

Basmati - Farming for All: RSTV – In Depth

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Larger Background:

- India is the largest producer of Basmati rice with about 70 per cent share in global production.
- However this Basmati rice is produced only in seven states in the Indo-Gangetic plains.
- Only Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, parts of Uttar Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir were permitted to cultivate basmati rice.
- The restriction has now been a bone of contention for other states, one of them being **Madhya Pradesh that has also asserted its right to cultivate Basmati rice.**
- Hearing the matter, the Delhi High Court has struck down the restriction on the production being confined to only seven states.
- But why was the cultivation of Basmati rice confined to just a few states? What was the restriction?
- And what is the specialty of Basmati rice. What is the scope and ambit of the Seeds Act?
- This edition of In-Depth would attempt to find answers to these questions.

Analysis:

- 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 plains.
- It has also struck down the decision to restrict the registration for Basmati varieties for certified and foundation seeds to areas under the Geographical indication for Basmati rice.
- Basmati rice is seen as a superior and premium brand of rice across the country. The use of the aromatic variety of rice is more widely prevalent in north India. However, its cultivation was subject to restrictions on the grounds that the quality and the purity of seeds needed to be protected.
- Till date, Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, parts of Uttar Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir had been growing the Basmati rice. But, now the Delhi High Court has set aside the centre's decision to confine its production to certain regions in the Indo-Gangetic plain.
- The High Court's verdict came on the Madhya Pradesh Government's decision to include 13 districts under the Geographical Indications category for Basmati rice.
- The Court set aside two Government orders on the subject.

What were these orders?

- The first one said that only Basmati varieties which are grown in the Indo-Gangetic region would qualify for certification.
- The second was a direction to ensure that the registration of Basmati varieties for certified seeds, was not undertaken outside the area indicated under the geographical indication.
- It is important to note that GI certification gives recognition and protection to Basmati rice producers to maintain specific qualities of rice grown in that particular region.

Case Concerning the Government of Madhya Pradesh:

- In its petition, the state of Madhya Pradesh had claimed that restrictive production of Basmati rice only in the Indo-Gangetic plains, go against the provisions of the Seeds Act.
- The Madhya Pradesh Government argued that both orders (as outlined above) were outside the scope of the SEEDS Act of 1966.
- The Government also contended that the Center's orders encroach upon its power to pass laws in relation to agriculture which is a state subject.
- The Delhi High Court however, refrained from expressing any opinion on a 2017 notification issued

by the Centre, which restricts seed production of Basmati varieties to the rice growing areas of Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Uttarakhand, parts of Uttar Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir.

A Note on APEDA:

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

Functions of APEDA:

- The following functions have been assigned to the Authority:
- Development of industries relating to the scheduled products for export by way of providing financial assistance or otherwise for undertaking surveys and feasibility studies, participation in enquiry capital through joint ventures and other reliefs and subsidy schemes;
- Registration of persons as exporters of the scheduled products on payment of such fees as may be prescribed;
- Fixing of standards and specifications for the scheduled products for the purpose of exports;
- Carrying out inspection of meat and meat products in slaughter houses, processing plants, storage premises, conveyances or other places where such products are kept or handled for the purpose of ensuring the quality of such products;
- Improving of packaging of the Scheduled products;
- Improving of marketing of the Scheduled products outside India;
- Promotion of export oriented production and development of the Scheduled products;
- Collection of statistics from the owners of factories or establishments engaged in the production, processing, packaging, marketing or export of the scheduled products or from such other persons as may be prescribed on any matter relating to the scheduled products and publication of the statistics so collected or of any portions thereof or extracts therefrom;
- Training in various aspects of the industries connected with the scheduled products;
- Such other matters as may be prescribed.

What has APEDA been entrusted with?

APEDA is mandated with the responsibility of export promotion and development of the following scheduled products:

- Fruits, Vegetables and their Products.
- Meat and Meat Products.
- Poultry and Poultry Products.
- Dairy Products.
- Confectionery, Biscuits and Bakery Products.
- Honey, Jaggery and Sugar Products.
- Cocoa and its products, chocolates of all kinds.
- Alcoholic and Non-Alcoholic Beverages.
- Cereal and Cereal Products.
- Groundnuts, Peanuts and Walnuts.
- Pickles, Papads and Chutneys.
- Guar Gum.
- Floriculture and Floriculture Products.
- Herbal and Medicinal Plants.

- In addition to this, APEDA has been entrusted with the responsibility to monitor import of sugar.

How did India manage to get the GI Tag and what are its benefits?

- India's fight to safeguard the identity of Basmati rice internationally came to an end in February 2016, when it obtained the Geographical Indication (GI) tag.
- Basmati rice is produced largely in Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh and in neighbouring Pakistan-making these two countries the major exporters of Basmati rice to the world. India has always been involved in protecting the name, 'Basmati', as a geographical indicator. In other words, 'Basmati' is a term that should be restricted to the product from its geographical location. Geographical indicators are a useful concept since they protect native wisdom, technologies, and traditional efforts from being stolen.
- On the 16th of February, 2016, Basmati rice obtained the geographical indication certification. Earlier in 2008, the Union Commerce Ministry's Agriculture and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), had applied to the geographical indications registry of India, to acquire an exclusive commercial use of the name, 'Basmati' for the rice grain varieties grown within the boundaries of the Indo-Gangetic plains.
- This GI protection in India, would lead to similar recognition of Basmati in other countries, including the European Union and the United States of America, which implies that India's competitors would be barred from using the Basmati tag. In the absence of such a GI tag, many private companies had been trying to register their products under this title, which commands a premium in the global market.
- Basmati rice from the Indo-Gangetic plains has a special aroma attributable and unique to it. India dominates with an 85% share in the global trade of Basmati rice at present.

What is a geographical indication?

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

Benefits of geographical indication:

- It confers legal protection to Geographical Indications in India.
- It prevents unauthorized use of Registered Geographical indication by others.
- It provides legal protection to Indian Geographical Indications, which in turn, boosts exports.
- It also promotes economic prosperity of producers of goods produced in a geographical territory.
- With the addition of Basmati rice to the GI protected list, bigger profits are reaching the concerned communities, growing Basmati rice in India.

A Look at the Seeds Act, 1966

- The Parliament passed the Seeds Act in the year 1966 to provide a legal framework around seed certification and make good quality seeds available to the cultivators.

• What did the act say?

- Under this act, seed rules were framed and notified in the year 1968 and systematic seed certification

started in India in the year 1969.

- As a matter of fact, it is part of the list of laws which are part of the Essential Commodities Act.
- 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.
- The act also covers cotton seeds and seeds of cattle fodder and all types of vegetative propagating material.
- The act provides for the 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.

(b) Some More Noteworthy Aspects:

- - 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.
 - With an aim to regulate the quality of seeds sold and replace the Seeds Act, 1966, the Government of India introduced the Seeds Bill in 2004.
- **The Seeds Bill (2004) failed to get the final nod in Parliament. After 10 years, the bill was revived by the Modi Government in November, 2014, but was put on hold in 2015.**

Features of the Basmati Rice:

- It is one of the best known varieties of rice anywhere across the globe.
- India is the world's leading producer as well as exporter of Basmati rice. It is a long-grained rice which has its origin in India and some parts of Pakistan.
- According to a report, the Indian Basmati rice industry is on the verge of clocking its highest ever exports of around 30,000 crore rupees, in this year (2019).
- Basmati rice has a unique position in the rice world due to its price, fragrance, grain morphology, as well as quality.
- A unique characteristic of Basmati rice is its slender look. It stands apart from other rice species. Moreover, Basmati rice has a unique fragrance and flavour.
- 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.
- Further, 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. As a matter of fact, such a significant increase in size cannot be seen in non-basmati varieties. This makes the basmati variety, one of the highly demanded rice varieties in the world.
- The 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.

