

2017 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – 3rd Prize]

Nature and Agriculture: The Idea of Life

(Original)

Anandhapadmanabhan Vijayakumar

(Age 20, India)

The anthropological relationship with nature cannot be understood without delving deeper into the practices, ideas and perceptions behind agriculture which is not only necessary for our survival, but also one of the existential anthropological activity that relates closest to the natural world.

One of the most relevant advancement made in human history in the past century is the massive revolution in agricultural practices that we call green revolution, that has also been a catalyst for cementing the much needed food security for millions. However, what we fail to notice in this is the after effects of the green revolution as we know, due to the exclusion of sustainable ecological practices that once dominated cultivation. Modern agricultural practices has been rife with exclusion of fundamental ecological determinants by eliminating the once diverse and countless varieties of crops and seeds, each of which had evolved over time to suit itself to the local ecosystem and climate.

The focus of Indigenous agricultural practices once used to be in creating an Ecosystem being inclusive of the delicate food web, the soil, the bacteria, insects and countless life forms that had built the delicate biological balance in which life in all its diversity stood and evolved.

Traditional agricultural practices involved the assimilation of ecology with cultivation. A certain philosophy of life and symbiosis that nurtured your nutrition. Managing the ecosystem was of priority. Studies indicate how constant biological interaction of these crop varieties with a flourishing ecosystem helped these crop varieties naturally evolve over time to improve its nutrient content, pest resistance and medicinal qualities. Evolution of life does not happen in isolation, but through constant biological interaction with your surroundings and your cognitive perceptions. Being one of the first steps of evolution, it is important to let the plants "perceive" a diverse and versatile reality so that they evolve to reflect the "collective quality" of the environment they grew in.

In essence, agriculture in itself has this philosophy of life of exposing the crop to the million manifestations of nature and allowing them to interact with the ecological reality that surrounds them. Allowing each generation of these crops to evolve. To provide them with a milieu just as humans would under a diverse society.

More than 40000 varieties of rice evolved through time, interacting with the ecology that traditional wisdom knew not to interrupt. No R&D, no laboratory experiments. Just letting them grow in a diverse ecology.

All manifestations of life accumulate certain Cognitive and perceptual knowledge in the course of their lifetime, gradually causing it to interpolate into their genetic makeup and evolve through generations. Be it a honey bee, a human or even a crop. The exclusion of bio pool around crops leave crops nothing to interact with, making it just a piece of life in the middle of nowhere with a stunted development of its cognitive biology. This will eventually result in the destruction of the ontological process resulting from being part of a diverse natural milieu.

I understand the challenges of poverty and global hunger. But a transcendental approach to agriculture will fail sooner or later, as several generations of crops pass, detached from an ecosystem and cut out from the process of evolution will eventually fall in ontological versatility. Philosophy of agriculture and Nature nourish the same philosophy of life. The principle is that impulses and evolution of life is mutually entangled. Actions of one form of life has a profound effect on itself and the world around it. It is therefore not conservation alone, but also evolution which should be envisaged in our understanding of nature.