

David Isaac Jere

Who Really Feeds the World? by Dr. Vandana Shiva

Reflections on Chapter 1

The backdrop for Dr. Vandana Shiva's critique of industrial agriculture and its effects on world food systems is laid forth in Chapter 1. By proposing that small-scale, sustainable agricultural practices are the real foundation of global food security, she challenges the widely held belief that industrial agriculture feeds the globe. She begins by giving a brief background to how humanity farmed over the last tens of thousands and how these systems and cycles of nature had given rise to the renewal, reproduction and diversity. According to her, in the process of evolution of these sustainable systems, organic farming thrived. In this, Dr Shiva seems to be advocating for sustainable agriculture as opposed to Industrial agriculture. She went on to give references to two people who supported her notion of not disturbing the existing sustainable agriculture.

The Law of Return, which prioritizes ecological balance and community well-being, and the Law of Exploitation, which prioritizes corporate profits, are the two paradigms that Dr. Shiva offers. She draws attention to the fact that industrial agriculture is motivated by the Law of Exploitation and leads to social inequality and environmental destruction, whereas agroecology is guided by the Law of Return and supports biodiversity and local food sovereignty. Dr Shiva was blaming the colonial exploitation for the famine that took place in India, the Great Bengal famine of 1943, according to her the ways of farming had nothing to do with the famine as this had been practiced over tens of thousands of years.

She argued that the shift in the type of farming from sustainable agriculture to what she termed non sustainable, chemical intensive, water intensive, and capital-intensive agriculture had caused the famine. In this she was trying to bring out that the so-called new changes to agriculture are not so effective as they are touted to be, as they require too much water, capital and chemicals, the same chemicals that she went on to say that the constant use has destroyed the ecological foundations and devastated the natural environment. She strongly thinks that food insecurity is because of this “conventional farming”.

Dr. Shiva presents compelling evidence that industrial agriculture is failing to address hunger and malnutrition, despite its claims to increase food production. She highlights the unintended consequences of industrial agriculture, such as soil degradation and water pollution, loss of biodiversity and ecosystem disruption, displacement of small farmers and rural communities, increased dependence on fossil fuels and chemical inputs

The idea that industrial agriculture is required to feed the world's population is contested by Vandana Shiva. Small-scale agroecological farms, according to Dr. Shiva, are more sustainable and productive. She points out that these tiny farms use holistic farming practices that uphold the integrity of the environment and society to produce 70% of the food consumed worldwide. Dr. Shiva prefers organic methods of farming and throughout the chapter, she constantly sheds the industrial agricultural revolution in a negative way, and she even refers to the use of pesticides as using poison. She also castigates the introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMO). Dr. Shiva says instead of the pesticides killing the pests they have helped in creating new pests and weeds that are growing in resistance as a result there has been reduced food production.

She highlights that traditional knowledge systems that used to be kind to the environment had been replaced by a militarized way of thinking. In her view she equates the advent of the industrial agriculture revolution to a war against nature. This we see with the way she uses words such as militarized, violence. In trying to bring out her point she asks some pertinent questions when she said, “sophisticated, sustainable systems of both thought and food production have always existed. Humanity after all did not start eating in contemporary times. How then did we arrive at a situation where the green revolution and industrial agriculture displaced and destroyed systems that have nourished humanity over millennia and substituted the knowledge of agricultural systems - agroecology- with tools of warfare”

I've learned a lot about the shortcomings of my prior beliefs regarding industrial agriculture after reading this chapter. I had thought that feeding the world's expanding population required large-scale farming. But after listening to Dr. Shiva's views, I'm now convinced that small-scale, sustainable farming is not only better for the environment but also works better to combat hunger and malnutrition. The irony that industrial agriculture, which is hailed as the answer to the world's hunger crisis, is making matters worse, strikes me. The chapter has also increased my awareness of the significance of fostering food sovereignty and local, organic farming methods.

From this chapter what I have learnt is that industrial agriculture is not the solution to global hunger. As some methods that are being used are not yielding the expected results and that small-scale, sustainable farming practices are crucial for food security. According to Dr Shiva, the farming practices that the small-scale farmers practiced for tens of thousands of years produced more than the industrial. She also highlights the important role women play in maintaining sustainable agriculture.

To sum up, I've had my preconceptions about global food networks challenged by Chapter one of "Who Really Feeds the World?" and have gained a better grasp of these intricate processes. After listening to Dr. Shiva's arguments, I'm now convinced that achieving actual food security requires sustainable agriculture, which is also morally required.