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In Depth: Basmati – Farming for all

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The **Delhi High Court** has set aside the **Central Government's decision to restrict the production of *Basmati* rice to certain regions** in the Indo-Gangetic plain. It has also **struck down** the decision to **restrict the registration** of ***Basmati*** varieties for certified and foundation **seeds** to areas under the Geographical Indication (**GI**) for ***Basmati* rice** i.e **certain areas** in the Indo-Gangetic plain. The High Court's verdict came on the **Madhya Pradesh government's plea** to include 13 districts in the State under the Geographical Indications (GI) category for basmati rice.

- The **Ministry of Agriculture** had through **two** Office Memorandums (**OM**) of May 2008 and February 2014 **confined the GI certification for basmati to the rice** grown in the Indo-Gangetic plains **in the states of** Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and parts of Uttar Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir.

- **OM-I** expressly provided that it would be necessary to ensure the linkage between the variety and the Geographical Indication and only Basmati varieties with prescribed characteristic grown in Indo-Gangetic region would qualify for such description.
- **OM-II** ensured that the registration of Basmati varieties for certified and foundation seeds is not undertaken outside geographical area detained under the GI for Basmati rice.
- The **Madhya Pradesh government argued that both orders were outside the scope of the Seeds Act, 1966.**
 - There is no power which is given to any authority including the Agriculture ministry under the Seeds Act to limit somebody from producing a certain quality of seed.
 - Any part of the country can produce Basmati Rice using Basmati seeds. However, whether they can call it basmati rice or not is a question which is to be addressed under the GI act.
- The government also contended that the center's order encroach upon its power to pass laws in relation to **Agriculture, which is a state subject.**

Basmati Rice

- It is one of the best known varieties of rice all across the globe.
- It is a **long grain rice which has its origin from India and some parts of Pakistan.**
- It has a unique position in the rice world due to its price, fragrance, grain morphology as well as quality.
 - Basmati rice has a **unique fragrance and flavour** caused due to the presence of a chemical called **2-acetyl-1-pyrroline**.
 - This chemical is found in basmati rice at about 90 parts per million (ppm) which is 12 times more than non-basmati rice varieties.
- Basmati rice needs **specific climatic conditions** to grow which is why it is cultivated in selected regions of India.

It is cultivated in the states of Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and western Uttar Pradesh.

Basmati vs Non-Basmati Rice

- **Basmati** is a **long grain** rice. The **non-basmati rice comes in all different shapes and sizes** – long, slender, short and thick, bead and round.
- **Basmati** has a characteristic **fragrance** and flavor while **non-basmati** varieties, do **not have an aroma.**
- **Basmati** is also available in **white and brown versions** depending on the extent of the milling process. Like wine and cheese, the older basmati gets the better its flavor and aroma. Hence the **aged Basmati costs higher** than the recent productions.

- **Basmati rice becomes almost double its size on cooking.** Such a significant increase in size **cannot be seen in non-basmati varieties.** This makes basmati variety one of the highly demanded rice in the world.
- **Yield of Basmati rice from the agricultural land is almost half the non-basmati varieties.** This is also one of the reasons for Basmati's higher costs.

Production of Basmati Rice in India

- **India is the largest producer of Basmati rice** with about 70 per cent share in global production.
- Basmati rice constitutes one of **India's significant exports** both in terms of **soft power and hard money.**
 - India is leading exporter of Basmati rice in the global market.
 - During 2016-17, India exported 40,00,471.56 MT of Basmati Rice.
 - Major Export Destinations in 2016-17 included Saudi Arabia, Iran, United Arab Emirates, Iraq and Kuwait.
 - According to a report, the Indian Basmati rice industry is on the verge of clocking its highest ever export of around 30,000 crore rupees in the financial year 2019.
- India has always been involved in protecting the name Basmati as a geographic indicator. In other words, Basmati is a term that should be restricted to the product from its geographic location.

Geographical Indication(GI)

- It is an **insignia on products** having a unique geographical origin and evolution over centuries with regard to its special quality or reputed attributes.
- It is a **mark of authenticity** and ensures that registered authorized users or at least those residing inside the geographic territory are allowed to use the popular product names.

Benefits of GI Tag

- It provides **legal protection** to Indian Geographical Indications thus preventing unauthorized use of the registered GIs by others.
- It **promotes economic prosperity** of producers of goods produced in a geographical territory.
- The GI protection in India leads to **recognition of the product in other countries thus boosting exports.**

Seeds Act, 1966

- The Parliament passed the Seeds Act in the year 1966 to provide legal framework around **seed certification** and make good quality seeds available to the cultivators.
It was effectively promulgated under the **entry 33 of the concurrent list of the Constitution**.
- Under this act, seed rules were framed and notified in the year 1968 and systematic seed certification got started in India in the year 1969.
- It is part of the list of laws which are **part of the Essential Commodities Act**.
Paddy is treated as an essential commodity.
- It **applies to the whole of India including Jammu & Kashmir**.
- It states the definition of a seed and a crop.
- The act **covers seeds of food crops and oil crops**.
It also covers cotton seeds and seeds of cattle fodder and all types of vegetative propagating material.
- The act provides for establishment of a Central Seed Committee to advise states in seed related matters.
- It also provides for establishment of Seed Certification Agencies in the states, Seed Certification Boards and State Seed Testing Laboratories.
- It sets out what shall be a seed variety which is notified legally under the act.
- The act **imposes restrictions on import and export of seeds** of notified varieties which means any variety imported or exported should meet the **minimum limits of seed germination and purity**.
- It also frames **rules for the sale of certified seeds of declared crops and their varieties** and appoints Seed Analysts and Crop Inspectors to check quality in the field.
- The act also **provides for actions to be taken against individuals** and companies that violate the provisions of the act and interfere in the work of Seed Inspectors.

The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA)

- It was established by the Government of India under the **Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority Act**, passed by the Parliament in December, 1985.
- It is a statutory body under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry** and is the apex organization engaged in work related to the development of export of agricultural products and processed food from India.
- It is **responsible for putting in place a system for administration of GI** and authentication of the product in India and abroad.