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SHIVA**
ORGANIC FARMING
WILL SAVE PLANET



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FEMINIST VIEWS

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According to Vandana Shiva, the merger of capitalism and patriarchy has led to the dangerous industrialization of the world's food supply. To find out more about Vandana Shiva's work, check out www.vandanashiva.org



why ORGANIC FARMING *will save* *the* WORLD

BY
BRITTANY
SHOOT

Vandana Shiva's philosophies on food sovereignty, consumption, community development and economics have transformed progressive politics around the world. She has also inspired efforts to protect the environment and promote sustainable agriculture.

Her foundation, Navdanya, operates a school based in Uttranchal. It promotes organic farming, seed sovereignty and biodiversity. Navdanya means "nine crops," a reference to India's food security, and the organization operates in 16 Indian states.

Shiva spoke to *Herizons* in Copenhagen during the December 2009 UN Climate Conference, where she encouraged women around the globe to resist the privatization of seed and to promote organic farming and ecofeminist values.

Herizons: Why is ecofeminism so important to the world right now?

VANDANA SHIVA: The merger of capitalism and patriarchy has given us the planetary-scale destruction that we face. It has redefined nature from a living mother to dead matter. It gave a licence to loot.

It has defined women as unproductive and uncreative—because creativity and production are now defined within an industrial system and science is defined as reductionist. This combination of the assault on nature and the assault on women is at the root of both the ecologic crisis and the social crisis.

On the other hand, a recognition of the relationship between the marginalization of women and the subjugation of nature—looking at the world through an ecofeminist lens—allows us to reconstruct the world with women at the centre, with nature at the centre. That means that rather than the economy of war, defined by false measures of growth and technology, we can see economy as maintaining the living systems on this planet.

If you look at *that* as economy, women are the most important economic players. They provide all the water, they provide all the food, they take care of the babies and they take care of the old. They are in the care economy. We now

Photo: Samuel Kobam, Getty Images

“We were made to believe that liberation from the kitchen means handing over power to corporations.”—Vandana Shiva

need to build a care economy centred on care for the natural world and care for human relationships. That is what the world is waiting for, and ecofeminism is the world view that can help us move towards that.

How does genetically modified food affect the rights of women and children?

VANDANA SHIVA: This industrial system makes women and children victims in multiple ways.

Women have been the seed-keepers of the world. When Monsanto takes control of seeds for genetic engineering, women's power is eroded. With that power, diversity is eroded. With that power, nutrition is eroded—quality, taste, everything goes out of the window. Instead, we get seeds generated only for two things: to own the seed through patents and intellectual property, and to create traits that maximize the profits of the company. Monsanto sells Roundup-resistant soy to sell [its product the herbicide] Roundup as well as soybeans. These are ways in which you control—economically as well as politically.

The hierarchy is very clear. When food becomes a commodity—and genetic modification makes food a commodity—it first goes to run the cars of the rich. That's where soy and corn is now going. It then goes to feed animals in prisons called factory farms. It then goes to the rest of society to make foods that are reformulated corn and soy.

Then it goes a bit to the global South to capture new markets. We have wonderful dhals [lentils] in India. They are disappearing. And now we have something called an i-dhal that is a blend of wheat and soy. It is not a dhal at all. It won't have any of the nutrition of pulses.

We are now treated as an economic superpower just because [India's] economy grows at nine percent, but in that same period we've also become the capital of hunger, with women and children suffering the worst malnutrition. Every second Indian child today is severely malnourished.

Tell us about your seed bank.

VANDANA SHIVA: We have 55 community seed banks! My work [with Navdanya] to start seed saving began when I heard the corporations talk about [how] five of them would control the seed, and the food, and the health. I

really thought this would be a dictatorship, and so I started to save seeds—not as the property of corporations, but in the commons for the community. The biggest one is in Dehra Dun [Uttarakhand, India], where we now have a teaching farm and a research farm. I run a school of the seed because I think there is so much we need to learn from seed in terms of resilience, renewability and the capitalist capacity for resurgence.

The capitalist patriarchal world view has made each of us internalize passivity. It has made each of us internalize linearity, and it has made us forget that we live in cycles, and that each of us has creativity built into us because we are part of a creative world. The seed teaches us, very humbly—the seed that you plant, and it sprouts and becomes a tree or a crop—teaches us that we have that power in us.

How can people use the Navdanya model in their own lives?

VANDANA SHIVA: I think the value of the Navdanya experience is that we began for the poorest farmers in India. We began with women as seed-keepers and women as the ecological farming experts. Through this, we have increased food production. We have increased farm incomes tenfold compared to genetically engineered cotton.

We run a grandmothers' university because it is grandmothers' knowledge that has been marginalized, and it is grandmothers' knowledge we need for the future. When Kellogg's advertises on Indian television, it makes fun of the grandmother. When Nestle sells products, it makes fun of the grandmothers.

We said they're making fun of the grandmothers to steal the minds and bodies of our children. We will celebrate the grandmother to help the children reclaim their identity and their sense of who they are. For us, the grandmothers are a big line of defence, and the grandmothers' university is one very important course we run every year.

Ecuador gave constitutional rights to Mother Earth in 2008, and even though Bhutan is one of the world's poorest countries, its government chooses to focus on the country's GNH: Gross National Happiness. Tell me about the power of these small nations, who are leading the way in ecologic justice.

VANDANA SHIVA: The small countries are building another world, just as movements are building another

“You protect biodiversity because without biodiversity authentic organic farming cannot happen.”—Vandana Shiva

world. I believe they're building an ecofeminist world because countries like Ecuador are saying the Earth is living. She is our mother. Her rights come first. They've put this in the constitution.

Similarly, Bhutan is saying the welfare of our people is the most important thing. Therefore, the right to protect the natural world and the right to protect culture—the duty to protect both—as well as to provide for everyone, is the basis of happiness. They have said that we will not strive for gross national product and maximizing financial flows through our economy. We will maximize gross national happiness to maximize the vital energy of nature and society in our economy.

Some larger countries have leading movements as well, such as the organic movement in China.

VANDANA SHIVA: I think the organic movement is a major transition movement, a shift away from the fossil-fuel era, and in my view it's vital. I've written about this in *Soil Not Oil*, and it's the subject of *The Manifesto on Climate Change* and *The Future of Food*.

Farming is the single biggest human activity and today [farming genetically modified crops] is destroying the planet, the soil, the water and the air. It's robbing us of healthy food and it's destroying our countryside and rural producers. Just by going organic, you solve multiple problems. You solve ecological problems, you reduce emissions and you conserve water because you reduce water use tenfold.

You protect biodiversity because without biodiversity authentic organic farming cannot happen. Rural livelihoods are rejuvenated because organic is best done on a small scale. We get healthy food and address the crises of obesity, diabetes and the hunger of a billion people.

There is another reason why this transition to organic farming is so important. It is something people can start on and believe in without waiting for governments. Unlike the shift in how you will generate energy, whether you will do it through coal, or nuclear, or solar—that depends on government decisions. The investment patterns drive it. But you can begin organic on a smaller scale and then farmers and consumers can come together. The economy will start to shift, and it has happened in country after

country. Both politically—as a place to create earth democracy—and ecologically—as a way of living more sustainably—food is definitely the place to begin, and organic farming is the real answer.

Can this type of food model set an example for other struggles against privatization and for people's own sovereignty?

VANDANA SHIVA: Definitely. Once you start to see food as a product of the gifts of nature and nature's processes—which is why organic farming is vital, because we work with nature and not against her—you realize that the seed is not your property; it belongs to the commons. You realize that the river from which you get the water to irrigate your fields is a commons. You realize that the amazing water cycle, which brings water from the air onto your soil, is a commons.

From food, another political economy begins to infiltrate every aspect of life. If we take the initiative to reorganize the food system through food democracy, then we can reshape how our cities look. We start to reshape how our health systems look. We start to reshape how the energy systems look.

If we were to have more local food distribution, half of the traffic across Europe could be shut down tomorrow, because when I travel, I see mostly trucks. Most trucks are just carrying food around, probably carrying the same food from one country to another, and it's a big food swap where there isn't really additional food, just additional trade.

What are the most important things women can do for the environment right now?

VANDANA SHIVA: The single most important thing that women can do is reclaim the food economy, but not be the only ones who do the work. We have to reclaim the kitchen. Industry wants to make the kitchen disappear. They want us to eat frozen dinners and false foods, and the only defence against it is to know what we're growing and what we are eating.

We were made to believe that liberation from the kitchen means handing over power to corporations. We need to liberate the kitchen for ourselves with our partners and our families. I think that is the single most important liberation step for women and the planet. ❀