

MODERN SCIENCE - WESTERN, PATRIARCHAL MYTH?

Part I

A CRITIQUE OF THE POPULIST ORTHODOXY

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INTRODUCTION

A strange anomaly has come to mark the current crisis in the Third World. The more intractable the problems have become, both internally and in relation to global capital in this post cold war phase, the deeper the Third World intellectuals have tended to retreat into the womb of some primordial past.

In the name of finding a "third way" that would somehow rejuvenate the civilization projects rudely interrupted by colonialism, many Third World intellectuals have parted company with all "alien" ideas. Their zeal for the indigenous, the supposedly "authentic" voice of the oppressed, has blinded them to all distinctions between the universal, humanistic kernel of western thought and its racist and ethno-centric manifestations.

A fundamentalist fog seems to have settled on the minds of our "progressive" intellectuals who can only think in terms of the "inherent" viciousness of the "West" and modernity as opposed to a fundamentally virtuous "Third World." History and contradictions do not figure in their moral outrage which has become a substitute for analysis.

This fundamentalism is especially noticeable in India. Formal democracy and well-established institutions of higher learning in that country have helped produce a fairly large group of intellectuals who are well versed in, and work in close contact with, intellectual and political movements in the rest of the world. This has resulted in the flowering of a variety of social movements not associated with formal political parties and ideologies and active in issues related to ecology, gender, civil rights, and so on.

There is no denying that some of the "public intellectuals" associated with these movements have done a seminal job in bringing issues affecting women, the environment, and related issues to the forefront of politics. But their philosophical borrowings from western avant-garde movements like post-modernism, coupled with their staunch cultural

and economic nationalism, have led them into the blind alley of populism. Their brand of populism, unfortunately, happens to find a deep emotional resonance in the angst-ridden Western academe and the nationalistic upper classes of post-colonial societies - who have everything to gain by substituting for internal class issues (and the looming specter of an all-out class struggle) a great and eternal civilizational battle between the good, spiritual "East" and the corrupt, predatory "West".

This article aims to delineate and critique the ideological planks of this populist thinking that has gained a substantial following in the new social movements in India (and elsewhere) in recent years. I will be mainly concerned here with the deeply conservative and rejectionist stance of the populists towards modern science and technology, and by extension, modern science-led development projects. For this purpose, I will use a recently published book that summarizes the oft-heard populist arguments against modern science-based development projects as a vantage point. I refer to Vandana Shiva's much-acclaimed *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*.¹

Shiva, in the classic populist mode, zeroes in on the very real pain of working men and women caught in the epic drama of modernization. She examines how the everyday rituals, work practices, and social mores of small peasant communities are crumbling; how the social and the physical ecologies of traditional societies are being rapidly transformed. But, again like most populists, her answers to what will soothe this pain, what will make these societies whole, healthy - and for the first time ever - democratic and egalitarian, lead nowhere. Shiva's answer can be summed up in one line: Reclaim the past to build the future. And the past that she, and her fellow populists, would return to is a past without any contradictions or oppressions. The past Shiva constructs is a kind of Rousseauist paradise of small property holders, operating within an egalitarian, communitarian framework; it is a past where patriarchy and caste oppression are unknown, and scarcity, disease, and ignorance do not waste lives. That this is a contra-factual past goes without saying. It is a construct, meant to provide the populists with a blueprint of, and an endpoint for, the development of non-western societies.

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Shiva's book is an especially interesting example of this vision for she pulls together many hitherto diverse strands in populist discourse.

This synthesis lends Shiva's book a deceptive theoretical depth. It makes populism look like the only social program that is consistent with the philosophical principles of post-modernism, feminism/eco-feminism, and liberatory science. Moreover, by presenting the populist program as as the wave of the future (that will be led by Third World women but will revolutionize the whole world), Shiva gives the impression that post-modernism has definitively won the war against the Enlightenment values of progress and rationality.

I believe it is important to challenge this kind of populist triumphalism. The values of the Enlightenment and modernity must be defended in the face of this reactionary assault. And this defense is best accomplished, in my view, by engaging with the philosophical tenets of this neo-romantic, Third Worldism represented by Shiva. It is important to deconstruct the emotional, nationalistic rhetoric to lay bare its theoretical poverty. Once that is accomplished, it will be easy to see populism for the airless, dark, unlivable trap that it is.

The Political and Philosophical contours on Indian Neo-populism

For all their co-option of post-modernist, feminist and radical relativist critiques of science, rationality, and progress so fashionable in universities in the west, Shiva, Ashish Nandy and other crusading neo-Gandhians are firmly located in the age old tradition of populism. Indeed, their brand of neo-populism is even more potent as it is wedded to nationalism, one of the most pernicious doctrines of the twentieth century.

Populism is a reactionary rejection of the scientific and industrial revolutions that have changed the course of human history. According to a critic, Gavin Kitching, populist tendencies are "counter-doctrines, minority oppositional creeds" to the idea of development fueled by industrialization. Populism does not take into account the social context of modernization: capitalism and socialism are considered equally destructive of the pre-modern village communities, which populists hold as the exemplar of ecological and social harmony. Kitching locates populism within the ideological currents and political movements rooted in the threat experienced by small producers (peasants, artisans and businessmen) as a result of modern industrialization. It includes the theories of various intellectuals who identify themselves with the fate of small-scale production and champion its merits as the basis of an alternative to socialism and to capitalism.

Populism has a history as old as industrialization itself. Wherever predominantly peasant societies have been confronted with the possibility or actuality of industrializa-

tion, populist ideas have come to the fore. These ideas have sought to confront the impending change with an alternative "vision" of small-scale enterprise of peasants and artisans in a "community" of villages and small towns. Gandhi, Nyerere and contemporary protagonists of "small is beautiful" belong together with Sismondi in nineteenth century France, Proudhon and the Ricardian Socialists in England, Russian and East European populists, anarchists and the well known narodniks at the turn of the century² Indeed, the label of "ecological neo-narodnism" is quite apt as often applied to the populist strand in Indian environmental movement.

Kitching distinguishes between the romantic rejection of the "dark satanic mills" found in the nineteenth century poetic works of Wordsworth, Shelley and others and populism proper. Populism has a relatively well defined and often sophisticated economic argument against industrialization. One hallmark of a populist, as compared to a romantic, is a profession of faith in material progress. The populists argue that an increase in material well being can come about without large scale industrialization or technological modernization of means of production. They believe that such progress is perfectly compatible with preserving a society in which small-scale peasants and artisans are in a large majority. While the populist vision of more rooted communities of small independent producers is attractive, it refuses to engage with the economic logic behind modernization and industrialization. It does not recognize that its vision of community can come to fruition only within a context of sustained industrialization.³ This *a priori* rejection of modern technology-based industrialization in favor of the traditional, the supposedly more "organic" and "authentic" knowledge of the people is buttressed by a radical rejection of scientific rationality itself as western, imperialistic and oppressive.

Born in the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment project that gave birth to the modern was incredibly optimistic. It believed in equality, liberty, human perfectibility and universal reason and sought to release the potential of all human beings to attain these goals. It aimed to reveal the universal, eternal and the immutable qualities of all humanity through the application of reason to "develop objective science, universal morality and law." The twentieth century - with its colonial empires, death camps, world wars, nuclear annihilation and gulags - has shattered this optimism. Especially after the disillusionment of events in 1968, many intellectuals in Europe and North America have been inclined to reject the very ideals of the Enlightenment - universalism and progress - as inherently totalitarian and imperialistic. This "rage against humanism" as Richard Bernstein has described the post-modern mood, has resulted in a denunciation of abstract reason and a deep aversion to any project that seeks universal human emancipation through mobilization of powers of science, technology and reason. The failure of socialism, moreover, to replace commodity relations and capitalist



rationality in their own societies has led these intellectuals into a nostalgic search for some ideal space outside of capitalism; alternatives rationalities uncontaminated by the Enlightenment values of reason and progress.

This is where our Third-Worldist intellectuals come handy: they obligingly retrieve from their pasts an idealized version of a world-we-have-lost, a paradise destroyed by the evil forces of modernity. This not only provides ready-made answers to angst-ridden post-modernists but also stokes their self-righteousness in giving a hearing to “marginal” voices supposedly silenced by the imperialism of reason and western science. The neo-populists claim to be the “authentic” leaders of “development” in their societies, as compared to the “westernized,” de-cultured Third World intellectuals. The route to development they favor, paradoxically, assumes that the past is a suitable model for the future; that the way forward will be found by looking backwards.

In keeping with the idealism of post-modernism, populists do not see the uneven development of Third World societies as a result of contradictory interests of global and national capital, mediated by the class relations of the latter. The problem instead is assumed to lie in the irreconcilable differences between the traditional world-view (for some reason, almost invariably called “wisdom”) of the “subjugated cultures” and the project of modernity and Enlightenment which is posited not only as Eurocentric or western in origin but also imperialistic in intention. Modernity is thus considered incompatible with or even inimical to the Third World. “True” development in this view is simply the development of indigenous systems of knowledge and production. Indeed, our nativist, born again Third Worldists have been singing “requiems for modernity” for quite some time now.⁴

This philosophical anti-modernism is matched by a romantic anti-capitalism in politics. Unlike socialism, the anti-capitalism of populist offers only a “moral and a historical critique of capitalism which can be backward looking and reactionary or both.”⁵ Socialism fully acknowledges the achievements of capitalism and then seeks to transcend its contradictions through social struggle; in other words, convert the potential released by capitalism into actuality. The anti-capitalism fashionable among Third World neo-populists takes a nationalist, pre-capitalist and often petty-bourgeois stand against capitalism and rejects it *in toto*.

One problem with neo-populists’ appropriation of post-modernism is that its understanding of modernity is a laughable caricature of the real thing. The metanarratives of progress and reason that they decry are *much more open, nuanced and sophisticated than they care to admit*. They completely fail to acknowledge the affirmative and emancipatory promise of modernity that “all that is solid [will melt] into air,”⁶ that all relationships of oppression “fixed and fast-frozen” (Marx) will collapse, setting humanity

free from arbitrary authority, able for the first time ever to take collective control over its destiny. When Third World populists extol the virtues of pre-capitalist communities, they ignore the lack of genuine moral choice for individuals living in such communities. They fail to realize that pre-capitalist, peasant societies could not but be *coercive, authoritarian and patriarchal* for it is only with capitalism that the material foundations needed for a consensual community have been created. Only with industrial advances made possible by capitalism have more and more segments of people the world over been able to free themselves from the leaden weight of nature - the necessary (though not sufficient) pre-condition for individuals to take control of their destiny.

It is to this genre of Third World populism that Vandana Shiva’s *Staying Alive* belongs. To the existing critique of modernity and science-based development as “western and bourgeois,” Shiva adds the category of gender: development henceforth becomes a “western, bourgeois and patriarchal” or, more simply, a “white, capitalist and male” project.

Shiva charges that modern science-based development is an “inherently patriarchal and violent” project. She thus moves beyond the weak and empirically verifiable thesis that development projects are often designed with a male bias and can hurt the interests of the weaker social groups (gender, classes and castes) and makes a much more damning charge: development and science are *inherently, ipso facto* patriarchal. This charge is premised on the central tenet of eco-feminist thinking - the so called “feminine principle” (or “prakriti” as Shiva’s puts it).⁷ It simply states that women are closer to nature than men. Once this equivalence is accepted the rest follows as a corollary: the forces that degrade nature are bound to degrade women; and the world-views and practices that are “in harmony with nature” become, by definition, liberatory for women. And once ecological degradation and resource depletion in India can be blamed on modern development projects, traditional technologies and world-views by definition become the saviors of nature and women. Shiva lays out this thesis in the first three chapters and elaborates on it in the rest of the book using case studies from the social forestry programs, Green Revolution and modern irrigation regimes.

In this article, I propose to use Shiva’s book as a platform for critically examining the underlying assumptions of the larger neo-populist, Third Worldist discourse about development. I will be mainly concerned with the premises on which modern science is critiqued and rejected in the populist discourse on development. I shall marshal recent writings from literature on western civilization, feminism, philosophy of science and agricultural development in the Third World to show:

- a) The rejection of science as “western” is based on an uncritical acceptance by Third World intellectuals of



a racist, Eurocentric construction of the history of ideas put forward by some western intellectuals aligned with imperialism in the 19th century. Prisoners of a myth created and promoted by imperialism in the first place, these self-described "anti-imperialist" scholars are blind to all that is genuinely universal in science.

- b) The rejection of science as "inherently masculine" is based on a tacit acceptance of the age old misogynist myths by "radical" feminists. This feminist critique of science as a mere fabrication of patriarchy has been lately subjected to searching critiques by some feminists themselves. Moreover, this new feminine mystique that stresses "difference" over gender equality, however problematic as a political program, has come to the west only *after* most formal and cultural blocks to women's entry into science and the public sphere have weakened. Third World feminists need to be very cautious with "difference theories" since the political and social context in which most Third World women live their lives needs to stress gender equality if any real gains are to be made for the majority of Indian women.
- c) The rejection of science as "just another social construct" of the same epistemological status as traditional knowledge systems (or Shiva's "ethno science") is based on an incomplete and incorrect understanding of the recent developments in history and philosophy of science.

The displacement of the idea that scientific reasoning is based on facts and evidence by the relativist thesis that everything boils down to subjective interests and perspectives is the most prominent and pernicious manifestation of anti-intellectualism in our times. Regrettably, the left has embraced and championed this mistaken and dead-end relativism, greatly detrimental to itself and the masses of poor people in the Third World. That natural science is "nothing but" class/gender/western interests is by now so entrenched in leftist thinking that it is hard to dislodge.

After showing why neo-populist's rejection of science cannot be sustained on philosophical grounds, this article will try to show that there is nothing inherently western or patriarchal about science-based development projects. Here again due to personal interests, the focus will only be on the Green Revolution.

Science and development are "western" projects

In the standard history of ideas written by westerners, the origin of all rational and scientific thought is presented as a uniquely western European phenomenon. While progressive historians of science in the west have long argued against this parochial interpretation, Indian

and Third World science critics have accepted it uncritically and completely. Indeed, they outdo the most conservative western ideologues in insisting that science is a purely "western" knowledge system and that non-western societies have played no role in its development - apart from being its victim. They then go on to invoke what Daniel Bell has called the "genetic fallacy"⁸ and explain away the past and present instances of western domination of non-western societies as a result of the western nature of science.

The word "western" has acquired so many negative connotations that its mere use signals rejection. It is indeed used more as an epithet than as an analytic category in most populist discourses. In other words, the reader is not invited to ask: "So what?" but is assumed to share the view that any idea qualified as "western" cannot but have imperialistic or other malevolent intentions and effects.

Shiva employs "western" more as an epithet than as an analytic category while describing science-led development: "... science and development are not universal categories of progress [as Enlightenment claims] but special projects of modern western patriarchy" (Introduction, p xiv); "They are "projects of male western origin both historically and ideologically" (p.xvi); "In Bacon's experimental method...there was a conjunction of masculine and scientific domination over nature, women and the non-west: (p.16). Development is a "post colonial project in which the entire world remade itself on the model of colonizing west ... development was equated with westernisation of economic categories" (p.1).

In a faithful rendering of the genetic fallacy the western origin is supposed to have significant political implications. Western science according to Shiva provided the ideological cover for colonialism:

... the domination of South by North, of women by men, of nature by westernized man are... rooted in the domination inherent to the world-view created by western man over the last three centuries through which he could subjugate the rest of the humanity (p.30)

... development being a westernization of economic categories... was thus reduced to a continuation of a process of colonization, economic growth becomes a new colonialism (pp.1-2)

The problem with such characterizations is that they accept that science was "created by western man" without any questions. But as recent scholarship shows, this assumption rests on an Aryan construction of ancient history put forward by European historians during the nineteenth century when imperialism was at its zenith and, incidentally, when the Enlightenment world-view was giving way to Romanticism. Recent works including Martin Bernal's *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of*



Classical Civilization, St. Clair Drake's *Black Folk Here and There* and Samir Amin's *Eurocentrism* have begun to chip away at this myth.⁹

In a recent review of Bernal and Drake, Vasant Kaiwar explains how the universal humanism of the Renaissance (that flowered from the fourteenth through the seventeenth centuries and led to the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century) came to be appropriated for a mythic rational and scientific "west."¹⁰ This construction erased from the history of ancient Greece, the supposed cradle of "western" philosophy, all traces of the "eastern" cultures that were pivotal for the formation of Greek thought. Influenced by the racist-romantic ideologies of late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, British and European intellectuals set out, self-consciously and purposefully to define a cultural identity of their "people" that would set them categorically apart from other cultural groups. Their recounting of history specifically set out to deny that:

... the ancient Greek civilization had its roots in the East Mediterranean cultures of Egypt and Phoenicia and that Egypt in turn had a profound connection with Africa and Phoenicia with Semitic cultures of the Near East. The elimination of these two from the ranks of great civilizations, and from having made any contribution to Greek language and religion, coincided temporally with black slavery, imperialism and subsequently with anti-semitism in Europe ... This innovation was in Bernal's view politically and racially motivated ... Mendacious arguments were used to suggest that Egyptian civilization could not have been African and that it was necessary for Asians to bring civilization and high culture to Egypt.¹¹

Creation of this Eurocentric myth, according to Samir Amin, was a result of a constant tension between the progressive and humanistic aspirations of Enlightenment thought (which emerged as a challenge to the universalism and dogmatism of Christianity) and its recognition of its own superiority:

This embryonic culture was in fact superior, both materially and in many other aspects to earlier societies both on its own territory (feudal Europe) and in other regions of the world (in the neighboring Islamic orient). The culture of the Enlightenment was unable to reconcile the fact of its superiority with its universalist ambitions. On the contrary it gradually drifted towards racism as an explanation for the contrast between it and other cultures.¹²

The result was the creation of Eurocentric history that assumed the "existence of irreducibly distinct cultural invariants that shape the historical paths of different people."¹³ In other words, the rationalism that flowered into the Enlightenment was claimed as a part of the

"national character" of the west: Ancient Greece then became merely the childhood of this inherent European cultural trait. Consequently, rationality and science came to be seen as purely Greek and therefore "western" while the "orient" became associated with metaphysics at best and irrationality at worst. This construction of "essences" of nations and civilizations, as Kaiwar shows, was not a result of the much-maligned rationalism of the Enlightenment but came about with the rise of Romanticism (evident in the ideology of organicity, purity of the "people" and pre-industrial imagery) in Germany and elsewhere in Europe in the late eighteenth century and after.¹⁴ The currently fashionable trend of claiming the "right to be different" based on endlessly fragmenting "identities" based on nationality, race, gender and ethnicity is in fact a betrayal of the Enlightenment project, a betrayal born out of fascism, world wars, the Gulags and anti-colonial wars.

But what if it can be shown that civilizations do not come with their "characters" already made and engraved on them for all eternity? What if it can be shown that "civilizations flower when cultures meet"?¹⁵ Bernal and others who are challenging the racist historiography of Eurocentrists are trying to show that ancient cultures - Greek, west Semitic and Egyptian - engaged in a dynamic exchange and syntheses of new ideas. But unlike provincial Third Worldists, Bernal and Amin do not deny or minimize the achievements of the tradition of scientific inquiry that the Renaissance and Enlightenment ushered in. They are comfortable with the idea of progress in a world-historical sense. As Amin emphasizes, the movement of pre-capitalist "tributary"¹⁶ cultures towards capitalism requires an "abandonment of metaphysics" defined as the "search for absolute truth" in favour of the search for "partial truths" of science. In other words, the evolution of science is rooted not in any fixed cultural trait of nations and peoples but in structural, and material changes in a society. According to Amin, the culturalist reactions flourishing all around the Third World stem from an impasse rooted in the fact that:

... modernity requires an abandonment of metaphysics. The failure to recognize this leads to a false construction of the question of "cultural identity" and a confused debate in which "identity" (and "heritage") are placed in absolute contrast with "modernization," viewed as synonymous with "Westernization" (p.133).

Let us move from historiography to the political implications of equating science and reason with the West. If the nativism of our populists was just a nostalgic look-back, there would be no argument. But their world-view has real practical and political implications. This becomes evident on examining the populist agendas in the economic and cultural spheres. In both, the boundary between the "west" and the "Third World," the "alien" and the "indigenous" serves an ideological function. It allows a deeply conserva-



tive ethos to present itself as a "radical" alternative. Drawing a clear line between two supposedly distinct and antagonistic categories - the "west" and the "Third World" - removes the need for critically examining the *material sources of oppression* in either of these categories.

Freed from the need to examine the sources of oppression in their own traditions, the protagonists of the indigenous, the authentic, and so on easily come to present themselves as the voice of the oppressed. This ideological work is done through a constant, mind-numbing invocation of the supposedly irreconcilable differences between East and West. And given the history of colonialism, this easily builds up an association of the west with plunder and Third World with hapless suffering. The need for an rigorous analysis of concrete situations is minimized. Assertions are substituted for analysis. Shiva makes full use of the ideological potential of the word "western." She juxtaposes "western Cartesian dualism" with the "dialectical harmony between male and female and between nature and man" that supposedly leads to the treatment of "nature as integral and inviolable" in "Indian cosmology" (p.40-41).

The onus is on her and anyone else defending this view to explain why the same cosmology that venerates nature legitimated, and continues to condone, a caste system that utterly degrades (through the phenomenon of Untouchability) those whose work involves contact with the elements of nature. This raises questions about what this nature veneration signifies, and what material interests it served in the traditional societies. Once these questions are dispassionately explored, it becomes clear that in spite of our nativists, "Indian cosmology" in itself cannot provide a progressive program of action to stem not just the degradation of the natural environment but also the *degradation of human beings*.

In a similar attempt to challenge the "arrogance of the west and those who ape it," Shiva contrasts the "reductionist" and "inherently violent" (against women and nature) western, male science with an inherently "holistic" and life-enhancing knowledge of women and tribals in Third World societies. The former:

violates [the latter] socially through the expert/non expert divide which converts them into non-knowers even in those areas of living in which through daily participation, they are the real experts.

In other words, scientific knowledge devalues indigenous knowers and knowledge. There is no denying that given the elitism that pervades all aspects of Indian society, the "modernizers" have been less than respectful of the local knowledge and local knowers. And given the dismal situation in primary education we are raising a generation of "non-knowers" deprived of any systematic knowledge, traditional or otherwise. But it does not in any way follow that the "western" science is inherently violent towards

local traditions and women or that it is inherently reductionist.

But scientific education does not take place in a vacuum. However exciting, liberating and delightful in theory, it can be thrust upon people in a paternalistic, authoritarian manner. Shiva and her fellow populists are not completely wrong in their discomfort with what has gone on under the name of "scientific development." I sympathize and share their anguish. But I believe they are wrong in their understanding of the problem. It is not the western origin - and therefore inherent nature - of scientific ideas but the social relations and cultural norms of our own society that can and often do make scientific ideas seem oppressive.

Turning now to the sphere of material production, the equation of science with the west gets translated into an equation of all modern science-based development (always mentioned within a set of mocking quotation marks) with the west. Subsequently, more by implication than by hard evidence, the western connection comes to stand for exploitation by the multinational corporations. Thus Shiva charges that development itself entails "westernization of economic categories" derived from the experience of the imperialist west and universalized to apply to an "entirely different context of basic needs satisfaction" of the people in the Third World (p.1). "Our" context of "need satisfaction," furthermore, is not really one of poverty: it is only "culturally perceived" to be so when seen through "their" eyes (pp.10-12 and *passim*). Traditional economies were the "original affluent societies" as they satisfied the "basic and vital needs" of all.

Arguing that development entails capital accumulation which apparently *requires* colonialism and commercialization, Shiva concludes that "economic growth is new colonialism." She further asserts that the very ideas of productivity, commodity production and growth are western, implying that prior to Adam Smith and colonialism, production was not for profit or trade but only for "need satisfaction" and "sustaining nature's productivity." In keeping with the genetic fallacy, Shiva derives truly sinister conclusions from the "western nature" of economic categories. A good example is her treatment of the Green Revolution which she assumes was initiated by "western male experts" with no other motive but of wresting control over food production away from poor Third World peasants so that western agribusiness could make profits.¹⁷

To anyone familiar with populist literature on India's development, the statements made above will seem self-evident: the repetition of a set of half truths - in the media, in international conferences and through books like Shiva's - has lent them an air of "truth." Indeed the shrill rhetoric of populists has created an atmosphere where a defense of even the most self-evident and basic gains from science and technology is considered heretical. But the populists' noisy assertions, like all half-truths, only distort



and over-simplify. My reasons for suggesting this are as follows:

- i) The claim that Third World people have “entirely different context of basic needs satisfaction” and that context is not “really” one of poverty and deprivation but only appears so when seen through “western categories” does not accurately describe the reality of India’s contemporary or past economic structures. Would Shiva deny that adequate calorie intake and life beyond infancy are “basic vital needs”? Examination of data on just these two needs, from India or any other technologically under-developed society, current or as far back in history as possible, should be enough to show the fallacy of Shiva’s claims.

Shiva is unable even to imagine that “basic and vital needs” can and must extend beyond mere survival and that it *is* possible, for the first time in human history, to include education, health, leisure in the rubric of “basic vital needs” for all of humanity. The hubris of our nativists would rather celebrate the “difference” of the “simple” ways of their people than allow the poor and long-suffering masses to participate in the new vistas opened up by science and technology.

Furthermore, the jet-setting, globe-trotting neo-populist intellectual’s propensity to project the life style of the poor and the oppressed as morally superior and socially richer than that of the Western oppressors is hypocritical to say the least. It is a sign of what Andrew Collier has aptly described as “nihilistic asceticism.”¹⁸ It is a common tendency among oppressed groups and their leaders to “idealize features of their lives that are, in fact, effects of oppression and to denigrate power, knowledge, beauty, culture, pleasure, etc.” (p.160). This is the reason why Third World radicalism that claims to look at the world through the vantage point of the oppressed fails to offer a progressive and feasible program for change.

- ii) Shiva and the anti-capitalist populists in general, have a tendency to lump and condemn all production for exchange together - be it for export markets linked to the global economy, for sale in urban areas or for local markets. “Commodity production” (production for sale) *per se* is supposed to be exploitative of subsistence producers. This position has been criticized. A recent article critiqued Shiva’s claim that the market oppresses tribal and peasant women by showing that in Jharkhand, women gatherers who sell their forest produce in local markets have in fact “greater rights over the income from their labor in gathering than they have over the income from their labor in agriculture” because:

...the income from sale of forest produce tends to be counted as the income of the individual who

gathers and sells the produce. In this system the introduction of commercial production of various forest produce, production not for direct use but for sale, has not worsened the position of women. Increasing the income from forestry will thus help strengthen the position of women within the family.¹⁹

At a more theoretical level, this generalized antagonism towards markets has been forcefully critiqued by Maureen Mackintosh, an economist associated with the Open University.²⁰ Instead of treating markets like a “black box,” they need to be analyzed as follows: the terms (ownership) on which people come to the market; the power and control of the producers in local markets and of Third World governments in global markets; the class structure of trade within the Third World and the terms of the labor market. It is these considerations more than any east-west, traditional-modern divide that will lead to a meaningful discussion about the role of the market and commodities in the subsistence economy.

- iii) The equation of development with internal colonization is questionable. The claim here is that because of commodity production and resource intensive industrialization, resources are being withdrawn from the subsistence economy. It is never made clear who is draining the subsistence economy and why: sometimes it is international capital through the MNCs, at other times it is the “national elites,” or even the whole project of “maldevelopment” itself. There is no indication of any linkages in the other direction, namely, the resource movement from the modern industrial sector into the rural area. Furthermore, Shiva’s peasant and subsistence economy lacks any reference to the class and caste differentiations internal to itself. The exploitation of natural resources and abuse of human labor that they entail is completely absent from Shiva’s treatment of the relations between the modern and the traditional sectors of the economy.

This emotive “taking the part of the peasant” has been seriously questioned by a number of scholars including Henry Bernstein and Hamza Alavi.²¹ Both challenge the suggestion that peasants/rural producers can be considered as members of any “pre-capitalist” or rural “moral economy.” According to Alavi, “such a view obscures the far reaching ways in which a long period of subordination to colonial and indigenous capital and the colonial and post-colonial state have transformed them. They have long since ceased to be pre-capitalists.” Bernstein too describes peasants as fully integrated with capitalist economy as:

...agrarian petty commodity producers within capitalism... there is no *necessary* contradiction



between peasants and capital, or the state (as there is between workers and the capital). Peasants cannot then constitute an intrinsically "exploited" class in capitalism if the condition for their freedom is the "freedom of the market."²²

Shiva's women, peasants and tribals who are allegedly struggling against "development" are not necessarily struggling against capitalism. Their demands can be fairly easily met within the existing social relations. Moreover, again following Bernstein, the charge of "colonization" fails to consider the place of agriculture and subsistence economy in a comprehensive agenda for progressive change at the national level. In other words, it overlooks the many backward and forward linkages between the agrarian/subsistence and industrial/urban economy and simply paints the former as virtuous and the latter as vicious.

iv) Strains of a conspiracy theory run right through all populist "analysis" of development projects. For instance, Shiva simply assumes that because the Green Revolution was initiated by western foundations and business interests, its real purpose was to swell profits for western agri-businesses. I am by no means suggesting that global capital does not profit from the sale of products and technologies in the Third World. But the mere presence of a foreign interest must not be read as exploitative and therefore harmful to Third World economies. As the burgeoning literature on dependent development suggests, the linkages between the Third World and the MNCs are more complex and allow much more "play" than earlier theorized by the "development of underdevelopment" school.²³

Indian critics need to be even more cautious in using dependency arguments for the simple reason that India has had the most self-reliant and insulated capitalist economy in the entire Third World. As Achin Vanaik points out in his recent book, most Indian leftists tend to over-emphasize the "imperialist" connection without due regard to actual economic facts. In India's most liberal and outward oriented plan, the seventh plan (1986 to 1990), the total foreign inflow did not amount to more than six per cent of the total investment and exports were only six per cent of the GDP in 1986.²⁴ Vanaik concludes that even after taking into account the indirect means of control, one cannot assign a meaningful place to imperialism in any sober analysis of India's post-independence economic history.

Populists who nevertheless insist on invoking external influences as the chief contradiction for Indian economy must be required to provide evidence for their claims and delineate mechanisms through which foreign capital works in concrete cases.

The second part of this article, on *The Green Revolution as "Western, Patriarchal and Anti-Nature" Agriculture* will appear in the next issue.

Notes

1. Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*, Kali for Women, New Delhi and Zed Books, London, 1988.
2. But in contrast with classical populism, the modern Third World neo-populism that has gained prominence since the late 1960s does not seek to arrest industrialization per se but to direct it into new forms and channels, to maximise employment and to increase equality. But as Kitching points out, in spite of all the discontinuities, the "essential 'vision' - a world of equality, of small property, a minimally urbanized world - manifests itself again and again." (Kitching, pp. 98-102).
3. Industrialisation, especially in the Third World can be legitimately criticized for its un-evenness and incompleteness. But populists go far beyond that: they question the very superiority of modern, science-based technology that fuels industrialisation over the more traditional, handicraft based "appropriate technologies."
4. See Ashish Nandy, *Science, Hegemony and Violence: A Requiem for Modernity*, 1989. Oxford University Press
5. From Bill Warren, *Imperialism: Pioneer of Capitalism*, Verso, 1980, pp. 7 and 20.
6. This phrase of Marx is the title of Marshall Berman's most inspiring and sensitive account of the experience of modernity. *All that is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, Simon and Schuster, 1982. Modern society, according to this book, is racked with pain and misery yet it is also a place where men and women can become freer and more creative than ever before. The fact that "all that is solid melts into air" is a source not of despair but of strength and affirmation. See also Berman's "Why Modernism Still Matters," *Tikkun*, 1990, Vol. 4, No.1, p.11. for a strong defence of modernity in the face of the intellectually fashionable post-modernist nihilism.
7. Equating a Hindu view of the world with "Indian cosmology", Shiva defines Prakriti thus: "Women in India are an intimate part of nature, both in imagination and in practice.... All existence arises from...primordial energy (*Shakti*).
8. Genetic fallacy simply states that the origin of an institution explains and even determines its function. Daniel Bell, "Resolving the Contradictions of Modernity and Modernism," *Society*, May/July, 1990.
9. Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilisation, Vol. 1, The Fabrication of Ancient Greece*, Rutgers, 1987; St. Clair Drake, *Black Folk Here and There: An Essay in History and Anthropology*, Centre for Afro-American Studies, UCLA, 1987; Samir Amin, *Eurocentricism*, Monthly Review Press, 1989.
10. Vasant Kaiwar, "Racism and the Writing of History, Part I", *South Asia Bulletin*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1989.
11. Kaiwar, p. 32.
12. Samir Amin, *ibid*, p 105.
13. Amin, *ibid*, p. vii.
14. Quoting Bernal, Kaiwar writes: "The change from the Enlightenment to Romanticism also involved a reversal of emphasis from 'cultivation and improvement' to the Romantic stress on 'nature and distinct, permanent national essences.' In the Enlightenment world-view, it was 'no great slur on the Greeks [and by extension Europeans] for their civilisation to be attributed to Egyptians and Phoenician colonisation.' In the Romantic view, it was 'intolerable to suggest that the Greeks had ever been more primitive than Africans and Asians.'
15. Kaiwar, p. 34.

