

This email was sent to Dr. Shiva on August 27, 2014:

Dear Dr. Shiva:

This is in reply to the letter you sent and subsequently posted on the Internet earlier this week. It is not for publication in any way or on your website, but I thought you were asking for a serious reply. So here it is: I should say that since you have said that the entire scientific establishment has been bought and paid for by Monsanto, I fear it will be difficult to converse meaningfully about your accusation that the story contained “fraudulent assertions and deliberate attempts to skew reality.” But maybe I am wrong; I’ll try.

As to some of your more specific problems: Mr. Specter met you in the lobby of your New York hotel; you then talked in a café in that hotel. He didn’t interview you in the lobby. I regret that we suggested you were in Greece when you were not. You did, however, invite Mr. Specter to join the caravan there, and then sent him to an informational site titled: International Solidarity Caravan with Vandana Shiva. The dates on the site were April 26th to May 4th and it gave as locations: Greece, Italy, France.

Part of the problem is that after encouraging Mr. Specter to travel with you both in Italy and India, you apparently changed your mind, and stopped replying to his interview requests (or emails.) Our fact checker also tried for more than a week to contact you directly, as well as through your headquarters in New Delhi. You never replied. Without any participation from you it was impossible to know you changed your plans. Mr. Specter never suggested that the journey was an “unscientific joyride.”

You also charge that Mr. Specter misrepresented your education. We were interested in the field you entered as a doctoral student; but nobody disputes that you received a master’s degree in physics and I am sorry we didn’t note that in the piece. Nonetheless, Mr. Specter “twisted” neither your words nor your intentions when writing about your work history. When he realized you were not going to grant him another interview he sent you a quite detailed list of questions, two of which asked about your work history as a physicist. Instead of answering his questions, you replied – to me – asking why we were “interested in academic qualifications of four decades ago.”

One hardly needs to hold a Ph.D. in physics to become an effective environmental activist, as you have demonstrated. Yet, when a prominent figure, such as yourself, is described for decades—in interviews, on web sites, in award citations, and on many of your own book jackets, as having been “one of India’s leading physicists” it seems fair to ask whether or not you ever worked as one.

It is not true, as you claim, that Mr. Specter neglected to include Africa in his piece. He discussed research in Africa on Golden Rice, cassava, and maize – which

he described as the most commonly grown staple crop in Africa. He mentioned Tanzania's efforts to produce a version of cassava that is resistant to endemic brown-streak virus, as well as research into insect-resistant cowpea and nutritionally enriched sorghum. Specter also quoted Sir Gordon Conway, who is a member of the board of the African Agricultural Technology Foundation, and perhaps the world's most renowned agricultural ecologist. "In Africa, the pests and diseases of agriculture are as devastating as human diseases." Conway also told Specter that the impact of diseases like the fungus black sigatoka, the parasitic weed striga, and the newly identified syndrome maize lethal necrosis—all of which attack Africa's most important crops—are "in many instances every bit as deadly as H.I.V. and TB."

Your math and conclusions on the issues of farmer suicides and seed prices and values differ from the math in studies carried out by many independent, international and government organizations. Mr. Specter is far from alone in rejecting, based on data, your charge that Monsanto is responsible for "genocide" in India. In your letter you state that "Specter promotes a system of agriculture that fails to deliver on its promises of higher yield and lower costs and propagates exploitation." This has always been your position, but as Mr. Specter pointed out in his article, there have been many studies on the effects of planting BT cotton in India, and on the whole, scientists – none of whom were connected to Monsanto – have found the opposite to be true.

You say that the prices of seeds are extremely high, but also that as a result of your action the government regulates their price. Several recent studies have shown that Bt cotton has been highly beneficial to cotton farmers in India. One of the best recent studies on the economic impact of Bt cotton on farmers found that "Bt has caused a 24% increase in cotton yield per acre through reduced pest damage and a 50% gain in cotton profit among smallholders. These benefits are stable; there are even indications that they have increased over time." The researchers also show that Bt cotton adoption has raised consumption expenditures, a common measure of household living standard, by 18% during the 2006–2008 period and conclude that Bt cotton has created large and sustainable benefits, which contribute to positive economic and social development in India.

You describe in your letter the stories of farmers who you believe were driven to suicide by Monsanto. Specter saw different farmers with different stories. Anecdotes involving a few people out of millions prove nothing. That was why he included the following sentence in his piece: "It would be presumptuous to generalize about the complex financial realities of India's two hundred and sixty million farmers after having met a dozen of them." The anecdotes happened, however, to support the vast preponderance of data that demonstrate that farmer suicides are driven largely by debt.

In the piece, Mr. Specter wrote that you had confused "a correlation with a causation." That was specifically in reference to your charges that glyphosate caused

increases in Alzheimer's, diabetes, kidney disease and autism rates in America. But you have applied the phrase to another issue entirely.

On a few of the other points you raise:

- 1.) The Orissa Cyclone occurred in the last week of October 1999. Specter referred to letters from you and Oxfam, both of which are freely available on the internet. It might also be noted that your letter to Oxfam was dated November 4th, the day after the worst of the cyclone had passed.
- 2.) Corn is considered both a grain, and a vegetable (and by some, a fruit.)
- 3.) Specter used the anecdote about the farmer and the elephant to illustrate the remarkable complexity and clear signs of progress evident in even the most rural parts of India. Having been to India many times, several of them for this magazine, he is well aware how ubiquitous cell phones are there.
- 4.) We take particular exception to your charge that Mr. Specter's physical description of a farmer, with "skin the color of burnt molasses and the texture of a worn saddle" was racist. It wasn't. In a 2005 profile he described the Italian designer Valentino this way: "Valentino spends a lot of time in the sun. His skin, the color of melted caramel, has the texture of a lovingly preserved Etruscan ruin." Last year, Specter described a sixty-eight year old American farmer as having "a tan, weather beaten face."

Dr. Shiva, I was distressed to read in your letter that you have been harassed and have received death threats. Nobody has a right to threaten you for expressing your views. It was all the more dismaying then, to learn that just a few weeks ago you posted on your web site a suggestion, made by Mike Adams, who runs the NaturalNews web site, that publishers, journalists, and scientists who support agricultural biotechnology have "signed on to the Nazi genocide machine of our day", and that they should be "tried for crimes against humanity." I am glad to see that you have now removed that awful screed from your web site.

Sincerely,
David Remnick