

Vandana Shiva at the Maternal Gift Economy conference November 2020

Introduction by Letecia Layson [Starts at 2:11:41]

Dr. Vandana Shiva is trained as a Physicist and did her Ph.D. on Quantum Theory, the “Hidden Variables and Non-locality in Quantum Theory” from the University of Western Ontario in Canada. She later shifted to inter-disciplinary research in science, technology and environmental policy, which she carried out at the Indian Institute of Science and the Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore. In 1982, she founded the independent institute, the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology in Dehra Dun dedicated to high quality and independent research to address the most significant ecological and social issues of our time, in close partnership with local communities and social movements. In 1991, she founded Navdanya, a national movement to protect the diversity and integrity of living resources, especially native seed, the promotion of organic farming and fair trade. In 2004 she started Bija Vidyapeeth [School of the Seed/Earth University], an international college for sustainable living in Doon Valley [India] in collaboration with Schumacher College, in the U.K. Dr. Shiva combines the sharp intellectual enquiry with courageous activism.

[Not on the recording. Time Magazine identified Dr. Shiva as an environmental “hero” in 2003 and Asia Week has called her one of the five most powerful communicators of Asia. Forbes magazine in November 2010 has identified Dr. Vandana Shiva as one of the top Seven Most Powerful Women on the Globe. Dr. Shiva has received honorary Doctorates from University of Paris, University of Western Ontario, University of Oslo and Connecticut College, University of Guelph. Among her many awards are the Alternative Nobel Prize (Right Livelihood Award, 1993), Order of the Golden Ark, Global 500 Award of UN and Earth Day International Award. Lennon ONO grant for peace award by Yoko Ono in 2009, Sydney Peace Prize in 2010, Doshi Bridgebuilder Award, Calgary Peace Prize and Thomas Merton Award in the year 2011, the Fukuoka Award and The Prism of Reason Award in 2012, the Grifone d’Argento prize 2016 and The MIDORI Prize for Biodiversity 2016, Veerangana Award 2018, The Sanctuary Wildlife Award 2018 and International Environment Summit & Award 2018.]

Starts at 2:13:21

Vandana Shiva

Thank you. It's a joy to be with all of you, and thank you Gen for triggering this gathering. Thank you to all the beautiful sisters who've gone before me.

Over these five decades of both trying to understand nature, how nature works, including how nature works at the quantum level, from the tiniest of molecules to the entire universe, and how at every level, there is not just quantum coherence but there is quantum relatedness. Non-separation was my PhD thesis, and yet you've got the capitalist patriarchy, especially of the last 500 years, assuming that humans are separate from nature, assuming that nature is dead, and whether you look at the witchhunts or you look at [Francis] Bacon writing a book [1603] called *The Masculine Birth of Time – Masculine Birth of Time – why?* Because until then Nature was recognized as alive and women were recognized as the Knowers. And to destroy women's knowledge and nature's life and transform Terra Madre, the living earth, our mother earth, to *terra nullius*, the empty dead earth, is really the edifice on which the violence against the earth, the violence against women, the violence against indigenous people, has all been founded.

I tried to understand the roots of this violence, both because I was involved with activism, beginning with an amazing movement of women from the mountains of the Himalayas in the '70s. You know, I saw the forests go and I decided to do everything I could to protect my Himalayan forest, my home. It was the women from the villages who came out and said "We're going to hug the trees!" The movement was called Chipko. They said "we're going to hug the trees and you'll have to kill us before you kill our mothers." And I think the whole discussion on sacrifice, sacrifice as part of mothering, when it is a gift, and sacrifice as austerity, as structural adjustment, when those who've been taking say "you must pay for the crisis that we have created".

I will concede Navdanya, the word, basically means nine seeds, diversity, but pronounced in a slightly different way *navdaanya*, daan is gift in our language. That unconditional gift from love is what we see in our universe, it weaves societies, and indigenous societies, and its rupture is at the root of all the hierarchies but also at the root of the climate emergency, the extinction emergency, the COVID emergency, everything can be traced back to this mind-set.

Let me share with you, because we are privileged to have Sherri [Mitchell] and others, I decided to go back to – you know I’ve written Staying Alive in the ‘80s, and then when our biodiversity was being stolen and patented, I wrote a book called Biopiracy. And I think, Gen, was it – you were involved in the past with biopiracy, right? When I visited Texas and we did some actions?

Basically, I think, from colonialism to neo-liberalism, to the current 1% economy, we’ve actually gone way beyond exchange. We’ve gone into one-way extraction, no giving at all. And the billionaires are now working on something they call the Zero Cost Economy where they will never have to pay anything. Our taxes will be collected from us to subsidize them to create markets where there are no markets. And this issue of patenting is actually a continuity of what started with colonialism.

The four elements of an extractivist economy for me is: First you declare nature is dead. Second you enclose the Commons, there’s been so much talk on the community, you privatize and you create ownership where there was no ownership, there was no private property. John Locke, who is treated as the person who taught us exactly what property is about and what governance is about, he writes that the mixing of labour with nature creates property. But it is not the labour of women, or the animals, or the serf, it is the spiritual labour manifested in capital. And this mixing up of controlling money as spiritual, and degrading the sacred earth as dead matter, degrading our sacred bodies, our sacred words, our sacred gifts as passivity, as nothing is happening, is total objectification. [John] Winthrop [Founder of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630] went further, he said natives in New England, they enclose no land, that’s their primitiveness. Neither have they settled habitations nor do they have tame cattle. They don’t improve the land. So they have a right to survive and we can take the rest.

From these enclosures comes extractivism. So I think what we went through, now after 500 years of colonialism, is extractivism. The theory of it is exchange. The reality of it is the violence of one-way extraction. And then this one-way extraction ends up taking non-stop from nature limitlessly, and taking non-stop from our bodies, our work, taking non-stop the surplus labour that Gen mentioned. And beyond a point extraction ends up creating these inverted pyramids, and I just

wrote a book called Oneness vs the 1% to try to understand the phenomenon of these new billionaires.

And interestingly, they are taking the whole pretence of giving to a new level. So in Oneness vs the 1% I started looking at what Bill Gates was doing because he was in Paris dictating to the heads of state how they should address climate change with more commodification, geoengineering, manipulating the entire planet, genetic engineering, patenting more seeds – everything that we have shown to actually be at the root of the problem. Gates was offering it as the solution. And if you look at Navdanya International's website you will find our recent report on the Gates to a Global Empire.

I say this because Bill Gates pretends he gifts. But he's very clever. What he does is he dangles a little carrot to the WHO [World Health Organization of the United Nations], to the FAO [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations], to the CGIAR [Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, a global research partnership], all our public institutions, our governments. And then he encloses the Commons of the public goods, of public governance, and turns these into new colonies.

One of the new colonies he's created, totally of his making, is the language of gene editing. In the gift economy, giving is self-organized. And the relationship between giving and receiving is what creates self-organized systems. Some people have been writing in the Question and Answer about Machurana. [Humberto] Machurana and [Francisco] Virela gave us the brilliant thinking about self-organized complexity. Self-organized complexity evolves out of giving. The self-organized complexity is what is disrupted when Mr. Gates decides to say I am turning all of life into a Word program. And I'm going to cut it and chop it and edit it. Gene editing – he funded the research, [Jennifer] Doudna, who got the Nobel [Prize in Chemistry] this year, basically he funded her research. And then he created a company called Editas [Medicine], which takes patents on gene editing.

The European Court of Justice has ruled this as a GMO [Genetically Modified Organism]; it should be regulated. Every scientific research on it has shown that because of this highly complex system of life, of giving, at every level, basically, when you change one gene, you're not writing a Word program, you're actually

scrambling one thousand five hundred genes. When you try and make hornless cattle you create cattle with new bacterial genes. And the research is all there, there are hundreds and thousands of papers. And yet, because they've created an insular empire, and I have watched, I mean if Bacon said the birth of masculine time or the masculine birth of time, in a way these pretend givers of today, the philanthro-capitalists, I even call them philanthro-imperialists, they basically go even further. Bacon said we have to subjugate nature. I don't think most of you are aware that Google has basically taken over everything. They've stolen all our books, they steal all our minds. The Facebooks, they first turn the earth into raw material. They turn the forests into raw material. My work on saving seeds has been preventing the seed, which is such an amazing source of giving - one seed gives us a thousand seeds, a million seeds. An abundance. This is the gift economy of abundance. This is what I've dedicated my life to the last 33 years. And fought patenting of seed.

Now, the latest raw material is us. Women's bodies were always treated as raw material. But now every human being is being treated as raw material for mining our brains and our bodies. There's a very, very good book I would request all of you to look at, it's called [The Age of} Surveillance Capitalism [by Shoshana Zuboff] on the reduction of the human being to the new raw material. It's an amazing system of extraction. Where we are extracted from, our data is manipulated and sold back to us as a commodity, as big data, sold back to us to manage our behaviour. Have you seen how the language of behavioural change, the gift economy, is behavioural change from within, because of your love. The behavioural change they're talking about is the next external input, the next external manipulation, the next external control.

So I say the first time round they said the earth is dead, *terra nullius*. Then they wanted to patent seed. I called it *bio-nullius*. I have fought cases with Monsanto. Monsanto's lawyers actually stood in the Supreme Court of India and said that seed is an empty container, it's what we put into it that makes it come alive. And this illusion I wrote about it in Biopiracy and I cited [Johann] Jakob Bachofen The triumph of paternity brings with it the liberation of the spirit from the manifestations of nature, a sublimation of human existence over the laws of material life.

Maternity pertains to the physical side of man, the only thing he shares with the animals, the paternal, spiritual principle belongs to man alone, as if there is no sacredness in nature, as if there's no sacredness in the soil, as if there's no sacredness in all of life on earth. But most importantly, as if women are not the true spiritual beings of this world. You can't be engaged in unconditional giving without a deep spiritual core. That's to me, this relating from love, is the true spirituality. And he goes on to say "Triumphant paternity partakes of the heavenly light while child-bearing motherhood is bound up with the earth that bears all things [1861].

Yeah, we admit we are bound up with the earth. And so are you, Mr. Bachofen. You might deny it, but being tied up with Mother Earth and receiving her gifts is what makes for your life, our life, everyone's life.

So the latest, of course, is *mente nullius*, empty minds. And it's not an accident. I think it would be so good for all of you who study this phenomenon of brute, violent, patriarchal power, working against the earth, working against women, working against humanity, working against our future.

So Mr. Google, you know, they've created a new life sciences division five years ago. The earth is four billion years in the evolution of life. Human society is 200,000 years. Most of that time they were based on mothering and the gift. Colonialism is the war of capitalist patriarchy against those indigenous cultures. And that crude colonization, the violent colonization, is now coming in technological garb. And the Head of the Life Sciences Division recently said we have to defeat Mother Nature. And this will to conquer, the will to conquest, is still continuing, just in new ways, with new tools. But extraction, and domination and separation are still the guiding force. And for us, it is giving and the gift.

I do a lot of ecological research. I have watched, when farmers give to the earth, we get more food. When we give seeds to each other we have seeds. Otherwise we have seed famine. If we give back water to the soil we have more water. If we have air to breathe, water to drink, food to eat, it's all a result of the gift economy. We know this but science is having to recognize it. All of ecological relationships are about gift. And giving creates a balance. Otherwise why – it's not an accident that indigenous cultures had abundance. And colonized, industrialized, globalized

economies have created misery and poverty, including in the richest land. Look at America with food deserts. Look at the fact that they're talking about 99% will be useless. So a lot of people think, Oh, but you know, isn't it too late to think that we can create societies of the gift economy? My reading is, when 99% of humanity is told you're useless people, when 70-80% of the species can be pushed to extinction, this is the moment where the gift economy says No, everyone matters. And through giving we can create systems which have a place for the tiniest of microbes. We are walking microbes, we are viromes and biomes, in our gut a hundred trillion microbes, a hundred trillion. We have only 10% of us and therefore we are interbeings. We are not insulated atoms. We are not insulated from society. We are community. We are not insulated from other life. We are ecological interconnectedness, happening to have an expression in embodiment of a human form.

So, thank you Gen. The gift economy is the future, otherwise there is no future for most people. And even these people, you know, I think you pointed out, that those who destroy the gift economy actually are parasites on it. So these parasites who think we don't live and we don't die, we'll be trans-humans who live forever, we will be appendages to machines, who will decide through algorithms what our value is. They, too, depend on the mothering of nature, their mothers, and the mothering of society. And their denialism doesn't take it away, it is still the foundation.

Thank you.

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