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## Navdanya Movement: A Quest Towards Ecofeminist Goals

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### **Abstract:**

*The paper seeks to analyze the Navdanya Movement from an ecofeminist perspective and attempts to understand how the movement is helping in combating the vying forces of globalization, in escaping from food and nutrition crisis. The paper put forwards the argument that a women led gender sensitive movement for the conservation of indigenous variety of seeds can help be helpful in twofold objectives of regeneration of earth, seeds and biodiversity as well as the empowerment of women themselves.*

**Keywords:** Ecofeminism, Globalization, Green Revolution

### **Introduction:**

Navdanya is an organization and a movement that strives for safeguarding India's biodiversity-based food legacy. (About Navdanya, n.d.) Based on the ideology of 'VasudhaivKutumbakam' (The Earth is one Family), the movement is trying to protect the native varieties of seeds, grains, agricultural land and traditional knowledge from the harmful and negative impacts of genetically modified variety of seeds. Established by Vandana Shiva<sup>1</sup> in the year 1987, Navdanya means Nine Seeds (Nava+ Dhanya), signifying the conservation of biological and culturally native variety of seeds. The term also means 'a new gift' referring to the sharing and conservation of native seeds, as commons. Shiva claims that this gift of nine seeds or "dana" is the greatest present, because it connotes a gift of life, legacy, and perpetuity. (About Navdanya, n.d.)

<sup>1</sup>An Indian academician and ecofeminist, who is working towards women empowerment and environmental protection, especially in the Third World countries.

Since its inception, the movement has grown tremendously, resulting in the establishment of 122 community seed banks in India and the conversion of a staggering 5,000,000 farmers to organic farming.(Tauranac, 2018)In contrast to the long history of women's labor, in the farms, being devalued and overlooked, the organization acknowledges women as farmers, this characterizes the most distinctive feature ofNavdanya farms. Shiva's "Women for Diversity" goal, which advocates for women's sovereignty and condemns India's history of female feticide, includes empowering women by giving them access to farm labor and decent remuneration.(Tauranac, 2018) Shiva claims that women are disempowered when they are forced out of agriculture, and food security suffers as a result. Food systems developed by women rely on biodiversity rather than chemicals and they produce food that is superior in quality, nutrition, and taste.(BBC World Trust, 2004)Navdanya, as the founders claim, is dedicated to preserving our biodiversity, sovereignty, and commons.

### **Navdanya, Women Farmers and Green Revolution:**

The Green Revolution that came in India in the 1960s and 1970s aimed at increasing the crop yield to provide food security for the Indian populace and greater economic viability to the farmers. Improved (modified) seeds, agricultural technology, better irrigation, and chemical fertilizers were employed to boost the agricultural production.(Italian Association for Women in Development) The revolution effectively increased the production and thereby resulting in the expansion of aggregate food supply. However, the benefits were not equally shared by all the stakeholders. The worst affected were the landless women farmers, these women were earlier employedfor the post-harvest activities like winnowing and thrashing, but as a result of mechanization, these women lost their traditional jobs and were displaced to other farming activities. Despite their contributions to agriculture, women have remained unseen as farmers. The labor that women perform in agriculture is often overlooked. Because it lies beyond the so-called 'production border,' their output is rarely recorded by economists as 'work' or 'production.'(Waring, 1988)

As promised by the Green Revolution, neither theincomes of women farmers (or farmers in general) increased nor any rise in their nutrition level was seen. Contrary to this, a majority of these women lost their jobs and as a result of this unemployment, they couldn't avail the benefits of increased crop yield. The women who belonged to landed households too suffered as a result of these technological advancements and High Yielding Variety (HYV) seeds. The households needed increased cash incomes for the purchase of these seeds, for this purpose women too started working as daily wage laborers (in addition to their roles as home makers) which not only increased their already high labor burden, but then also, their share in the final family income remained negligible. This unpaid increased labor and loss of other vital income generating ventures (in their domestic spheres) that were part of their daily routines like use of straw& grass for basket and mat making, selling husk for fuel etc., affected their status further.(Shiva, The Violence of the Green Revolution:

Third World Agriculture, Ecology and Politics, 2016) Almost 30% of the Indian agricultural labor force is constituted by women. (FAO, 2011) Navdanya comes to the rescue of such women farmers, it not only advocates for conserving indigenous seed variety by establishing a country wide network of community seed banks but also acknowledges their roles as farmers and contributors to the family income. The Navdanya concept is founded on a recognition of the importance of biodiversity, particularly in the lives of women, who are the guardians of food baskets of almost all the rural households. (Ramprasad, 1994)

### **Vandana Shiva on Green Revolution and Biopiracy:**

Shiva has continuously been warning against the reductionist nature of modern science which is detrimental for both women and nature, and leads to monopolization of knowledge that benefits only few. (Shiva & Bandyopdhyaya, The Violence of Reductionist Science, 1987) Even in the peaceful sphere like agriculture and health, claims Shiva, where welfare of all the human beings is a prime concern, the Modern Science remains violent. It benefits the corporates and harms the interests of larger human population. This stands true with Green Revolution as well, where the benefits were expected to the advantage of entire human populace, the rich and the poor, the men and women, the old ones and the children, did not really happen. Rather, the patenting of plants and seeds made corporates the winners. This patenting of plant life is referred to as 'biopiracy' by Shiva, as it permits big corporates to benefit from nature. (Bell, 2015) Norman Borlaug, the American agronomist and Nobel Laureate, whose contributions towards the agriculture led to Green Revolution, also acknowledged his apprehensions regarding the private firms and transnational corporations obtaining control of Plant Genetic Resources (PGRs) and seeds, and then getting the patents for those plants. This may cause food shortage and famines. (Shiva, Reclaiming the Commons: Biodiversity, Indigenous Knowledge and the Rights of Mother Earth, 2020) Shiva has also linked this patenting and globalized agriculture with farmer suicides in India, as this causes rise in the prices of seeds which were earlier available in lesser prices, resulting in decreased profits and increased burden on our farmers.

### **Navdanya and Crop Diversity:**

In India, after the advent of globalized and chemical intensive agriculture, the quality of land has got affected very badly. At the same time, the rich agricultural diversity of the country has been severely affected in accordance with the demands of the international market. Only in the state of Punjab, the diverse cropping pattern has been replaced with the monocultures of rice in the kharif season and wheat in the rabi season. This has also contributed to farmers' poverty along with the degradation of soil. (Shiva, Reclaiming the Commons: Biodiversity, Indigenous Knowledge and the Rights of Mother Earth, 2020) By gathering, rescuing and conserving almost 4,000 varieties of rice, Navdanya has preserved and promoted, forgotten food crops like millets, pseudo-cereals, and pulses,

which were previously pushed out by the green revolution and increasing trend of monocultures. Not only crop diversity, the organization has been working consistently on preserving the diverse knowledge systems, cultural diversity. In her campaign, 'Diverse Women for Diversity', Shiva along with her other colleagues tries to resist the monopoly of big business houses, mono culture agriculture and celebrates the diversity among women at local, national and international levels. (Diverse Women for Diversity, n.d.) The primary objectives of this campaign are preservation of biodiversity, food, & water.

### **Navdanya and Globalization:**

While the rhetoric of liberalization, globalization and "free trade" promises "less government," the reality is that corporate globalization — which is based on enclosures of the commons — necessitates the creation of a corporate state, an intrusive state that can forcibly penetrate the sovereign spaces shaped by our culture and secured by our constitution. (Diverse Women for Diversity; Mahila Anna Swaraj, 2021) A corporate state safeguards the interests of industries and the wealthiest at the expense of the rest of the population.

Indian agriculture has transformed completely after the entry of corporate globalization. It has now reduced merely to a market for expensive seeds and chemical inputs, and consequently become a producer of poor and cheap commodities. Not only the quality of products has degraded, the land where the crops are grown too have borne the negative impacts of this transition because of the extensive use of chemicals. However, the impacts of corporate globalization were not most favorable for Indian agriculture and the communities dependent on it, Navdanya has employed the same tool for the conservation of biodiversity. The Bija Yatra<sup>2</sup>, Bija Swaraja<sup>3</sup>, Bija Panchayat<sup>4</sup> and the Bija Satyagraha<sup>5</sup> have now become global platforms for asserting the rights of the local people to biodiversity and sustainability. Using these techniques, the organization is aiming to achieve sovereignty of the seeds and conservation of the biodiversity, internationally.

### **Navdanya as an Ecofeminist Movement:**

Ecofeminism as a theory and movement attempts to protect and liberate, both women and nature from exploitation and violence. Women and nature both form the creative power of the earth yet they are devalued and subjected to violence. The employment of new agricultural technologies is detrimental for the productivity of both nature (the land) and women. Women, as a result of Green Revolution have faced unemployment and loss of their traditional knowledge and income generation ventures. This consequently has taken a toll on their health and well being as well. Navdanya, as an

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<sup>2</sup> Seed March or Pilgrimages, for creating awareness about the seed diversity and protecting the farmer from suicides

<sup>3</sup> Sovereignty of the seed, to protect them from the monopoly of a corporate giant

<sup>4</sup> People's Seed Tribunal, to demonstrate the problems of seed and agriculture that have resulted as an impact of globalization

<sup>5</sup> Seed Satyagraha is a method employed by the organization to assert the rights of people to biodiversity with the help of non-violent rally and protests

ecofeminist organization, recognizes and acknowledges the creativity, intelligence, of all the living beings on this earth and therefore aims to preserve the diversity found in the nature. It recognizes women as equal citizens of the planet and puts the responsibility on both men and women, locally, nationally and internationally, to come together and contribute towards the betterment of the nature and society. Their farms, rallies and tribunals comprise of women in majority, as the organization believes that it's the woman, who feeds the world. (Diverse Women for Diversity; Mahila Anna Swaraj, 2021)

### **Conclusion:**

The Green Revolution combined with globalization has resulted in policies that undermine our country's 10,000-year civilizational legacy of bowing down in humility and respect to the soil and farmers. Today's prevailing agricultural policies, pushed by multinational companies, serve corporate profits at the expense of our agricultural lands, public health and farmers. Navdanya offers a solution to all these pressing issues of the time. Through its community seed banks, the organization saves and preserves the diverse varieties of seeds, their women only farms acknowledge women as farmers and give them that economic and social status, which they have long been denied. As a critique of Modern Science and Globalization, the organization calls for a method of agriculture which is organic and based on our traditional knowledge. Also, using various Gandhian techniques of Satyagraha, the organizing is helping vehemently in creating awareness, internationally, against the monoculturalization of agriculture that is both unnatural and unsustainable in a long run.

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