

Ever heard of Hood Robin?

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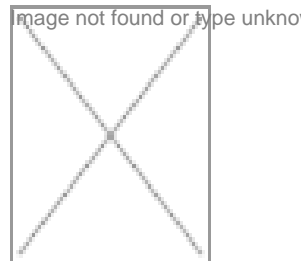
Science should be developed to address the concerns of the poor. It should not be masqueraded.

For Sumitra Behera, 35, a resident of Badibahal village in Angul district of Orissa, selling her one month old daughter for a paltry sum of Rs 10 (approximately 21 US cents), was perhaps the only way to feed her two other daughters – Urbashi, 10, and Banbasi, 2. Her husband had died about eight months ago. The shocking reflection of the harsh ground realities that prevail throughout the countryside, and Orissa is no exception, will however soon be buried under denials and allegations.

Sumitra Behera's supreme sacrifice comes at a time when Ingo Potrykus, the scientist who invented a genetically altered rice carrying a miniscule percentage of vitamin A, demanded that opponents of genetically engineered crops should be made to stand trial in an international court. "I would make them responsible, have them in an international court and get them to justify the pain and suffering they are inflicting on so many people."

The Switzerland-based Dr Potrykus believes that the "Golden Rice" he has produced will save almost one million children a year from going blind. This prompted the ever eager Rockefeller Foundation, European Union and the Swiss government to provide US \$ 2.6 million (approximately Rs 12.5 crore) over seven years to the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) with the aim to engineer the pro vitamin A genes into the local varieties of rice.

If only the same amount of research funding had gone to feed the hungry, over one million impoverished could have been



pulled out of extreme hunger in the next seven years. In other words, Dr Potrykus' research has deprived at least one million hungry of their basic fundamental rightâ€”food. Snatching food literally from the hands of the hungry is perhaps the greatest human crime. How will Ingo Potrykus and his supporters like to be treated for exploiting even the hungry for the sake of amassing more profits for the commercial companies? I leave it to him and his tribe to provide the answer.

In all fairness, Dr Potrykus is not the only one. What about the 2,000 scientists, including several Nobel laureates, who signed the AgBioView Foundation's appeal in 2001, urging the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) not to destroy a mere 3,000 tones of genetically modified rice and instead export it to the hungry millions? Their resolve for hunger vanished when told that they should come and help distribute 45 million tones of surplus food grains, much of it rotting in the open in India. After all, if they had joined hands, India could have succeeded partially in removing hunger. With 320 million hungry, India alone has one-third of the world's hungry.

What about the Royal Society that castigates the critics of biotechnology, and admonishes the media for printing anything that goes against the commercial interests of the biotech companies? What about the Nuffield Council on Bioethics that unethically appoints a working group of experts, all known supporters of biotechnology industry, so as to convince the British government of its 'moral duty' to invest in GM crops research for the sake of developing countries? All of them, the so-called distinguished academic institutions and forums, swear in the name of hunger and malnutrition, but only if it adds to the profit of the GM companies. If it does not bring profit for the companies, let the hungry go to hell.

Let us hear what Prof. Derek Burke, a former vice chancellor of the East Anglia University (UK) and a former chairman of the Advisory Committee for Novel Foods and Processes, has to say about GM technology: " ...the consequence of the loss of this technology for society is the loss of the ability to create new wealth. It's my grandchildren that I'm concerned about. How will they earn their living in 20 years? The answer may lie partly in your hands."

Prof. Burke is one of the authors of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics recently released controversial report on the use of genetically modified crops for the developing countries. The report tries to create an illusion as if the interest of the British scientists is the welfare of the poor and hungry in the developing countries. In reality, they are worried about the future of their own scientists, their own children. And you think these are the Robin Hood's of the 21st century? You think they feel compassionately for the hungry and the dying? Think again.

Gone are the days when the legendary Robin Hood would rob the rich and give it to the poor. It is just the opposite now. The rich and elite are sparing no effort to rob the poor, even building profits over the starving millions. Worse still, hungry are being robbed of what ever little they live with, ironically under the emotional and scientific cover of eradicating hunger and starvation. These are the Hood Robinsâ€”always willing to exploit the poor and hungry for the sake of corporate interest.

The Hood Robins change jobs back and forth between corporate agribusiness and the Agriculture Department until the two are indistinguishable. Hood Robins masquerade as scientists, bureaucrats, as educated entrepreneur and of course as representatives of GM food companies. They have successfully co-opted the public sector university research system in a way that tax dollars support research, which ultimately enhances the company profits. They help the GM companies spend \$119 million for lobbying in 1998 in the US alone. What for? "Educating" the American politicians about the virtues of genetic engineering. Not only the American politician, they even set up an NGO that regularly imparts orientation courses to the judges from the developing countries.

Scientific research is rigged, alarming evidence of health dangers is covered up and intense political pressure silences the sane voice of dissidents. You have probably heard of the four scientists who dared to stand for the cause of 'good science', their voice was silenced for the sake of the neoclassic model of 'sound science', another name for corporate controlled science.

- *Arpad Pusztai - Consultant, Norwegian Food Sciences Institute, formerly Principal Scientific Officer, Rowett Institute, Aberdeen, Scotland.*
Discovery - Cytological and histological damage to rodents fed with transgenic (genetically modified) potatoes.

Suppression - Dr Pusztai was fired from his position of 30 years as a scientist at the Rowett Institute in Scotland. His research files were seized, including in a break-in at his home. Major campaign of discreditation.

- *John Losey - Associate Professor, Cornell University.*

Discovery - Damage and death in Monarch butterfly caterpillars fed with pollen from transgenic corn.

Suppression - Promotion of research targeted towards discreditation of his discoveries. Media campaign.

- *Tyrone Hayes - Associate Professor, University of California, Berkeley
Discovery - Damage to tissues, organs and ecology of amphibian reproduction due to low levels of Atrazine, the most widely used chemical in the US agriculture.*

*Suppression - Attempts at suppressing, delaying and derailing research. Targeted research to discredit his findings.
Discreditation campaign.*

- *Ignacio Chapela - Assistant Professor, University of California, Berkeley*

Discovery - Genetic contamination of maize by transgenic (GMO) DNA in its center of origin in Oaxaca, Mexico.

Suppression - Attempts at suppressing, delaying and derailing research. Direct threats. Coordinated, industry-funded international discred-itation campaign. Not granted a research extension.

Distortions, omissions, cover-ups and bribes are used to promote an unhealthy and risky technology and that too with the 'pious' intention of eradicating hunger. Hood Robin's exploits surely read like adventure stories.

Meanwhile, Sumitra Behera has already spent the 11 cents (not enough to buy a bottle of mineral water) that she got for selling her one month old baby. She is probably planning to sell her second daughter, Banbasi, aged 2. That's the only way she can keep herself alive, fighting her daily battle with acute hunger and deprivation. She is in a way lucky that she continues to survive against all odds. Nearly 24,000 hungry like her die every day the world over waiting for food. Not knowing that Hood Robins have siphoned off the money that was meant to provide them with food.

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