

Biography of Dr. Vandana Shiva



Dr. Vandana Shiva, did her Ph.D on the Foundations of Quantum Theory on the topic "Hidden Variables and Non Locality in Quantum Theory" from the University of Western Ontario in Canada. After spending three years doing interdisciplinary research at the Indian Institute of Science and Indian Institute of Management, in 1982 she left an academic career to start the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and ecology (RFSTE), a public interest research organization focusing on critical ecological issues of our times.

She has, over the past 35 years dedicated her life to the protection of nature and defense of people's rights to nature's resources – forests, biodiversity, water, land.

Dr. Vandana Shiva combines the highest of holistic, systems science with activism; she combines resistance to giant corporations seeking to privatize and own seed and water with building alternatives so that the basis of life stays in the commons and supports all life.

Her passion for the protection of biodiversity began in the 1970's with the Chipko Movement (the hug the trees movement started by the women of Uttarakhand). Chipko also became the ground for seeing the links between nature's protection and provisioning of basics needs of food, water and energy for the poor, as well as the links of women and ecology. This led her to develop her philosophy of ecofeminism and

founding the movement “Diverse Women for Diversity”. Her contributions to women and environment have been globally recognized. She was identified as one of the top ten feminist of the world by Forbes magazine in 2010 and one of the 100 most influential feminist by Guardian of U.K in 2011. She was honoured by the State of Uttarakhand on 8th March, 2011 (International Women’s Day) with a State Award.

In 1984, as a result of the tragedy of Punjab (extremism took the life of 30,000 people) and the tragedy of Bhopal (a gas leak from Union Carbides’ pesticide plant killed 3000 people in one night and 30,000 since then) Dr. Shiva focused her attention on the violence of industrial farming (also called the Green Revolution) and the need to build non-violent ecological alternatives. She questioned the paradigm of the Monocultures of the Mind, and created diversity centered paradigm for thought and action.

In 1987, Dr. Shiva founded Navdanya (which means both “nine seeds” as well as “new gift”) to start saving seeds as an alternative to the corporations rushing to patent and genetically engineered seeds and using the WTO to impose GMO’s and seed monopolies on all countries.

Navdanya is based on the philosophy of saving and sharing seeds and knowledge. It is therefore committed to not allowing the duty of saving seeds to be converted into a crime through Intellectual Property Rights on seeds.

For free sharing and saving seeds, Navdanya has set up more than 122 community seed banks in 17 states of India to defend seed as a commons, and to defend the rights of farmers to seeds. Navdanya works with over 800,000 farmers to defend their seed sovereignty and food sovereignty. The movement for GMO free zones was started by Navdanya in 6000 villages, as was the movement for documenting traditional knowledge of biodiversity in Community Biodiversity Registers (CBRs) and using these CBR’s to declare biodiversity and knowledge sovereignty. Navdanya is the largest small farmer network of organic producers in India.

Dr. Shiva is recognized as the leading expert on the issue of intellectual property in the area of biodiversity and seed. Her research and books are used in universities worldwide. The University of Western Ontario gave her a honorary doctorate for her contributions in this area.

Dr. Shiva has played a pioneering role in challenging patents on life, since life is not an invention. She has also successfully challenged the biopiracy patents on Neem, Basmati and Wheat. Currently she is campaigning against the biopiracy patents on climate resilient crops on the basis of the report “Biopiracy of Climate Resilient Food Crops: Gene Giants Stealing Farmers Innovation of Drought Resistant, Flood Resistant, Salt Resistant Varieties”. These movements have been spread to the global level and have started a new trend for recovery of the biological and knowledge commons.

Dr. Shiva has played an important role in building the movement for GMO free food and agriculture. In 1997-98, when Monsanto illegally introduced Bt. Cotton in India, Dr.

Shiva through the RFSTE sued Monsanto in the Supreme Court of India. This stopped commercial sale up to 2002. The monopoly on cotton seed, first through hybrids and then through Bt. Cotton has pushed farmers into debt and then to suicide. 200,000 Indian farmers have committed suicide since 1997.

Besides carrying out studies and organizing public hearing to make farmers suicides visible, Navdanya organized seed pilgrimages, from the North to the South, from the East to the West, to distribute open pollinated varieties of indigenous seeds to farmers. The Seeds of Hope campaign has helped farmers increase their incomes tenfold compared to farmers using GMO cotton.

In 1993, when the U.S sued Europe in WTO because of GMO bas, Dr. Shiva launched a Global Citizens GMO Challenge. The campaign handed over one million signatures to the WTO at the Hong Kong Ministerial. Dr. Shiva has supported anti-GMO movements in U.K, Spain, Germany, France, Italy, Sweden, USA, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Kenya, South Africa, Ethiopia.

Complex issues related to the Agricultural Agreement and the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights Agreement of the WTO have been demystified by Dr. Shiva for farmers movements in India and the world. From 1991 to 1995, she tirelessly travelled across India's villages translating the GATT Agreement to local communities. In 1993, she organized a protest of 500,000 farmers in Bangalore in India to stop the GATT (General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs), the precursor of WTO.

Dr. Shiva has been called on by Governments for advise on biodiversity and agriculture policies. She is on the Scientific Committee advising the Government of India, The Regione of Tuscany in Italy, President Zapatero of Spain. The Prime Minister of Bhutan has invited her to advise him for promotion of sustainable agriculture. Dr. Shiva serves on the National Board of Organic Standards for India and is member of the expert group on Environment of the Planning Commission.

What is unique about Dr. Shiva is she effortlessly combines scientific research with action, resistance with constructive creative action to build alternatives and grassroots involvement with global transformation.

As a thinker and public intellectual, she has contributed to a paradigm shift from violent predatory, exploitative science, technology and economic organization to non-violent, compassionate, cooperative systems of knowledge, production and consumption. Her books include Soil not Oil, Earth Democracy, Water Wars, Patents Myth and Reality, Tomorrow's Biodiversity, Stolen Harvest, Biopiracy – The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge, Monocultures of the Mind – Biodiversity, Biotechnology and Agriculture, Ecofeminism, The Violence of the Green Revolution, Ecology and the Politics of Survival, Staying Alive.

The Bija Vidyapeeth, the school of the seed, founded by Dr. Shiva in 2001 has emerged as a global learning centre for living sustainably, equitably and peacefully on this beautiful and fragile planet Earth.

The Navdanya biodiversity conservation center in Doon Valley is recognized by the Government of Uttarakhand as a center for excellence for training in sustainable agriculture, supported by several international organizations such as the Green Korea Foundation.

Dr. Shiva has been a visiting professor and lectured at the Universities of Oslo, Norway, Schumacher College, U.K. Mt. Holyoke college, U.S., York University, Canada, University of Lulea, Sweden, University of Victoria, Canada, and Universite libre de Bruxelles, Belgium. In 2011, Dr. Shiva was the Wayne Morse Chair at the University of Oregon in Eugene.