

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### NONVIOLENCE AND CULTIVATION OF DIVERSITY

**A**n intolerance of diversity is the biggest threat to peace in our times; conversely, the cultivation of diversity is the most significant contribution to peace—peace with nature and between diverse peoples. The cultivation of diversity has to be a conscious and creative act, intellectually and in practice. It demands more than mere tolerance of diversity, because tolerance alone is not enough to contain the wars unleashed by the intolerance of difference.

Diversity is intimately linked to the possibility of self-organization. Decentralization and local democratic control are political corollaries of the cultivation of diversity. Peace is also derived from conditions in which diverse species and communities have the freedom to self-organize and evolve according to their own needs, structures and priorities.

Globalization has undermined the conditions for self-rule, self-governance, and self-organization. It has established a vio-

lent order, both in terms of the coercive structures needed to maintain the order, and of the ecological and social disintegration and violence that are products of that order.

The cultivation of diversity involves reclaiming the right to self-organize for those coerced into living by imposed measures. For the dominant groups of nations and humans, who impose their priorities and patterns on the living diversity of peoples and other species, the cultivation of diversity involves seeing the capacity and intrinsic value of the "other"—other cultures and other species. It involves giving up the will to control, an imperative rooted in the fear of that which is free, a fear that gives rise to violence. The cultivation of diversity is, therefore, a nonviolent response to the violence of globalization, homogenization, and monocultures.

Biodiversity is fast becoming the primary site of conflict between worldviews based on diversity and nonviolence and those based on monocultures and violence.

Biodiversity has been seen as the exclusive domain of conservationists. Yet, nature's diversity converges with cultural diversity. Different cultures have emerged in accordance with different endowments of species in varied ecosystems. They have found diverse ways to conserve and utilize the rich biological wealth of their habitats. New species have been introduced into their ecosystems with careful experimentation and innovation. Biodiversity does not merely symbolize nature's richness; it embodies diverse cultural and intellectual traditions.

There are two conflicting paradigms of biodiversity. The first paradigm is held by local communities, whose survival and sustenance is linked to the utilization and conservation of biodiversity. The second is held by commercial interests, whose profits are linked to utilizing global biodiversity as inputs for large-scale, homogeneous, centralized, and global production systems. For local indigenous communities, conserving biodiversity means conserving their rights to their resources, knowledge, and production systems. For commercial interests, such as pharmaceutical and agricultural biotechnology companies,

biodiversity in itself has no value; it is merely raw material. Production is based on biodiversity destruction, as local production systems based on diversity are displaced by production based on uniformity.

The conflict between these two paradigms is exacerbated by the emergence of new biotechnologies for the manipulation of life and new legal regimes for the monopoly control on life.

Both the technological and legal trends are toward monocultures and uniformity. They are predicated on wiping out diverse technological options as well as the pluralistic ways people have related to nature and evolved systems of rights and obligations. The monopolizing control of the molecular monoculture mind is most powerful through the rise of the new tools of genetic engineering. As Jack Kloppenburg has warned:

Though the capacity to move genetic material between species is a means for introducing additional variation, it is also a means for engineering uniformity across species.<sup>1</sup>

The production of transgenic species has been achieved through the crossing of species boundaries, which have been nature's way of maintaining distinctiveness and diversity. While the ecological impact of crossing these boundaries has not yet been fully anticipated or assessed, a few predictions are possible. For example, breeding plants for herbicide resistance is one of the largest areas of investment in agricultural biotechnology. The aim is to concentrate market control of agriculture into the hands of a few corporations. At the same time, however, it introduces new pressures for uniformity since crops not resistant to these herbicides cannot be grown in fields contaminated by their excessive use. Further, in regions of biodiversity, the introduction of crops genetically engineered for herbicide tolerance can end up creating superweeds, as genes for herbicide resistance transfer to weedy relatives of crops.

From an ecological perspective, these technological options are wasteful, hazardous, and unnecessary. They are being spread not only because legal systems create conditions of mo-

nopoly control over biological material and markets through intellectual property rights. Like patents, IPRs are supposed to be rights to products of the mind. Yet different cultures have evolved different knowledge traditions, and different values and norms for the sharing and exchange of that knowledge. Thus, for example, at the beginning of the agricultural season in India, during a festival called *Akti*, farmers bring their diverse seeds together and exchange them. In this cultural context, the seed is treated as common, not private, property. Intellectual property rights, however, are based on a knowledge monoculture that excludes diverse knowledge traditions. IPRs colonize the intellectual heritage of non-Western cultures as well as their natural heritage, which is concentrated in what have become Third World countries over five centuries of unilaterally determined exchange.

The TRIPS treaty in GATT recognizes IPRs only as private, not common, rights. This excludes all kinds of knowledge, ideas, and innovations that take place in the intellectual commons—in villages among farmers, in forests among tribespeople, and even in universities among scientists. Such IPR protection will stifle the pluralistic ways of knowing that have enriched our world.

IPRs are recognized only when knowledge and innovation generate profits, not when they meet social needs. Profits and capital accumulation are the only ends to which creativity is put; the social good is no longer recognized.

The universalization of the preferred priorities of a very small part of human society will destroy creativity, not encourage it. By reducing human knowledge to the status of private property, intellectual property rights shrink the human potential to innovate and create; they transform the free exchange of ideas into theft and piracy.

In reality, IPRs are the sophisticated name for modern piracy. With no regard or respect for other species and cultures, IPRs are a moral, ecological, and cultural outrage. Moreover,

IPR actions in the biodiversity domain are tainted with cultural, racial, and species prejudice and arrogance.

The GATT is the platform where the capitalistic, patriarchal notion of freedom as the unrestrained right of men with economic power to own, control, and destroy life is articulated as free trade. But for the Third World, and particularly for women, freedom has different meanings. In what seems the remote domain of international trade, these different meanings of freedom are a focus of contest and conflict. Free trade in food and agriculture is the concrete location of the most fundamental ethical and economic issues facing humans today.

The biodiversity issue is an opportunity to recover diversity at the ethical, ecological, epistemological, and economic levels.

The conservation of biodiversity, at the most fundamental level, is the ethical recognition that other species and cultures have rights, that they do not merely derive value from economic exploitation by a few privileged humans. The patenting and ownership of life-forms is ethically a statement of the opposite belief.

Biodiversity conservation is a product of the cultural contributions of communities that respect other species, and that have evolved the knowledge of diverse species and their interactions to allow for a utilization in harmony with the objectives of conservation.

Conservation of biodiversity, therefore, involves the conservation of cultural diversity and a plurality of knowledge traditions. This plurality, in turn, is ecologically necessary for survival in times of rapid change and accelerated breakdown.

Even as the world becomes more and more uncertain and unpredictable, technological and economic models are being based on a linear paradigm that assumes total certainty and control. While we live with the negative social and ecological consequences of past systems of centralization and uniformity in production, the centralization and uniformity is being increased.

It is often assumed that centralization and uniformity are growth imperatives. But growth of what?

When multidimensional, diverse systems are perceived in their entirety, they are found to have high productivity. Their low productivity is a product of an approach that evaluates and assesses within in a one-dimensional framework, which is, in turn, related to an instrumental worldview. When a pig or cow is simply treated as a bioreactor, for instance, to produce a certain kind of chemical for the pharmaceutical industry, it can be re-engineered and redesigned without any ethical constraint. Diversity as a worldview allows diverse components to be perceived, irrespective of their size. The recognition of the diverse roles and interdependence of each part puts limits on our exploitation of other species, and limits human arrogance.

*Navdanya* (nine seeds) or *barnaja* (twelve crops) are examples of highly productive systems of mixed farming or polycultures based on diversity, yielding more than any monoculture can. Unfortunately, they are disappearing—not because of their low productivity, but because they need no inputs, being based on symbiosis with legumes providing nitrogen to cereals. In addition, their outputs are diverse—providing all of the nutritional inputs a family needs. This diversity, however, acts against commercial interests, which need to maximize the production of a single output to maximize profits. Polycultures, by their very nature, are ecologically prudent. Thus, recovering diversity in production provides a countervailing force to the globalized, centralized, and homogeneous systems of production that are destroying livelihoods, cultures, and ecosystems everywhere.

By pluralizing our options, we simultaneously create the tools for reconstruction and resistance. In India, a massive movement—the Seed *Satyagraha*—has emerged over the past few years in response to the threats of recolonization through GATT, especially its intellectual property rights clauses. According to Gandhi, no tyranny can enslave a people who con-

sider it immoral to obey laws that are unjust. As he stated in *Hind Swaraj*:

As long as the superstition that people should obey unjust laws exists, so long will slavery exist. And a passive resister alone can remove such a superstition.<sup>2</sup>

*Satyagraha* is the key to self-rule, or *swaraj*. The phrase that echoed most during India's freedom movement was "*Swaraj hamara janmasidh adhikar hai*" (self-rule is our birthright). For Gandhi, and for the contemporary social movements in India, self-rule did not imply governance by a centralized state, but by decentralized communities. "*Nate na raj*" (our rule in our village) is one slogan from India's grassroots environmental movement.

At a massive rally in Delhi in March 1993, a charter of farmers' rights was developed. One of the rights is local sovereignty. Local resources have to be managed on the principle of local sovereignty, wherein the natural resources of the village belong to that village.

A farmer's right to produce, exchange, modify, and sell seed is also an expression of *swaraj*. Farmers' movements in India have declared they will violate the GATT treaty, if it is implemented, since it violates their birthright.

Another Gandhian concept that the Seed *Satyagraha* has revived is that of *swadeshi*. *Swadeshi* is the spirit of regeneration, a method of creative reconstruction. According to the *swadeshi* philosophy, people already possess, both materially and morally, what they need to free themselves of oppressive structures.

*Swadeshi*, for Gandhi, was a positive concept based on building on the resources, skills, and institutions of a community, and when necessary, transforming them. Imposed resources, institutions, and structures leave a people unfree. For Gandhi, *swadeshi* was central to the creation of peace and freedom.

In the free trade era, the rural communities of India are redefining nonviolence and freedom by reinventing the concepts of *swadeshi*, *swaraj*, and *satyagraha*. They are saying "no" to unjust

laws, like the GATT treaty, that legalize the theft of the biological and intellectual heritage of Third World communities.

A central part of the Seed *Satyagraha* is to declare the common intellectual rights of Third World communities. While the innovations of Third World communities might differ in process and objectives from those in the commercial world of the West, they cannot be discounted just because they are different. The knowledge of the rich bounties of nature's diversity has been a gift from the Third World. But Seed *Satyagraha* has gone beyond just saying "no." It has created alternatives by building community seed banks, strengthening farmers' seed supply, and searching for sustainable agricultural options suitable for different regions.

The seed has become the site and symbol of freedom in the age of manipulation and monopoly of its diversity. It plays the role of Gandhi's spinning wheel in this period of recolonization through free trade. The *charkha* (spinning wheel) became an important symbol of freedom not because it was big and powerful, but because it was small; it could come alive as a sign of resistance and creativity in the smallest of huts and poorest of families. In smallness lay its power.

The seed, too, is small. It embodies diversity and the freedom to stay alive. And seed is still the common property of small farmers in India. In the seed, cultural diversity converges with biological diversity. Ecological issues combine with social justice, peace, and democracy.