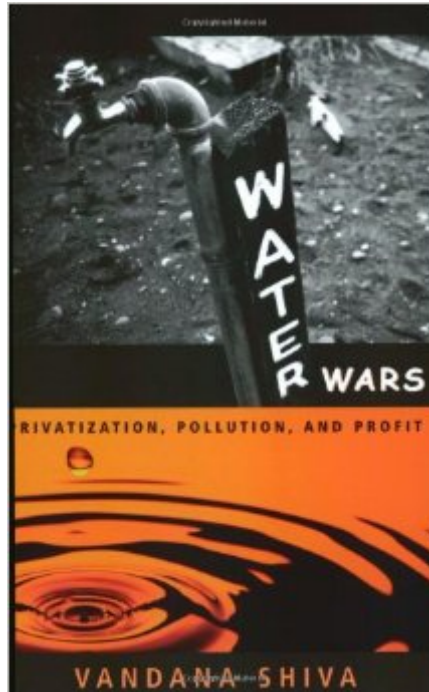


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# Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution, And Profit



## Synopsis

While draught and desertification are intensifying around the world, corporations are aggressively converting free-flowing water into bottled profits. The water wars of the twenty-first century may match—or even surpass—the oil wars of the twentieth. In *Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution and Profit*, Vandana Shiva, "the world's most prominent radical scientist" (the Guardian), shines a light on activists who are fighting corporate maneuvers to convert this life-sustaining resource into more gold for the elites. In *Water Wars*, Shiva uses her remarkable knowledge of science and society to outline the emergence of corporate culture and the historical erosion of communal water rights. Using the international water trade and industrial activities such as damming, mining, and aquafarming as her lens, Shiva exposes the destruction of the earth and the disenfranchisement of the world's poor as they are stripped of rights to a precious common good. In her passionate, feminist style, Shiva celebrates the spiritual and traditional role water has played in communities throughout history, and warns that water privatization threatens cultures and livelihoods worldwide. Shiva calls for a movement to preserve water access for all, and offers a blueprint for global resistance based on examples of successful campaigns. Vandana Shiva is a world-renowned environmental leader and recipient of the 1993 Alternative Nobel Peace Prize (the Right Livelihood Award). She is author of several books, including *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply* (South End Press, 2000); *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (South End Press, 1997); and *Staying Alive* (St. Martin's Press, 1989). Shiva is a leader, along with Ralph Nader and Jeremy Rifkin, in the International Forum on Globalization. Before becoming an activist, Shiva was one of India's leading physicists.

## Book Information

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## **Customer Reviews**

Vandana Shiva's concise, intelligent and well-written book *Water Wars* examines the political economy of water, a scarce resource that is fast increasing in value all over the world. Among many themes explored in the book, the author effectively contrasts two markedly different approaches to water stewardship: centralized vs. decentralized management systems. Centralized systems are associated with private for-profit capitalism whereas decentralized systems are typically managed by local community co-ops. Shiva draws from her extensive knowledge of her native India to describe how centralized controls imposed during the colonial and post-colonial eras have largely failed to meet the needs of the people and the environment. She discusses how dams built with World Bank and other foreign dollars merely reallocated water resources at an enormous cost to the environment and to the many poor people displaced from their ancestral homes. The author also points out that modern pumps installed in the name of progress have unfortunately succeeded in withdrawing water at an unsustainable rate, thereby causing thousands of wells to run dry and consequently causing suffering for many. On the other hand, Shiva relates cases where villagers have returned to native systems of water management that have succeeded in resuscitating wells, streams and rivers that had previously dried up. These projects are managed democratically by the villagers themselves with an eye towards sustainability and social justice (everyone gets their fair share of water but no one gets more water than necessary). Shiva also gave the book a spiritual dimension. She cites both ancient and contemporary sources to prove that water holds special meaning to people the world over for its unique life-giving properties.

With the debate around water scarcity expanding across the globe, Vandana Shiva's *Water Wars* is an important book to read. With it, she has produced another collection of thought-provoking and well-researched essays. A physicist turned environmental activist, Shiva has a passion for the "essence of life". Water, she argues, is intrinsically different from other resources and products and can NOT be treated simply as a commodity: without water people and the environment cannot survive. To subject water to commercial restrictions and to control its availability to people and communities is unacceptable. Vandana Shiva discusses the failures and successes of diverse water management systems, past and present. She builds her case by reviewing traditional water systems

and evaluating the impact of modern dam building. She examines the recent and current conflicts around water and access controls between countries and peoples. Contrary to others who claim that water scarcity will lead to conflicts in the future, Shiva brings evidence that water wars are already with us and are happening all over the world. She is furthermore convinced, based on her research, that conflicts will become increasingly violent as fresh water resources dwindle. Destruction of fragile ecosystems and the displacement of people and communities have resulted from the construction of the huge dams, so popular in the sixties to the eighties. She describes the impacts of some of the best-known big dams in India, the United States, Mexico, and China. Using her in-depth knowledge of the Indian Subcontinent she strengthens her arguments with many examples from that region.

Water rights and access to water are a commons. They inherently belong to all people collectively, from which to benefit and to be responsible for as stewards. Including being a guide to participating in popular resistance, this is a history of how the principle of water as a commons has evolved as part and parcel of the evolutionary rise of the human species. Also catalogued is the very recent advent of the concept of water as a privatized commodity. Although Shiva doesn't say it in so many words, the book often reads as a direct indictment of the United States because many of the problems she enumerates trace back directly to the fossil fuel economy. The US is the most egregious and careless contributor to the degradation of the environment. Although the US stands to experience a large part of the devastation global warming is already wreaking, perhaps the loss of Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas to a potential 2 foot rise in sea levels, many poor and island nations will bear the disproportionate brunt of global warming's effects. This book might easily be perceived as a treatise in Luddism. Shiva says almost every so-called advance in water management, as for example diverting and draining rivers, which is necessarily a move to centralize and privatize water management, results in catastrophic social and ecological consequences - especially natural disasters such as floods, supercyclones, and droughts. When water is managed locally and collectively by the indigenous as a commons, its use is equitable, ecologically sound, and sustainable - words of wisdom from mouth of justice. When water is treated as a commodity, and corporatized the unforeseen consequences, which are quite serious, include pollution and climate change.

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