

On Gender and Ecology: for People's Manifesto

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“Yeli Van Poshan Teli Poshi An”, Nund Rishi

(When forests last, then alone food will last)

To my background:

I have worked with the European women's movement from early 70's till late eighties and thereafter with the autonomous women's movement in India. Also during my stay in Germany I have sensitized the European public through small exhibitions/posters etc. on women's movement in India as well as collected funds for donations to support the women's movement in India. Since end Eighties I am a part of the autonomous women's movement in India, particularly worked with SAHELI and MANUSHI.

Though there are differences in the social, cultural, political and economic situations in Europe, compared to Asia, there are some basic similarities too. Patriarchy is international, as one puts it.

For example: there is gender-wise division of labor prevailing in both regions. Also there is no gender equity in the different institutions and committees of political nature as well as in other areas.

Women are still primarily sex objects and much more expected to fulfill men's physical and sexual needs in Europe than in India. There is a greater confrontation between the sexes in Europe than I see in India. Violence towards women of all races, religions, castes and classes, though in different forms, is however common to both societies.

In India the culture of family- and the not I-me-my- oriented attitudinal behaviour of men and women, does provide certain possibilities of humane environment in daily life for both sexes. Nevertheless one also knows the various anti-girls and anti-women nature of

our families. Early girl child marriage, dowry deaths, domestic violence marital rapes, trafficking etc. are just some examples.

Facts are also that though Indian women ('s groups) have played and are playing a major role in ecological, political and social movements (e.g. CHIPKO, Radha Bhatt, Medha Patkar, Vandana Shiva, Suman Sahai etc.; Vijaylaxmi Pandit, Indira Gandhi, Medha Patkar , Devaki Jaine etc.; Mathura bala, Shah Bano & Ameena cases etc. resp.), the average Indian woman is far from living a humanly dignified life, particularly when we keep the 75% rural, agricultural workers and small farmers in mind.

With this background I want to make some suggestions on Gender and Ecology, particularly on agriculture, for our People's Manifesto and also furnish some reading material for that.

Let me mention that I make these recommendations embedded in the context of a socialist society, in which our goal is that

basic needs are fulfilled for all, which means:

We live sustainable lifestyles, consciously keeping the others, the neighbors, the family, the friends, the animals, the ecology etc. in mind. This would then mean that

- We try not to consume more than the average Indian can afford
- We try to use only minimum energy intensive materials in our daily lives
- we try to use public transport systems
- We try to give preference to local markets
- We try to include manual/physical labour in our daily work
- We try to use technological tools to the minimum extent
- We try to give life education to our children
- We try to use traditional, indigenous systems of medicines for our daily health concerns.

- We give due recognition to indigenous people's lifestyles and oppose the current trend of take over of forest and agricultural lands by Indian and foreign companies
- We try to have time for building and upkeeping inter human relationships

Coming back to the task in this paper, let me start with asking us about MDG Goal 3 :“Promote gender equality and empower women” And MDG 3 Progress indicators:

- Ratio of girls to boys in primary/secondary & tertiary education (UNESCO)
- Ratio of literate women to men (15-24 years old) (UNESCO)
- Ratio of women to men in wage employment in non-agricultural sector (ILO)
- Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament (IPO)

We have to admit, we are far from having achieved a satisfactory level in this process.

Keeping in mind that in many places (for example in District Medak of Andhra Pradesh, where I live in a small village a so-called organic agricultural lifestyle since last 15 years) women voters outnumber men voters; we must also be addressing women's issues for our political interventions.

I want to start with a positive note:

First and foremost, as declared in the Green Charter, let us make a resolve that:

- We all will support each other personally and politically with friendship, optimism and good humor, and not forget to enjoy ourselves in the process!

Also let us not forget that

- Peace starts at home. Peaceful and happy relations between men, women and children in their personal relationships are a necessary step towards peace in societies.

Coming back to the Gender and Ecological issues:

When we talk about Gender, at least as far as I understand it, we are trying to give visibility to the woman's life and work situation.

Gender bias in agriculture and bio-diversity:

Water, land, agriculture, forests, environment etc are part of ecology. Land is the source of sustainable livelihood, food security and poverty alleviation for almost half of the world population. An estimated 45% of world's population is still making their livelihood from land.

Unfortunately laws relating to land are still anti-woman; as an example, in Andhra Pradesh, married or deserted minor daughters have been left out in land reforms acts.

Food is an entire culture in and of itself, in India particularly so, and women are keepers and reproducers of this culture. Food security cannot and should not be achieved at the cost of this culture. The main aim of agricultural production has to be to provide the native population with healthy and sufficient food, according to its cultural context, and not for profit maximization through trade and international marketing.

Women's access to resources, knowledge, ownership and control over assets, patterns of paid and unpaid work, wages, the ability to generate income, educational patterns and political and economic power are still issues of much concern, even after generations of feminist struggle in India.

As a signatory and a major contributor to many international agreements, the Indian Government has a special responsibility towards developing gender-disaggregated databases on conservation practices, integrating gender analyses and perspectives into

policies and programs for sustainable development and ensuring the equal participation of women with men at all levels of environmental decision-making

One of the important tasks before us therefore is the Gendered Dimensions of Policies and their Evaluation.

The role of NGOs and Governmental Organizations in empowerment of agricultural women workers, also in the context of Globalisation and Liberalisation of economies worldwide, needs being improved upon!

The Women and Environment Task Force of the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) in its kit on women and Food Sovereignty issues, emphasizes the need for mobilization of peasant (and adivasi) women to understand Globalisation and its direct attack on their ability to safeguard not only food, but livelihood for themselves and their families, as well as to respond adequately to the encroachment of corporate agriculture in their lives.

Also at the macro policy level, the issues of women workers have not been adequately addressed, failing to recognize the micro level differences. All kinds of structural biases are more prevalent in case of women workers. The case of Aanganwadi workers, Aaganwadi helpers, Vidya volunteers, ANM's is one in point. One expects them to accomplish all sorts of "voluntary" work, though they are already doing immense work with very low wages.

In the movements of tribals and landless workers in Shahada, Maharashtra or the Chatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini in Bodh Gaya in Bihar or the peasant women of Shetkari Sangathana, the Bhartiya Kisan Union, the Akali Dal and the CPI(M) led struggles, women are not the decision-makers, they only follow the dictates of the male leaders. Their needs and issues are always subsumed under the "larger" interests of the society. If any one of them gets raped and she admits it openly, she gets ostracized by her community, is denied her maintenance rights in the family land and is not even allowed

to offer water or to participate in any ritual. (madhu kishwar in “women’s mobilization in rural India”, EPW , Dec 1988)

This often leads to marginalization of women workers not only in terms of job opportunities but also in terms of their access to credit, property, skill acquisitions and other economic resources.

Facts are that Women, for example, by tending livestock, growing vegetable gardens and cultivating subsistence crops such as rice--are responsible for between 70 percent and 80 percent of household food production in sub-Saharan Africa, 65 percent in Asia and 45 percent in Latin America.

In agriculturally advanced states like Punjab and Haryana, the child sex ratio has declined from 875(879) in 1991 to 793(820) in 2001. The same is true for industrially advanced states like Gujarat (878 in 2001) and Maharashtra (917 in 2001).

Finally let me mention the constraints on women’s work that have to do with the Asian belief systems and cultural practices. A plethora of taboos and myths prevent women from participating at various levels. In Bankura, West Bengal, tribal women cannot take part in tussar cocoon culture, because it is feared that their touch would kill the larvae. Some peasant communities do not allow women to handle “sacred” paddy or ginger seeds. In Northeast India some tribal communities say women must not use axe or the spade and almost everywhere do not use the plough.

A study done by the ISI in coastal Kerala has noted, that concepts of purity and impurity are used by fishing communities to keep women from going to the sea. The popular perception is that women are “impure” (because they menstrate) and will contaminate the sea or the crops.

In India we still have remains of feudal structures and patriarchy too. There are a number of social norms that inhibit the movement of (rural) women e.g. (rural) women (upper

and lower castes) are not supposed to go out of house and not the least to the (agricultural) market. Those who do so, are either of the poorest category or ones, who could not find a male member to do the job and are mostly unhappy about it, or the very few, who have enough self-confidence and ignore what other people think or say. This is the reason why small and marginal (rural) women farmers are so in dire need of cash. And yet they are not the ones, who commit suicide, because they think of the welfare of their family members.

There is also a strong prejudice in Agriculture in the recognition of women's vs. men's work. Women themselves believe that the work which men do is more difficult, heavy etc. and so they should get higher wages. (rural) women do weeding work for nearly 7 hrs a day in a squatting position and still believe that they do not do hard work as men do.

For example an inquiry into the Dairy Development in Ambala, which reported no female to be a worker in animal husbandry, showed that actually (rural) women were bringing in fodder, preparing food mix for cattle sheds, treating sick cattle, making dung cakes, storing them, making compost etc.

In a study questioning this assumption in the report, the authors quote a comment made by a male anthropologist, who reported that when he asked a man why males did not do transplanting and weeding work; he was told “ no man can keep standing bent over all day long in the mud and rain. It is much too difficult and our backs would hurt too much.

There is gender bias in Community Resource Management Programs. Though throughout South Asia, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and self-help approaches are being undertaken, there is gender bias. Gender aware and gender sensitive facilitators, as also extension workers, are still an exception. As an example, the thousands of village level water user groups formed throughout Andhra Pradesh, (rural) women have virtually no role to play, because the criteria for membership is land ownership and (rural) women do not have land in their names.(www.ncasindia.org)

The critic from the Women's movement in India towards Food Security policies of the Govt. is well put in the "Women's Charter for Food Rights", Delhi women's group, describing how food security can well be achieved if women's perspectives are given due priorities. They are very critical towards the WTO policies on agriculture, as these do not take into account the life-situation of (rural) women and the farming community in India into account.

Women and children suffer most, when food rights are threatened. Therefore women's and children's food rights must be at the center of our country's concerns. Hence the Women's Charter on Food Rights demands strengthening of the Public Distribution System (PDS) and women given a special role in the running of these PDS.

A publication of the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy on gender auditing of the budget (2003) has noted that the budgetary allocation for women-specific schemes has increased only in the area of Family Planning. In schemes to provide foodgrains to adolescent girls as well as pregnant women and nursing mothers and for nutritional support for girl children through Mid Day meals scheme, there have been budgetary cuts. This in spite of the Supreme Court order on the Right to Food petition of PUCL favouring such allocations.

A gender just food and agriculture policy must be based on the equal and fundamental right to food irrespective of gender, class and age.

Recommendations on an Alternative Agriculture Policy (RFSTE)

- Should discourage corporate monopoly on seeds and save farmers freedom and provide them seed sovereignty
- Should demand no patent on life and life forms, including seeds, plants and microorganisms
- Should demand for accepting Community Biodiversity Registers as authentic document for registration of seeds and promotion and propagation of farmer's varieties and extinct varieties to save farmers from suicides through dependency and debts caused by unreliable, high dependency and non-renewable hybrid seeds.

- Should demand for no genetic engineering in agriculture and strong bio-safety regulations to protect our agriculture and environment.
- No privatisation of Water and no diversion of water from agriculture to industrial urban consumption
- The govt should come with proper loan facility which can save farmers from selling off their lands.
- The govt should also desist from acquiring agricultural land for development projects.
- The govt should provide intensive subsidy to farmers who take up sustainable agriculture and organic farming.
- Remove agriculture from WTO agreement.
- Minimum support price must stay.

From the gender perspective, some recommendations of the National Policy for Farmers, Govt. of India, may well be put into action:

- Mainstream the human dimension in all farm policies and programs and give explicit attention to issues relating to women in agriculture.
- Invariably much of the biodiversity conservation work (nurseries, plantations etc.) having been done by the women, gender roles be taken into account in the conservation and enhancement of bio-resources
- Kisan credit cards have been issued mostly to men. Women's organizations and SHG's views need being more involved.
- Support group farming by SHG's through easy and low rate of interest Govt. credit.
- Absence of titles to land is preventing many de facto women farmers from eligibility to institutional credit. Following the conferment of land rights to women under the Hindu Succession Amendment Act (2005), the provision of appropriate support services to women farmers are urgent.
- Joint pattas are required, particularly where there is out migration of men
- Legal literacy with reference to the entitlements for women are needed
- De-Linking of institutional credit for agriculture from land title is required

- Crèches, healthcare and functional literacy courses for women are required.
- In plantation labour, many women, require support services like crèches, life and health insurance. Nutritional requirements of pregnant nursing women need to be fulfilled.
- SHG capacity building and mentoring centers for women farmers are required.
- Training in food safety and quality management are essential for women, as they handle most of the post-harvesting operations.
- Women-headed farm households suffer many handicaps in the area of access to technologies, inputs and extension advice.
- Majority of the representation of farmers union at the district level are men. Without conscious effort to change this state of affairs and promotion of women's skills and technological empowerment, the productivity of small farmers will remain low and post-harvest losses high.
- Farm men and women belong to different categories and require different support
- Women need implements, which can reduce drudgery and enhance output
- Technology has to be seen as an ally in the movement for gender and social equity.

There is need to have gender-sensitive extension workers and researchers, while evolving and disseminating any technology for agricultural purposes.

IFOAM, the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements has following social justice standards:

- All employees (on a farm) should have equal opportunity and adequate wages when performing the same level of work, regardless of color, creed and gender.
- Workers should have adequate protection from noise, dust, light and exposure to chemicals that should be within acceptable limits in all production and processing operations.

- Operators should respect the rights of indigenous peoples and should not use or exploit land, whose inhabitants or farmers have been or are being impoverished, dispossessed, colonized, expelled, exiled or killed or which is currently in dispute regarding legal or customary local rights to its use or ownership.

And the Ifoam Training Manual on Gender in Agriculture has this to say:

- Women have advantageous skills and knowledge of Organic Agricultural principles. They are primary users of agricultural land, forest products and water for the livelihood needs of the whole family. They have considerable indigenous knowledge about the use and preservation of natural resources through their traditional role as providers of food for the household. They have traditional experience in management of agriculture, food production, forests, soil and energy and water resources and related conservation technologies. Also their traditional experience gives them a good understanding of the biodiversity needs.
- Organic Agriculture requires such knowledge and so (rural) women should be included in projects on Organic Agriculture as active agents, instead of as passive beneficiaries.
- In the past policy makers have mostly relied on information obtained from men and oriented towards men, to formulate policies. (rural) women's views have too often not been heard. In many cases it is easier to obtain information from men, because they are represented more in decision-making bodies, co-operatives or farmer groups. Also they are more confident in speaking out their views. It is important that extension workers and policy makers make an effort to actively involve (rural) women – of all castes and classes!

The two Gender Budgeting Analysis, one on "Impact of Maharashtra's agricultural policy on women farmers"

and the second on “MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE SCHEME” have shown that:

- Less than 1 % of total budget and less than 6% of the budgetary funds allocated to agriculture is devoted to the needs of the women farmers, who constitute more than 50% of agricultural labourers
- The crop development program package is by and large gender blind, except for the program “nurseries raising”
- There are two groups of people who are disproportionately excluded, the elderly since they are not considered capable of manual labour and female-headed households who ought to be recognized as independent households but are subsumed in the cards of their natal families or excluded altogether.
- Single widowed women were included in the family of other married males (sons, father-in-law or husband’s brother, etc). Only in the absence of such males was the card issued in the name of the woman.

And following suggestions are made:

- The payment of minimum wages
- part payment of wages in grain (calculated at BPL prices)
- the issuing of individual job cards to women
- registration of female-headed single/multi-member households
- Provision of worksite facilities and provision of Crèches with some meal Scheme
- Selecting women-friendly Projects and labour processes, a special land improvement package for farms headed by female farmers
- There is a strong demand from women for individual beneficiary schemes and income generation activities like horticulture, sericulture, food processing, especially in the rainy months.

Also at the international level following considerations are being discussed and important for our work:

1. In the midst of a deepening global food crisis, the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) will address agricultural issues for the first time in ten years at its 16th review session from May 5 to 16, 2008. The International Federation of Agricultural Producers (IFAP), which represents the interests of more than 600 million farm families worldwide, will present the farmers' vision for sustainable development, which must be heeded by governments worldwide to avert global catastrophe.

Agriculture needs to be given a much higher priority on development agendas, with a strong participatory role given to farmers' organizations, in helping the world to achieve a sustainable future.

2. An IAASTD (the international assessment of agricultural science, technology and development) report on a new agriculture paradigm focusing on poor farmers is a step in the right direction. Conceived in 2002 by the World Bank and the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, the IAASTD began to work in 2004 with the objective of improving life, health and prosperity for millions of poor farmers.

The IAASTD report underlines the necessity of a deep rethinking of the approach to agriculture. It admits the market's lack of capacity to deliver prosperity and food security to the poor and it states the need to review some unfair trade rules. The report also emphasizes the need to reform some intellectual property laws on patents on novel crops, as to not let them jeopardize new research and agriculture innovation. The report is also critical towards the domination of multinational companies on seed and fertilizer markets. It calls for an implementation of agro-ecological strategies, in particular to realize environmental sustainability, and spotlights the doubts and controversies concerning genetically modified crops. The report is definitely asking for a new agriculture paradigm, focused on the role of farmers and especially on poor farmers.

In their recent book, Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies also show the link between ecological degradation and patriarchy, between global militarisation and ecological

destruction. It is accepted that fact that women are not only the most vulnerable but also key agents for survival and stability in the community,

Ecofeminism, a fusion between feminists and environmentalists, explains the relationship of nature and women. Nature is seen as inferior to humans, just as women are. Ecofeminists want to change the world into a better place. A powerful way forward can be found in commonalities between ecofeminist and indigenous struggles.

With the share of women in government delegations at the annual U.N. meetings on climate change ranging between 15 percent and 30 percent in the past 11 years, women's advocates are also pressing governments and the U.N. to fully involve women in planning and implementing environmental projects at both the international and local levels.

Annexe:

Any long term meaningful intervention by, for and with women is possible only when (Domestic) violence towards women is decimated from the globe.

“Violence towards women in general and particularly domestic violence are essential characteristics of societies which suppress women and is used to control in the field they are traditionally assigned, the domestic field.” (Report of the UN special correspondent on violence against women, 1996)

Particularly:

female foeticide and -infanticide, female genital mutilation (fgm),

bride burning, dowry deaths, rapes must be removed through all possible socio-cultural, legal, political and economic measures.

We must support the proposed International Criminal Court judgment in war crimes: mass rape should be regarded as a war crime.

More research and education continue on woman friendly reproductive technologies, affirmative action and positive discrimination, feminist perspectives of work, atheism,

(religious) fundamentalism, spirituality, matriarchy and matriarchal societies as prototypes is required.

Culturally and religiously rooted violence against women is still a shockingly widespread human rights violation.

- Many 'employment agencies' that are springing up in cities of India, to place migrant women for domestic work are little more than traffickers. The condition in which these women work violates several laws including the Bonded Labour Act and in many cases the Child Labour and Juvenile Justice Act. Activists are calling for a specific law to regulate the domestic work sector. (National Commission for Women)
- Worldwide there are 130 million women today, whose genitals have been mutilated. Every year 2 million additional women suffer the same fate.(source UNIFEM, WHO, Human Rights Watch...)

Finally let us try and follow THE SPANISH MODEL:

In a country whose culture has been defined by machismo, the new Socialist government headed by Prime Minister Zapatero is legislating equality in every aspect of Spanish life.

All political parties must now allocate 40% of their candidate lists to women, while all large corporations are required to give women 40% of corporate board seats. Women ministers make up half of Zapatero's Cabinet and his Vice President is a woman - Maria Teresa Fernandez de la Vega. He states: "We talk of slavery, feudalism, exploitation - but the most unjust domination is that of one-half of the human race over another."

(Source: Washington Post, 10/7/06)

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