example 'big dams' and indigenous rights), making it more plausible to generalize about the 'bundles' of attitudes and orientations that these groups advocate.

For these reasons the anti-GMO case in India could be described, in positivist terms, as a strong 'hypothesis generating' case (Gerring 2007 b: 39-43) as well as allowing for a certain amount of 'hypothesis testing', since the case contains multiple observations of different social groups and networks in different locales and levels and it is possible to 'test' whether similar processes are taking place in those different locales and levels.

Evans et al (1995:4) offer a good appraisal of the kind of case study model advocated here:

It (the case-study method) is work that draws on general theories whenever it can but also cares deeply about the particular historical outcomes. It sees particular cases as the building blocks for general theories and theories as lenses to identify what is interesting and significant about particular cases. Neither theories nor cases are sacrosanct. Cases are always too complicated to vindicate a single theory.....At the same time, a compelling interpretation of a particular case is only interesting if it points to ways of understanding other cases as well.

**Unorthodox methodological choices: an 'ecological' model of organizational behavior, 'ideal types' and critical-interpretive methods**

This dissertation differs from standard conceptions of a case study in political science in three respects: firstly, and most importantly, the claims made are not of the 'covering law' type, in which cases confirm or disconfirm a causal law, but rather the argument made employs the language of systems and environments, in other words an *ecological* rather than a physics-centred way of

viewing social causality; secondly, in another departure from positivism, the dissertation constructs 'ideal types' in ways that are normatively broader and more contentious than most political science research; thirdly, the research aims at providing (an admittedly crude) 'ethnography' of the organizations it describes, employing interpretive and critical methods more common in literary studies or anthropology than in empirical political science.

As to the first point: the theoretical contributions that this dissertation tries to generate should not be seen as *causal* in the sense that dominates mainstream political science. In other words, the aim is not to claim that activist networks (or in particular the 'romantic' variety highlighted here) invariably cause certain changes in domestic politics or that they themselves are caused by certain external factors. This is for two reasons: Firstly, activist networks and NGOs change the organizations they 'couple' with in ways that are impossible to reduce to linear causality. It is preferable to think in terms of political environments, in which new actors form symbiotic linkages with old actors, in ways which might change both. As environments change, so certain adaptations prosper and certain symbiotic linkages aid the survival of organizations. The arguments described above (for example the favoring of romantic over modernist orientations by TANs) work in this way: TANs are simply not able to link with groups that do not share their internal ways of framing or coding issues, so 'old' groups have to choose whether to persist in ways of framing the world that cut them off from TANs or to adapt to the new opportunity. This kind of mutual *adjustment* is more subtle and contingent than linear causality; Secondly, many things change at once in a political environment, making the positivist goal of isolating particular causal influences very difficult or impossible. For example, in India, old farmers' movements declined just as new transnational opportunities arose and just as the state was withdrawing farmer-support services from the countryside. Quantifying or formalizing the role of these various causal influences on the rise of new activist networks in Indian rural politics would be nearly as forlorn a task as isolating the precise

weighting of factors that caused human beings to acquire complex language<sup>29</sup>. It would also arguably be less 'useful' to participants and scholars than a good *functional* account of how different types of organizations work in their environments<sup>30</sup>.

Niklas Luhmann's concept of 'structural coupling' (akin to Heins' use of 'parasitism' discussed above) is a useful way to conceptualize this *ecological* approach to social causality. For Luhmann, two systems (which he conceives as autonomous and 'closed', that is to say, with their own particular modes of framing/coding environmental inputs) can become dependent on each other for those external inputs, one obvious example being the mass media and the economy. As Luhmann (2000: 66) puts it in relation to advertising:

For advertising has to make its product a reality via the auto-dynamics of the social system of the mass media and not merely, as is typically the case with other products, via technological or physical-chemical-biological suitability for the satisfaction of a particular need. Within the strand of advertising, then, the economy is just as dependent upon the system of mass media as the latter is upon it, as is typical in cases of structural coupling, no logical symmetry, no hierarchy can be detected.

If for advertising and mass media one were to substitute NGOs and the Indian media and for 'physical-chemical suitability' one were to substitute 'farmers' actual needs' this would be a good indication of the kind of analysis undertaken in chapter three. As Luhmann emphasizes no 'hierarchy' can be established in such cases, meaning that the role of the social scientist is to observe and describe the functional compatibilities of coupled systems, rather than to jump in and reduce (in hierarchical form) what he/she observes to some prior set of 'causes'.

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<sup>29</sup> Ragin (2000) attempts just such a hopeless task with his idea of 'fuzzy set social science'. But his rigidly deterministic approach is quite unlike the ecological approach to causality taken here.

<sup>30</sup> See Cartwright (1999) and Manicas (2006) for philosophical defences of a science that does not necessarily seek causal generalizations that could be applied to all comparable cases. As Cartwright points out, there are very few 'closed systems', even in the natural sciences, in which contingency, chaos and feedback effects can be ignored when making theory. In the social world, of course we can add the complex feedback effects of theory feeding back into practice, 'self-fulfilling prophecies', etc.

As to the second methodological point, the dissertation employs 'ideal types' as ways to categorize groups of organizations. According to Weber (1997: 88)

An ideal type is formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct.

In chapter three ideal types of organizations are drawn up, such as 'regional', 'nodal' and 'mass based'. These ideal types are fairly uncontroversial, being based on 'objective' factors such as the type of advocacy organizations engage in, their geographic locations and the professional expertise of the organizations concerned. More contentiously, in chapter four, organizations are categorized as 'romantic' based on an underlying world view or 'deep structure' of their claims and in chapter six TANs are divided into four ideal-hypothetical types on a grid.

The justification for using these unusually broad and arguably contentious categories is that they are more likely to resonate beyond the particular case. As discussed earlier in this chapter and in more detail in chapter six, cases as varied as Islamic Jihadism, the Zapatistas in Mexico, diasporic nationalism and the spread of Christian evangelism resonate with the category of 'transnational romanticism'. While much scholarship on TANs cautiously generalizes around 'mechanisms' that sometimes verge on platitude or tautology, or which are too closely tied to the particular case at hand, this dissertation aims to set up a research agenda that will hopefully fertilize discussion about a larger range of transnational phenomena, drawing attention to 'family resemblances' (Wittgenstein 2009 [1953]) between phenomena that might otherwise be overlooked.

It is important, however, to have concepts that are broad enough to have relevance to other issue areas and other countries, but which still have resonance 'on the ground' with activists themselves<sup>31</sup>

The categories used in the dissertation were determined both by reading extensively in secondary and historical literature and through conducting one to one interviews with activists. Where appropriate the categories used in this dissertation were mentioned with participants and responses were usually favorable<sup>32</sup>.

The use of a critically loaded term such as 'romanticism' leads into the third area of methodological importance – the eclectic use of ethnographic and literary forms of analysis in the dissertation. For example in chapter four the dissertation attempts to put current framings of GMOs into a 'deep' historical context going back to colonial historiography. Chapter four also engages in a brief literary-critical analysis of some of the material produced by anti-GMO activists and references scholars of romanticism in diverse fields. The justification for these practices accords with the general outlines of 'constructivism' as a research project, in that interpretive framings and enduring discourses have material consequences and in fact *are* parts of material reality as much as guns and dollar bills. For colonial Britain for example, as discussed briefly in chapter four, a 'romantic' framing of the Indian countryside was a particular tool used to justify certain taxation practices as well as a fantastical consolation (for middle class consumers of the discourse) for the woes and guilt induced by industrial capitalist society. For NGOs and activists today framings and interpretations are equally tools used for organizational purposes, and it is no surprise that those tools are not designed from scratch, but are rather borrowed and refined from historical models: hence the historical comparative nature of chapter four.

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<sup>31</sup> See Gerring and Barresi (2003) for the mini-max idea that social science concepts should be a compromise between maximum applicability to other cases and 'ideal-typical' richness. Hopefully the categories of romantic and modernist in relation to rural politics achieve this balance.

<sup>32</sup> Interestingly Indian scholars based in India have been much more sympathetic to the categories used here than western scholars who have responded at conference presentations of some of the material.

In practical terms, the basis for the dissertation comprised three field trips to India from 2007 through 2009. Ideally the dissertation would be based on an ethnographic level of detail, from total immersion in the day to day activities of NGOs and farmers' groups. However, given limited resources, multiple languages spoken in the field, and most critically, the generally wary attitude of Indian NGOs to external observations (when not guaranteed of ideological sympathy in the observer) this level of immersion was not possible. Instead, the research strategy was to substitute breadth for depth and try to visit almost all organizations active in the network across four states and multiple 'levels' of activity – from elite intellectuals in New Delhi to volunteer activists in Andhra Pradesh. In addition, NGO reports, pamphlets and video materials, newspaper articles, biotechnology industry reports and parliamentary debates were studied for information and for their discursive strategies.

A list of interviews is provided in the appendix, which includes not only NGO members and activists but Indian based scholars and journalists. Farmers were interviewed in Andhra Pradesh, mainly in small groups with the aid of translators.

### **Chapter Outlines**

Chapter two describes the discourses on GMOs in India. Using data gathered from The Hindu Newspaper over a period of 10 years it performs an analysis of GMO related events, establishing the provenance of stories in the English language media (whether NGO, grassroots, scientific or corporate), categorizing their evaluative content (positive, negative or neutral) and tracing certain 'memes' or recurrent story lines associated with GMOs over time. The chapter then shows how an anti-GMO discourse has permeated the public sphere using an analysis of parliamentary questions tabled on GMOs in the Lok Sabha, in the global 'blogosphere' and in the elite western media. The second part of the chapter describes a much richer array of alternative perspectives on GMOs in

India gleaned from interviews and scholarly literature. These alternative perspectives describe political *roads not taken* on GMOs, raising the core puzzle of how the debate on GMOs in the media and in much social science literature becomes stereotyped into 'either or' choices. The chapter therefore describes a possible 'middle way' on the GMO debate in India that emphasizes public sector science, pro poor potentials and the need for better government information to farmers. The discussion also illustrates the complex causality and regional differentiation behind 'big narratives' such as the 'success' or 'failure' of Bt Cotton, 'globalization, 'rural crisis', 'organic agriculture' and 'farmer suicides' and thus illustrates the way transnational 'filters' narrow and stereotype the debate.

Chapter Three sets out the 'functional' face of transnational networks. It begins by describing the organizational terrain of groups involved in agricultural politics. The aim of this section is to show how transnational resources (especially funding) enabled a differentiation and professionalization of the field of actors involved, with nodal and regional groups mediating in the middle, all partly supported by transnational resources. The chapter examines how the anti-GMO coalition formed various symbiotic linkages or 'structural couplings' with state actors in India, with international markets for organic cotton, with media organizations, with donors, with political parties, with farmers' unions and with international academics and activists. The chapter dissects these various structural couplings between NGOs and state and market actors, analyzing the financial, personal and discursive glue that links them together.

Chapter four, which paired with chapter three explains the 'two faces' of the dissertation's title, addresses the 'romantic' face of the network, in contrast to its 'functional' linkages. It posits a romantic – materialist divide in agricultural politics and describes how the balance of power between romantic and materialist forces is affected by transnational opportunities. To do this the chapter begins with a description of existing approaches to 'political romanticism' including arguments from Carl Schmitt and Timothy Morton, and then traces an historical path through

romantic conceptions of the countryside in India derived from British colonial historiography. It then shows how in two previous cases - the Chipko movement and the anti- Narmada dam movement, those domestic activists that have sought to transnationalize the framing of issues, have done so within a 'romantic' master frame, sometimes with deleterious consequences for the groups they claim to represent. This argument about the romantic narrative is then applied to key players in the anti-GMO network and different 'varieties' of romantic discourse are isolated and analyzed. The chapter thus aims to trace an historical line of descent for romantic politics, showing how the anti-GMO network is embedded in previous struggles and discourses.

Chapter five comprises a pair-wise historical comparison of two key farmers' movements: the Shetkari Sanghatana in Maharashtra and the KRRS in Karnataka, and attempts to show how already existing 'romantic' tendencies of the KRRS' leadership under Prof. Nanjundaswamy were accentuated by that organization's growing transnational linkages in the 1990s, while the Sanghatana mainly avoided transnational contacts. The chapter attempts to find reasons why one organization went the transnational path and not the other. It does so by examining the structure and ideology of the two organizations and the affinity between the KRRS' world view and the new transnational romantic narrative about the countryside. It explains how the KRRS also contributed to and helped shape that transnational discourse. The chapter ends with a discussion of the Sanghatana's later alliance with transnational libertarian organizations, and asks whether a type of 'market romanticism' (akin to Jackie Smith's neoliberal globalizers) might also be fostered by transnational linkages, with surprisingly similar characteristics.

Chapter Six, the conclusion, extends the discussion of chapters three through five by trying to account for the conditions that make 'romantic TANS' possible, in particular a vacuum of representation in rural India that has encouraged the turn to transnational linkages. The chapter then sets out various processes and mechanisms that may be especially relevant to the romantic variant of TANS, including the prevalence of brokerage activities in the network, the elongation of

the network and the accompanying 'social distance' that this entails, the competition over authenticity in the network and the reasons why its claims are so modular and 'unrestrained' by external realities. Finally the chapter applies these processes and mechanisms to other issue areas and ends with a tabular description of how romantic TANs differ from governance oriented and grassroots TANs.

### **Why does it matter?**

The purpose of this dissertation is evaluative as well as theoretical. The aim is not merely to score points against certain bodies of academic literature, but to help answer larger questions of what TANs are and what and what they are good for. William DeMars (2005: 22) aptly summarizes the need to ask these kinds of questions when he refers to the "roads not taken" in response to globalization.

The history of the marginalization and suppression of these alternatives [such as mass movements, religious movements, governments themselves] is long and complex. But it is a matter of immediate observation to acknowledge that installing NGOs in the lead against globalization rather than any of the alternatives constitutes an historic "switching point" with profound, if not entirely foreseeable, consequences for the future.

It may be that DeMars exaggerates the potential for 'alternatives'. Determining this is part of the work of this dissertation. For example, it could be that NGOs and associated TANs fill a vacuum formed by the decline of older forms of representation, such as trade unions and mass rural movements. But whether one accepts DeMars' radical critique or not there are valid questions to ask about the legitimacy of TANs which should be of interest both to the academic and activist communities: do activist networks really represent their clients or do the various mechanisms outlined above distance them from those they claim to represent? Are traditional ways of doing politics being superseded by transnationally inclined network-politics, and if so what does that mean

for the poor? These are the normative questions that the conclusion to chapter four and the whole of chapter six address in the light of the empirical evidence.

## **Chapter Two: Transnational Activism and the Missing Alternatives on Biotechnology in India**

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part comprises an outline of the various narratives or 'memes' about GMOs in India over the last ten years, using an analysis of media content from Indian newspapers and the internet. This is intended to give a sense both of where narratives originate and which narratives have preoccupied public discussion during the course of the GMO controversy in India.

The second part of the chapter addresses and, in effect, challenges those narratives about GMOs by analyzing the complex terrain out of which the simplified narratives emerge. The aim is to illuminate the way 'transnationalized' narratives reduce complex realities to the kind of 'modular' categories described in chapter one. The 'complex' realities addressed in the second part of the chapter, and against which the simplified narratives are contrasted are the following: the regionally and temporally complex picture of the 'success' or 'failure' of Bt Cotton as opposed to a media narrative about homogeneous failure or success; the complex debate about 'farmer suicides' and its relation to an NGO narratives about those suicides; the ambiguity of the term 'organic' and its being contrasted to Bt Cotton; the question of the 'price' of seeds and Monsanto's dispute with the government of Andhra Pradesh over price and finally, the question of developmental and environmental potentials of biotechnology and the squeezing out of 'pro poor' options for the future of biotechnology by the Manichean narratives that have captured the debate.

## Introduction to Bt Cotton in India

Before looking at common media narratives about Bt Cotton, it is useful to outline some of the main features of the technology<sup>33</sup>.

Bt Cotton was made by inserting a gene from the *bacillus thuringiensis* soil bacterium into cotton hybrids. This gene enables the plant to produce the cry1Ac protein which is lethal to Lepidoptera. This means the plant has an 'in built' weapon against the 'American bollworm', *Helicoverpa armigera*, which is one of the most serious risk factors for Indian cotton farmers, especially since the cotton plant has a tendency (unusual among plants) to shed bolls when just a fraction of a plant is damaged by pests. (Deshmukh 2010: 179-80).

Advocates of biotechnology have argued that Bt Cotton has multiple advantages over the preceding regimes of pest control (Manjunath 2007: 25-26): it protects against the bollworm for the entire life of the plant (unlike pesticides) and in every part of the plant; it targets only Lepidoptera, not other potentially beneficial insects; it (should) mean fewer pesticide sprays and thus lower spending on pesticides (which also require high water use for mixing), and reduced side effects from the dissemination of external pesticides in the environment and in contact with human sprayers<sup>34</sup>, and finally, from a psychological perspective, Bt Cotton should reduce farmer tensions over bollworm, deriving from the constant need to monitor bollworms. Although it only targets the bollworm and not the 160+ other insects that threaten cotton, this insect has proven to be the greatest threat to Indian cotton farmers: the bollworm has caused enormous damage to cotton crops in India in recent times, for example (CICR 2003: 3) in Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab in the 2001-02 season where 50% of yield was destroyed just by the bollworm.

In addition, from the agronomic perspective, Bt Cotton, is a scale-neutral technology (Lipton 2007), in that small and marginal farmers (assuming they have equal access to the seeds), should benefit

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<sup>33</sup> Drawing on Herring (2011) and a recent symposium on GMOs in India (Symposium 2011)

<sup>34</sup> In the words of the CICR (2003: 7) "even if the effect of the technology is merely to substitute one pesticide for another, the net effect might be to reduce negative environmental consequences".

the same as large farmers, unlike, for example, a revolution in automated harvesting technology, which would follow economies of scale.

Bt Cotton was first introduced into India (legally) by Mayrco-Monsanto Biotech Ltd (MMB) in 2002 and then licensed to different Indian seed companies for a license fee. Since 2002, the number of hybrids in which the gene construct has been inserted has gone from 3 hybrids (MECH 12, MECH 162 and MECH 184) to nearly 800 (Herring 2011). These different hybrids, many now produced by Indian owned companies such as Nuziveedu Seeds, Rasi Seeds, Ankur Seeds and Ganga Kaveri Seeds, are each adapted for particular climatic and soil conditions in specific parts of India. Only one 'variety' (produced through the CICR, Nagpur: see below) has been produced in a Bt version. Varieties differ from hybrids in that the seeds are fertile, and can be re-sown in the following season, although they are generally less popular with farmers than the higher yielding hybrid versions. New Bt gene constructs have since been added to the initial cry1Ac version, making for 'stacked' versions of Bt Cotton, that have been designed to overcome potential resistance developing in the bollworm, resistance which has been observed in studies by senior Indian cotton researcher Prof Kranthi of the CICR.<sup>35</sup> The other measure, to prevent resistance developing is the use of 30% 'refugia' of non Bt cotton, supposed to be planted alongside the Bt cotton plants. This practice, however, is rarely followed in reality, even though packets of Bt seed always contain non Bt seed intended for planting in refugia.

The regulatory regime in India (described in an organizational diagram in chapter three) is multi layered. Applicants must pass through three layers of testing and committees in order for a hybrid to be approved. For MMB and the initial three Bt hybrids this process took approximately 7 years and cost around 1.5 million dollars (Murugkar et al 2007: 3787). For Indian firms seeking to utilise non Monsanto genes, this regulatory system may act as a disincentive, even though a handful have since purchased constructs from China or manufactured them domestically. The regulatory process was

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<sup>35</sup> Interview number 36

streamlined in 2008 by shifting to an 'event' based regulatory model (that is, the gene construct producing the cry1Ac protein is judged safe to be inserted in any hybrid or variety) rather than a 'hybrid' based model (in which each hybrid with the gene in it has to be assessed separately). However, the unilateral refusal of permission for Bt brinjal (egg plant) by agriculture minister Jairam Ramesh in 2010 (Herring 2011) shows that the approval process is still highly contested and, in comparative international perspective, quite demanding.

### **1. Analysing Narratives about GMOs in India**

The media discourse about GMOs in India has attracted the attention of at least one scholarly article. Yamaguchi, Harris and Busch (2003) focus on the period before adoption of legal Bt Cotton in 2002, so their findings concentrate on the media discussion of governance and regulatory issues that have been less dominant post adoption. They conclude that civil society actors on the one side, and government, science and industry figures on the other "were not engaged in meaningful discussion" (2002: 68) because of their opposing views on the functionality of regulatory mechanisms.

This study does not take us very far because it does not categorize the particular framings or narratives around GMOs or tabulate the sources of particular narratives. Below, is an attempt to probe deeper into the specific stories produced about GMOs with data from the years 2001 to 2010, taken from The Hindu newspaper's online archives. Unfortunately their archives do not go back further than 2001, so stories featuring the KRRS' 'Cremate Monsanto' campaign from 1998 and other controversies involving Vandana Shiva and Suman Sahai are missing from this archive. The Hindu is India's third largest circulation English language daily (Wikipedia) and was chosen mainly because its online archives are designed efficiently for thorough content searches (its rivals the

Times of India and Hindustan Times do not have this facility) and because of its relative popularity in Southern India, where most of the Bt Cotton related controversies have occurred.

The first table, below, show the total number of stories, from the national edition, that featured 'Bt Cotton' as the primary subject matter of the story, from the years 2001 to 2010.

Table 2.1. Number of stories about 'Bt Cotton'<sup>36</sup>

Year	Number of stories
2001	24
2002	23
2003	17
2004	2
2005	5
2006	22
2007	17
2008	17
2009	35
2010	41

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<sup>36</sup> All searches related to the Hindu conducted December 2010.

It should be borne in mind that these are totals for the national edition of The Hindu, and that local editions probably included more stories<sup>37</sup>, but this gives a good indication of the debate nationally and among elites in New Delhi. The years 2001 to 2003 saw a peak of controversy with the decision by the GEAC to approve commercial cultivation of Bt Cotton in March 2002. Part of the later peaking of stories is explained by the controversy over Bt egg plant (or 'brinjal') in 2009 and 2010, which was linked in most stories to the previous issues over Bt Cotton. Clearly, despite the almost universal uptake of Bt hybrids by 2010, the debate about GMOs had not died down, and despite a fallow period for stories in 2004 and 2005 was able to reemerge with new strength, and as discussed below, with very similar narratives. Another reason for the reemergence, was the rise of new civil society entrepreneurs, in particular Kishor Tiwari of the VJAS in Vidarbha, who was able to ignite (or reignite) a narrative about farmer suicides in 2006 and was especially successful at getting stories about suicide into the national press.

The next table shows the breakdown of stories about Bt Cotton into 'positive', 'negative', 'nuanced' and 'factual'. The first two categories are self explanatory, referring to stories where only one perspective is put forward, whether they are editorial pieces or reports of others' opinions. 'Nuanced' refers to stories that include both positive and negative points of view from different sources, or (much rarer in this search) stories that try to synthesize points of view to create a balanced perspective. 'Factual' refers mainly to brief reports on harvest numbers or the price of cotton, which offer no opinions about Bt Cotton per se.

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<sup>37</sup> See chapter three for a discussion of criteria by which stories move from regional to national editions.

Table 2.2. Opinions Expressed about Bt Cotton in The Hindu 2001-2010

	Positive	Negative	Neutral (balanced)	Factual
2001	7	4	2	11
2002	9	9	0	5
2003	3	11	1	2
2004	1	0	0	1
2005	1	1	1	2
2006	6	7	1	8
2007	6	7	1	3
2008	5	9	1	2
2009	7	13	3	12
2010	3	18	3	2
Totals	48	79	13	48

The table shows that negative stories outweighed positive ones, by nearly two to one over all 10 years included, with little evidence of a shift in perspective over that period. Stories that tried to include conflicting perspectives or transcend 'for or against' dichotomies were clearly in the minority and showed no sign of increasing over the ten years.

What were the sources of the positive and negative stories included in the sample? Tables 3 and 4 address this question, showing the sources for stories in The Hindu. Most of these are self explanatory and the organizations and individuals concerned will be addressed in later chapters. 'Editorial' refers to commentary from The Hindu's own editorial team or from a regular columnist.

Table 2.3. Sources of Positive Stories in order of prominence

Central Government	9
Public Agricultural Universities and institutes	8
State governments	7
The Hindu reporters	6
ISAAA (International Service for the Acquisition of Agribiotech Applications)	4
Editorial/Columnist	4
Monsanto	4
Farmers interviewed	3
Indian agricultural business associations	3
United States embassy	1
Sharad Joshi	1
Local government officials	1

Table 2.4. Sources of Negative Stories in order of prominence

VJAS (Vidarbha Jan Andolan Samiti)	11
Greenpeace	6
State Governments' spokespeople	6
Gene Campaign/Suman Sahai	5
P M Bhargava	5
Environment Minister Ramesh	5
Editorial opinion /regular columnist	5
Vandana Shiva	4
Left Farmers' Unions	4
DRMU (Dakshini Rajasthan Majdoor Union) Rajasthan	3
NGO Coalitions	3
Punjabi organic associations	3
Other academic / 'expert'	3
Planning Commission	2
Central MPs	2
DDS (Deccan Development Society)	2
Organic export associations	2
KRRS	2
Kalpavriksh	2

CSE (Centre for Science and Environment)	1
Devinder Sharma	1
Aruna Rodrigues	1
The Hindu reporter	1
Other central government	1

In these tables ‘source’ means the ultimate source of the information for the article. This takes the form of press conferences, publications, press releases, interviews, and more rarely, demonstrations or other mass events. These tables reflect an informational struggle, fought on a battlefield of rival narratives, in which the winner is the group best able to get its narrative and its memes ensconced in the public sphere.

The tables also illustrate important themes to be explored in the dissertation. Firstly, non governmental organizations and urban, transnationally active campaigners have a predominant role in disseminating negative stories about GM crops, whereas positive stories arise mainly from the Indian state at central and local level and from state academic establishments<sup>38</sup>. This casts doubt on interpretations of the dispute that (following Jackie Smith or Ruth Reitan) would interpret the conflict in terms of transnational capital versus civil society. Instead, arguments *for* Bt Cotton in the Indian media come from primarily *Indian* sources. Secondly, and related to this, is that stories come almost exclusively from professional organizations, not from farmers themselves or from mass based farmers’ organizations. In fact, none of the negative stories are sourced from interviews with farmers. This illustrates the way that India’s public sphere is organized – with very little ‘input’ from grassroots levels and an increasingly professionalized mediating layer of NGOs that serve as

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<sup>38</sup> Although the role of some central and local state officials in disseminating negative stories is also illustrated – and discussed further in chapter three when looking at alliances between NGOs and governmental actors.

information sources for the media<sup>39</sup>. The lack of full time agricultural journalists is also crucial in explaining this mediation by NGOs, as discussed further in the section on media-NGO linkages in chapter three.

What exactly are the narratives being disseminated? The following table illustrates the negative 'memes'<sup>40</sup> disseminated in the stories. The table breaks down the appearance of these memes by the year in which they were found to try and illustrate possible shifts and trends in the stories. No table is included for the positive stories because these break down very simply: of the 48 positive stories, 35 were associations of Bt Cotton with higher yields/better harvests and the other 13 mentioned higher export earnings (5 instances), higher profits for Indian biotech firms (3 instances), lower pesticide use (3 instances), and comparisons with China urging the need for Bt crops (2 instances).

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<sup>39</sup> Is there reason to suppose this is different in the non English language media? This is a crucial question unfortunately not explored in depth here, but an interview with a Telegu language journalist, discussed further in chapter three, suggested that local media use the same NGO-predominant sources as the English language media.

<sup>40</sup> Following Dawkins (1976) in which the meme is a fundamental self-replicating unit akin to a gene, which reproduces itself in and is subject to selection pressures in human media of communication just as genes reproduce themselves in and are subject to selective pressures via the media of biological phenotypes.

Table 2.5. Negative memes<sup>41</sup> about Bt Cotton in order of preponderance

Meme	2001	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	Total
Bt Crop failure		2	5		1	1	2		4	1	16
Transnational capital/Monsanto exploitation	1	5	1			1	1	1	2	2	14
Inadequate regulation	3	1	1			1	3	2		1	13
Allergies and animal deaths due to Bt cotton	1		2					2	3	2	10
Bt increases vulnerability to market forces / risks					1	2	1	1		2	7
Crop resistance failing	2		1				1	2		1	7
General / unspecified 'risks'	1	2	2						2		7
Deaths of children in Bt cotton fields									4	2	6
Bt cotton causes farmer suicides							2		1	3	6
Consumer safety (linked to Bt Brinjal)										5	5
Price too high (MRTPC dispute)			1			3					4
Harm to soil			1				1		1		3
Organic cotton better	1	1				1					3
Refugia not used by farmers										2	2
Private technology not public sector										1	1
Farmers can't keep seed									1		1

<sup>41</sup> Total adds to more than the 79 negative stories as obviously some stories contain more than one meme.

This table illustrates the main arguments used by anti-GMO campaigners against Bt Cotton<sup>42</sup>. Unfortunately the 1998-2000 period fell outside the searchable index on The Hindu's web edition. Had this period been searchable the 'Terminator gene'<sup>43</sup> meme would probably have been prominent (thanks to the KRRS' and global activism discussed in Chapter Five) and the score for Monsanto would probably have been even higher. It is noticeable that the main memes recur throughout the ten year period analyzed with no particular pattern. This suggests the relative autonomy of the memes from actual events, (for comparison, those events are illustrated on the timeline of Bt Cotton related events in appendix one). For example references to 'Bt cotton crop failure' occur just as frequently in the last three years analyzed as in the first three, despite overwhelming evidence of higher cotton yields by this later period. Similarly, stories linking Bt Cotton to farmer suicides actually occurred several years *after* the peak period of rural suicides and after the main academic discussion of causes of suicide in the mid part of the decade. This independence from 'events' or the outcome of scientific studies points to the power of media-organizational linkages to create stories that have their own self-sustaining logic. Media dependence on activists and NGOs linked to those activists means that the repertoire of memes is limited to certain modalities or 'framings' that suit the mutual interests of media and activists (see chapter three).

However there is also evidence of 'meme innovation' during the period studied. One is the 'farmer suicide' meme, that catches on in the middle of the period mainly due to advocacy by a new organization – the VJAS of Maharashtra. The second is a meme implicitly linking Bt cotton to abusive

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<sup>42</sup> This is not an exhaustive of all activist arguments about Bt Cotton. In Chapter Four we consider the more subtle socio-historical claims that these memes about Bt Cotton fit into, in a discussion of rural 'romanticism'. However, this table certainly includes the key informational claims that activists have used to try and affect public policy through court cases, video materials, press releases and published studies.

<sup>43</sup> Being the claim that Monsanto would sell seeds with an in-built mechanism to ensure that seeds could not be replanted. This was not in fact the case and arguably irrelevant to the Indian situation where mostly hybrid seeds are bought and not replanted, whether Bt or non Bt. See Herring (2009) on the origins of the Terminator meme.

labor practices in the 'Bt cotton fields' of Gujarat<sup>44</sup>. This meme is propagated by the DRMU of Gujarat, an NGO advocating for child workers. Both these cases show evidence of imitation and innovation, whereby new organizational entrepreneurs take advantage of the saliency of Bt Cotton as a symbol to advance their own agendas. This theme of organizational rivalry and imitation is explored further in chapter three.

As regards the content of the negative stories, a crucial finding from the table, is the relative absence of discussion of the core economic issues of the price of the seeds and of the private/public divide in Bt Cotton technology (just 5 mentions out of 79 negative stories). As discussed further below, these core economic issues have been largely ignored by the anti-GMO coalition, arguably to the detriment of the debate. Instead the focus of opposition has been on two core thematic areas: firstly, 'risks' of various kinds (to soil, animals, workers, 'nature') and secondly, Bt Cotton as a symbol and embodiment of the commodification of agriculture and the dangers of transnational capitalism. Neither of these core themes are susceptible to the analysis of costs and benefits: they are propounded as absolutes: for example in these stories the risks of Bt Cotton are not balanced against the risks of pesticide use or the risks associated with other forms of biotechnology as applied to pharmaceuticals, for example. Similarly, debate over the relative roles of national and transnational firms or public and private sectors in selling and developing Bt seeds is bypassed by an equation of Bt Cotton with transnational capital. In other words, the negative stories maintain a purity of attack on Bt Cotton, and avoid topics which might lead to the possibility of compromise or causal complexity.

This Manichean framing of Bt Cotton and the 'success' of memes that stress short causal chains has been discussed in chapter one, in the context of the work of Volker Heins and William DeMars. Here, we see these modalities in action: memes that originate in the discourse of NGO activists emphasize

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<sup>44</sup> In this series of stories no explicit causal connection is ever made between Bt Cotton per se and suspicious deaths of child workers but it is clear that the NGO feeding these stories to the media is using a template in which 'Bt Cotton' summons up n

clear harms (to innocent victims) and clear 'harmers' in the form of Monsanto and Bt technology. Chapter four addresses the 'big picture' behind these individual narratives/memes. There it is argued that the anti-GMO network is drawing on a background modality of expression, which the chapter generalizes as 'rural romanticism'. To what extent do the media memes in the table represent that theme? At a 'deeper' level of similarity the claims about Bt Cotton touch on the following 'romantic' meta themes:

- The big institutions of the state and the market (what Douglas and Wildavsky (1983) refer to as 'The Center') cannot be trusted.
- 'Nature' (conceived as something separate from and innocent of human beings) should not be meddled with, and when it is, it will bite back (in the form here of resistance developing against Bt cotton, crop failure assigned to technological hubris and harmful side effects to innocent animals, conceived as outweighing any gains from productivity)
- Science and scientific method is conceived as something inherently 'risky' (implicitly more risky than current practices), which feeds back into the second meta theme, that 'nature' will punish the hubris of science and technology.

These meta themes are further explored in chapter four. The existence of a larger background world view, or modality, helps explain why some individual memes, such as the 'crop failure' and 'allergies' memes persist, despite lack of empirical foundations. Of course, there are limits to this: the 'terminator gene' meme, popular in the late 1990's, does not appear in the table and the 'Bt causes suicides' meme is only cautiously used by activists<sup>45</sup>. Both these memes, unlike the vaguer allegations of crop failure, exploitation and hard to verify or disconfirm illnesses, are subject to

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<sup>45</sup> Even in the case of Kishor Tiwari and his VJAS, the 'Bt causes suicides' meme is not prominent in the organization's study on problems about cotton production in Vidarbha (VJAS 2006), although in its conclusions it calls for a ban on Bt Seeds. The VJAS nevertheless puts most of the blame for rural suicides on factors related to globalization, and Bt cotton is a useful symbol of globalization. Technocratic organizations like Suman Sahai's Gene Campaign altogether avoid this meme (interview number 87, with Suman Sahai)

public disconfirmation or (in the case of suicides) scholarly disapproval. However, as argued in chapters four and six, the organizations that follow the ‘romantic’ meta narrative will tend to keep producing memes that accord with their underlying world view; some will stick, others will be temporary, but the institutional power of the romantic meta theme ensures that like minded claims keep being produced<sup>46</sup>.

Do these memes extend beyond the world of English language Indian media? As a brief test, the table below performs a similar analysis for internet web results on the google search engine.

Table 2.6. First 100 page hits on ‘Bt Cotton and India’ search on google<sup>47</sup>, sorted by positive, negative, neutral and factual

Positive	Negative	Neutral / nuanced	Factual
29	48	6	17

Table 2.7. Sources of Positive stories on google in order of prominence

Indian business media	9
Business associations	6
Indian public research institutions	4
Academic articles	4
Monsanto	3
Economic think tanks	3

<sup>46</sup> As argued more fully in chapter six, this is where the argument of this dissertation parts company with mainstream studies of TANs, which focus on memes / frames at the expense of meta narratives.

<sup>47</sup> Search conducted July 12<sup>th</sup>-July 14th 2010.

Even more than in the Indian media, the emphasis of these positive stories on the internet is overwhelmingly about yields and increased profits, from a cotton industry, rather than farmer-centric perspective. Only two positive web pages addressed reduced pesticide use and improved health.

Table 2.8. Original Sources<sup>48</sup> of negative stories on google in order of prominence

Suman Sahai/Gene Campaign	8
Vandana Shiva	7
DDS (Deccan Development Society)	7
NGO Coalitions <sup>49</sup>	6
CSA (Centre for Sustainable Agriculture)	4
VJAS	4
Greenpeace	3
Global anti GMO sites	3
Devinder Sharma	2
Blogs	2
GRAIN	2
P. Sainath	2
Environment minister Ramesh	1
Organic produce associations	1

<sup>48</sup> Many page hits are blogs or meta-blogs so wherever possible the story was classified according to the original source, rather than ascribed to the blog.

<sup>49</sup> Such as 'South Against Genetic Engineering' (SAGE). Based on interviews, these coalitions appear to be artifacts either of DDS or CSA, based in Hyderabad, two 'rival' NGOs with overlapping networks of smaller NGOs working with them, as described in chapter three.

These tables show similar results to those looking at the Indian media. One significant difference, as might be expected, is the even greater prominence of NGOs and NGO activists in the google list, and the relatively lesser role of Indian government officials. Some of the NGOs score higher on the google list than the Indian media list, and this accords with analysis from field interviews: the DDS of Hyderabad for example has adopted an international profile, with video materials (discussed in chapter four) aimed at a mainly global audience. Vandana Shiva and Suman Sahai have also cultivated mainly global connections, via frequent speaking engagements. Organizations such as GRAIN and the CSA of Hyderabad, as discussed in chapter three, have tended more to cultivate domestic, governmental linkages.

Table 2.9. Negative ‘memes’ about Bt Cotton from google search

Crop failure	12
Animal deaths due to eating Bt cotton	7
Suicides related to Bt cotton	6
Resistance developing in pests	4
Regulatory laxness	4
Monsanto exploiting farmers	3
Harm to soil from using Bt	2
Unfavorably compared to organic crops	2
General risks	2

Compared with the stories in the The Hindu, the noticeable difference here is the prominence of stories about animal deaths due to ingestion of Bt Cotton. It could be that this meme (appealing to animal-welfare conscious northern publics) has greater purchase globally. Otherwise the story lines are similar to those appearing in The Hindu, this time with no reference at all to issues of price or issues of public/private ownership of the technology. Given that the google stories are mostly collected through blogs and global activist meta-news sites this lack of reference to specifically Indian factors is not surprising.

## **2. Gauging the Impact of activism**

Has the predominance of certain memes had an impact on public policy in India? What are the ways in which activist originated ideas and campaigns have affected the introduction of GM crops in India? One immediate way to measure the impact of NGO / activist originated memes is to look at parliamentary questions about Bt Cotton in India's Lok Sabha. The following table draws on the Lok Sabha's online search engine to highlight questions asked about Bt Cotton by members of parliament . Some of these questions seem to echo the negative memes seen in The Hindu and on the internet and which were sourced mainly from NGO-activists.

Table 2.10. Lok Sabha Questions tabled on topic of Bt Cotton seeming to draw on activist/NGO claims

Member of Lok Sabha	Focus of question	Date <sup>50</sup>
Vijay Krishna	MNC's 'patenting' indigenous seeds/exploiting farmers	25.08.04
	Andhra Pradesh ban on 3 Bt hybrids <sup>51</sup>	01.08.05
Iqbal Ahmed Saradgi; S.R.Rao	'Failure' of Bt in South India	06.03.06
Iqbal Ahmed Saradgi	Karnataka 'huge losses' due to Bt according to NGOs	07.08.06
Shivaji Patil; A.V.Adsul	Bt harming soil	07.08.06
Shivaji Patil	Failure of Bt in Vidarbha	05.03.07
Vinod Boianapalli	Failure of Bt in Vidarbha and Andhra Pradesh	20.08.07
C.K Chandrappan, S.S.Reddy	Cattle deaths due to Bt Cotton	27.08.07
Hitten Barman, K.S.S.Rao	Bt cotton harming traditional 'seed exchanging' / general risks	26.11.07
Ranen Barman	MNC's selling 'fake' seeds	21.04.08

It should be noted that the Government of India / ministerial replies to these questions were all highly detailed rebuttals of the empirical premises of the criticisms. It should also be pointed out that during the same period the Lok Sabha search engine turned up an equivalent number of Bt

<sup>50</sup> The Lok Sabha's online indexing system does not extend back beyond 2004 and the survey here was conducted in 2009 so this is an incomplete survey.

<sup>51</sup> This is not strictly an 'activist' or NGO originated question, although the ban on three Bt hybrids was regarded as the NGO coalition's greatest success in Andhra Pradesh in 2005.

Cotton related questions (nine), which were mainly factual in nature (asking about the number of Bt hybrids on the market) or positively encouraging the government to subsidise Bt cotton seeds or push for more public sector involvement in the production of Bt hybrids and Bt varieties. Nevertheless, this table provides some evidence that activist generated memes and claims have infiltrated the Indian legislature and that for some legislators, at least, NGOs are primary sources for information about Bt Cotton.

The above discussion has established the prominence in the public sphere of certain memes and claims about Bt Cotton. But what real world effects have activist originated claims had on public policy? This counterfactual (what would have happened in the absence of activism?) is much harder to prove empirically, but from field interviews and secondary literature the following conclusions can be cautiously drawn.

Interviews with two former members of India's GEAC – the chief regulatory body for biotechnology approvals, confirm that activist claims have impacted decision making in this body. Professor Anand Kumar<sup>52</sup> claimed that NGOs had pushed India into what he described as an overly cautious approach to introducing new hybrids, as opposed to the 'gene construct based' (rather than hybrid based) regulatory structure that he argued would have made more sense, with no detriment to safety. Professor A.R.Reddy<sup>53</sup> claimed that NGO campaigns caused anxiety in the GEAC and that he anticipated "mindboggling" opposition to food crops such as Bt eggplant and Bt rice. He argued that due to activist pressure the GEAC had been forced to include "too many" non geneticists on its decision making panel, trying to incorporate socio-economic factors into decision making that he argued were quite separate from the Bt technology itself.

Dr Khadi, director of the Central Institute for Cotton Research (CICR) in Nagpur, while concurring with these GEAC officials<sup>54</sup>, singled out the role of the public interest litigation against Bt Cotton,

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<sup>52</sup> Interview number 52

<sup>53</sup> Interview number 49

<sup>54</sup> Interview number 35

orchestrated by activist Aruna Rodrigues. He argued that this litigation had prevented the timely introduction of at least 35 Bt hybrids in the 2002-2005 period, some of which would have been better adapted to Indian conditions than the three hybrids originally marketed by MMB. Here is one instance of the paradoxical nature of activism: by influencing policy toward precaution it disproportionately favored MMB'S products over those marketed by Indian owned firms, because the higher the regulatory hurdles, the more the larger firm is favored in the regulatory process<sup>55</sup> with more information about the variety of agronomic conditions, therefore arguably contributing to some of the early 'failure' stories that applied to the Monsanto hybrids (see discussion below on causes of 'failure').

A representative of Nuzivedu Seeds<sup>56</sup>, a major rival to MMB, argued on similar lines to Dr Khadi, about the paradoxical 'empowering' of MMB involved in higher regulatory hurdles. He also made the related claim that delayed permission (in the case he mentioned, for Bt 2 hybrids) simply led to more illegal seeds on the market, and that illegal seeds were more likely to be spurious, resulting in more stories of 'Bt crop failure'.

No doubt activists would contest this kind of analysis, since their complaints about GM crops are posed at a more fundamental level and they could justifiably claim that 'paradoxical' side effects of activism were tolerable in a larger war against corporate power or technocratic hegemony. However, several interviewees raised larger concerns about the impact of NGO claims on discussion in the public sphere about biotechnology, concerns that relate to the questions raised from the discussion of media memes above.

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<sup>55</sup> For an economic analysis of this phenomenon, whereby high regulatory hurdles give a 'first mover advantage' to the biggest player see Murugkar et al 2007. Even Monsanto's vice president in India, Mr Rak Ketkar (Interview number 26) brought up this point in relation to Vandana Shiva's campaigning, arguing that it was the "small players" who were most hurt by the campaigns and that "up to three years" had been lost in "unnecessary trials" of every Bt hybrid.

<sup>56</sup> Interview number 33

Professor N. Raghuram of the School of Biotechnology at Indrapastha University, for example<sup>57</sup>, has undertaken speaking engagements all over India, arguing that the discussion about GM crops in India has been distorted by a “proxy war between the USA and EU in Indian civil society”, in which neither model was appropriate for India’s particular developmental needs. He argues that the modes of activism that NGOs have undertaken are deliberately opaque to public participation, whether it be court cases, or the (semi-covert) strategy of playing state governments against the central government over supposedly illegal field trials of GM crops. In all this, the ‘middle way’ of active public sector involvement in biotechnology research and priorities gets sidelined. Various other public sector biotechnologists interviewed argued along similar lines, expressing feelings of frustration about their inability to enter the public discussion about GM crops<sup>58</sup>. As Lipton, (2007: 11) strongly puts it, public sector biotechnologists get drawn into “a boring struggle against pseudo environmentalist PR” rather than making the case for public sector research<sup>59</sup>.

These kinds of criticisms can even be found in some parts of the non governmental sector, in NGOs that have taken a more technical orientation to agricultural issues rather than an advocacy position. At the Centre for Environmental Concerns (CEC), Hyderabad, for example, the director, Mr Gopal<sup>60</sup>, argued that the debate over Bt Cotton had generated “more heat than light” and that NGOs had entered into a position of “permanent critique” that was not useful to farmers<sup>61</sup>. This criticism is shared even by those critical of Monsanto and of what they see as over enthusiasm about the new technologies such as Dr Kranthi of the CICR, whose work has been selectively quoted by NGO activists themselves. He argued<sup>62</sup> that NGOs were “mainly spreading confusion” about what he thought were the multi causal origins of Bt cotton’s ‘success’ or ‘failure’ (see below). In his capacity

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<sup>57</sup> Interview/Lecture number 55.c

<sup>58</sup> For example a brief roundtable discussion the author had with scientists at the University of Agricultural Science, Bangalore: Interview number 87.

<sup>59</sup> Pray and Naseem (2007: 22) make the similar point that NGOs working *with* public sector scientists could be making a strong case for pro poor research, instead they are working against each other.

<sup>60</sup> Interview number 34

<sup>61</sup> See also his specific criticisms of the DDS, which he once directed, in chapter three.

<sup>62</sup> Interview number 36

as an active researcher trying to produce Bt cotton varieties (rather than hybrids) in the public sector he argued that the debate was being directed away from issues about the *management* of the technology toward essentialist questions about the technology itself.

Finally, one crucial impact of the Bt Cotton debate has been its legacy in the current debate about Bt brinjal (eggplant) in India. As Herring (2011) argues, the organizational infrastructure and memes of the anti- Bt Cotton coalition – what Herring refers to as “the residue of cotton politics” (3) have proven more effective when applied to Bt brinjal (in achieving a ban on the product), because of the even more marginal political influence that small brinjal farmers have on policy decisions.

Table 11 summarizes some of the most salient points about the impact of activist memes on policy and on the context for debate about policy. Crucially these impacts should be considered in terms of the *potential* debates that are precluded when certain narratives dominate public discussion as well as in terms of the immediate consequences on policy.

Table 2.11. Summary of impacts<sup>63</sup> of activism on GMO related policy and debate

Direct impacts	Indirect consequences
Pressure on regulatory apparatus to take precautionary approach, via court cases and media campaigns	Delays in legalization of larger numbers of Bt hybrids; advantage to Monsanto over smaller Indian competitors when regulatory hurdles higher; increase in illegal seed meaning higher percentage of 'spurious' seed sold leading to crop failures;
Dominance of activist memes in the public sphere (as illustrated above)	Precludes debate about a. price of seeds. b. the public/private role in research and marketing. c. the government's role in <i>managing</i> the new technologies. Makes it harder for public sector scientists to make their case for pro poor biotech research. Has impacted decisions down the road on Bt Brinjal.

In the remainder of this chapter the activist memes/narratives about Bt Cotton are examined in the context of the complex realities of Bt Cotton, literally, 'on the ground'. After summarizing field interviews with groups of cotton farmers themselves, four narratives about Bt Cotton are examined: firstly the fundamental claim that the crop 'failed', increasing the poverty of small farmers and their vulnerability to market forces; secondly the related linkage of Bt Cotton and farmer suicides; thirdly the claim that Bt Cotton is the antithesis of ecological or organic farming and fourthly the 'non meme' of price and how debate and action over pricing of seeds took place outside the circuit of

<sup>63</sup> Of course, this summary omits some of the 'positive' consequences that activist debate may have promulgated, and which even critics of those activists in India acknowledge. For example, NGO critics such as Mr Gopal of CEC Hyderabad admit that NGO memes played a role in moderating Monsanto's initially exaggerated advertising claims about Bt Cotton. But others suggested that this mutual critique constituted a kind of closed circuit between NGO and corporation and did not actually further the debate.

activist memes . In the first three cases a homogenizing and monocausal narrative is ‘confronted’ with a complex reality. This could be seen as a rather facile exercise in ‘falsifying’ a set of Manichean claims that perhaps even their proponents would accept are meant to attract attention to a more fundamental cause. But the aim of the below discussion is not just falsification: rather, each section points to *possibilities* unrealized in the debate over GM crops and to the way complex realities of rural ‘crisis’ and poverty get subsumed into transnational meta narratives. As chapter six suggests, the irony is that the causes of rural crisis are often also the enablers of this ‘take over’ by professional mediators.

As a final pointer to the debates which the Bt Cotton controversy precludes the chapter ends with an alternative set of pragmatic cum utopian ‘demands’ that incorporate GM crops into a pro poor agenda for agriculture.

### **What do Farmers say?**

I conducted three field trips to speak with farmers in Andhra Pradesh, with translators (as I do not speak Telegu). As pointed out in chapter six there are reasons to be skeptical of information gleaned from brief visits to cotton farmers, as opposed to immersive ethnographic work<sup>64</sup>. Farmers quite openly discussed how they gave different answers to different audiences, and found this a source of amusement.<sup>65</sup> On the first field trip, in the vicinity of Warangal, AP, in the company of an anti GMO activist, farmers were much more likely to speak negatively about Bt Cotton, but only after the activist had raised the issue, even prompting them to ascribe illnesses or allergies to Bt. Although they did not know him personally, they were surely able to pick up hints about his own attitudes. Conversely, in Guntur, AP, in the presence of a wealthy landowner (who was also an input dealer)

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<sup>64</sup> Which unfortunately would have been unwise given visa restrictions (lack of research visa).

<sup>65</sup> Interview number 24 with farmers near Warangal.

local farmers had nothing but praise for the impact of Bt Cotton<sup>66</sup>. With a ‘neutral’ research assistant, known as distant kin to farmers in Sidupuram, AP, farmers were neither particularly enthusiastic nor critical of Bt.

Some farmers in the group interviewed near Warangal spontaneously raised issues of ‘sovereignty’ and ‘foreigners’ damaging their way of life, complaining about the “a/c” [air conditioned] way of life that elites led in Warangal<sup>67</sup> and its distance from real farmers. Farmers here (four interviewed individually off the side of the road, then a group of about 12 together in a hamlet), were farming on non irrigated land, and were clearly willing, with just a little prompting from the activist translator, to blame Bt cotton for various different problems, including the ‘wilt’ of leaves, asthmatic attacks in farmers and ‘poisoning’ of the soil by something in the plant, none of which could be plausibly assigned to Bt from a biological standpoint. Often, when pushed by the activist, they claimed to have heard ‘stories’ about sheep or cattle deaths, although tellingly, one farmer claimed that it was rare for sheep to be allowed to graze on cotton fields, so he doubted the stories (see chapter three). It should also be stressed that in many of these areas support for the Naxalite rebels runs high – with monuments to Naxalite martyrs in many villages, so that the activist’s linking of Bt to external/foreign interventions or colonialism (given the Naxalites’ anti imperialist rhetoric) would have extra resonance here.

In Sidupuram, a village 12 km from Warangal<sup>68</sup>, where farmers were fortunate to be beneficiaries of an Australian irrigation scheme, Bt Cotton was seen more positively, with farmers claiming that Bt had meant fewer costs for pesticide use and higher yields. Interestingly some of the problems assigned to Bt cotton in the first group of farmers in Warangal, including respiratory problems and ‘poisoned’ soil, were here ascribed to previous high levels of pesticide use. Not all farmers here were

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<sup>66</sup> Interviews number 12 b

<sup>67</sup> That the medium sized town of Warangal is taken by farmers to represent elite, metropolitan values and decadent luxury reveals the sheer social distance between small cotton farmers and the transnational arena in which NGOs flourish.

<sup>68</sup> Interview number 27

enthusiastic about Bt Cotton, although the minority (two out of ten farmers interviewed individually or collectively) who were less enthused saw it as making no difference rather than being harmful.

Obviously the agronomic surveys described below give a more objective picture of the success or failure of Bt Cotton, but even from these brief field interviews with farmers relevant sociology of knowledge insights emerged: that farmers' responses are highly attuned to their interlocutors; that rural India is rife with rumors and hearsay claims about the causes of bad outcomes, which could easily be assigned by an interlocutor to an external influence; and that whether farmers were basically in a good or bad socio-economic situation probably makes a big difference as to whether an external factor like Bt Cotton can be framed by interlocutors as the cause of problems (with the non irrigated farmers near Warangal easily, with the irrigated farmers in Sidupuram less so). This ease with which failures and problems can easily be assigned to available causes obviously applies even more at higher levels of civil society, removed from rural realities, and this is explored in the next section concerned with Bt Cotton 'failure'.

### **'Failure' of Bt Cotton?**

As described above in the media analyses, google searches and parliamentary questions the most popular meme about Bt Cotton in the last ten years has been the claim of 'failure'. For example the titles of several Deccan Development Society (DDS) video documentaries talk of "Bt Cotton in Andhra Pradesh: A Three Year Fraud" and "Bt Cotton: A Disaster in Search of Success". In addition activists have produced several studies since the early years of Bt Cotton adoption showing 'failure' of the crop<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>69</sup> Studies from four of the most prominent activist organizations are Shiva and Jaffri (2003); Qayam and Sakkhari (2006); VJAS (2006); Sahai and Rahman (2003) and GRAIN (2004), representing the survey work of Shiva's RSFTE, the DDS, the VJAS, Gene Campaign and GRAIN.

Most NGO originated survey claims, however, are based on opaque research methodologies and small sample sizes<sup>70</sup>, however, there is one interesting exception in the form of a very detailed analysis of cotton production by the Centre for Science and Environment in Delhi (CSE 2006), which acknowledges gains in yield and profits for farmers in various statistical tables, but strains in its editorializing of these statistics to link B Cotton with broader themes of crisis in the cotton industry connected to low tariffs and high US cotton subsidies. The CSE, however, is noticeably not part of the main anti GMO networks in India, and like Oxfam UK in the late 1990's, its more nuanced analysis has made it the object of criticism by other activist groups (see discussion in chapter three).

The defenders of Bt Cotton point to all-India statistics showing very strong gains after Bt adoption. For example, India's Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry (ASSOCHAM, 2007) conducted a 6,000 farmer study of Bt and non Bt farmers in nine cotton growing states finding that 93% of Bt farmers were satisfied with the performance of the crop, that net revenue increases (compared to non Bt Cotton) were 7757 Rs per acre, taking into account higher yields (50% higher than non Bt) and reduction in pesticide use (37% lower than conventional cotton). Vasant Gandhi's (2006) study of nearly 700 Bt and non Bt cotton farmers in four states backs up this study, finding that overall Bt Cotton produced 80-90% higher profits for farmers when taking into account yields, input costs, and reduced pesticide sprayings, with farmers satisfied with Bt Cotton and only unhappy with the high cost of the seed at the time of the survey. Crucially higher yields applied roughly equally to both irrigated and rain fed conditions (around two thirds of cotton farmers farm in rain fed conditions in India). Studies by Narayanamoorthy and Kalamikar (2006) for Vidarbha in Maharashtra (supposedly the most crisis hit part of the cotton belt) and Peshin et al (2007) for Punjab also find significant

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<sup>70</sup> No clear research methodologies are made available for the widely cited DDS study for example. Chapters three and six explore the problems of studies based on villages where organizations are working or might be working in the future, leading to a clear conflict of interest, with low paid NGO volunteers inclined to harmonize their findings with those of NGO leaders, for obvious career oriented reasons. But basic methodological problems exist with all these NGO studies, (IFPRI, 2008: 22), apart from perverse incentives. Most obviously, NGO studies select small samples in those (few) areas where Bt cotton was initially unsuccessful, for reasons described in this chapter. They then unjustifiably generalize these local findings to the whole of India.

gains in yield which outweigh marginal increases in costs of seed. Most of these studies were conducted before the 2005 court case in AP which led to a sharp price cut for MMB's Bt seeds, so the cost part of these equations has probably been lower since the 2006 season. All these studies, in contrast to NGO studies were conducted using random sampling techniques and in most of the cited studies included both irrigated and rain fed farmers, farmers on different types of soil (black and red soils), and different hybrids of cotton (Bt and non Bt).

On the macro level, Government of India statistics (Government of India, 2008) confirm that cotton has experienced relatively much higher gains in productivity over rival crops since the introduction of Bt technology<sup>71</sup>. The below table reproduces some telling statistics from that survey (Government of India: 161)

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<sup>71</sup> The report itself suggests that Bt Cotton is the key variable in explaining increased yields (Government of India 2008: 161).

Table 2.12. Rates of growth in yield and production for major crops in India

	rice	wheat	pulses	foodgrains	cotton	oilseeds	sugarcane
Growth in production (%)							
1989-2007	1.17	1.90	-0.03	1.18	2.04	1.25	1.13
1992-1997	1.73	3.60	0.66	1.88	4.88	3.57	3.74
1997-2002	1.13	1.26	-2.52	0.67	-5.79	-4.68	1.23
2002-2006	1.75	0.42	3.27	1.61	<b>20.22</b>	9.81	-1.23
Growth in yield (%)							
1989-2007	1.02	1.16	0.32	1.43	1.17	1.24	-0.04
1992-1997	1.27	2.06	1.01	2.05	0.77	2.96	1.14
1997-2002	0.75	1.41	-0.76	1.23	4.56	-1.38	-0.53
2002-2006	2.10	-0.66	1.25	1.09	<b>18.48</b>	4.11	0.36

The figures in bold type show cotton outperforming other crops and outperforming its own figures from before the legalization of Bt Cotton in 2002. Cotton appears to be an exception in a time of relative agricultural stagnation in India. The same report shows a reduction in pesticide use (for which cotton farmers are the largest users) from 72,000 tonnes in 1991-92 to 38,000 tonnes in 2006-07, seemingly concurring with Gandhi's (2006: 11) finding that pesticide sprayings per season had been reduced by about 30% on Bt Cotton fields. Ramaswani and Pray (2007) additionally argue that the financial gains from these increased yields have accrued more to farmers than to seed companies (and initially that means MMB), in the ratio of two thirds to one third, so that the narrative of 'exploitation' cannot be maintained.

So what are the grounds for claims about Bt Cotton ‘failure’? There are two issues here, which should not be confused. The first, and more straightforward concerns problems with initial versions of Bt, in MMB’s first three hybrids. The second concerns *regional differentiation* in the general success of cotton farmers in India. This regional differentiation accounts for the particular problems facing cotton farmers in those areas where Bt Cotton is claimed, by organizations like the VJAS, to be a failure, but there is little evidence, other than some more speculative arguments cited below, that these regional factors would disproportionately affect the outcome of using Bt seeds.

To address the relatively simple question, of why Bt Cotton may sometimes have ‘failed’ in its early years there is a wide range of secondary literature, especially a series of articles published in India’s premier social science journal, *Economic and Political Weekly* (Naik et al, 2003; Shourie David et al 2002; Narayanamoorthy and Kalamikar 2006). These articles point to problems with the initial germplasm, confined to just three hybrids. In some areas and some soils, these hybrids may have been inappropriate: the studies point to ‘Bunny’ and ‘Brahma’ hybrids as showing better yields (although Naik et al suggest the difference were not great). Ironically, it was the very severity of the regulatory regime which caused the low number of hybrids at the outset, despite NGO claims, especially from Suman Sahai, that poor regulation was leading to ‘failure’. This problem has since been resolved by the flood of new Bt hybrids available, to the extent that there may now be too many, rather than too few hybrids (see discussion below).

On these issues Dr Kranthi of the CICR in Nagpur is an important voice, often cited by activists as an opponent of Bt Cotton. But in interview he was keen to stress that his criticisms concerned the ‘management’ of the crop not the technology per se<sup>72</sup>. He argued that the wrong ‘grandparent’ hybrid for the initial Bt hybrids (cocker 312) had been chosen, which was inappropriate for Indian conditions, with only one picking per harvest (better suited for American machine picking systems)

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<sup>72</sup> He has been personally involved in producing Bt varieties available through the public sector (as opposed to hybrids) although uptake and distribution of these varieties has been very limited so far. On NGOs he argued that they were “mainly spreading confusion” and singled out their “nonsensical” claims about animal deaths in relation to ingestion of Bt cotton. (Interview number 36).

and with fibre lengths that were too short and too variable. Better agronomic results in recent years had been due to the more appropriate 'Bunny' hybrid being used for the Bt gene construct and to changes in seed treatment and insecticides that were separate from Bt technology.<sup>73</sup> Kranthi linked these poor initial choices with the general failure of public sector science in India to get its voice heard and to poor synergies between farmers and scientists in terms of information exchange.

The more complex question concerns regional differences in cotton farming and whether the problems of regions specifically affected the performance of Bt Cotton. The relatively faster uptake and greater gains in yield in Gujarat, as opposed to Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka is one of the key regional differences borne out by the literature. Shah's (2007) study of Bt cotton in Gujarat argues that high densities of social networks linking seed merchants, farmers, cotton agents and a wealthy transnational diaspora mark Gujarat out from other cotton growing areas<sup>74</sup>. These networks assisted in the dissemination of the original 'illegal' varieties of Bt Cotton – Navbharat seeds – and continued to give farmers confidence in the quality of seeds provided them by seed merchants after legalization in 2002<sup>75</sup>. In sharp contrast, as numerous interviewees in Maharashtra observed, these tight socio-economic networks based around caste solidarity between farmers and merchants are lacking in the poorest cotton producing area of Maharashtra – Vidarbha. This is the region where Kishor Tiwari's VJAS has been able to establish itself as a global witness to the farmer suicide crisis, caused, according to him, primarily by the WTO and Monsanto.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Other interviewees questioned Kranthi here, arguing that cotton has seen exceptional success compared to other crops such as chick peas that had also experienced similar new seed treatments.

<sup>74</sup> Shah also points to the 'dark side' of the success implied by Gujarat's high social capital: its efficient exploitation of low paid (often adivasi) labor to engage in cross pollination of cotton seeds and produce stably performing hybrids. However, her essay's implicit linking of the Bt technology with this political economy of exploited labor is strained, and resembles the CSE's ambivalent assessment of Bt Cotton described above. These authors, despite their nuanced analyses of the contextual political economy of cotton production, seem unwilling to 'give up' Bt technology as a talisman of exploitation, but in doing so they miss the value of a real critique, which should be to point to the potentially utopian (but hitherto suppressed) potentialities of a given technology.

<sup>75</sup> Legalization that was abetted and pushed for by protests in Gujarat.

<sup>76</sup> Interview number 42

In interview<sup>77</sup> Vivek Deshpande, editor of the Indian Express in Nagpur, Maharashtra argued that activists (aiming in particular at Kishor Tiwari of the VJAS whom he has often criticized in print) had missed the “regionally specific complexes” that had determined the success or failure of cotton farming. For Deshpande the ‘theatrical’ and ‘symbolic’ claims made by activists involved in the anti-GMO network distract from less dramaturgically salient factors such as land fragmentation (the generational diminution of average landholding size from around ten to a much less efficient three acres over three decades), lack of irrigation ponds, poor water conservation strategies, locally salient informational problems with newer cotton farmers trying to enter the market for a cash crop, comparatively poor economic networks in Maharashtra as opposed to neighboring Gujarat, and local government’s tendency to build agricultural strategy around vote banks rather than infrastructure.

Other interviewees were at pains to point regional factors that long *preceded* either WTO membership or the introduction of Bt Cotton. Taking the very long view, eminent sociologist D.N.Dhanagare, argued in interview that the regional problems of Vidarbha and the Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh (the other chief ‘hot spot’ for activist claims of Bt induced failure) date back to the feudal social relations and subsistence agriculture prevalent in those regions for most of the last 200 years, as opposed to the histories of migration, commercial agriculture and diasporic remittances that created entrepreneurial cultures in Gujarat and Punjab<sup>78</sup>. For Dhanagare, debt and ‘crisis’ in these regions are not recent phenomena but long term legacies. Mohanty (2009) argues along similar lines, for long term cleavages inside Maharashtra between politically well connected and ethnically united sugar and commercial farmers in the west, near urban Mumbai, and the neglected east (the cotton region) where caste and ethnic divisions prevented a unified movement of agriculturalists.

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<sup>77</sup> Interview number 44

<sup>78</sup> Interview number 62

Some former Shetkari Sanghatana leaders and advisors, Pradeep Apta, Vijay Hardikar and Chandrakant Wankhade<sup>79</sup> pointed to more recent political economic factors that have marred the Vidarbha region's attempts to benefit from new technologies. These commentators were mostly academics or journalists who had formerly been involved in farmers' movements (see chapter five) in the 1980's and early 90's. They were not involved in the anti-GMO network. They were mostly positive about the role Bt Cotton had played in these regions, and while some were critical of MMB's advertising campaigns they saw the Bt issue as a minor one in relation to these underlying systemic and political problems. Many of their comments bore a similarity to the comments of experts<sup>80</sup> on the area of Andhra Pradesh around Warangal, which has been the other geographical focus of negative claims about Bt Cotton (although crucially these claims do not talk about 'failure' as *local* failure). The following list attempts to summarize the comments made in these interviews in the form of a socio-economic overview of what has happened to these cotton growing areas over the last twenty or thirty years:

- Vidarbha and the Warangal area of Andhra Pradesh were never fully integrated into commercial networks, due to long term historical legacies (persistent feudal and semi feudal systems) in these areas.
- With the gradual collapse of the reciprocal 'village system' (for example non monetary exchanges of labor and product), the monetization of working relationships and then, crucially the 'withdrawal of the state' (agricultural extension, state seed companies and minimum support prices) in the 1990's period of economic reform<sup>81</sup> these regions were comparatively hardest hit.
- The reason for this comparative failure was that small cotton farmers did not have the social networks necessary to thrive under the new conditions. Interviewees

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<sup>79</sup> Interviews number 65, 67 and 82

<sup>80</sup> Venkateshwali, Telengana independence activist and academic, interview number 79 and Narasinha Reddy, agricultural correspondent of Telegu language newspaper Eenadu, interview number 5.

<sup>81</sup> See the discussion in Chapter six of the sociological 'background' for a fuller overview of this analysis.

spoke of continual conflict between farmers, input dealers<sup>82</sup>, moneylenders and cotton mills, in which the economic and political power lay with the dealers, moneylenders and mills. This conflict means low information, and poor choices, for example, about when to spray crops with pesticide (farmers may have over sprayed Bt crops due to advice founded on zero sum relations with pesticide dealers) and about the quality of Bt seeds (especially when 'illegal'). It also means inadequate feedback from farmers to seed merchants about which seed varieties/hybrids worked best in which conditions – exactly the kind of feedback that helped 'illegal' Bt Cotton thrive in Gujarat.

- State institutions should have stepped in to substitute for the lack of networks in these regions, providing information, consolidating landholdings (a kind of reverse land reform), providing institutionalized credit and most crucially for cotton farmers, irrigation.

These arguments are supported by Deshmukh (2010), who argues that in Eastern Maharashtra specifically, there is a systematic political preference for cotton mills over cotton farmers, which leads to inadequate procurement of cotton by the state procurement agency, 'cheating' of farmers in the form of bad 'grading' of the quality of their cotton, and most importantly at the national level (188-89) no attempt to prioritize cotton as an export crop<sup>83</sup> by state or federal government promotion of integration between farmers and actors further up the production chain.

The most detailed survey, specifically on the relation of Bt Cotton and rural crisis, comprising a meta analysis of published and unpublished data from 2003 to 2008, by the International Food Policy

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<sup>82</sup> For example Reddy described how cotton buyers and input dealers in Warangal would collude to keep prices paid for cotton down at harvest and prices of inputs high during sowing. Frequently moneylenders and input dealers were the same people, giving them opportunities to drive unfavorable deals with farmers, for example hiking interest rates on loans to buy pesticides during particularly bad outbreaks of pests. These practices appear to be far less common in Gujarat where caste solidarity between farmers and dealers insures fewer zero sum struggles.

<sup>83</sup> Cotton is not on the agriculture ministry's list of 10 export crops called the 'Preference List', where growers and processors are encouraged, through incentives to merge or cooperate. The list includes floriculture, wheat, coarse grains, processed foods, spices, horticulture, cashew, oil seeds, rice and sugar.

Research Institute (IFPRI, 2008) concurs on the importance of context for 'success' or 'failure'. The four contextual factors this report highlights (IFPRI 2008: 15-20) can be summarized below:

1. 'Spurious' seeds have been responsible for crop failure, especially in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, due to the regional issues of low social capital discussed above and due to poor government regulation of hybrids – from too few hybrids initially to too many by 2007 (135 on the market). Too few meant farmers turned to illegal seeds claimed to suit local conditions better; too many meant farmers (in low social capital regions) were dependent on seed dealers for information regarding which to use. Similarly, Stone (2007) in a widely cited piece, describes the confusion facing farmers about which seeds to plant, a situation he universalizes to one of 'de-skilling' brought about by new technologies; his research, based in one of the least successful cotton growing regions in Andhra Pradesh could be seen as supporting the 'regional complexes' argument expounded in this chapter and is clearly not specific to Bt technology per se.
2. The decline of agricultural extension services in rural India has meant that "seed and fertilizer company agents have been the sole interface between the technology and the farmers" (IFPRI: 15). Where good networks exist this has not been a problem, where they do not it can mean farmers being exploited by dealers.
3. This same lack of information and the perverse incentives of dealers (who usually sell both seed and pesticides) have led to excessive spraying regimes, thus impacting the financial gains that Bt Cotton should have entailed.
4. No central agency has gathered information on Bt Cotton and its various hybrids and used that information to disseminate nuanced instructions to farmers.

However, none of the above analysis backs up the claim that Bt Cotton systematically 'failed' or that its failures particularly hurt certain poorer regions most. The only evidence for that proposition would be that strong social networks assist with the introduction of any new technology, and that

poorer regions lack those networks of trust between dealers and growers. New technology may then have provided further opportunities for information-exploitation, as in the example of dealers telling farmers to keep using more pesticides even with Bt seeds. On the other hand however, with the pesticide 'internalized' to the seed, the opportunity for dealers to charge exploitative prices for pesticides during a bollworm outbreak should be reduced. The agronomic studies cited above, also seem to confirm that gains from Bt Cotton were neutral in terms of size of farm and whether farms were irrigated or non irrigated.

Activists and NGOs campaigning against Bt cotton (the VJAS in Vidarbha or the DDS in Andhra Pradesh) do not often raise these kinds of regional/structural issues, instead preferring to emphasize the technology itself, Monsanto's 'lies' and the 'WTO regime' which they were keen to associate with Bt cotton. In the words of an Indian academic otherwise sympathetic to the anti GMO case<sup>84</sup>, Bt Cotton had become a 'red flag to a bull' for the activist community and parts of the Left. This matters because the structural issues, such as the lack of integration between growers and processors of cotton and the relative government neglect of cotton exports deserve more public discussion. It is doubtful that Bt cotton can be used as a suitable 'wedge' issue to get these deeper problems on the agenda; it is not a suitable symbol because cotton farmers' problems, as described above, are problems of 'relations' of production, to use Marx's phrase, rather than technologies of production. Even when Bt Cotton/Monsanto focused campaigns attract attention to the crisis in cotton farming, therefore, they do so in a romantic modality (chapter four) that obscures rather than reveals the real problems.

### **Farmer suicides and Bt Cotton**

As seen above in the media analysis, 'farmer suicides' have been explicitly and implicitly linked to Bt Cotton technology and to Monsanto. Most directly Vandana Shiva, who had promulgated the

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<sup>84</sup> Interview number 72 with Prof A R Vasavi.

‘suicide and globalization’ theme in the 1990’s (Shiva and Jafri, 1998) explicitly connected suicide among farmers to Monsanto’s Bt Cotton in the following decade (Shiva, 2004). Delhi activist Devinder Sharma has also made the connection, arguing revealingly in interview that “multi causal explanations” of farmer suicide “are bunk”.<sup>85</sup>

From around 2004 onwards the main actor linking Bt Cotton and suicides has been Kishor Tiwari of Vidarbha’s VJAS, an organization he founded after a long career with General Electric in India. Tiwari has acquired national fame in India and apparently the ear of Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh<sup>86</sup> with his ‘suicide count’ in the Yavatmal district of Maharashtra, in which he informs the Indian media on a weekly basis of the number of suicides that have taken place. His campaigning on suicides has brought him a nomination for the CNN-IBN – ‘Indian of the Year’ award for 2006 in the category of ‘public service’ and an interview in PBS Frontline’s documentary about farmer suicides – ‘Seeds of Suicide’ (2005). Other NGOs have been more cautious or ambivalent in making the connection between suicides and Bt – especially those with a more technocratic orientation<sup>87</sup> (see chapter three). However, the DDS of Hyderabad, in its video materials especially, has been willing to use individual biographies to explicitly connect adoption of Bt Cotton to suicide<sup>88</sup>. In the case of Greenpeace India, while the campaign officer was reluctant to link suicides and Bt Cotton in interview with the author, they have nevertheless done so in press releases<sup>89</sup>. A recent book on Monsanto (Robin, 2008) draws on several of these sources (Shiva, the DDS and Tiwari) in a chapter entitled “India: The seeds of Suicide”, presenting the connection as scientific fact.

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<sup>85</sup> Interview number 53.

<sup>86</sup> He has been credited, even by interviewees otherwise skeptical of his claims, with playing a role in pushing Singh to visit the Vidarbha region in July 2007 and confront the issue of compensation to farmers.

<sup>87</sup> Those most keen to distance themselves from this meme in conversation were the CSA in Hyderabad and Suman Sahai of Gene Campaign. As argued in chapter three, these technocratic organizations try to avoid ‘radical’ or sensational claims in order to stay on good terms with state authorities and preserve their access to committees and in the case of the CSA to state funding for their organic agriculture projects.

<sup>88</sup> For example in its documentary, ‘A Disaster in Search of a Success: Bt Cotton in the Global South’, discussed in chapter four.

<sup>89</sup> For example a description of an anti GM corn meeting from March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009, on the Greenpeace India website (<http://www.greenpeace.org/india/en/news/stop-gm-trials-monsanto-qui/>) where a “criminal” Monsanto is explicitly blamed for suicides.

As in the case of the ‘regional complexes’ described above, it might be straightforward to ‘debunk’ the ‘Bt Cotton causes farmer suicides’ meme by looking only at macro level statistics. For example, Table 13, drawn from an important study on this specific topic (IFPRI 2008: 6) shows that at the ‘macro’ level the idea of an escalation in farmer suicides relative to the general population is a myth:

Table 2.13. Farmer Suicides and suicides in the general population<sup>90</sup>

Year	Suicide rate/100,000 general pop.	Suicide rate/100,000 farmers
1997	10.0	1.42
1998	10.8	1.65
1999	11.2	1.62
2000	10.6	1.62
2001	10.6	1.60
2002	10.5	1.71
2003	10.4	1.61
2004	10.5	1.68
2005	10.3	1.55

But macro statistics can be misleading. Suicide ‘hot spots’ have coincided with the same troubled regions described above, that is, parts of Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh that have seen marked spikes in farmer suicides, especially in 2002 and 2004 (IFPRI, 2008: 8). Here, the conclusion of the

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<sup>90</sup> These figures are drawn from the only state by state official, comparable data source on suicides: the National Crime Records Bureau, which as the authors of the IFPRI report make clear is subject to dispute either for too low or too high figures for suicides.

IFPRI report concurs with the analysis in the previous section and is worth quoting at length (IFPRI, 2008: 43):

One implication of this study is the critical need to distinguish the effect of Bt Cotton as a technology with the context in which it was introduced.....in addition the increasing adoption rate in two suicide prone states, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, indicates that farmers overall are seeing this technology as one of the solutions to their problem and not a cause of the problem....The second implication is that , as farmer suicides are not new or specific to recent cases or to the introduction of Bt Cotton, they point toward the failure of the socioeconomic environment and institutional settings in rural dry areas of India.

Apart from this study, which specifically tackles Bt cotton's relation to suicides, four other major reports have been produced in recent years on the subject of farmer suicides: by a Pune, Maharashtra, based independent research institute (Yashada 2006); in an academic article by B B Mohanty, an academic also based in Pune, (Mohanty 2005), a Government of India, Ministry of Finance Report (Government of India, 2007) focusing on indebtedness and its causes and consequences and a volume of essays edited by Deshpande and Arora (2010). From these reports an explanation of spikes in suicide in particular regions at particular times can be drawn, that coincides quite closely with the account of regional 'failure' in the previous section.

These four surveys encompass three broad ways of looking at the suicide crisis: the first based on short term failures of the government to offer protections and support to farmers in the wake of trade liberalization, the second looking at long term structural and sociological problems in regions prone to suicide and the third taking a more Durkheimian view of suicide in the wake of cultural shifts in power between urban and rural areas. There are also two more simplistic narratives about suicides: one the NGO/activist narrative putting most of the blame on Monsanto and Bt Cotton<sup>91</sup>, and another dismissive narrative that sees the suicide epidemic as either driven by the perverse

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<sup>91</sup> In interview Kishor Tiwari (interview number 42) certainly mentioned other factors, mainly corresponding to the first 'narrative' about trade liberalization and failures to protect farmers from unfair competition. As with some other participants in the anti GMO network there is a tension between Tiwari's obvious knowledge of the subtleties of trade politics and the radical simplicity of the message he delivers to the media and online. The transnationalizing incentives that create this tension are one of the main themes of this dissertation.

incentive to make compensation claims or as the result of personal failures on the part of individuals<sup>92</sup>.

The Government of India report, perhaps surprisingly, takes the first perspective on suicides and agrarian crisis, concluding that trade liberalization has had few benefits for rain fed cash crop farmers in neglected regions. The report emphasizes the failure of the state in the form of withdrawal of agricultural extension services and the state's failure to act as an effective informational mediator between market and farmer. Putting it succinctly the report argues (GOI 2007: 13) that "the gradual withdrawal of the state from active participation in development activities has resulted in a steep decline in public investment in agricultural infrastructure in general." While an inevitable shift has been taking place from subsistence crops to diversified cash crops, the report argues that the state has failed to play its part in offering infrastructure, in the form of institutionalized credit or public-private partnerships in agricultural technology, to protect farmers of cash crops from risks. Thus the government report puts much of the blame on government failures.

The Mohanty survey emphasizes what he refers to as the "*systemic* element of causality" (Mohanty, 2005: 258) in farmer suicides. By this he means the social systems in places like Yavatmal, Maharashtra that fail small cotton farmers. Information about seeds and other inputs is only available through caste networks that exclude small farmers, who also tend to be from lower caste groups (260). According to the article there are now intense, caste based social antagonisms in the villages between small, low caste farmers, trying to achieve higher social status and new to cotton farming and upper caste farmers, with strong commercial networks linking them to input merchants and money lenders. Mohanty therefore sees farmer suicide in Dukheimian terms as the

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<sup>92</sup> Journalist Vivek Deshpande in Nagpur referred to earlier, comes close to holding this narrative about suicide, although not about agrarian crisis, which, he believes to be real and regional. He had become, by his own account a kind of 'nemesis' to Tiwari, following up every account of suicide given by Tiwari over one week and interviewing families of victims, concluding that heterogeneous personal factors were mainly to blame for suicides and not agricultural factors. But as the Mohanty and Yashoda reports make clear it is not so easy to separate personal and structural factors in the causes of suicide.

consequence of a breakdown of reciprocal village systems into intensely competitive individualistic systems, without the state stepping in to ameliorate these antagonisms. His analysis echoes and contrasts with that of Shah, for Gujarat (2003) described in the previous section, where caste solidarity among farmers made commercial success in cotton farming possible.

The Yashada study, uses different kinds of data, collecting over a hundred detailed biographies of suicide victims in Yavatmal, Maharashtra. The survey agrees with Mohanty and GOI that it has been mainly small farmers new to cotton growing who have committed suicide (Yashada, 2006: 131); it also concurs on the failure of government to mediate between markets and farmers in the age of liberalization and the informational problems caused by the 'withdrawal of the state'. But the report also puts the suicide problem into a larger cultural context, describing the "social humiliation" common to most of the suicide biographies (Yashada, 2006: 111). This humiliation derives from the increasing gap in productivity and earnings between urban and rural incomes combined with a continuing need to provide dowries and pay for expensive wedding ceremonies. Not surprisingly, the report finds that fathers of unmarried daughters were disproportionately likely to commit suicide and more likely to have suffered beforehand from the common precursor to rural suicide – alcoholism. Thus the report concludes that harvest 'success' or 'failure' and levels of indebtedness alone cannot explain suicides, since both indebtedness and crop 'failure' were just as, if not more common throughout the twentieth century but in previous times the social context did not translate these material problems into suicide.

The Deshpande and Arora volume concurs with much of the above analysis, emphasizing especially the political consequences of the shrinkage of farm size<sup>93</sup> for farmers' ability to bargain with input dealers. Although small size farms are not less efficient qua acreage, it is this lack of bargaining power and capital that makes it harder for small farmers to access new inputs or institutionalized credit.

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<sup>93</sup> The estimate given is 49 million small/marginal holdings in 1970-71 and 98 million in 2000-01 (Deshpande and Arora 2010: 12).

The aim of these summaries of farmer suicide studies has been to show how the ‘Bt causes suicides’ meme is orthogonal to the problems of small cotton farmers. In fact, to the degree that Bt Cotton increases yields (as shown above) and acts as an ‘insurance equivalent’ in the seed<sup>94</sup>, Bt Cotton should be *part* of the solution set to farmer suicides. The danger, when activists use narratives of this kind, with their immediate transnational and elite resonance, is that they obscure the complex structural problems facing farmers. The campaigning narrative, linking Bt Cotton, the WTO and transnational corporations, may attract media attention, and was arguably partly responsible for bringing Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to Vidarbha to address the suicide issue, but it fails to articulate the structural problems that lie behind suicide and agrarian crisis in particular regions. As chapter five seeks to show, grassroots farmers movement such as the Shetkari Sanghatana, in the 1980’s, were able to articulate varied and specific issues because of their relatively democratic structure and a more favorable political climate for farmers’ issues. Today’s ‘farmer’ organizations such as the VJAS, on the other hand, articulate ‘strong’ narratives that resonate in the media, online and among transnational activists, but which bear only a loose connection to the problems of farmers in an era of ‘state withdrawal’ and loss of cultural status for agriculture. When they get to speak with those in political power (and it is debatable whether this is often their goal), these new organizations may have little in the way of policy to propose or negotiate on.

### **Bt Cotton versus organics and ‘Ecopragmatism’**

The meme of genetically modified crops versus organic agriculture receives less prominence in the media analysis above. But, as chapter three seeks to show, this meme is crucial to the insertion of NGOs into the niche markets for organic cotton in Europe and the USA. The same NGOs<sup>95</sup> that

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<sup>94</sup> It can be seen as a premium paid to avoid catastrophic losses rather than having to pay exaggerated prices at the time of a bollworm epidemic. (Interview number 36 with Prof Kranthi of CICR, Nagpur).

<sup>95</sup> Almost all the campaigning NGOs, including Suman Sahai’s Gene Campaign and Vandana Shiva’s Navdanya, also supervise organic cotton farming projects. These projects are frequently referred to in their campaigning

participate in activism against Bt cotton also run organic agricultural projects as evidence of viable alternatives to GMOs. In this narrative, the two options – GMO or organic are framed as mutually exclusive.

Before questioning this mutual exclusivity of organics and GMOs, it should be pointed out that the viability of organic farming as a solution to rural crisis is also in question in India. As one interviewee put it<sup>96</sup>, most small Indian cotton farmers already are de facto organic given lack of access to fertilizers and even pesticides. The process of conversion to organic farming takes 6 years according to NGO interviewees at several projects, and requires many 'hidden' inputs in terms of teaching techniques and access to bio fertilizers and natural pesticides, as well as requiring more labor input, from workers who are willing to forego opportunities for seasonal work in urban areas. Based on a recent field study of organic cotton farmers Puttaswamaiah and Shah (2008) argue that although organic farming cut costs, the reduction in yields (compared to conventional farming) outweighed the financial gains from reduced input costs<sup>97</sup>, and that this calculation does not even take into account the various start-up costs borne by the NGO – Agro-Cell - that supervised the area studied.

But could the two approaches be combined? There are both theoretical and 'grassroots' reasons to question this binary opposition between GM technology and organic agriculture. Again, the activist narrative may be making pro poor policy harder to articulate rather than 'speaking for the poor'.

At the theoretical level, some ecologists are now taking a much friendlier view of genetic engineering. Stewart Brand, president of the 'Long Now Foundation' in California, has articulated a perspective that he christens 'ecopragsmatism'. In Brand's latest book (Brand, 2009, Ch 6), he draws on the pragmatic approach of Indian agricultural scientist M.S.Swaminathan, known as the 'father of

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literature and in the case of smaller regional NGO's, such as Warangal's MARI, provide a large amount of their funding. (see chapter three for details).

<sup>96</sup> Interview number 21 with Prof. Deshpande of ISEC, Bangalore.

<sup>97</sup> Yields were 32 % less than on non organic farms in the vicinity of the project while input costs (not including NGO payments and training costs) were 19% less.

the green revolution', to extol the possibilities of biotechnology in the global south, quoting a speech by Swaminathan from 2006, (Brand, 2009: 191), in which he declared:

The difference between organic farming and green agriculture is: You use integrated pest management, integrated nutrient supply, scientific water management – all methods by which the potential of the soil is not reduced – *and also* you can use molecular breeding or Mendelian breeding, whichever is most appropriate. [italics in the original]

This '*and also*' is a crucial reason why activist narratives that *must* separate 'green' and 'organic' approaches, for organizational and marketing reasons, are flawed. As Brand, and numerous others have pointed out, new work in evolutionary biology shows that "life at its most creative is transgenic" (Brand, 2009: 176). In other words, gene swapping via viruses – so called 'horizontal gene swapping' is ubiquitous in nature, perhaps even the "dominant engine of evolution"<sup>98</sup>(Brand, 2009: 175). If this point might seem esoteric, Brand also points out that seeds, including organic seeds, have been produced for decades by selecting the best varieties after bombarding them with radiation – a process known as radiation mutagenesis. This process, very common between 1965 and 1990 and not subject to regulation in the EU<sup>99</sup>, is rarely critiqued in the literature supporting a pure version of organic farming, even though the varieties that result from mutagenesis may be theoretically more prone to the kinds of 'unpredictable' consequences for phenotype that campaigners have attributed to single gene insertion<sup>100</sup> (Demain and Solomon 1981 cited in Miller and Conko 2004: 6).

Brand joins Lipton (2007) and Paarlberg (2010) in arguing that problems about property rights and access to gene constructs by the public sector in the global south *can* be addressed, but that activism

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<sup>98</sup> Brand contrasts this fact with the sub-Heideggerian rhetoric common to some organic agriculture 'purists', such as the argument that "Genetic engineering does not respect the characteristic way of being ("nature") of living organisms." (Brand, 2009: 185). See chapter four for further analysis of the 'romantic' framing of nature entailed in this kind of rhetoric.

<sup>99</sup> Information from Federal Government of Germany website: <http://www.gmo-safety.eu/glossary/815.mutagenesis.html>

<sup>100</sup> Other 'internal contradictions' of the organic discourse include the fact that biotechnology as applied to pharmaceuticals, such as insulin for diabetics, has not been the target of anti-GMO activists. (Herring, Personal communication)

has made it harder not easier to engage in those kinds of discussions and negotiations. When Greenpeace for example sets itself permanently against GE technology for bananas, cassava, sorghum and 'golden' rice (Brand, 2009: 195), it demonstrates an intransigence which filters down to activists at all levels, contributing to a climate of insecurity that Brand likens to the fears of the national security community on new technologies (Brand, 2009: 203).

Bringing the discussion down to the local level: Cornell researcher Devparna Roy's work (Roy, 2006), among Gujarati 'organic' cotton farmers shows that the binary opposition between organic and genetically modified also does not hold among grassroots farmers. Roy conducted interviews with organic cotton farmers in Gujarat from 2002 to 2004 and found (Roy 2006: 174-75) that from a sample of 30 self declared 'organic' farmers, 12 followed activist memes about the incompatibility of GM crops and organic crops (the 'organismic' view about an 'essential' nature), while 13 farmers believed Bt cotton *was* part of organic agriculture, mainly because the pesticidal component was 'in' the plant not in the form of 'external' pesticide sprays.

These examples of show that activist narratives may not be in tune with the interests or interpretations of small farmers themselves. Chapters three and four pursue the themes of organic agriculture through the lenses, respectively, of organizational incentives facing NGOs in India and the 'romantic' interpretation of nature and agriculture that informs transnational framings of agricultural politics.

### **Bt Cotton and the price of seeds**

The final specific issue to be addressed in this chapter is that of the controversy over the (initial) pricing of seeds by Monsanto and its licensees in India. Here, the question is somewhat different: it is the *non* appearance of the issue in activist discourse that is of interest. As seen in the media analysis section, price rarely gets a mention in media discourse, and those stories that did mention

price originated from Left farmer unions in Andhra Pradesh and from Andhra Pradesh government officials, not from NGOs or activists. In fact, activists interviewed admitted that they did not want to get involved in discussions about the price of seeds. The Greenpeace India campaign officer<sup>101</sup> argued that price was “not their concern” and that farmers’ unions were being “tricked” by Monsanto into engaging on this issue rather than the crucial issue (for Greenpeace) of the biosafety, health and larger ideological objections to Bt cotton. Although Kishor Tiwari of the VJAS talked about price in his interview, and Vandana Shiva sometimes writes about price issues in her attacks on Monsanto, neither campaigner was in a position to formulate a demand for *lower* prices of Bt seeds, whether through regulatory changes or public sector involvement, because their identity as activists had come to depend on a non negotiable opposition to GM crops.<sup>102</sup>

But in January 2006, the Andhra Pradesh government filed a case against Monsanto at the Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission (MRTPC) over the pricing of Bt cotton seeds, which the state won in a judgment of May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2006 (CSE, 2006: 28). The court found that Monsanto was charging an excessive trait fee of Rs 1250 per 450 gram pack of seed, whereas for the same amount of seed in China the fee was just Rs 90 and in the USA the equivalent of Rs 150. After initially fighting this decision Monsanto lowered the price of the trait value on its seed across India<sup>103</sup>.

While some economists argue that this decision smacked of populism and that the long term effect might be to deter innovation among private seed companies (Pray and Naseem, 2007), the consensus among interviewees in Andhra Pradesh was that the decision was a major success for cotton farmers, not just in price of legal seeds but because the reduction virtually eliminated the

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<sup>101</sup> Interview number 22

<sup>102</sup> Although this is probably less true of Tiwari than Shiva, since he runs a much smaller operation and is less tied to transnational sources of funding. As of Summer, 2011 however, there is no evidence of a shift in the VJAS position on Bt Cotton.

<sup>103</sup> In interview Monsanto India vice president Raj Ketkar (interview number 26) offered various justifications for this ‘excessive’ pricing, arguing that Chinese farmers used more seed per acre, therefore justifying a higher price in India to compensate Monsanto for its research costs.

market for ‘illegal’ seeds that were more likely to be spurious and cause failure<sup>104</sup>. The key point for the argument of this dissertation is that the process whereby complaints about price were addressed was through ‘traditional’ political mechanisms plus a certain amount of chance; the activist network did not participate in this process. In fact, one of the activists’ most impressive policy achievements had occurred in Andhra Pradesh the previous year, 2005, when the three initial Bt cotton hybrids were banned by the state government<sup>105</sup>. The comparison is telling, because this banning was largely symbolic – at this point new and better hybrids were coming on the market, whereas the price decision in 2006 put money in farmers’ hands that would not have been there otherwise<sup>106</sup>.

Which actors were involved in the decision to take Monsanto to the MRTPC? According to Andhra Pradesh’s agriculture minister<sup>107</sup> those pushing for the move included the Congress Party’s own officials on the ground, the Communist Party of India’s (CPI’s) associated farmers’ union, and an unusually committed agriculture commissioner of the state – Punam Malkondiah. The minister was keen to stress that activists and NGOs played no role in the decision, and in none of the interviews conducted with activists did anyone claim credit for it. According to other interviewees it was Nuziveedu Seeds, a major Indian rival to Mayhco-Monsanto, that provided the main ‘push’ to the AP government, presumably through bribes, in the (justified) expectation that lowering the seed price would destroy the market for illegal Bt seeds and increase its own market share, or perhaps as ‘punishment’ to Monsanto for what they felt was an unfair monopoly over the seed market based on the pro-Monsanto consequences of India’s strict regulatory regime<sup>108</sup>.

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<sup>104</sup> This point was made by Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, director of agriculture for the local government. Interview number 12.

<sup>105</sup> Although one interviewee argued, off the record, that this decision was brought about by pressure from Nuziveedu Seeds in order for them to be able to sell their own Bt seeds illegally after the ban and increase their market share. If this is true, then even the NGO campaigners’ biggest ‘win’ may be questionable.

<sup>106</sup> The AP agriculture minister claimed that the decision had put 180 crore rupees (around \$40 million) into the pockets of Andhra farmers.

<sup>107</sup> Interview number 7

<sup>108</sup> This is one implication of the analysis of the dispute in CSE, 2006: 28, where it is pointed out that at the MRTPC trial a previous dispute between Nuziveedu and Monsanto was brought up

The upshot of this episode, is twofold. Firstly, activists have deliberately paid little attention to issues of price, for obvious reasons – their identity and organizational incentives, described in the following two chapters, make it impossible for them to advocate on behalf of farmers on issues of pricing, because they are committed to opposing GM crops in whatever form. Secondly, the price trial was the result of a contingent coming together of actors – a committed agriculture commissioner for Andhra Pradesh<sup>109</sup>, a private sector dispute between Nuziveedu Seeds and Monsanto and a Congress Party in the state that had staked some of its political prestige on addressing farmers' issues. The contingency of these factors actually highlights the vacuum of representation for farmers' issues in India. With no powerful activist groups addressing fundamental material concerns like price, and with media space taken up with activists memes about the 'failure' of Bt Cotton and its dangers, few groups speak for farmers, as once was the case in the 1980's.

### **A 'modernist' agenda that includes GM Crops?**

Finally, it is a useful exercise to draw up an 'imaginary' or 'ideal' agenda that *includes* GM crops, but which has pro poor goals. This agenda could be labelled 'modernist' or 'developmentalist' in the sense that it proposes, not a *withdrawal* from state and market institutions but a *strengthening* of them (Gupta 2000; 2009, Jodhka 2007). The purpose of this exercise from the point of view of the dissertation as a whole is to point to the 'missing' agenda in the public sphere in India. In an alternative world, what might activists be arguing? Making this case highlights the narrow set of options that dominate the activist network and encourages a critique of why that spectrum of options is relatively narrow. As Reiss and Straughan (1996: Ch 6) argue, in their overview of the ethical considerations surrounding GM crops, there is no a priori reason why certain ethical 'absolutes' should block the consideration of costs and benefits of new technologies, especially, we

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<sup>109</sup> Several interviewees pointed out this fact, speaking volumes for the status of farmers' concerns when they expressed surprise that an agriculture commissioner would a. have an agricultural background and b. care about farmers.

might add, when those ‘absolutes’ tend to be ideas about nature held by middle class northern publics or southern elites.

Some items in this pro poor agenda are specific to Bt cotton:

- An active role for agricultural extension services in surveying and processing data on which hybrids are appropriate for which agronomic region. Local ‘failures’ of Bt cotton in India can be partly ascribed to a lack of information flow between farmers and seed manufacturers. At the beginning of Bt’s introduction there were too few, and probably inappropriate hybrids, whereas later there have been too many, leading to confusion and ‘gambling’ (Stone, 2007) over which to choose. Arguably, only the state can intervene to provide this relevant information. Bt farmers also need information about how often and when to spray Bt crops, and input dealers are unreliable mediators of this information.
- The state could push for the use of Bt varieties as opposed to Bt hybrids. Some evidence suggests (CSE, 2006: 25, drawing on CICR research) that varieties, as used in China, might have been more effective against bollworm infestations, as well as being cheaper for farmers. While the CICR has produced Bt varieties they have had little impact on the market, and again, this is connected to the withdrawal of the state from the arena. Lipton (2007: 7) makes a similar case for multi-gene insect resistance rather than single gene, arguing that
- The withdrawal of the state may date back even further, according to various sources<sup>110</sup>, to the failure of the Indian government (more specifically, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, ICAR) to accept an offer from Monsanto in 1993 to purchase the Bt gene construct and use it, through the public sector, to produce Bt seeds. This kind of public-private partnerships, or “fee for service” deal (Lipton, 2007: 14) has been neglected and the role of activists in deterring such deals cannot be discounted.

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<sup>110</sup> Raj Ketkar, vice president of Monsanto, India. Interview number 26 and Dr Narayanan of ANGROU, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh. Interview number 13.

- Bt seeds are a technology that is beneficial for small and large farmers, independent of size of farm, and which should cut costs overall if pesticide spraying is reduced, but for small farmers to get access to seeds might require institutionalized credit. Small farmers, from low caste groups in 'low social capital' regions such as Vidarbha, Maharashtra, or certain parts of Andhra Pradesh, do require state help in terms of credit and possibly a return to some of the state run seed distribution mechanisms that have disappeared since the period of liberal reform.

In more general terms, Lipton (2007) argues that the state does need to intervene to push the private sector in the direction of pro poor research priorities<sup>111</sup>, but that even private sector innovations alone will have likely positive effects on marginal and poorer farmers (55); more so arguably than in the Green Revolution, where positive impacts were size and resource dependent. In summary, Lipton makes a point that is significant for the argument of this dissertation that (35), "Policy makers have agency, and can turn almost any breeding strategy in favor of – or against – the rural poor".

'Pushing' this agency in the direction of the poor is part of any definition of pro poor activism or pro poor social movements. This chapter has highlighted some of the ways that the anti-GMO network in India may not have played a constructive role in this process, and in many ways has achieved the opposite: providing ammunition for the Indian state to raise regulatory barriers, favoring Monsanto (MMB) over smaller Indian companies or the public sector, distracting attention from the 'tougher' politics of relations between growers and the textile industry, and perhaps most crucially in the long term, starving the public sphere of alternative voices arguing for a pro poor direction in biotechnology research.

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<sup>111</sup> That is into traits that bring "higher yields and greater robustness for staples in water-insecure environments", (Lipton, 2007: 54) rather than being chosen to suit consumers in the global north.

As Anitha Ramanna, of Pune University argues on the basis of interviews with cotton farmers in Maharashtra: (Ramanna 2006: 18):

The farmers' viewpoint appears to be starkly different from both the pro and anti-GM networks. Farmer experiences with Bt cotton do not correlate with views of Bt cotton as an answer to poverty nor as a harbinger of hunger. The farmer is neither an autonomous entity, whose views can simply be taken out of context to make policy decisions on the 'need' for GM technology, nor is he a victim as portrayed by NGOs. The farmer's view illustrates the importance of viewing any technology in a holistic perspective in relation to agricultural practices and not in terms of reductionist frames.

## Chapter Three: How the anti GMO Network Couples with other Organizations

### Introduction

This chapter argues that the transnational activist network that has arisen around opposition to GMOs in India represents constellations of interests which forge functional linkages of mutual dependence, or what Niklas Luhmann (for example Luhmann 2000: Ch's 9 and 15) calls 'structural couplings'<sup>112</sup>. It will be argued that these constellations or couplings cannot easily be accounted for as bottom up, normative responses to external threats of the kind described in the recent academic literature on TANs (for example Reitan 2007 as discussed in Chapter 1). The aim of the chapter is to provide a model for how to conceptualize new activist networks in global politics, one less focused on the stated aims of these networks and more alert to the unanticipated dependencies they create with actors in civil society, the state, the media, the donor community and the private sector.

This chapter brings the debate on TANs into touch with the large and critical literature that already exists on NGOs in the developing world, and asks what the advantages might be of applying the themes of this literature to the study of TANs. The thinking behind this is twofold: firstly that the NGO literature pays more attention to questions of linkages, co-dependence and institutional self-interest; questions which have been under emphasized in the literature on TANs; secondly, that in many cases TANs are highly NGO-ized anyway, and the anti GMO TAN is exemplary in this regard, with most of the main actors running NGOs.

The empirical part of the chapter begins with an *institutional map* of the organizations in India devoted to opposing GMOs, showing how they operate geographically and how they are connected

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<sup>112</sup> For Luhmann these couplings are not mere marriages of material convenience but mutual agreements to schematize reality in ways that reduce chaos and entropy for both partners to the coupling: eventually both organizations in the coupling come to rely on the other's ways of 'coding' reality as an input into their own system.

to each other in clusters of mutually dependent and cooperative nodes in a larger network. The next section of the chapter examines the various *interests* that are at work at the various levels of the network, analyzing the co dependence between the network actors and various powerful and less powerful actors at international, national and local levels.

### **TANs and NGOs: Redefining 'brokerage' by learning from the literature on NGOs**

One of the aims of chapter one was to describe the recent academic outpouring of work on TANs in the wake of Keck and Sikkink's original (1998) work, and to show how this literature might be brought to bear on the anti-GMO case in India. Scholar-advocates such as Reitan (2007), Smith (2008), McMichael (2005), Featherstone (2008) and Routledge (2009) have argued that TANs herald a new form of political participation, based on transnational flows of information and networked forms of political cooperation across borders. These forms of politics are seen as the natural counter movement to the flows of capital, goods and neoliberal ideology brought about by economic globalization. As explained in chapter one, the anti-GMO coalition in India has been specifically highlighted in the work of some of these scholar advocates (Featherstone 2008; Reitan 2007; Schurman and Munro 2010) and on first analysis the network would seem to be an exemplary case of TANs in action, whereby grassroots voices, and if not grassroots, at least non conforming voices, from the global south are translated into protests that attract a world-wide following, gaining capacity from transnational linkages to affect politics at the domestic level in the global south, in the classic form of a 'boomerang' (Keck and Sikkink 1998)

At the same time as a (mainly celebratory) literature on TANs has been gathering force, there have been numerous more circumspect analyses of the rise of NGOs as an institutional form in the global south, as providers of development assistance, as mediators between International Financial

Institutions and local states and as advocates for the poor<sup>113</sup>. Few scholars (with the clear exception of Bob 2005) have attempted to link the two literatures conceptually. Below, we discuss the critical literature on NGOs in ways that will hopefully prove useful for the analysis of TANs, and transnational social movements more broadly. I divide the existing critiques of NGOs into radical, institutionalist and ethnographic schools of thought, and then ask: to what extent can this critical literature on NGOs teach us lessons that might then be applied to the study of activist networks and global civil society more broadly?

Firstly, on the left, NGOs have been seen as a threat to more traditional forms of social mobilization based around class interests. Petras (1999) for example, condemns the way in which NGOs deflect mass anger at what he sees, following dependency and world systems theories, as imperialist economic exploitation in the global south. By fragmenting the poor into sub sectors, each dependent on particular NGOs, the potential for mass protest is pre-empted, and on the normative level “ersatz globalism”, as Petras terms it, replaces the possibility of radical class consciousness across borders.

India and South Asia, as high NGO growth areas, have been at the centre of radical critiques of the rise of NGOs. Kamat (2002) writing about India and Feldman (1997) writing about the most heavily NGO-ized state in South Asia, Bangladesh, concur on the dangers of NGO led politics: that it immobilizes grassroots action by creating new forms of institutional patrimony at the local level; that social goals blur into narrow program goals; that stakeholders to NGO action have little say over those programs compared with the real partners – the NGO donors and that a new business model supplants populist politics at the local level. In Feldman’s words (1997: 63) the NGO model “refashions mobilization to represent particularist, not popular interests”.

These are critiques based on a commitment to radical, mass politics. But institutionalists, more concerned with the supposed ‘efficiency’ of NGOs as service providers and catalysts for the growth

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<sup>113</sup> For an example of the liberal celebration of the rise of NGOs as a new political form, against which these critiques are aimed, see Matthews (1997) who sees NGOs initiating a “power shift” (52) away from old hierarchical politics.

of domestic civil society have also contributed to doubts about the NGO model. In an influential piece Cooley and Ron (2002) argued that NGO politics is beset by two dilemmas: principal agent problems that make accountability difficult<sup>114</sup> because there are multiple principals (donors) allowing agents (the NGOs) to play off among them, and the complementary problem that the demands of the NGO market for donor support and individual contributions make honest reporting of NGO results unlikely<sup>115</sup>. Empirical work in this tradition on NGOs in the former USSR by Mendelson and Glenn (2002), finds similar agent-principal problems at work, when donor driven agendas cause NGOs to shift their priorities over very short time frames, and emphasize donor agendas (such as the nebulous 'biodiversity') rather than address clear cut local instances of economic exploitation.

The third body of work critical of NGOs, takes an ethnographic approach to the impact of NGOs on domestic politics, trying to 'get inside' the black box of NGO activity, and asking whose interests are served by the discourses NGOs reproduce. Ferguson (1990) had pointed to the ways the 'discourse' of NGOs can depoliticize contentious issues of resource distribution and actually strengthen the hand of state elites in the name of 'development'.<sup>116</sup> Fisher (1997) points out that NGOs represent not so much individual agents as a new 'arena' of contestation, where potentials for resistance and tendencies toward professionalization meet and conflict with one another. For Fisher it is naive to create a dichotomy between 'good' grassroots social movements and 'bad' NGOs (1997: 451), given the ways that social movements are often in fact coalitions of NGOs.

The best empirical work on NGOs in India, such as Batliwala (2004) adopts this ethnographic critique, by problematizing a naive conception of genuine 'grassroots' organizations. Both her work on NGO slum organizations and that of Randeria (2006) on the anti dam movement emphasize that NGOs in

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<sup>114</sup> Though see Wapner (2002) for a counter argument on accountability: that a larger number of stakeholders (members, donors, network partners) actually makes NGOs more accountable than states who are only accountable at elections, if that. However Wapner passes over the problems of multiple agents and principals

<sup>115</sup> In the most notorious case described by Cooley and Ron, NGOs in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide in Goma refugee camps put self publicity ahead of justice for the perpetrators and ended up assisting those who had committed genocide.

<sup>116</sup> See Lewis and Mosse's (2006: 4) important critique of ethnographic work in Ferguson's tradition, relevant to chapter four of this dissertation, where they argue that an ethnographic methodology all too often spills over into a romantic populism, scornful of all things 'modern' or associated with 'development'.

India form 'cunning alliances' (Randeria 2006: 103) to be able to deal with 'cunning states'. Alliances consisting of donor funded NGOs and the 'grassroots' groups they aim to catalyze might lead either to a new elitist politics or to new forms of resistance, quite different from the mass movements of the past. For this reason, ethnographic approaches are less definitively critical than the radical and institutionalist critiques of NGOs, but they emphasize the ambivalence of NGOs as 'change agents', and question whether today there really is a 'grassroots' politics that can be contrasted with the institutionalized and donor funded domain of the NGO.

Even more pertinent in this tradition of ethnographic analysis is the recent work of Lewis and Mosse (2006) on 'brokerage' and NGO politics. Drawing on the Manchester School of sociology, they argue that a brokerage approach sees organizations as active shapers of their own environment: "social actors operate as active agents building social, political, and economic roles rather than simply following normative scripts" (2006: 11). Existing literature on TANs also refers to brokerage as a concept for understanding activist networks, in terms of "the linking of two or more previously unconnected social actors by a unit that mediates their relations with one another and/or with yet other sites" (Tarrow 2005: 190)<sup>117</sup>. However, for Lewis and Mosse brokerage is not just about information transfer, or acting as a 'transnational hinge', as Tarrow puts it, between actors in different locations; it is also about the *strategic and discursive interests of the mediating actors themselves*, as well as those of the parties they are linking. This sense of brokerage as concerning the interests of the brokers is closer to institutionalist critiques of NGOs, but it goes beyond the institutionalists' emphasis on money. For example Bending and Rosendo (2006: 226) in the Lewis and Mosse volume show how organizations representing the Penan nomadic groups in Malaysia "have first had to adopt and help reproduce the discourse of romantic environmentalism in order to secure an alliance with foreign NGOs, and those same NGOs in turn adopt and help reproduce the discursive mantle of "sustainability" and technocratic sustainable resource management". Here we

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<sup>117</sup> See also Reitan's similar (and similarly 'passive' definition): "information transfers that depend on the linking of two or more previously unconnected social sites" ( Reitan 2007: 42)

have the 'two faces' of NGOs referred to in this dissertation's title, straddling the ambiguous zone between romantic ideology and technocratic managerialism and becoming adept at the professional 'brokerage' skills required to face different audiences at different times. In fact this analysis of the mutual adjustment process brings Lewis and Mosse's work close to Luhmann's concept of 'structural coupling' described above.

This chapter will try to provide an analytic description and critique of the network against GMOs, with this critical literature on NGOs brought to bear on transnational activism. The 'celebratory' literature on global civil society described in chapter one, should be modified with the help of these critiques, as will be argued further in chapter six. There is still a tendency to uncritically associate transnational activists' voices with 'grassroots' voices. There is also a tendency to overlook the institutional prerogatives of TANs themselves – the means by which they position themselves (as brokers) in a political environment to maximize their resources and gain the most media and international attention, while trying to present different 'faces' to different audiences and at the same time maintain a discursive and ideological consistency of vision.

These complex pressures can be analyzed by looking at the different functional dependencies that the actors create (this chapter) and then by looking at the other 'face' of the network – its 'world view' which is the hybrid product of transnational and domestic currents (discussed in chapters four and five). These chapters seek to demonstrate a way of analyzing TANs that goes beyond either celebration of their aims or the mere description of mechanisms of linkage and scale shift. 'Brokerage', in the sense we explore here is *a transnational process whereby new types of actors are empowering themselves, driven in part by financial motivations and strategically alert to organizational opportunities wherever they are to be found, but also actively producing new types of transnational ideology.*

### The Institutional Geography of the Anti GMO Network:

The six 'levels' of the coalition sketched below represent a macro view of the organizations in the network (s) against GMOs in India. The tables provide information about how long the organizations have been working, who their main funding partners are, if any, and what kind of work the organization engages in. The 'levels' are 'ideal types', and in some cases organizations may fall under two different headings depending on what kind of work they are doing at a particular time. For example the KRRS farmers' movement, during the lifetime of its leader Nanjundaswamy, was both a 'charismatic' cosmopolitan organization and a mass based grassroots organization. A brief summary follows each table, although the institutional dynamics involved with particular organizations are explored more fully throughout the rest of the chapter.

#### 'Technocratic' Metropolitan Organizations

Table 3.1. Technocratic metropolitan organizations.

Name	Working since	Type of work	Main Funding Partners <sup>118</sup>
GRAIN, India	1995	Lobbying and research	GRAIN central office in Spain: Action Solidarite Tiers Monde (Luxemburg); Oxfam Novib (Neths); Basque Gvt; KZE Germany; SwedBio; Brot Fur Die Welt (German church group); Grassroots International, USA; Christensen Fund, USA; Swissaid
Gene Campaign	1993	Lobbying and research; program management	German church groups (KZE); donations via website

<sup>118</sup> Here, and in the below tables, the funding partner information comes from a mixture of interviews, NGO brochures picked up during interviews and NGO websites, where made public. The information is subject to changes in partnerships (which usually run for 5 years), and more problematic – the fact that donors fund particular projects and funds are not supposed to be fungible between projects – so that some donors may be funding projects not directly related to GMOs / organics, even though administration costs may be fungible across tasks.

These organizations are based in New Delhi and their interactions are of a mainly technocratic nature, lobbying the central government of India in various forums where NGOs are invited, and also various Treaty Organizations concerned with setting norms on biotechnology. By technocratic we refer to interventions designed to affect policy at the central level or to assist the central government in its interactions with international agencies. These organizations *regard themselves* as repositories of expert knowledge, and their aim is to insert themselves as necessary intermediaries in contentious transnational debates, to access working groups set up by the government and be the first port of call for opinion in the elite English language media. However, in the section on governmental linkages below, it is argued that this part of the network should not be classified as strictly governance oriented, in the way that, say some human rights groups are – with organizationally specific technical/legal expertise and regularized input into governance decisions. This distinction becomes theoretically relevant in chapter six where ‘romantic’ TANs are contrasted with ‘governance oriented TANs’

### Charismatic Cosmopolitan Organizations

Table 3.2. Charismatic cosmopolitan organizations.

FBFS / Devinder Sharma	Late 80's	Lobbying and research	Unknown
KRRS (till death of Prof Nanjundaswamy)	Early 80's	Farmers' movement and international campaigns	Mainly domestic contributions from sugar farmers; small grants from Via Campesina, Peoples' Global Action; United States of the World (SUM: a Bahai faith group in Italy) for organics
RFSTE and Navdanya Vandana Shiva	1987	International campaigns; program management	HIVOS; Focus on the Global South; ETC Group; Via Campesina; Slow Food International; Tibetan Gvt in exile; Terre des homes
VJAS / Kishor Tiwari	2002	International / national campaigns	Privately funded

Two of these organizations also work out of the capital, New Delhi, while the VJAS is based in rural Maharashtra and the KRRS in Karnataka. They represent the obverse of the metropolitan / technocratic organizations above; in Weberian terms drawing their legitimacy through the force of personality of their leaders and the rhetorical power of making the issue of GMOs 'meaningful' in a wider context, rather than by being repositories of technical, bureaucratic knowledge. This rhetorical power is explored further in chapter four, where Vandana Shiva's and others' 'romantic rhetoric' and capacity for metaphor-making is analyzed. The Forum on Biotechnology and Food Security (FBFS), fronted by Devinder Sharma and the VJAS fronted by Kishor Tiwari also depend on the dramaturgical rhetoric of their leaders and their successful access to the media and senior

political leaders. Of these groups Shiva's Research Foundation for Science Technology and Ecology, RFSTE gets substantial funding from abroad (see below), while the other two groups (whose funding is more obscure and are operated on small budgets) depend almost entirely on linkages to the media, as analyzed below. The risk these organization face is oblivion without their central charismatic figure, as seen most dramatically in the decline of the KRRS after the death of Prof. Nanjundaswamy, as described in chapter five.

It should be pointed out that interviewees from other types of organization were divided over the role of the charismatic campaigners. Some expressed embarrassment at the 'egotistic' tactics of Shiva and Tiwari, but others saw complementarities between the two approaches. The 'two faces' approach taken in this dissertation agrees more with the latter argument: the 'two faces' of the campaign are essential to its persistence and often the same actors take a charismatic role in one situation (perhaps Suman Sahai giving a political speech to a mass audience) and a technocratic role in another (Sahai on a government advisory body). The two types of legitimacy (charismatic and technocratic) are as crucial for the survival of activist networks as for other modern forms of governance.

### Nodal Organizations / Nodal Donor organizations

Table 3.3. Nodal organizations.

Centre for sustainable agriculture, Hyderabad	2004	Campaigns and project management	HIVOS; NABARD (Indian development bank); Swissaid; Aid India; Aide a l'enfance de l'Inde, Sir Dorabji Tata Trust; Oxfam GB; Andhra Pradesh Gvt
Deccan development society, Hyderabad	1985	Campaigns and project management	Misereor and KZE Germany; NABARD, Find Your Feet, UK; HIVOS; Christian Aid, UK; EED Germany (Church groups)
Chetna Organics, Hyderabad	2004	Organic cotton marketing and projects; campaigns	Solidaridad (Neths); ICCO (Neths based church groups); Oxfam GB
Greenpeace India, Bangalore	1998	Campaigns	Greenpeace International (private fundraising); Indian fundraising
HIVOS, India, Bangalore	1997	Project coordination and funding	HIVOS (Dutch Gvt; EU; private fundraising)

These organizations are based outside of Delhi, in the regional capitals - Hyderabad and Bangalore.

This location enables them to be 'nodal' intermediaries, between transnational audiences and local NGOs and social movements concerned with agriculture. These nodal groups have two main

functions: firstly, to channel funding to and monitor local agricultural projects connected to organic crops and research into 'alternative' farming; secondly, to gather information from local sources and put that information into forms appropriate for transnational campaigns. Obviously the two *international* organizations listed (HIVOS and Greenpeace) play a somewhat different role, of necessity, less openly polemical in orientation, but working very closely with the other nodal and charismatic groups listed, sometimes including direct exchanges of personnel.

These nodal groups are less concerned with inserting themselves into centres of power in Delhi, and more concerned with the media, and with the crucial work of 'framing' movement activity. It is in these nodal groups that most of the key 'frames' and 'data' of the anti- GMO coalition are forged, and it is no surprise that workers in these groups often come from a background in public relations as well as in environmental science.

### Nodal Service Organizations

Table 3.4. Nodal service organizations.

Kalpavriksh, Pune	1979	Provides library resources and conducts research on ecological issues	Oxfam Novib (Neths); Greenpeace India; SwedBio; WWF; Misereor; UNDP; Global green Funds; Concern India Foundation
National Centre for Advocacy Studies, Pune	1992	Lobbying; training NGOs in advocacy; producing video and research material	Ford Foundation; Christian Aid UK; Oxfam GB

These groups have played a relatively small role in the GMO debate, although their staff have participated in the anti GMO network's meetings and NCAS has produced some video materials and documentation (NCAS 2007) arguing against GMOs in agriculture. But mainly these are 'service' organizations that provide resources to NGOs, in the form of well stocked libraries (Kalpavriksh) and, more crucially training in the techniques of advocacy, framing and lobbying (NCAS).<sup>119</sup> These resources make NGOs valuable sources of information to elites and to the media, providing a source of informational power to the network.

### Regional Organizations

Table 3.5. Regional Organizations.

MARI Warangal	1988	Organic farming projects and campaigns	Oxfam GB; Center for World Solidarity; Spices Board (Govt of India); CARE India;
SYO Warangal	1993	" "	Oxfam GB; CARE India; NABARD; World Bank; DDS; EED (German church groups); Greenpeace; Andhra Pradesh Govt
CROPS, Jangaon	1991	" "	Oxfam GB; DDS; MARI
ICRA Bangalore	1990	" "	HIVOS
Green Foundation, Bangalore	1996	" "	HIVOS; UNDP; USC Canada, Agreetera; IDRC; Karnataka Govt; Global Green Foundation
Dhara Mitra, Wardha	1998	" "	Swissaid
VOFA, Yavatmal, Vidarbha	n/a	" "	n/a
YUVA, Maharashtra	2001	" "	Oxfam GB; Oxfam Novib (Neths)

<sup>119</sup> NCAS clearly takes an anti-GMO stance although it frames this in a highly 'objective', data oriented style, for example in its booklet aimed at members of parliament data on GMOs is presented neutrally as a set of statistics showing uptake of Bt Cotton, but in a section devoted to the 'problems' facing Indian farmers.

These groups are the local workhorses of the coalition. They run projects on a fixed term basis with money channelled either from nodal and metropolitan organizations (as seen in the funding relations of some of the above) or directly from INGOs and foreign governments, though also with significant amounts from state government or national bank (NABARD) sources. They are less involved than the metropolitan and nodal groups in communicating with the media or in national level lobbying or protest activities. However, apart from their 'development' work, they serve the wider coalition in three main ways: firstly they provide field data about the 'failure' of Bt Cotton and the danger of GMOs to health and wildlife; secondly, they provide manpower for protests and marches from the villages in which they work; thirdly their projects provide an 'alternative' model of agrarian economics, which is frequently cited in the literature of the nodal and metropolitan groups. The skill sets of their workers reflect their less media centred role, with senior officers being generally older, having worked in rural development since the 1980s in most cases. For these groups, participation in anti GMO networks is just part of their identity, and success in organic farming projects might make them more viable contenders for funding in many other areas of development work, as discussed below.

### Mass based and grassroots organizations

Table 3.6. Mass based and grassroots organizations.

KRRS	Early 80's	Campaigns	As above
Factions of Shetkari Sangatana	Mid 90's	Campaigns	None
CPI affiliated farmers' and shepherds unions and Left groups	Since 1948	Campaigns	Party funding
Gandhian grassroots organizations	Since 1948	Projects at village level	Domestic funding

These are non professional organizations, either voluntary (the Gandhian groups), or openly political in orientation (the farmers' unions affiliated to the Indian Communist Party and mass farmers' movements). Their relationship to the anti-GMO coalition is more problematic, as analyzed below, and in chapter five (where the case of the Shetkari Sangatana and the KRRS is explored in depth). They have many different motivations to involve themselves in the coalition, which are analyzed below, but apart from the KRRS up till 2002, they have played a mainly subordinate role in coalition activities and in the framing of movement goals. This is largely because of the crucial difference between this 'level' and the others - the lack of professional resources and professional 'framing' capacity of this group of organizations. In most cases, they rely on information generated at the level of the nodal and metropolitan groups, and have made few contributions to the copious documentation and research put together by the nodal and metropolitan groups.

One of the ironies of the coalition, given its emphasis on Gandhian themes, is that the Gandhian groups at the bottom of the list, have few connections to the rest of the organizations. For example, a long term Gandhian village organizer interviewed in Nagpur<sup>120</sup>, who had been pushing for organic cotton farming in the villages he worked with, told me that he had no transnational linkages at all, and that the only connection he had to the network was a symbolic gift of organic seeds from Vandana Shiva's organization, Navdanya, when she visited as part of her 'bija satyagraha' campaign. Local ashrams may provide support for these village level Gandhians, but they lack the capacities or ideological orientation to transnational imaginaries necessary to participate in the network. This gap in ideational 'pull' is explored further in chapters four and six.

### **Funding of organizations**

Looking in more detail at the patterns of funding for NGOs in the coalition, we see that European INGOs and donors dominate the scene. In particular, the following groups occur with the most

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<sup>120</sup> Interview number 39: Mr Nisal.

frequency: HIVOS (Netherlands), Oxfam GB, and various German church groups (Misereor – the Catholic umbrella organization, and EED and EZE, two protestant/evangelical umbrella groups). In turn, these European donors like HIVOS of the Netherlands receive a majority of their funding from EU sources<sup>121</sup> so there is a strong but indirect link between the EU and network members in India, the significance of which is explored below.

The amounts of money involved are quite large. Data is not available for all actors in the network but the data does exist from both donors and recipients and can be extrapolated to give a picture of the financial health of both elite and regional organizations in the coalition. From HIVOS, the most generous donor to coalition members, the following amounts (converted into August 2011 dollars for ease of comparison) were contracted for projects<sup>122</sup> to organizations mentioned in the tables above, for two to four year periods beginning in 2006: (from HIVOS 2009):

DDS, Hyderabad: \$ 176,445

Navdanya / RFSTE (2 projects): \$ 890, 443

CSA, Hyderabad: \$ 72,138

Green Foundation, Bangalore: \$ 126, 485

ICRA, Bangalore (2 projects): \$ 583,429<sup>123</sup>

Oxfam, India also reports yearly amounts distributed to organizations included in the coalition (Oxfam India 2010: 68):

CSA, Hyderabad: \$ 37,029

MARI, Warangal: \$ 76,615

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<sup>121</sup> Interview number 71 with HIVOS sustainable agriculture program director.

<sup>122</sup> For particular village projects, but presumably including salaries and other expenses at headquarters of these organizations. An assumption of some fungibility of funds seems realistic.

<sup>123</sup> Information in HIVOS (2008), the annual report for years 2006/2007

SYO, Warangal: \$ 84,902

NCAS, Pune: \$ 55,100

YUVA, Maharashtra: \$ 280,009

Greenpeace India does not report the specific amounts it disburses to particular groups (it spends most of its own money rather than working directly with others), but its total figure for both income and expenditure in 2009 (give or take a few dollars difference between them) was \$ 2,778,274, of which 11% (\$ 305, 610) was directed toward GMO related campaigns (Greenpeace India 2009:37). This amount is all the more substantial given that Greenpeace do not fund organic farming projects directly, so the money is given for meetings, one off protests, advocacy and lobbying, mostly for events run directly by Greenpeace India, although the DDS and SYO in Andhra Pradesh, for example reported one off sums being made available for research (surveys of farmers) and advocacy ( transporting farmers for rallies, etc. )

Looking at the other side of the balance sheet – at figures for particular recipient regional organizations (which were usually not made available to me), the Green Foundation in Bangalore reported (for 2007) foreign donor contributions<sup>124</sup> of \$ 153,000, and domestic contributions of \$21,500 toward its model organic farming and seed bank projects in 10 villages, with 20 field workers. On a smaller scale, CROPS in Andhra Pradesh which runs one village level project (of about 30 farmers) in Eenabavi near Warangal, reported total contributions of \$ 20,860 for the year 2008, not including incomes for its many other village level projects (see below).

What does this data mean? A number of conclusions can be drawn from the figures above and in the tables showing the names of donors. Firstly, in the Indian context these incomes are very high: Vandana Shiva's Navdanya is earning (from HIVOS alone) nearly \$1,000,0000 for a four year organic

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<sup>124</sup> The bulk coming from HIVOS, UNDP and USC Canada.

agriculture project, and when income from Navdanya's stores in Delhi, online contributions and from other aid organizations is added, Shiva is clearly running a multi-million dollar operation. Even at the most modest level (CROPS), an input per farmer of around \$1,000 per year is considerable in the Indian countryside, and creates strong incentives to participate in such projects for farmers heavily in debt or earning just a dollar a day on average. Secondly, donors are overwhelmingly European, and as described below, the externalisation of Europe's anti GMO preferences is part of the larger explanation for the persistence of the network. Thirdly, and most importantly for this dissertation, these large sums of money are *not* available to traditional organizations, such as farmers' unions, non professional Gandhian activists, or to the non transnationalized faction of farmers' movements such as the KRRS and Shetkari Sangatana (see chapter five). Neither can advocates of what chapter two described as 'modernization' approaches offer similar incentives for organizations to mobilize around their themes. Financial incentives therefore exist to adapt to the prevailing norms, for anyone or any organization working on agricultural issues.

#### **Remarks on the 'levels' of the coalition**

The diagram below tries to sketch the relationships between the levels of the network, in the form of a *map of transactions*, highlighting the direction and type of flows that occur between the different members. Information, money and 'authenticity' are taken as the three key elements moving between members.

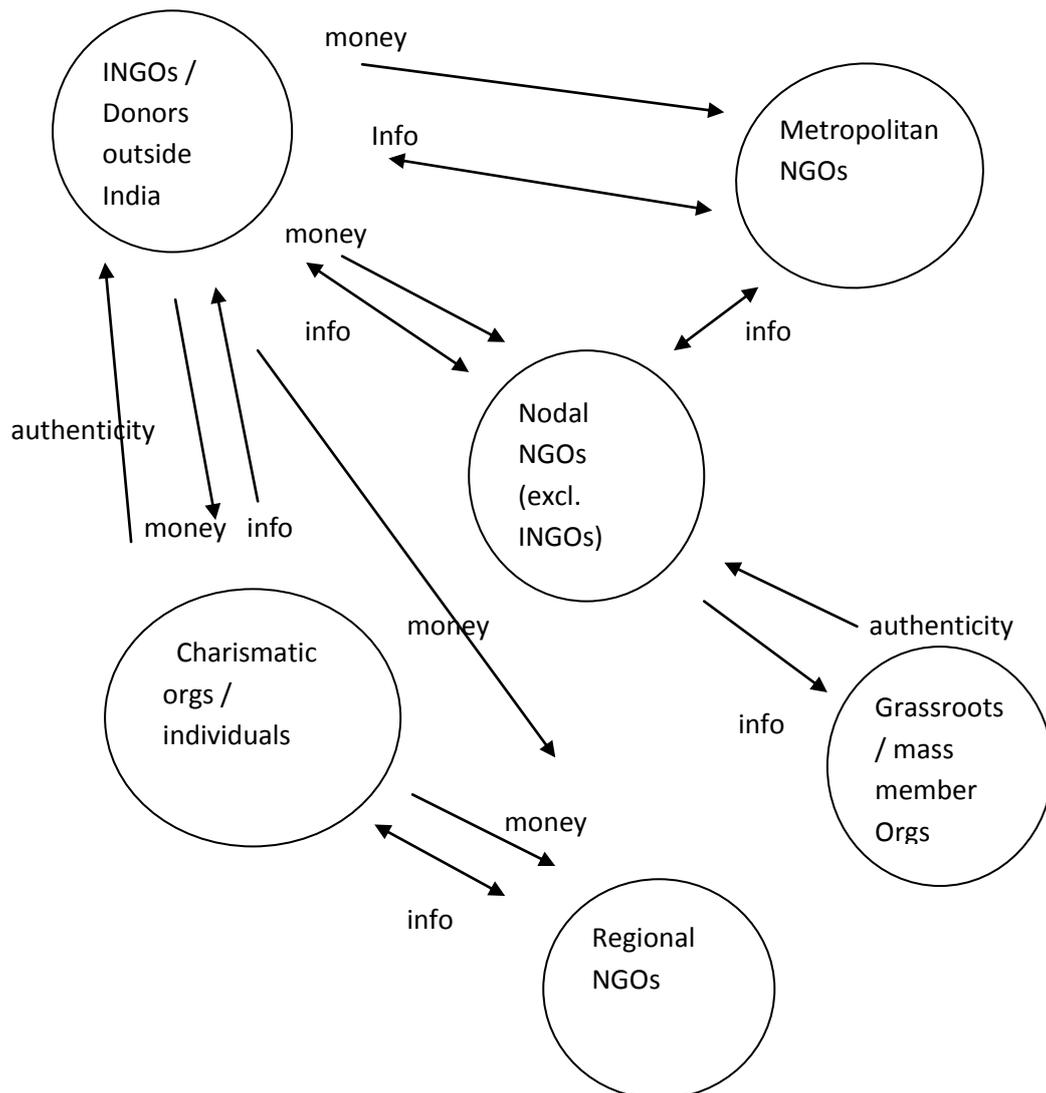


Figure 3.1. Diagrammatic overview of the network(s)

This sketch highlights several points about the network (bearing in mind that it ignores, for simplicity's sake, the various governmental and private actors also involved in the coalition, (described below). Firstly, it shows that the network is really various networks rather than one 'spoke and wheel' system. This is important when addressing the intra network rivalries described in

chapter six. Secondly it shows that grassroots, or mass membership groups<sup>125</sup> have relatively little input into the network and get little money out of participation, reflecting the fact that they do not produce professional information or marketable discourse that can be utilized in the media or handed on to donors; instead they are 'receivers' of frames and information from nodal and charismatic members of the network. Thirdly, it shows that the charismatic groups are relatively poorly linked to the nodal and regional groups, reflecting the fact that activists like Vandana Shiva and Kishor Tiwari speak mainly to English speaking media and an international audience, in a discourse that is less immediately utilizable for project oriented or technocratic organizations. Fourthly, it shows how information is circulated around the system; although some high level scientific information comes from foreign INGOs to the Indian network, via for example, Greenpeace's science officer in the UK, data about GMOs is 'produced' mainly at the intermediate / nodal level, in the form of reports, surveys and video material. Finally, it highlights how, not just information, but 'authenticity' (here meaning the appearance of grassroots 'voices' if not the reality) are exchanged when donors give funds to regional or charismatic organizations: representations of these groups' activities act as valuable marketing tools for northern organizations and stories from India about Bt Cotton percolate down to northern activists, rallying people against GM crops or corporations, where the less tangible harms of GMOs in Europe might be less persuasive<sup>126</sup>.

The network is therefore, not *dominated* by northern interests, in the way that Bob (2005) sometimes implies in his otherwise complementary account of TANs. As argued in chapter one, Indian actors ('strategic transnational thinkers') are the movers and disseminators, not international donors. Instead, there are a series of exchanges, which, overall, encourage the production and dissemination of certain frames and narratives. Below, the linkages and relationships involved in the

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<sup>125</sup> Meaning here, primarily Left farmers' unions and the remnants of the KRRS and Sanghatana that oppose GMOs.

<sup>126</sup> This claim is based on interviews conducted in the UK with some anti GMO activists, for whom the narratives coming out of India have great emotional force. See also the online anarchist magazine Do or Die (1999), which draws heavily on Vandana Shiva's account of Monsanto's actions in India.

network are broken down in more detail, bringing in other types of organizations, as well as just donors and NGOs.

### **Institutional Linkages**

In this section of the chapter, we examine nine functional linkages, or ‘structural couplings’, which have sustained the anti-GMO network, asking what interests are served at some of the different levels set out in the sketch above. Questions of ideological commonality and cultural significance are postponed until chapters four and five, although in some sections (on the media and international donors), ideational resonance in a wider community of ‘users’ obviously makes functional linkages possible just as those linkages then accentuate those ideas in a positive feedback loop. The point of this section is to try and show for a particular activist network the richness of its connections to players not normally thought of as ‘civil society’ actors, and to provide a (sometimes ironic) contrast for chapter four’s analysis of the normative or ‘romantic’ face of the network. These structural couplings can also be described as instances of the ‘brokerage’ that Lewis and Mosse (above) saw in NGO behavior.

#### **1. Negotiating international choke points: the network and the Indian state in functional co-dependency**

One reason for the influence and prestige of the metropolitan NGO-activist networks in India is that they work in an area riven with international conflict, where expert guidance, information and activist ‘framings’ of the issues can be useful both to foreign states and to the Indian state itself. Speaking metaphorically, TANS occupy rifts in global governance rather as bacteria occupy rifts in the

sea floor, because these openings are rich in sustenance. For organizations, the sustenance comes in the form of attention from powerful players in world politics, who often use information and discourse provided by activist networks and their accompanying NGOs to achieve their political goals under conditions of normative and regulatory uncertainty.

Herring (2009; 2010) has coined a useful term – ‘choke points’ – in relation to the anti GMO coalition. A choke point occurs when there is a fundamental ambiguity or disagreement about norms or the competency of particular agencies; at these points TANs and NGOs thrive because they are able to offer technical knowledge and are able to ‘sell’ their own version of events in the media. Drezner (2007) and Pollack and Shaffer (2009) highlight the regulation of GMOs as a key choke point in the international regulatory order. As Pollack and Shaffer put it (18) each of the EU and US “has sought to promote international standards and international cooperation on its own terms”, and despite over a decade of deliberation this rift has become deeper<sup>127</sup>. Briefly, the US has promoted a view of GMOs that reconciles them with existing agricultural products, that does not treat them as special based on the process by which they have been produced, but rather as ‘substantially equivalent’ to ordinary crops. The EU, on the other hand, with the Cartagena Protocol of 2000 as its embodiment, sees GMOs as fundamentally ‘special’ because of the recombinant process that formed them<sup>128</sup> and therefore worthy of a ‘precautionary principle’ in putting the products into the market. In practical terms this has meant strict labelling of products containing GMOs, a practice

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<sup>127</sup> The causes of the rift go beyond the scope of this dissertation, although the use made of India is not. Pollack and Shaffer highlight four causes: interest group configurations (fewer beneficiaries of GM technology in Europe than the USA); cultural differences (especially as regarding the status of farming in Europe as protector of the land); institutional differences (with more ‘veto players’ in the EU) and contingent events (the food crises in Europe of the late 1990’s)

<sup>128</sup> Herring ( ) points out the irony that only certain kinds of products produced through recombinant processes get targeted for special regulation, as medicinal products such as insulin, do not. Interest group politics is at work here -

strongly resisted by the USA and its allies in Latin America<sup>129</sup>, given consumer resistance to GMOs in European export markets.<sup>130</sup>

For developing countries such as India, as Pollack and Shaffer (2009: 295) put it, the problem is as follows:

In making their domestic regulatory choices, developing countries must take into account developments in the ongoing US / EU dispute, the economic and political pressure exerted on them by both sides, the resulting conflicts among and stalemates within most relevant international regimes, and the uncertainty about the future direction of biotech regulation and its impact on agricultural change.

Or as Bernauer (2005: 9) puts it more bluntly, for developing countries not to antagonise the US or the EU on GMO regulation “amounts to squaring a circle”. Without this precondition of international uncertainty and stalemate, it is hard to believe the anti-GMO network would have endured as long as it has. Practically, this transcontinental rift means two principle roles for TANs: firstly, and most crudely, a role for metropolitan organizations to channel the ‘European’ / Cartagena line on biosafety, in other words to act as *ambassadors* for Europe in India; secondly, and more subtly, to act as *agents* of the Indian state and its various departments as it struggles to negotiate a fine line between developmentalist objectives, wariness of American corporate motives and fears for the European market for Indian agricultural products.

The first of these roles – that of ambassador was often cited in interviews with supporters of GMOs in India<sup>131</sup>. These critics see TANs as straightforward tools of the European Union, in its battle with the USA over regime type. Drezner (2007), for example, makes this argument for TANs in the GMO case. Along similar lines for Africa, Paarlberg (2008; 138-47) has made a strong case for the dominance of European money in the NGO opposition to GMOs, in a case which may well be over

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<sup>129</sup> Bernauer (2003: 8) distinguishes the USA, Argentina and Canada as the GMO enthusiasts and Australia, Brazil, China, India, Japan, Mexico, Russia and South Africa as the cautious countries wary of EU norms.

<sup>130</sup> Obviously this public resistance is complexly related to the regulatory regimes, as

<sup>131</sup> These kind of claims were commonly made in interview with those involved in pro biotech think tanks, public sector scientists and those in the pro GMO farmers’ networks.

determined, given the reliance of African farming on European markets and the high percentage of development aid in African budgets.

Indian civil society is arguably more autonomous than Africa of direct financial dominance from Europe. Certainly, however, in terms of the discourse, metropolitan members of the network have pushed for the adoption of European norms. This is especially true of Suman Sahai's metropolitan group, Gene Campaign. This organization's literature, for example, is replete with references to EU formulations on biosafety (for example, Gene Campaign 2004).

The data (described above) on money originating mainly from Europe, and much of that originally from the EU (via INGOs like HIVOS) might support the above hypothesis. However, several interviewees argued that sheer market forces (fears about export markets) were more important in pushing India toward the EU model.<sup>132</sup>

Perhaps, the more promising line is to see the network's metropolitan organizations as *agents* of the Indian state in its attempts to negotiate a difficult path on GMO regulation, rather than more directly as ambassadors of European norms. The Indian government has had to thread the needle between European worries about GMO exports, and a developmentalist approach that would mean promoting India's own biotechnology industry (Menski 2005; Scoones 2006). This has given NGOs a vital role in providing discursive frames and data to governmental agents in India's negotiations with international organizations.

There are four ways in which members of the network act as agents for the central state. The first sees civil society providing resources to the state with outcomes it may not quite intend. In his PhD dissertation Menski (2005) argues that on a range of issues (biosafety, patents and

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<sup>132</sup> For example Prof. Anand Kumar (interview number 52) argued that it was fears about the EU market for GM crops that influenced policy more than any direct donor influence. But market sentiment in Europe has obviously been strongly influenced by NGOs (Toke 2004; Pollack and Shaffer 2009), many of whom work in partnership with Indian groups and utilise Indian narratives in their campaigns, so assigning causality to the market or to civil society is impossible.

biosovereignty)<sup>133</sup> civil society organizations (especially Gene Campaign and Vandana Shiva's RFSTE) have been invaluable agents of the Indian government. For example, it was the NGOs with their skills at 'framing' activities and public relations who coined the term 'biopiracy' to critique the way that western corporations were attempting to develop versions of Indian crops like neem and basmati. The Indian government took up the terminology, and incorporated what seemed to be NGO concerns into the 2002 Patents Amendment Act (Menski 2005: 191). However, according to Menski's analysis, the Indian government was *not* intending to hand over patent rights on crops to *communities* and / or their NGO 'guardians'. The benefit is subject to state discretion (229). Similarly, while taking up NGO rhetoric about not commodifying nature in the form of patents, the Indian government was also trying to encourage Indian entrepreneurs to do exactly that, by filing patents of their own (187). Menski refers to this as a "hybrid discourse" (173), in which nationalism, NGO talk and liberalism get melded together, and it is something that the Indian government would not have been able to produce by itself, argues Menski, without input from consummate NGO 'framers' such as Vandana Shiva and Suman Sahai.

The second way NGO members of the network act as potential agents of the state is more direct than in Menski's argument. Metropolitan NGOs, especially Suman Sahai's Gene Campaign have sought to incorporate themselves into governmental decision making bodies. In fact, Gene Campaign's literature appears designed to serve this end – with its emphasis on the particular points in the regulatory apparatus that need NGO or 'civil society' input. For example Sahai frequently lists points of entry for civil society 'experts' into the decision making machinery, both in publications (2004: 153) , and more recently on her internet blog. To summarize some relevant points from a blog of February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2010<sup>134</sup>:

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<sup>133</sup> Menski's argument works best for the latter two issues, and less well for biosafety, where the NGOs' demands chime less well with the developmentalist / productivist concerns of the Indian government.

<sup>134</sup> [http://sumansahai-blog.blogspot.com/2010\\_02\\_01\\_archive.html](http://sumansahai-blog.blogspot.com/2010_02_01_archive.html)

- The GEAC (the primary advisory body on biosafety issues) should be divided into different committees with expertise on social science, agronomy, ecology, etc
- New “structures [to] enable public participation in decision making” should be established
- “Risk - benefit” analysis must include public participation

Tellingly Sahai also refers to European norms as being more appropriate than American norms, including the ‘precautionary principle’, labelling of GM products and the inappropriateness of putting GMO regulation under environmental protection legislation. Gene Campaign is trying to make the case for the indispensability of civil society organizations like Gene Campaign. Not only are they the ideal mediators to arrange for ‘the public’ to get their voice heard in government but they can (as suggested above) select the best norms for India from international options, unlike the Indian government that lacks, in Sahai’s eyes, the competency to do this.<sup>135</sup> Gene Campaign’s tactics include the launching of a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in 2004, the outcome of which was to get the anti GMO scholar, Pushpa Bhargava installed on the GEAC, and, a quieter effort with government actors to get Gene Campaign acknowledged as an official advisory body on GMO’s. The latter tactic has succeeded, with Gene Campaign and Greenpeace India taken on board as official advisers to the recently concluded M S Swaminathan panel on the future of GMO regulation in India<sup>136</sup>. This tactic of ‘insertion’ into key committees and advisory bodies has led to tensions played out in the media and described by interviewees, for example between Prof Deepak Pental and

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<sup>135</sup> Heins (2008: 96) makes this case for Gene Campaign, based in research in the 1990’s. He argues that Sahai emphasized the incompetence of the Indian civil service, framing the Indian government as the ‘enemy’ rather than Vandana Shiva framed foreign corporations as the enemy. He may understate the way in which Sahai’s discourse differs from Shiva’s – the difference in my argument between technocratic and charismatic forms of NGO legitimation.

<sup>136</sup> See Financial Express, June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2010, where ‘experts flay’ the panel’s findings – the experts being Suman Sahai and Greenpeace scientific adviser Dr Ashesh Tayal.

Suman Sahai over a Planning Commission taskforce on GMOs in 2007<sup>137</sup>, in which Pental felt Sahai had distorted the consensus of the panel toward the precautionary approach<sup>138</sup>.

This latter incident suggests a meaningful distinction between organizations that are technocratic in the way they frame themselves and those that are genuinely ‘*governance oriented*’ (chapter six – conclusion). While Gene Campaign has gained access to some committees as described above, they were described by several interviewees as having little or no influence on policy. Perusal of Gene Campaign’s documentation (as described in chapter four) shows that arguments come down to appeals to ‘uncertainty’ and to a general appeal for tighter regulation. This is a rather different relation to governance than, for example, human rights organizations that gather data which is then passed on to United Nations bodies for possible action. As argued in chapter six, the restraint that such governance relations put on TANs is not present in any actors in the coalition against GMOs.

The third aspect of state-network linkages is the dextrous way in which members of the network ‘target’ particular parts of the Indian state, trying to form linkages and personal alliances with individuals or agencies with which they believe they can form lasting partnerships. These linkages can help to accentuate rifts in the extremely complex governmental apparatus surrounding GMO regulation in India. This complexity is explained in the table and figure below, the table adapted from USDA (2007)<sup>139</sup> sets out the main agencies involved and the figure from Manjunath (2007: 64) describes the process of application (at least up until 2008 when a gene event model simplified applications somewhat).

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<sup>137</sup> Times of India June 2<sup>nd</sup> 2007 and Sahai’s own explanation: <http://www.genecampaign.org/home/Dr-ss-response-to-PC.htm>

<sup>138</sup> This is an interesting, if minor case of the politics of information flows, since Pental was only alerted to a discrepancy between his views and the panel’s findings by a pro GMO private activist in Bangalore, Prof Kameshwara Rao.

<sup>139</sup> Essentially a guide written by the US embassy in India to potential biotechnology investors in the USA.

Table 3.7. Main Actors in biotechnology Policy.

Agency	Role in regulation
Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC), under Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF)	Responsible for implementing Biotech Rules of 1989: to approve use of bio-engineered products and approve imports.
Department of Biotechnology (DBT), under Ministry of Science and Technology (MST)	Evaluates overall strategy on biotechnology and sets research agenda for public research
Review Committee of Genetic Manipulation (RCGM), under DBT	Monitor ongoing field trials of all bio engineered crops and decide on regulatory apparatus used by GEAC
Ministry of Agriculture (MOA)	Assess agronomic performance of GM crops
Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MHFW)	Evaluates human safety issues associated with biotech
State Governments and State Biotechnology Coordination Committees (SBCC)	Research support at state agricultural universities; monitoring any adverse effects of biotech products on the environment

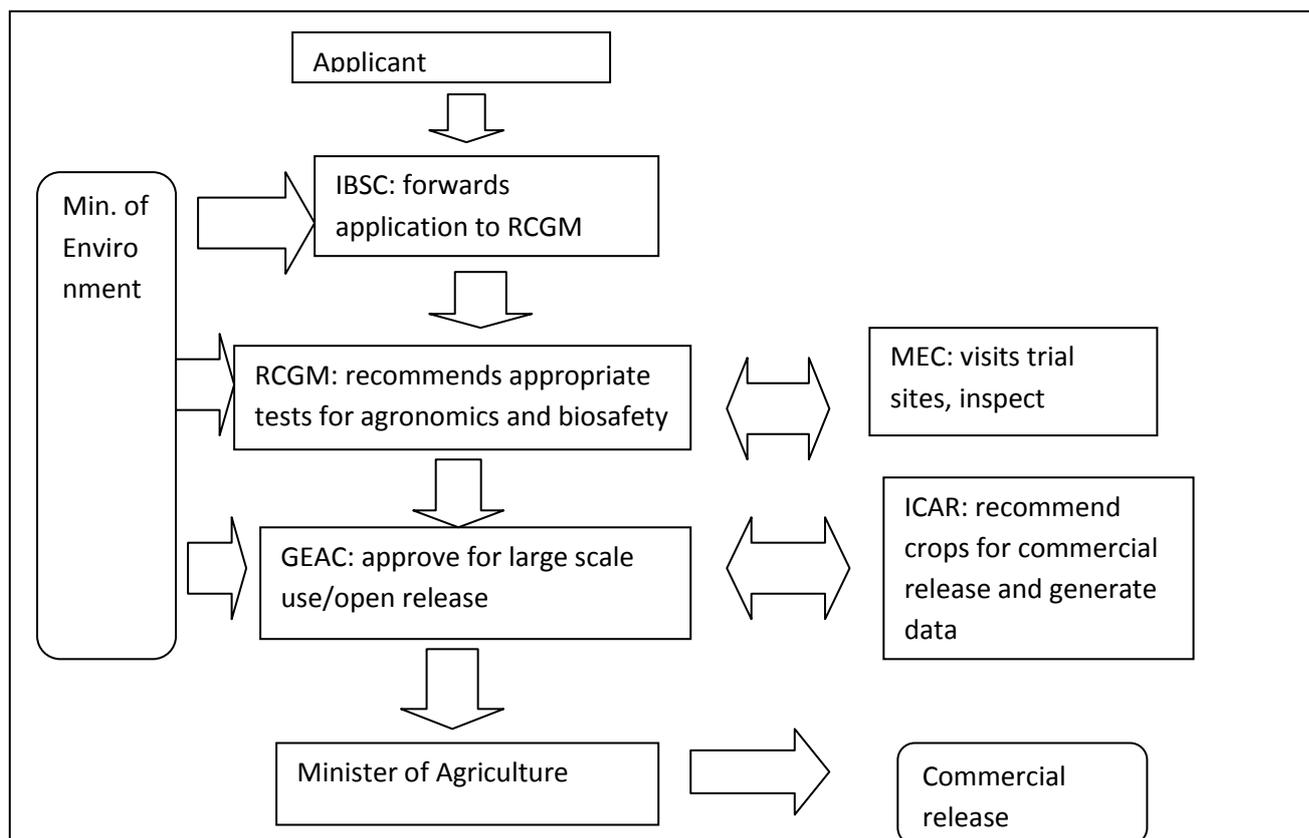


Figure 3.2. GMO Application Process

As Montpettit et al (2007: 268) argue, based on European cases, fragmented polities, especially federal ones like India, provide more opportunities for interest groups like the anti GMO coalition to grow. Network actors are aware of this and have used tensions between different levels of regulation to form linkages, as argued below in the case of tensions between state and central government at the stage of field trials.

In interview with Greenpeace India's GMO officer for example, he stressed that the very complexity of the GEAC's apparatus alone (with 7 ministries involved and 4 represented on the GEAC itself) was an opportunity for Greenpeace to intervene. Herring (2010) refers to the 2010 decision of Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh to ban Bt Brinjal over the objections of the minister of

agriculture and the various coalitions of pro and anti GMO actors who tried to win over the environment minister.

In the past, this targeting has involved the former Union Health Minister (2004-2009) Dr Ambumani Ramadoss. As President of the *Pasumai Thayagam* (Green Motherland) movement within the PMK (allies of Congress), Ramadoss was seen as the crucial sympathetic insider by NGOs such as Greenpeace India<sup>140</sup> and Greenpeace invited him to their public consultation sessions on GMOs .

Finally, NGOs in the network have cultivated links with political parties at the centre. A search through the online archives of the Lok Sabha for 'Bt Cotton', for example, shows numerous questions from members referring explicitly to NGO knowledge claims or discursive formulations, as shown in chapter two. These are members from all of India's main parties (CPI, Congress, Shiva Sena, BJP), about half of whom represent areas with cotton farming. As several interviewees in the NGO sector suggested, Indian MP's are 'knowledge poor' or 'followers not leaders' on GMO issues and NGO's provide a 'hot button' discourse for MP's to take advantage of politically<sup>141</sup>.

More importantly these party political linkages also include strong ties between the leading network members and metropolitan NGOs. Suman Sahai, for example had such ties to the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in her native Bihar, in the capacity of official spokesperson and general secretary<sup>142</sup> and Vandana Shiva and Devinder Sharma have both tried to forge ties with the BJP, especially at the regional level (see below). As discussed in the next section, NGOs with their international legitimacy and local projects offer valuable resources to political parties, especially before elections when funds are being disbursed to rural constituencies and it is helpful if the channels for disbursement look like development aid. At the same time, as the example of Sahai and Gene Campaign shows, having experience in the 'old politics' of political parties run as one person fiefdoms (Laloo and the RJD) might act as a background condition for the success of NGOs in accessing governmental networks. In

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<sup>140</sup> Interview number 22

<sup>141</sup> See Herring (2010) on the use the opposition parties have made of NGO discourse on Bt Brinjal

<sup>142</sup> Prof Volker Heins reports in a personal communication that he raised concerns about these linkages in 1999 as part of his role as auditor of Gene Campaign on behalf of a consortium of German donors

either case, functional dependencies tie network members to the kinds of hierarchical politics their romantic discourse (see chapter four) condemns.

## 2. Linkages to Local state governments and parties

This section continues a similar theme. Members of the network have developed functional, co dependent relations with political actors at the state as well as the central level. Suman Sahai's links with a political party in the notoriously corrupt state of Bihar were mentioned above. What kinds of advantage can state actors and network members get out of these kind of linkages?

One advantage was very clear from interviews conducted in the run up to India's 2009 general election. State governments were keen to find ways to appeal to the rural electorate, which explains a flurry of (probably superfluous and poorly targeted) measures in the field of debt relief before the election. Support for 'organic' agriculture is another way in which funds can be disbursed to key rural groups and NGOs are channels for this kind of funding. For example more than one interviewee<sup>143</sup> mentioned the role of Devinder Sharma as intermediary between NGOs, (formerly)the KRRS and the Karnataka BJP government, which he has cultivated as a partner over the last 10 years; the Karnataka government announced a generous package of support for organic agriculture before the election in 2009<sup>144</sup>. In this enterprise, Sharma was joined by Vandana Shiva, who also cultivated links with the Karnataka BJP, via its farmers' wing, the *Kisan Morcha*, (Madsen 2001 b). In Andhra Pradesh it is the CSA in Hyderabad which has done most to cultivate linkages with the state government. Apparently<sup>145</sup>, these linkages began with the personal interest of the AP agriculture minister in organic farming on his (extensive) personal land. According to some

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<sup>143</sup> For example Mr P Babu of ICRA, Bangalore (interview number 78)

<sup>144</sup> It is not clear how this money was to be distributed or which NGOs in particular would benefit, but all the project oriented NGOs I spoke to in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh talked about receiving an increasing portion of funding from state sources for organic agriculture.

<sup>145</sup> Interview number 5, with Eenadu (Telugu newspaper) agriculture journalist.

interviewees, the CSA has close linkages with the hierarchy of the AP Congress Party<sup>146</sup> and has used these linkages to channel funding to organic projects. It is noteworthy that in Maharashtra, where interviewees all agreed the state government has historically had little focus on the Western cotton growing areas, there are very few NGOs or formal activist groups within the network. The lack of viable linkages with state government as compared with AP and Karnataka may be one explanation for this.

In an interview with CSA program coordinator Kavita Kuruganti<sup>147</sup>, it was made clear than another mutual dependency between the network and state politics matters: this is the capacity of NGOs to remind state governments of incursions on their 'sovereignty' over agricultural issues, especially in the form of field tests of Bt Cotton that allegedly were unknown to state governments. The strategy mirrors the role metropolitan NGOs played with the central government in Menski's account, whereby they used international sovereignty anxieties to make themselves indispensable to the state as 'defenders' of Indian autonomy vis a vis international corporations.

At the state level NGOs remind jealous state governments that much of the activity on GMOs is being regulated at the central level. However, the degree to which NGOs are valuable knowledge sources for state government is challenged: in interview<sup>148</sup> the Andhra Pradesh agriculture minister strongly denied that NGOs had had any role to play in the state's legal battles with Monsanto (chapter two) or over the question of Monsanto's supposedly unacknowledged Bt trials on state territory. But other interviewees, otherwise hostile to the network<sup>149</sup>, conceded that this was one area where NGOs had an advantage over knowledge-poor farmers' unions and grassroots political activists

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<sup>146</sup> According to Prof Kameshwara Rao, a pro GMO activist and scientist, these linkages were seen as politically valuable by the AP Congress in its rivalry with the Telegu Desam Party, and in its efforts to be seen as pro rural – a crucial symbolic factor in the victory of the AP Congress in 2002.

<sup>147</sup> Interview number 3

<sup>148</sup> Interview number 7

<sup>149</sup> For example Anil Kuman of the Confederation of Kisan Organizations, interview number 8

### 3. Linkages with the media

As the media analysis in Chapter two showed, network NGOs have managed to orchestrate much of the debate in the Indian media about the cons of GMOs, setting the terms of the debate and potentially drowning out the alternative discourses described in that chapter. The ‘memes’ which the media responds to, as shown in chapter two, are persistent and seemingly immune from reality checks. But the nature of this media-network linkage goes beyond the capacity of these organizations to get stories into the media. There are two mechanisms by which a media-NGO complex emerges: the first through a subtle logic by which certain stories are regarded as news and others are ignored, the second through the rise of ‘celebrity activists’ who work specifically through access to the media. These influences are made easier by changes in the structure of news media in India.

In interviews with journalists at major English language and Telegu language newspapers in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra what emerged was the new structure of the news media in India. The number of specific agricultural correspondents has dramatically reduced over the last 20 years. When I asked to speak to ‘agricultural journalists’ for interviews, I was usually told by editorial staff, that no one met that description. This has meant that agricultural stories or ‘rural’ stories need an especially strong narrative or ‘hook’ to get into newspapers. For example, Mr. Venkateshwarlu at the Indian Express in Hyderabad<sup>150</sup> pointed out that when he covered Bt Cotton stories his own name would be attached to the story, whereas typical agricultural stories would be given an anonymous ‘special correspondent’ tag. In addition, he believed that Bt Cotton related stories were more likely to be ‘promoted’ to the national editions of his newspaper than other agricultural stories, for example about irrigation money corruption. These stories emerge from NGO’s, making them key partners for journalists strapped for resources and trying to ‘sell’ rural issues to a mainly

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<sup>150</sup> Interview number 79

urban audience. A journalist at Telegu language newspaper Eenadu, Narasinha Reddy<sup>151</sup> agreed that NGO's working on GMOs were now primarily working via the media, rather than other forms of mass protest and that even in the regional language press NGOs were crucial sources of information for journalists, almost all of whom are now based in urban areas without close family relations in the countryside, as might have been the case 20 years previously.

At the 'highest' end of this system of media filtration, are the European newspapers that run stories on issues related to GMOs in India. For example a Guardian (UK) environment story from July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2008 "Indian farmers shun GM for organic" simply takes quotes from the DDS and CROPS in Andhra Pradesh and unquestioningly refers to these groups as if they were spontaneous social movements of farmers<sup>152</sup>.

Two 'charismatic' members of the network – Devinder Sharma and Kishor Tiwari have proved to be particular masters of the media. In an interview, Sharma pointed out that he now writes 11 newspaper columns, 7 in regional languages and 4 in English. Kishor Tiwari of the VJAS ( see above) has waged a campaign to 'count' the suicide dead in Vidarbha District, for which he has attracted attention in the national and international media, not least for his insistence that suicides are related directly to globalization and in particular to Bt Cotton use<sup>153</sup>. However the latter case also points to a rare rupture in the functional dependency of media and activist networks; in Nagpur, Vivek Deshpande, editor of the Indian Express in that city, has waged a less renowned campaign<sup>154</sup> *against*

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<sup>151</sup> Interview number 5

<sup>152</sup> This particular article may be unusually poorly researched, and out of date, given that by this point these NGOs, when I interviewed them had stopped claiming (within India) that they were social movement organizations, and would never have made the extravagant claims about Bt failure mentioned in the article within India, but it illustrates the 'direct line' that the activist network has to the most prestigious newspapers.

<sup>153</sup> For example in the English language version of Der Spiegel of August 9<sup>th</sup> 2007, where it is pointed out that he is driven around in a vehicle on the front of which is written "this man was sent to help the poor" or on the BBC website 1<sup>st</sup> May 2006, where Tiwari is described as founding a 'farmers' movement' to oppose globalization and biotechnology in India. Tiwari certainly fits the 'charismatic' ideal type.

<sup>154</sup> 'How facts die in the Vidarbha Suicide count', Sunday Express, Sep 2<sup>nd</sup> 2007, where Indian Express journalists travelled to meet families of the '10 suicides in 24 hours' reported by Tiwari on the occasion of the Prime Minister's visit to Vidarbha District. The findings were that only two of the 10 suicides were related to agrarian crisis, the others being a combination of family problems, natural calamities such as floods and histories of alcoholism. This is not, of course to say that these problems might not have socio-economic origins

Tiwari's suicide watch, by visiting the families of suicides immediately after Tiwari and trying to find out the causes of the suicide. In most cases Deshpande claims, suicide was due to a variety of psychological and family problems and rarely corresponded directly to the 'international' narrative Tiwari was trying to promote<sup>155</sup>. Even where economic problems and debt were the primary cause Deshpande referred to the 'regional complexes' that affect Vidarbha District and cannot be directly tied to globalization, let alone Bt Cotton (see further discussion in chapter two). Cases like this, where the transnational GMO / globalization narrative was challenged are rare; for example while the two journalists interviewed in Andhra Pradesh were skeptical about the centrality of the GMO/globalization narrative they felt it was their job to present the news available to them, and the NGOs were the best creators of news stories<sup>156</sup>.

In all these cases, apart from the careerist motivations of journalists to rely on reliable NGO news sources, it is also the narrative power of the Bt Cotton / globalization story itself that makes reports based on this narrative 'rise' further through the hierarchies of the global media than stories about 'regional complexes' and multiple causation would. As media theorists have suggested there are certain types of story which resonate with the demands of international media more than others. This should not be seen simply as 'distortion', which is how the media is portrayed in Boykoff's (2006) analysis of the media's framing of the Global Justice Movement, for example.<sup>157</sup> Neither, with this particular TAN has the media been a threat to the network's ability to 'set its own agenda' (Tarrow 1994: 128). Rather, we find, in this case at least, a *symbiosis* of media and NGO framings.

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or be made worse by socio-economic conditions, but in Deshpande's view the causes are a regional lack of agricultural-social capital / skills and internal to regional politics and corruption and do not correlate with the narrative of the GMO / globalization thesis. For example debt problems in Vidarbha according to Deshpande were even worse before the arrival of Bt Cotton and were a constant even before the minimum support price of cotton was reduced in 2002 by the Maharashtra Government, allegedly at the bequest of global neoliberal discourse.

<sup>155</sup> See Chapter 2 on 'regional complexes' for further discussion

<sup>156</sup> Interview with

<sup>157</sup> He argues that 'violence', 'disruption' and 'freak' frames of the anti WTO protests damaged public opinion of the protestors at Seattle. Perhaps, the anti GMO TAN's greater staying power and 'success' is partly due to its ability to work with rather than against the grain of the codings and formulae of mass media – as suggested above.

In Niklas Luhmann's (1996: 26-41) catalog of nine formal features of news media representations, there is much overlap with the anti GMO narrative. In the table below, the relevant features mentioned by Luhmann (one of them – 'local relevance' seems less applicable) are enumerated and their relation to the anti GMO narrative is pointed out.

Table 3.8. Luhmann's media analysis applied to the case

Luhmann's category	Application to anti GMO narratives
<b>Surprise:</b> "break with existing expectations " but preferably in a "series of novelties"	The GMO stories of crop failure or allergies, etc recur with each harvest – both surprising and regular
<b>Prolonged/deferred conflicts:</b> "put off the liberating information about winners and losers by way of reference to a future"	Constant appeals to regulation 'in the future' – court cases, etc, create drama of minor battles and larger war
<b>Norm Violation:</b> a particular deviation from normal practices is picked out as noteworthy, especially if 'extraordinary' – e.g 'alligator in back garden'.	'External' arrival of Bt Cotton marks a seeming violation of 'normal' agriculture (as Luhmann points out – the media coding of violation is often factually wrong when contextualised – in this case debt and risky market based agriculture are decades long features in India, but this is passed over in the media)
<b>Moral Judgment of norm violation:</b> but "disembedded" from any practical possibility of restitution through law. Allows for free play of commentary as 'observers' <sup>158</sup> ,	Complex causality of rural crisis is moralized in attacks on Mayhco-Monsanto or on lax regulation, or alien technologies, but without practical suggestions of alternative institutions.
<b>Attribution to Actors not structures:</b> particular organizations "serve society as tangible symbols of an unknown future", especially in times of rapid social change, and despite the obvious	The campaign attributes blame to Monsanto and to the GEAC, rather than to structural dysfunctions or long term change in the relative incomes of rural and urban citizens, etc

<sup>158</sup> This links to the analysis of the 'romantic' world view of chapter four.

simplifications involved	
<b>Recursive Topicality:</b> 'series' of events are favoured for reporting	As above: yearly harvests, and the potential for yearly 'crises' make Bt Cotton 'failure' stories useful for the media; they are also able to re-use and refer to previous stories of 'failure', e.g the recurrence of Bt failure stories when Bt Brinjal was proposed
<b>Quantities are favoured:</b> because they do not require 'context'; they appear to have significance in and of themselves, especially if they are 'big'	Kishor Tiwari's strategic use of suicide 'numbers' on a large chart in his office demonstrates this synergy of NGOs and media; again, as shown in chapter two context is missing
<b>Expression of Opinions:</b> the media are drawn to charismatic opinion makers, because 'strong' opinions can be endlessly reflected on, even within the media itself.	The evidence from chapter two, showing the prominence of charismatic figures like Vandana Shiva and Kishor Tiwari. Critiques of these strong views and counter critiques of the critiques then get fed back into the media system.

As Luhmann puts it, the mass news media, as any system, whether social or biological, makes 'selections' from its environment "based on a context of condensing, confirmation, generalization and schematization not found in the same way in the outside world" (37). It so happens that the kind of selections and schematizations made by the media (in the above table) are strikingly similar to those made by campaigning NGOs, especially as described in chapter one in the work of Heins (2008) and DeMars (2005). This pre-established harmony of function may of course be related to a mutual history of symbiosis dating back to the co evolution of modern mass media and modern campaigning organizations.

In Luhmann's monograph, this kind of schematization is not depicted as a 'problem' – more as a deep structural fact of modern experience along the lines of Anderson's (1991) print media and the corresponding experience of 'simultaneity' through newspapers. However, there is a difference between 1990's Germany, which Luhmann had in mind, with its multiple and relatively effective modern institutions, and rural India today. In the absence of effective parties, agricultural extension, or universal education, that might represent agriculturalists or enable them to integrate into other modern institutions, the media and their NGO partners have a disproportionate power to represent agricultural issues. With the decline of locally knowledgeable journalists (at least in the English language media), this means a 'pull' toward frames and narratives that are exportable across media markets and which are upwardly mobile to more prestigious national editions.

#### **4. Linkages with international donor organizations**

As discussed above, members of the network are not just 'ambassadors' within India for the precautionary principle as championed by the EU. More crucially, the network has forged ongoing linkages with donor organizations, more focused on trying to find partners with the requisite grassroots legitimacy and involved in projects that will resonate with the concerns of contributors in Europe or North America. Donor-activist relations are under studied in the literature, with the obvious exception of Bob (2005), but Bob's instrumentalist approach may understate the power that southern organizations have in the relationship, at least in a country with a long history of civil society activity like India.

Some very useful information related to the functional needs of donors comes from the Greenpeace International Archive of documentation (up to 1998), held at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, which I visited in June 2011. Unfortunately, this archive does not contain information about the post 1998 GMO campaigns in India or elsewhere, but it includes high level

managerial discussions of earlier biotechnology related campaigns, and arguments for setting up a permanent Greenpeace office in India.

In an intriguing diagrammatic representation, from 1996, senior program coordinator Chris Rose laid out Greenpeace's task, and dilemma for the future, as follows (this is a replication of the original drawing):

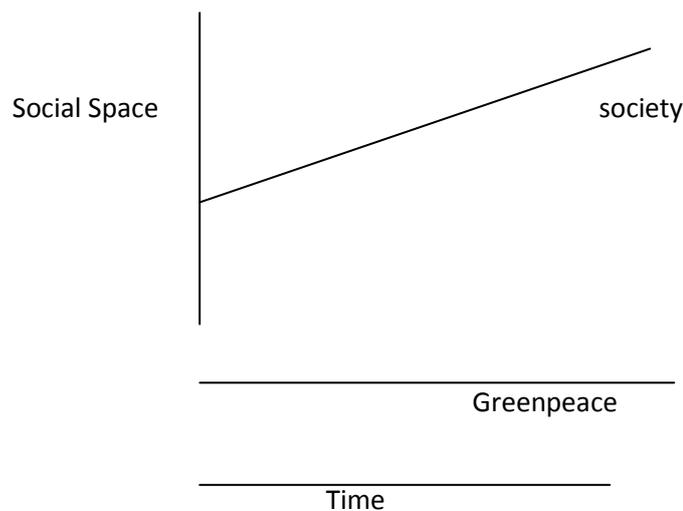


Figure 3.3. Greenpeace representation of challenges it faces

Rose interprets this graph as meaning that the old 'eco warrior' image of Greenpeace as heroic interceptors of whaling ships, etc, is now endangered. Instead, with an increasingly complex 'social space', meaning expanded mass media and the burgeoning internet, Greenpeace needs to form linkages around the idea of 'choice' rather than just the old idea of 'protest', by connecting with both new media and with markets for ecologically oriented products, otherwise it will be left behind. Effectively, Greenpeace's own senior management understand their role in a similar way to that expounded in this chapter: that the creation and nurturing of structural couplings is essential to

organizational growth and that this is potentially in tension with the ‘romantic’ aspect of Greenpeace’s ideology<sup>159</sup>.

A similar set of concerns is seen in the documents considering the opening of an office in India<sup>160</sup>, something that was finally done in 1998. A set of institutions was listed as possible strategic allies.

The list (same wording as original) was as follows:

Media: English media very influential

Judiciary: Very supportive on environmental issues

Bureaucracy: Very vulnerable to informal activism, more resistant to pure peoples’ movements

Industry: Has received no opposition so far

Urban Middle Class: Increasingly aware, can be strategically made part of environmental debates on middle class issues, for credibility

In other words Greenpeace is thinking in terms of possible structural couplings, in ‘social spaces’ that have not yet been exploited, providing room for the kind of organizational growth required (as set out in the previous diagram). Newly middle class India represents an environment in which this expansion is possible.

Particular individuals are highlighted as contact persons: these are Devinder Sharma (media), Anil and Ravi Agarwal<sup>161</sup> and Vandana Shiva (NGOs) and M C Mehta (law). Obviously this list includes two of the most prominent anti GMO campaigners, even though the documents do not yet mention GMOs (in 1997) as a potential Indian issue.

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<sup>159</sup> Although the argument made in this dissertation is somewhat different: that the two faces go together. It is not as if the ‘romantic’ appeal of Greenpeace is *replaced* with a consumer oriented, marketing operation, it is more that the two inevitably go together – as argued in chapter four – a romantic ideology is already amenable to consumerism.

<sup>160</sup> Archive number 2015.

<sup>161</sup> Of the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) ironically ridiculed elsewhere in the archive by another Greenpeace official (see below) as the “conservative pro free trade” group.

Archival documents frequently use the word ‘radical’ (in its strictly marketing sense), to mean a message that can cut through crowded social space and give Greenpeace more prominence. For example, in the archive related to biotechnology (1987-1992) Roger Wilson writes this note to Nandini Katre:

It may be useful for us as an organization to strategically propose an interpretation [of biotechnology and biodiversity] that we know is radical

Here, the conjunction of ‘strategic’ and ‘radical’ is noticeable, and appears to be linked to the need for a message on biotechnology that is strictly Manichean – as seen in a revealing internal email from Kay Treakle (17<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1989) which argues that Greenpeace must avoid GMOs being framed as ‘anti pesticide’, (clearly a logical possibility as argued in chapter two) and must instead adopt a “hard stance” against them from the beginning.

By contrast to their own ‘radicalism’, when reviewing the existing Indian NGO environment (in a memo from May 1996), the committee call the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) in Delhi “a conservative, pro waste, pro trade NGO”. The CSE’s research on GMOs was discussed in chapter two: it was mainly critical of GMOS, but certainly acknowledged arguments on both sides, admitting the productivity increases following Bt Cotton’s introduction. For Greenpeace, however, ‘radical’ seems to be conceived as a pure media-oriented message, with no caveats<sup>162</sup>. It also means innovating new tactics, more appropriate to a middle class, market oriented organization: another memo from the India related archive talks favorably about (media) “stunts” replacing “marches /morchas, yatras,

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<sup>162</sup> Ironically, perhaps, the CSE later adopted strategies closer to those of Greenpeace, in a successful campaign against Coke and Pepsi on pesticide residues in their drinks from 2003 (Frontline, Aug 22-25th 2006). Some interviewees saw this as a degeneration in an organization (under new leadership) that had previously concentrated on poverty related issues - the Pepsi residue issue being marginal to the much bigger pesticide health problems facing India’s farmers.

strikes, lockouts, etc". Clearly the implication here is that Greenpeace can help<sup>163</sup> develop a new mode of protest geared toward linkages with the media and middle class interests, and that mass based protest is now seen as out of date.

The most generous donor to the network in India is HIVOS of the Netherlands, with headquarters in Bangalore (where Greenpeace India is also based). An interview with the officer responsible for their 'sustainable production' program<sup>164</sup> revealed several of the factors that draw donors to organic agriculture projects and to the NGOs that combine this agricultural work with campaigns against GMOs. It should be noted that the officer himself appeared non committal about the science behind GMOs<sup>165</sup>; for him it was the organizational benefits of forming partnerships that were crucial. HIVOS (like Greenpeace in its planning documents) regarded Vandana Shiva whom it has funded (see above) and previously the KRRS under Nanjundaswamy, as 'strategic partners'. According to the HIVOS officer, these organizations, because they are *seen* as 'indigenous' or 'authentic' and because they started out without foreign funds, have a charisma and legitimacy that both donors and NGOs want to be associated with. While money might move from donors to Vandana Shiva, what she offers them was described as being more valuable, in terms of transnational prestige.

It is important to note the ways that these big donors are hardly 'shapers' of the ideational terrain in India: again, the concept of brokerage in Lewis and Mosse is more useful here than a more cynical (instrumentalist) perspective which might see Indian entrepreneurs manufacturing discourse to suit the needs of donors. More subtly one could see forms of indigenous 'legitimacy' (however romantic)

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<sup>163</sup> Although as the archives suggest, this is not a 'western' imposition, but in tune with the changing tactics of elite Indian activists like Vandana Shiva, Devinder Sharma, and the author of the assessment document on opening an Indian office, Smitu Kothari.

<sup>164</sup> Interview number 71.

<sup>165</sup> Specifically, when asked he said "time will tell" and admitted that India was being treated as a battleground between EU and US norms on GMO regulation.

being traded for financial support, with project NGOs and donors both trying to benefit from association with the charismatic energy of Shiva, Sharma or Nanjundaswamy<sup>166</sup>.

Another crucial, and more instrumental benefit to donors from work with the network is the mutually beneficial access to parts of the population that donors need to fulfil their own criteria about beneficiaries (interview with HIVOS). Because agricultural NGOs work in areas with a preponderance of 'dalits' and 'tribals / adivasis', their projects 'tick boxes' for working with marginal groups, as well as for sustainability. As analyzed below, this coupling of interests is not necessarily beneficial to the wider rural population or even to the ostensible goals of spreading organic agriculture.

The network has also been useful to donors like HIVOS, Greenpeace and Oxfam because the organic projects they supervise provide an 'alternative' to mainstream agriculture associated with GMOs<sup>167</sup> and these projects are therefore sources of information to be disseminated around the world. HIVOS sees part of its function as proving, via these projects that 'corporate agriculture' and GMOs closely tied to it in the European discourse are not the only way forward. Some of the paradoxical consequences of this approach are discussed in the section below. In effect, donors are 'paying' for data and information from supposedly grassroots organizations, without which the data would have little legitimacy. The DDS and CSA in Hyderabad have been the organizations of choice for both Greenpeace and Oxfam, in conducting 'scientific' surveys of GMOs and comparing GMO and organic cotton production. This information ultimately ends up among NGOs in the North. Activists

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<sup>166</sup> It is worth comparing HIVOS here with Greenpeace: Greenpeace have given less regular money to project NGOs than HIVOS and have funded mainly one off conferences, events and pieces of research, rather than having permanent relationships with any organization, in line with their philosophy not to have 'permanent alliances' with anyone. However, they certainly need to acquire information and data from local NGO partners, and as with HIVOS the businesslike and skeptical tone of the young, very 'urban' officer at Greenpeace responsible for GMOs whom I interviewed belies the fact that they rely on the ideational groundwork of campaigners like Shiva, Sharma and Nanjundaswamy to give legitimacy to their 'safety' focused campaigns. Again, the 'two faces' of the network are at work: the HIVOS officer, while personally undogmatic, admitted that the populist and romantic aspects of the campaign were essential to its success – this is why they have channelled over a million dollars to Vandana Shiva.

<sup>167</sup> Though of course see Chapter 2 for the point that organics and GMOs are not logically incompatible. There is a cultural politics at work in the assumptions made by groups like HIVOS.

interviewed in the UK for example<sup>168</sup>, rely on information that has been filtered through this system, a system with systematic incentives to bias discussed in chapter six.

### **5. NGO partners of donors: the functions and relations of nodal and regional NGOs**

Almost all the NGOs I interviewed in the network that are now working with international donors pre existed the explosion of funding for sustainable agriculture from HIVOS, Oxfam and German aid groups in the late 1990s. However, this new interest in ‘sustainable agriculture’ (the obverse of GMO or corporate agriculture in the transnational discourse), meant that NGO’s could expand their programs at the turn of the millennium. At the same time many respondents talked of a large increase in available funds for NGOs domestically at this time, with the booming IT sector producing a surplus that state governments could invest via reliable partners. For example the Centre for World Solidarity (originally founded as a German group *Actionsgemeinschaft Solidarische Welt – ASW*) in Hyderabad split into 6 different organizations in the late 1990’s to accommodate donor interests in diverse fields of rural development, including the CSA (Centre for Sustainable Agriculture), which is now responsible for GMO issues. The CSA has become an exemplary ‘nodal’ organization, rivalled only by the much smaller DDS<sup>169</sup> in Hyderabad. It is important to emphasize how technically extensive and far reaching the CWS / CSA are. Their annual report for 2008-09 (CWS 2009) describes 322 separate annual grants given to NGOs (in mainly five states) out of total receipts for the CWS of around 3 million dollars per year. Of these the sustainable agriculture / non GMO program is obviously only a small but significant fraction. The ‘activist’ part of their work is therefore embedded within a huge apparatus with deep penetration into the countryside, explaining the political influence (see above) that the CSA has with state government

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<sup>168</sup> For example the chief campaigning group in the UK, Genewatch and informally with an anarchist / green activist (and acquaintance) at Birmingham University who was preparing a paper on the impact of GMOs in India for a newsletter.

<sup>169</sup> The DDS, as argued in Chapter 4, is more concerned with transnational media relations, given its director’s background in television production. Its offices are much smaller and less plush than those of the CSA and it operates with just two officers working on sustainable agriculture.

NGO partners to nodal organizations and donors have brokered their way into the network by offering local knowledge, grassroots legitimacy and capacity. A contrast between two Warangal NGO's demonstrates how different kinds of local actors end up performing similar functions in the network by responding to demands from further up the network hierarchy.

MARI in Warangal is led by a 'social worker', Mr Murali, with a long history in Gandhian grassroots organizing and, in interview, a very clear 'world view' of a future of self sufficient village communities at which he was aiming<sup>170</sup>; for him the resources of the network offered the chance for greater professionalization and expansion, with the equivocal gains this brings (see below). Some of these local groups on the other hand, had had little previous legitimacy as social movement organizations, but had a record as successful 'brokers'. The SYO (Sarvodya Youth Organization) in Warangal, which has put its name to several DDS funded studies on Bt Cotton and sheep deaths as well as partaking in various network protest activities<sup>171</sup> is illustrative of the processes involved with some of these NGOs. The SYO was previously (from 1993) a legal service provider involved in conducting law suits for consumers against local companies<sup>172</sup>. In 2000 it started to receive funds from Oxfam and CARE International for organic agriculture projects on the basis of its linkages to the nodal group, the DDS in Hyderabad, and on the back of these linkages has since branched out into micro-finance and World Bank funded urban health projects.

The success of a small (basically one man) organization like the SYO demonstrates how organizations can succeed by framing themselves as 'grassroots' and by skilfully brokering the ever changing development discourses favoured by donors. While MARI and the SYO may have started out with very different social intentions, they have become similarly placed actors in the network, with incentives to produce the same discourse about GMOs that higher placed organizations (nodal,

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<sup>170</sup> Mr Murali, who was a Gandhi Peace Centre fellow in 1990 and in his interview liked to put MARI's activities in the context of a holistic 'world view' involving the overcoming of anomic conditions of labor (see chapter four), in sharp contrast to the businesslike attitude of the SYO leader I interviewed.

<sup>171</sup> For example sending villagers to rallies in Delhi and mobilizing local level protests in Warangal

<sup>172</sup> Filing 10,000 cases on consumer electronics and similar products according to the interview

donor and metropolitan) were rewarding. And, we could add, that the directors of *both* MARI and SYO are led by older individuals without the prestigious educational qualifications held by officers at the CSA, DDS or Greenpeace, so that the educational prestige of the 'higher level' groups forms part of their 'pull' over socially less prestigious individuals. In short, the 'base' of the network comprises a heterogeneous mixture of normatively committed activists and entrepreneurial NGO brokers, both subject to the same 'pulls' coming from higher up the network where the resources are.

So what are the functions that these varied regional, project oriented NGOs serve in the network and what functions does the network serve for them?

Firstly, NGOs devise programs that enable their donor partners to 'tick boxes' on distribution of aid to 'marginal' groups. The NGOs in rural areas which I interviewed therefore focus their programs on areas with a high proportion of adivasi / tribal / low caste and female beneficiaries. This can lead to paradoxical consequences: the programs are located far from urban centres, partly to access the most marginal populations and partly (according to one NGO activist)<sup>173</sup> to make it less likely that the participants will leave the program early and migrate to urban jobs, because people in remote areas are more likely to be dependent on financial inputs from the NGO and less susceptible to the 'pull' of the city. But choosing distant areas for programs means firstly, that the imitation effect of programs is likely to be less (because marginal, geographically remote farmers are unlikely to be role models) and secondly that the farmers in the programs are already de facto 'organic' / low input farmers. In other words program locations are chosen to comply with two transnational donor discourses of 'sustainability' and 'empowerment of marginal people', but these aims are not necessarily compatible with each other and the latter is not necessarily compatible with the network's stated aim to provide viable 'alternatives' to corporate / GMO agriculture.

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<sup>173</sup> Presentation about the Timbuktoo Collective (an organic farming project) in Karnataka, at Hyderabad University

Secondly NGOs act as showpieces, or to put it more provocatively, Potemkin Villages for an urban and transnational audience. For example CROPS, which runs an organic farming village at the village of Eenabavi near Warangal illustrates the way that NGOs broker a place for themselves, sometimes awkwardly, between transnational discourses and local 'needs'. The director of the project explained that they were working with primarily 'scheduled' or 'backward' castes in the project, comprising 51 families in one village. The village itself is a marketing tool for the network's organic alternatives, with sign posts on the main road advertising the various foreign aid agencies that have donated to the project, including CSA, HIVOS and AEI from Luxembourg. In addition to donor funds the village makes money by inviting groups of farmers from around India on tours (recorded in the visitor book). While it has succeeded in keeping farmers away from the 'temptations' of the city, Eenabavi clearly requires a large input of financial and human resources to keep going: roughly \$20,000 in annual donor financial input (for just the 51 families, as shown in the section on funding) plus presumably much larger start up costs to purchase necessary livestock, build wells and provide very intense and long term training<sup>174</sup>.

Thirdly, NGOs take advantage of the professional competencies demonstrated by running agricultural projects to expand their portfolio and forge linkages with multiple donors at the same time. As mentioned above, the SYO in Warangal proudly displays a list in its office of the numerous projects it is involved with, including AIDS awareness, women's' empowerment, microfinance, urban health, and pesticides. MARI, Warangal, according to its documentation (MARI 2006) is involved in nutrition, HIV prevention, child development, micro finance, panchayat raj institution strengthening, water tank renovation, drinking water, chilli farming innovation, forest management, gender sensitization, water conservation and natural resource management training, while CROPS also boasts its involvement in child labor eradication and micro finance. These programs may be funded

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<sup>174</sup> Several organic NGOs I spoke to agreed that even under ideal conditions it would take 6 years for farmers to become sustainably organic without external training or inputs, although it was never clear whether examples actually existed of villages where organic methods were still being pursued when funding ended. See below, for the problems NGOs have had in finding markets for organic cotton.

by the same nodal NGOs that fund the agricultural work or (in the case of the SYO) by bigger donors like the World Bank. This represents a way that NGOs make use of the network to expand their own professional portfolio and their capacity to broker new roles, should 'sustainable agriculture' fall out of fashion with donors.

Fourthly NGOs are producers and conduits for data, which then finds its way up the hierarchy of the network, as described in chapter six.

Finally, NGOs are able to mobilize farmers who work on their projects for demonstrations and protests that can then be framed as 'grassroots'. This practice has declined in the last few years, as protests have become more focused on the media (although Bt Brinjal may resurrect 'mass' protest). Though often mentioned by critics of the network, at least two NGOs, in interview, admitted to this practice of 'shipping' farmers to protests in distant locations <sup>175</sup>.

In summary the relation between project oriented NGOs and the nodal NGOs and donors who fund them could be described in terms of the following transactions:

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<sup>175</sup> Interview with MARI project villagers in Sadyatanda village, Warangal District (interview number 47), where the MARI worker told me that villagers from this project had joined protests in 2004 at the height of the 'Bt Failure' campaign in the Warangal area, and that they had also participated in DDS video documentaries about Bt Cotton (see chapter 4) and interview with Chetna Organic, Hyderabad (interview number 32).

Table 3.9. Transactions between project NGOs and donors

From donors / nodal NGOs to projects NGOs	From project NGOs to nodal/donors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finance</li> <li>• Discursive meta frames: e.g 'sustainable production'; 'marginality'</li> <li>• Training on techniques for 'replicable' organic farming</li> <li>• Opportunities for branching out into non related development work</li> <li>• Access to global organic product markets (see below)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data about success of organics and failure of GMOs</li> <li>• Supply of farmers for protests</li> <li>• Evidence (video, photo, anecdote) of project success</li> <li>• Access to marginal groups: low caste / adivasis</li> </ul>

## 6. Local Activists, farmers and the Network

At the bottom of the hierarchy that runs from donors to nodal groups to regional organizations are the farmers and unpaid activists who work with regional NGOs like MARI or the SYO. Why would farmers join an NGO project and why would unpaid activists work as volunteers or very low paid part time workers with NGO's in the network? (see chapter two for the larger discussion of farmers' points of view on GMOs).

One answer is obviously the financial motivation. After a research interview with one of MARI's village-projects in Warangal District I interviewed farmers in the next, non NGO village and asked them what they had heard about the MARI project. Their only response was that 'an NGO was giving money to farmers' to do organic farming, while they had not heard stories of sheep and goat deaths that were told me by MARI project workers.

Less instrumentally, it was clear from visits to the MARI and CROPS projects in the Warangal District and from talking to regional NGOs in Maharashtra and Karnataka that life conditions in the organic projects were probably better than outside in various non pecuniary ways. NGO financing makes possible a semblance of the 'traditional village' (see chapter four), with regular community meetings and strict regulations about child labor and the gender division of labor. It is notable that on these projects there are more young farmers than usual in contemporary rural villages, suggesting that the 'lure' of the city condemned by almost all NGO directors has been overcome with varied work, a sense of 'specialness' and financial stability/insurance provided by the NGOs' steady source of income.

For the unpaid NGO activists and workers, the incentives are more to do with career trajectories. A case study may illustrate some of the incentives. In Warangal I interviewed a high school teacher who had set up his own 'name only' NGO on organic crops (SEED, Warangal – which is listed on websites as a partner in various coalition groups against GMOs) and was working simultaneously as a volunteer for MARI and for the SYO in Warangal. He was also (see chapter six) assigned as an 'experimenter' by DDS to test the dangers of Bt Cotton on goats. He had previously been involved with the Naxalite movement (in an intellectual capacity) and he now saw the organic / anti GMO campaign as the best available way to accomplish both ideological and career goals. Ideologically he strongly associated the campaign with the leftism of the Naxalites<sup>176</sup>, emphasizing the anti corporate / imperialist aspects of the network's discourse. In terms of career, he described how unpaid volunteer work might eventually pay off with a paid NGO job: even for a stably employed school teacher such positions are seen as an excellent opportunity, involving varied work and the possibility of foreign travel and funding for further Masters level education.

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<sup>176</sup> Albeit his was the (relatively) middle class (romantic) framing of Naxalism as an anti corporate movement, rather than a movement for basic survival against police/landlords/thugs.

## 7. Left affiliated unions, Left organizations and the Network

Why do organizations that might seem to hold a more ‘materialist’ attitude to new agricultural technologies attach themselves to the network and what function do they serve *for* the network?

Below we consider the left affiliated farmers’ unions in Andhra Pradesh, the Shepherds and Goatherds Union in the same state, and the Left oriented National Alliance of Peoples’ Movements (NAPM) that works across several states. Discussion of the KRRS (arguably a ‘left’ oriented mass member organization) is postponed until Chapter five.

The CPI affiliated farmers’ union of Andhra Pradesh has been an active player in the network, able to mobilize farmers in Warangal District during the height of the anti Bt protests in a way that no NGO could. Other NGO actors, including Greenpeace India mentioned this union as a key player and the alliance with them as a way to maintain the popular legitimacy of the anti GMO movement. In return, one function the resources of the network serve for the union is the provision of modern, professionally presented ‘data’ about GMOs. For example when I visited Malla Reddy the head of the CPI farmers’ union<sup>177</sup>, he had numerous NGO publications (primarily by the DDS though he also mentioned useful information he had received from the CSA) on his desk which he showed me when I asked him about the supposed dangers of Bt Cotton. The slick professionalism of the NGO workers I met certainly contrasted with the somewhat chaotic and much more distinctly patriarchal and deferential atmosphere of the union’s main office. It was clear that this organization would not thrive in the English speaking conferences and transnational media events that are the lifeblood of the network against GMOs. Therefore it is no surprise that the union was not actively contributing to shaping the information flow about GMOs, but was rather taking up a ‘list’ of NGO claims<sup>178</sup> which

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<sup>177</sup> Interview number 6.

<sup>178</sup> In interview this list included

often did not cohere with the union's other claims about price of seeds and access to state help<sup>179</sup> in buying those same GM seeds.

He stressed that his organization was 'not against technology' at the start of the interview and one of his main points was about ongoing local conflicts (with a decades-long history) between union members and seed dealers, which included Monsanto but did not seem confined to transnational corporations. In fact Reddy's repeated emphasis was on the issue of price and costs, so that he mentioned the cheaper price of Bt seeds in China and even (quite contrary to the NGO 'line') complained that planting non Bt refugia on 30% of land was economically impossible for farmers and that they should not have to do this, nor should they have to pay for the non Bt seeds that accompany the packets of Bt for this purpose.

A larger ideological agenda concerned his stated fear that Bt Cotton was somehow associated with future 'plans' by various international and domestic actors to transform the Indian countryside into contract farms and completely withdraw the state from agriculture. As discussed in chapters two and four, this set of concerns only partially overlaps with the network's more 'romantic' brand of anti corporate ideology, with the concerns about price and that the state itself should 'do more' in the area of biotechnology falling outside the network's concerns, leaving only the anti corporate aspect of Reddy's arguments to echo the network's own discourse.

According to another activist-scholar interviewee<sup>180</sup> the Left Unions in AP had lost their political *raison d'être*, which was in opposition to big landlords and have been struggling to reassert themselves by adopting local struggles with input dealers (for the background of such struggles see chapter three). They had not come to terms with fact that political power was now based "outside the village" as this critic put it. Targeting Monsanto and working in synergy with the anti GMO network could be seen as one attempt to re-establish a political *raison d'être* for their fading force.

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<sup>179</sup> The other chief concern of the union was the decline of the Andhra Pradesh Seed Corporation, which Reddy believed should be distributing Bt seeds itself.

<sup>180</sup> Interview with Dr Kodandaran, Nizam College, Hyderabad, an activist for Telengana independence and supportive of the anti GMO network (Interview number 57).

Indeed Malla Reddy boasted in interview of 'locking up' various seed dealers who he labelled as 'Monsanto' workers, although no verification for this was available and the disputes probably had little to do with the ultimate ownership of the company – foreign or Indian. The NGOs could be seen as 'followers' of these kinds of local level actions, drawing on the general hostility toward seed dealers but retrospectively, at an elite level, redescribing them as actions against GMOs or 'big corporations'.

In the case of the allied Shepherds and Goatherds Union, led by Mr. Jamaliah in Andhra Pradesh, an even sharper contrast to the professional part of the network presents itself. This union has been cited by NGOs in protests about the deaths of sheep and goats in the state which are alleged to have consumed Bt Cotton leaves. The union claims to have over 100,000 members in the state, and as with the CPI farmers' union the organization is part of an older type of politics conducted by older men, who are not part of the English speaking circuit of professional NGOs, although the union, as with the CPI group, cites NGO (DDS) data to back up its claims.

A larger sociological focus might help to explain this linkage over the Bt issue<sup>181</sup>. Traditionally, shepherds were invited by farmers to graze their animals on the fields after harvest in a reciprocal system, so that farmers got animal manure in exchange for the animals having a chance to feed. This practice was treated as customary in rural areas, with shepherds being invited into the farmers' homes during the grazing period and offered food. However, this practice is now dying out, along with most of what could be referred to as the 'village system' (see chapter 4). With fertilizer use increasing the need for animal manure has decreased and with urban migration of the young, reciprocal systems like the above are waning along with the social knowledge that made them possible. In this context the possibility of mistrust between shepherds and cotton farmers has increased. Somewhat speculatively, low levels of trust between shepherds and farmers might explain the quick uptake of rumors about animal deaths., as well as the need for the union to make

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<sup>181</sup> For this context I am grateful to the interview with Mr P Chennaiha of the NAPM (see below) who has worked closely with the Shepherd and Goatherds Union in AP. (Interview number 81)

linkages wherever possible with allies that can publicise the plight of shepherds, who are mostly illiterate and at the bottom of the rural status pyramid. This sociological explanation squares with the possibility of numerous alternative 'sheep death' scenarios (Rao 2007, Herring 2008), most of which include as a background condition declining communication and trust between farmers and shepherds.

Thirdly, there are the social movements of the (non Marxist) Left, such as the National Alliance of Peoples' Movements (NAPM)<sup>182</sup>. This group of activists, like the CPI Unions (although more middle class in background) are not global media oriented activists. They meet in informal settings and were suspicious of a foreigner (the author) observing their discussions. What was clear from discussions with participants after their meeting<sup>183</sup> was that issues like Bt Cotton were seen in the same frame as the anti dam campaign, as ways to unite what was described as a group of movements divided by caste, party, region and language. However, Bt Cotton was not emphasized by participants unless I brought it up – they were more focused on a minimum support price and insurance schemes for small farmers. Although one of the participants mentioned Vandana Shiva and Devinder Sharma as partners on some issues, there did not appear to be a formal connection with these activists and the anti GMO network, showing that not all left leaning activists have chosen to join transnational networks, either for ideological reasons or for lack of opportunities.

The table below, attempts to summarize who gains what from the linkages between Left organizations and the network.

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<sup>182</sup> Their website: <http://napm-india.org/aboutus> shows that they were formed over mainly domestic issues – the rise of hindutva following the Ayodhya incident. GMOs are not mentioned on their main list of activities. In fact less transnationally fashionable campaigns against SEZs and against anti Muslim activities of Gujurati leader Narendra Modi have pride of place.

<sup>183</sup> Interview number 80.

Table 3.10 Left organizations and the network.

What the network brings to the Left organizations	What the left organizations bring to the movement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to professional data</li> <li>• The potential for scaling up local movements around an issue that attracts resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legitimacy as 'grassroots' social movements</li> </ul>

It should be noted of course that the grassroots legitimacy of these left groups is also in doubt, and that even the Left Unions in AP may be trying to 'piggyback' on spontaneous disputes between farmers and seed dealers, for example<sup>184</sup>.

### 8. Business, markets and the network

A crucial and burgeoning form of 'coupling' or functional dependency within the network is between network actors and market actors. This mainly takes the form of the actions of what could be termed 'market environmentalists' within the network and their attempts to form linkages for transnational textile and fashion companies. There is also another, more conspiratorial argument which links the network directly to the interests of Monsanto. The economic logic of this is clear (see chapter two), since higher regulatory hurdles will make it easier for a very large company like Monsanto to get a product onto market than smaller rivals. Variants of this (rather unlikely) argument were suggested in interviews several times, sometimes going further to suggest that

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<sup>184</sup> Interview number 79.

Monsanto was directly funding NGOs for publicity, or to try and avoid the risk of competing with public sector science<sup>185</sup>.

While such linkages are either alleged conspiracies or purely speculative, other network actors have been trying to forge real linkages with the international market. Chetna Organic, an NGO based in Hyderabad, is the most active player, although most project NGOs are trying to make their projects 'sustainable' by finding buyers of organic cotton in Europe. Chetna's project officer<sup>186</sup> openly contrasted his market oriented strategy with what he admitted was the lack of a grassroots social movement on GMOs. Chetna has forged links with higher end fashion retailers such as 'Under the Canopy' in the USA and 'H and M' in the UK. According to Chetna, in this "very competitive" market it is important to have an "edge". For them this has been the concept of 'traceability', whereby through a website called [stringtogether.com](http://www.stringtogether.com)<sup>187</sup>, customers can trace the village where the cotton for their clothing came from. The officer was keen to stress that this kind of marketing linkage was more sophisticated than that used by other NGOs in the field, especially those funded by Oxfam in AP, which he criticized for their lack of market savvy<sup>188</sup>.

At the same time, Chetna has been active in anti GMO protests, sending a party of 'its' farmers to the Ministry of Health in Delhi, for example. For Chetna, it seems, the anti-GMO protests are crucial, but subsidiary to its market ambitions, since the buyers of cotton want to be persuaded that their cotton is 'pure' and GMOs do not fit that definition in the transnational discourse. Therefore, although the Chetna officer expressed skepticism about the "prima donna" antics of Vandana Shiva, one could argue that the romantic ideology of village India (chapter four) most eloquently propounded by charismatic campaigners like Shiva underpins the market success of groups like Chetna. A parallel might be found in Luetchford's (2007) work on fair trade coffee in Costa Rica, where the romanticization of the conditions of its production went hand in hand with fierce

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<sup>185</sup> For example in an interview with Prof K C Suri at Hyderabad University (interview number 4)

<sup>186</sup> Interview number 32.

<sup>187</sup> <http://www.stringtogether.com/>

<sup>188</sup> See chapter six for a discussion of the competitive logic which this unleashes.

competition for access to a valuable ‘market niche’<sup>189</sup>. Again, the ‘two faces’ of the network – its capacity to form functional relationships and its romantic rhetoric – combine in Chetna’s market oriented strategy.

Finally, NGOs in the network often double as retail outlets for organic and other ‘village made’ products. For example Vandana Shiva’s Navdanya organization in Delhi is effectively a shop, selling various textiles, spices and books associated with her village projects, as is the office of the Green Foundation in Bangalore. This aspect is suggestively emphasized in Navdanya’s numerous booklets and brochures, which always features products for sale.

### **9. ‘Western’ Academia and the network**

Finally, and more speculatively, there are couplings between academia and the network. Most of the research cited in chapters one and six, which praises the anti GMO network as art of ‘global civil society’, draws primarily on material and interviews provided by organizations that are part of the network. This is not universally true (see Pattenden 2005 and his critique of KRRS claims and of course many articles and chapters by Ron Herring), but generally NGOs provide a useful resource for researchers, as I also found. It is easier to access NGOs than farmers’ unions for example: they speak fluent English and they have ready-made sources of information in the form of brochures, pamphlets, surveys and video materials, whether free or for sale. This ease of access obviously brings with it problems for objectivity in the representation of network claims. The ‘modernization’ thinkers I interviewed, for example, were accessed through very different circuits (starting at small public universities), and I would not have found them, if I had relied on a ‘snowballing’ method beginning only with NGOs.

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<sup>189</sup> See also Murdoch and Miele (1999) for the new differentiation of the food market according to the means of production – whether perceived as ‘natural’ or ‘industrial’.

It is less clear what NGOs gain from the linkage with academics, given the slow turnaround time for academic publications. One small instrumental advantage is the supply of interns from the global North, used widely at Vandana Shiva's Navdanya and at NCAS in Pune, for example. Interns have often heard about campaigns through academic literature. A longer term, more important advantage may simply be the prestige and 'certification' that reference to network members and their claims brings. So, for example when David Graeber, arguably the world's most brilliant anthropological theorist refers to (the remnants of) the KRRS as a mass based "Gandhian socialist" organization (Graeber 2002), or when eminent scholar of India Dietmar Rothermund (2008: 126) endorses the link between Bt Cotton and the spike in farmer suicides in a major overview of Indian politics, this has the effect of certifying the claims made by network organizations, in ways that, indirectly, may benefit their opportunities for gaining resources in the future.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the functional dependencies / structural couplings between network organizations, both among themselves and with external actors in the state and the market. A discussion of the *implications* of these findings for the literature on global civil society and activist networks will be postponed until chapter six.

Chapter four applies different methodologies, to the analysis of the ideational 'face', of these organizations and in the conclusion of chapter four an attempt is made to square the ideational and functional aspects of the power of the network using the ideas of Mary Douglas and Michael Mann.

## Chapter Four: Rural Romanticism, the Anti GMO Network and the Global

### Protest Imaginary

Chapter Three developed one 'face' of the activist networks and NGOs fighting GMOs in Indian agriculture. Seen from this 'functional' face, TANs and their associated NGOs find functional niches for themselves, structurally coupled in symbiotic relations to the state, the media, donors and others. This 'face' was depicted through the lens of the systems sociology of Niklas Luhmann, although some of the insights can be squared with a rationalist, instrumental view of organizational motivations, as in Cooley and Ron (2002) and arguably Bob (2005).

This chapter takes a look at the 'other face' of the coalition and delves into the political culture of the anti GMO movement in India and globally, using more critical, ethnographic and interpretive methods. Firstly, it tries, from a very broad perspective to outline the features of romantic politics and especially romantic environmental politics as a 'syndrome' or world view with several inter related characteristics. Secondly, it examines how a strand of romantic politics, termed 'romantic ruralism' has been a long lasting feature of politics in India, with governmental as well as idealistic features. Thirdly, the chapter describes a 'global protest imaginary' in which anti-GMO politics is just part of a generally 'romantic' meta frame or orientation, informing responses to issues, especially as concerns ecology. These historical and theoretical insights are then applied to two movements which can be seen as precursors of the anti GMO network: the Chipko movement and the Narmada dam campaigns. The chapter then gives an account, drawing on interviews and primary documents, of how the anti GMO network in India displays many of the features of romantic politics accounted for earlier and ends with some speculations about how to square these interpretive insights with the instrumental approach taken in chapter three. Throughout the chapter a 'modernist' or 'materialist'

alternative to romantic politics is taken, somewhat loosely, as a theoretical foil for the ideal type of romanticism.

Such an excursion into political culture and discourse is justified because it helps interrogate the idea that new transnational activism is something unprecedented and that the content of its ideas is a direct or unique response to neoliberal globalization. On the contrary, the chapter argues that political romanticism and its sibling, ecological romanticism are deep seated tendencies in modern (middle class) life that happen to thrive in the conditions offered by transnational advocacy networks and new mass media.

### **Political and Ecological Romanticism as a 'syndrome'**

Theories of 'political romanticism' emphasize widely differing aspects of this varied 'syndrome'. As Kompridis (2009) puts it, romanticism should be taken as a broad structuring of response to events, rather than a set of particular doctrines:

[a] distinct form of expressive response...which outlines a relation to the world and to ways of life, individual, and shared, that [this] form of expressive response makes visible...

Carl Schmitt, German political theorist of the Weimar, and later, (notoriously) the Nazi period, draws on Hegel's conceptualization of the 'Beautiful Soul' to describe political romanticism (which can be of left or right varieties). For Schmitt, the essence of political romanticism is the aestheticization of political events<sup>190</sup>, combined with a refusal to *engage* in actual institutions, whether as defenders,

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<sup>190</sup> But it should not be equated with early literary romanticism: It is arguably the later nineteenth century's version of romanticism, in figures such as Ruskin and Morris (Guha( 2000) describes Ruskin's opposition to the railways as exemplary) that has more in common with contemporary romantic protest movements; Wordsworth and the early romantics were less prone to turning rural life into mere symbolism. In fact it is

reformists, or revolutionaries. The crucial irony of the political romantic position for Schmitt is that while appearing to remain ‘pure’, and above the fray of everyday politics the romantic denies his/her own embeddedness in the institutions of the modern world: critiquing or rhapsodizing while denying that their ability to do so depends on everyday institutions, markets and the state<sup>191</sup>. For Schmitt (1986 [1919]: 160), romanticism is not the same as myth-making:

[in romanticism] an impression suggested by historical or political reality is supposed to become the occasion for subjective creativity....an intellectual music for a political program. This is not the irrationality of myth. That is because the creation of a political or a historical myth arises from political activity....A myth arises only in the real war...

This distinction between romantic ‘mood music’ and the creation of real, mobilizing myths<sup>192</sup> will be important in chapter five, where the Shetkari Sanghatana’s ‘Bharat-India’ opposition could be seen as a ‘myth’ that mobilized farmers for real change, while the KRRS’ transnational activities of the 1990’s more closely resemble the romantic aestheticism criticized by Schmitt.

Arguably, Schmitt’s analysis is even more trenchant today, when the mass media makes possible an aestheticization of ‘suffering at a distance’ (Chouliariki 2006), barely dreamed of by nineteenth century political romantics.

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telling that Guha (24) argues that Gandhi’s romanticism was more “practical” than Wordsworth’s, given Gandhi’s highly mediated and idealized perspective on the Indian village – unlike the radically ‘open’ project of Wordsworthian romanticism. For an interesting take on ‘Wordsworth meets GMOs’ see Francois (2003), who argues against what she sees, using Wordsworth as a foil, as the arrogant denial of contingency in both the pro and anti GMO discourse (arrogant techno-science for the former or arrogant protection of an essentialist version of nature for the latter). The Wordsworthian contingency she defends is difficult to map onto the political terrain, although in Chapter Two we tried to outline a ‘middle way’ view of biotechnology as serving human needs and local variations in climate, soil, skills and demands that come close to a political analogue. It should be borne in mind that ‘materialist’ in this dissertation *does not* map onto a pro-biotech or pro-Monsanto point of view – it maps onto a mixture of reformist and radical measures that farmers seem to want, including access to new technologies but also more government support on a host of issues, as set out in Chapter Two.

<sup>191</sup> Obviously the parallel between the instrumental and romantic faces of the anti GMO network is implied here.

<sup>192</sup> ‘Myth’ here resembles Mannheim’s ‘Utopia’ – which must be distinguished from mere ‘ideology’ because a Utopia puts forward hitherto unimagined possibilities that might actually change social relations, while ‘ideology’ disguises reality from its participants. (Mannheim 1985 [1936])

Morton (2007) brings us up to date, with an analysis of contemporary ecological romanticism which is also inspired by Hegel's 'beautiful soul' (117-18). For Morton, ecological romanticism is fixated on imagining "a coherent sense of place" (84):

Such thinking aims to conserve a piece of the world or subjectivity from the ravages of industrial capitalism and its ideologies. Place, and in particular, the local, have become key terms in Romantic ecocriticism's rage....Moreover this impotent rage is itself an ironic barrier to the genuine...interrelationship between beings desired, posited and predicted [by romantic ecocriticism]

So ecological romanticism's rhetoric seems (intentionally or otherwise) designed to prevent real institutional change, and to preserve a purity of position from which to observe various threats to a purported innocence of 'place' or 'the local'<sup>193</sup>. For pragmatic environmental activists, like Brand (2009), the romantic attitude might have been useful in attracting attention to the issues (208), but is "poor at solving problems" (215). In particular the romantic obsession with decline, impending disaster and threatened innocence (217) are inadequate ways to frame climate change or biotechnology. For Brand, 'ecopragsmatism', by contrast will mean environmentalists abandoning the 'beautiful soul's' position of wounded purity, engaging with scientists and accepting some technological solutions to environmental problems.

Below, is an attempt to isolate five key aspects of the syndrome of political and especially ecological romanticism; this list will help orientate the discussion in the rest of the chapter:

- *Nostalgia* for 'place': romantics mourn the loss of 'closed systems' such as the (imaginary) village. Morton cites the archetypal modern instance in Tolkien's 'Shire' – home of the

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<sup>193</sup> For an example of such thinking see Bate (2000), who argues that 'ecopoetics' must necessarily be non political, if political refers to things 'of the polis' – the city. For Bate eco poetry and criticism is about "imagining a state of nature prior to the fall into property, into inequality, and into the city" (266).

hobbits, who live in a “world-bubble” (97), outside of politics, markets or institutions (and are chosen as heroes by Tolkien precisely because of their non political status<sup>194</sup>)

- *Pessimism* about institutions, politics and technology: romantics see the world in terms of ‘slippery slope’ arguments – institutions cannot be trusted and any interventions to avert problems are likely to make the problem worse. Selection bias informs their analysis of risk along these lines – with potential costs always being rated more highly than potential benefits of interventions.
- *Spectacle*: romantics are drawn to, and more importantly *invent* spectacles – often of suffering, or victimhood (Greenpeace, for example, is a skilled producer of these kind of images). This spectatorship, designed for mass media, is allied with a *consumerist* tendency, in fact *is* a form of consumerism (Morton 2007:110).<sup>195</sup>
- *Moralism*: when ‘world bubbles’ such as the Indian village, so perceived, are punctured by external forces, the natural reaction is outraged moralism, exercised again in a ‘spectacular’ way, inspiring pity in observers, rather than through direct political action by those affected.
- *Paternalism*: the ‘practical’ manifestation of romanticism is a paternalistic attitude towards those(victims) it claims to represent. Because the victims, or potential victims, are ‘outside history’ or modern institutions they need to be protected and helped by benefactors (think of Gandalf’s relationship to Frodo as an archetype here). This last characteristic is crucial because it links romanticism as consumer commodity to romanticism as a form of power – as describe below in the section on colonial romanticism.

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<sup>194</sup> Only the Hobbits can be entrusted with the carrying of the ring, because they are too innocent and clueless to ever utilize political power themselves. This seems to be Tolkien’s ideal imagination of a democratic public and resonates with the way I found NGO project leaders talking about farmers as both quasi sacred carriers of tradition and as lazy and feckless.

<sup>195</sup> See discussion of market environmentalism in chapter three.

The history of the Luddites, skilled English laborers who smashed machinery that was destroying their livelihoods, in the early nineteenth century, provides a useful example of how romanticism has been deployed politically.

As recounted by Steven Jones (2006: 27 and *passim*) in a monograph on the Luddites and their neo-Luddite imitators, the original Luddite actions in Nottinghamshire, England were associated with a “customary labor culture” and were overwhelmingly concerned with opposing the economic disaster they associated with new looms<sup>196</sup>. This account parallels the famous analysis of Luddism by E P Thompson (1963). It was only somewhat later in urban Manchester, that Luddism “functioned more artificially as a device to unite the diverse interests of spinners, colliers, and other workers with those of Jacobins and radical reformers already active in the area” (Jones: 27). While this fusion, around the original ‘myth’ of General Ludd, was still strongly rooted in the material conditions of the English working class, through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries a process of romanticization took place, as Luddism became an increasingly middle class, urban phenomenon leading up to the various ‘neo-Luddite’ congresses of the 1990’s (Jones: Ch 1). These congresses themselves flowed into the global anti-GMO and anti capitalist networks flourishing around international summit meetings, most famously at Seattle. An example of this contemporary use of Luddism, which connects it to the anti GMO campaigns, comes from British anarchist online magazine ‘Do or Die’ (1999):

Two hundred years ago the English elite’s main enemy was the peasantry who lived for the most part outside the cash economy and were forever rising up.....The class was eradicated by physical force and the elite’s technology and forced to become either wage slaves....or [work] on the farms of the rich. Two hundred years later.....the relative autonomy and link

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<sup>196</sup> Luddite groups “began to organize themselves.....in order to take direct actions against those they accused of violating the fair and customary practices of their trade, sometimes putting them out of work and generally profiting from changes in their social and economic conditions by deploying new kinds of machinery” (Jones: 47)

with the land which fuelled the Zapatistas in Mexico, the Viet Cong in Vietnam and the MST in Brazil has to be destroyed. This is where genetic engineering comes in.

This quote is revealing in the way it re-describes the Luddite struggle as a struggle for ‘autonomy’ and withdrawal (from modern institutions), rather than the struggle for maintenance of (cash) wages described by E P Thompson. Thompson’s Luddites were strategic thinkers, willing to make deals, to target only the worst offending owners (who had most reduced wages) and when their economic goals were partly achieved, as in the Luddism of the Midlands (Thompson 1963: 556), end their protests. These contemporary neo- Luddites however dismiss “lobbying the government” as pointless and call for a ‘final’ conflict with the powers of evil: capitalism, international institutions, and technology.

This brief overview of the historical trajectory of Luddism helps put the issue of romanticism in historical context. To summarize: The romantic perspective uses symbols such as an idealized Luddism, to summon up images of a community that has already passed; these symbols are usually mobilized by middle class activists. We can suggest, in contrast to this romanticism a ‘materialist’ or ‘modernist’ foil to romantic activism. A ‘materialist/modernist’ perspective, is centred on specific demands directed at economic or political institutions. It usually aims at *inclusion* rather than *autonomy*, even when the demand for inclusion may invoke populist and revolutionary demands, as in the original Luddism.

It could be argued that in the modern era there has always been an oscillation between these two modalities (the romantic and the modernist) in social movements, especially today in those concerned with the environment and with agriculture. This dissertation asks how transnational protest might bias that oscillation toward its romantic moments.

### **Romantic Rural Politics in India**

Romantic attitudes and values do not just float in the ether of ideas. They are connected to power and interests. Scholars have noted how 'romantic' ideologies accompanied and assisted the work of colonialism in the nineteenth century, shaping the treatment of Native Americans, for example (Hutchings 2009; Fulford 2006), and justifying their exclusion from modern institutions in ways that were both sentimentally ennobling, and paternalistic. The romantic conceptualisation of innocence could become a less than innocent justification for the exclusion and exploitation of certain groups, marked out simultaneously for protection and control.

In the case of colonial India, Ronald Inden (1990) provides a useful survey of ideas of 'village India', concentrating on British colonialist historiography of the nineteenth century. He points out that in the British model of village life, peasants were "the truly powerless opposites of themselves, abiding in natural communities that had only a natural history" (148). The "self-contained world of solidarities and reciprocities" of the village (159) resembles the 'cold' part in Levi Strauss' (1963) division of the world into 'cold' peoples (the fortunate pre moderns, trapped in timeless stasis) and 'hot' moderns (rushing into history).

For Metcalf (1994) these romantic binary oppositions and projections served more than one political and economic purpose for the British colonists in India. They allowed the British rulers to take advantage of 'traditional' forms of tax collection (70) by labelling them as natural, timeless facts of village life and to create lucrative trades in 'authentic' Indian arts and crafts. But they also helped to disguise domination and brutality under "medievalist fantasies" which (80):

can best be seen as a form of theatre which was meant, through insistence upon the persistence of the past, to obscure, from the British themselves as much as from the Indians, the extent of change which occurred under British rule.

This “simulation of the Middle Ages” (in which caste hierarchies were categorized in terms familiar from European feudalism) would enable the British to shape those categories in ways that suited their interests (Dirks 2001), but with the patina of an ethnographic authenticity that also acted as a psychological stimulant for those Victorian middle classes who were tired of dirty, commercial urban existence and fond of projecting lost values onto the idealized Indian village.

This ‘Indological’ conception of the village, is arguably carried forward into post independence India in the thought of Gandhi and his social movement imitators<sup>197</sup>. The colonial tendency to describe the countryside as a ‘place without history’ gets adopted in the nationalist movement, albeit changed in tone from disparagement to praise<sup>198</sup>. As Jodhka (2002: 3343) puts it, for the nationalists, “the village represented ‘the real’ India, the nation that needed to be recovered, liberated and transformed”. Gandhi saw the village in romantic terms as a source of community to be restored through outside activism. Although Gandhi did not believe in a simple ‘going back’ to old forms, and of course wanted to bring education and handicraft skills to the countryside, nevertheless the village stood in sharp contrast to the city, which had been corrupted by western influence, and most of all by contact with global markets. As with John Ruskin in England before him, the railways represented

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<sup>197</sup> There are of course many Gandhis, as Nandy (2000) points out: from the Gandhi appropriated by Indian nationalism, to the Gandhi as international symbol mobilized by Polish *Solidarity* or Martin Luther King. Many ‘materialist’ movements of the poor have learned from Gandhi’s tactics, including the Shetkari Sanghatana discussed earlier. Nandy links Vandana Shiva to his preferred version of Gandhi, as ‘ragamuffin’ or ‘nag’ of transnational corporations and the state. I argue later that this kind of Gandhianism is anything but worrying to the Indian state or to global capitalism, unlike the specific and material demands made by the Shetkari Sanghatana prior to 1992 (chapter five) or the modernist demands for proper state biotechnology research described in chapter two. In any case it seems legitimate to select Nandy’s preferred Gandhi as the Gandhi most closely associated with the global protest imaginary and its intersection with metropolitan Indian activists.

<sup>198</sup> As Nanda (2003) points out, there are other routes from nineteenth century romanticism (especially the German variety of Vedic Indology not discussed above) to contemporary Indian politics – including the appropriation of Germanic Vedic romanticism in the Bengal renaissance and by the founders of Hindu revivalism.

a potentially infectious means of linking people who would be better off outside of the tumult of history (Gandhi, cited in Basu 2007: 40):

The railways, too have spread the bubonic plague. Without them, the masses could not move from place to place. They are the carriers of plague germs. Formerly we had natural segregation....They accentuate the evil nature of man....The holy places of India have become unholy.

As Basu (43) argues, such rhetoric against modern technology can come dangerously close to chauvinism, when it leads to nostalgic and essentialist claims such as Gandhi's statement that "India was one undivided land so made by nature".<sup>199</sup> It also makes for a romantic political ideology that is, as Madsen (2001 a: 3735) puts it in his critique of Gandhianism in the KRRS (see chapter five), "thin on institutions", or on strategies mechanisms for negotiating with institutions.

In contrast to Gandhi, the figures of Nehru and Ambedkar offer, for Jodhka (2002) alternative *styles* of thinking about the countryside which have had consequences for the real world politics of India over the last fifty years. Nehru is the godfather of contemporary state led developmentalism (Gupta 1998), but as Jodhka points out (3348) Nehru too took as his starting point the British view of the village as static and unchanging, leading to a paternalistic form of intervention that began from the premise of rural idiocy. Only Ambedkar, who unlike the other two founding fathers of India, actually had lived in a village, had a thoroughly hostile attitude to it, and a hope that rather than it being reconstructed or revived the village, as "the negation of the Republic" would be absorbed into modern, secular institutions. As Jodhka (3351) puts it:

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<sup>199</sup> Of course few social movements in India, bar the Naxalite Maoist Peoples' War groups and certain dalit groups, would abjure Gandhi as a role model. Even those groups I think of as 'materialist' in orientation such as the Shetkari Sanghatana hold Gandhi up as a model and emulate his non violent forms of protest. The argument is that the more essentialist and romantic strand in Gandhi's thought gets (over) emphasized in contemporary transnational romanticism.

While Gandhi and Nehru accepted the notion of ‘village community’ as a natural fact of Indian civilization, Ambedkar perhaps saw it in more historical terms, as having been derived from the colonial western imaginations of India.

This digression into the competing world views of the founders of the Indian state matters, because such configurations represent long standing conflicts over the representation of rural India, which are still playing themselves out today<sup>200</sup>. Whereas in Jodhka’s formulation British historiography was taken up by Gandhian romantic nationalism, today a transnational discourse and its accompanying resources, in the form of a ‘global protest imaginary’, combine with indigenous romanticism to help shape views about what is going on in the Indian countryside and arguably to stifle voices of ‘social modernization’ like Ambedkar’s<sup>201</sup>. Today, this push toward the romantic view is coming from middle class, metropolitan voices in the south at least as much as from the north. Indian environmentalists (and scholar-activists), for example, have taken up certain romantic themes, with more or less nuance, in their diagnoses of rural Indian problems.

Ramachandra Guha (2000), himself a collaborator in and scholar of Indian environmental movements since the 1970s, admits the tension between a (mainly Northern) “ecology of affluence” and Southern environmentalisms that focus on “claims of economic justice - that is, the rights [of poorer communities] to natural resources” (122). However Guha rather too easily finds an accommodation between the two, perhaps because his view of those ‘claims’ of justice relies on a Gandhian assumption that communities want primarily to maintain their autonomy from modern

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<sup>200</sup> See Shome (2011) for an overview of Indian environmental romanticism that takes a similar line of argument to that of this chapter.

<sup>201</sup> Ambedkar wrote almost nothing about rural economics, but this critical quote makes his modernist / Marxian critique of Gandhi’s Luddism clear: “The economics of Gandhism are hopelessly fallacious. The fact that machinery and modern civilization have produced many evils may be admitted. But these evils are no argument against them. For the evils are not due to machinery and modern civilization. They are due to wrong social organization which has made private property and the pursuit of personal gain matters of absolute sanctity” (Rodrigues, 158). Given Ambedkar’s relentless focus on *actual* exploitation and caste based privilege, it would be invalid to link his variety of Marxism with the externalizing and romantic kind favoured by the KRRS, Left farmer unions in Andhra Pradesh and Shiva herself.

institutions or states' development agendas (122-124)<sup>202</sup>. Kothari and Parajuli (1993), the former the founder of Lokayan – an important activist resource organization and part time participant in the anti GMO network, declares more emphatically, about 'tribal' rights movements that (234):

They found the state to be a cause of their insubordination, exploitation, and deprivation. Whilst challenging the very nature of development itself, these movements are no longer pressing for a greater share in the pie of national development but for greater autonomy.

The second sentence does not follow automatically from the first, and if it is true of certain tribal communities it may be more a despairing than a transformative attitude; it represents a shift to a new (romantic) key ('challenging the very idea of development') that speaks more to the world view of postmodern critics of development, such as Wolfgang Sachs (the editor of the volume in which the essay appears (Sachs 1993)) than it does to tribal communities' self understanding.<sup>203</sup>

In a more rebarbative account, environmental activist, close ally of Vandana Shiva and future key participant in the anti GMO network<sup>204</sup>, Claude Alvares (1988) declares himself a proud 'Luddite' and condemns the "dissemination of scientific knowledge" (109) as:

an alien cosmology that is exogenous to peoples' living environments and harvested through a method which must conflict with nature, with the daily technology of the non elites..

Despite his speaking up for these 'non elites' versus western scientific imperialism his account of the 'failures' of western science and medicine draws heavily on 'western' relativistic critiques of the

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<sup>202</sup> See the later discussion in the chapter of the Chipko movement and Guha's views of it, (which are close to those of Vandana Shiva).

<sup>203</sup> Such judgments are bound to be highly contentious. I have never done research among tribal communities: however, speaking to researchers based at Indian universities who had done such research tends to give a picture of the needs and views of these communities that clashes with that of Kothari. A fundamental sociology of knowledge problem seems to be at work here: graduate researchers I spoke with at the University of Hyderabad – a non elite Indian institution – seemed to take for granted a 'modernist' / materialist approach to rural politics (how can these communities get better roads and water from the state?) – an attitude which extended naturally to the issue of GM crops.

<sup>204</sup> As one of the named authors of the petition to the Supreme Court to ban Bt Cotton and director of the Goa based Organic Farmers' Association of India (OFAI), in which capacity he has helped to convene meetings in Maharashtra of anti GMO NGOs.

knowledge claims of science, such as that of Ivan Illich<sup>205</sup>. This is the kind of irony that Nanda (2003) makes much of, in her denunciation of ‘postmodern’ romanticism in India: while ‘radical’ ecologists like Alvares condemn western science they do so through a romantic lens thoroughly implicated itself in western colonialism and power.

When applied specifically to the agricultural economy this ‘romantic’ attitude tends to emphasize ‘individualization’ and the fragmentation of rural social relations – what many interviewees termed the ‘village system’. Vasavi (2010: 79), also drawing on Stone (2007) is exemplary of this attitude:

Withdrawn into their individualized households and families agriculturalists are often unable to gauge the risk involved in engaging with an unpredictable market, varying and unreliable climatic conditions, unreliable quality of seeds, fertilisers and pesticides and unsure and untested forms of new agricultural practices<sup>206</sup>.

This plangent emphasis on unknowable risks and dubious technologies echoes the activist discourse described below, especially in the ‘risk’ discourse of Suman Sahai of Gene Campaign and kavita Kuruganthi of the CSA, Hyderabad.

In the next section we consider how a global protest imaginary has developed over the last twenty years. This global imaginary links back to the discussion in chapter one of the ‘modular’ discourse of transnational activist networks, of which it is a key variety. The resources of this global imaginary combine with the Indian middle class romanticisms described above (with their own legacies in colonialism) to produce the conditions for transnational romantic activist networks.

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<sup>205</sup> For an example applied to biodiversity issues see Reese and Rosenthal (2008).

<sup>206</sup> To be fair to Vasavi there is also a ‘modernization’ aspect to her argument, when she points out that the dilemma facing farmers (80) is that the ‘cultural’ sphere has not been so individualized – leaving farmers in the worst of all worlds – needing to make dowry payments for example, but without the ‘village system’ to fall back on.

## A Global Protest Imaginary

Steger (2008: 199) describes the rise of a “Justice Globalism” imaginary in this way:

In addition to articulating their particular concerns and demands within a global framework, the members of this New-New left increasingly engaged in “multi-issue framing” – the ability to grasp how certain issues like environmental protection or the struggle against AIDS related to other issues such as patriarchy, race or the debt burden of the global South

This description is consistent with the work of Reitan (2008) discussed further in chapters one and six. Other scholars, such as McDonald (2006) refer to a new “grammar” in the global sphere, linking multiple issue areas around common themes such as resistance to infringements on common property resources and threats to biodiversity. The ‘romantic’ element in this global imaginary is visible in the way it fuses together multiple concerns, each of which has a separate causal history. In the above citation, for example, it is not clear what links ‘patriarchy’ with the ‘debt burden’ and ‘environmental protection’. In fact, one might as well argue on the contrary that the spread of global institutions and markets is a threat both to patriarchy *and* rainforests. But as McDonald phrases it (2006: 4) these new transnational movements “confront us with forms of public experience that do not correspond to understandings of deliberative , rational, disembodied public spheres” ; instead McDonald urges us to see these new movements, exemplified by the Zapatistas, as representative of a new “romantic structure of feeling” (94) that defies the Weberian differentiation of the social sphere. This global imaginary, then, is organized around the postulation of communities outside of modernity, whose resources might actually ‘renew’ our stale and decadent societies, if only we can forge connections with them.

It might fairly be argued that McDonald and Steger represent an unrepresentative form of academic romanticism that tells us little about social movements in the real world. But the 'global protest imaginary' is also a real place. It consists of those global stages, like Seattle where Vandana Shiva and Jose Bove made spectacular protests against GMOs in the name of 'real food' and authentic peasantries, or in the Inter Continental Caravan through Europe attended by the KRRS of Karnataka discussed in detail in chapter five. It also consists of those media spaces that give air time to anti-globalization and anti-GMO protestors, or quality newspapers like Britain's Guardian and Observer that have frequently taken stories from India about GMOs directly from activists.

The rhetoric of these scholars resonates with the modus operandi of a subset of transnational movements<sup>207</sup> that refuses to engage in negotiation over lists of policy proposals and prefers instead to concentrate on projecting an identity for consumption in these global spaces<sup>208</sup>. Such movements, of the 'global protest imaginary' nostalgically refer back to a rural past while looking forward to new forms of community founded on 'feeling' rather than on bureaucratic rationality.

For example, some influential transnational networks working on rural and agricultural issues show strong romantic tendencies in their public documents and stated policy position. Best known of these transnational groups is the Via Campesina, which includes among its member groups the KRRS of Karnataka<sup>209</sup>, and which has actively intervened in the GMO debate in India over the last 15 years, especially by disseminating a set of ideas about the dangers of GMOs *from* India *to* the rest of the

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<sup>207</sup> Bearing in mind Tarrow's (2002) injunction to be 'splitters' rather than 'lumpers', not all transnational movements should be termed 'romantic' or mainly romantic. Delineating this, is part of the task of chapter six. For example, climate change groups that centre on epistemic communities of scientists and concerned citizens, might have romantic tendencies at the margins, but speak a technical language that makes them more amenable to integration in governance systems. (see diagrammatic representation at end of chapter six)

<sup>208</sup> Bob (2005) makes this case most forcefully.

<sup>209</sup> The Via Campesina is also connected to the KRRS through marriage: with Prof. Nanjundaswamy's daughter, Chuki Nanjundaswam marrying a Via Campesina leader from Brazil. This is something that the 'non-family' leaders of the KRRS (interview) regarded as partly explaining her lack of interest in maintaining the local grassroots viability of the organization. The KRRS also hosted the 1999, 'Third Annual Congress' of the Via Campesina in India.

world. The Via Campesina refers to itself on its website<sup>210</sup> as “the international peasant movement” and boasts (as of October 2009) 148 member organizations in 69 countries. The use of the term ‘peasant’ has been a crucial ingredient in the Via Campesina’s global image, as explained in the words of a Canadian activist cited by Edelman (2003: 187):

If you actually look at what “peasant” means, it means “people of the land.” ....We too are peasants and it’s our land and our relationship to the land and food production that distinguishes us... We’re not part of the industrial machine...The language around this matters. It begins to make us understand that “people of the land” – peasantry everywhere, the millions of small subsistence peasants with whom we think we have so little in common – identifies them and it identifies us.

This quote is revealing. The term ‘peasant’, as Desmarais (2008: 195) points out in her book on the Via Campesina, is redolent of feudalism and of bygone rural social formations. As with the typical rhetoric of the global protest imaginary it points both forwards and backwards, but does so with claims about connection and identity that are hard to make tangible. Does a relatively wealthy Canadian organic farmer really have so much in common with a ‘subsistence’ farmer from Karnataka? What would that activist have said if they had known that their partner organization the KRRS, for example, caters almost exclusively to relatively wealthy non subsistence sugar farmers, very much immersed in the trials of the global market?

As Borras (2008) points out in his sympathetic article on the Via Campesina as a ‘transnational agrarian movement’ (TAM), these kind of contradictions are masked by the ‘global master framing’ the Via Campesina has constructed around the World Bank, “whose villainy was...relatively easy to explain to the different subjective forces...that the campaign hoped to sway” (267). Contradictions in the movement were many: not least the tendency for wealthy farmers’ groups in a country (the KRRS is mentioned as a key example (275) to block membership of groups adopting more radical

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<sup>210</sup> <http://viacampesina.org/en/>

(materialist) positions about land reform (see chapter five). Despite Borras' positive gloss on the Via Campesina's innovations in terms of *identity formation* (the global peasant), even he has to admit that it has had negligible or no policy impacts (282). In a marked parallel to the anti GMO network and like the middle class neo Luddism described by Steven Jones, the Via has taken certain genuine themes of concern to farmers (privatization of common property resources especially), and translated them into a global imaginary driven by the romantic rhetoric of a lost *agraria*.

In the next sections, two movements that preceded the anti GMO network are examined, for evidence of how domestic and transnational imaginaries combined under romantic interpretations of protest; sometimes retrospectively inventing romantic themes, sometimes directly in tension with more modernistic/materialistic grassroots motivations.

### **Chipko and the Narmada protests: Forerunners of the anti-GMO protests?**

The Chipko and Narmada Dam movements are obvious precedents for the anti-GMO coalition<sup>211</sup>. Both involved issues of protecting rural communities from alleged external threats, and both involved transnational imaginaries, transnational activist linkages and transnational media interest.

As Haripriya Rangan explains, the Chipko Andolan the mid 1970s in the Garhwal Himalayas in Uttarakhand has acquired the character of a "fairy tale" (Rangan 1993: 8) that "the people [of the Garhwal region] had evolved a harmonious and peaceful coexistence with nature" which was subsequently disrupted by the Indian state's decision to build roads and encourage greedy timber merchants to plunder the regions resources, bringing environmental catastrophe in its wake. This plunder was then opposed by grassroots activists in combination with elite Gandhian activists such

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<sup>211</sup> See Peritore (1993) for the particular significance of Chipko in formulating a 'green' ethic among elite Indian opinion makers.

as a young Vandana Shiva<sup>212</sup> and, more prominently at the time, Sunderlal Bahuguna, as celebrated in Guha's (1991) 'The Unquiet Woods'<sup>213</sup>. Chipko then became an international cause celebre of the global environmental movement, long before the acceleration of transnational activism in the 1990's, and perhaps as a key model and precedent for that acceleration.

However, some powerful scholarly critiques exist of this narrative, from Rangan (1993), Linkenbach (2007) and even former Chipko activist Bandyopadhyay (1999). Rangan provides a severe critique of the 'romantic' interpretation of Chipko and, for the purposes of this dissertation a powerful model of the 'unintended consequences' that activism driven by metropolitan elites can have on local people. She develops two crucial themes: firstly that that 'innocence / innocence disrupted' myth of the Chipko movement was greatly exaggerated, in that local people had been in dispute over their economic *access* to forest resources for over a century rather than disputing that the forests should be used as a material resource; and secondly, that externally led activism harmed the very local people it claimed to be helping, by providing rhetorical resources to the state in its effort to create a "politics of coercing conservation"<sup>214</sup> (280) that *excluded* local people from access to forest resources even more severely than before. Here there is a direct parallel to the colonialist 'use' of romantic narratives to control, order and 'protect' subject peoples.

Linkenbach (2007) provides a critical ethnography of the movement, showing how Sunderlal Bahuguna became the 'international face' of Chipko – arguing abroad that villagers had an inherent

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<sup>212</sup> See Shiva and Bandyopadhyay (1986) for the 'romantic' view of Chipko as a Gandhian movement of villagers engaged in previously sustainable practices of forestry, a struggle which Shiva characteristically and strategically links (20-21) to the new environmental movements in Europe. See also Routledge (1993: Ch 4) for a (mis)reading of Chipko that emphasizes the 'defence of the sacredness of place' in the movement and virtually ignores the material dimensions of the actual movement.

<sup>213</sup> Guha's analysis is nevertheless different from Shiva's; he emphasises the 'moral economy' aspects of the protests in the subaltern studies tradition, rather than the more contentious feminist/ecological interpretation of Shiva. Although both would agree with Guha's claim that the protests were in favour of a way of life "more harmoniously adjusted with natural processes" (Guha 1991: 196).

<sup>214</sup> In particular by helping the Indian government's rhetorical arsenal in its transfer of control of the forests to the Ministry of Environment and Forests, from the Ministry of Agriculture, thereby excluding the arguments of villagers that they should have economic rights in the forests by invoking environmental conservationist themes.

spiritual connection to trees (49) based on their Hindu beliefs, a spiritual message highlighted in the (transnational) 'slogan' of the movement: "What do the forests bear? Soil, water and pure air!" Linkenbach's analysis of the growing tensions between Bahuguna and the more 'materialist' grassroots of Chipko is worth quoting at length (68):

Bahuguna knits together love, harmony, and protection as basic elements of an 'ecological' attitude towards the forest. This attitude finds its practical expression in the 'true' Chipko demands for a total ban on green felling and the closure of all forest-based industries. Against this demand the establishment of labour cooperatives for the extraction of timber....to achieve local employment is identified with exploitative praxis....This early 'economic' phase of Chipko.....had to give way to the 'true' i.e ecologically inspired Chipko, represented by Bahuguna himself.

This rivalry of romantic and materialist was won, in the field of representation by the romantics; Linkenbach records (81) how Bahunguna was adept at using the mass media (books, films, newspaper editorials) to marginalize Chandi Prasad Bhatt – the leader associated with the labour cooperatives described in the above passage. Linkenbach reports that the outcome of this 'victory' for villagers was, as Rangan also argued, largely negative – with new strict forestry access rules framed in ecological language, and as the villagers reported (85) "the awards and the money are for the *samsthans* [the NGOs]". In this respect Chipko represented one of the first global examples of a campaign increasingly geared to the needs of a transnational and urban activist community, eager to project its concerns onto peasants. Even former activist Bandyopadhyay (1999), though formerly a joint author with Vandana Shiva of an account of the movement (1986), later argued that Shiva had retrospectively appropriated Chipko for her own urban concerns

The anti Narmada Dam networks, opposed to the Sardar Sarovar Project on the Narmada river, covering three states (Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat) are just as widely studied and, arguably, mythologized, as the Chipko movement. Again, there is an overlap with the anti-GMO

case. Many of the NGOs I interviewed in Maharashtra, especially those based in Pune, were also involved in the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada Movement)<sup>215</sup>. A Greenpeace advertisement against the possibility of GM rice plays on the parallel, with the words 'Dhan Bachao!' ('Save our rice!') written on a field, viewable only from the air for media consumption and reproduction in Greenpeace publicity materials.

Unlike the Chipko Movement, where Rangan and Linkenbach report that local villagers, supposedly the 'grassroots' of the movement, had rarely even heard of it, the movement against big dams among people threatened with having their villages flooded had extensive grassroots involvement and few experts of whatever ideological orientation believe mega-dam projects are an efficient or equitable way to provide irrigation to farmers<sup>216</sup>. However, there have been deep tensions within the anti-dam and resettlement organizations which would be hard to discern from reading the best known scholarly work on the transnational part of that movement, Khagram's (2004) *Dams and Development*.

In brief, the Gujarat based ARCH-Vahini and the Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh based Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) were at loggerheads during the early 1990's over whether to concentrate on getting resettlement and compensation for villagers whose villages would be submerged (the ARCH-Vahini position)<sup>217</sup> or whether to link the Narmada campaign to a larger environmental and symbolic campaign against dams per se (the NBA approach). It should be stressed that *both* campaigns involved outsiders intervening on behalf of locals, and also transnational dimensions (at least in the ARCH-Vahini case so long as the World Bank was funding the project – which was until 1993), although it was the NBA that achieved global recognition as representative of affected villagers and

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<sup>215</sup> For example Lokayan and the National Centre for Advocacy Studies as well as activists such as P M Lata (see chapter six)

<sup>216</sup> See numerous articles collected in Fisher (1995)

<sup>217</sup> See the Introduction to Dreze et al (1997) for a balanced overview of the dispute

which was far more active in building transnational linkages both normative and practical in the ways described by Khagram.<sup>218</sup>

Many issues of relevance are discernable in the anti-dams coalitions. Firstly, the decision over whether to seek compensation or whether to oppose the dam and actively work to stymie compensation attempts<sup>219</sup> depended on a larger ideological view about whether villagers affected were true subsistence oriented 'adivasis' (indigenous persons) or were, rather, peoples with a complex history of economically motivated migration, interested in partaking of modern institutions and legal guarantees of land ownership. This, in turn is nested within the broad modernist / romantic orientations we have tried to make thematic in this chapter. Secondly, the NBA, as even a sympathetic observer such as Baviskar observes (1995: 242) threatened to undermine their clients through its romanticization of their identity. Baviskar argues:

Romanticizing *adivasis* reduces their problems and refuses to acknowledge that, at present, their ability to mount a critique has been vastly eroded by their subordination. While intellectuals as well as people in the valley stress that priority must be given to a need-based economy – a wholly sound basis for reorienting natural resource management, that, in itself, is not enough. The scale of the degradation of the land and forest requires a massive effort calling upon financial, technical and organizational resources – a magnitude that has been achieved so far only by the state.

This tendency to frame the dam issue as a battle for the survival of autonomous communities, and therefore rule out mediation through the state, had practical consequences for the network. Anil Patel of ARCH-Vahini for example, argued versus the NBA (1995: 196), that they had actively denied villagers in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh information about possible resettlement and

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<sup>218</sup> A google search reveals 33,000 pages referring to the Narmada Bachao Andolan versus 1,350 for the ARCH-Vahini

<sup>219</sup> This is Anil Patel of ARCH-Vahini's (1997) complaint against the NBA, arguing that they actively denied villagers in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh information about possible resettlement and compensation (as worked out in Gujarat) in order to pursue their adamant opposition to the dam, thus actively undermining the interests of their supposed clients in order to continue playing a transnational role as defenders of those clients.

compensation (as worked out in Gujarat) in order to pursue their adamant opposition to the dam, thus actively undermining the interests of their supposed clients in order to continue playing a transnational role as defenders of those clients. Even more dramatically, ARCH-Vahini had complained when the NBA publicized some threatened villagers' willingness to drown rather than face resettlement (Fisher 1995: 24), arguing that this was a misrepresentation designed to appeal to the media and global audiences and that it actually played into the hands of the Indian government that wanted to portray the villagers as intransigent (Patel, 1995: 196).

Unlike either the Chipko or the anti GMO campaign a more complex dynamic was at play in the anti dam networks: firstly, there was the greater importance of self organizing village level groups (Baviskar 1995), *before* transnationalization, and secondly the different *types* of transnationalization at work. The ARCH-Vahini had succeeded in forging very specific, technical linkages with Oxfam UK and , via them, the World Bank (Patel 1995: 186), to ameliorate the resettlement options of villagers. At this time, the NBA had actually opposed transnationalization. But later, the tables turned, and it was the NBA that entered into a transnational phase, but not so much for technical mediation with the World Bank as to illustrate symbolically the plight of *adivasi* communities to a global audience. The first type of transnationalization was not 'romantic'<sup>220</sup>; the second was – and it is arguable that transnational linkages and the prospect of access to international media coverage helped push the NBA toward the strategy of romantic 'indigenization' of its clients and Manichean opposition to dams, even at the expense of the claims of those at the alleged grassroots of the movement<sup>221</sup>. At

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<sup>220</sup> In Chapter six I label it 'governance oriented'.

<sup>221</sup> See especially Whitehead's (2007) sympathetic but critical (from a Marxist perspective) paper on the NBA, where she points out that the rhythm of protest was shaped by the availability of 'celebrity activists' like Arundhati Roy: "throughout the 1990s the vocabulary of the movement as well as the timing of local actions was increasingly dictated by the demands of the media and the constituency of transnational environmentalism" (412). The romanticization of valley dwellers as 'true' *adivasis* was crucial to this. Whitehead's attack on romanticism is arguably vitiated however by an equally romantic version of Marxism which she advocates, demanding a full scale assault on commodification and enclosure in the countryside: not in accord with Marx's own views about the practical options facing rural agriculturalists.

the end of Chapter six I try to theorize further what this difference between ‘governance oriented’ and romantic TANs might mean and what explains it.

### **The Anti-GMO Campaign: Variations on a Romantic Theme**

Most famous of the ‘southern ‘romantic activists involved first in the Chipko campaign and in the anti GMO network is Vandana Shiva. Her activities were discussed in Chapter Three in terms of her NGO based work on GMOs and the powerful emulative effect she exerted on Indian social activists is discussed in chapter six. She has published more than twenty books, and won at least 18 international awards for her ecological campaigning<sup>222</sup>.

Shiva’s work on GMOs and other topics (especially the WTO, organic farming, and patents) is informed by a small number of generative metaphors and signifiers. This ability for symbolic production is part of what makes her such a powerful media figure, and leads to her frequent speeches, and invitations to protests abroad,<sup>223</sup> and her status as key strategic partner for powerful INGOs such as Greenpeace and HIVOS (chapter three). Two signifiers stand out in much of her writing: *the seed* and *monoculture*. This passage combines both themes in a typical fashion (Shiva 2005: 52):

The seed signifies the freedom of diverse cultures from *centralized* control. In the seed, ecological issues combine with social justice. The seed can play the role of Gandhi’s spinning wheel in this period of recolonization through “free-trade”. The native seed has become a system of resistance against monocultures and monopoly rights.....Diversity as a way of

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<sup>222</sup> A list of the awards appears on her Wikipedia page: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vandana\\_Shiva](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vandana_Shiva)

<sup>223</sup> One of the ironies of the hagiographic film *Bullshit* (2005) about Shiva’s work is that despite her praise for the ‘local’ she is constantly seen traveling internationally in the film.

thought and a way of life is what is required to transcend the impoverished monocultures of the mind.

Here, agriculture becomes a symbol for much wider social aspirations. Shiva is arguably less interested in the (very real) practical problems with monocultures<sup>224</sup>, and more interested in turning ‘monoculture’ into a global meme, referring to the supposed homogenization of ‘local’ cultures under the market and the state. Similarly the ‘good’ local seed is set against the ‘bad’ seed of Monsanto, who sell “seeds of suicide” (Shiva and Jaffri 1998), or “seeds of deceit” (Shiva 2005: 53). These metaphors are made concrete at Shiva’s Navdanya organization (Navdanya 2007), where “seed keepers” preserve ‘indigenous’ seeds from around India, as a last resort for farmers, whose access to a variety of non hybrid seeds is apparently being limited by corporate agriculture.<sup>225</sup> In the hagiographic European made film about Shiva called ‘Bullshit’ (2005), pictures of these ‘natural’ seed banks are juxtaposed with the words of a Monsanto scientist (with ominous music in the background) describing how “Monsanto has simulations of every occurring climate type in its data banks”; the implication being that in Monsanto, a computerized, homogenizing algorithm is being used to flatten local differences, whereas in Navdanya local differences are celebrated and protected.<sup>226</sup>

The other ‘concrete’ manifestations of the seed metaphor are the Gandhian protest repertoires based around the seed – or ‘bija’ in Hindi; these include the ‘Bija Satyagraha’ (seed ‘soul-force’<sup>227</sup> protests) organized alongside the KRRS (see chapter five) in 1992 on the occasion of the GATT / Dunkel Draft debate about patents on bio organisms, the ‘Bija yatra’ (seed pilgrimage’ of 2006-07)

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<sup>224</sup> Shiva originally worked with Prof. Nanjundaswamy of the KRRS on eucalyptus monoculture in Karnataka in 1983 (Assadi 1997). The trajectories of both activists could be seen as a flight into symbolism since then.

<sup>225</sup> ‘Seed banks’ are described in chapters three and six, where the actuality of their low impact and uptake is highlighted.

<sup>226</sup> Needless to say I believe this dichotomy is simply false: if anything the Monsanto data banks have the potential (with good regulatory policies) for *increasing* the amount of seed variety available to farmers, whereas Navdanya’s seed banks appear to be mainly for show in the media, at ritual distributions and in brochures, rather than a practical resource for farmers.

<sup>227</sup> Satyagraha is a neologism of Gandhi’s

joined by organic NGOs and focused on suicide affected parts of Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh (Navdanya 2007: 35-6), and the 'asha ke bija' (seeds of hope) scheme that accompanied the yatra, where 6000 farmers were given seeds, in ritualistic style, from Navdanya's collection (Navdanya 2007: 37).

Roy and Borowiak (2003: 79) analyze the atavistic elements of Shiva's romantic rhetoric, citing her characteristic statement that:

'Development' has meant the ecological and cultural rupture of bonds with nature, and within society, it has meant the transformation of organic communities into groups of uprooted and alienated individuals searching for abstract identities.....in effect turning away from the soil as a source of meaning and survival and turning to the state and its resources for both. The destruction of organic links with the soil also leads to the destruction of organic links with society

This shows how Shiva's views of the countryside are associated with a mythology of the "death of the sacred" (Roy and Borowiak: 79) which recalls Gandhi's words on the railways cited above. In her attack of GMOs, as Roy and Borowiak critique them<sup>228</sup>, Shiva incorporates this quasi religious vocabulary to imply that "manipulating seeds is...analogous to manipulating female bodies" (82), where the feminine is associated with the soil and with the true spiritual source of the nation, echoing, for Roy and Borowiak, the rhetoric of Hindu nationalism. For Nanda (2003: Ch 9), this kind of gendered rhetoric (she cites Shiva's various comments on women as protectors of the land) is also harmful to women, because it overlooks how *integration* into markets and wage labor has been the main source of emancipation for Indian women. For these critics, by positing the purity and femininity of the soil and the seed, threatened by external violations, Shiva is playing with themes that may

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<sup>228</sup> Although their critique of Shiva is marred by the way that they, like Brass (2000), merge her rhetoric with agrarian populism per se. This seems to be because they take for granted an equally romantic leftist view of a potential rural politics of landless labourers united with the urban working class and take everything else as the promulgation of false consciousness.

even tend, in Nanda's terms (12) toward fascism. If this judgment goes too far, the rhetoric certainly implies the need for a paternalistic authority<sup>229</sup>, and therefore, conveniently, a justification for vertical relations of dependency between organizations like Navdanya and the farmers working on organic 'projects' under their supervision.

Many interviewees among NGOs claimed that they found Shiva's romantic framing unrealistic, although several (like Lata P M, described in chapter six) talked of Shiva as a target for emulation, even rivalry. But Shiva's rhetoric has found resonance in the media (see chapter two), and in a global constituency, and influenced the representation and strategies of well known social movements in India over the last few decades, from Chipko onwards.

What of the other organizations in the anti GMO network? The tenor of romantic argument in the network depends on who the audience is for a particular presentation, and also on the other types of 'structural coupling' organizations have, as described in chapter three. Videos, for example, made for worldwide distribution or slogans intended for the national media tend to make use of a highly romantic rhetoric, while on the other hand metropolitan INGOs like GRAIN and Suman Sahai's Gene Campaign adopt a discourse that is amenable to coupling with governmental agencies, with less metaphorical or symbolic content and more reference to surveys conducted by NGOs and to 'risk' discourse. However, as discussed below, this kind of 'risk' discourse has its own romantic components.

At the next level down, the 'nodal' groups discussed in chapter three, such as Greenpeace and Chetna Organic and nodal funding agencies such as HIVOS India are in the business primarily of forging connections, funding smaller groups, and in the case of Chetna, as 'market

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<sup>229</sup> In interview with Kishor Tiwari of thje VJAS (interview number 42), he also stressed fears over female corruption, saying: "our daughters are out of control", loosely linking this to a series of external threats, including of course Bt Cotton.

environmentalists', working as brokers for organic farmers with international fashion companies. While these groups strive for a professional, technical attitude in their self presentation and their employees are mostly career track NGO workers, they nevertheless provide resources to those promoting dramatically romantic views such as Vandana Shiva, sometimes, as described in chapter three, to the tune of six and seven figure dollar amounts. This can lead to a peculiar tension, which was very apparent in interviews, especially with Greenpeace, Chetna Organic and HIVOS representatives. All three adopted a skeptical, cautious and seemingly open-minded perspective on GMOs in interviews<sup>230</sup>, and emphasized their distance from Vandana Shiva's views without prompting.

Nevertheless, even these self consciously professional organizations depend on romantic framings as part of their coupling with the media and their global supporters. This is the 'radicalism' mentioned in chapter three from the Greenpeace archives: not perhaps as sincerely felt as Shiva's myth making, but conscious of the power of romantic narratives to penetrate crowded "social space" as the Greenpeace director put it in the archival materials. For this reason Greenpeace refuse to engage with any framing of GMOs that includes price, or cost benefit calculation (chapter two). The GMO campaigns officer argued that what they objected to was the input-output model of agriculture per se: a position that accords with Shiva's vision of village autonomy, even if Greenpeace does not poeticize this theme. Similarly, Chetna Organic's market oriented organic cotton projects depend on romantic appetites for 'authenticity', the 'value' of which is partly constructed (in unquantifiable ways) by more overtly romantic activists like Shiva: as Spooner (1986) argues in relation to the 'oriental carpet' as object of interest for westerners, the non commodified production techniques

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<sup>230</sup> Interviews numbers 22, 32 and 71. The key term they used was 'uncertainty', about bio-safety. However, none of them would endorse specific claims about allergies, sheep deaths, etc, and they were quite detached and even ironical when discussing such claims (often produced by research funded by their own organizations) This was even more true of Greenpeace's international science officer Doug Parr, interviewed in London in April 2006, who seemed positively dismissive of many of the key claims made by his own organization against GM crops, and keen to emphasize the work he felt more comfortable defending, for example on nuclear waste disposal.

involved in making an object, paradoxically enhance its value as a commodity in these niche markets.

At the regional level, NGOs such as the DDS and CSA in Hyderabad, or large organic farming NGOs which fund smaller village projects are the clearest example of the ‘two faces’ of the anti GMO network; on the one hand producing dramaturgical video documentaries, for example, and on the other playing the part of science-based, technically sound rural development organizations that can be trusted by state governments and donors to disburse funds efficiently. At this level, ‘romantic’ attitudes were apparent in interviews, when the directors of projects spoke candidly about the villagers they were working with. For example, at the Green Foundation in Bangalore and MARI in Warangal<sup>231</sup>, the directors emphasized the ‘ignorance’ of the villagers they worked with, in the context of their susceptibility to ‘external’ influences. They saw their projects as attempts to ‘save’ villagers from the corrupting influences of the city, even if they were fighting a losing battle. Mr Murali of MARI constantly stressed that the project encapsulated a ‘vision’ for “keeping young people in villages”<sup>232</sup>. At Dhara Mitra in Maharashtra, the director similarly talked of “cutting people out of the [market] system”, as the solution to rural crisis<sup>233</sup>. This vision is put on display quite vividly at Eenabhavi, near Warangal in a project run by CROPS (described in chapter three), where villagers are literally encouraged to ‘live out’ the mythos of the communal Indian village; gathering under the banyan trees for communal discussion once a week, as mandated by NGO protocol<sup>234</sup>. But of course, this re-imagined solidarity is only possible with ‘external’ inputs of donor money, even when the *idea* of autonomy appears to be at the heart of the way these projects are framed to donors and the global media.

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<sup>231</sup> Interviews 20 and 16

<sup>232</sup> Contrast the views of Dipankur Gupta (2000; 2004; 2009) on the need to overcome this perspective on the village and how he believes it hampers policy making. (see chapter six)

<sup>233</sup> Interview number 40. Here, and elsewhere the writings of Japanese organic farming pioneer Masanobu Fukuoka (1996) were mentioned as an inspiration.

<sup>234</sup> Interview number 25 with CROPS director

Others, among these regional NGOs were more nuanced in their understanding of the romantic framing of agriculture – Mr P Babu, of ICRA, Bangalore<sup>235</sup> argued that a fusion of Marxism and ‘Eastern’ ways of thinking was needed (“Bakunin meets Sannyasa” in his words). Unlike others interviewed, he was more alert to the negative aspects of the “old village system”, in terms of hierarchies and lack of opportunities, but at the same time, as in other project NGOs, he argued that they would only work with those villagers who “did not produce a market surplus”. This reluctance to engage with farmers who are actually producing for the market is revealing; suggesting either the inherently low attractiveness of the ‘organic village’ for actual farmers, even with financial incentives, or more, cynically, the greater ease with which NGOs can form symbiotic connections to remote places where their external financial input carries greater relative weight and where ‘exit’ options are limited.<sup>236</sup>

In terms of media productions, the Deccan Development Society (DDS)<sup>237</sup>, run by former television producer P.V.Satheesh, has produced a series of video documentaries, aimed at an English speaking audience, about the ‘failure’ of Bt Cotton in Andhra Pradesh. There are three films produced by an organization called the ‘Community Media Trust’, entitled ‘Bt Cotton in Andhra Pradesh: A Three Year Fraud’, ‘Bt Cotton: A Disaster in Search of Success’, and ‘Why are Farmers in Warangal so angry about Bt Cotton?’. These films were funded by HIVOS, the EED (the association of German evangelic churches) and by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) in the UK. The films are supposedly produced and filmed by a collective of women farmers from Andhra Pradesh, who we occasionally see holding video cameras and audio equipment in the films. But the credits at

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<sup>235</sup> Interview number 23

<sup>236</sup> This also came over in a talk given at Hyderabad University (Interview/lecture number 55 d) on an organic project in Karnataka, called the Timbuktu Collective, where it was stressed that geographical distance from trunk roads and urban areas was a precondition for the success of such projects – the aim of which was to “revitalize old cosmologies” as well as farm organically.

<sup>237</sup> Pearson (2006) has conducted a discourse analysis of DDS documentation, and comes to similar conclusions as those presented here: he interestingly compares Monsanto and DDS discourses, concluding that both see rural people as needing professional interlocutors: “DDS represent farmers as having lost their traditional knowledge and agency. They require re-education and the professionals (the NGOs) are the ones to show them how to reclaim their sustainable ways of life” (313).

the end mention a script by P.V.Sattheesh<sup>238</sup>, and at no point do we see or hear the women actually communicating with farmers. They make a trip to South Africa and to Mali, to interview farmers about the failures of Bt Cotton there, but the supposed cosmopolitan interaction of subalterns never takes place; the African farmers are mostly represented by ‘rappoteurs’, dressed in the hip ‘ethnic’ garb of urban social activists.

There is also an interesting gap in the films between the often quite pragmatic comments of the farmers interviewed and the editorial views of the film. In both India and Africa, farmers express the wish that they could farm sugar cane (hardly a more environmentally friendly crop) instead of cotton if they had the capital, and the ominous commentary which, in booming Bollywood tones declares how “into this paradise [of supposedly sustainable cotton farming in the past] entered a terrible pest: the American bollworm” (the word *American* is emphasized). At the end of one film, a woman who had planted Bt Cotton in a field rented with borrowed money, and then suffered crop losses, is described as not knowing she was buying the “seeds of her death”; but this is despite her family (interviewed) putting her problems down to a mixture of poor rains and insupportable debt taking. The films try to construct a romantic narrative of paradise lost and innocence taken advantage of, out of the complex causal terrain of rural crisis described in chapter two. This depiction is clearly aimed at an international audience, who also funded the films, and perhaps primarily at donor organizations, like HIVOS, wanting to get a return for their investment, in terms of materials that can be consumed in Europe.

As suggested in the introduction, the forms of romanticism extend further than imaginations of autonomy and the accompanying paternalism. Risk discourse also comes in a romantic form, in which cost benefit calculation succumbs to slippery slope pessimism. For example, the Centre for

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<sup>238</sup> I also spoke to Sattheesh’s predecessor at the DDS (interview number 34), who criticized the direction he had taken the organization, toward media driven activities and told me that there were frequent and deliberate mistranslations in the films, of what farmers in AP were saying in telegu.

Sustainable Agriculture's main GMO program officer Kavitha Kuruganti, in her largely factual and technical seeming Economic and Political Weekly articles (2005; 2006), but especially in a CSA booklet (funded by donor agency HIVOS) on GMOs (CSA: 2007) employs a discourse that draws on romanticism (she uses Shiva's term "reductionist science" for example), but is closer to what Madsen (2001 a), in relation to the KRRS' Inter Continental Caravan, refers to as rural 'conservatism'. By this Madsen (3737) means an ideology combining "romance and pessimism": that is "a secular conservatism rooted in a belief in the value of local folk-beliefs and practices, even though these are admitted to be no longer really viable or enforceable in the age of darkness". This discourse emphasizes 'uncertainty' above all else, and in the CSA text, this sense of lurking dangers behind any kind of 'intervention' pervades the argument, though that argument is presented in technical terms backed up with data and biological terminology (unlike with Claude Alvares' and Vandana Shiva's discourse). In the CSA booklet, GMO technology is described as "a very imprecise, unreliable and unpredictable technology. The only thing that is predictable is that it is unpredictable". This argument relies on a notion of genetic "holism" that may not have much scientific content, but which in a more subtle form links to the notion that 'nature' (conceived as external to homo sapiens) is resistant to human interventions, and will punish attempts to penetrate her complexity. It is noticeable that despite its relatively moderate tone (and this is true of Suman Sahai's writings too) the booklet ends up finding no promise at all in any type of GM technology present or foreseeable. Its blanket refusal of the technology, and dark warnings (though not precise claims) about possible health effects, end up meshing with the romantic imaginary's Manichean form of argument; as Madsen argues, this represents a form of nihilism, in which no kind of action could ever change anything, except for the worse.

### **Conclusions: Why does romanticization matter?**

In this chapter I have attempted to draw some lines of historical continuity, to make sense of contemporary transnational activism. While much literature on activist networks, tends to concentrate on the strategic framing work done by movement elites in the present, it is also essential to see how these frames have roots in specific political cultures and, more critically, that these frames might endorse one world view over others, with distributional consequences for the livelihoods of people represented in these movements. This argument about framing is continued in chapter six.

We have seen, in the cases of Chipko, Narmada and GMOs that there are indeed such consequences, when a romantic frame is emphasized over the complex set of local and national demands that could loosely be termed 'modernist' or 'materialist'. The very fact that modernism/materialism is much harder to define here (it is more eclectic and locally variable) than romanticism confirms one of the key points of this chapter – that romanticism, under conditions where transnational opportunities are available, may become a homogenized and homogenizing option for certain southern groups, who have made an initial decision to participate in the global protest imaginary<sup>239</sup>.

The table below helps to summarize the differences of the romantic and modernist world views as applied to the three cases described, drawing on chapter two, when looking at the 'modernist' arguments *not* emphasized on GMOs. In each case a transnationalized civil society is more likely to opt for the claims in the 'romantic' column, because it resonates with a global protest imaginary and brings in resources, as described in chapter three.

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Table 4.1. Summary of ideologies in the three campaigns

	Romantic	Modernist/Materialist
Chipko	Subsistence, indigenous people against external appropriation of resources by state and market; defending a 'way of life' close to nature	local people in dispute with government decision to allow certain logging firms access to forests rather than them; dispute about <i>who</i> is allowed to exploit forest resources
Narmada	Indigenous / <i>adivasis</i> versus a combination of the Indian state and transnational capital; attempt to preserve a viable, pre-modern way of life	Attempt to prevent non-efficient and costly big dams; if not prevent then gain adequate compensation for resettlement
GMOs	Attempt of Indian peasant farmers to prevent more incursions by transnational capital into traditional farming; opposition to a dangerous and unpredictable meddling with nature	Complaints against seed companies over poor choices of hybrids for early Bt Cotton; Attempt to reduce price of Bt Cotton; push for research into GMOs designed for Indian conditions and marginal farmers

While there are certainly continuities between the three cases, the anti GMO network has more in common with Chipko than with the Narmada protests, in that in the first and third cases, the 'base' of the network was small (Chipko) or non existent (GMOs), whereas in the Narmada case the base

was large and at different times (and in different interpretations) in synergy or in tension with the transnationalized ‘head’ of the network. As argued in chapter six, the GMO case may be an extreme type of ‘romantic TAN’, in which professionalized mediators, thriving in the numerous ‘choke points’ that have arisen, have free rein to romanticize the issue, in the absence of an articulated grassroots with more material concerns<sup>240</sup>.

The consequence of romanticization is a selective focus on particular sources of disenchantment that deflects attention from more pressing problems. This is Nanda’s (2003) line of argument, in her attack on what she sees as the alliance of western postmodernism and southern romanticism. For Nanda, just as the Nazi regime condemned the culture of science in the name of ‘organic unity’, while pushing for technical advancements in military technologies<sup>241</sup>, so these civil society groups tend to selectively focus on particular instances of ‘disenchantment’ and ‘commodification’, while themselves developing (in chapter three’s argument) highly efficient technical capacities to coordinate with donor agencies, governments and markets.

This also means a diversion of activist energies; E P Thompson’s (1994: 247-48) eloquent summary of Raymond Williams’ argument in ‘The Country and the City’ (1975) is worth citing at length here:

What was wrong with the ‘myth’ of rural life was that it became softened, petrified, protracted, and then taken over by city-dwellers as a major point from which to criticise ‘industrialism’. Thus it became a substitute for the utopian courage of imagining what a true community, in an industrial city might be – indeed of imagining how far community may

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<sup>240</sup> Carl Schmitt would no doubt concur – since he argued that the ‘political romantic’ is someone who seeks out issues that can be rhapsodized, and where ugly blow back from reality is kept to a minimum.

<sup>241</sup> As Ronald Herring points out (personal communication) there is no campaign against genetically engineered medical products like insulin, although they should be subject to the ‘uncertainty’ critique exemplified by the CSA booklet. Insulin is probably used more by rich than poor. Conversely, the cotton oil, used mainly by the poor, has not been a focus of NGO campaigns against Bt Cotton, even though it is actually ingested: here the Greenpeace officer I interviewed argued that science has shown the Bt gene couldn’t possibly harm humans in the form of cooking oil, but Greenpeace has adopted a much more liberal attitude to potential risks when it comes to reports of sheep deaths, etc.

have already been attained.....Williams [sees] the idealising of country life as a continuous cultural haemorrhage, a loss of rebellious blood, draining away now to Walden, now to Afghanistan.....solving nothing in their own countries but kidding themselves that they had somehow *opted out of contamination by a social system of which they are themselves the cultural artefacts*. In a sombre late chapter he reminds us that the idyllic labourers....upon whom the myth was long sustained, are now the poor of Nigeria, Bolivia, Pakistan. [my emphasis]

And, of course, the 'they' mentioned in this passage are now also the middle classes of southern countries, not just 'westerners'.

#### **Ideas and material interests in the network(s): Separate or Inextricable?**

How can we square the ideational/historical approach taken in this chapter with the functional approach taken in chapter three? Some hints have already been made in this chapter in the discussion of the governmental 'uses' of romantic ideas and in chapter three in the discussion of Niklas Luhmann's and Lewis and Mosse's work – in which the instrumental rationality of organizations and their ideational perspectives are seen as mutually constituting. Four types of answer are available: the first three pointing to particular mechanisms (however vague they might be at present), the fourth making a larger theoretical point about the compatibility of ideational (chapter four) and instrumental (chapter three) forms of argument about TANs.

Firstly, and most generally, following Hegel, Schmitt, and more recently, Morton, we could appeal to general psychological/ideological formations in the modern world: the pervasive 'beautiful soul' syndrome which reappears in countless guises, whether of left or right, cosmopolitan or nationalist, religious or secular. As described above, this syndrome involves a (self contradicting) disavowal of complicity in modern institutions and, in its transnational variety, a projection of this threatened

purity onto likely targets, whether they be indigenous persons, subsistence farmers or Tibetan monks.

Probing this complex ideological construct is well beyond the bounds of a dissertation in comparative politics. However, a consumer base responsive to that range of feeling is implied in at least three of the structural couplings described in chapter three – the media, the market for organic goods and the mass membership of European religious or donor organizations that sponsor the network(s). The contemporary mass media in particular may encourage the cultivation of spectatorship at a distance (Boltanski 1999); in other words the medium itself may encourage a ‘romantic’ framing of issues in which middle class audiences spectate struggling agriculturalists whether in their own national hinterlands or abroad, and project their anxieties and sense of pervasive ‘risk’ (Beck 1992) onto those groups.

Secondly, following Douglas and Wildavsky (1983), we could appeal to the *type of organization* involved in TANs. As these authors argue, ‘border’ type organizations – meaning smaller, voluntary or quasi voluntary organizations, such as NGOs or even larger contribution-dependent groups like Greenpeace tend to adopt Manichean or apocalyptic values as a kind of organizational glue, in order to overcome their internal collective action problems. These (romantic) values then get externalized in the form of their attitudes to social problems and to risk: (123):

The border is self-defined by its opposition to encompassing larger social systems. It is composed of small units and it sees no disaster in reduction of the scale of organization. It warns the center that its cherished social systems will wither because the center does not listen to warnings of cataclysm. The border is worried about God or nature, two arbiters external to the large-scale social systems of the center.

For Douglas and Wildavsky, the decline of industrial organization and the rise of service industries creates a proliferation of these ‘border’ type organizations, or ‘sects’, usually manned by workers from these service sectors, who have had no positive experiences with large scale organizations. The argument could now apply transnationally to the proliferation of such ‘border’ groups. In addition to this externalization of organizational values, competition *between* border groups (chapters five and six) in terms of ‘purity’ and ‘authenticity’ accentuates those values.

Thirdly we could follow Duffield (2007), and take up arguments already made in this chapter, showing that romantic framings of subsistence serve governmental purposes, whether of the state or NGO sector. Duffield argues (67-70) that ‘sustainable development’ and its concomitant encouragement of labor intensive, small, autonomous forms of production, arose following the failure of modernization to reach marginal populations in countries of the global South. Since the 1990’s it has been encouraged (he argues in analogy to colonial regimes, as also argued above) in order to ‘soak up’ surplus labor and to prevent unwelcome migrations, whether internally to cities or externally to richer countries. For Duffield romantic tropes such as self-reliance, autonomy, and small sized ‘natural’ communities mirror and assist in these projects of ‘containment’. Certainly, the paternalistic rhetoric of many NGO’s interviewed fits with this argument, in particular their emphasis on keeping farmers ‘away’ from outside influences. More importantly the influx of funds from state governments for organic agriculture in recent years suggests anxieties about rural discontent that labor intensive organic projects might meet. The anti-Bt coalition, then, could be seen as a very small but symbolically significant part of a larger effort to construct zones of what I would call *governed autonomy* in the countryside – fusing Gandhian rhetoric with a less than progressive ‘containment’ strategy, in a hybrid strategy with a long history.

Finally, and more abstractly, Snyder (2006) reminds us that there is no contradiction involved in joining together these supply and demand side explanations (themselves mixing psychological and

organizational factors) in accounting for TANs. In an important essay on network forms of power, he draws on the sociology of Michael Mann (1986) to argue that ideational complexes in networks emerge through feedback effects from their structural potency. Ideas that find “social niches” in which they “resolve contradictions of *meaning or organization*” for actors (324, my emphasis) will prosper. An example cited by Snyder, from Mann’s work, is the dissemination of Christianity, which solved psychological problems of status for freed slaves, economic trust problems for transnational merchants and ultimately governmental legitimacy problems (temporarily) for the Roman Empire. Success in filling these niches, however, in the context of no rival ideologies, created an emergent entity more potent than its individual origins. On a much smaller scale romantic TANs such as the anti GMO network fill various psychological and organizational niches, described in this and the previous chapter. This is in the absence (as argued in chapter six) of viable alternative ideologies in the Indian countryside. The ideational solutions, as argued in this chapter, are not new, but draw on similar patterns from colonial India and from previous social movements.

## **Chapter Five: Comparing Farmers' Movements. Why did the KRRS take the transnational route and not the Shetkari Sanghatana?**

### **Introduction**

Chapter three described the organizational linkages that have kept the anti GMO network in India active and influential. Chapter four tried to pin down the concept of 'rural romanticism' and pointed out that romanticism tended to be associated with transnational linkages in previous activist networks in India and that the anti GMO network exemplifies this 'romantic' approach. Chapter five, combines some of these themes, showing how making transnational linkages was both an organizational and ideational choice of the KRRS (Karnataka State Farmers' Organization), which enthusiastically led the way on opposition to Monsanto and Bt cotton. In contrast the Shetkari Sanghatana (Cultivators' Association) of Maharashtra, which took a strongly pro Bt cotton line, even organizing rallies for legalization, tended not to forge transnational connections with activists, in line with its forms of organization and its more 'modernist/materialist' orientation.

The comparison is more complex than that, however. The epilog to the chapter points to some of the ways that Sharad Joshi, leader of the Sanghatana did forge transnational linkages since the mid 1990's. These linkages, of a 'market romantic' or libertarian hue, were ideologically at variance with those of the KRRS, but reflect some of the same structural issues surrounding transnationalism.

The chapter deliberately does not focus exclusively on the Bt Cotton campaigns by the KRRS. In line with the methodology expressed in chapter six, the aim is to make sense of the framings of the anti-Bt cotton protests by putting them in a larger social and historical context. This context is what the chapter aims to provide.

Methodologically, the chapter can be taken as a 'pair-wise' comparison of the two farmers' movements. But, bearing in mind the discussion of social causality in chapter one, it is not intended

as a strict 'test' of the 'causes' of a movement turning to transnational linkages or the causal consequences of those linkages (holding certain similarities constant). This is partly because the reasons for key differences in structure and ideology of the two movements are obscure and will probably never be known, given the lack of field research on the movements in the 1980's<sup>242</sup>. There may be long term, structural/historical reasons why the farmers' movement in Karnataka was destined to be more hierarchical and more 'romantic' in orientation than that in Maharashtra; much also rests, in both cases, on sometimes arbitrary seeming decisions and personal preferences of the movements' two charismatic leaders. At most, the chapter can hint at 'elective affinities' between a certain kind of movement (in this case the KRRS) and the transnational public sphere, which might be probed further by similar studies on different issue areas in different countries. Nevertheless this chapter hopes to contribute to scholarship by its comparisons: the movements' opposite views on GM crops provide an interesting bifurcation to investigate and none of the existing scholarship sets out to systematically compare the movements' strategies, especially in the period of their decline, after the mid 1990's<sup>243</sup>.

### **The KRRS as Transnational Icon**

One important motivation for this chapter is that the KRRS has acquired an almost iconic status in some academic literature, as an exemplar of transnationally oriented resistance to neoliberal capitalism, and a potential example to movements throughout the world.

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<sup>242</sup> Despite excellent articles, dissertations and monographs on these movements, referred to in this chapter, no one ever undertook a systematic comparative survey of the movements' membership in the 1980's when they were genuinely mass movements. Much rests on later conjecture and reconstructions by interested parties. This chapter relies heavily for empirical analysis on work done by Assadi (1994; 1997) on the KRRS, and Omvedt (1980; 1993; 2004) and Youngblood (2004) for the Shetkari Sanghatana.

<sup>243</sup> Even Youngblood's account ends in the late 1990's, and has very little to say about the 'decline' in the Sanghatana's membership and power at that period – sometimes slipping into the error of redescribing decline in terms of deliberate 'looseness' of structure; not an analysis which former Sanghatana officers found very plausible in my interviews.

For Reitan (2007: 156-59) the KRRS represents a mass movement (she claims of 10 million members) joining up with transnational networks (the Via Campesina and Peoples' Global Action) to demand "ecological sovereignty" (157) for global farmers. Reitan describes the KRRS as an example of a generative organization with global reach, innovating tactics that were imitated in Europe (smashing KFC outlets imitated by the Confederation Paysanne of France, versus McDonalds) and as another scholar has pointed out, burning trial fields of GM crops, even before that tactic had been adopted by British activists (Scoones, 2008: 16). Featherstone (2008) devotes a whole chapter of his book on 'counter global networks' to the KRRS, and like Reitan, stresses the 'productive' networking that created new forms of global resistance to neoliberal norms and through which the KRRS was able to switch "from targeting rural-urban division in India to contesting transnational power relations" (152). Featherstone is alert to some of the paradoxes of the KRRS' transnational activities, especially the essentialist and xenophobic views expressed during the 'Inter Continental Caravan', discussed below, but nevertheless sees the KRRS as exemplary of the way third world groups can offer a transnational response to what Featherstone assumes are transnational problems caused by MNC's and neoliberal norms.

Perhaps the most sophisticated defence of the KRRS as harbinger of a new networked and transnational politics comes from Gupta (1998). Gupta argues that farmers groups in India, especially the KRRS "are aware that global accords signal important shifts in the territorial basis of nationalism and are struggling to articulate what this postcolonial space represents for peasant organization and resistance" (292). His Foucaultian argument is that new 'intermestic' forms of governmentality/power (as represented by global bio-property rules or the activities of Monsanto or Cargil in Karnataka) have brought forth new forms of transnational resistance. Such forms of resistance, such as the innovation of new solidaristic identities ("farmers of the world", 323), go beyond 'northern environmentalism' with its technocratic biases. Even though the KRRS may draw on "contradictory logics" (328), including old nationalist rhetoric, the organization nevertheless

represents a rupture with the old logic of the nation state and a move into an 'unbundled' world where global technocracy both confronts and generates global resistance.

Gupta's and Featherstone's assessments of the KRRS as exemplar of a new politics of resistance are nuanced enough to admit to contradictions in the KRRS' position, not least that it is primarily a rich farmers' organization talking about protecting the poor, and that it has employed a sometimes essentialist, nationalist or masculinist rhetoric in its campaigns. But none of these favorable accounts can explain the anomaly (although Gupta mentions it) that the Shetkari Sanghatana of Maharashtra, representing a similar group of farmers and facing similar problems, did not enter into new forms of transnational resistance. In fact, where the Sanghatana enters the debate, as on the activist website [lobbywatch.org](http://lobbywatch.org), it has been in the form of corporate stooge, rather than mass organization<sup>244</sup>. This disparity in attention is also true of the secondary academic literature on the two movements: while the KRRS (or its transnational 'face', at least) has inspired a large number of articles and book chapters, the Sanghatana remains largely undescribed, apart from dedicated works by Omvedt (1993; 1994; 2004) and Youngblood (2005).

The rest of this chapter attempts to explain this anomaly and point to organizational and ideological factors that might have predisposed the KRRS into forging transnational alliances, where the Sanghatana did not. Before making this comparison it is useful to consider how both movements<sup>245</sup> fit into the history of rural social movement organization in India since independence.

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<sup>244</sup> <http://www.lobbywatch.org/profile1.asp?PrId=195>

<sup>245</sup> For purposes of comparison, farmers' movements from other states, such as the powerful BKU of Uttar Pradesh, are excluded, partly because of the limitations of this particular research project, partly because the BKU did not have to deal with issues related to Bt cotton, being based in a non cotton producing state.

### **The two organizations compared**

For simplicity's sake three phases of farmers' or rural mobilization in India can be described (Pai, 2010). In the first phase, from 1948 to the 1970's mobilizations were primarily about the failure of land reform in the immediate post independence period and were fought under the banner of socialist or communist 'anti feudal' ideologies. From the early 1970's with the onset of the Green Revolution and the concomitant rise of class differentiation in the countryside, so called 'new farmers' movements' or 'rich farmers' movements' took over. These movements, which included the KRRS and the Shetkari Sanghatana, mobilized against the state and its interventions in the agricultural economy. The target of these heterogeneous movements was 'urban bias' (Lipton, 1977); the critiques and prescriptions of these movements are described in more detail below. Finally, in the period since liberal reforms began in India, since the early 1990's, the picture is much less clear. The economic background to this period is the relative decline of agriculture in India's more diversified economy, the withdrawal of the state from the countryside (described in chapter two) and a focus of opposition to globalization in the form of trade agreements and transnational corporations. During this period mass rural movements have steadily declined as the rural middle classes that once led them migrated to the cities, to be replaced variously by NGOs and activist networks, rich farmer-corporation linkages and a resurgent Naxalite guerrilla movement. It is this third 'phase' (which has no clear label as yet) that is the focus of this dissertation and the aim is to shed light on the complex patchwork of rural organizations that have replaced the mass mobilizations of phases one and two.

The Sanghatana and the KRRS both originated at the same time (late 1970's), under similar economic conditions and, superficially at least, offered similar prescriptions to the problems faced by farmers. Before analyzing in more depth the more subtle differences in membership, organization, tactics and ideology of the two organizations, it is useful to summarize the broad points of similarity (Omvedt, 1980; 1993; 1994):

- Both organizations argued that the Indian state was extracting surplus from agriculture, in the form of depressing price of agricultural commodities, and using that surplus in urban areas and for urban industrial expansion. Both organizations framed this as a form of exploitation.
- Specific complaints included such barriers to trade as zonal restrictions on where farmers could sell their crops, price controls organized through the Agricultural Price Committee (APC), artificially high exchange rates favoring imports for industry over agricultural exports and restrictions on 'value added' activities by farmers such as processing of raw commodities.
- Both organizations favored specific state interventions in the countryside to improve irrigation and infrastructure
- Both organizations were led by and had as members, primarily, wealthier farmers – “intellectual rich peasants” as Assadi terms them (1997: 215), who were the gainers from the technological improvements of the Green Revolution; increasing surpluses, thanks to new crop hybrids had meant more time available for protest and organization. Their founders were upper middle class professionals , who were not reliant on farming for a living: Sharad Joshi of the Sanghatana had a background as an officer in the United Nations and Prof. Nanjundaswamy of the KRRS was a lawyer and university teacher who had quit a post in Germany to return to India and lead the movement (Gupta, 1998: 333)
- Both organizations showed a similar pattern of rise and fall: initially able to mobilize rallies of hundreds of thousands of farmers in the early to mid 1980's, by the early 2000's, after failed flirtations with electoral politics, both were subject to splits, fractiousness and decline in mass membership, to the extent that active membership may now be down to the few thousand in both states<sup>246</sup>.

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<sup>246</sup> Youngblood makes a case that the Sanghatana was still a mass organization in the year 2000, around which time his field research came to an end, but no one interviewed for this dissertation in Maharashtra believed

Despite these important similarities there were three crucial areas of difference between the two movements: in their membership structure, organization, and ideology/campaign targets. Exploring these differences can help explain why the KRRS was able and willing to form transnational linkages and the Sanghatana was not, and why the KRRS' ideational history made it compatible with the transnational imaginary's mode of representing GM crops while the Sanghatana was not.

### 1. Membership Structure

As pointed out above, the senior leadership of both movements was drawn primarily from richer and middle income farmers in their respective states. Some scholarly accounts, by Marxist oriented scholars (Brass 1994; 2000, Dhanagare 1994) stop the analysis there and 'write off' the movements as populist lobby groups for 'middle peasants', whose agenda was twofold: to get subsidies from the state which would disproportionately benefit the rich<sup>247</sup>, and to distract political and media attention from the exploitation of agricultural labor. Other scholars (in particular Varshney, 1998), point to the flaws in this critique, arguing that the aim of raising prices in the countryside could reasonably have attracted the support of marginal farmers and even laborers.

However, there were differences *between* the movements here. Firstly, the Sanghatana's support base appears to have encompassed more crop areas than that of the KRRS. Having begun with a dispute over onion prices, the Sanghatana in its heyday represented farmers of gram, peanut, chilli, cotton, tobacco leaf and dairy and was strong in the poorer, rain fed, eastern portions of Maharashtra such as Marathwada and Vidarbha (see chapter two) where cotton growing predominates (Youngblood, 2004: 14). The KRRS, on the other hand, found its core membership

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that the Sanghatana could still be called a mass organization today. Pattenden (2005: 1981) argues that "By 2002, its [the KRRS'] organizational presence was skeletal and no longer crossed both caste and class boundaries." In both cases the primary reason for decline was economic: the exodus of 'peasant intellectuals' or their children from rural employment to the cities and, with declining terms of trade, a lower amount of time available to farmers for protest activities.

<sup>247</sup> Omvedt (1994) points out that it was actually communist party allied farmers' unions (as described in chapter three) that were demanding subsidies, not the farmers' movements.

confined to richer, irrigated parts of Karnataka, and in particular to sugar plantations and some coffee and spice farmers (Assadi, 1997, 42-45). The sugar cane farmers were crucial for the funding of the KRRS, providing a revenue stream for the KRRS that was lacking among their peer organizations (Madsen, 2011), so that Assadi can even describe the KRRS as a “sugar farmers’ union” (Assadi, 77)<sup>248</sup>. In fact, significantly for the overall argument here, cotton farmers had deserted the KRRS early on in the history of the movement, leaving in 1983, alongside rain fed farmers from the Bellary, Raichur and Dharwad districts who felt their interests were not being addressed by the leadership of the KRRS (Assadi, 145). These differences in financial structure matter because, in a parallel to the ‘resource curse’ in primary commodity exporting countries, they led to different structural tendencies: in the KRRS a tendency toward central control and a ‘freedom’ of ideological action unrestrained by dependence on a larger contributing membership, and in the Sanghatana a need to respond to the demands of a more diffuse base.

Arguably connected to these financial difference the two movements also had varied success in reaching out to groups beyond farmers. According to Youngblood’s thesis on the Sanghatana, the movement was successful in promoting the involvement of women, marginal farmers<sup>249</sup> and to a lesser extent of agricultural laborers and adivasis (‘tribal’ peoples). For example, Sharad Joshi pushed for India’s farmers’ movements to include a higher minimum wage for labor as part of their core program (Youngblood, 17). He did this by placing the interests of subordinate groups in a larger context of oppression at the state level. The Sanghatana, unlike the KRRS, also made efforts to reach out to urban trade unions (Assadi, 117). Overall, as Youngblood (18-19) summarizes it:

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<sup>248</sup> Madsen (2011) describes the ‘KRRS levy’ that these cane farmers paid in return for the success of the KRRS in getting them higher can prices than in neighboring states. Much of this ‘levy’ was at the personal disposal of Prof. Nanjundaswamy.

<sup>249</sup> Quantitative data is hard to come by, but Youngblood conducted a brief survey in 1996 at a Sanghatana rally (Youngblood, 140-41) and found that “the represented proportion of small and marginal holders was just two percentage points less than their overall representation in the state”. By contrast the KRRS leaders interviewed for this thesis in Bangalore (interview number 75) readily admitted that the KRRS was a ‘richer farmers’ organization’ and that they had rarely dealt personally with marginal famers in the state.

It [the Sanghatana] opposed entrenched dominant caste interests, and conservative ‘Hinduist’ and casteist rhetoric that served to factionalize rural social groups. In the process it continued to attract agriculturalists with widely differing degrees of participation in the market, and reached out to rural laborers, women and the scheduled castes (SC’s) historically marginalized by the politically dominant Marathas and ideologically dominant Brahmins of the state

This verdict matches the (later<sup>250</sup>) opinions of Omvedt (1993; 1994; 2005) on the Sanghatana, as an inclusive movement, and is taken up below in the section on organization. The KRRS, by contrast, according to Assadi (118), was unwilling and/or unable to incorporate agricultural laborers in its agenda, being seen, more exclusively as a union for the interests of richer farmers, and in particular the sugar farming lobby.

## 2. Organization

The inclusiveness or exclusiveness of membership relates to the way each movement was organized. Although interviews conducted with former leaders and advisors revealed that both Joshi and Nanjundaswamy were described as “egotistical”, “power crazy” and “undemocratic” by some of their former colleagues, nevertheless there are crucial differences in the way these leaders used their charismatic modes of leadership. The legacy of these differences is clear today: despite the collapse in mass membership of both movements, the Sanghatana still has a well kept office, with an archive of Sanghatana related documents and newspaper clippings; in addition, it was clear from interviewing former advisors and colleagues of Sharad Joshi that he had surrounded himself with highly educated and independent minded people, many of whom now work as university professors in Pune and Nagpur. In Karnataka, on the other hand, the institutional legacy of the KRRS is much harder to locate. The KRRS currently has no website or permanent office. Instead they have been

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<sup>250</sup> As opposed to Omvedt (1980) where she took the Marxist/Leninist line on the Sanghatana as primarily a rich farmers’ union.

donated a space in a large function hall in Bangalore<sup>251</sup>, where small delegations of farmers still visit one (unfunded) faction of the current leadership to ask for political support on local issues. That leadership, as discussed below, is fractured and contentious, with arguments raging over access to trust funds and valuable transnational linkages.

These current legacies relate to the way the movements developed in the 1980's. Youngblood devotes a good portion of his dissertation on the Sanghatana to an account of its democratic decision making processes. Following Steinberg (1998), these processes could be described as 'dialogical', meaning that leadership and grassroots were in constant communication, and the structures of the Sanghatana were specifically designed to ensure this kind of engagement, or 'co authoring' of the movement with its grassroots. The most important evidence for this encompassing character of the Sanghatana is given by Youngblood, in his account of the various 'positive spillovers' (not his term) of Sanghatana activities. Because of the leadership's flexible approach, individual villages were able to suggest local issues in which the larger organization could participate. Among these activities, described by Youngblood (205-223) and Omvedt (1994: 136-38) were monitoring and exposing corruption of local officials, registering women as property owners, increasing women's participation in village panchayats (local village councils), setting up cooperative marketing schemes and labor and dalit rights initiatives, assisting in compensation demands for farmers afflicted by crop failure and addressing local demands for infrastructure, such as roads or irrigation.

It would be wrong to suggest that the KRRS was unable to do any of these things. Even today, as witnessed during field research, KRRS leaders were engaged, during my interview, in taking details of compensation claims from farmers. Certainly, in the 1980's some 'KRRS villages', as reconstructed in interviews by Pattenden (2005: 1981) were able to look beyond caste and class differences to "the green scarf" of the KRRS. However, Assadi's account of the KRRS' institutional structure<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Interview number 75.

<sup>252</sup> An account backed up in interview with Prof. Basavaraj of Mysore University, a former KRRS leader and friend of Prof. Nanjundaswamy. (Interview number 76).

demonstrates some crucial differences from that of the Sanghatana, even in its heyday. As Assadi<sup>253</sup> puts it (107), in terms that contrast sharply with Youngblood's and Omvedt's descriptions of the Sanghatana:

The grassroots/district units, except concentrating on local issues, had limited autonomy which was confined to certain things like passing resolutions in conformity with the central leadership, duplicating the discourses of the movement or the central leadership....

For Assadi (104) the Sanghatana was an 'issue' oriented movement, whereas the KRRS was a 'structure' dominated movement, where rigid hierarchies determined unit level activities. Assadi backs up these claims by quoting internal letters from KRRS officials to Nanjundaswamy, complaining as early as 1986, that the KRRS leadership was becoming overly hierarchical and dictatorial (109) - claims acknowledged by former and current KRRS leaders interviewed for this dissertation. As described in greater detail below, this tendency became even more pronounced during the 'transnational' phase of the KRRS: as Assadi puts it, (97):

peasants were often appropriated and their appearance in rallies....was construed to mean consent to the political agendas of the movement. Paradoxically this became counter-productive to the movement later on.

Another important organizational feature of these movements was their relative capacity to form horizontal linkages with each other and with the other Indian farmers' movements. Prof. Basavaraj, who was involved in talks between Nanjundaswamy and Joshi and Tikait of the BKU, commented that Nanjundaswamy's "intellectual arrogance" and inability to speak hindi cut him and the KRRS off from the other two big farmers' movements (of Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh), marring the possibility of an all India movement, despite various 'all India' coordination committees being set up.

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<sup>253</sup> Is Assadi a reliable commentator? His work was also an important source for Pattenden (2005), so there may be systematic bias here. In interview with Prof Assadi (interview number 77) it was clear that he was actually sympathetic to the content (if not the style) of the more transnationalized, anti-corporate campaigns of the later KRRS, while acknowledging the hypocrisy of Nanjundaswamy's claims to democracy. His critiques come from the Marxist left not from the pro corporate right. His book length study of the KRRS is amply referenced with primary sources and his position at the University of Mysore means he was close to senior KRRS leaders during the 1980's.

In interview Assadi claimed that Nanjundaswamy felt thwarted by his failure to get KRRS ideas accepted at the all India level. This failure to generate horizontal solidarities at a national level, probably influenced the transnational tendency taken by Nanjundaswamy later on, and is discussed in further depth below.

### **3. Ideology and campaign targets**

Perhaps the most important difference between the two movements was in their ideological perspectives. The program of the Sanghatana had a clear focus on 'fair price' as a unifying theme. Around this theme, other cultural and ideological aims took shape. The KRRS on the other hand never formulated an ideology or 'theory' about farmers' issues that 'stuck'. This difference is a key reason why transnational themes became attractive for the KRRS.

Omvedt (1994: 134) describes how Sharad Joshi was able to formulate an ideology that would "share with Marxism its materialism", while transposing Marx's story of exploitation from class oppression to the urban elite's oppression of the countryside. This was distilled, succinctly into the opposition between 'Bharat' (the productive part of rural India) and 'India' (the quasi colonial extractor of value from 'Bharat'). In addition to this quite plausible narrative (supported in Lipton, 1977 and Varshney, 1998), the Sanghatana was able to draw on older cultural themes of Brahmin caste oppression, particular to Maharashtra. Youngblood stresses these cultural themes in his dissertation, showing how anti Brahmin sentiment among rural masses was mobilized by replicating certain Marathi myths around the (anti brahmanic) figures of Shivaji and the fabled 'return' of the folk King Bali. This cultural symbolism was successfully tied, in Sanghatana mythology, to the theme of Bharat versus India. Although Youngblood may over emphasize these cultural aspects of the

Sanghatana<sup>254</sup> one key outcome of this fusion of cultural and economic discourse was to help keep the 'hindutva' movement out of rural Maharashtra, by depriving it of normative and institutional space (Lindberg 1995). This was something that the KRRS, despite equal ideational hostility to hindutva, was not able to do in rural Karnataka (Assadi , 264).

A theme that emerges from studying the two movements' ideologies is that, despite the utilization of myth, the Sanghatana was forward looking and modernistic in its program, while the KRRS' program was more scattershot and reactive. Omvedt shows, in her detailed analysis (1994: 147-51) of the Sanghatana's 1990 agricultural policy proposals (scuttled by the contemporaneous rise of hindutva ideology at the centre), how a plausible vision for managing rural change was articulated by the organization. This vision, encapsulated in a proposed National Agricultural Policy (NAP), is worth dwelling on, as it speaks to key themes in this dissertation. It is an example of the 'path not taken', of pro science, pro poor development, described in chapter two. The NAP asked for a "drastic reordering of the pattern of national priorities" (quoted in Omvedt: 147) which included, but was not limited to, the core program of 'fair price' for agricultural commodities. Among the proposals were ecological goals that combined new technologies (in 1990 meaning new hybrid seeds) along with less emphasis on chemical fertilizers<sup>255</sup>; radical proposals for decentralization of decision making, including panchayat (village council) control over village forest resources; egalitarian proposals for equal inheritance for male and female children and , perhaps most relevant to the discussion of 'paths not taken' in chapter two, a proposal for more integrated agricultural research, with feedback from farmers on 'needs' which would be plugged into the state agricultural research system.

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<sup>254</sup> One Sanghatana former leader who had worked with Youngblood argued that he had overplayed this cultural dimension in his thesis, and that 'fair price' was the fundamental mobilizing theme, even for illiterate masses

<sup>255</sup> Proving, for Omvedt, that the Sanghatana (and in this case the KRRS too) were not working only for rich farmers, for whom fertilizer subsidies would be disproportionately beneficial, but had a larger vision of rural development.

The upshot of these proposals, for Omvedt was a kind of modernized Gandhianism<sup>256</sup> (Omvedt 1993: 120-21) that rejected Gandhi's nostalgia for pre capitalist social relations and his anti-technological stance, but embraced the idea of power going back to the villages, but this time in the form of capital accumulation and investment under the democratic control of village panchayats. Such a vision saw South Korea's and Taiwan's paths to modernity as exemplars (Lindberg, 1994: 118-19). In these countries capital accumulation and investment in the countryside had gone hand in hand with industrialization<sup>257</sup>, rather than the countryside (Bharat) being sacrificed to the cities (India).

The KRRS' vision of rural development was considerably less clear. This is apparent from the long 'lists' of demands that the organization puts out, sometimes with 20 or more items on them<sup>258</sup>. The Sanghatana on the other hand always framed its demands in terms of core principles. Alongside the profusion of particularistic demands the other tendency of the KRRS was toward an essentialist version of Gandhian ideas. While Nanjundaswamy also focused on price controls, and his own version of 'fair price', called 'scientific price', he also formulated what he termed the 'Khadi Curtain' (Assadi 1994). Unlike the Sanghatana, for whom farmers needed to maintain a connection to international capital and technology, despite the unfairness of foreign subsidies and the predatory mediations of 'India', for the KRRS, a more isolationist stance was advisable. Rural India, in this conceptualization had to cut itself off from foreign and corrupting influences before it could hope to rejuvenate itself. The 'Khadi Curtain' concept drew on dependency theory and on Gandhian ideas, to blame foreign capital for the exploitation of Indian farmers, laying the groundwork for the series of transnational targets that the KRRS had in its sights through the 1990's.

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<sup>256</sup> As opposed to the anti-modern variety of Gandhism Omvedt (2004: 190) assigns to the KRRS: taken "to the point of anti-developmentalism".

<sup>257</sup> With the rural population becoming consumers for industrial goods.

<sup>258</sup> For example Mr Veerasangaiha, current general secretary, read me a list of 21 points, including transnational targets such as opposition to Monsanto, demands for increases in the cost of sugar cane, investment in wind power, free electricity, investment in horticulture, womens' empowerment, seed banks for farmers and opposition to Special Economic Zones.

Assadi, throughout his monograph on the KRRS, suggests that this adoption of Gandhian rhetoric and the 'othering' of western capitalism by the KRRS were strategies designed to disguise the lack of unity in the organization. Gandhianism, paradoxically, became a tool of top down control (Assadi, 111): the idioms of unity and 'the village' and the externalization of 'the enemy' helped to disguise the organization's fundamental structural weaknesses. Assadi also analyzes the use of Marxist-Leninist rhetoric in the KRRS along similar lines, although here, as a radical Marxist himself, Assadi's critique is that Nanjundaswamy did not take the analysis to its logical conclusion. Instead, Nanjundaswamy emphasized the 'cultural' aspects of imperialist theory, focusing on threats to 'nature' in rural India, and drawing up Manichean binaries between imperialists and peasant farmers, who were framed (in terms echoing Vandana Shiva) as preservers of natural values (Assadi, 128).

In short, although Assadi does not put it this way (due perhaps to his own ideological perspectives) the KRRS, unlike the Sanghatana, did not formulate a viable alternative modernity for Karnataka's farmers. The division between 'Bharat and 'India' that flexibly encompassed various instances of predation for the Sanghatana, including predation *within* the countryside (Omvedt 1994: 160, note 5), became for the KRRS a more essentialized opposition between the rural world as a whole and external, urban and foreign influences. This Manichaeism then fed into the transnationalization of the movement's demands, leading up to the campaign against Monsanto and Bt cotton.

To summarize the differences and similarities between the two movements: Both movements were led by richer farmers and demanded an end to urban bias in the form of price controls and zonal regulations on selling produce. However, the Sanghatana had a more democratic structure, and was responsive to varied demands by farmers. It was also able to formulate culturally and economically cohesive narratives that appealed to marginal farmers and even laborers. By contrast, the KRRS had a smaller reach, with a membership dominated (in terms of influence) by sugar farmers and a more hierarchical, less dialogical structure. This was accompanied by a more 'romantic' (in chapter four's

sense) narrative that pitted India against foreign capital, and nature against new technologies and which hypostasized the idea of an autonomous village community, perhaps to disguise its own structural weaknesses.<sup>259</sup>

### **The Transnationalization of the KRRS: a Gradual Process**

One of the key methodological points of this dissertation, expanded on in chapter six, has been to put transnational activism in its social context. Rather than treat campaigns as isolated case studies, they should be seen as emerging from movements and actors who have been involved in prior activism, who have world views and perspectives that then hybridize or are accentuated by transnational linkages.

This is certainly true of the KRRS. Its world famous 'Cremate Monsanto' campaign of the late 1990's, needs to be understood in the ideological context described above and by a series of increasingly 'transnationalized' campaigns for ten years prior to the Monsanto campaign. In these campaigns Prof. Nanjundaswamy showed his dramaturgical talent for taking advantage of global memes and innovating new forms of global identity politics that have been admired by the scholars and scholar-activists described at the beginning of this chapter. In all this, he was often the first mover, a 'strategic transnational thinker' and certainly not the passive recipient of northern funds or ideas. However, transnationalization came with costs attached, and after looking at some of the transnational moves made by the KRRS, these costs will be considered.

A useful overview of the reasons for the 'transnational' move, made by the KRRS in the 1990's is given in a revealing letter written by Nanjundaswamy (1999), for distribution on the internet. In this

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<sup>259</sup> Madsen (2011) argues along similar lines that the focus on transnational enemies was one way for the KRRS to "shed its reputation as an illegitimate child of the Green Revolution", in other words being beholden to rich sugar farmers. This was not a presentational problem for the Sanghatana whose 'Green Revolution' farmer members were smaller and less wealthy.

letter, he explains the context of his disappointment with colleagues who have proved unreliable or fractious, and with the 'mistake' the KRRS made in trying to enter party politics in Karnataka. In contrast, 'In Europe' during the 'Inter Continental Caravan' of 1998:

We saw that the non hierarchical organizational model attempted with respectable degrees of success by our European friends was, despite some eccentricities and a couple of serious problems, more attractive and interesting than the twisted relations between the high ranks of our movement.

Of course, Nanjundaswamy himself may have been responsible for these 'twisted relations', as the KRRS interviewees for this dissertation suggested. But it is notable that he describes the transnational sphere as being "more attractive and interesting" than the politics of his own movement. It would be hard to imagine a senior Sanghatana leader saying something like this, and it reveals the fundamentally 'romantic' disposition of Nanjundaswamy, in a sense of romantic that echoes Carl Schmitt's definition of the term, described in chapter four – a preference for an aesthetic politics of spectacle over a politics of mass mobilization and negotiation. As discussed further below, Nanjundaswamy's talent for dramaturgy, for example holding a 'laughing protest' in front of the Karnataka State Assembly, where farmers were brought in to sit continuously and laugh at the proceedings, meant he was predisposed to the theatrical tactics of transnational activists.

The next two sections analyze, firstly the series of transnational protests engaged in by the KRRS from 1992 up to the Bt cotton protests, looking at some of the rationales used by the KRRS and arguments about those rationales, and secondly the increasingly dense organizational linkages forged with transnational groups and activists that accompanied these events.

### **Transnationalization of Protest: Key Events and KRRS Rhetoric**

The first incidents in the transnationalization of the KRRS came in 1992 and 93, with joint protests by the KRRS against the United States owned Cargill seed company in Bangalore and related protests against the Dunkel Draft of the GATT Treaty in New Delhi. In Bangalore the KRRS demanded that Cargill and 11 other multinational companies 'Quit India', in language echoing Gandhi's anti-British campaign of that name. In December 1992 Cargill's headquarters on St Mark's Road, Bangalore were ransacked by KRRS members, destroying company documents and a Cargill warehouse in the town of Bellary was also attacked in July of 1993 (D'Monte, 2000, Assadi, 1997: 96). This property destruction was in line with Nanjundaswamy's doctrine of 'non violence toward people; violence toward things (Assadi , 1997: 123). In March of 1993 Nanjundaswamy along with members of the BKU farmers' union of Uttar Pradesh led a delegation of around 20,000 farmers to Delhi to protest the terms of the Dunkel Treaty. This was part of what Vandana Shiva and her then ally Nanjundaswamy termed the 'Seed Satyagraha', referring to Gandhi's tactics of nonviolent resistance. These events culminated in October of 1993, when the KRRS hosted a convention of 'Third World Peasantry' in Bangalore, with leaders from movements from Indonesia, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka and the Philippines, demanding rejection of the Dunkel proposals and 'autonomy' for peasant farmers (Assadi, 96).

At the same time Sharad Joshi, sent an equal, if not larger delegation of farmers from Maharashtra in favor of the treaty (Omvedt, 1994: 154), accompanied, (as described above) with the Sanghatana's proposed National Agricultural Policy, that had welcomed freer trade, but with proposals designed to keep capital accumulation in the countryside.

The terms of the draft, as even an ideological opponent of Dunkel such as Assadi acknowledges (205) were not immediately threatening to Karnataka's farmers: it represented an effort to move toward what would later become the World Trade Organization, and to ensure that the intellectual property rights concerns of richer, northern states would be incorporated into that multinational

organization. The pros and cons of the Dunkel Draft are beyond the scope of this dissertation, but Menski (2005, Ch 5) provides a thorough account, which draws on interviews with many senior Indian government officials and public sector scientists. Menski argues that while the draft may theoretically have put India at a disadvantage, because strictly enforced patent laws might have stymied research, nevertheless most public sector scientists and government officials, including M.S.Swaminathan, saw the treaty and the future WTO as an opportunity: firstly to create incentives for research and development nationally and secondly to provide a collective forum where developing countries could pool their influence rather than rely on bilateral agreements with the EU and USA. The Indian state was able (in Menski's terminology) to 're-territorialize' the threats presented by Dunkel, by compulsory licensing agreements to be imposed on MNC's, by safeguarding farmers' rights to share seed and by limiting patents on genes (Menski, 141).

More relevant to the argument of this chapter Menski claims, more tenuously<sup>260</sup>, that protests such as that of the KRRS<sup>261</sup> might have helped give the Indian state ideological ammunition with which to negotiate with the USA and the EU. This is plausible in the case of Suman Sahai of Gene Campaign, who at that time was arguing about biotechnology along nationalistic/developmentalist lines, rather than the 'risk' discourse which she currently emphasizes<sup>262</sup>, but the tone of the protests by the KRRS and Vandana Shiva was different. Nanjundaswamy's rhetoric focused on Gandhian themes of threatened autonomy and recolonisation, as cited in Assadi (1997: 205):

From being autonomous producers with control over resources like land and seeds, farmers are being transformed into low wage labourers for agro business...It is our rural society which gives rise to the diverse cultures which make India a distinctive civilization. The displacement of the small farmer is destruction of our culture.

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<sup>260</sup> In that the Indian officials he cites seem to have had clear developmentalist objectives about the Dunkel negotiations from the outset and Nanjundaswamy's type of protest appears to have appealed to a very different audience of "Delhi progressive intellectuals" as Omvedt (1994:154) somewhat sarcastically terms them, and increasingly to global activists and groups.

<sup>261</sup> Although Menski only briefly mentions the KRRS itself. His focus is on Gene Campaign/Suman Sahai.

<sup>262</sup> See chapter six for further discussion of this shift in tone

This 'romantic' protest was framed in absolute and Manichean terms, quite different from the (then) nationalistic discourse of Suman Sahai. More importantly it 'externalized' the problems facing Karnataka's farmers onto a future menace, which at the time had not even materialized.

The next phase of transnationalization came in 1995 and 1996, with two incidents: protests against the staging of the Miss World beauty pageant in Bangalore and physical attacks on Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) in the same city. In January 1996, as the culmination of campaigns in 1995 to tear down billboards for western products such as Pepsi (Pepsico owned KFC), 150 KRRS farmers led a raid on Bangalore's first KFC outfit (Gupta, 1998: 332), destroying furniture, and in an echo of the Cargill attack, ceremonially burning documents in the street outside. This protest was later emulated by fellow Via Campesina member from France, the Confederation Paysanne, with its attacks on McDonalds. (Reitan, 2007: 158).

Gupta draws on KRRS literature to articulate a rationale for the attacks, (Gupta 333-335), arguing that meat consumption, encouraged by western fast foods, would drive up food prices and harm poor Indian farmers. There is clearly truth in this claim, but, as with the Dunkel Draft, there is also an element of 'externalization', as discussed later in the chapter. It seems implausible, for example that increased meat consumption is being driven purely by western advertising in India, and even as of the late 2000's western fast food restaurants in India remain the preserve of the upper middle classes: symbols of the new inequality but not structurally responsible for rural crisis.

In the case of Miss World, Nanjundaswamy again emphasized cultural themes in his protest<sup>263</sup>, arguing that the competition was a conspiracy of MNC's, and in particular Rupert Murdoch, to "introduce a meat and beer culture in India", and "sell national honour", as well as introducing culturally inappropriate sexual imagery. Nanjundaswamy threatened to 'burn' the stadium in which the contest was to be held<sup>264</sup>, and joined in the protest with female MP's from the Bharatriya Janata

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<sup>263</sup> *Indian Express* (16-11-1996)

<sup>264</sup> *Indian Express* (05-10-1996)

Party (BJP), fusing Hindu culturalism with nationalist themes. Nanjundaswamy later called off the campaign, with allegations that he had been 'paid off' by the event's host – Indian megastar Amithab Bhachan (Madsen 2011).

These were the precursors to the two events, or series of events, that the KRRS launched in connection to Monsanto and Bt cotton. The first was 'Operation Cremate Monsanto', launched in 1998; the second was the Inter Continental Caravan in Europe, in Spring of 1999.

Operation Cremate Monsanto, was described by Nanjundaswamy in 1998, in an email distributed to global activist sites<sup>265</sup>, in this way:

The campaign will run under the following slogans: stop genetic engineering, no patents on life, cremate Monsanto and bury the World Trade Organization. There is also a more specific message directed at all of you who have invested in Monsanto: You should take your money out before we reduce it to ashes

This message, aimed specifically at western audiences, shows Nanjundaswamy's grasp of global campaigns: a clear, uncompromising message ('radical' in the terminology of Greenpeace from chapter three) aimed precisely at a northern audience, joining together some of the most potent symbolic enemies of the anti globalization / alter globalization movement. This was followed up by various actions.

The operation itself began when Bt cotton trial crops were burned in two locations in Karnataka<sup>266</sup>, with KRRS activists accompanied by activists from Spain and Germany (D'Monte, 2000). This tactic, of field burning, was then copied by associated activists in neighboring Andhra Pradesh. The next stage of the operation was a stone throwing attack on the Indian Institute of Science (IIS) campus in Bangalore, which the KRRS believed (it proved wrongly) housed a Monsanto research centre<sup>267</sup>.

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<sup>265</sup> Here accessed via a site names 'monsantosucks.com', <http://www.monsantosucks.com/cremate.htm>

<sup>266</sup> The farmer of the first field burned allegedly did not know that his field had been planted with Bt cotton (Klingsnorth 1999)

<sup>267</sup> Hindu Business Line (11-09-03)

Operation Cremate Monsanto went hand in hand with a campaign named 'Monsanto Quit India', a Gandhi-inspired campaign trying to draw parallels between British colonialism and MNC's. As part of this campaign the KRRS organized a postcard protest, in which postcards were distributed to NGOs and individuals across India to be sent to Monsanto's corporate headquarters in Illinois, USA (Klingsnorth, 1999).

The second phase of the biotechnology related campaign was the Inter Continental Caravan (ICC) of 1999. In this event, Nanjundaswamy accompanied around 500 farmers from India, including 170 from Karnataka, to Europe (Madsen, 2001), where the protest culminated, after visiting 9 countries and numerous symbolically significant sites<sup>268</sup>, at Cologne, Germany, the location of the G8 summit in June. During the ICC, the mark of the KRRS was clear, with a 'laughing parade' at the G8 summit, (Reitan, 2007: 209) echoing the 'laughing agitation' the KRRS had held at the Karnataka State Assembly 8 years previously (Assadi, 1997: 91-92) and other events, including the uprooting of fields planted with GM rice (alongside Jose Bove) echoing KRRS actions against Bt Cotton in India. The aim of this tour was to publicize not just the campaign against genetic engineering, including the feared (but not ever produced) 'terminator seeds' from Monsanto (Herring, 2005), but also a wider set of complaints about the WTO, globalization and the victimization of peasant farmers by neocolonial MNC's (Madsen, 2001; Featherstone 2003, 2008). The ICC is analyzed in more depth below in the section assessing the consequences of transnationalization.

The campaign against GM crops was clearly the most 'successful' of the transnationalized actions taken by the KRRS. As Prof. Assadi explained in interview<sup>269</sup> the campaign represented the biggest 'overlap' between the interests of Nanjundaswamy and those of the global activist community. Unlike the Miss World and KFC campaigns it could be linked directly to core agricultural issues (despite the KRRS not actually representing cotton farmers); it posed ongoing regulatory issues that

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<sup>268</sup> Featherstone (2003: 405) lists all the sites including Monsanto's technical centre in Louvain, the WTO headquarters, the Nuffield Foundation in London, the EU headquarters in Brussels, various transgenic filed sites, the City of London, the European Patent Office and Cargill HQ in Amsterdam.

<sup>269</sup> Interview number 77

would keep the issue alive (choke points), and it resonated strongly in Europe at the time, where funding, travel, and media opportunities awaited.

The final significant transnational action by the KRRS was to try and launch an alternative to the World Social Forum (Pattenden 2005; Majumdar 2005). This forum was named ‘Mumbai Resistance - 2004’ and set up across from the main WSF venue, which Nanjundaswamy accused of lacking ‘genuineness’ (Majumdar, 22) and of being the tool of NGOs and international funding agencies such as the Ford Foundation and Oxfam. It was accompanied by a return to the rhetoric of anti-imperialism, taking up the Marxist-Leninist strain of KRRS thinking (over the Gandhian). This last action, before Nanjundaswamy’s death in the same year, 2004, was perhaps a sign of weakness rather than strength – a last attempt to show the KRRS’ relevance in an increasingly crowded arena for ‘authenticity’.

### **Global Partnerships**

Throughout these campaigns the KRRS was building a set of transnational linkages to other ‘peoples movements’ but also to INGOs.

According to an interview with Nanjundaswamy’s former colleague, Prof. Basavaraj, it was at the meetings to plan protests against the Dunkel Draft in 1991 that Nanjundaswamy first made contact with globally oriented activists<sup>270</sup>. These activists came under the banner of the Third World Network (TWN), (Assadi, 1997: 95). Most important of these were Vandana Shiva and, to a lesser extent, Devinder Sharma, who brought with them access to global networks and, just as crucially, a modality of rhetoric and publicity that resonated with global audiences of activists. However, Nanjundaswamy was soon able to form linkages of his own, without the mediation of Shiva, as can be seen in the October 1993 convention of ‘third world peasants’ hosted in Bangalore, described above. This rapid

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<sup>270</sup> Interview number 76

success of the KRRS in the transnational field may have led to the tensions between Shiva and Nanjundaswamy described below.

One of the two transnational networks with which the KRRS began to work closely was Peoples Global Action (PGA). This loosely structured anti-capitalist / anarchist network was first named in 1998, but had begun after the Zapatista uprising came to international attention in the mid 1990's (Pattenden, 2005: 1978; Graeber 2002). The KRRS soon became one of the most prominent 'peoples' groups within the PGA, hosting their second international conference in Bangalore, in August 1999, at which the organization formulated its 'hallmarks' and 'organisational principles'<sup>271</sup> and undertaking its Inter Continental Caravan of 1999 under the aegis of the PGA (Featherstone 2008), including funding for flights organized via the PGA online network.

The other prominent transnational network in which the KRRS played a key role was the Via Campesina (VC). This group had a more distinct identity and mission than the PGA (Reitan, 2007: Ch 5). The VC grew out of what Reitan describes (168) as a struggle of international peasants' groups to claim autonomy from national political parties and from NGOs. Founded in 1993, its three most prominent members were the Confederation Paysanne (CP) of France (with its charismatic leader, Jose Bove), the Movimento dos Sem Terra (MST) of Brazil (the 'Landless Movement'), and the KRRS itself. The aim of this umbrella group was to bring together northern and southern peasants' organizations, that felt marginalized by corporate agriculture and that could coalesce around the idea of 'food sovereignty' (Borras, 2008: 260).

After demonstrating organizational and marketing flair during the Dunkel protests and the 1993 convention of farmers' movements in Bangalore, Nanjundaswamy became a leading member of the Via Campesina, acting as regional/Asian 'gatekeeper' to the organization (Borras, 275), and coordinating its anti-corporate and anti-GMO campaigns (in close cooperation with Jose Bove of the CP). Apparently Nanjundaswamy hoped that the VC would set up headquarters in Bangalore

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<sup>271</sup> See their website: <http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/en/>

(Madsen, 2011). However, as Borras points out (275-76), the KRRS also acted to shift the direction of the VC away from its (Latin American) roots as an organization for the poor and for land reform, to such an extent that Borras claims that groups in Asia representing very poor farmers, laborers and indigenous groups were blocked from entry to the VC at the whim of Nanjundaswamy.

While Nanjundaswamy always claimed to be opposed to NGOs and formal organizations (leading to the Mumbai Resistance-2004 described above) , he nevertheless formed some links to donor organizations. For example, Madsen (2011) reports an organization based in Rome, called 'SUM' (*Stati Uniti del Mondo*) was giving support for the KRRS' 'sustainable agriculture' projects in Karnataka via a charitable trust called the 'Amrutha Trust' which featured Nanjundaswamy's family as chief trustees. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) also partly funded farmers to travel to Europe on the ICC (Madsen, 2001: 3739). This flow of money was linked in the opinion of several interviewees and Madsen (2011) to Nanjundaswamy's media successes following the early 90's Dunkel Draft protests. However, from an interview conducted with Greenpeace's campaigns officer<sup>272</sup> it was clear that Greenpeace stayed clear of close cooperation with Nanjundaswamy: for one thing they already had close ties to his rival Vandana Shiva – and in addition Nanjundaswamy could have been an unreliable partner, given his stated aversion to NGOs. Accurate accounts of the funding sources for the KRRS from abroad will probably always be opaque, given that Nanjundaswamy controlled these linkages personally, in fact because of the fortunate financial links the KRRS had with wealthy sugar farmers, it is unclear that the organization *needed* flows of foreign funds, at least until the 2000's, when its mass character began to decline.

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<sup>272</sup> Interview number 22

## Reasons and Consequences of Transnationalization

The next two sections consider, in turn, the reasons why the KRRS 'transnationalized' based on the above analysis of its history and structure, and secondly, what the drawbacks of that transnationalization were, based on field interviews with current and former activists and other social activists in the state.

As pointed out above, the KRRS had failed to 'scale across', or form horizontal solidarities in its activities with other Indian states. At the All India Coordination Committee level, Nanjundaswamy had relatively little influence over, or personal affinity with, Sharad Joshi of the Sanghatana or Tikait of the BKU. As Kisan Patnaik, an Indian socialist leader put it (cited in Assadi, 1997: 138):

Only the Maharashtra and Karnataka organizations [the Sanghatana and the KRRS] are in a position to bring about co-ordination among the non-party movements in different parts of the country. In this task Karnataka has lagged behind, Maharashtra leaders are always available to other states. Karnataka friends are insular.

As a leader with a flair for media oriented events, such as the 'laughing agitation' of 1989 Nanjundaswamy probably began to see a 'scaling up' to the transnational level as an effective route to keep the KRRS newsworthy. Nanjundaswamy's own talents as a media provocateur and publicist chimed with the new 'marketing' culture of transnational activism. It appears that this realization came during the Dunkel Draft protest preparations when Nanjundaswamy met Vandana Shiva and other 'Third World Network' Delhi based intellectuals. From that point on Nanjundaswamy focused most of his energies on becoming a 'gatekeeper' for transnational networks such as the Via Campesina and Peoples' Global Action, even framing the KRRS as a more 'radical' alternative to the World Social Forum, emphasizing his movement's 'authenticity' and mass character in comparison to the NGOs that had begun to dominate the WSF.

But as we have seen, the decision to 'go transnational' was not just strategic: it went to the heart of the KRRS' ideological outlook. Unlike the Sanghatana, in which a broad range of types of farmers and

income levels participated in a largely democratic structure, the KRRS was dominated by relatively wealthy<sup>273</sup> sugar farmers. It was therefore less relevant for the KRRS leadership to mobilize a mass membership around the ‘bread and butter’ issues of price and general rural development. This is why, from early on, the KRRS resorted to an ‘othering’ or ‘externalizing’ strategy, in which distant or foreign enemies were emphasized at the expense of systemic problems closer to hand. This strategy had the double virtue of disguising the class and caste inequality *within* the KRRS and occupying a space within the media and public sphere of ‘intellectuals’ that was predisposed toward anti-colonial narratives. The relatively hierarchical and leader-dominated structure of the KRRS made this strategy more available to Nanjundaswamy than would have been the case in the Sanghatana, where village representatives would presumably have objected to priorities that overlooked their more pressing material needs, and a reliable flow of income from the sugar farmers arguably made it possible for Nanjundaswamy to pursue his ‘romantic’ agenda unhindered.

What were the *consequences* of transnationalization for the farmers’ movement in Karnataka? Four key issues are discussed below.

A good place to start in answering this question are interviews conducted for this dissertation with current KRRS leaders<sup>274</sup>. To my embarrassment, these leaders were keen to ask me how I could help them get to the UK or USA, both to improve their English language skills and to try and make connections with NGOs and activist groups in those countries. The reason they gave was that since the ‘split’ in the KRRS, between Nanjundaswamy’s family and the faction led by them and Mr K Puttanaiah (Madsen 2011), they had ‘lost’ the transnational connections that, they claimed, had become essential for mobilization, funding, and media attention, even though their ‘faction’ of the KRRS comprised maybe 90% of the members. A particular problem mentioned was that Nanjundaswamy’s daughter, Chuki Nanjundaswamy, had become, after her father’s death, the KRRS’

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<sup>273</sup> But again, it should be stressed that the KRRS still had the ‘progressive’ agenda of trying to get those farmers a fairer share of profits vis a vis the much more powerful sugar mill owners.

<sup>274</sup> Interviews 75a and 75b

‘secretary for international affairs’. This meant that she alone had the ability to network with transnational groups, arrange foreign travel for conferences and receive funds for projects. Chuki’s transnational connectedness was bolstered by the fact that her husband – Luca – was an Italian leader of the Via Campesina. Not only this, but there was a continuing dispute over the ownership of 100 acres of land, claimed personally by Chuki Nanjundaswamy, but which the other KRRS leaders claimed was KRRS property.<sup>275</sup>

The perspective of these leaders might be slanted against Nanjundaswamy. But others, more sympathetic to Nanjundaswamy’s legacy concurred that, from the early 1990’s Nanjundaswamy had tended to “keep international connections to himself”<sup>276</sup> and that this was the key reason for the split in the organization in 1999<sup>277</sup>. In other words *internal factionalism* is one of the likely consequences of transnationalization, where, as is inevitable in a mass organization based in the developing world, only a few leaders or one leader act as gatekeepers to transnational connections<sup>278</sup>.

In addition to this internal factionalism, the second main consequence of transnationalization seems to have been *external rivalry*. Here, the rivalry between Nanjundaswamy and Vandana Shiva is exemplary. Herring (2010) has aptly coined the term “authenticity rents”, to describe the way that activist leaders need to claim authentic representativeness in order to succeed in the transnational activist field. We could go further here, and point out that the battle over ‘authenticity’ is a zero sum game, or, in other words, authenticity is a ‘rivalrous good’. This may be one (obviously unstated and probably unconscious) reason, for the otherwise surprising rivalry between Shiva and Nanjundaswamy over the Inter Continental Caravan. Madsen (2001; 2011) and Featherstone (2003;

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<sup>275</sup> This is almost certainly part of the Amrutha ‘trust fund’ that Madsen (2011) refers to, dedicated to growing ‘indigenous seeds’ and funded partly by international donors.

<sup>276</sup> Prof. Basavaraj. Interview number 76

<sup>277</sup> Madsen (2011) interviewed K Puttanaiah who blamed the 1999 split specifically on the ‘Caravan’, and said that this trip was the final ‘betrayal’ of the larger movement, and that Nanjundaswamy preferred to speak English and cooperate with foreign activists than attend to Karnataka’s farmers.

<sup>278</sup> This was especially true in the 1990’s when, according to Madsen (2011) Nanjundaswamy was the only leader with an internet connection, but the wider dispersal of internet connectivity would not change the fundamental point that transnational connections are likely to link only the top of social movement pyramids.

2008) have described how Shiva publicly condemned the ICC, alleging that the farmers on the Caravan could not be 'authentic' because real farmers could not have afforded the airline tickets to Europe<sup>279</sup> and that the KRRS had broken Gandhian principles of non violence by attacking property in its various raids on Monsanto and Cargill offices. As Madsen (2011) comments (based on interviews with KRRS leaders at the time of the Caravan):

Vandana Shiva had no field base. Hence, she was keen to utilize the field base of the KRRS. The KRRS was interested in sharing the Western and global base cultivated by Shiva. But when the KRRS used the Caravan to project itself as a *sui generis* movement with a global presence, and not as a derivate of her nodal presence, she reacted<sup>280</sup>.

Such rivalries occur because of the structural demands of the transnational activist sphere, driven by limited access to global media and global funding.

A third consequence of transnationalization refers back to the arguments of chapters two and four. This is that transnationalization *accompanied*, and *accentuated* but did not necessarily *cause* a 'romanticization' of the KRRS' agenda and its turning of attention away from more local, material issues facing farmers in the state. Again, it is important to emphasize that this is not a standard causal hypothesis: groups like the KRRS that were *already* inclined to post Gandhian, romantic ruralist ideas were more likely to seek out connections with a 'transnational imaginary' (chapter four) that supported a similar world view. But the resources and attention that came with those connections enabled the KRRS to *perpetuate* that romantic focus, even when it caused disengagement from the mass membership.

This 'romanticization' was most obvious, and reached its peak at the Inter Continental Caravan. Madsen (2001) has described the nature of the romantic and theatrical 'display' that KRRS representatives engaged in here, making the KRRS seem, in the eyes of the world to be "a fortress

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<sup>279</sup> A charge resonant with hypocrisy given that Shiva had no mass movement at all and was from an even more privileged background (for example, speaking English as a first language) than Prof. Nanjundaswamy.

<sup>280</sup> P Babu (interview number 78) also claimed that Shiva helped effectuate the split in the KRRS by selectively reaching out to leaders of the KRRS.

guarding folk ways” (3737). The problem with such a stance is that it is “thin on institutions” (3735) or even suggestions for building institutions. In fact it is striking how the events of the ICC and Madsen’s interpretation of them resonate with Carl Schmit’s definitions of ‘political romanticism’ described at the beginning of chapter four, in other words, an aesthetic response, that avoids any pragmatic proposals and avoids ‘taking sides’ in material disputes, instead summoning up nostalgic images of past ways and inciting intense feelings about their supposed imminent destruction.

In practical terms, two non-KRRS commentators from Karnataka interviewed<sup>281</sup> agreed that this emphasis over the last 15 years on narratives about patents, ‘food sovereignty’, ‘indigenous seed preservation’, neocolonialism, and ‘western’ technology had distracted the KRRS away from other problems. These problems included land seizures for Special Economic Zone (SEZ) purposes (including 1000 acres recently cordoned off in the Bellary area of Karnataka) and a corrupt public distribution system that may actually have benefited the wealthier farmers the KRRS represented. Activist interviewee P Babu pointed out that the KRRS’ transnational activities had made domestic ‘scaling up’ to combat these kinds of issues (especially the SEZ ‘enclosures’) harder to achieve<sup>282</sup>. Obviously this emphasis on the transnational discourse also prevented the KRRS from forming any alliances with the public sector scientists, whose perspective was described in chapter two, against neoliberal trends in agricultural policy. Instead the KRRS literally ‘stoned’ buildings in public research universities (the Indian Institute of Science) and showed no nuance in distinguishing pro poor from profit oriented uses of biotechnology.

There is also a relationship between the use of romantic rhetoric and the rivalries described above. As the rivalry between Nanjundaswamy and Shiva intensified, Nanjundaswamy was striving to ‘radicalize’ his message. The Mumbai-Resistance-2004 attempt seems to represent a last throw of the dice, in which Nanjundaswamy even parted company with the Via Campesina (Borras, 2008),

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<sup>281</sup> Prof. Vasavi of the University of Bangalore and Mr P Babu of ICRA, a Bangalore based NGO and long time Gandhian social activist in the state. (Interviews 72 and 78). Both these individuals could be said to support Gandhian, anti corporate ideas themselves, so their views are highly relevant.

<sup>282</sup> Interview number 78.

who set up an 'intermediate' forum between the 'mainstream' WSF and Nanjundaswamy's radical alternative forum. Nanjundaswamy claimed to represent "true radical leftists" (Majumdar, 2005: 22) while the WSF was the territory of "imperialist/capitalist" groups like Oxfam and the Ford Foundation. This heightened rhetoric came five years after the split in the KRRS, at which point Nanundaswamy's claims to representativeness were very small.

Finally, there is the question of basic hypocrisy, but hypocrisy that may have practical consequences. As Pattenden puts it, in his essay on the 'trickle down solidarity' practiced by the KRRS (Pattenden 2005), there was a basic contradiction between the 'horizontalist' rhetoric espoused by the KRRS and its transnational ally the PGA, and the reality of the KRRS' hierarchical structure at the village level. Or as social activist P Babu put it vividly in interview, it was hypocritical for an organization funded by environmentally 'suspect' sugar farmers and whose leader drove around the countryside in a vehicle, and in a style, more typical of India's political party 'bosses', to talk at the transnational level about solidarity, green values and village republics. This 'hypocrisy' is dramatically exemplified in the response of European anarchist and anti-capitalist demonstrators to the attitudes and behavior of many of the KRRS delegation at the ICC, as documented in the British anarchist publication *Do or Die* in 1999. In one article (Do or Die, 1999) an anonymous author describes his or her shock at the way KRRS delegates silenced and ostracized non Indian delegates, threatened Nepali delegates with rape and violence, proclaimed support for Hitler and Nazism, and demonstrated unquestioning subservience to their leader Nanjundaswamy. The article ends with the understatement that despite the exciting potential of transnational networking "the ICC showed how hard it is to make that networking meaningful". The larger political dangers of moments like these, when reality intrudes into the fantasy of transnational imaginaries is that the inevitable disappointment will damage future, more realistic attempts to forge solidaristic networks.

### **A Mirror Image: The Shetkari Sanghatana's splits, transnationalism and 'market romanticism'**

After the National Agricultural Policy (NAP) proposals in 1991, described by Omvedt (1994), the Sanghatana also faced gradually waning mass membership and splits. Was there a parallel transnationalization for the Sanghatana? Arguably there was, although it has been of much less importance either in Maharashtra or globally. One faction led by Vijay Jawandhia tried to form links with the anti-GMO campaign and other globally oriented activists, while Sharad Joshi moved closer to a globalized libertarian outlook, in concert with a Delhi based libertarian group.

Vijay Jawandhia argued in interview<sup>283</sup> that the Sanghatana had made a crucial ideological shift in 1992. After this point, the more nuanced pro-modernization, pro-capital, but pro-decentralization, ruralist agenda described by Omvedt, was jettisoned in favor of a belief that “the market can solve all farmers’ problems”. 1993 marked Jawandhia’s split with Joshi and the beginning of the factionalization of the Sanghatana, with no new, younger leader able to take up the reins from the older generation.<sup>284</sup>

Jawandhia’s own position, now without any mass base, appeared to have ‘forced’ him into alliances with transnational activists with whom he did not share fundamental perspectives. For example, while he had attended (he said) around 40 meetings with NGOs (such as the CSA and DDS of Hyderabad and Kishor Tiwari of the VJAS) in order to plan protests against Bt cotton and Bt brinjal, he also expressed admiration for the way Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi had pushed for the legalization of navbharat seeds’ ‘illegal’ Bt cotton – showing, he said, that Modi, unlike Maharashtra’s leaders, was “on the side of farmers”. Similarly, while he mentioned statistics and claims, probably originating from the DDS, about Bt ‘poisoning the soil’, he also pointed out that the organic agriculture promoted by NGOs like the DDS was “irrelevant” for India, where the problem was that marginal farmers were organic by necessity anyway. In other words, there was no obvious

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<sup>283</sup> Interview number 41

<sup>284</sup> Comment made in interviews 82, 43 and 63.

social location by the mid 1990's for Jawandhia's position: pro technology but anti-free market, he seemed unable to speak the Manichean / romantic language of the new transnational networks fluently<sup>285</sup>.

Another former Sanghatana leader Chandrakant Wankhade of Nagpur<sup>286</sup> was more self-consciously aware of the potential contradictions and drawbacks of working in transnational networks: he argued that activists such as Tiwari, were missing the 'total policy picture' on agricultural crisis (as argued in chapter two), but that the suicide narrative and the GMO narrative were necessary to 'sell' the problems of the countryside to India's middle classes, via the media. For Sanghatana activists of the 'left', previously committed to a 'modernist' approach to rural problems, it was clearly difficult to campaign easily alongside the likes of Vandana Shiva.

At the same time as some former left-leaning Sanghatana leaders turned, cautiously, to the new transnational activist networks, others, including Sharad Joshi himself, appear to have turned ideologically and (to a lesser degree) organizationally, to the kind of pro capitalist networks predicted by Jackie Smith (2008).

An example from field interviews will help to illustrate the shift that has taken place between generations of activists. I interviewed the Kashikar family of Wardha<sup>287</sup>, among whom both parents had been Sanghatana leaders, and in the case of the wife – Saroj – had spent substantial time in jail for protesting in the early 1980's. Saroj Kashikar's analysis of the problems facing farmers matched well with the modernist program the Sanghatana was pursuing in the 1980's and early 90's – in favor of new technologies including Bt cotton (which she described as an 'insurance policy' for farmers) and in favor of cutting regulations about where and at what price farmers could sell produce, but at the same time aware of the long historical legacy of crisis in the eastern Maharashtra region. This

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<sup>285</sup> This is backed up by Prof. Basavaraj of the KRRS' comment in interview (number 76) that Jawandhia was 'envious' of the ability of Nanjundaswamy to network with transnational groups, and of the 10,000 delegates Nanjundaswamy was able to bring to the 2004 Resistance-Mumbai meeting in Jawandhia's home state.

<sup>286</sup> Interview number 82

<sup>287</sup> Interview number 84

crisis she explained using a sophisticated understanding of history in the region , describing how former zamindars (British sanctioned tax collectors cum landlords) were able to maintain their status by forming new cooperatives, leaving the poorest in a cycle of debt. She felt there should still be a role for government services in the countryside, including institutionalized credit and information for farmers. Her son, on the other hand, spoke a language closer to western libertarianism, seeing no role for any farmers' movement in the present, because the government had already followed Joshi's advice and 'got out' of the countryside. For the son, the main issue was to remove land ceilings to allow corporate agriculture to flourish. Information services were of little value, since new products like Bt cotton were 'demand' driven, just like cell phones for 'rikshaw wallahs'.

Joshi himself, in a phone interview<sup>288</sup> would not be drawn on whether he now described himself as a libertarian, but argued that "farmers have suffered most under socialist regimes" and that his philosophy was "the pursuit of freedom, truth and beauty", to which he contrasted the "antiquated" world view of Prof. Nanjundaswamy and his defense of "old world agriculture".

According to Ramanna (2006) Joshi had joined forces in March 2002, with two pro-free market organizations: the Liberty Institute in Delhi and Changan Reddy's Confederation of Indian Farmers' Associations (CIFA)<sup>289</sup> around the agenda of "setting the Indian farmer free". This meeting was occasioned by the failure of the GEAC to approve the commercialization of Bt cotton and the concomitant success of the illegal Gujarati Navbharat Bt cotton. Barun Mitra, the director of the Liberty Institute, claimed in interview<sup>290</sup> that he had been in touch with Joshi for up to seven years before the Bt cotton protests, and that Joshi had shaped his own perspectives on Indian politics. The Liberty Institute<sup>291</sup> is a libertarian think tank, based in Delhi, and dedicated to the ideas of Julian

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<sup>288</sup> Interview number 85

<sup>289</sup> The author attended two meetings of CIFA: but it is less an ideological organization than a lobby group for wealthier farmers of commercial crops: they also make some less than libertarian demands – for higher subsidies on water and electricity and inputs. CIFA perhaps represents in reality the stereotyped Marxist version of what the 1980's farmers' movements were – lobbies for rich farmers.

<sup>290</sup> Interview number 86

<sup>291</sup> Website: <http://indefenceofliberty.org/content.aspx?t=5&m=7>

Simon, Friedrich Von Hayek and Ayn Rand. Its transnational partners include the Atlas Economic Research Foundation (associated with Ayn Rand's ideas) and the libertarian Friedrich Naumann Stiftung in Germany. Mitra used the example of Gujarati seed entrepreneurs to frame his own libertarian diagnosis of India's agricultural problems. For Mitra the single best answer to rural India's problems is corporate farming, which could be made possible by removing all ceilings on land ownership<sup>292</sup>. For Mitra, removing barriers to 'choice' is the answer to every element of crisis: choice to sell one's land; choice to buy whatever seeds companies can produce with minimal regulation; choice to sell produce anywhere in India or the world and choice to take loans from moneylenders (who should not be demonized or regulated).

In these prescriptions the example of Gujarati farmers may be misleading, as the analysis in chapter two suggested. Elsewhere in India, in specific regions and among lower caste and class farmers, lack of social and economic networks have stymied modernization, in ways described by Stone (2002) and Shah (2003)<sup>293</sup>. Harris-White (2005) uses the term '(free) market romanticism' to describe the kind of views expressed by the Liberty Institute. For Harris-White market romanticism fails (40):

to recognize either the theoretical limitations to markets or the incapacity of markets by themselves either completely or decently to structure social life. It mis-attributes some contingent effects mediated by markets to necessary characteristics of them and assumes away as 'contingent' other institutions which are structurally necessary and whose diversity is structurally necessary.

Such diversity includes gender, caste, ethnicity, region, religion, and the various nepotistic and ethnic networks involving state officials, input dealers, moneylenders, and farmers that organize the market in India. To an extent, the (transnationalized) discourse of market romanticism parallels the 'fortress against folk ways' of Nanjundaswamy and the romantic ruralists: it depends on abstractions that divert attention away from regionally specific complexes of poverty and low social capital and

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<sup>292</sup> Not that this is necessarily an 'extreme' libertarian position. Several interviewees from a mixture of ideological views, accepted a need for more integration of land holdings and saw corporate style farming as part of the solution.

<sup>293</sup> See chapter two for an account of these authors' analyses.

from particular institutions in need of reform. The effects of this transnational market romanticism on the debate in India are so far unclear. Given the sheer market power of business interests (textile producers, seed companies, etc), ideological mobilization may be unnecessary. However, when market romanticism comes to be seen as the only alternative to rural romanticism, the alternatives get lost in a debate, in which both sides come to mirror each others' abstractions<sup>294</sup>.

## Conclusion

This chapter has used a pair-wise comparison of farmers' movements to show how mass rural movements of the 1980's transitioned into a new political environment in the last two decades, in which the conditions for rural mass mobilization declined and new transnational opportunities arose.

The KRRS, unlike the Shetkari Sanghatana, could be said to have had an 'elective affinity' for the new transnational activism, and was in fact a key actor in forging frames and contentious routines for TANs. However, the chapter also argued, contrary to the consensus in the scholarly literature, that it was the very undemocratic and hierarchical structure of the KRRS that made that organization more compatible with transnational campaigning than the Sanghatana. Where dialogic interaction with a base was lacking, the KRRS leadership was able to indulge in a romantic ideology that concentrated on 'external' threats and globalized activist frames, of arguably little relevance to the marginal and middle farmers it claimed to represent. Romantic tendencies that had existed already in the 1980's therefore came to fruition in the 1990's in alliances with transnational partners. First came campaigns against 'foreign' influences like KFC and Miss World, and finally the Bt Cotton campaign, which achieved more resonance than the other campaigns for contingent reasons (choke

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<sup>294</sup> A vivid example would be a 'more heat than light' encounter between Barun Mitra of the Liberty Institute and followers of Vandana Shiva at a meeting about GMOs, filmed as part of the Shiva documentary *Bullshit* (2005).

points, media interest, etc) , but which was part of a series of attempts to turn the KRRS into a transnational gatekeeper for the whole of Asia.

If Nanjundaswamy had lived he might have continued to forge these transnational linkages, but his strategies toward the end of his career suggested an increasing desperation to stand out as 'radical' or 'grassroots', given competition from Vandana Shiva and others. Arguably the KRRS would not have been well suited to the more 'professionalized' transnationalism of the last 10 years, described in chapter three, where romantic rhetoric and framing were combined with more stable and reliable partnerships with donor agencies, state actors and markets. In a sense Nanjundaswamy proved less flexible than Shiva in reconciling romantic frames and professional brokerage activities.

This chapter like others in the dissertation has avoided making strong 'causal' claims about the impact of transnational linkages. Again, the emphasis has been on environments and more subtle selection and adaptation processes, whereby globalized romantic discourses (whether pro or anti market) act as magnets for socially fragmented or isolated elite activists in the global South – a process that should resonate beyond this case, as argued in the concluding chapter.

## Chapter Six: 'Romantic Activist Networks': the future of advocacy?

### Introduction

The previous four chapters have analyzed, respectively, the role of anti-GMO activists in the media and public sphere debate on biotechnology in India and the way they have shaped that debate; the linkages and 'structural couplings' between the network and various bureaucracies, parties, markets, and the media, the 'romantic' orientation of the network's way of framing rural issues and the way that some farmers' movements joined forces with transnational networks and others did not.

By way of conclusion, this chapter attempts to draw out mechanisms and processes from this case study that might address gaps in the literature on TANs. As in previous chapters, the aim is to solve the particular puzzles of the network's staying power and 'unrestrained' empirical claims by *putting the network in a social and historical context*, rather than treating activism as a set of disembodied 'frames' and 'ideas'. The socio-historical approach is in line with the 'big' questions Charles Tilly (2004: 153-58) asks about the future of social movements in the coming century: will professionalization of movements and networks exceed in momentum the bottom up democratization of societies? Will the growth of activist mediators and entrepreneurs (of the kind illustrated in this dissertation) choke or replace locally responsive grassroots mobilization?

In order to address, in however modest a way these 'big' questions, chapter six summarizes the characteristics of what we have termed the 'romantic activist network' and asks whether these characteristics are likely to be applicable to other issue areas and in other social contexts. If they are widely applicable, then Tilly's worries about the 'dark side' of transnational mobilization may have more urgency than if 'governance oriented' or even more optimistically 'grassroots' or 'democratic' TANs are actually more prevalent. The chapter therefore opens with an account of the particular social conditions in rural India that have made romantic activism possible. It then goes on to

summarize the characteristics of the anti GMO network focusing on those that might be generalizable to other issues areas. The secondary literature is then mined to suggest likely issue areas where romanticization has been and will be prevalent. Finally, in an attempt to generate a more positive theory of how the case fits into the universe of activist networks the chapter ends with a series of tables intended to situate types of activist networks and to isolate the characteristics that make some networks 'romantic' in the way they frame their claims.

### **Romantic TANs and Vacuums of Representation**

One conclusion that many interviewees agreed on was the background condition for the success of the anti GMO network. This condition is the exodus from the countryside of rural 'elites' who had previously made up the backbone of regional farmers' movements such as the Shetkari Sanghatana in Maharashtra and (at first) the KRRS in Karnataka. Chapter five pointed to the three periods in the history of farmers' mobilization in India. To recap briefly:

1. 1948-1970s: radical movements of laborers for land reform and Naxalite inspired movements of tribal peoples
2. Late 1970s-mid 1990s: 'new' farmers' movements such as the Sanghatana, KRRS, BKU
3. Mid 1990s to present: The rise of transnationalized NGO-led protests such as the anti GMO and anti dam networks and the transnationalized versions of the new farmers' movements (chapter five)

The social conditions that underpinned each phase involved the relative power and influence of key classes in the countryside. With urbanization and industrialization the laboring classes behind radical peasant movements became semi-detached from the countryside as they migrated for seasonal work in the cities. The Green Revolution that empowered medium and large farmers was the impetus for the new farmers' movements (Lindberg 1995; Rudolph and Rudolph 1987). These

farmers, equipped with new wealth and time, were able to use these resources to mobilize against a politics seen as discriminatory against agriculture. Finally, in the third phase, this generation of richer Green Revolution farmers saw their children begin to move to the cities, not for manual labor, but into white collar jobs. The social prestige of the medium and large farmers began to fall as the relative prestige of urban IT workers and service sector workers (the BJP's 'Shining India') rose, while at the same time the economic coherence of the village disintegrated as rural non farm employment (RNFE) became the main source of income for most villagers (Gupta 2004).

If this sketch is accurate, then the NGO networks 'representing' India's farmers to the world are beneficiaries of an exodus of well educated, indigenous rural activists like Sharad Joshi, who were able to mediate the interests of small and middle farmers (and even laborers) with the state in the 1980s. In support of this thesis, Jodhka (2007: 27) argues (for Punjab, but relevant to India generally) that there is a crisis of representation in rural politics:

Most importantly, the explanation for the marginalization of the village and decline of agriculture lies in the changing orientation of the erstwhile agrarian / rural elite. The new elite that had emerged from the village during the decades of the 1960's and 1970s and identified almost completely with the agrarian economy are increasingly moving away from the village. Agriculture is not where they see the future of their coming generations.

For Jodhka this "growing internal differentiation" of economic interests in the countryside is the underlying structural cause of "the fragmentation of farmers' movement" described in chapter five. For Gupta (2004; 2009) and Suri (2006) this differentiation also entails a specifically cultural and status crisis, of the kind some have blamed for the spike in suicides (see chapter two). In the absence of well educated, high status farmers to lead (but not necessarily dominate) organizations rural policy has become listless. The equivalent generation of highly educated rural leaders will now be living in cities, and if not living there, earning money from investments in the city. This lack of 'push' from below is one reason, for Gupta (2004: 215) why "there is no fresh agricultural policy that can give a vision to the future of rural India" and that elected politicians, notoriously passive when it

comes to giving direction to policy in India, are, in Gupta's analysis falling back on clichés, either of the market romantic kind (just raise land ceilings, let corporations in and push microfinance initiatives) or of the romantic ruralist kind (organic farming, village autonomy) documented in chapter four.

This is the political-cultural vacuum that allows professional NGO networks to become magnets for the remaining rural activists; often causing them to abandon more complex-to-implement 'modernist' approaches<sup>295</sup> to appeal to the polished and professional discourse of the network. A region by region sketch of the network's centres of activity confirms that it is in those places most devoid of representation through party or social movement structures that the network tends to thrive; and this explanation is much stronger than the network's claim that it is where Bt Cotton 'failed' most catastrophically that it concentrates its resources<sup>296</sup>. In some states and regions, especially Gujarat (Shah 2003), but also much of Karnataka (Panini 1999) middle and larger scale farmers have become integrated into transnational commodity networks and have therefore lost their dependency on the caste or non caste local/national solidarities<sup>297</sup> that were essential resources for farmers' movement organization. These farmers have effectively abandoned domestic political agitation; those less well connected to transnational commodity networks therefore find themselves without potential spokespeople and, crucially, without local elites with an interest in the modernist agenda of pro poor agricultural research (Nanda 1995).

Areas such as eastern Maharashtra and the Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh, where capitalist networks are relatively weak, party representation of rural classes has been historically low and vacuums of representation even greater than elsewhere in those states have become particular

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<sup>295</sup> See especially the case of Vijay Jawandhia described in chapter five

<sup>296</sup> As chapter two argued, there is no evidence that Bt Cotton fared relatively worse in these 'vacuum' areas, although other aspects of rural crisis *are* worse in those areas. For example most respondents argued that Bt cotton had fared better in its early years in the (NGO heavy, politically poorly represented) Warangal area of Andhra Pradesh than in the commercially more integrated and wealthier Guntur region of AP.

<sup>297</sup> See Youngblood (2004) on the Shetkari Sanghatana and its regional anti Brahmanical solidarity

targets for the new activist networks<sup>298</sup>. This process was illustrated in chapter three, where the Andhra farmers' union and shepherds and goatherds union leaders were 'forced' to attach their agendas to the professional networks, in their claims making and in their own knowledge sources (for example the DDS brochures lying on the farmers' union leader's desk).

Ironically this same 'vacuum' was what helped seed companies such as Mahyco-Monsanto disseminate exaggerated claims for Bt Cotton in some areas. Even supporters of the technology pointed out in interview<sup>299</sup> that Monsanto's tactic of hiring young unemployed men to ride into villages on motorbikes, spread the news about Bt cotton, show videos and put up posters had a detrimental effect in the medium term, leading to excessive expectations about the crop and earning the added hostility of the Left farmers' unions described in chapter three.

#### **Summarizing scope conditions of the case study**

The presence of this 'vacuum of representation' is probably the most important background condition for the flourishing of 'romantic TANS', but what other conditions are likely to be present in the environment for similar networks to thrive? In the terms of positivist social science, "to what range of institutional settings, cultural contexts, time periods, geographic settings, and situational contexts do the findings apply?" (George and Bennett, 2005: 119). In order to specify this domain of applicability some further background conditions are specified below.

As chapter four showed, India has been the site of several internationally renowned TANS, including Chipko and the Narmada Bachao Andolan, discussed as precursors to the anti GMO network. India has many characteristics that enable TANS of the 'romantic' kind to proliferate:

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<sup>298</sup> The Greenpeace campaigns officer (interview 22) pointed out that these were the regions where Greenpeace expected their narrative to be most successful, for 'cultural' reasons, although he could also have been referencing the lack of competition over representation in such areas.

<sup>299</sup> Interview number 8

1. It is a democracy with few 'official' barriers to entry in civil society.
2. The 'Emergency' period in the 1970's catalyzed the growth of an oppositional civil society, many members of which are still working in TANs today (Baviskar 2010)
3. Its Gandhian tradition has found traction with transnational imaginaries, and in the case of Gandhi have contributed to those imaginaries
4. Bureaucratic 'choke points' over regulatory matters (in both the Narmada and GMO cases) enable the growth of coalitions, and the prominent role of international actors (The World Bank, Monsanto) in the absence of a strong developmental state, attracts transnational interest and resources.
5. Illiteracy, social fragmentation and the withdrawal of state institutions enable TANs to monopolize representation of certain issues and engage in 'unrestrained framing' (the social vacuum described above)

These conditions make something like the anti GMO coalition more likely to thrive in India than many countries, but only number 3 is unique to India per se, and as chapter three argued the 'Gandhian' cultural legacy in the network may be overstated. Nevertheless, based on these conditions we might expect 'romantic TANs' to be less prominent in China and East Asia (where widespread literacy and stronger state-society synergy reduces social vacuums in which TANs can proliferate), and more prominent in Latin America, which, appealing to a general knowledge of the secondary literature, does appear to be the case<sup>300</sup>.

Attempting to summarize the issue areas around which 'romantic TANs' might coalesce is more problematic than the more general socio-geographic conditions listed above, because any summary is liable to superfluosity: organizations will tend to romanticize issues when the socio-economic and institutional conditions 'select for' romanticization. However, the issues discussed below along with the case study in this dissertation suggest the following:

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<sup>300</sup> See Stahler-Sholk et al (2008)

1. Cases where a TAN can effectively 'adopt' a group, depicted as somehow 'authentic' or 'traditional' in its way of life and depict that group as actual or potential victims of negative external influences.
2. Connected to point 1 – there should be no clear rival organization mobilizing that group on 'modernistic' grounds – where the goal is greater *inclusion* in global or state institutions (the removal of secular modernist politics in the Middle East over decades of western interventions provides this condition for jihadism; the lack of broad based farmers' movements in India for our case; for indigenous peoples there may be a tension between autonomy seeking and inclusion seeking goals)
3. The issue should enable multiple linkages, especially media linkages, which do not 'restrain' the network into responding in their framing activity, to either the human needs of a mass base or the technical rational requirements of a governance institution (see discussion of restrained and unrestrained 'framing below')

Finally, drawing on chapter three, there are two contingent, institutional conditions that made 'romantic TANs' more viable, in this case at least:

1. The existence of multiple 'choke points' in a governance process – allowing a TAN to generate discourse about governance failures, but *not* (as in a governance oriented TAN) allowing for a tight coupling of any governance institution and the TAN. The TAN is able to exploit the choke point for discursive ends without participating in governance processes<sup>301</sup>.

In other cases or issue areas, a similar choke points might substitute for the regulatory ones in the GMO case (for example the ambiguous legal status of indigenous persons in Latin America or the

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<sup>301</sup> In Carl Schmitt's terms (from chapter four) for political romanticism to pertain there has to be a potential for aestheticizing activity, without the pressure to actually partake of *decisions*.

deferred hopes of statehood for the Palestinian people) – so long as it allows for a TAN to occupy a niche of critique around the choke point, without taking responsibility for governance.

## 2. Generous ‘external’ sources of funding not tied to strict performance criteria

External funding that does not depend on ‘performance’ vis a vis a ‘base’ or a clear governance oriented goal contributes to the ‘unrestrained’ nature of romantic TAN framing; effectively this is a ‘resource curse’ situation among the elite activists who can easily attract funds<sup>302</sup>, combined with intense competition at lower levels of activism (see above) to enter this elite group of recipients of resources.

Not all these conditions (10 in total) are likely or necessary to pertain for all ‘romantic TANs; the case of the anti GMO TAN may be an ‘ideal, ideal ’ case where all the conditions enabling romanticization pertained at once. As argued in chapter one the aim of analyzing ideal types is to generate ‘family resemblances’ that cut across conventional demarcations of TANs, not to enable a list of ‘causes’ that must be strictly in place for the phenomenon to occur. If ‘romanticism’ in activist campaigns is a long term feature of modern societies the particular, contingent circumstances in which it arises are likely to vary over time. Thus an excessive focus on the ephemeral contingent conditions enabling romantic TANs, might miss the forest for the trees.

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<sup>302</sup> Implying an analogy with the ‘resource curse’ of oil or mineral rich states, who, blessed with easy rental incomes, thereby fail to invest in alternative institutions, education, etc (Auty 1993). For elite activists the ‘curse’ is that ‘unrestrained’ or romantic framing is enabled by resources that depend neither on strict criteria of governance oriented achievements nor on the approval of a ‘base’.

## Summarizing the Characteristic of Romantic TANs

In the following sections the key characteristics of the anti GMO network(s) are summarized along with empirical examples from interviews. Some of these characteristic will apply across other types of TAN; for example governance oriented TANs also involve professionalized brokerage. However, underlying all of the processes is the particular way in which ‘romantic TANs’ find themselves claiming to represent the views of a grassroots base, while at the same time occupying a social space within a specialized sphere of professional activism. As section 5 on ‘framing’ makes particularly clear this potential contradiction is what is most distinctive about romantic TANs.

### 1. Elongation and professional brokerage monopolization in the network: a new oligarchy?

What are the class consequences of the kind of TAN represented by the anti GMO network?

As argued in chapters three and five, high level professional skills are required to manage the numerous ‘structural couplings’ involved in an activist network that focuses on the media, donors and other, heterogeneous elite organizations. These symbioses of organizations do not necessarily *expand* entry points into policy debates for less educated and less wealthy people, and may act to *limit* such access, certainly in comparison to the farmers’ movements of the 1980’s. As Herring (2009) points out in relation to ‘Operation Cremate Monsanto’ in Karnataka, these barriers to entry have class consequences that can work *against* the poor, contrary to the hopes held out for TANs from both their liberal and radical defenders.

Overall, TANs intersect with domestic politics in a highly *uneven* manner. Liberal theorists of TANs (Smith and Wiest 2005) have pointed to the way that greater participation in global institutions and treaties leads to greater TAN activity in countries as a whole (albeit that richer countries still participate more in TANs). However, there has been no systematic attempt, to look at the distribution of TAN activity *within* countries. A geography of TAN distribution could begin with the

kind of diagrammatic analysis attempted in chapter three, where the anti-GMO network was broken down into its cosmopolitan, nodal and regional elements. Such a geography would act as a counter weight to the tendency in both TAN scholarship to treat as the 'dependent variable', the number of transnational connections and interactions, but to ignore the distribution of those connections across a population and the variable access to those connections by social class<sup>303</sup>. Chapter five, for example, dealt with such variable geography in its analysis of Prof. Nanjundaswamy's monopolization of access points to the Via Campesina in Asia.

Thus the social geography of the network involves elongation and professionalization. Elongation is readily apparent from the tables at the beginning of chapter three, where the network is visualized as a hierarchy of organizations. In terms of the politics of how issues are framed, this means that the metropolitan and nodal groups are effectively 'insulated', in some cases by three 'layers' of hierarchy from contact with the farmers who they claim to represent. Only at these higher levels can the information acquired from farmers be transformed into (romantic) narratives which are communicable within the media-donor complex.

A parallel to Michels' (1911) 'iron law of oligarchy' is arguably apt here. Whereas for Michels oligarchy meant control of the bureaucratic apparatus of European social democratic parties, excluding the working class 'base', today it means control of networks of representation, in which the 'base' may have even less input. This is so because unlike in Michels' case, where the 'masses' had at least de jure powers to select party leaders through elections and hustings, the activist network politics described in this dissertation involves even greater distance between social levels, even in organizations like the KRRS which were nominally mass based.

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<sup>303</sup> Interestingly, Bob, in his later work on Dalit transnationalism in India (Bob, 2007) returns to this mode of analysis rather than that he had innovated in his earlier monograph – taking the level of transnational interactions between Dalit leaders and global INGO's and networks as the main measure of 'success' for these activists.

This professionalization has been described by Indian sociologist D.N.Dhanagare as the “NGO ization of social movements<sup>304</sup>” (alongside what he terms the “projectization of NGOs”). As Sethi puts it (1998: 410) in an essay on the retreat of traditional social movements in India and the rise of new professional activist networks:

Effective power over how issues will be formulated and presented passes on to the non-grassroots para-professional groups and individuals. Put more sharply, it implies a shift in focus from grass-roots mobilisation and organisation, the hallmark of local activity, to trying to achieve media coverage in an effort to influence the environment and policy process, a *strategic impulse* favoured by those somewhat removed from the ground [emphasis added]

Field research among the various ‘levels’ of the coalition provides support for the idea of different ‘levels’ of professional qualification and status across the network. Metropolitan NGOs are staffed by people with PhDs (Vandana Shiva and Suman Sahai) or Masters level qualifications in some form of agricultural science or public relations. This is also true of the nodal NGOs who appeared to be staffed mainly by young (under 40 year old) professionals, most of whom had Masters degrees in agricultural sciences or public relations (the current Greenpeace GMO officer) and sometimes (one of the DDS campaign managers) a background in corporate agricultural companies. When we move ‘down’ to the level of regional NGOs however, the average age of activists increased: they were more often part of a generation of activists that remembered the 1970s ‘emergency’ and associated themselves with Gandhian alternatives to the Green Revolution and urbanization. This difference extended to the ‘personal style’ of the interviewees – something hard to pin down, but which demonstrated itself in the way regional NGO officers wanted to tell personal narratives about their rural origins (even if as elites), often evoking a nostalgia for the ‘village system’ described in chapter four. On the other hand, staff of the nodal and metropolitan organizations (barring Vandana Shiva’s questionable claims of coming from a ‘farming’ background) never talked about having rural origins. These are international professionals who frequently fly to Europe to attend training and conferences and are very unlikely to socialize with the older generation of activists that run regional

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<sup>304</sup> Lecture at Hyderabad University: Interview number 58 a

groups, let alone hopeful participants like the high school teacher who accompanied me to villages in Warangal.

But why is such professionalization necessary and what are its consequences? There are many reasons why a network that depends on creating various functional ‘couplings’ with powerful actors tends to be dominated by professional, highly educated people. Obviously complete fluency in English is a prerequisite, and this is a key variable when analyzing the ‘levels’ of the network, with metropolitan and nodal groups staffed by people for whom English is probably their main language of everyday use, to regional NGO staff who are competent but not completely comfortable in English, to the grassroots / Left union activists with whom I needed a translator to be properly understood. In the case of the KRRS, for example, Nanjundaswamy’s fluency in English was a key reason for his ability to keep transnational connections to himself.

But beyond language, it is the subtle capacity for engaging in ‘brokerage’ that marks out the skill set of the new professionalized activist class. The analysis of Greenpeace archives in chapter three showed how the organization needed officers capable of constructing ‘radical’ campaigns that could penetrate the newly ‘expanded’ social space of the internet age. This skill set, aptly demonstrated in interview by the Greenpeace officer responsible for GMOs<sup>305</sup>, involves myriad strategic decisions about which alliances to work on at particular times, which government ministers to focus attention on, which media sources to channel stories to and which stories to select for publication in official brochures and websites. He described for example the low ‘resonance’ that would result from emphasizing the use of GM cotton oil, a product ingested mainly by the poor in cooking, and therefore (one might argue explicitly although he did not) less likely to resonate with the urban and European consumers of the anti GMO discourse. Similarly the officer had to weigh the costs and benefits of alliances with high profile, but unreliable actors like Nanjundaswamy of the KRRS, judging them inadvisable, whereas Vandana Shiva had both high media profile and high professional

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<sup>305</sup> Interview number 22

reliability. This kind of judgment call requires skills similar to a public relations officer for a multinational corporation: the ability to deal with allies and rivals in other professional spheres, knowing which aspect of the discourse to emphasize with which organization for maximum effectiveness.

With these skill sets required, it seems very unlikely that anyone could get 'promoted' up through the network, from grassroots to regional to nodal to metropolitan levels<sup>306</sup>, casting doubt on the claim that the new activist networks are likely to bring greater inclusivity to politics. Chapter five documented exactly this process, whereby a skilled transnational communicator, Prof Nanjundaswamy, was able to bypass traditional mass politics and traditional farmers' leaders through the cultivation of transnational linkages. This leads into the next section on the tension between vertical and 'horizontal' solidarity in activist networks.

## 2. Vertical versus Horizontal Solidarity in activist networks

One of the possible lacunae in the literature on TANs has been the idea that 'scaling up' to transnational levels will benefit the network and those it represents. In other words, vertical forms of solidarity can *complement* or *supplement* horizontal forms of solidarity at the domestic level. This process is sometimes described in terms of the concept of 'scale shift' (Tarrow (2005: 120-24), and Reitan (2007), as recounted in chapter one), whereby, through various brokerage mechanisms, groups are able to adjust their claims and even identities, to achieve a global voice.

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<sup>306</sup> Of course, many at the grassroots have much wider concerns than GMOs or even globalization related issues, so the issue might be moot. But the very fact that at 'higher' levels of professionalization only specialized issues like GMOs are represented through sophisticated activist networks is part of the problem for generating strong, grassroots social movements.

The implication of this case study is different and potentially generalizable across other issue areas where (romantic) TANs involve a purported 'base' of claimants and the possibility of transnational 'scaling up'. A key point relates to Tarrow's remark (2005: 123-24) that "the transaction costs of moving up the scale of contention are much higher than scale shift in familiar domestic settings". One implication of this dissertation has been that this is not always the case. The resources and incentives in place for 'scaling up' in the case examined here, mean that activists have a ready-made set of channels through which to coordinate with transnational levels and much more professional assistance and funding than would be the case if they chose to try and coordinate action horizontally between Indian states or between, say, farmers and India's public sector agricultural scientists. In other words, vertical solidarity may *replace or substitute for* rather than complement the search for new horizontal solidarities.

Chapter five, for example, showed how it was actually *easier* for Prof. Nanjundaswamy of the KRRS to scale up vertically to the transnational level than to forge horizontal domestic alliances with fellow farmers' movements in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. As cited in that chapter, his advisors were frustrated with this tendency to look to the vertical before the horizontal. Chapter five also showed how Vijay Jawandhia, formerly of the Shetkari Sanghatana, somewhat reluctantly scaled up vertically to the transnational level, when the conditions for horizontal mobilization of a left leaning, pro-modernization alliance in rural Maharashtra had failed. Some other cases from Maharashtra also help illustrate the 'pull' that transnationalism has on grassroots activists and how the desire to emulate those activists, such as Vandana Shiva, motivates an emphasis on forging vertical ties.

Ms Lata P M, for example<sup>307</sup>, was an early supporter of Sharad Joshi in the Sanghatana's womens' movement. She felt that Joshi was genuinely concerned with womens' empowerment in the early 1980's and that the movement was able (as recounted by Youngblood, 2004) to synergize various interest groups around a common theme of rural neglect. By the 1990's however, with no new

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<sup>307</sup> Interview number70

generation of leaders to fill Joshi's place Lata felt that the Sanghatana had become drawn to 'neo-liberal' themes and abandoned its interest in marginal rural groups. Crucially, she argued that anyone who wants to organize domestically now has to do so *through* the transnational sector. Only those with transnational linkages are physically "able to meet" domestically, thanks to the resources provided for such simple facilities as conferences, libraries of activist literature (such as at Kalpavriksh of Pune) and travel expenses. Hence she began work as a movement 'trainer' with the National Centre for Advocacy Studies (NCAS) in Pune, Maharashtra, an organization that trains NGOs in how to frame issues to gain maximum traction with the media, donors and Indian parliamentarians. As argued in chapter three, an organization like NCAS gains legitimacy by employing someone with a grassroots activist background like Lata P M (and her multiple connections with small rural groups that can be turned into legitimate recipients of funding), while she gains access to the transnational resources she sees as necessary for social activism today<sup>308</sup>. She described Vandana Shiva as "a shining figure" in rural activism, but at the same time expressed some resentment that "second line leadership" was unable to gain access to these transnational resources, leading to an internal hierarchy among activists, with those who could access organizations like NCAS and the transnational 'domain' privileged over those who could not.

Arguably those most adept at accessing groups like NCAS are precisely those whose ideological orientation is most attuned to the transnational 'romantic' discourse described in chapter four. So a hidden 'selection' process is at work, in which those with more nuanced or 'modernist' views about GMOs or globalization would be unlikely to end up working for a group like NCAS. Lata P M, for example, appeared to hold quite a romantic conception of rural problems, critiquing the "cash economy" per se and the consequent "social fragmentation", with an emphasis on a return to small scale "sustainable farming" rather than the rural modernization agenda of the 1980's Sanghatana (see chapter five). Along with these attitudes came a rather paternalistic conception of rural women,

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<sup>308</sup> Interview number 69 with NCAS director

when she suggested that activists had to “learn how to mediate on behalf of women who can’t articulate for themselves”.

As implied above and throughout this dissertation it seems unlikely that NGO-ized activist networks will achieve, or even want to achieve<sup>309</sup>, potentially more contentious horizontal solidarities. The state is becoming less of a ‘container’ of activist energies. In fact in a highly NGO-ized activist network it is debatable whether the terminology of scale shift really applies at all, since that terminology (as used by Keck and Sikkink and their followers) assumed that the *end* of activism was *change* at the local or national level. One Hyderabad based activist, who had been a founding member of the left leaning activist collective Lokayan, argued in interview<sup>310</sup> that NGOs nowadays are “in awe” of donors and unwilling to “risk a more political stance” by concentrating on issues which do not resonate with transnational themes, such as electricity privatization or the corruption associated with Special Economic Zones<sup>311</sup> and the public distribution system, issues which would entail horizontal connections across Indian regions, but which would have relatively little resonance with donors. In other words vertical solidarity may be the default option, enabled by donor and nodal groups keen to couple with ‘legitimate’ grassroots activists, but only within a limited range of ‘transnationalizable’ issues. As one left leaning activist argued in interview: “it’s easier to confront an external enemy”<sup>312</sup> through TANs, than to mobilize around complex domestic issues.

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<sup>309</sup> Recall the remarks of the Greenpeace project officer cited in chapter three, about only wanting to form temporary alliances of opportunity.

<sup>310</sup> Interview number 59 with Mr Narayan

<sup>311</sup> But see the account of the less ‘transnationalized’ and less resource endowed National Association of Peoples’ Organizations in chapter three.

<sup>312</sup> Interview number 82, with Chandrakant Wankhade

### **3. Knowledge production and epistemological filtering, policing, convergence and monopolization in activist networks**

Scholars have pointed out that activist networks and social movements produce 'frames' (see discussion below) as well as grievances, stories and modes of thinking as an integral part of their activities (Melucci 1997; Poletta 1998). Conway (2006), makes this a central point in her examination of new, network activisms, in which (alternative) knowledge production becomes central to the social movement task, over and above traditional forms of mobilization. Social theorist Nico Stehr (2001) makes this a central point in his claim that new social movements challenge the monopolization of knowledge in functionally differentiated societies and can become "a medium and manifestation of emergent conditions for a broader based linkage between knowledge and emancipation in modern societies" (141). Along these emancipator lines, activists in the anti GMO network, such as Vandana Shiva, have emphasized their role as 'keepers' of traditional, alternative knowledges, via seed banks and the invocation of such practices as 'Vedic agriculture' (see chapter two). Chapter four critiqued such claims in its analysis of the 'romantic' discourse of the network; suggesting that a modular, mono causal interpretation of Indian agricultural life lay behind the more radical claims of the network to be enabling alternative forms of knowledge (see also Nanda 2003 on this theme).

As was suggested in the diagrammatic figure of the activist network in chapter three, the network against GMOs can also be seen, in more instrumental or strategic terms, as an engine for the production of data, knowledge and causal claims about the lives of poor farmers and the dangers of GMOs. This 'data' was said to be 'sold' to urban and international sites in exchange for access to those sites and to funding opportunities. In this sense, Sikkink may be too idealistic when she suggests that network forms of activism rely on the 'exchange' rather than the commodification of knowledge (Sikkink 2009: 230). Certainly in the case of romantic TANs, more than grassroots or governance oriented TANs, knowledge production in the form of romantic narratives about harms

and farmers is likely to be central to their concerns. This is because these romantic narratives are the hooks which attach organizations to crucial media, donor and market linkages.

This kind of 'production' of knowledge was illustrated in chapter four in the discussion of some of the DDS' video materials and in chapter three in the discussion of the National Centre for Advocacy Studies (NCAS) and its tools and training for the dissemination of causal claims. It can also be observed in the case of the unpaid school teacher cum activist-volunteer I spoke to in Warangal. I discovered after speaking to him that he was the source for a 'scientific' study into the effects of Bt cotton consumption on sheep deaths, funded by the DDS in Hyderabad. This study found that three sheep who fed on Bt Cotton leaves died, while three sheep who fed on non Bt Cotton survived. Obviously there are strong incentives for someone whose aim is to work for an NGO, to produce data that fit the NGO's framing of risks<sup>313</sup>. This is also true of the more sophisticated data produced by regional NGOs for donors and nodal NGOs, purporting to show that organic cotton is actually more profitable than Bt Cotton<sup>314</sup>. Although the directors of regional NGOs may be dedicated experts on organic farming, the data they are provided with comes from lower paid trainers and supervisors at the village level, who also have overwhelming incentives to 'buy in' to the narrative of organic cotton success and Bt cotton failure.

There are ways in which the network selects frames and narratives that accord with its ideational and institutional needs. The following examples illustrate, respectively, processes of epistemological 'filtering', 'policing', 'convergence' and 'monopolization' in the network .

Filtering can be illustrated by a case from Maharashtra, where two left oriented social activists and academics based in Mumbai – a husband and wife team - the Pendses<sup>315</sup>, were asked by Oxfam UK

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<sup>313</sup> See also Herring (2010: 90) for a discussion of the upward dissemination of claims from the CSA Hyderabad (rival knowledge 'producer' to the DDS) to articles in the Guardian Newspaper, UK about sheep deaths.

<sup>314</sup> For example a lengthy study by Dhara Mitra in Wardha, Maharashtra. The study shows non Bt cotton being 'more profitable' than Bt, but this is only in the NGO's own project areas, where presumably the organic cotton was lavished with special attention and there is no data about how the Bt cotton was treated – whether it received the amount of pesticide sprayings that are recommended, etc.

<sup>315</sup> Interview, number 68, with Aruna and Sanjeev Pendse

(a key funder of NGOs in the network) to produce a study on the relationship of globalization and agricultural crisis in Maharashtra, focusing on cotton as a commodity. Oxfam's aim was to provide a parallel study to one on Burkina Faso in Africa, where globalization appeared to have caused ruin to indigenous producers. However, their research suggested no links between crisis among cotton farmers in Maharashtra and globalization per se. For example, they argued that since 1987 the price of Indian cotton had been above the international price (ruling out the effects of dumping claimed by some network activists) and that in fact there was a consistent shortage of cotton for the domestic market of around 11-13% per year during this period, with only one year since 1951 in which imports were greater than exports. The Pendses argued (in line with the discussion in chapter two) that the causes of agricultural crisis (and ultimately suicides) in Maharashtra were lack of irrigation, small acreage farms that reduce returns to scale in picking, a lack of back-up subsistence crops in Vidarbha to cover against failure of cotton, regional deficiencies in farmer-market linkages and in policy terms a decision to reduce funding for the National Bank for Rural Development (NABARD) in 1997, which meant the rise of private money lenders who could manipulate interest rates by only announcing rates late into the season. This report (*Cotton Cultivation in Maharashtra*, 2003) was rejected by Oxfam, who, according to the Pendses never wrote to explain why they had rejected it<sup>316</sup>. The Pendses argued that "it is very hard to say no" to the "meta frames" of big donors like Oxfam and that regional NGOs and activists (perhaps those without regular academic posts like the Pendses) come to realise how to frame debates to fit the meta narrative, even when it bears little relation to the facts.

'Policing' can be illustrated by the dispute between Oxfam and Vandana Shiva, where, in November 1999, she (Shiva 1999) responded to a policy document published by British INGO Oxfam (Oxfam 1999) on the future of GM crops in the developing world.

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<sup>316</sup> Leaving open the possibility that it was rejected on other grounds of course.

In its position paper on "G.M. crops, WTO and Food Security", Oxfam recommends, Donor governments and agencies commit resources for investment in research into the potential opportunities presented by applications of G.M. to deliver environmental and health benefits pertaining to small holder agriculture in adverse agroecological zones.

We feel that Oxfam risks betraying the South, the poor and food security objectives by calling for support for promotion of G.M. crops in the South instead of calling for support for ecological and sustainable agriculture which is much better suited to the small farmers in adverse agroecological zones.

A perusal of the original document from Oxfam shows that the tone was overwhelmingly skeptical toward GMOs and supportive of the European 'precautionary principle', but Shiva picked up on a short section that asked for more public sector research into pro-poor applications like drought resistant crops. For Shiva, it was important to 'police' the message of the network of organizations involved in activism, perhaps successfully, since Oxfam has not afterwards published similar papers and may be sensitive to discussion of this topic<sup>317</sup>.

Epistemological 'convergence' is a harder concept to pin down, because it is less overt. It implies that incentives and career trajectories 'pull' actors towards similar perspectives over time. These processes will include funding opportunities, media access and 'career' advancement in the activist profession. This dissertation has provided several possible examples: the journey of Vijay Jawandhia (chapter five) from farmers' leader pursuing a broad agenda to activist against GM crops; the convergence of regional project NGOs (described in chapter three) around the anti-GMO theme and their providing surveys and 'field' authenticity to back up anti-GMO claims, and the move of Lata P M from Sanghatana activist to aspiring transnational activist (above).

It is difficult however, to catch the 'social field' performing the work of epistemological convergence. One important, but debatable case is that of Suman Sahai of Gene Campaign in Delhi. One

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<sup>317</sup> Repeated attempts to interview Oxfam officials involved with policy on GM crops failed.

interviewee, an academic from Hyderabad<sup>318</sup> recalled Sahai's "stirring nationalist rhetoric" in speeches she had given about biotechnology in the wake of the Dunkel Draft and TRIPs agreement in the early 1990's. Her emphasis had been on how India must pro actively develop GM crops to suit its own agenda rather than rely on transnational corporations<sup>319</sup>. This is reflected in Sahai's publications from this period up to the late 1990's (for example, Sahai 1997) where Sahai explicitly argued (along modernist or developmentalist lines) that "the western debate about bioethics" was irrelevant to a developing country like India where hunger was the priority and GM crops could play a crucial role. After the anti-GMO campaign exploded in 1999-2002, Sahai's emphasis shifted from nationalism to 'risk' as the key discourse (for example, Sahai 2004). As argued in the media analysis of chapter two, it is now hard to locate 'developmentalist' views on GM crops among activist participants. Convergence, then, is hard to prove, and the convergence of views among activists is probably unconscious even to them, but instrumental reasons (in Sahai's case funding from the German NGOs described in chapter three, and perhaps more importantly the incentive to take part in governmental panels as the advocate for 'biosafety' – the very 'western' idea Sahai was previously critiquing in the name of national development) may 'guide' the field into a uniformity of perspective.

Finally, knowledge 'monopolization' describes the way that the key 'nodes' of the network accumulate knowledge, making themselves indispensable resources for less privileged nodes. In Chapter three, for example, we described how Andhra Pradesh farmers' union leader Malla Reddy relied on DDS documents and brochures to make claims about GMOs. According to public sector biotechnologist Prof. N. Raghuram of Indraprastha University<sup>320</sup> NGOs have skilfully exploited the "vacuum" of knowledge about GMOs and the regulatory process associated with them, especially at the state level, where agriculture departments often lack a knowledge base on biotechnology (a

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<sup>318</sup> Dr K C Suri, Interview number 4

<sup>319</sup> This is the interpretation of Sahai's work favored by Heins (2008) based on interviews conducted in the 1990's.

<sup>320</sup> Interview/lecture number 55 c

central state prerogative). This was demonstrated in chapter three's discussion of how nodal NGOs successfully coupled with state governments to object to field trials of Bt Cotton, that were supposedly circumventing the jurisdiction of states, and also in chapter two's discussion of Indian MP's questions to Parliament, where NGO knowledge claims were uncritically adopted by parliamentarians.

#### **4. Competition versus synergy in transnational activist networks**

Sikkink (2009) describes how transnational networks can achieve more efficient results to hierarchies or 'traditional' parties because of four factors (230): their voluntary nature; their capacity for rapid informational dissemination and learning; the trust that builds among nodes in the network and their inherent flexibility. As well as arguments from efficiency and speed, advocates of TANs see the network, or network of networks as inherently more democratic than hierarchical forms of organization – the rhizome (Hardt 2002) being the organic analog of this hope. Chapter three suggested that the anti GMO network(s) is actually complex and striated in its internal structure: it is quite hierarchical in the way different tasks are assigned to different 'levels', comprising a 'hub and spoke' type structure rather than an egalitarian 'distributed' structure, but it could also be configured as several overlapping and rivalrous sub networks, each with their own particular hubs and spokes – such as the CSA of Hyderabad or the DDS in the same city.

The irony of this rivalry is that while the rhetoric of the anti GMO network, as explored in chapter four, presented a picture of bottom up cooperation, sustainability and local solidarity as opposed to the forces of a brutal and inhumane global market, the reality of relations between parts of the network is very different. Cooley and Ron (2002) opened the debate on competition and rivalry among emergency relief NGOs, but a similar logic may apply to transnational activist networks, albeit with more subtle consequences. Competition within the network takes many forms and is

about more than just jockeying for funds and media coverage (as for Cooley and Ron); it is about maintaining and building a reputation for ‘authenticity’; building allies and sub networks *within* the network, and finding niches for the organization that will guarantee institutional stability in the long run (see the discussion of Snyder (2006) in the conclusion of chapter four for this fusion of ideas and material incentives). Romantic TANs are likely to be especially prone to these forms of competition because they depend on projecting an image of authenticity to their partners. Competing for authenticity ‘rents’ (Herring 2010) may become a zero sum game in and between romantic TANs, a zero sum game that may also appear in the competition for niche organic commodity markets.

As noted above in the description of Lata P M, one form of competition is about access to the ‘top tier’ of activism where the transnational linkages are found. The most vivid example of this was given in chapter five where an account was given of the factional warfare *within* the KRRS over access to transnational resources and *between* the KRRS and Vandana Shiva over claims to ‘authenticity’<sup>321</sup>.

A good illustration of the contrast between the rhetoric of cooperation and the reality of competition or mutual indifference within the network, is in the concept and practice of ‘seed banks’. In theory, NGOs set up seed exchanges, with information about the particular qualities of seeds in certain soils and climates, for farmers to access free of charge and outside the control of transnational corporations. Seed banks serve both a practical and a symbolic role, in that they represent a possibility of cooperative and local agriculture as an alternative to intensive, corporate agriculture (Shiva 2005). All the organic NGOs I spoke to claim to operate or be part of some such system, with the Green Foundation in Bangalore and Vandana Shiva’s Navdanya in Delhi producing glossy brochures about their seed bank programs. However, when I asked the director of the Green Foundation<sup>322</sup> whether any attempt had been made to produce a national seed bank to coordinate between different NGOs and share knowledge about seeds she did not even know about the

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<sup>321</sup> The claim that other network organizations or activists lacked ‘authenticity’ was pervasive in interviews.

<sup>322</sup> Interview number 20

existence of other networks of seed banks, nor indeed even the names of large NGOs like MARI working on the same set of issues in Andhra Pradesh. In other words these networks of seed banks exist in isolation from each other, arguably to attract the support of donors and act as publicity tools, rather than to act as a real bottom-up form of anti corporate agriculture<sup>323</sup>.

Another illustration of more direct competition between networks came on my second visit to the regional NGO MARI in Warangal in January 2009. When I arrived the director was too busy to see me as the village organic agriculture projects were undergoing what a project supervisor described as their yearly “crisis time”, when the organization struggled to find buyers for their organic cotton. I was reminded of the observation by the Chetna Organic officer in Hyderabad, that most of the Oxfam funded NGOs had weak marketing skills and had failed to form linkages to key organic textile buyers from the global North. Again, as with the seed banks, it might seem surprising that more cooperation does not take place between network actors on arranging linkages with northern organic cotton buyers, especially given the emphasis of their rhetoric on the need to return to non market forms of solidarity; but NGOs funded by different northern partners are very unlikely to enter into cooperative relations on such issues, forming instead exclusive vertical networks in rivalry with other networks.

Different nodal organizations also preside over different ‘spheres of influence’ within the network. Most notably the DDS and the CSA; despite channelling funds to some of the same regional NGOs, having headquarters just a few miles from each other and being more or less united on framing<sup>324</sup> and ideas, they barely communicate with each other on a regular basis.<sup>325</sup> For example the DDS convenes a coalition of 140 NGOs in Andhra Pradesh called ‘the AP Coalition in defence of diversity’,

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<sup>323</sup> Arguably it is the central government that should be operating such exchanges if they are to work, but the need for NGOs’ to run such programs weighs against the option of pressing the state via agricultural universities, for example, to provide such programs.

<sup>324</sup> The Chetna Organic officer claimed that the DDS were less friendly toward markets per se than the CSA, and this may reflect their different structural locations in the anti GMO network (s), with the CSA attracting funds from the state for large projects and the DDS using media more exclusively. Chapter four, however, argued that they both accept largely ‘romantic’ framings of agriculture, albeit with different emphases: the DDS on threatened innocence, the CSA on the inherent risks of technology.

<sup>325</sup> Interviews number 3 and 14.

but surprisingly this does not include the CSA. The CSA is linked to an alternative mini coalition with Chetna Organic and Greenpeace India, named the 'Coalition for a GM Free India', which is glued together partly by the family connections of its key officers<sup>326</sup>. Taking into account criticisms of the CSA's closeness to the AP Congress Party<sup>327</sup>, one reason for the lack of cooperation could be inter network rivalry over access to AP government funding for organic agriculture.<sup>328</sup>

##### **5. 'Framing' in the network: how framing can become 'unrestrained' in the absence of internal and external constraints**

Here, 'framing' refers to an "interpretive schemata that signifies and condenses the 'world' out there by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences and sequences of action in one's present or past environment" (Snow and Benford 1992: 137). 'Collective action frames' include the 'diagnostic', which tell us what a problem is and attributes blame to targets, the 'prognostic', which propose remedies for that action and the 'motivational', which encourages people to take action (Stobaugh and Snow 2010; Snow and Byrd 2007). The *content* of these frames is drawn strategically from the "inherited and invented fibers" of culture and history (Tarrow 1998: 118). Framing *processes* then emerge out of strategic and dialectical encounters between network or movement leaders and the institutions against which claims are being made (Tilly 1995, Herring 2010; Tarrow 2010). Herring, for example, (2010) has described how the 'generative frame' of GMOs emerged out of the institutional 'choke points' surrounding biosafety regulations. These choke points provided ample space for activists to coalesce and discursive and institutional opportunities for mobilization. Sato (2008) has similarly shown in great

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<sup>326</sup> Kavita Katurunga's brother in law is program officer at Chetna Organic and Kavita herself moved to the CSA from working at Greenpeace

<sup>327</sup> Interview with Kameshwara Rao, Interview number 18.

<sup>328</sup> The DDS website does not mention any funding from the AP government in contrast to the CSA which has many ongoing projects partially funded by the state government.

detail how anti GMO frames acquired their particular form from interactions with particular regulatory institutions in France.

The general emphasis in this dissertation has been rather different from this kind of 'strategic frame analysis', although it has hopefully made contributions to understanding the origin and persistence of certain strategic frames. For example, much of the discussion in chapter three contributes to a specific institutional analysis of how activists interact with various 'targets' and allies and how their framing of GMOs reflects those interactions – for example grafting opposition to GMOs onto an institutional role as regional NGO doing 'sustainable agriculture' projects and framing that opposition in terms of the 'better alternative' of organic agriculture, or in Suman Sahai's case, shifting to a biosafety frame that matches institutional opportunities for involvement in decision making for 'experts' in the NGO community. Framing is *strategic* because successful frames resonate with specific audiences at specific points in time and, as my interview with Greenpeace's GMO campaigns officer suggested (see the example of cotton oil above), and as Oliver and Johnston (2000) note, framing work in contemporary activist networks is strongly related to 'marketing'. In fact, a business marketing text such as Heath and Heath (2007) is often pointed to as an invaluable guide as to how networks and movements can frame issues effectively.

This focus on the strategic nature of framing processes, choke points and 'framing as marketing' sits awkwardly with scholarship that sees 'global framing' of campaigns as giving a voice to the voiceless. Reitan (2007: 19), for example, claims that "frame alignment" between local and global will lead to "a global transformative frame" that channels popular discontent with neoliberal norms. However, the key puzzle arising from the anti GMO case in India, and which is likely to be most applicable to romantic TANs more generally, concerns the *unrestrained* nature of the frames that the coalition has constructed. Here 'unrestrained' refers to the lack of 'reality' constraints on the choice of frames - even though ironically those frames are strongly circumscribed by the modular romantic world view described in chapter four.

The approach adopted here to addressing this puzzle, tries to explain how the anti GMO coalition found itself in a unique ‘niche’ in which framing activities were unrestrained either by *technical responsibilities from above* or by *dialogical interactions with a base*. While lacking either top down or bottom up restraints the network was able to flourish in a rich ecology of media attention and donor funds, enabling it to frame GMOs according to a default transnational romanticism.

As to the lack of ‘top down’ restraints, unlike transnational organizations such as Amnesty International in the area of human rights, for example (Foley 2008: 24), the coalition members have not needed to attain a reputation for flawless fact checking or technical expertise in their ‘technical’ field of biosafety. Unlike these governance oriented TANs the network has not formed structural couplings with organizations that require replicable and rigorous information. This emerged in chapter three, where it was argued that Suman Sahai’s Gene Campaign in Delhi had inserted itself into technical committees and working groups, but that these concessions to Sahai appeared to be designed to placate the coalition rather than to act as serious sources of expertise. These insertions were often a source of controversy and objections from scientists. Since the audience for the coalition’s claims has been far away, either geographically (a European public) or in terms of social class (upper middle class activists in India), those claims have not been subject to expert interrogation by core partners of the network<sup>329</sup>.

As far as lack of restraint from below is concerned, it can be argued that dialogical interactions with a ‘base’ should prevent elite framing activity from diverting too far from ground realities and perceived human needs. Steinberg (1998), drawing on the theories of Bakhtin, describes the ‘dialogic’ as the inherently conflict riven process whereby stable ‘packages’ of meaning such as ‘frames’ are produced. For Steinberg, the literature on framing in social movements studies has tended “in practice if less so in theory” (848) to concentrate on the generic end product of dialogical

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<sup>329</sup> This point about social distance from the object about which claims are made is made by Herring in various articles (Herring 2009; 2010).

struggles in the form of “neatly structured packages or worldviews”. In other words, studies have concentrated on what Steinberg refers to as “mesomobilization” (860), meaning the marketing of pre packaged frames in the arena of mass communication and modern media, rather than on the “joint ideological labor” of interactions between elites and masses that (ideally) construct claims and frames in the first place.

As argued above, the vacuum of representation in rural areas has meant that the ideal conditions apply for ‘mesomobilization’ – with no grassroots base with which to engage dialogically, network organizations have instead focused on *marketing* their claims to the various partners described in chapter three. In the contrasting case of the Shetkari Sanghatana, it was argued that dialogical forms of organization actually precluded the movement focusing on such elite framing activities in the media or at the transnational level. For other coalition organizations it is clear, that despite claims to be representative, no dialogical activity occurs between leaders and farmers – on the contrary as argued in chapter four, paternalism is a better description of the structure of the regional organizations in the network that work with farmers.

While Steinberg wants to argue that a reliance on the elite level of mesomobilization and professionalized framing in partnership with the media, will lead to the instability and collapse of movements (860), it is argued here that romantic TANs are not necessarily subject to these restraints. This was illustrated in chapter five, where the fame and (media evaluated) success of the KRRS reached its peak *after* it had declined as a mass movement.

If this analysis has force, then we can argue that the really pressing questions about the type of activist network analyzed here are not so much about which frames will stick or how frames interact with particular institutional arrangements, but rather about how the prevalence of strategic framing activities aimed at the media and elite partners (‘mesomobilization’) itself sidelines other forms of activity, such as the *formulating* of claims in interaction with a ‘base’ in the first place. In other words, Snow and Benford may be right about the prevalence of strategic framing but this prevalence

needs to be historicized and explained. In particular, frames may have ‘resonance’ (in Snow and Benford’s phrase) at the level of elite and media linkages, but not with a purported base. Speaking more metaphorically, framing in this case may be less a jazz improvisation, where leaders suggest a theme that is transformed dialogically in the group (Tarrow 1992:191, summarizing Tilly 1983), and more a pre packaged pop song, effectively produced by algorithm to appeal to targeted demographics.

### **5.2. The upside down roots of network framing activities**

If the above arguments are correct the anti GMO network(s) is a good example of a romantic TAN that focuses its framing, and its brokerage activities on diverse elite organizations rather than on a grassroots ‘base’. Its patterns of interaction could be described as an upside down tree, whose ‘roots’ are in the air.

The diagram below attempts to illustrate this point by showing the paucity of framing activity in rural politics that actually originates with agriculturalists. The anti GMO network is shown alongside rival sources of frames in the diagram.

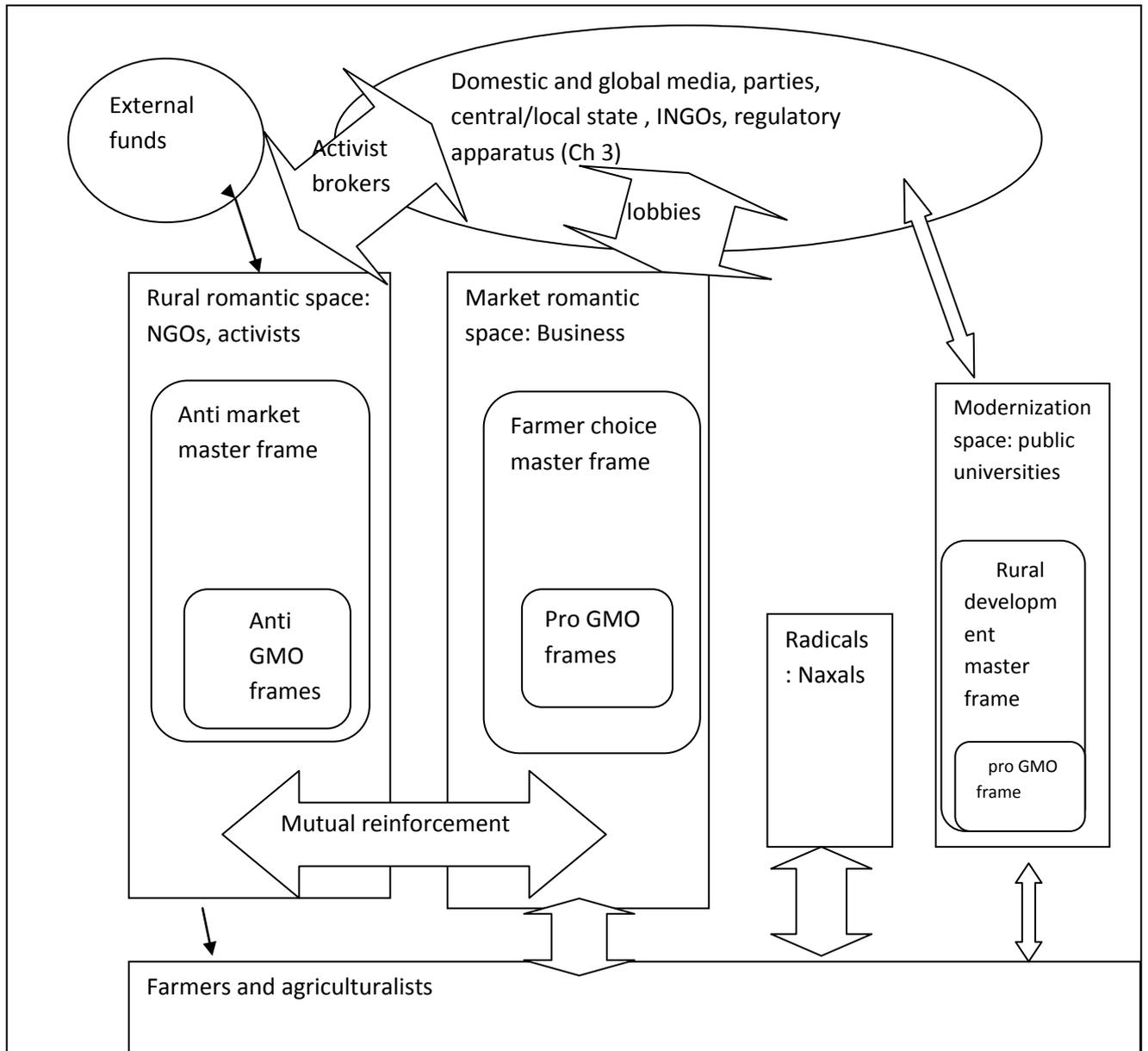


Figure 6.1: Overview of Framing processes concerning agricultural policy

The figure tries to illustrate how the 'space' or 'grammar', of romantic ruralism on the one hand and of market oriented views on the other, dominate discussion of agricultural issues, while the 'modernist' or developmentalist space associated with public research and figures such as M S Swaminathan has shrunk. The diagram shows that some of the 'base' of agriculturalists might be dialogically connected to three of the spaces, but not to the romantic ruralist space: for example

Gujurati farmers are linked to national and global markets by diasporic connections and rich social networks (Shah 2005), while poor *adivasi* farmers often *are* Naxalites. Connections to the modernization space, if they exist, are more tenuous but are held together by diminished extension services and outreach by universities. The NGOs and activists on the other hand mainly work in a *paternalist* manner with farmers, as argued in chapter four, hence the one way arrow.

Further up the diagram we see how the rural romantic and market romantic spaces feed off each other: as Herring (2010: 79) argues, they produce 'mirror images' of each others' discourses, while at the top of the diagram they are both richly connected to professional and state institutions and resources. It is at this cosmopolitan level that the true linkages occur – between NGOs and other professional institutions. The modernization space, on the other hand, as argued in chapter two, is smaller and starved of rich connections, hence the narrower arrows.

It must be remembered that the diagram represents an historically specific constellation. In 1950, for example, the modernization space would have been much larger, and the market romantic space nonexistent. Social movements can break up spaces and reconfigure them. In 1985 the Shetkari Sanghatana would have formed its own individual space, fusing together elements of all four of the separate spaces in the diagram, but more importantly forming strong vertical, dialogical connections going from agriculturalists to the state. TANs on the other hand might be said to draw more conservatively on older spaces and discourses, finding niches in existing institutional and discursive space.

Frames connected to GMOs are deliberately downplayed visually in this diagram, by being portrayed as subsets of larger 'spaces'. Particular institutional interactions will determine what these frames look like, but the 'grammar' in which they appear depends on this larger space. Thus the pro GMO frame of the modernization space may look superficially like that of the market romantic space but is part of a very different set of concepts, in which 'farmer choice' and 'less state' lie behind the GMO

frame. The ‘unrestrained’ nature of the framing in the romantic ruralist space is implied by the one way arrow to agriculturalists.

If networks are able to engage in such ‘unrestrained’ framing activities, then their contribution to a more democratic global civil society is questionable. Rather than forging more and more inclusive frames that scale up struggles to the global level and form new solidarities (Reitan 2007), organizations may be indulging particular audiences and media and effectively ‘framing away’ from the concerns of those they claim to represent, brokering ‘upside down roots’ with elite actors rather than with a base. In the political vacuum of rural India ‘framing away’ to more lucrative audiences becomes a viable option and the anti GMO frame just one, particularly durable example <sup>330</sup>

#### **Parallel cases of romantic activism?**

Do the characteristics of ‘transnational romanticism’ highlighted in the above sections have applicability outside the case of GMOs and organic agriculture? There is good reason to think so since many of the concepts used to analyze this case were adaptations of ideas applied by Clifford Bob, Volker Heins and other scholars (chapter one) to account for a diverse range of cases.

Chapter four argued for similarities between the anti GMO case and the Chipko and Narmada campaigns, although noted that in both those cases (especially the latter) the picture was complicated by the presence of a real ‘base’. In the Narmada case this was the base of villagers being displaced by the dam organizing initially *outside* of transnational circuits (Baviskar 1995); only later and only at certain ‘levels’ did the NBA become highly integrated into a transnational campaign, some of whose characteristics prefigured the romantic framings of the GMO campaign.

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<sup>330</sup> Baviskar (2010: 387) raises the same concern about TANs in India, in particular about what happens when “the rank and file no longer need to provide the material resources to sustain the campaign”.

Two issue areas that might be receptive to the kind of analysis undertaken here are the fields of indigenous rights and transnational religious networks. The two issues are chosen as examples, because they are ostensibly so different according to standard 'liberal/illiberal' criteria, but may both be illuminated by parallels with the case in this dissertation.

Bob (2005) described how 'indigenization' was a trend in networks that originally had more immediately material goals (the Zapatistas and the Ogoni of Nigeria). More optimistically, 'indigenous rights' campaigns have been hailed as exemplary success stories of transnational activism (Brysk 2000; Perrault 2003) in which advocacy networks, organized around the United Nations and INGOs such as Survival International, have provided space for organization for local communities, enabling them to preserve autonomy and protect forest habitations and native cultural practices. However, this process has gone hand in hand with elements familiar from the story in this dissertation. As Andolina et al (2005) argue with respect to the Andean '*Allyu*' communities of Bolivia, the trade off for transnational connections may be an added emphasis on 'cultural authenticity', including rivalry within networks over which group is 'most authentic'. This cultural reification then gets reincorporated into market and state structures, perhaps at the expense of more 'modern' forms of incorporation into the state. As the authors put it (689):

Ethnodevelopment [the new transnational discourse] reifies links of contemporary indigenous peoples to traditional culture, instead of seeing indigenous cultures as particular manifestations of modernity

This romantic turn in indigenous politics has the paradoxical effect of tying indigenous communities to government and markets, not in the capacity of national citizens, but only on condition that they live up to, even *perform*, their particular indigenous identity<sup>331</sup>. This is particularly true of the 'Faustian Bargain' (Ginsberg 1991; Prins 2002) that some indigenous groups have made with the media, in another parallel to the anti GMO case: by appealing to Northern conceptions of "romantic

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<sup>331</sup> For example, through economies based on producing cultural items for western markets; and through incentives to *seem* truly indigenous/authentic in order to preserve a protected status vis a vis the state.

exoticism" (Prins 2002: 72) groups can get attention and achieve policy goals, but at the cost of potentially ossifying their own communities in the light of those romantic perspectives.

Transnational religious movements have been described by Castells (2004) as 'reactive', as opposed to the 'progressive' transnationalism of the Zapatistas or Seattle alter globalization protestors, but it is arguable that 'transnational romanticism' is a useful concept for analyzing the "bad transnationalism" of Al Qaeda and certain kinds of Christian evangelism, and that making parallels with the anti GMO network might help avoid both essentialist/Islamophobic explanations and complacent liberal typologies.

Philips (2011: 283), for example, describes transnational Jihadism in this way:

In contrast to mainstream Islamist opinion....the jihadists placed much greater emphasis on foreign malevolence in accounting for the *ummas's* travails....In recalling the imagined unity of the early caliphate the global jihadists sought to transcend the parochialism of their more nationally focused counterparts.

The irony here, which unfortunately Philips does not stress, is that global jihad was partly funded and 'seeded' by transnational (Saudi and American) sources (Mamdani 2004). The parallel with externally funded 'authenticity' in the anti GMO network presents itself. Redefining jihadists as 'transnational romantics' might also help alleviate the neoconservative emphasis in Philips' account, and others in the International Relations literature, on jihadism as a concerted attempt to overturn the norms of state sovereignty; romanticism with its emphasis on the spectacular and aestheticizing may have less ambitious aims.

An even better parallel in the area of religious transnationalism are Christian evangelical TANs in Africa. Kaoma (2009) and Buss (2003) have described how American churches and more particularly the Institute of Religion and Democracy (IRD) have directly funded African churches in the reciprocal expectation that they will support harsh anti gay legislation. The 'master frame' given to the African churches by foreign supporters (Kaoma 2009: 2) was 'anti imperialism' – in which homosexuality was

framed as an alien, western intrusion into authentic African culture. This was doubly ironic, since the IRD had previously opposed African liberation movements and of course, it was Victorian homophobia, not homosexuality that could best be described as an imperialist intrusion into African cultures (Kaoma 2009: 13). While foreign funded African churches' homophobia resonated with indigenous nationalist rhetoric, it exaggerated it, through a process of 'authenticity rivalry' similar to the battle between Prof. Nanjundaswamy and Vandana Shiva described in chapter five; churches could attract more funds (which were deposited directly in bishops' accounts, unlike the funds coming from more liberal denominations) by proclaiming a purer and more 'authentically African' position than their rivals<sup>332</sup>.

### **Categorizing Types of TANs**

If the above discussion points to the plausibility of romantic activism as a category, how does romantic transnational activism fit in to the overall range of organizations engaged in transnational advocacy?

The best way to specify the scope of this case study conceptually is to construct a series of tables, each representing an ideal type of TAN. These tables could be a resource for future research into TANs, opening up new kinds of research questions and encouraging a more comparative approach to the field of study.

The tables below classify TANs along several dimensions. One dimension is the degree to which the network(s) have a dialogical (Steinberg 1998) relation with a base, consisting of those people the

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<sup>332</sup> The strongest parallel might be drawn with Paarlberg's (2008) account of the anti GMO network in Africa, where, given even greater poverty and weaker organizations than in India, the 'external push' may have been more important in fostering anti GMO norms. On GMOs, as on gays, anti-imperialism acted as a useful master frame for romantic transnationalism in Africa.

TAN claims to be representing, whether they be indigenous peoples, Muslims of the world or small farmers. (This base does not include the 'mass membership' of groups like Greenpeace who are essentially consumers not participants of the organization's activities). The second dimension is whether 'mesomobilization' (Steinberg 1998) is prominent, where this term refers to an emphasis in the TAN's 'structural couplings' on the mass media and other organizations such as donor organizations that orient themselves around narratives produced by the mass media. The third dimension summarizes the type of 'brokerage' engaged in by the organization – meaning what kind of professional or non professional activity is devoted to building new linkages or expanding the scope of the movement. The fourth column in the tables tries to summarize the ideal-typical role the TAN plays in political life and the final column provides some real world examples of the type.

These categories are contested and contestable. The 'ideal typical characteristics' might be accepted by participants in some cases but not in others. Participants in 'romantic' networks would almost certainly deny the term about themselves<sup>333</sup>, while conservative critics of global governance (Rabkin 2007) have described the 'governance oriented' type as itself guilty of a form of romanticism<sup>334</sup>. However, it is the belief of the author that contestable categories are more likely to provoke debate and allow us to look at Tilly's 'big picture' than the extraction of mechanisms and processes that may be common to all types of TAN.

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<sup>333</sup> Although of course this is true of many categories used by political scientists, for example, 'terrorist', 'democratic', 'illiberal', 'conservative' even in many cases 'left' or 'right'.

<sup>334</sup> For Rabkin, (in an argument similar to that of Carl Schmitt summarized in chapter four) this is the romanticism of governance without the power to use 'legitimate' violence to enforce itself. Some on the 'old' left, such as Chandler (2005; 2009) would agree.

Table 6.1: Governance Oriented TAN

Ideal Type of TAN	Presence of a mass 'base'?	Degree of 'mesomobilization' activity: esp. engagement with mass media	Type of brokerage	Ideal typical characteristics of the TAN	Empirical Examples
Governance Oriented	No: linkages are openly restricted to international organizations, UN treaty bodies, epistemic communities etc. Relation to mass is overtly top-down representation <i>on behalf</i> of a client group.	Moderate to high: mass media mobilized to gain leverage in linkages with international organizations, large retailers, etc as in landmines or 'blood diamond' campaigns	Technocratic brokerage between advocates and the organizations they aim to 'tightly couple' with. Relations of 'expertise' developed, for example between blood diamond activists, UN organizations and retailers	Functions to expand the global reach of existing legal/technical norms to threatened or excluded groups or create new technical norms to make market transactions more transparent (e.g. the Kimberly Process for diamonds)	Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, ARCH-Vahini Gujarat (chapter four on dams), Land mines campaign, 'Blood diamond' and 'blood timber' campaigns, child soldier campaigns

Table 6.2: Romantic TAN

Ideal Type of TAN	Presence of a mass 'base'?	Degree of 'mesomobilization' activity: esp. engagement with mass media	Type of brokerage	Ideal typical characteristics of the TAN	Empirical Examples
Romantic	Yes, but not in dialogical interaction with the leadership. Base is represented rather than actively self-representing	High: focuses on couplings with mass media and donor organizations. Prestige and authenticity are derived from capacity to formulate narratives that resonate with these systems.	Multiple and opportunistic brokerage with a large diversity of organizations, markets, parties, donors etc (see chapter three)	Organization focuses on media representations that appeal to urban/middle class understandings of victim groups. Arguably not focused on political mediation/negotiation but on preserving their own right to represent those groups.	Anti GMOs, some indigenous rights campaigns, some anti logging and anti dams campaigns (NBA, chapter four), some global religious networks

Table 6.3: Grassroots TAN

Ideal Type of TAN	Presence of a mass 'base'?	Degree of 'mesomobilization' activity: esp. Engagement with mass media	Type of brokerage	Ideal typical characteristics of the TAN	Empirical Examples
Grassroots	Yes: arguably <i>only</i> a base exists, with limited professionalization	Varied: media used to disseminate ideas but main dialogic work is among 'cells' of the network with each other. Media linkages subordinated to primary mass mobilizations.	'Rhizomatic', leaderless response to structural conditions: therefore relies on non relational forms of diffusion rather than professional brokerage (hence status as true transnational <i>network</i> in doubt)	A genuinely bottom up response to top down forms of globalization, challenging existing norms and power structures	Occupy Wall Street and its imitators, Zapatistas/EZLN (contested)

Table 6.4: Global democratic TAN

Ideal Type of TAN	Presence of a mass 'base'?	Degree of 'mesomobilization' activity: esp. Engagement with mass media	Type of brokerage	Ideal typical characteristics of the TAN	Empirical Examples
Global democratic	Yes: formalized mass membership	Low: institutionalized status at global level and power to mobilize through labor action means less reliance on media	Formal procedures and structures link base to global negotiating 'head'	Represents members from multiple countries at global venues in order to negotiate with capital/global sources of power	Transnational trades unions in North America (Kay 2011)

How can these tables help make sense of transnational advocacy/activism in contemporary politics, and how can this kind of categorization help specify Charles Tilly's 'big questions' about professionalization versus democratization of social movements cited in chapter one and earlier in this chapter? Four advantages of using this kind of tabulation are laid out below.

Firstly, these tabulations might clarify the great diversity of TANs even *within* particular issue areas. Campaigns against dams and logging for example include both romantic and governance oriented TANs and provide a rich field for comparison between these types in terms of impact, endurance and function. Chapter four discussed the differences in approach taken by different strands of the dams

movement in Gujarat (the ARCH Vahini) and Maharashtra (the Narmada Bachau Andolan, NBA). The former organization displayed many of the characteristics of a governance oriented TAN, with its close ties to the World Bank (via Oxfam UK) and its focus on using those ties to achieve particular resettlement goals. The NBA on the other hand arguably developed over time into a 'transnational romantic network' with a structural focus on media spectacle and celebrity support and an ideological emphasis on the impossibility of compromise and the defense of indigenous 'ways of life'<sup>335</sup>. Similarly, in their seminal work on TANs Keck and Sikkink (1998: 150-165) describe competing strands of the anti logging network in Malaysia, which included romantic networks that emphasized threatened nomadic ways of life (155) and governance oriented networks (155-160) that concentrated on building alliances with UN organizations, the Malaysian government and on organizing specific boycott campaigns of northern retailers. The tabulations and typology invented here offer a way to compare such cases and formulate questions about why romantic campaigns might endure and come to predominate in some cases (Narmada) but not in others (Malaysia).

Secondly, the tabulation might help to illuminate contentious cases, which can be conceptualized as lying on the 'border' between categories. The Zapatistas/EZLN of Chiapas, Mexico are one such case, lying on a border between romantic and grassroots categories. While Bob's analysis, which focuses on the 'mesomobilization' aspect of the group (2005) would place them in the romantic box, other scholars such as Castells (2004) and Oleson (2005) would place them in the grassroots category. The criteria outlined in these tables might help researchers focus on changes in groups like the Zapatistas over time; for example Castells' account suggests a revisionist reading of the Zapatistas in which the initial political failure of the movement led to a recalibration toward romantic positioning and mesomobilization. The border between romantic and governance oriented networks is likely to be even more populous, as suggested in the discussion on anti dams campaigns above.

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<sup>335</sup> See also Mallaby's (2004: 261-285) account of the campaign against the Qinghai dam project in Tibet as an example of a campaign that fits the romantic profile.

The third advantage of these tables is that they avoid conceptually superficial categorizations of TANs as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ or ‘liberal’ or ‘illiberal’<sup>336</sup> or the more abstract categorizations in Heins (2008) and Keck and Sikkink (1998) such as the prominence of ‘short causal chains’ or ‘instances of harm’ in the TAN’s repertoire of claims. These criteria would probably fail to distinguish between governance oriented and romantic TANs, which both tend to emphasize ‘instances of harm’ and ‘short causal chains’, but with very different organizational *intentions*: for governance oriented TANs the intention is to ‘tightly couple’ with technocratic global organizations and become the enforcement or monitoring arm of those organizations, while for romantic TANs the target is the mass media and the larger array of organizations (chapter three) that respond to the production of romantic narratives. In addition to more clearly specifying such differences these new categorizations allow for exploration of networks not generally studied under the umbrella of transnational activism, for example, as suggested above, the case of global Islamist networks, some of which (Al Qaeda) would fit in the romantic category, while others (The Muslim Brotherhood perhaps) may lie on the border of the romantic and grassroots categories. By deliberately eschewing liberal categories that focus on whether networks advocate violence or whether they embrace certain formal democratic norms, these categorizations allow us to ask provocative questions about the *similarities* between the tactics, narratives and world views of activists generally seen as occupying opposed positions on a left-right spectrum, for example Prof Nanjundaswamy and the late Osama Bin Laden.

Finally, the tables help us to address Tilly’s worries about the class and distributional aspects of the new transnationalized social movements. Looking at the population of each box provides one answer to those questions: not many TANs are currently likely to be placed in the two ‘bottom up’ or mass oriented boxes: the grassroots and the global democratic. While Kay (2011) makes a case for North American transnational labor cooperation in response to NAFTA, there are few instances of transnational activism that manage to square the circle of mass membership and cross border organization; this category of global democratic TAN, where institutionalization and formal

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<sup>336</sup> As is arguably the case in Buss (2003), and in accordance with Snyder’s methodological suggestions (2006).

membership systems are in place may be the most sparsely populated type, but labor unions with their pre-existing institutional strengths are probably the most likely future catalysts for this kind of transnational politics. The grassroots category is a contested one, as discussed above. The most viable contender for membership would be the recent (2011) 'Occupy.....' protests, where transnational diffusion seems to have occurred without the need for a professionalized activist elite to broker that diffusion, and where there have been 'boots on the ground' taking real risks of arrest or police violence. In the case of 'Occupy.....' media linkages ('mesomobilization') have *followed* mass action rather than (as in the case of the anti GMO network) professional brokers organizing media spectacles from the top down (as in the case of Nanjundaswamy and the KRRS in Europe described in chapter five).

The boxes which are more populated with cases at this juncture are the first two: the governance oriented and the romantic. These boxes are essentially peopled by middle and, more precisely, upper middle class activists adept at complex brokerage, and while the aims of governance oriented TANs may be progressive in the sense of a liberal institutionalism committed to efficiency, transparency and the promotion of individual human rights norms, they are not mass based and are unlikely to be sources of a (Polanyian, or any other) ideological challenge to structural inequalities or the (perhaps ill specified) nexus of global neoliberalism.

Likewise, romantic TANs are fundamentally middle/upper middle class in their world view, a world view that focuses (as chapter two argued) not on issues such as fair prices or access to modern institutions but on constructing a narrative of forsaken community. However, unlike the 'grassroots Gandhians' described in chapter four, who eschew media work for long term community building, transnational romantics focus instead on mass mediated forms of community and themselves remain at a paternalistic distance from the 'masses' they claim to represent. As Harris (2009: 123)

puts it in his analysis of Indian middle class activists, they “engage in such activism whilst people of the informal working class engage in politics”.<sup>337</sup>

The possible global outcome of this has been described by Anderson (1998: 45)<sup>338</sup> as the “quasi-planetary dispersion of bounded identities”. He argues that new transnational identities (he was thinking primarily of ‘long distance nationalism’ in diasporic networks) tend towards the reification of identity – what he terms ‘bound seriality’ – in common, not with the bottom-up, liberating aspect of early nationalist modernity (the ‘unbound seriality’ carried through media such as the newspaper) but with the classificatory aspect of modernity associated with ‘the census, the map and the museum’. Certainly chapter five’s account of the self-representations of Indian ‘peasant farmers’ in Europe chimes with Anderson’s account of bound seriality, and the description could be extended to the self representations of Amazonian indigenous elites to the mass media and to the media representations of religious community put forward by Al Qaeda or ‘global family values’ activists.

### **Possible Future Scenarios**

One answer to Charles Tilly’s question then, is that the hope for a democratizing trend in global social movements depends on future conditions favoring the growth of grassroots or global democratic TANs. In the optimistic scenario, given greater literacy and access to the internet, grassroots TANs might become more common, some of which might go on to crystallize into global democratic organizations, especially as globally convergent wages cause similarly placed groups of workers to become conscious of potential horizontal solidarities. From their different starting point

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<sup>337</sup> For a recent illustration see Arundhati Roy’s denunciation of Indian anti corruption activist Anna Hazare’s hunger strikes and accompanying mass movement as being ‘undemocratic’ (“Anna Hazare is not Secular”, *Times of India*. 23 August 2011), which could be seen as a middle class activist’s response to a mass movement threatening to intrude on issues previously monopolized by the de-politicized sphere of elite campaigning.

<sup>338</sup> See also Markell (2007) for a theoretical critique of a politics based on the recognition of ‘bounded’ identities. Anderson assumes (1998: 74) that non ethnic activist identities will be transient ; but that is an assumption less easy to make 12 years later, where indigenous, peasant, and other global activist generated ‘bounded’ identities seem to have staying power, at least at the level of elite representations.

governance oriented TANs might mutate into global democratic organizations as their clients become better able to represent themselves. At the same time the appeal of transnational romanticism might fade, as transnational movements such as the Arab Spring and Occupy..... reinvent a 'modernist', universalist politics based on demands for more inclusive institutions rather than on the media representation of nostalgic, bounded communities.

In the pessimistic scenario, increasing inequalities *within* countries actually multiply the opportunities for romantic transnationalism, with a small, urban upper middle class monopolizing the representation of the *excluded* in an increasingly globalized and interconnected media/advocacy/donor complex. Domestic activists (like the former Shetkari Sanghatana members described in chapter five) will find themselves increasingly drawn into the ambit of these transnational romantic networks. At the same time romantic networks will comfortably coincide with governance oriented networks that focus on narrow specialties and work as de facto implementers of technocratic global governance and corporate social responsibility.

This study of the anti GMO network in India has hopefully provided some criteria that might be useful when exploring these alternative scenarios. Like all social networks this network creates sunk costs, 'lock-ins' and positive feedback loops that set advocacy on a particular set of tracks which might be hard to change. The critical analysis of such networks, with an eye to their longer term implications is therefore important for anyone concerned with the future of social movements.

## Appendix 1: List of Field Interviews Carried Out

1. Prof. Chanresekhara Rao, Hyderabad. Dec 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007
2. Abdul Qalam, Deccan Development Society, Hyderabad, Dec 5<sup>th</sup> 2007
3. Kavitha Kuruganthi, Centre for Sustainable Agriculture, Hyderabad, Dec 5<sup>th</sup> 2007
4. Dr K C Suri, Hyderabad University, Dec 15<sup>th</sup> 2007
5. Narasinha Reddy, Eenadu Newspaper, Hyderabad, Dec 20<sup>th</sup> 2007
6. Malla Reddy, AP Farmers' Union (CPI), Dec 21<sup>st</sup> 2007
7. YS Vivekananda Reddy, AP agriculture ministry, Hyderabad, Jan 4<sup>th</sup> 2008
8. Anil Kumar, Confederation of Kisan Organizations, Hyderabad, Jan 8<sup>th</sup> 2008
9. Dr K C Suri, Hyderabad University, Jan 12<sup>th</sup> 2008
10. Dr Milind Kindlikar, Hyderabad, Jan 14<sup>th</sup>, 2008
11. Representative of AP Seeds Corporation, Guntur, AP, Jan 16<sup>th</sup> 2008
12. Ajit Kuma, Director of Agriculture, Guntur, AP, Jan 16<sup>th</sup> 2008
13. Dr Narayanam, ANGROU, Guntur, AP, Jan 16<sup>th</sup> 2008
14. Kiran Sakkhari, Deccan Development Society, Hyderabad, Jan 18<sup>th</sup> 2008
15. Seed Dealer, Guntur, AP, Jan 21<sup>st</sup> 2008
16. Mr Murali, MARI, Warangal, AP, Jan 23<sup>rd</sup> 2008
17. Mr P Damodar, SYO, Waranal, AP, Jan 23<sup>rd</sup> 2008
18. Prof. Kameshwara Rao, Bangalore, Karnataka, Jan 26<sup>th</sup> 2008
19. Green Peace Street worker, Bangalore, Karnataka, Jan 26<sup>th</sup> 2008
20. Dr Ramprasad, Green Foundation Bangalore, Karnataka, Jan 27<sup>th</sup> 2008
21. Prof. Deshpande, ISEC, Bangalore, Karnataka, Jan 27<sup>th</sup> 2008
22. Rajesh Krishnan, Greenpeace India, Bangalore, Karnataka, Jan 28<sup>th</sup> 2008
23. Mr P Babu, ICRA, Bangalore, Karnataka, Jan 28<sup>th</sup> 2008
24. Cotton farmers off road near Warangal, AP, Feb 2<sup>nd</sup> 2008
25. Mr Lingaiah, CROPS Jangaon, AP and Eenabhavi AP, Feb 2<sup>nd</sup> 2008
26. Raj Ketkar, Vice President, Monsanto India, Mumbai, Maharashtra, Feb 4<sup>th</sup> 2008
27. Cotton farmers in Siddapuram, AP, Feb 6<sup>th</sup> 2008
28. Seed dealer in Siddapuram, AP, Feb 6<sup>th</sup> 2008
29. CPI (M) field worker, Siddapuram, AP, Feb 6<sup>th</sup> 2008
30. Cotton farmer in Thogarrai hamlet, AP, Feb 6<sup>th</sup> 2008
31. Laxman Misra, Monsanto-Mahyco, Hyderabad, AP, Feb 8<sup>th</sup> 2008
32. Arun Ambatipudi, Chetna Organics, Hyderabad, AP, Feb 9<sup>th</sup> 2008
33. Representative of Nuziveedu Seeds, Hyderabad, AP, Feb 10<sup>th</sup> 2008
34. K S Gopal, CEC Hyderabad, AP, Feb 10<sup>th</sup> 2008
35. Dr Khadi, Director, CICR Nagpur, Maharashtra, Feb 15<sup>th</sup> 2008
36. Dr Kranthi, CICR Nagpur, Maharashtra, Feb 15<sup>th</sup> 2008
37. Dr Agrawal, Politics Dept Nagpur University, , Maharashtra, Feb 16<sup>th</sup> 2008
38. Dr Deshpande, Economics Dept, Nagpur University, Feb 16<sup>th</sup> 2008
39. N B Nisal, Nagpur, Maharashtra, Feb 18<sup>th</sup> 2008
40. Dr Karte, Dhara Mitra, Wardha Maharashtra Feb 19<sup>th</sup> 2008

41. Vijay Jawandhia, Wardha Maharashtra Feb 19<sup>th</sup> 2008
42. Kishor Tiwari, VJAS, Yavatmal, Maharashtra, Feb 21<sup>st</sup> 2008
43. Mr Khandewale, Nagpur, Maharashtra, Feb 22<sup>nd</sup> 2008
44. Vivek Deshpande, Indian Express, Nagpur, Maharashtra, Feb 22<sup>nd</sup> 2008
45. Mr Murali, MARI, Waranal, AP, Feb 26<sup>th</sup> 2008
46. Sar Panch (Village Head) Siddhapur, AP, March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2008
47. MARI organic cotton project officers and farmers, Sadyatanda, Rolleakal, AP March 4<sup>th</sup> 2008
48. Farmers near Sadyatanda (see 47), AP, March 4<sup>th</sup> 2008
49. Prof A R Reddy, GEAC, phone interview, March 5<sup>th</sup> 2008
50. Mr K Ventateshwarle, The Hindu, Hyderabad, AP, March 6<sup>th</sup> 2008
51. ISAAA, New Delhi
52. Prof Anand Kumar, PUSA/IARI New Delhi, March 15<sup>th</sup> 2008
53. Devinder Sharma, New Delhi, March 16<sup>th</sup> 2008
54. Scientists at University of Agricultural Science, Bangalore, March 19<sup>th</sup> 2008
55. University of Hyderabad Conference on Biotechnology, Jan 10<sup>th</sup> 2009
  - a. Rasheed Sulaiman, CRISP, Hyderabad
  - b. Chandrasekhara Rao, CESS, Hyderabad
  - c. N Raghuram, Indraprastha University, New Delhi
  - d. T Laxmi, Timbaktu Collective, Karnataka
56. Malla Reddy, AP Farmers' Union (CPI), Hyderabad, AP, Jan 12<sup>th</sup> 2009
57. Dr Kodandaram, Nizam College, Hyderabad, AP, Jan 13<sup>th</sup> 2009
58. Prof D N Dhanagare, Lectures and interviews at Osmania University, Hyderabad, Jan 20<sup>th</sup> 2009
59. Mr Narayan, formerly of Lokayan, Hyderabad, AP, Jan 21<sup>st</sup> 2009
60. Kiran Sakkhari, Deccan Development Society, Hyderabad, Feb 1<sup>st</sup> 2009
61. Changal Reddy, Confed.. Of Indian Farmers' Associations, and other participants at meeting of CIFA, Hyderabad, Feb 3<sup>rd</sup> 2009
62. Prof D N Dhanagare, Pune, Maharashtra, Feb 5<sup>th</sup> 2009
63. Dr Palshikar, Pune University Political Science Dept. Pune, Maharashtra, Feb 6<sup>th</sup> 2009
64. Pradeep Chavan, Kalpavriksh, Pune, Maharashtra, Feb 10<sup>th</sup> 2009
65. Pradeep Apta, Pune, Maharashtra, Feb 10<sup>th</sup> 2009
66. Prof Anitha Ramanna, University of Pune, Political Science Dept. Pune Maharashtra, Feb 11<sup>th</sup> 2009
67. Vinay Hardikar, Pune Maharashtra, Feb 11<sup>th</sup> 2009
68. Profs Aruna and Sanjeev Pendse, Mumbai, Maharashtra, Feb 12<sup>th</sup> 2009
69. National Centre for Advocacy Studies, Pune, Maharashtra, Feb 14<sup>th</sup> 2009
70. Ms Lata P M , NCAS, Pune, Maharashtra, Feb 14<sup>th</sup> 2009
71. Mr Ghose, HIVOS, Bangalore, Karnataka, Feb 19<sup>th</sup> 2009
72. Dr A R Vasavi, Centre for Advanced Studies, Bangalore, Karnataka, Feb 20<sup>th</sup> 2009
73. Dr Anil Kumar, ISEC, Bangalore, Karnataka, Feb 20<sup>th</sup> 2009
74. Prof. Joan Mencher, lecture at ISEC, Bangalore, Karnataka, Feb 20<sup>th</sup> 2009
75. Mr Veerasangaiah and other officers, KRRS, Bangalore, Karnataka, Feb 21<sup>st</sup> 2009
76. Prof Basavaraj, Mysore University, Mysore, Karnataka, Feb 22<sup>nd</sup> 2009
77. Prof Assadi, Mysore University, Mysore, Karnataka, Feb 22<sup>nd</sup> 2009
78. P Babu, ICRA, Bangalore, Karnataka, Feb 23<sup>rd</sup> 2009

79. Mr Venkateshwarlu, The Hindu, Hyderabad, Feb 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009.
80. National Alliance of Peoples' Movements conference (various people), Nagpur, Maharashtra, Feb 25<sup>th</sup> 2009
81. Mr P Chenniaha, Federation of Agricultural Workers, Nagpur, Maharashtra, Feb 25<sup>th</sup>, 2009.
82. Chandrakant Wankhade, Nagpur, Maharashtra, Feb 26<sup>th</sup> 2009.
83. Saroj Kashikar and family members, Wardha, Maharashtra, Feb 27<sup>th</sup> 2009.
84. Arun Kashikar, Nagpur, Maharashtra, Feb 27<sup>th</sup>, 2009.
85. The hon. Sharad Joshi, phone interview, Feb 28<sup>th</sup>, 2009.
86. Barun Mitra, Liberty Institute, New Delhi, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009
87. Vandana Shiva, Navdanya, New Delhi, March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2009
88. Suman Sahai, Gene Campaign, New Delhi, March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009.
89. Prof. Deepak Pental, Delhi University, New Delhi, March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2009.
90. Dr Doug Parr, Greenpeace UK, London, UK, January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007.
91. Sue Mayer, Gene Watch, Derby, UK, February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

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