

Everything I Need to know I Learned in the Forest by Vandana Shiva

The essay by Vandana Shiva offers insight, awareness about nature and pleads for the integration of humans with nature. Vandana Shiva is an internationally renowned activist for biodiversity and against corporate globalization. In the essay “Everything I need to know I learned in the forest” she reveals to the readers about her early lessons in environmentalism. She further tells us how she learnt all the major ideals of a good life from the forests such as diversity, freedom and co-existence. Vandana Shiva’s ecological journey started in the forests of the Himalaya. Her involvement in the contemporary ecology movement began with “Chipko”.

Chipko Movement

It was a nonviolent response to the large scale deforestation in the Himalaya region. In the 1970s peasant women in the Garhwal, Himalaya had come out in defence of the forests. Vandana Shiva noticed a steady loss of forests in this region. She decided to become a volunteer for the movement.

Bio-diversity/Navadanya Farm/Navadanya Movement

Chipko Movement taught Vandana Shiva about biodiversity. She realized the importance of biodiversity based living economies. She started Navadanya, the movement for biodiversity conservation and organic farm in 1987. Vandana Shiva has worked with farmers to set up more than 100 community seed banks across India. They have saved more than 3000 varieties. This is a transition from monocultures to bio-diverse ecological systems.

To demonstrate her experimentation she started Navadanya Farm in 1994 in the Doon Valley in the lower elevation Himalayan region of Uttarakhand Province. They are now able to conserve and grow 630 varieties of rice, 150 varieties of wheat and hundreds of other species. Thus, they practise and promote a biodiversity intensive form of farming that produces more food and nutrition per acre.

Rights of Nature / Separatism - eco-apartheid

Vandana Shiva interestingly talks about how the UN General Assembly organized a conference on harmony with nature as part of Earth Day celebrations inspired by the constitution of Ecuador and the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth initiated by Bolivia. This emphasises the significance attached to the mother Earth against the overdue human domination over nature. She upholds the view that human beings are an inseparable part of nature. So, she feels that today, we do not need an apartheid situation which once divided people based on colour. Our challenge now is to overcome eco-apartheid based on separateness of humans from nature.

The Dead Earth/Industrial Revolution/Capitalism/Exploitation

This separateness paved way for the industrial revolution replacing vibrant earth and turning it into a dead matter. This has further led to Capitalism and Consumerism which exploit natural resources indiscriminately. Thus Terra Madre (Mother Earth) was replaced by Terra Nullius (the empty land / the dead earth).

The Earth University/Earth Democracy

The Earth University located at Navadanya biodiversity farm is an inspiration from Rabindranath Tagore which teaches Earth Democracy; to recognize, protect and respect the rights of other species. It is a shift from anthropocentrism (human-centric) to eco-centrism (nature-centric).

Forest and Freedom /Principles of Equity

The last section of this essay is adapted from “Forest and Freedom” written by Vandana Shiva published in the May / June 2011 edition of “Resurgence”. This highlights Tagore’s view of forest as the source of beauty and joy of art and aesthetics of harmony and perfection. The forest teaches us union, compassion and balance. It teaches us enjoyment through renunciation against greed and possession. Thus Vandana Shiva concludes that it is the forests that can show us the way beyond this conflict marred with consumerism.

Edited for Students

Source

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