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## **"Seeds of Discord": Brinjal Seed Sovereignty movement in India**

### **Synopsis**

This project seeks to understand social activism by theorizing that varied conceptions of sovereignty make claims within social movements like Brinjal seed sovereignty movement in India. Intellectual property laws not only aid in organizing the claims of economic life, it also promotes custody or control of things. Scholars have identified that the law concerning intellectual property rights is embedded in the notion of the "romantic author," which they indicate is an amalgamation of property and sovereignty. Therefore, the notion of sovereignty becomes crucial in understanding biodiversity activism. Scholarship on biodiversity activism in India has acknowledged contribution of multiple players in the process of mobilizing of movements. This project identifies three different players, namely the nation state, ecological group "Navdanya<sup>1</sup>," and the indigenous farmers. Previous scholarships have highlighted how the nation as well as the ecological group (Navdanya) conceives sovereignty. This research project questions whether there are varied indigenous conceptions of sovereignty that are making claims in the seed movement. Data for this project will be collected through qualitative in depth semi structured interviews, focus group discussions and via discourse analysis of relevant newspaper articles. Data coding and analysis will follow to understand the overlap of sovereignty and social movements.

### **Framing research questions**

Scholarships on social movements have proposed myriad different theorization that range from ethical, social, to economical and physical aspects of movement (Castells, 2012; Tsing, 2005). In *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, Anna L. Tsing (2005) counters the perception that globalized movement of liberalism removes layers of cultural superstition, distinction, and hierarchy to create frictionless world. Instead, she argues that globalization<sup>2</sup> is not about homogenizing and proposes the metaphor friction to understanding the diverse and conflicting social interactions that make up the contemporary world. Further, Tsing through her conception of scales explains how universals like, knowledge and freedom are conceived in various scale making projects. Her research on the Indonesian rainforest movements show the presence of multiple players, each of whom in their attempt to understand certain universals are actively engaged in their own scale making process. Manuel Castells (2012) in his book *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social movements in the Internet age* argues that the internet has created a 'space of autonomy' for the exchange of information and the sharing of feelings of collective outrage and hope. His account signifies that internet technologies play a role in rapid

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<sup>1</sup> [Navdanya](#) is initiated as a program of the Research Foundation for science, Technology and Ecology (RFSTE), a participatory research initiative founded by world-renowned scientist and environmentalist Dr. Vandana Shiva, to provide direction and support to environmental activism.

<sup>2</sup> Globalization has been defined by many different scholars in many different ways, this project will use the Tsing's (2005) definition, which states "globalization means corporate consolidation, the standardization of world markets, and the deference of national governments to transnational business demands" (p. 85).

mobilization of people and coordination of action. However, Castells fails to recognize the complex relationship between social movements and new technologies, which is defined by complex dialectics between transformation and continuity, technical and social, and between old and new political repertoires of political action and media activism. Tsing (2005) explains collaboration does not mean simple sharing of information, nor does it indicate that all collaborators share a common goal. Instead, the standardizing of knowledge or goals suppresses certain truths that are incompatible with the universal.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, as Tsing (2005) indicates to understand social movements it is necessary to understand how individual actors translate ideologies and meanings as they construct their agency in social movements.

This study examines a recent activism in India, the Brinjal Seed sovereignty movement ("Brinjal Satyagraha," n.d), which was initiated in July 2009 as part of the Seed sovereignty movement. Following Mahatma Gandhi's inspiration from the Salt Satyagraha,<sup>4</sup> Gandhi's non-violent protest against the British salt monopoly in colonial India, Navdanya declared the launch of "Seed sovereignty movement" against Seed Laws and Patent Laws ("navdanya," n.d.). These laws seek to make sharing and saving of seed a crime by making seed the "property" of companies like Monsanto,<sup>5</sup> and forcing indigenous farmers to pay royalties for what was their (India's) collective heritage (Sunder, 2007). One of the key players of the seed sovereignty movement, ecological group Navdanya, demands that Indian laws should not legalize patents on seed and food, and should review Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property's (TRIP) in order to exclude patents on seed and food ("navdanya," n.d.). The group pledged to protect sovereignty to save native seeds and grow food freely without MNCs domination and control. Their mission statement is "We have received the precious gift of biodiversity and seeds from nature and our ancestors and we pledge to protect our rich biological heritage and fundamental freedom to save and exchange seeds" ("navdanya," n.d.). Brinjal seed sovereignty movement is an activism against intellectual property rights, therefore in order to recognize how multiple actors of the movement comprehend intellectual property it is necessary to understand how each actor individually conceives meanings and interpret intellectual property from their perspective.

Patents and the rhetoric of "ownership society" seeks to own, control, monopolize everything (water, cells, genes, animals, plants) in which life has no intrinsic worth, integrity or subject hood (Boyle, 1996). James Boyle (1996) explains that intellectual property (IP) rights are fed by the conceit of romantic authorship. He states, "The author vision blinds us to the importance of the commons—to the importance of the raw material from which information products are constructed" (Boyle, 1996, p. xiv). Further, he posits the notion of sovereignty is integrated with the idea of romantic author. This is because IP rights assign rights to certain parties to control information thereby providing them sovereignty, while foreclosing certain other uses takes away power from others (Boyle, 1996). Additionally, Rosemary J. Coombe asserts that IP holders achieve sovereignty, which she claims if affectively utilized can work as a powerful force in claims to own images of alterity (Coombe, 1998). In his innovative work on

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<sup>3</sup> This project will use Tsing's (2005) conception of universal, which she states are "both imperial schemes to control the world and liberatory mobilizations for justice and empowerment (p. 9).

<sup>4</sup> See [Salt Satyagraha](#)

<sup>5</sup> Monsanto is a publicly traded American multinational agricultural biotechnology corporation who first genetically modified plant cell and field tested the [genetically modified](#) crops. It is also a pioneer in applying the [biotechnology industry](#) business model to agriculture.

intellectual property laws, Boyle (1996) points out the failure of intellectual property system and suggests the importance of public domain in realizing the "other side" of intellectual property as the utilitarian theory of intellectual property is without more, not working. Based on the aspect that sovereignty is an integral part of intellectual property rights it is necessary to recognize the overlap of sovereignty and social activism.

Therefore, utilizing Tsing's (2005) framework of scale making and the concept of IP rights and sovereignty this project will shed light on the scale making projects of different players like nation state, ecological groups, and indigenous farmer in the Brinjal seed sovereignty movement however, specifically focusing on how concepts of intellectual property and sovereignty is conceived by indigenous farmers. How are they conceived within the community? How are these understandings used within the local, social, and cultural system? How are they understood, circulated, and remixed within the communities, individually, and collectively?

### **Project description**

Indian peasantry is the largest body of surviving small farmers in the world, where two thirds of India makes its living from the land (Chandra, 1976). However, due to globalization, farming became disconnected from the earth, the biodiversity, and the climate, and linked to global corporations and global markets, and by the greed of corporations, the viability of small farmers and small farms were destroyed. In 1998, the World Bank's structural adjustment policies forced India to open up its seed sector to global corporations like Monsanto (Sreelata, 2012 July). The global corporation's seed monopolies changed the input economy overnight, where a free resource like seed that are available on farms became a commodity that farmers were forced to buy every year. The global intellectual property law followed the seed monopolies, and developing nations like India had to be fully compliant with the agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property (TRIPs) (Sunder, 2007). Anupam Chander and Madhavi Sunder (2004) explain that to establish a property regime, TRIPS requires substantial standards of protection for intellectual property in all member states. Further, to enable foreign ownership, TRIPS imposes national treatment obligations, requiring states to treat foreigners as equals of their own citizens and this schema of robust private property rights and foreign access thereto is leading to a steady transfer of the "ownership" of intellectual "products" from the developing world to the developed World (Chander & Sunder, 2004). The second mandatory law was the Geographical Indication (GI) Act, which is originally required by TRIPS as a means to protect French makers of wines and champagnes (Sunder, 2007). The law gives trademark-like protection to distinctive goods or services whose quality and reputation derive from the geographical area where they are produced<sup>6</sup>. For more than a decade, the developing world had resisted this moment (Sunder, 2007). Because of these laws, seed saving became unlawful as it is prevented by patents as well as by the engineering of seeds with non-renewable traits. The farmers are therefore compelled to buy seeds for every planting season. This pushed the poor peasants into increased poverty and indebtedness. As debts increased and become unpayable, farmers were compelled to sell kidneys or even commit suicide (Shiva, 2005 April 4). Vandana Shiva states that more than 25,000 peasants in India have taken their lives since 1997 when the practice of seed saving was transformed under globalization pressures and multinational seed

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<sup>6</sup> This explanation is obtained from the India governments' [Geographical Indications Registry](#)

corporations started to take control of the seed supply. As a result, of these looming laws widespread protests and activism started in India at numerous different levels that range from indigenous farmers, local women to scientists, student, lawyers, academics, and ecological activists (McManis, 1998). Ever since countries like Brazil and India were pressurized into signing TRIPs during the Uruguay Round of WTO negotiations (Sunder, 2007), they consistently argued that strong intellectual property rights helped the West but would devastate the rest.

Tsing (2005) signifies that the widespread expansion of corporate globalization in the contemporary world has progressed through a violent, chaotic, and divisive process. Vandana Shiva (2005) posits that corporate globalization is based on "new enclosures of the commons" (Shiva, 2005; p. 2), which transforms human beings and resources into commodities and robs diverse species and people of their rightful share of ecological, cultural, economic and political space. As Shiva explains, enclosures create exclusion and these exclusions are the hidden cost of corporate globalization. Though protestors against corporate globalization have been criticized for their lack of appreciation of the process of global integration (Tsing, 2005), these protestors have also proved the need of a new paradigm to respond to the fragmentation caused by various forms of fundamentalism (for example free- trade zones, transnational specialization, privatization etc). Protest against corporate globalization materialized through new movements like Earth Democracy<sup>7</sup> that were seen in the streets of Seattle and Cancun and in homes and farms across the world, which emphasizes the move from the dominant and pervasive culture of violence, destruction, and death to a culture of non-violence, creative peace, and life (Shiva, 2005). Shiva (2005) states Earth Democracy as a movement aims to reclaim the freedoms and rights of all people and all living beings through everyday actions on everyday issues.

In India, the ecological group Navdanya ("navdanya," n.d.) started the Earth Democracy movement, which provides an alternative worldview where humans are embedded in the Earth Family, and are connected to each other through love and compassion not hatred and violence and ecological responsibility and economic justice replaces greed, consumerism and competition as objectives of human life. Shiva (2005) argues that Earth Democracy is both an ancient worldview and an emergent political movement for peace, justice, and sustainability. Further, she states that indigenous cultures worldwide have understood and experienced life as a continuum between human and non- human species and Earth democracy instigates the awareness of these connections by connecting the particular to the universals, diverse to common and local to global. Among the various other movements launched by the Ecological group Navdanya, (under the broad umbrella term of Earth Democracy) neem tree activism (movement built and mobilized at the local levels) is the most noteworthy with respect to the organization as it won the biopiracy case. The success of the neem tree activism laid the path for other activism like that for basmati rice, Indian wheat (Carlsaw, 2000 June 26). Further, neem victory was an eye opener for the developing countries, who were fighting for sovereignty rights as it revealed that most patents are based on the appropriation of indigenous knowledge, which violates the basic criteria of patent (novelty, nonobviousness, utility) as they range from direct piracy to minor tinkering involving steps ("Victory for India," 2005).

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<sup>7</sup> This project uses the definition of Earth Democracy that Vandana Shiva provides in her book Earth Democracy (Shiva, 2005).

As is common in case of most activism (see Tsing, 2005), the recent Brinjal seed sovereignty movement in India has multiple units of agency each striving to perceive themselves as models of change. Among the numerous actors, this study recognizes three different form of scale making at work that is at the level of nation, activist group Navdanya, and the indigenous farmers. Therefore, this project seeks out if there is varied indigenous conception of sovereignty that is making claims in the Brinjal seed sovereignty social movement.

### **Importance and timeliness of this research**

Previous scholarship on the movements or struggles in India has often used the dominant lens to understand the problem. Dipesh Chakraborty (1994) argues that Indian histories has been conceived through the process of translation, which resulted in the emergence of analytical history where through abstraction of capital everything is made exchangeable with one another. Through his conception of History 2,<sup>8</sup> Chakraborty (1994) beckons scholars to understand more affective narratives of life forms, which are porous but not exchangeable through an abstract term of equivalence. This study will focus on understanding how conceptions and meanings of intellectual property and sovereignty are conceived at the grass root level. In order to understand the Brinjal Seed sovereignty movement at the grass root level, I will use Tsing's (2005) conception of scale making to understand the indigenous narrative, particularly how indigenous people construct their agency. Secondly, Nicholas Mirzoeff (2011) points out the necessity of understanding the contestation between the nation (authority) and the vernacular that strives against dependence, I will use his conception of vernacular to understand how new political agents are formed. Finally, as Chakraborty (1994), notes sovereignty in India is conceived from the perspective of the state and in this construct, the conceptions of the indigenous people are lost. Therefore, this study particularly attempts to understand the indigenous conception of sovereignty.

#### **a. Making of scales**

Tsing (2005) argues that though a scale is defined as the spatial dimensionality required for a specific kind of view, scales are not just neutral frames for viewing rather they, "must be brought into being: proposed, practiced, and evaded, as well as taken for granted" (p. 58). She suggests that scale making may be "projects that make us imagine globality in order to see how it might succeed...or projects that make us imagine locality, or the space of regions or nations, in order to see their success" (p. 57). In the Brinjal seed sovereignty movement there is numerous scale making projects at work, but this study will focus on three scale- making projects that came in conjunction here; the nation making aspiration of sovereignty, the freedom making aspiration of the ecological group, and the sovereignty making claims of the indigenous farmers.

Since India joined World Trade Organization in 1995,<sup>9</sup> as member they were expected to be in fully compliant with the TRIPs, the global intellectual property law. After a decade long resistance to intellectual property laws by peasants and environmentalist (McManis, 1998), when the global intellectual property laws were implemented in India in 2005, many in India began to

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<sup>8</sup> see Chakraborty (1994). *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial thought and historical difference*. Princeton University Press.

<sup>9</sup> India has been a WTO [member](#) since 1 January 1995.

question how these laws could be beneficial to them (Sunder, 2007). Madhavi Sunder (2007) cites the case of an award-winning farmer in Kerala who developed a high-yield method for planting rubber trees, but later when somebody tried to plant (rubber tree) in the same way, the farmer objected and stated that he would get a patent in this. Sunder (2007) notes this case was proclaimed at the national level as an indicator of an apparent shift in the understanding of intellectual property in India, where the farmer who had only elementary school education had some idea about how this particular law can stop somebody else from using his conceptualized method. The dominant national discourse started promoting that intellectual property can be used as a tool to help protect poor people's knowledge as well (Ramanna, 2006). Further, she demonstrates that this led to an increase in appeals for GI (Geographical Indication Act of 1999) of goods, which was seen as a source of recognition and income for India's poor rural as protection will allow local artisans to stay in their communities and fend for themselves, without having to renounce their traditional work. Thus, as the nation (a scale making project in itself) conceives intellectual property the diversity and differences of India was homogenized in order to apply the concepts of IP rights to India as a nation. Further, GI laws neglect other less reputable regions that produce similar products it was deemed as effective for India's poor rural and thereby rendering culture as static rooted to one specific location.

Due to the extensive tentacles of corporate globalization, corporate seeds replaced farm saved seeds in India and a free resource available on farms became a commodity (Shiva, 2005). In 1993 instigated by various ecological activists groups, half a million Indian peasants pledged to resist classification of seeds as private property (McManis, 1995). In response to the crisis of agricultural biodiversity, ecological group Navdanya ("navdanya," n.d.) started the movement of seed saving. In their mission statement, the ecological organization stated that conservation of agricultural biodiversity is impossible without the participation of the communities who have evolved and protected the plants and animals that form the basis of sustainable agriculture. The program works to promote ecological agriculture based on biodiversity, for economic and food security. The prominent universal encouraged by Navdanya, the primary initiator of the seed sovereignty movement were the principles of becoming self-sufficient & self-supporting and the philosophy of seed sovereignty. However, as Tsing (2005) explains collaboration does not mean simple sharing of information, nor does it indicate that all collaborators share a common goal. Instead, it involves a complex process that indicates friction between the numerous collaborators. The conception of seed sovereignty by Navdanya also engages in scale - making by assuming homogenous solidarity between other players involved in the Brinjal seed sovereignty movement.

Previous scholarship on globalization and intellectual property rights (Chander & Sunder, 2004; Sunder, 2007) has shown the ill effects of property rights. Under globalization, the notion of romantic author have robbed Indian farmers of their social, cultural, economic identity as a producer and deemed them merely as "consumers" of costly seeds and costly chemicals sold by powerful global corporations through powerful local elites (Sunder, 2007). Even though Sunder (2007) indicates a shift in conception of intellectual property, she explains that this shift is neither complete nor uncontested. This is because, Sunder demonstrates there is constant contestation between the traditional views, which stands against monetary benefit in exchange of knowledge share. Therefore, even though GIs certainly hold promise for the poor, they have limits as it protects only those goods or processes whose quality or reputation are shown to be "due exclusively or essentially to the geographical environment, with its inherent natural and

human factors" (Sunder, 2007, p. 114). Boyle (1996) suggests the necessity of the public domain in order to understand the other side of intellectual property. Therefore, considering the shift in the understanding of intellectual property at the indigenous level, and the necessity to reconfigure the other side of intellectual property this project will use Tsing's (2007) concept of scale making in order to understand how indigenous farmers conceive intellectual property.

The Brinjal seed sovereignty movement has brought together multiple players, therefore, it becomes necessary to move beyond the assumption that solidarity indicates homogeneity. This is because as Tsing (2005) demonstrates, each actor is engaged in their own scale-making project where they translate ideologies and meanings based on their understanding of the world. In order to understand how varied groups who disagree about the common cause and objects of concern locally reconfigure universalist causes, this study specifically aims to unpack the scale making process of local brinjal (eggplant) farmers, who configure and translate meanings based on their local ideologies and understanding.

### **b. Vernacular discourse**

Partha Chatterjee (1993a) argues that marginalization of the internal "other" in the post-colony by the political elites is likely to propel them to seek national and global acknowledgement of their plight by invoking the logic of Enlightenment (i.e. equality for all) on which the postcolonial nation is supposedly created. Mirzoeff (2011) asserts that vernacular images provide a different mode of predicting solutions to social problems. In this study, I will use Nicholas Mirzoeff's (2011) concept of "vernacular" (p. 31), to understand how discourses work within and reinforce dominant logics of what is common sense and how they challenge those logics. According to Kent A. Ono and John M. Sloop (2002), dominant discourse is concerned with political, social, and cultural norms and maintains, "The commonly accepted (and institutionally supported) understanding of what is just, good or bad" (p. 14). Mirzoeff (2011) argues vernaculars counter pose with dominant discourse and signifies any position incommensurable with dominant or normative positions however, it is not necessarily just a disagreement or conflict or inversion of dominant discourse instead it becomes a political agent in itself. Further, he explains that vernaculars emerge from marginalized communities and work based on differences rather than litigation. Moreover, as Mirzoeff (2011), points out vernaculars do not just reflect culture, history, and differences but also produce them. In other words, he indicates vernacular discourses is not just counter hegemonic discourse, as often it takes up fragments of the dominant discourse in order to create new effects, which then becomes the dominant discourse.

The shift from farm save seeds to corporate monopolies of the seed supply, which came with the opening of the seed market (Shiva, 2004 April 4) also initiated a shift from biodiversity to monocultures in agriculture. News reports on the effect of crop monocultures from states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, and Maharashtra demonstrates that monocultures not only lead to disappearance of millions of products of nature's evolution and farmer's breeding but also increased the risks of crop failure as diverse seeds adapted to diverse ecosystems were replaced by rushed introduction of unadapted and often untested seeds into the market (Shiva, 2009 April 28). The second pressure Indian farmers are facing is the dramatic fall in prices of farm produce as a result of free trade policies of the WTO (Sikdar & Nag, 2011). Yet at the domestic level,

official agencies in India were in deep denial of any links between free trade and the countrywide farmers' survival (Stephenson, 2013 January 22). However, a number of studies initiated by the government of India sidelined the theory that seed monopolies and free trade was responsible for farmers' debt in India (Borromeo, 2012). Drawing from the above news reports highlighting India as the nation's stand on the effectiveness of seed monopoly; I contend that a particular form of universalization might be at work in the Indian national discourses as expressed by the elites, where the government of India clearly denied any association between free- trade and farmer's sovereignty.

Navdanya ("navdanya," n.d.), the activist group is another major player in the seed sovereignty movement, however as was revealed above in the scale making project of the group it too assumed the homogeneity of the indigenous farmers and called for solidarity. In their mission statement<sup>10</sup> for the seed sovereignty movement, even though they claim indigenous farmers as partners they call out to them to become self sufficient & self-supporting and adapt their philosophy of seed sovereignty. Therefore, as is obvious in their attempt to collaborative they undermine the sovereignty of the indigenous farmers and position themselves in the dominant position.

A recent news report (of an incident that is part of the broader seed sovereignty movement) published in late 2012 narrates that farmers in Northern India forced the authority to stop field trial of Monsanto's GM corn (Kreiss, 2012 October 23). According to the report, "after a daylong drama where Monsanto's officials, with the support of University staff, tried to sneak out the GM corn from the field trial this morning. Alert villagers stopped them" (Kreiss, 2012 October 23). The above-mentioned incident in North India that challenged corporate giant as Monsanto proves that activism does not necessarily change the structure or cultural forms of the nation, but is meaningful and consequential in the sense that it might potentially redefine and challenge the established category of nation through social contestation between the elites and the vernacular.

Applying Mirzoeff's (2011) conception of vernacular, this incident report of the above mentioned farmers protest in North India, shows how discourses that start as vernacular to challenge the dominant discourse establish their own political subjects, and in turn becomes a dominant discourse in itself. As with the corn seed movement, this project will delve into how vernacular discourses surrounding Brinjal seeds are conceived, nurtured as political agents and becomes dominant discourse as it establishes itself as the "common knowledge." Tsing (2005) posits that meanings are interpreted and translated by different actors present in different contexts, therefore it becomes particularly important to analyze the dominant and vernacular discourses (Mirzoeff, 2011) in case of the Bt Brinjal controversy in India, as it will then help to recognize how indigenous people are both receivers and producers of knowledge. This is because as Sunder (2007) explains, "Failing to promote poor people's capacity for creative work and their participation in global culture and commercial markets hinders development..." (p. 124).

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<sup>10</sup> see Navdanya [mission statement](#)

### c. Various conception of sovereignty

Chatterjee (1993a) posits that dominant discourses of nation creates a particular collective identity to legitimate particular ways of collective life by transcending individual differences as the subjects accept the extant identity positions. Therefore, discourses that are conceived are constituted through social relations where all knowledge, talk, and argument takes place via which meanings are shaped for its participants. Powerful groups define who makes up a nation, and those who are outside of it (Chatterjee, 1993a). Further, he states that India is a high status based society and there are tremendous disparities between classes. Predominantly in urban middle and upper classes areas, peoples' socioeconomic and educational status puts them in "respectable positions" and provides them with relatively easy access to education, and jobs. According to Chatterjee (1993a), as postcolonial nations attempt to bring all masses under its fold, a considerable population remains distanced from the evolving ideals of nation. These marginalized citizens are not, therefore, proper members of civil society and are not regarded as such by the institutions of the state. Balibar (1991) argues that when a society is conceived through the paradox of nationalism, the imagination of a nation-state, the effort of creating a unified community leads to further divisions in the society. Further, he asserts that though excess racism is linked to the fact that nationalism is formed in opposition to class struggle and shortfall of racism is linked to the fact that class struggle is repressed by nationalism, both in fact have combined effects. This is because he explains that the phenomenon of institutional racism comes out as a key player in the construction of the category "masses" (p. 204). Additionally, Foucault (1978) states that when a society promotes political form of the sovereign the value of pedigree becomes very important, as in such a society, power is constituted around the blood lineage.

Post colonial India is primarily constituted through two ambivalent national discourses; the discourse of "unity in diversity"<sup>11</sup> and upper- caste Hindu hegemony<sup>12</sup> (Ilaiah, 1998). While the nation is constituted as a homogenized diversity through the discourse of "unity in diversity" which attempts to imagine an Indian nation that embodies cultural pluralism, overlooking caste, race, religion, or linguistic differences that make up the composite whole, the elision of the categories of caste and race from the national discourse silenced any oppression based on these constructs (Sarkar, 1998). For a newly formed postcolonial nation, the language of political transformation was one of compromise, emphasizing secularism and democracy at the expense of justice and redistribution. Hence, the dominant group, stressed on "unity" through the logics of homogenized diversity. This excluded the subordinate groups defined by class differences and helped in the consolidation of hegemony in Indian political scenario. This nationalism excluded the "others" and constituted their vision of India based on three, not necessarily mutually exclusive, approaches: constituting and containing the "other"; its marginalization; and finally exclusion. The denial and omission of differences also subvert an understanding of the structuring of exclusion and oppression. Modernist scholars of nation emphasize the recency and constructedness of nations as social creations of the elites in pursuit of political and economic goals (Anderson, 1991; Giddens, 1985). However, they recognize that national subjects also participate in this construction by either buying into the discourse of the elites, by opposing it, or by constructing themselves as subjects independent of the elite construction. These initiates

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<sup>11</sup> "unity in diversity" - The Indian nation imagined in the this discourse includes all people irrespective of their caste, religion, or race as integral members of the newly formed postcolonial nation. (see Chatterjee, 1993)

<sup>12</sup> Hindu- hegemony- Immediately before and after independence, upper-caste elites legitimated their power with an ideology that fused both nationalistic and secular elements to mask their caste hegemony ( see Ilaiah, 1998)

tensions or frictions among multiple groups competing to define the concept of sovereignty according to their own interests. Therefore, it becomes necessary to understand how other subjects who do not buy into the fiction of "the people" created by the powerful groups is conceiving and defining sovereignty in their own terms. This project will therefore attempt to understand how indigenous farmers define and understand sovereignty.

Corporate globalization has unleashed a war against farmers, against women, and against other cultures. Shiva (2005) claims that while the project of corporate globalization is based on the imposition of a global monoculture, shaped by Monsanto (in reference to the current project here), due to the growing moments like seed sovereignty movements we will not witness a disappearance of diversity. Dr Vandana Shiva has been the most significant and prominent leader of the seed sovereignty movement, which did not align itself to the elite nationalist cause that occupied political center stage at the time of adaptation of the intellectual property laws and open market policies. Although she and her ecological group Navdanya ("navdanya," n.d.) has formed the basis of much contemporary antagonism between indigenous people and giant corporate, the ideologies and principles promoted by the group assume the position of the dominant discourse in the conception of sovereignty, which I argue continues to marginalize the indigenous people by imposing their meanings and ideologies on them.

Tsing (2005) demonstrates that a movement is constantly re-constituted or redefined through the "Others." Namely other nations or activist groups and pertaining to this project, the internal marginalized farmers group. This gap or the exclusion of the internal "Other" becomes a privileged site for locating internal resistance of the marginalized group. Although India's IP act Geographical Indication is seen as a potentially important source of recognition and income for India's rural poor, who has been displaced and forced further into poverty by globalization, the protection of only those goods or processes whose quality or reputation are exclusive to a specific region have adverse effects on indigenous sovereignty. This is because it neglects other regions that even though produce similar products lacks in reputation. As Sunder (2007) notes intellectual property rights often lead to the ironic production of authenticity or indigeneity, which conforms to traditional structures from the past, rather than celebrating cultures as diachronic peoples who are dynamic and heterogeneous. Therefore, considering how India as a state conceives sovereignty, how ecological groups as Navdanya conceives sovereignty this study will use Tsing's (2005) conception of scales and friction and Mirzoeff's (2011) notion of vernacular to understand how indigenous people conceive sovereignty in the Brinjal seed sovereignty movement.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do indigenous people, farmers (Brinjal growers) define sovereignty?
2. How do farmers reconstruct the dominant discourse of seed sovereignty by interpreting it through their own ideologies?
3. What are the local understandings of intellectual property? How are they conceived and circulated within the community? How do farmers construct and establish their own agency as they conceive intellectual property?

4. How farmers conceive and establish divergent means and meanings of the cause of the seed sovereignty movement based on their specific locales? Do they serve different purposes to local communities and other interested parties?
5. How are divergent understandings of different things sovereignty and intellectual property used within the local, social, and cultural system? How are they circulated, and remixed within the communities, individually, and collectively?

### **Research Design and Implementation**

India being an Agrarian community there is a wide difference in language, ideology between farmers from different geographical area. This study will utilize multi level qualitative research methodology involving in- depth one- on- one interview with local farmers, focus group discussion with community members from two different rural communities in India. The two selected areas are the state of West Bengal and Karnataka focusing specifically in regions within the two states that have a significant number of brinjal (eggplant) growers. I select these two areas not only because these two states have the maximum number of seed sovereignty movement activists (Natarajan, 2013), but also because of their difference in terms of language, geographic locales, and ideologies. Apart from interviews, I plan to do discourse analysis of news published regarding the activism in those two selected areas locally as well as at the national level newspapers. I will use community newspapers for example *Deccan Herald* (Southern India) and *Ganasakti* (Eastern India) and I will look at three mainstream English language national newspapers in India: *The Times of India*, *The Hindu*, and *The Indian Express* to understand how local activism is interpreted at the national level. I will analyze articles from August 2009 to July 2012. I am choosing this time frame as during this period the controversy regarding Monsanto's illegally use of indigenous brinjal seeds to create GM seeds came into prominence, which triggered country wide uprising, questioning the need to reconsider patent laws.

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