



In Depth: Basmati - Farming for all

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.

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