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Transcript: Interview with Dr. Vandana Shiva

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Transcript 

[Since this interview with Vandana Shiva in which she talks about Coca-Cola's involvement in water depletion and contamination in Kerala, India, we have received letters on the issue both from Coca-Cola India and from the affected village. Read the [letter from Coca-Cola India](#) responding to Vandana Shiva's remarks on NOW. Also, read the [letter from the Panchayat](#) (15-member elected board at the village level) addressed to the plant manager of Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages voicing community complaints against the plant.]



BILL MOYERS: What do you mean by globalization?

DR. VANDANA SHIVA: It is rules written into the World Trade Organization. It is rules that say you cannot decide the agriculture policy. You cannot decide your tariff structures. You cannot decide to make sure your people have food. You cannot decide that people in your country have jobs. The market will decide it and the market will be favored on the basis of unfair asymmetric rules of trade.

BILL MOYERS: Who writes those rules?

DR. VANDANA SHIVA: Unfortunately, it wasn't governments even though they're the members of the WTO. The rules of WTO were written by corporations. There were four new areas brought into trade that never belonged to trade: agriculture, intellectual property, services and investment. Now, each of these four areas had a treaty in the general agreement on trade and tariffs in the Uruguay Round.

Every one of those treaties was driven by a particular group of companies. The agricultural agreement driven by Agri-Business. The TRIPS agreement, the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights agreement driven by the pharmaceutical industry, the biotech industry and the entertainment industry. The services agreement driven by the financial interests, the banks. And now increasingly driven by the water companies which want to treat trade in water as a trade in services.

When I was in Tehri last week... Tehri is a town, it is the capital of our region. And it's been dammed on the Ganges to supply water now through Suez to Delhi.

BILL MOYERS: This is a project by the big French company, Suez.

DR. VANDANA SHIVA: Suez, this world's biggest water company, wants to privatize the Ganges. One hundred thousand people were displaced. And the women started to talk about how many women are starting to commit suicide. Because they can't walk the water and the government has canceled every local water scheme saying, "Now all the money, all the public wealth has gone into these mega-projects." So not only are rural communities denied the water, they are denied the public investment to bring water if their own village has run dry. So we have women jumping into the Ganges because now the Ganges instead of being their mother for life has become a graveyard. So it is, in a way, a system of dispossessing

the poor.

Coca-Cola, South India, just been there on Earth Day. I celebrated a year of protests with tribal women who are fighting Coca-Cola, which is sucking out 1.5 million liters a day of water for the bottling of what is called India. And the Coca-Cola bottled water. Interestingly, two miles radius, every tank, every well is dry. Women have no drinking water. That's how it plays out.

BILL MOYERS: You're saying this is depriving the people at the grassroots of the water they need just for the sustenance of life? Is that the point?

DR. VANDANA SHIVA: Absolutely. Women in the hills are being denied water so that every drop of Ganges water can flow down to be sold. So globalization commodifies what the resources that are necessary for survival.

BILL MOYERS: There is an argument that water is getting increasingly scarce and only the market can determine how it can be effectively distributed. You obviously disagree with that.

DR. VANDANA SHIVA: I disagree with it because I'm enough of a scientist to know that water is created in nature and not in markets. Markets can only allocate water and take it uphill to where the money is. Usually this means that those who have destroyed water resources by abuse and pollution get new license to destroy it.

It is not an incentive to conserve. It's an incentive to over-exploit. And the Coca-Cola case in Kerala is a very good example. That here is a company that can take the water. It doesn't conserve the water. Depletes it and creates scarcity where there was no scarcity.

BILL MOYERS: Is it taking this, is it bottling this water for sale?

DR. VANDANA SHIVA: It's bottling the water for sale. So water it takes for free from local communities it then sells at ten rupees a bottle.

BILL MOYERS: But don't they have...

DR. VANDANA SHIVA: They never cleared it from the community. And our Constitution requires that in tribal areas, the tribals are the ultimate competent authority in legal terms. The community as a whole has to give clearance on any resource used.

BILL MOYERS: The Indian government has to be a party, right? You couldn't a corporation couldn't just come in there and do what it wants to do because India is a democracy. And the people are represented, supposedly, in the Parliament and it's a member, your government is a member of the World Trade Organization, the WTO. So how does this play out? Give me an example.

DR. VANDANA SHIVA: Well, the way it actually plays out is that every country and every government which has actually implemented these rules has lost elections. And every opposition party that has said, "We need to call this kind of corporate-driven globalization to a halt," has won elections. But once they come into power, their hands are tied by these rules because contrary to what is perceived that countries make a decision. Once countries are members, they, in a way, are forced to adopt the whole baggage.

And the Coca-Colas of the worlds, the Cargills of the world, the Monsantos of the world, the Suez-Vivendis of the world rest on local elites. They rest on local elites who also benefit out of destroying the livelihoods of their own people. It is not the case that Indian elites don't join with the global elites. Globalization in my view is a partnership of elites to exploit the people of the world against the democratic will of people.

BILL MOYERS: It was just a coincidence that earlier this week I happened to read a report by a company here in New York saying that corruption in India is at an all-time high. That in some states, in fact, less than 1/3 of the development money reaches its intended goals. And that even in the capital of New Delhi, 20 percent of the members of Parliament have a criminal past. That 40 percent of famine relief stock is sold on the black market. I mean, that's a pretty devastating portrait of what's happening in your own country.

DR. VANDANA SHIVA: And it's been made worse by the kind of money that global corporations bring in. Two decades ago, every politician of India had to go house to house, ask for funding. Make sure that the financial base of elections was the political base of governance.

You know, kick-backs is the name given to corporate bribes. In the case of Enron, I mean, its corrupt factors here were known.

But very little is known about the fact that Enron came into India along with Bechtel to set up a plant. And they had an entire budget item called "political education" that through the court hearings in India was revealed to be corruption money.

So political education has become the new name for bribes and corruption. And the scale is so different. You know, two rupees versus two billion. The mound of corruption you can spread is huge.

BILL MOYERS: Is the world's largest democracy in jeopardy?

DR. VANDANA SHIVA: I think all the world's democracies are in jeopardy. And my own thesis is that this is connected to the trade liberalization and globalization.

BILL MOYERS: How? Because most people in this country who support trade liberalization say just the opposite. You know, they say this is what brings globalization is what brings ideas. It brings wealth. It brings technology and innovation to a country. And it should create a commonwealth of prosperity. You're saying just the opposite.

DR. VANDANA SHIVA: Well, if globalization was founded on democratic decision making from the ground up, it would create more freedom of interaction. It would create more flow of positive ideas, more universal solidarity among communities. But globalization as it's shaped right now under the coercive rules of trade under the World Trade Organization, of the World Bank and IMF structure adjustment, basically doesn't create wealth.

It takes the wealth of the poor and puts them in the hands of global cooperation, leaving insecurity behind. In addition, decisions that we made as national systems, whether it was decisions about how we run our intellectual property rights systems. What do we do with our water?

How do we do our agriculture? What seeds we plant? What price our crops will sell at? All those are decisions taken out of the country, put into a World Trade Organization or put into the hands of global corporations.

BILL MOYERS: You are very controversial. I was reading one of your critics say, "Dr. Shiva," and he was respectful of much of your science, of much, he said, "But she too often feeds off the West's vision of a golden age of pre-industrial idyll when the peasants lived in mystical harmony with nature." Now, is he characterizing your view accurately?

DR. VANDANA SHIVA: No, he's not because you know for me, my entry point into life was as a physicist. If I am today engaged in ecological research and activism or fighting globalization or fighting for peace, it is because of the reality of today — a very contemporary reality — in which small peasants can't make a living.

I'm not talking about an idyllic past. I'm talking about a brutal today in which ordinary hard-working people are being denied their survival. I am talking about a today in which a Ganges that belonged to all is starting to belong to one company. A today where in Kerala water rich abundant rain women have no water because Coca-Cola took it. It's not an idyllic past for me. It's a violent today for which I am seeking a non-violent response.

BILL MOYERS: I know you're controversial in India because you stand up to the government and stand up to the powers that be. But you're controversial in this country because people say you have created a philosophy that is totally contrarian to our law, to our rights of property. That you want to create a kind of socialist, if not a Communist society.

Is there no compromise between what you're arguing for in India and the modernization of the world?

DR. VANDANA SHIVA: You know, it's very interesting that the choices that are opposed are always between centralized controlling states and centralized controlling markets. There's never room left for decentralized democracy for communities. And my options are beyond centralized states and beyond the centralized markets. They are about communities making decisions about how the rivers will function, how the forests will be protected, what food they will grow.

And I think the US had a deep, deep loss in imagining that societies could be built on individuals alone. That atomization can be the ground of core and structures. I think what we really need is bringing back community, bringing back commons as the next step of humanity across the world. Not just in India. Also in the United States, also in England. And that will be a peaceful world.

BILL MOYERS: I know that you don't believe everything in the West is repulsive because you came to a Canadian university. That's where you did your graduate work, isn't it? Was the...

DR. VANDANA SHIVA: I've never talked about the West being repulsive. I've talked about the colonizing West trying to present itself as the liberator being a bit of a falsehood. I have never been against interaction. I've never been against internationalism. I talk about Earth's democracy, about all of us being citizens on the planet.

And we need a globalization that is based on countries making their decisions, communities making their decisions. The current globalization is trying to build a roof by eating out the foundations. And there is panic because it's a false building. It's a building that's going to crumble. It is already crumbling.

And there is no reason to not have international trade. There's no reason not to have international interaction. There's no reason not to have international democracy. But an international democracy is a genuinely democratic only if national democracies are in tact and local democracies are vibrant.

BILL MOYERS: Dr. Vandana Shiva, thank you very much for joining us on NOW.

DR. VANDANA SHIVA: Thank you, Bill.

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