

# Mother's milk turning toxic: Preventive steps needed



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In the past 10 months, 111 infants hardly one year old died at Maharajganj in Uttar Pradesh. Subsequently a study of the deaths similar to one another held revealed that toxic substance was found in the gastrointestinal tract of the newborns.

The experts, who conducted the study, were shocked at the finding, wondering how these below one year old babies could have been fed with external food so the toxic substance sneaked into the viscera. Further carrying on the examination of the issue, they discovered that mother's milk, generally celebrated as something pure and unpolluted, was the villain of the piece, containing as it did the toxic substance.

Though there are several habits and practices which are responsible for an increased toxic content in the food we take, the chief one is the use of banned pesticides and insecticides in agriculture practiced on our soil. These pesticides have been found to have played a major role in the deaths of the infants.

### **Foods that turn toxic**

The residues of pesticides are found in cooked food, water, wine, fruit juices and cool beverages. The toxic substance is transmitted to humans through chemicals fed into cows to augment milk production and through the fodder fed to cattle. It is all the more shocking that even potatoes were found to have toxic substances such as organochlorine and organophosphate which cannot be removed even after the potatoes are peeled off and cleaned in water.

### **Chennai not spared either**

The toxic substance of pesticides mixing with the mother's milk is nothing new. Even in Chennai it has happened. Way back in 2007, organochlorine, a pesticide residue, was found in the mother's milk collected for a study from Perungudi, Chidambaram and Parangipettai. Particularly, the mother's milk collected from Chennai was found to have high levels of hexachlorocyclohexane. In the study conducted between 1997 and 2007, the organochlorine level in mother's milk was found to have doubled. Now the level must have increased manifold.

In the study conducted in Shanghai in China in 2011-12, mother's milk was found to contain toxic substance. Toxic substances of various pesticide residues were found in the milk collected from 142 mothers. Particularly, experts have pointed out how the bio-organic pollutants, when accumulated in the human body, trigger adverse consequences such as cancer. In several countries including Pakistan, mother's milk has been found to contain toxic

substance. But what shocks the humanity is the harsh fact that the newborns fall victim in hundreds.

### **Lack of awareness**

The bitter reality is that there are no regulations on the outlets selling pesticides. As the pesticides are sold under commercial brands of various companies, it seems difficult to identify the problem pesticide. Farmers are not educated nor enlightened on this count.

Science speaks about bioaccumulation. That is to say, when chemicals such as pesticides enter into human body, they tend to multiply. For instance, the DDT, a chemical found in the grass, doubles when used as a fodder for the buffaloes. Then, the chemical quadruples when transmitted to humans consuming the cow's milk. This multiplication of chemicals happens in what is known as geometric progression. As a result of this, adverse consequences arise in human body. Insecticides, herbicides and fungicides trigger serious diseases such as cancer, infertility etc. This finding has been arrived at in several studies conducted in Burkina Faso in West Africa.

In India the incidence of cancer has been on the rise generally attributed to use of tobacco and smoking. But the inimical effects of pesticides are ignored.

### **Increasing inimical effects**

According to the data provided by the National Cancer Registry Programme, the number of male cancer patients was 6,79,421 in 2020 and is estimated to touch 7,63,575 in 2025. The number of women cancer patients was 7,12,758 in 2020.

The types of cancer found among men are oral, lung and intestinal cancers. Among women the prominent one is breast cancer that accounts for 35 per cent of cancer cases. So, the mother's milk

having toxic waste and the breast cancer point to the link with pesticides.

The chemical compounds in the pesticides and chemical fertilizers destroy the endocrine glands and vital organs and as a result, the women's chances of conceiving a child turn erratic. The chemicals cause abortion, birth of pre-mature babies and underweight babies and uterus problems. They also take a toll on hormones and their operations.

So, insecticides and pesticides containing chemicals must be banished from agriculture. Similarly, the use of DDT must be abolished in sanitation works and malaria elimination. It is our moral responsibility to abolish the toxic pesticides, keeping in mind the welfare of our future children.

**Translated by V. Mariappan**