

Original Article

# Roots and Resistance: Ecofeminism as Postcolonial Praxis in the Select Works of Vandana Shiva and Donna Haraway

Dr. J. Charles Arockiasamy

Assistant Professor of English, St. Joseph's College(Autonomous), Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, Tamilnadu, India.

Received Date: 04th August 2025

Revised Date: 21st August 2025

Accepted Date: 06th September 2025

Published Date: 17th September 2025

**Abstract** - By contrasting Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble* with Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive and Ecofeminism*, this essay explores ecofeminism as a crucial site of resistance and renewal. Haraway reimagines kinship, responsibility, and multispecies entanglements as ways of surviving ecological precarity, while Shiva places ecofeminism within postcolonial struggles over land, livelihood, and cultural survival, emphasizing the intertwined oppressions of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy. The paper examines the similarities and differences between a postcolonial praxis of place-based, rooted resistance and a relational, speculative ethics that decenters the human. Across these frameworks, it contends that ecofeminism offers a transformative vision of interdependence as well as a grounded politics of survival, providing potent tools for rethinking resistance in an ecological age.

**Keywords** - Ecofeminism, Resistance, Renewal, Postcolonial Praxis, Place-Based Struggles, Land And Livelihood, Cultural, Survival, Colonialism, Capitalism, Patriarchy, Multispecies Entanglements, Kinship, Responsibility, Relational Ethics, Speculative Ethics, Decentering The Human, Interdependence, Survival Politics, Ecological Precarity.

## 1. Introduction: Ecofeminism's Emergence

In 1974, the Chipko movement in northern India, where women physically embraced trees to stop deforestation, gave rise to the term ecofeminism, symbolically connecting ecological preservation with feminine embodiment (Shiva 66). This peaceful demonstration is still representative of ecofeminism's revolutionary capacity to reveal the connections between the exploitation of women and the destruction of the environment, particularly in the context of colonial and capitalist legacies. As stated by Vandana Shiva in *Staying Alive*, "women in subsistence economies, producing and reproducing wealth in partnership with nature, are experts in their own right of holistic and ecological knowledge of nature's processes" (Shiva 22). Shiva challenges the epistemic violence of Western, patriarchal science and development models by framing ecofeminism as lived resistance rooted in material practices rather than just a symbolic connection.

Although writing from a different setting, Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble*, in which she makes the case for an ethics of multispecies entanglement, both supports and complicates this vision: "we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles" (Haraway 4). Haraway's proposition to "make kin, not babies" highlights how relational ontologies are replacing anthropocentrism and undermining the idea of human exceptionalism. Haraway's speculative ecofeminism points to a posthumanist praxis that both echoes and broadens the postcolonial ecofeminist critique when paired with Shiva's criticism of colonial-capitalist exploitation of women and the environment.

When taken as a whole, these pieces show how ecofeminism developed from grassroots resistance movements in the Global South to theoretical interventions in Western academia. While Shiva and Haraway offer the theoretical framework for comprehending ecofeminism as a postcolonial praxis and as a speculative reimagining of



life in times of ecological crisis, the Chipko movement serves as an example of how ecofeminism is grounded in acts of resistance and survival.

According to academics like Val Plumwood, Western rationalism promoted a human/nature dualism that devalued and subordinated both women and nature (Plumwood 104). According to Carolyn Merchant, the mechanistic perspective of the scientific revolution played a crucial role in approving the objectification of nature and the subjugation of women. In *The Death of Nature*, Merchant argues that the Enlightenment paved the way for extractive colonial logics by substituting mechanical analogies for organic metaphors of the earth as a nurturing mother (Merchant 32).

By placing this criticism in the context of postcolonial societies' material realities, Vandana Shiva expands on it. She makes the case in *Staying Alive* that "maldevelopment is not merely underdevelopment; it is the development of a system that systematically destroys life" (Shiva 14).

Here, she draws attention to the ways that industrial capitalism and Western science, which are based on the same dualisms that Plumwood and Merchant identified, are complicit in the marginalization of women in the Global South as well as ecological destruction. Shiva further maintains in ecofeminism, which he co-authored with Maria Mies, that "the same processes that marginalize women also destroy nature, and the liberation of both must go hand in hand" (Mies and Shiva 13). By emphasizing local knowledges, subsistence methods, and relational epistemologies, ecofeminism is positioned as a practice that directly challenges the universalizing assertions of Western rationality.

Although she deviates from Shiva's postcolonial critique, Donna Haraway uses a posthumanist perspective to examine the same historical logics of dominance. She warns against the "Euclidean dreams of modernity" in *Staying with the Trouble* and advocates instead for "learning to stay with the knot of human and nonhuman histories" (Haraway 30). In addition to recovering organic metaphors, she challenges the mechanistic worldview by redefining relationality itself in terms of kinship, entanglement, and interspecies cooperation. Haraway places more emphasis on speculative reimaginings that challenge the dichotomies inherited from Enlightenment thought than Shiva does on resistance to capitalist and colonial structures.

When taken as a whole, these criticisms show how ecofeminism challenges the longstanding foundations of dualistic, mechanical thinking. Haraway provides a conceptual framework for reconsidering relationality beyond the human, while Shiva's praxis-oriented interventions show the tangible effects of these worldviews in postcolonial contexts. According to both viewpoints, ecofeminism is an effective means of destroying the structural and epistemic legacies of dominance.

## **2. Language and Metaphor: Feminizing Nature and Animalizing Women**

Through linguistic analysis, Carol J. Adams expands on this criticism, contending that patriarchal language's animalization of women and metaphorical feminization of nature legitimizes their dominance. Adams illustrates how women and animals are presented in the media and culture as consumable objects in *The Sexual Politics of Meat*: "Just as animals are rendered as meat, women are similarly fragmented and commodified" (Adams 45). Under patriarchal discourse, the symbolic union of nature and woman normalizes their exploitation, turning nature into resources and women into bodies.

By analyzing the colonial-capitalist language of "resource," which deprives nature of subjectivity and reduces women's labor to invisible, reproductive functions, Vandana Shiva emphasizes this connection. She observes in *Staying Alive*: "The death of the feminine principle is simultaneously the death of nature, and the death of the woman as producer and provider" (Shiva 38). According to Shiva, language shapes scientific and economic practices that legitimize exploitation and is not just a means of description. She explains in ecofeminism, which she co-authored with Maria Mies, that "nature is spoken of as dead and passive, to be manipulated and controlled; women are spoken of as subsumed under man, as the second sex" (Mies and Shiva 24). The metaphors of objecthood, passivity, and silence are epistemic weapons of language.

By opposing both the feminization of nature and the human exceptionalism ingrained in patriarchal metaphors, Donna Haraway muddies this landscape. Instead, she promotes language that emphasizes kinship and

relationality in *Staying with the Trouble*: “It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories” (Haraway 12). According to Haraway, metaphor enacts worlds and is not neutral. She presents the Chthulucene as a metaphor of tentacular interconnection that rejects hierarchical binaries, as opposed to reinscribing woman/nature equivalencies. The anthropocentric and androcentric logics that uphold dominance are undermined by this linguistic shift, which reframes metaphor as a generative rather than an oppressive force.

Shiva and Haraway's combined reading highlights the importance of metaphorical representation in ecofeminist theory: Haraway strives for speculative metaphors that subvert those very dualisms, while Shiva highlights how colonial and patriarchal languages legitimize exploitation by reducing women and nature to passive objects. Both strategies emphasize how language and metaphor serve as key battlefields in the fight for feminist and ecological liberation.

### 3. Spiritual Ecofeminism and Ecocommunion

An embodied, earth-centered spirituality that honors nature as sacred and immanent is promoted by spiritual ecofeminists such as Charlene Spretnak and Starhawk. This theological perspective honors the Goddess or Gaia as representations of interwoven life cycles, fertility, and resistance, while rejecting transcendent, patriarchal deities (Christ 78). As Carol Christ notes, “The Goddess affirms the sacredness of all living beings, not in hierarchy, but in relation” (Christ 92). In these eco-spiritual frameworks, spirituality is positioned as a source of resistance to patriarchal and capitalist alienation, while ecological ethics are rooted in respect and community rather than dominance.

Although her framework is more grounded in lived subsistence practices and cultural ecology than in overtly theological language, Vandana Shiva shares resonance with this orientation. She states in *Staying Alive*: “Nature is *Prakriti*, the creative principle; women as producers are part of this creativity” (Shiva 39). Shiva challenges the colonial-capitalist desacralization of the earth and upholds a worldview in which ecological and spiritual vitality are inextricably linked by drawing on Indic cosmologies that honor nature as living. She elaborates on this idea in ecofeminism, which she co-authored with Maria Mies: “The recovery of the feminine principle in nature and society is simultaneously a recovery of ecological balance and justice” (Mies and Shiva 17). In this context, spirituality transforms into praxis, an embodied kind of ecological resistance based on both symbolic reclamation and material survival.

Donna Haraway presents a thought-provoking rebuttal. She shares spiritual ecofeminism's dedication to relationality and interconnectedness, despite her skepticism of its goddess-centered imagery. She maintains in *Staying with the Trouble*: “We become-with each other or not at all” (Haraway 4).

Haraway describes what could be referred to as a secular ecocommunion, where kinship with nonhuman beings is fostered through sympoiesis—making-with—instead of evoking sacred feminine metaphors. As a sort of counter-spiritual metaphor, her idea of the Chthulucene operates almost mythopoetically, establishing ecological responsibility in collective becoming as opposed to transcendence.

When read together, Shiva and Haraway demonstrate the oscillation between materialist entanglement and spiritual reverence in ecofeminist praxis. While Haraway suggests speculative, non-theological forms of ecocommunion, Shiva grounds ecofeminism in a sacralized ecology connected to subsistence, survival, and cultural cosmologies. Both affirm immanence, interdependence, and the need to re-enchant our relationship with the living world while rejecting patriarchal transcendence.

### 4. Postcolonial and Indigenous Ecofeminism: The Work of Vandana Shiva

The foundation of Vandana Shiva's ecofeminist practice is her criticism of Western development and science, which she refers to as maldevelopment. She criticizes global capitalism-imposed monocultures and agribusiness in *Staying Alive*, pointing out how they supplant subsistence farming and increase gendered environmental risks. As she composes, “Monocultures of the mind...generate models of production which destroy diversity and legitimize domination” (Shiva 114). Shiva argues that industrial agriculture's reductionist logic perpetuates colonial patterns of material and epistemic violence by silencing women's ecological knowledge and undermining biodiversity.

The "feminine principle," an ecological ethic based on sustainability, biodiversity, and care, is at the heart of her philosophy. Shiva clarifies: "The recovery of the feminine principle is the recovery of the earth as a living system, and of woman as central to its regeneration" (*Staying Alive* 39). By emphasizing indigenous and subsistence practices as counter-narratives to capitalist extraction, she here links ecological survival with cultural survival.

As the most vulnerable groups to pollution, pesticides, and land dispossession, women, children, and marginalized ethnic groups are disproportionately affected by environmental destruction, according to Maria Mies, co-author of *Ecofeminism* with Shiva. While they quarrel, "The struggle for women's liberation and the struggle for the preservation of the environment are inseparably linked" (Mies and Shiva 27). This articulation establishes ecofeminism as a postcolonial practice: resistance is embodied in the daily work of rural and indigenous women to sustain life, in addition to being theoretical.

Here, Donna Haraway creates a useful tension. She uses her concept of sympoiesis, or "making-with," to critique the same global systems of domination even though she is not interested in postcolonial categories. She maintains in *Staying with the Trouble*: "We require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations" (Haraway 4). Haraway imagines multispecies alliances that defy capitalist logics by creating alternative relationalities, in contrast to Shiva's appeal to the feminine principle and indigenous cosmologies. Both methods question Western universals: Haraway decenters the human completely, while Shiva grounds knowledge in gendered and indigenous experience.

When combined, Shiva and Haraway shed light on various but complementary ecofeminist resistance strategies. Whereas Haraway's speculative posthumanism reimagines kinship and interdependence beyond anthropocentric and patriarchal hierarchies, Shiva's postcolonial ecofeminism insists on reclaiming indigenous knowledges and women's agency in maintaining biodiversity. Both agree that relational approaches that respect interdependence and the diversity of life-worlds are essential to combating ecological crises.

## 5. Ecofeminism and Epistemology: Situated Knowledge

The Enlightenment epistemology that values objectivity, universality, and detachment is contested by poststructural ecofeminist philosophers such as Donna Haraway and Sandra Harding. By highlighting the fact that knowledge is always situated and influenced by the historical background and social position of the knower, Harding reveals how claims of neutrality frequently hide power structures. Haraway's landmark paper "Situated Knowledges" reframes scientific observation as relational and embodied: "We are not disembodied observers but actors engaged in mutual understanding with nature" (Haraway 583). Haraway rejects the "god trick" of seeing everything at once and instead views knowledge as partial, accountable, and co-constituted.

Vandana Shiva applies this epistemological critique to ecological and postcolonial contexts. She notes in *Staying Alive*: "Reductionist science is not universal knowledge; it is a local tradition of the West, with specific social, economic, and political roots" (Shiva 22). Shiva draws attention to the epistemic violence of colonialism, which delegitimizes indigenous ecological knowledge and women's knowledge by revealing Western science as a culturally specific knowledge system rather than a universal truth. She makes the following claims in ecofeminism, which she co-authored with Maria Mies: "The marginalized have always known that life cannot be reduced to fragments; their knowledge is ecological, holistic, and contextual" (Mies and Shiva 14). Ecofeminism is situated at the nexus of knowledge production and resistance because of its emphasis on the legitimacy of alternative epistemologies.

This epistemological theme is carried on in Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble*, where she imagines ways of knowing that are based on sympoiesis, or making-with. She insists: "It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories" (Haraway 12). Haraway sees knowledge as a collective, narrative practice that is co-produced across species and materialities, in contrast to the Enlightenment's dispassionate epistemology. Shiva's appeal to stay grounded in lived, place-based ecological knowledges is similar to her insistence on "staying with" rather than avoiding problems.

When combined, Shiva and Haraway provide contrasting criticisms of epistemological dominance. Shiva reclaims indigenous and women's knowledge systems as essential to ecological survival, placing her resistance within postcolonial struggles. In response, Haraway challenges anthropocentric claims to mastery by redefining

epistemology as relational, speculative, and multispecies. Both show how ecofeminism turns epistemology into a site of resistance by putting forth accountable, embodied, and intricately linked modes of knowing with the living world.

## 6. Conclusion: Towards an Ethical Reworlding

A convincing framework for postcolonial environmental ethics is provided by ecofeminism. It offers the means to envision a different future based on sustainability, equity, and reciprocal care by revealing the dual dominance of women and nature as co-constitutive processes ingrained in language, science, and policy. According to *Woman and Nature* by Susan Griffin, "We are the roaring inside her, and she is us" (Griffin 19). This mutual identification is a sign of reworlding, a radical rethinking of human relations with the earth and with one another, as well as resistance.

According to Vandana Shiva, the restoration of biodiversity and respect for subsistence knowledge must be the first steps in this reworlding. She writes in *Staying Alive*: "Diversity is not just an external attribute of ecosystems; it is the very condition for their sustainability and renewal" (Shiva 45). Shiva believes that preserving cultural diversity and women's agency is inextricably linked to preserving ecological diversity. She also highlights in ecofeminism, which she co-authored with Maria Mies, that "life-centered worldviews are the only viable alternative to death-centered development" (Mies and Shiva 13). In this vision, environmental ethics are reframed as a practice of daily survival and group resistance to global capitalism and neo-colonial exploitation, rather than as an abstract principle.

In *Staying with the Trouble*, Donna Haraway supports this by "We must learn to live and die well with each other in a thick present" (Haraway 1). Her appeal to "make kin, not babies" represents a reworlding that grounds ethics in multispecies entanglements and expands kinship beyond human boundaries. Haraway encourages us to "stay with the trouble" of complexity in order to create cooperative futures that defy both domination and despair, as opposed to pursuing transcendent answers or sentimental returns.

Shiva and Haraway together suggest an ecofeminist ethic of reworlding that is both imaginative and grounded: it is based on the real-life struggles of women and indigenous communities, but it is also receptive to hypothetical multispecies futures and forms of kinship. By combining posthuman relationality and postcolonial resistance, ecofeminism becomes both a critique and a generative praxis, a call to rethink societies in which justice, care, and interdependence are essential to human and nonhuman survival.

## References

- [1] Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory*, Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 1-272, 1990. | [Publisher Site](#)
- [2] Jhilik Chakraborty, and Arpita Goswami. "Women and Nature: Ecofeminist Study in Social Media." *F1000Research*, vol. 14, 2025. | [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Site](#)
- [3] Carol P. Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality*, Routledge, pp. 1-238, 1998. | [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Site](#)
- [4] Griffin, Susan, "Woman and Nature:" *The Roaring Inside Her*, Harper & Row, pp. 1-263, 1978. | [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Site](#)
- [5] Donna J. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 575-99, 1988. | [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Site](#)
- [6] Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, New York, USA: Duke University Press, 2016. | [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Site](#)
- [7] Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, Harper & Row, pp. 1-348, 1983. | [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Site](#)
- [8] Maria Mies, and Vandana Shiva, *Ecofeminism*, Zed Books, pp. 1-325, 1993. | [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Site](#)
- [9] Celia Núñez-Puente, "Vandana Shiva: Ecofeminist and Pioneer of Ethical Posthumanism," *Indialogs*, vol. 11, pp. 121-129, 2024. | [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Site](#)
- [10] Sarita Pandey, *Ecofeminism and Indian Women Writing in English*, Academica Press, pp. 1-200, 2023. | [Publisher Site](#)
- [11] Douglas A. Vakoch, and Nicole Anae (Eds), *Indian Feminist Ecocriticism*, Lexington Books, 2022. | [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Site](#)
- [12] Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, 1<sup>st</sup> Edition, Routledge, pp. 1-250, 1993. | [Google Scholar](#) | [Publisher Site](#)

- [13] Shazia Rahman, *Place and Postcolonial Ecofeminism: Pakistani Women's Literary and Cinematic Fictions*, Bloomsbury, Pakistan, pp. 1-246, 2019. |[Google Scholar](#)| [Publisher Site](#)|
- [14] Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development*, Zed Books, 1989. |[Google Scholar](#)| [Publisher Site](#)|
- [15] Charlene Spretnak, *The Politics of Women's Spirituality: Essays on the Rise of Spiritual Power within the Feminist Movement*, Anchor Press, pp. 1-590, 1982. |[Google Scholar](#)| [Publisher Site](#)|
- [16] Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex, and Politics*, Beacon Press, pp. 1-242, 1982. |[Google Scholar](#)| [Publisher Site](#)|