



# Vandana Shiva: An Icon of Environmental Sustainability

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## Abstract

Vandana Shiva is a well-known environmental activist and philosopher. She started her green journey with 'Chipko Movement'. She is the founding director of 'Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology'. She formed 'Navdanya' to protect the native seeds sideways promoted biodiversity conservation, organic farming and intellectual property rights. She also put efforts on ecofeminism approach, indigenous people and human sustainability. The article comprises a brief introduction of Vandana Shiva, her personality and her contribution towards the Indian society, culture, nation, and environment at large.

**Keywords:** Vandana Shiva; Environment; Biodiversity; Conservation; Sustainability

## Introduction

Vandana Shiva is native to Dehradun (Uttarakhand), a hilly area. She was born on 5 November, 1952. Her school education was held in Dehradun as her father was in Indian government service as forest conservationist. Her affection to nature originates from her parents and their background. She has masters in Physics and Philosophy from Punjab University, Chandigarh and the University of Guelph, Canada in 1973 and 1976 respectively. She achieved her doctorate degree from the University of Western Ontario, Canada in 1978. From 1979-1982, she engaged in research field at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore and the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore [1].

In 1973, Chipko movement was initiated in Uttarakhand. Women were in the front line to protect the forests. The movement stimulated her a lot. She began writing about the movement and the importance of natural resources for human survival from her close views and experiences. She learnt about biodiversity and its economic importance for indigenous people and women and she made her mission to protect them.

## Contribution of Vandana Shiva

Vandana Shiva primarily works for nature, women, and indigenous people. Her work is a contribution to our nation, society, and culture.

To address these matters, she founded the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology (RFSTE) in Dehradun in 1982. She instituted Navdanya organization in 1991 which means nine seeds in order to protect the diversity of native seeds by distributing free natural seeds to farmers through seed bank. There are 124 seed banks across the country. Rice seeds of more than 3,000 varieties have been conserved by Navdanya. Genetically modified seeds or High yield varieties of seeds are toxic with less nutritional value, high cost and dependent on chemical inputs. Local Indigenous seeds are highly nutritious with no chemical inputs [2]. She wrote books titled as 'The Violence of Green Revolution' and 'Monocultures of the Mind: Perspectives on biodiversity' in 1991 and 2011 respectively where she pointed out the challenges occurred due to genetically modified crops and use of high yield varieties seeds. Today, the negative effect of change in agricultural practices and patterns can be seen

in India in the form of human health issues. In her 1997 book, *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge*, she discussed the global threat posed by the technological transformations of organisms, cells, and molecules and by their exploitation and profit and these practices are biological theft. Shiva explained her ideas on corporate trade agreements, declination in the genetic diversity of crops, and patent law in her books *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply* (1999), *Tomorrow's Biodiversity* (2000), and *Patents: Myths and Reality* (2001). She criticizes about the privatization of water resources in her book *Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution, and Profit* which was published in 2002 [3].

She established Bija Vidyaapeeth- Earth University in 2001 with inspiration from India's ancient Aranya Sanskruti – of learning from nature and forests for how to live as Vasudhaiva Kutumbukam (The Earth Family). It is based on Shanti Niketan University formed by Rabindranath Tagore with the philosophy of living in and learning from nature. The foundation of Indian culture is mainly the forest culture. The forest culture has diversity and similar diversity can be seen in Indian society and their culture. The stepping stone of our civilization is unity in diversity which is the basis of both ecological sustainability and democracy [4].

Vandana Shiva authored two books on ecofeminism. These are 'Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India' in 1988 and 'Ecofeminism' co-authored with Maria Mies in 1993. According to her, ecology and feminism have been inseparable. Most farmers of the world are women. Women grow food as nourishment, not as supplies. They have the potential to lead the transition to regenerate the Earth, biodiversity and human health and nutrition. According to her, *Diverse Women for Diversity* is one expression of combining women's rights and nature's rights, celebrating our cultural diversity and biological diversity. The defense of nature's rights and people's rights is Earth Democracy which means the democracy of all life on earth. It is a living democracy which supports and is supported by living culture and living economies. She wrote on the global domination of corporate and development in her books *Globalization's New Wars: Seed, Water and Life Forms* (2005), *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace* (2005) and *Making Peace with The Earth* (2012). Shiva also edited *Manifestos on the Future of Food and Seed* (2007). In 2008, she also authored book *Soil Not Oil: Environmental Justice in an Age of Climate Crisis* [5,6].

She received several awards like the Right Livelihood Award, the Global 500 Award of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Earth Day International Award of the United Nations, the Order of the Golden Ark of Netherlands, the Golden Plant Award, the Save The World Award, the Sydney Peace Prize, Thomas Merton Award by Thomas Merton Center for Peace & Justice, the Calgary Peace Prize, the Honorary Doctor, the Universities of Oslo, Norway, and Fukuoka Grand Prize [7]. Time Magazine identified her as an environmental hero in 2003. Shiva Founding member and board member of many international organizations such as the International Forum on Globalization, Founding Councilor of the World Future Council and received Wayne Morse Chair of Law and Politics, the University of Oregon, U.S. [8].

## Conclusion

We need to follow Vandana Shiva's footsteps to save the nature and human survival. Environmental issues are global but their solution lies locally. Hence, we need to find out the local solution of environmental problems. Use of local seeds and local natural resources would make India self-reliant. Collectively, we can build a diverse earth family with rich biodiversity and further create an earth democracy.

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