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# Crop Residue Burning in India

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## ABSTRACT

*India is known to be a country with diverse culture and traditions which makes the country rich in flavors of various spices and crops, as well as traditions which hands over the responsibilities to carry them forward with due respect to the environment we live in. Indians, the people who believe in carrying forward their ancestral practices which keeps their culture alive through several ways. Farming is even an occupation as well as a culture in India, which makes this country second largest agro based economy country. This country harvests number of crops which generates large amount of agricultural waste too, and due to absence of adequate decomposition management of crop waste, farmers mostly in northern India prefer crop residue burning. Crop residue burning is a traditional method to set fire to the straw stubble that remains after grains, which is restricted by Indian government with the reason that it not only reduces the soil fertility but also harms the environment and the health of people during the time of Covid-19. This research paper will talk about the impact of Crop Residue burning on environment and the health of people during the situation of Covid-19, the reasons of it being practised continuously even after being restricted by government, legal as well as governmental measures to restrict this practise*

## I. INTRODUCTION

With the passing time we have made number of mistakes and learnt to think logically, gained knowledge, understood the importance of education and self-dependency which has helped us to get a better standard of living. But meanwhile we have lost the love and care for the environment. In order to progress we are not just destroying the nature, we are destroying ourselves too with it. Our every small negligence contributes in the preparation of a big disaster and crop residue burning is one of such negligent practise. India, gives farming a lot of importance which makes this country rich in flavours of food. Crops like rice, paddy and wheat are among the extensive farming practices in states of Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh. These states are famous for crop residue burning after harvesting season. Even though the government has restricted this practice increasingly after 1990's, farmers from Punjab and Haryana practice crop residue burning every year in late September and October,

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<sup>1</sup> Author is a student in India.

it is estimated through the recent reports that 35 million tons of crop residue is burnt every year after harvesting. Due to which nearly 150 million tons of carbon dioxide, more than 9 million tons of carbon monoxide, tons of sulphur oxide, 1 million tons of particulate matter and more than million tons of black carbon generates. It directly contributes to not only air pollution but also to the diminishing glaciers of the Himalayas.<sup>2</sup>

## **II. THE REASON CROP RESIDUE BURNING CONTINUES TO SMOTHER NORTH INDIA**

Farmers from Punjab were interviewed regarding this issue. They had responded saying that government had promised to reward good behaviour - in 2019, the Supreme Court ordered a clutch of northern states to give 2,400 rupees per acre to every farmer who didn't burn stubble. Farmers, had avoided this practise last year but did not receive a single rupee as reward. In the month of August, the Punjab Government had admitted they couldn't afford to pay so many farmers. A wealthy farmer had tried to avoid the practice of crop residue burning, but it turned out to be expensive for him as the machine needs a tractor to work and the two combined cost up to \$15,000. Most of the farmers could not afford this expense. Another potential substitute was provided to them suggesting a bio-decomposer developed by the Indian Agricultural Research Institute, turns crop residue into manure in 15 to 20 days. Farmers refused to it saying that they do not have so much time between the crops.<sup>3</sup>

This interview had given following reasons which leads crop residue burning in India-

- a) According to farmers burning crop residue is the most economic and the fastest way to prepare the field for the next harvest.
- b) There is lack of awareness of tools and techniques.
- c) Government needs to build a direct bond between them and farmers through which the supplies of new techniques and rewards can be transferred.

## **III. EFFECTS OF CROP RESIDUE BURNING ON ENVIRONMENT**

### **- Causes Air Pollution**

Burning leads to pollution and global warming because it generates Carbon dioxide, Carbon Monoxide, Ammonia, Nitrogen Oxide, Sulphur Oxide, Methane and aromatic hydrocarbons and other volatile and semi-volatile organic compounds which are hazardous for the environment.

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<sup>2</sup> Times of India – Article

<sup>3</sup> BBC NEWS

#### - **Reduces the fertility of the soil**

It even reduces the fertility of the soil as these particulate matter produced by burning crop residue decreases the essential nutrients that soil retains.

#### - **Harms Ozone layer**

Moreover, crop residue burning spreads to other states and cities too as this particulate matter form smog which creates intense pollution when moves around. It affects the ozone layer due to interlinked cause and effects as well as human health.

#### - **Impact during Covid-19**

It is more dangerous during the time of Covid-19 as pollution makes people more vulnerable to infection and slows their recovery. It has been noted, from October to December 2020 air quality in New Delhi and other cities in north India has degraded up to 20 times than what it should have been said World Health Organization. <sup>4</sup>

#### - **Impact on biodiversity**

Section 36 of Biodiversity act 2002 states that the Central Government has two responsibilities to perform:

1) to form policies and plan to conserve biological diversity, resources derived from it for sustainable use and benefit-sharing, in parallel to this also promote, educate and extend the reach of awareness to farmers and individuals of the particular state.

2) to supervise and manage the biological diversity areas and its resources if they are prone, or threatened by the act of overuse, abuse or harmful activity to the environment and its surroundings.<sup>5</sup>

Crop residue burning is a loss of biodiversity and it violates the provision of Biodiversity Act 2002.

### **IV. LEGAL AND GOVERNMENTAL MEASURES**

Crop residue burning is a crime under section 118 of IPC and APCA of 1981. Section 2 of APCA 1981, the act of burning residue falls under the category of pollutant which causes severe pollution and has an adverse impact on the environment and health. Section 19(3) of the APCA, 1981 states that, the State Government with the consultation of the State Board can prohibit the use of unapproved fuel and appliances causing Air Pollution in any area or area declared as Air

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<sup>4</sup> Times of India

<sup>5</sup> Biodiversity Act 2002

Pollution Control Area.<sup>6</sup> Clause(5) states that “burning any material other than fuel” could be prohibited by government. Any material can include crop residue burning. The Supreme Court of India passed a judgment in early 2019 to regulate the emission of gases from different sources, including the combustion of crop stubble and garbage as well as emissions from motor vehicles.<sup>7</sup> There were cases registered against at least 30 farmers in different areas of Uttar Pradesh's Fatehpur district for practicing crop residue burning.<sup>8</sup> They had to pay fine or go to jail. Indian government have tried to stop this practice by imposing fine, sending the farmers to jail even by announcing rewards, but seems like nothing worked as it all turned the farmers against the state and gave rise to protests. The National Green Tribunal has banned crop residue burning in neighbouring 4 states of Delhi that is Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh. National green tribunal had passed an order in a case of 2017 Vikrant Kumar Tongad Vs. Environment Pollution (Prevention Control) Authority & Others regarding air pollution due to burning of agricultural residues. It had directed NTPC to file complete details of its total demand of coal and how much agricultural residue either in the form of pellet or otherwise it can use, if not purely at least it has to be mixed with coal, in all the coal based Thermal Power Houses in the States of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh.<sup>9</sup> Recently two students have approached the Supreme Court against crop residue burning. The petition is regarding the pollution caused by neighbouring states of Delhi, which is increasing the mortality rate during Covid-19 and is seeking a total ban on stubble burning. A three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice of India (CJI) SA Bobde has listed the petition for hearing on October 6 along with the batch of M.C Mehta matters pertaining to Delhi pollution. Senior advocate Harish Salve has mentioned the petition and is assisting the Court as amicus curiae.<sup>10</sup>

## V. CONCLUSION

Burning is not the only way to dispose Crop residue there are several other ways like it can be used as cattle feed, compost with manure, rural roofing, bioenergy, beverage production, packaging materials, wood, paper, bioethanol, generation of electricity, growing mushroom, paper industry and in many more ways. Government needs to be a little stricter regarding this issue and build a direct connection with farmers so that their problems can be directly heard by the state.

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<sup>6</sup> Air Pollution Control Act, 1981

<sup>7</sup> energies-14-04281%20(1).

<sup>8</sup> The Hindu

<sup>9</sup> Vikrant Kumar Tongad Vs. Environment Pollution (Prevention Control) Authority & Others

<sup>10</sup> Hindustan Times. 2021. Two students move Supreme Court against crop residue burning. [online] Available at: <<https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/two-students-move-supreme-court-against-crop-residue-burning/story-QyP96q7LPhgXBIIINob2R4H.html>> [Accessed 29 September 2021].