

August 2019

**Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development. Vandana Shiva.
North Atlantic Books, 2016 (Reprint Edition), 244 pages. ISBN
978-1-62317-051-6**

Chittaranjan Subudhi

Keyoor K

Follow this and additional works at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws>



Part of the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Subudhi, Chittaranjan and K, Keyoor (2019). Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development. Vandana Shiva. North Atlantic Books, 2016 (Reprint Edition), 244 pages. ISBN 978-1-62317-051-6. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 20(7), 428-429.

Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol20/iss7/29>

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

This journal and its contents may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Authors share joint copyright with the JIWS. ©2022 Journal of International Women's Studies.

Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development. Vandana Shiva. North Atlantic Books, 2016 (Reprint Edition), 244 pages. ISBN 978-1-62317-051-6

By Keyoor¹ and Chittaranjan Subudhi²

What defines the process of development highly discussed and debated topic in the contemporary era. Vandana Shiva's book *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* is a contribution to this discourse. Shiva evaluates consumerism and the reductionist science of modern Western scientific framing and posits the need for feminine-principle based development, which is non-violent, non-gendered and inclusive in its primordial form. Shiva claims that reductionist science affects society in two ways: (i) exclusion of other knowers and (ii) exclusion of other ways of knowing. Further, she notes that Western science and development has maintained hegemony over all traditional and indigenous knowledge and has controlled and excluded those who were practicing it for centuries in a sustainable way.

Shiva portrays a relationship among development, ecology, and women and relates nature with women, alluding that the death of nature is in-fact the death of women. Shiva considers the modernization process as being associated with new forms of dominance that have globally led to both poverty and hunger. From this perspective, developmental projects dismantle "women's productivity both by removing land, water & forests from their management & control, as well as through the ecological destruction of soil, water and (the) vegetation system." As evidence, Shiva presents several cases, such as the Ethiopian famine, poverty of nomadic Afars and Gond in Bastar, and the Penanas of Sarawak in Malaysia attributing these outcomes to Western developmental policies. Shiva notes "development is the violation the integrity of organic, interconnected and interdependent systems that sets in motion a process of exploitation, inequality, injustices and violence". Shiva minutely discusses the harm of *scientific agriculture* referencing that it has been led by private companies and in turn, causes hunger and poverty among many communities.

Shiva investigates the nature of modern science and concludes that it is embedded with patriarchal values. Scientific-development, she notes is also patriarchal since it comes out from the core of "*western, bourgeois, masculine project.*" Shiva, also, highlights the methodologies and philosophies of the father of modern science, Francis Bacon, criticizing and relaying that for Bacon "*it was a special program benefitting the middle class, European, male interpreneurs....*" and he was promised to make "*a blessed race of heroes and superman.*" Shiva notes that in Baconian science there is a dichotomy of male and female, subjective and objective, mind and matter, rational and emotional, and it is neither neutral nor value free. From this perspective, Baconian science, Shiva posits, promotes the philosophy of production in lieu of reproduction by controlling nature. For Shiva, it is an attempt of "*de-mothering of nature.*"

To present the importance of women in a traditional knowledge system Shiva depicts their role in Indian cosmology and emphasizes that women are an integral part of nature both in imagination and in practices. In Indian cosmology the "*world is produced and renewed by the*

¹ Keyoor is Post-Doctoral Fellow at Council for Social Development (CSD), Hyderabad, Telangana, India.

² Chittaranjan Subudhi is working as an Assistant Professor, in the Department of Social Work, School of Social Sciences and Humanities, Central University of Tamil Nadu, Thiruvavur-610005, India, Mob: +91-9658639979 India, Email: chittaranjan.subudhi@gmail.com / chittaranjan@cutn.ac.in

dialectical play of creation and destruction, cohesion and disintegration” and nature is an expression of *Shakti*, which is feminine-principle of cosmos. *Prkriti*(nature) is worshiped as *Aditi*, the primordial power and source of prosperity. Without *Shakti*, the force of creation and destruction, *Shiva* is powerless. In Indian cosmology, the universe is an organism wherein there is no separation between the popular and elite imagery, sacred and secular traditions, men and women, forest and river, field and forest, animals and crops and so on. From this perspective, the question of transgender is not a question of exclusion, rather they are the part of the organic construction. Their exclusion is consistent with Western science, which relies on dualism. Shiva establishes the view that like nature, women produce and reproduce life not merely biologically, but socially and economically also.

Shiva argues for the interconnectedness of the forest and women and asserts that from ancient times people were integrally linked to forests. Their survival was dependent on forests. Forests were worshiped within a feminine perspective as *Aranyani* and this view was prevalent across most of the South Asian communities. The masculine view came during British period and several scientific tools and techniques were used to exploit forests and forest dwellers that finally resulted in poverty, hunger, displacement in Third World Countries. It also replaced rural and tribal knowledge as well as the survival system, introducing a new kind of scientific forestry. It is notable that period between 1855 and 1861, the destruction of the forest was at its peak in the name of developmental activities such as railways and industries. Scientific management of forestry became a tool of oppression and subjugation to indigenous communities. Social-forestry projects, and entire a-forestation projects were violent and destructive in their core goal. For example, greening with eucalyptus is violence against natural ecology, however industrialists, foresters and bureaucrats appropriated eucalyptus trees since they have commercial and market importance.

In the context of the agricultural system, Shiva refers to the father of sustainable farming, Sir Alfred Howard, who wrote in his classic *‘An Agricultural Testament’* that knowledge of India is far more advanced than that of West. Shiva criticizes *green revolution* and *scientific agriculture* that damaged traditional ways of organic agriculture and ecology. The feminine principle of food was based on the connection between trees, animals, crops and participation of women. Shiva considers the *green revolution*, *white revolution*, *scientific agriculture* and high-yielding-seeds as harmful and unjustifiable paths of development. She reflects that modern agricultural development breached the traditional inclusiveness and crushed their activities in two sectors: “first, is highly visible, globally planned and controlled and state subsidized production for profits and markets, and second, is less, sometimes invisible self-provisioning of food through what is called subsistence farming”. In fact, the first is masculinization of modern chemical incentives, mechanized, capital intensive and the second one is feminization of traditional subsistence food production, which is extremely poor, unhealthy and vulnerable. Shiva also probes the problem of water and states that actually it is manmade problem, which is inherent in the policies of modern development. In today’s world, a large proportion of the population is being displaced and dispossessed from their own place and traditional knowledge system for the sake of development, which is urban-centric and has lesser affinity towards the people of peripheral regions.

To understand the core and latent principles of the Western developmental model and its patriarchal values, Shiva’s probes into the prevailing developmental framework, which is not only anti-women, but anti-humanity and anti-earth in its broader consequences. Shiva’s book is relevant not only to academicians, but common readers, students from across a broad array of disciplines who may have an interest in environmental ethics and policy; activists and policymakers.