

Vandana Shiva

Is Climate Change a 'Man-made' problem with a Feminist Solution?

Key Concepts: Eco-Feminism
Key Work: *Staying Alive – Women, Ecology, and Development (1999)*, *Soil Not Oil (2008)*, *Water Wars (2002)*, *The Violence of the Green Revolution*.

“The worldwide destruction of the feminine knowledge of agriculture evolved over four to five thousand years by a handful of white male scientists in less than two decades has not merely violated women as experts but, ... has gone hand in hand with the ecological destruction of nature’s processes and the economic destruction of poor people in rural areas.” *“Staying Alive”, P. 8.*

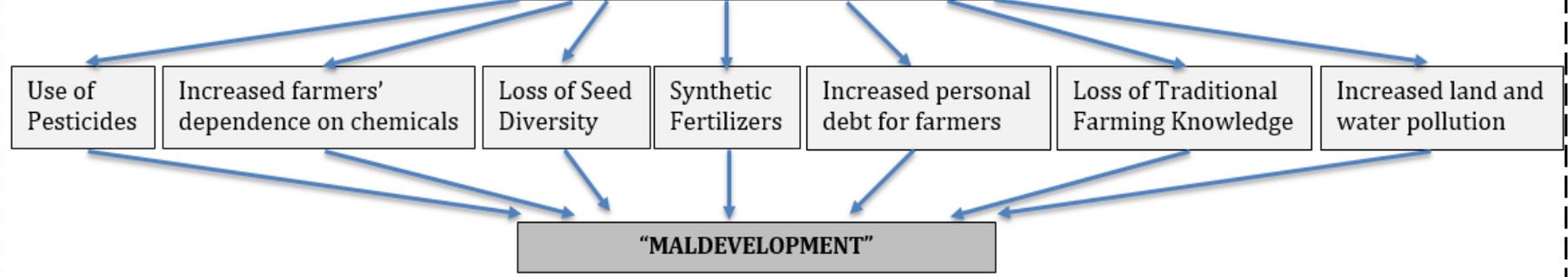
Background: The ‘Green’ Revolution
From the late 1950s and 60s there was a major change in the way food was produced. Instead of relying on traditional farming methods, the Green Revolution brought Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO seeds such as ‘Dwarf Wheat’ and ‘IR8 Rice’). This significantly higher “yields”, but were dependent on synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, mechanization (petroleum energy), and different irrigation methods. This movement was headed up by scientist Norman Borlaug (“*The Father of the Green Revolution*”), who won the **Nobel Prize** for Peace in 1970, because it was argued that the increased food production saved about 1 Million lives, and reduced conflicts over scarce food resources.
Your job, when trying to get your head around whether you support Shiva’s ideas or not, is to weigh up the positive benefits of the Green Rev and see do they outweigh the negative consequences....?

Shiva argues against this development in her book “*Violence and the Green Revolution*”
She wants to understand what she calls the “Ecology of Terrorism”, where she links the growth of international terrorism with changes in ecological practices. She summarizes them into 3 lessons:
1. Nondemocratic economic systems that centralize control over decision making and resources and displace people from productive employment and livelihoods create a culture of insecurity. (Link to Eriksen)
2. Destruction of resource rights and erosion of democratic control of natural resources, the economy, & means undermines cultural identity, where one is in competition with the “other” over scarce resources. (Marx and Said)
3. Centralized Economic systems erode the democratic base of politics. In a democracy, the economic agenda is the political agenda. When the former is hijacked by the WB, IMF, WTO, democracy is decimated.

The Green Rev has been heralded as an unprecedented political & technological achievement. But this supposedly nonviolent revolution has left lands ravaged by violence & ecological scarcity. Shiva examines the “*devastating effects of monoculture and commercial agriculture and revealing the nuanced relationship between ecological destruction and poverty*”. Control over nature & control over people were essential elements of the centralising strategy of the Green Rev. Ecological breakdown and the political breakdown of society were both consequences of a policy based on tearing apart both nature and society. It is “the American paradigm of agriculture,” imposed on India as a condition of receiving aid.



Shiva’s Criticism of the Green Revolution



Shiva prefers to talk about Climate **Chaos**, rather than Climate ‘**Change**’. But why? ‘Change’ suggests predictability which is definitely not the case and also has positive connotations, i.e. ‘change’ is not inherently a bad thing. Shiva thinks that it is not a good description of the current problem...

The Green Revolution is the “New Slavery, New Holocaust, New Apartheid – a War against nature, women, children, and the poor”

Two Organizations you MUST Know:

Chipko: Eco-Socialist & **Eco-Feminist** movement started in 1973 to carry out 'non-violent' protests over Deforestation in Northern India (now heavily involved in afforestation). They were the original 'Tree Huggers'. They inspired the young Shiva who returned to India to participate in protests.

Navdanya: Shiva's Indian-based NGO which promotes **biodiversity, conservation, biodiversity, organic farming**, the rights of farmers, and the process of **seed saving**. Established in 1984 and meaning the '9 Seeds', it has 54 community seed banks, and has trained over 500,000 farmers in "*food sovereignty*" and sustainable agriculture, and helped set up the largest direct marketing, fair trade organic network in India. According to Shiva, "**Seed Freedom** is the answer to hunger and malnutrition" What happens to the seed affects the web of life. Shiva argues that "*When seed is living, regenerative and diverse, it feeds pollinators, soil organisms and animals - including humans. When seed is non-renewable, bred for chemicals, or genetically engineered with toxic Bt or Roundup Ready genes, diversity disappears.*"

Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution and Profit

Some of Shiva's Principles of 'Water Democracy'

Water is Nature's gift.

We receive it freely from nature, therefore we owe it to nature to use this gift in accordance with our sustenance needs, to keep it clean and in adequate quantity.

Water is a 'commons'.

It is not a human invention. It cannot be bound and has no boundaries. Therefore, it cannot be owned as private property and sold as a commodity. Link this idea to John Locke's ideas of 'Property Rights' & land enclosure...

Water cannot be substituted.

Water is intrinsically different from other resources and products. It cannot be treated as a commodity.

Shiva argues that the mismanagement of Water resources by National Government, the World Bank, the IMF, and private corporations has resulted in increased conflicts over water rights. The 'Water Wars' mutate into culture wars and/or religious war, but are actually about 'access to vital resources'. She overtly links this to groups like Boko Haram and the origins of the Civil War in Syria which she says started off as an 'ecological conflict' in 2011 when 60% of Syria's arable land "*experienced the most severe and prolonged drought, causing crop failures in the land where agriculture had begun and has endured for 12,000 years.*" (WW, xxviii)



Criticisms of Shiva

As you will have seen above, much of her language is suffused with Violence. You need to decide whether you think that this is done as a way to shock and motivate Shiva's readers, as a way to highlight the real cost of the Green Revolution, or whether it could be seen as an incitement to more radical action? Would Shiva be responsible for an outbreak of violence at a protest, or is this morally acceptable?

Mark Lynas – British author & Climate Change activist criticises Shiva, saying she is a "**Demagogue** who opposes the universal values of the enlightenment)." He argues that her figures around **farmer suicide** are dramatically oversimplified.

Anne Glover, Chief Scientific Advisor to the European Commission, thinks it is "unethical to ignore G.M. crops if other approaches have failed." She thinks that most people are less concerned with the technology itself, but with the "*business practices in the agrifood sector, which is dominated by multinational corporations.*"

Others criticise her **Extremism**. New Yorker Magazine's Michael Specter reported that in the aftermath of a cycle hitting India in 1999, 10,000 people died and millions were left homeless. When the US dispatched grain and soy to help the victims, Shiva held a news conference claiming that the "*US has been using the Orissa victims as guinea pigs*" for their GM products. She then wrote to the NGO Oxfam to say that "*she hoped it wasn't planning to send GM food to feed the starving survivors.*" (If you want to dig further into these criticisms, read Specter's article "**Seeds of Doubt**" – New Yorker Magazine, 25th August, 2015.)

Shiva and John Locke – The 'Tragedy of the Commons'

Shiva argues that Locke's treatise on property "effectively legitimized the theft of the commons in Europe during the enclosure movements of the 17th Century", partly to justify his own family's wealth. Remember back to his 'labour theory of property', where Locke argues that idle, unused land becomes the property of the person who cultivates and encloses it... "*Whatsoever, then, he removes out of the state of Nature hath provided and left in it, he hath mixed his labour with it, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property.*" *** Most people forget the next bit – so long as 'as much and as good remains for others'!!!****

She disagrees with Garrett Hardin who argued that the lack of social management in the commons was "a recipe for lawlessness".

Instead, Shiva argues that "*the concept of ownership, not on an individual basic, but at the level of the group*" should be the guiding principle of how to deal with water. Shiva argues that "Regulations of utility are what protect pastures from overgrazing, forests from disappearing and water resources from vanishing.

This shift in how water is owned and managed is, she argues, disastrous for poor farmers. "*Most privatization of water projects pushed by WB and IMF have been stopped wherever and whenever movements for Water Democracy have arisen to defend the rights of water, the rights of communities to their water commons, and their right to life.*"

Two Key Case Studies: What does the data say?

Investigate the data and arguments in these 2 key legal cases taken by Shiva

Shiva 'vs' Monsanto

Arguments in favour of Shiva:

Monsanto's Defence:

Shiva 'vs' Coca Cola

Arguments in favour of Shiva:

Coca Cola's Defence:

Shiva is a very powerful public speaker. Make sure that you've watched a couple of her YouTube interviews. Try searching: **A Billion Go Hungry Because of GMO Framing: Vandana Shiva**. Check out her contribution to the Film "**Seed: The Untold Story**". And because I love podcasts, try her interview in Season 1 Ep 5 of the "**Mothers of Invention**" Podcast -v. useful!

Test your knowledge: As your 'Exit Ticket', test yourself on the Key Terms by taking the Shiva quiz at : <https://polsocpodcast.com/key-thinker-quizzes/>. There are quizzes there relating to all of your key thinkers and lots of the institutions we study. Give them a try! Listen to Ep 8 of the podcast (on Fr McDonagh) and see what similarities you can find between the two...

Thinker's Background

- Shiva was born in 1952 into the prosperous 'Brahmin' class in India, meaning that she had a higher social status (in contrast with the lower 'Dalit' caste who are predominantly paid labourers rather than land-owning farmers).
- Her father was a conservator of forests, and her mother was a farmer with a love for nature, both of which suggest a longstanding commitment to environmental and farming issues and concerns
- Educated initially in India, she pursued her graduate studies in Canada, receiving an MA at Guelph and a PhD at the University of Western Ontario on the Philosophy of Science (this is sometimes misrepresented as saying that she is a 'Quantum' or 'Nuclear' Physicist – which isn't quite right, it seems!)
- Her earlier involvement with the **Chipko** movement resulted in her founding **Navdanya** (see above), which is now a national movement with seed banks all over India and with increasing political support.
- She has written more than 40 'Peer Reviewed' journal articles and dozens of books (which she updates regularly by adding new introductions. This is both very useful for our purposes, but also helps keep her work relevant and up to date!). She is also a prolific blogger, which you can find archived on her website: <http://www.vandanashiva.com>

Personal Response

(A.) **"Underdevelopment is caused by people in less developed countries not having the knowledge, technology and industry of people in developed countries."** In responding to this question in relation to Shiva, ask yourself, "What is meant by 'technology' here? Is it just things like computers and advanced machinery, or are GMO crops and synthetic fertilizers also technology?" Would Shiva push back against this idea?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

(B.) **"Industrialisation in less-developed countries has driven women, who were the traditional environmental stewards in societies, into a position of powerlessness and poverty and has damaged the environment."** As an 'Eco-Feminist' Shiva would certainly agree with this statement. But even if you don't agree, you'll need to take these ideas into account...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Links to other aspects of the course

You might find some obvious links, but there are some surprises in this area too!

1. How does he link to the idea of Human Rights and whether or not they are a Western ideas imposed on the East? Shiva argues that access to water is not a commodity, but a basic right. She calls these '**Usufructuary**' rights (A right of one individual to use and enjoy the property of another, provided its substance is neither impaired nor altered, i.e. water in a stream). This is a fundamental rejection of **Locke's** view of property rights.
2. There are clear overlaps here with Fr Sean **McDonagh**. Compare his discussion of the T'Boli people in the Philippines with Shiva's arguments about India.
3. Look back to your notes on **AGF**. What were his (mainly economic) insights into the Green Revolution. Do they broadly support or contrast with Shiva?
4. Would Shiva agree with **Huntington** that 'western' Human Rights aren't as 'universal' as some people believe?
5. What kind of intersectional experience of Feminism would Shiva have? Would **Walby** view her activism as part of the public or private Patriarchy (or maybe both?)?

Reading Tip: In your research see if you can find out more about how scientists have responded to the criticisms of the Green Revolution. Pay particular attention to the newer idea of the "**Evergreen Revolution**". Check out an article from "*The Times of India*" called 'Father of Green Revolution gives call for Evergreen Revolution', well worth a read!

In particular, investigate the possibilities presented by "**Golden Rice**", which is a strain of GM rice that is particularly strong in Vitamin A. Its proponents/advocates argue that it has the potential to save up to 1 million lives a year. In your research, try and identify and evaluate **THREE** pieces of information and assess the quality of the sources...

Favourite Moment: One further criticism of Shiva by Bernie Mooney is that "*She also may not be the Socialist darling the western left think she is. Her insistence on a return to traditional ways, or 'local ways of knowing' is very much more in tune with right-wing Hindu nationalism than socialism. It means a return to the feudal and caste system of the past, which rather than help impoverished people, will harm them. It will only help the land-owning elite. Basically she wants a return to the status quo of her Brahmin, landowning you, **except with women in charge.**"* **Do you agree?** Read more here.: <https://theprogressivecontrarian.wordpress.com/2013/01/06/vandana-shiva-brahmin-in-shudra-clothing/>