

Vandana Shiva

Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India

Spinifex Press, North Melbourne, 2010, 224 pp., \$34.95.

Vandana Shiva was one of India's leading physicists before becoming a activist committed to radical social change. This year she will be awarded the prestigious Sydney Peace Prize, some seventeen years after she was first awarded the Right Livelihood Award (the 'alternative Nobel Prize'). Shiva bridges scientific understanding with moral philosophy – imbued with a deep concern with the environment, poverty, women's rights, energy and nutrition.

This book, first published in 1988, is one of the foundations of modern eco-feminism. The 2010 edition included a new introduction, addressing 'the gendered politics of food and the challenge of staying alive'. It situates concerns with food security as part of a broader contemporary political challenge to the power of global corporations in agriculture, the push for developing nations to grow cash crops for export and 'the masculinisation of biodiversity that has led to violent technologies' adversely affective food production (*p. xiii*). Factory farms are described as 'negative food systems' because they consume more food than they produce. Subsequent chapters re-state Shiva's critique of how globalising patriarchal capitalism adversely affects resources, water, forests and the environment as well as food and prospects for development.

Gender is a theme throughout the treatise. The emphasis is on women's disproportionate burden but also on their sometimes inspiring resistances. Shiva writes with passion about the women of the Chipko movement in rural India who 'had put the life of the forests above their own and, with their actions, had stated that nature is indispensable to survival' (*p.218*). As Shiva notes, the Chipko women also won the Right Livelihood Award. However, symptomatic of the anti-ecological ideas and interests that need to be confronted, it was in the very same year that the neoclassical economist Robert Solow received the Nobel Prize for economic science for having developed a theory of growth based on the dispensability of nature!