



Land, Livelihood and Access to Resources

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On 15 August 2007, India turns 60. It has travelled quite a distance in the 60 years since its birth. Nearly double digit economic growth, India remains the world leader in maternal mortality, female infanticide and foeticide, deaths due to preventative disease, and other indicators of human development. Even in 2007, in Raitara village of Vanarasi in Uttar Pradesh, a five-year-old Dalit girl is facing imminent death from starvation as the family being slaved in a farm for free labour. Likewise, vulnerable villagers, namely, rural women, meanwhile, get a lot of impacts in the gap between two faces of the country. Those bad indicators are always appeared in rural women.

Peril of livelihood surges particularly up to minority women

Amid the all contradiction in India, minority women, who are doubly or multiply discriminated by their gender, caste and ethnicity, are located in the most dangerous place for their livelihoods; particularly, landless women, workers who are minority communities, women from Dalit caste (and particularly, those who are in the caste to conduct manual scavenging work, who are mostly women), Irulas, Naricuravar, Dhobi women, Tribal women, Forest dwellers, Muslim and other religious minority women, sex workers, Mathammas, transgenders and women from self-help groups.

In addition, the land alienation leads women to the erosion of livelihood, particularly those who are related to the land- not only owners who might get compensation, but also peasant women as well as girl children and elderly women who are dwelling in the region. Those who are in unorganised sectors, therefore, cannot have any force to act against land alienation when they are suffering of devastation of their livelihood. 80% of the unorganised sectors, moreover, are women. Minority women are facing multiple discrimination even in terms of evaluation of their contribution to the society. Although toiling very hard with extremely low wage, minority women are not granted benefits of the success of the economic growth of the country as well as recognition of their work. Even women in general are workers whilst they are not seen as workers. They have no social benefits of all production. Women are working a lot but unpaid within the household and family farm. Women's work remains invisible, unproductive and unrecognised. No maternity benefits are provided to women workers. The gender based misrecognition against minority women workers catalysed with the misrecognition of their caste and other social status. They are facing a lot of violence in all level in all forms: at home, at workplace, and in the community- verbally, physically, and psychologically.

Minority women are coping with the question of survival and dignity simultaneously, and the question of dignity can be inseparable with the question of subsistence: land, resources and livelihood are strongly related to social status of these women. Dalit women are treated to be bad, impure, immoral subjects compare to women in other community. The question of chastity, which can be transferred to the question of dignity for some women, is not for Dalit women. Dalit women, thus, are seen as “easy play evil”- sexually harassed and exploited. Although being untouchable in the society, they are touchable in the night. Sex workers, mathammas and transgenders are located within the closed culture. They are stigmatised and almost pushed into begging for survival. Muslim women with the burdha, in Indian context, are fighting to come out of the clutches of the religious leaders.

Girl children, especially from minority communities, are not sent to school for better education due to dowry system. Also, the value of the society looking at women with the anti-girl feeling, stigma, the patriarchal norms and religious teachings fuel the tendency to keep girl children away from the accessibility to education in high quality. Vedas are not allowing women, especially women referred in the paper to obtain property rights. Housing and cultivable land cannot be inherited to women for this reason. Although Indian property laws permit women to hold properties, it cannot be implemented properly in the society as a practice. For Mathammas and sex workers, they are not given even houses for rent.

The globalisation process, on the other hand, do not recognise women’s knowledge on agriculture especially seed collection and preservation as well as the use of water, storing and protecting grains. It even ruins women’s rights to preserve the knowledge on agriculture and trying to put everything their patent. The women’s knowledge and the common property are eroding now everywhere in India.

Then, how do we expect women to own land and related resources? Women’s status in particular societies, such as Indian society, is quite dependent. Thus in the eyes of the national state, even the policies, women are the subjects which are provided only “small” things. When it comes to the question of women, governmental schemes are on credit- should be “micro” credit not “macro” credit, “small” saving not stock market or even not big companies. This is obviously discrimination and division based upon gender which is widespread in the national economic order. Any government policies as such can be far from pro women and the schemes are not designed appropriately accountable for women.

Vegetable vendors would have lost the place where vending is due to reliance controlling vegetable market. The vegetable vendor women would be unemployed. Traditional occupation of the agricultural women workers can be replaced by mechanisation, and thus women are forced into prostitution for survival. Single women who are Mathammas, sex workers, and trans-genders are all facing social, economic, and sexual exploitation.

Feminisation of poverty is intensified in post tsunami where relief and rehabilitation was not provided to women- only the household headed by the “man” can be offered. For example, in Tamil Nadu, middle aged elder sister living with the family of the younger sister was not provided separate housing even though she had her own (ration) family card. At the post tsunami situation, women

were treated as beneficiaries than claiming over their rights, cannot see any support which is women-centred programme even being provided basic amenities, shelters, water and sanitation.

Agricultural lands are taken away to aqua farm for horticulture and floriculture before and after Tsunami. In Kollathur Dalit village, agricultural lands were taken away for prawn farm for exportation. Meanwhile, Dalit women were unable to get fish and shrimp from the backwater, which is also the primary occupation adding to agricultural work in the field, the toxic influence discharged from aquaculture ponds destroyed the shrimp and fish in the backwater, and created health problems for Dalit women. Dalit women, then, have lost their catches of fish as well as agricultural livelihoods which have affected their local and household economy. In addition, they need a lot of funds for medical cost for treatment as well as legal cost for handling false cases booked on them by the owner of the farm.

Dalit women, as a result, have to leave the children with the elders and migrate to other state with the men to earn for the family. The women migrate for more than 20 days only for the work, and they lose their freedom and dignity in bad working conditions.

Whilst the rural farmers lose their lands and means of livelihood, the productive industry shifts into the “easier money making” industry. Agriculture is turned into floriculture where small farmers would be eager to see cash everyday. Women and school-going children are employed to pluck flowers for extremely low wages. Women and children working in the fields where pesticides are sprayed are affected by the hazardous agro chemicals which damages health of the workers.

Special Economic Zones ruin the rights to land, resources and livelihoods

At present, 1,34,000 hectares of lands are set 67 multi-product “Special Economic Zones (SEZs)” in India (Financial Express, 30 Aug 2006). It is creating widespread discontent amongst farmers and common peoples all over India.

The Government of West Bengal, for example, has decided to acquire 1,253 acres of fertile agricultural lands at Singur, Hooghly district for the construction of a plant for “Tata Motors”, a car manufacturing unit of Indian multi-national corporation Tata. As a result, more than 5,000 peasant families as well as thousands of agricultural labourers, unregistered sharecroppers, cottage industry workers and local small business people in 11 villages in the region are living under the threat of imminent eviction and their livelihood is endangered. Meanwhile, Singur peasant women would be severely affected since many of them do not own land so they would not get the compensations in their names.

People, however, strengthen their protest against injustice distribution of land as well as perils of their livelihoods. In Singur, the active peasants strength and gain solidarity by organising Singur Krishi Zami Raksha Committee, and refuse to accept the acquisition notification.

In Nuagaon of Jagatisinghpur district in Orissa, women come out against steel project of Korean company- POSCO. When the government machinery was out to support the Korean company without holding any dialogue with the villages, women were leading the movement against the government even though they feared police action. Ms. Nirupana Rout says, “If policemen enter our

village to help POSCO take our land, they will have to kill us first. We will no longer create barricades to block their entry, but will ourselves stand as barriers on their way". (The Hindu, 12 Apr. 2007)

The state repression on resistance, on the other hand, has increased. Or rather, the state behaves as an agent of the corporation. The state government, which is essentially responsible to the citizen not only becomes advocates of the corporations but also acts as corporations. The state government itself takes away the land, especially agricultural lands, coastal lands with the coastal regulation zones, salt pans, and forest lands for SEZs. The land taken for SEZs, meanwhile, only 35% is used for industry and the rest for non-industrial purposes: recreation centre- and housing. In Chattisgarh Salwajudum is created by the state to control the peoples' movement to fight against land acquisition.

In Nandigram, West Bengal, 17 villagers were shot to death with the protested against government taking away lands for corporation; chemical hubs of Salim group. Out of 17 killed 12 are Dalits. The people of Nandigram have lived in daily fear of retaliation when the Citizen's Committee entered to the district. The mission found that women were extremely apprehensive, begging the mission to spend the night with them.

The state, however, is not restoring land rights and titles to landless women. Land given to SEZs promoters is more than 1000 hectares which obviously violates Land Reform Act. SEZs will not create employment for local women but it will push away women because SEZs employs skilled and educated workers. Communities, especially women in unorganised sectors, will not be employed in SEZs.

Women living in the region of POSCO project, actually, earn their living by cultivating betel leaves, cashew and other crops; not steel production. SEZs will destroy local livelihoods and provide inadequate employment opportunities. The SEZs, also, will use excessive amount of water for construction. There will be increased deforestation, environmental pollution. There is no probation of the monitoring environmental impacts of SEZs.

At Uriyur of Vellore District in Tamil Nadu, a contractor was permitted by the government for the sand quarrying. The contractor has gone beyond the specification and dug deep pits and removed the sand. This has made huge pits and thereby causing heavy damage to the link road between the village and the main road. During the rain it was flooded and in the pits three children were drowned and died. Dalit women stopped the trucks coming to the river in the midnight, punctured the tires broken the glasses and finally stopped the sand quarrying.

Women are questioning mirage of dreams in commercialised social service can serve for their livelihoods

Whilst rural women are suffering from feminisation of poverty as well as inclusion of SEZs, local resources are eroded further with the introduction of micro-finance and self-help groups, which are embracing campaigns that it would eradicate poverty, support firmly the women's livelihood and development by claiming that there would be an access to savings. Through micro-finance and self help groups, women can get spaces for coming together, but this has controlled exploitation of money lenders. The microfinance as a result disintegrated women's movement. Even loan

distribution, Dalit women are discriminated again by excluded from the scheme. There are political vested interests for voting purpose. Although women's groups are created, state is not accountable in ensuring economic benefits which women might be able to get. Self-help groups are not supported for productive activities. Corruption is systemised and high interest remains charged. Not only minority women, but elderly women are excluded in those schemes.

There is, again, a dark side of programmes as well as accountability problems which can be shown as women are suffering with the results of corruption in development programme. Whilst the high rates of interest charged by micro finance institutions, and the coercive means of recovery used, there is no justification on the limitation on the loan amount. In addition, it is not accountable for the destination of profit of "non-profit micro finance institutions".

Likewise, every social service sectors are all commercialised and privatised- health and education. Although the rights to health should be the fundamental question for all women, there has been inequality in providing sanitation infrastructure and basic facilities that affects women's health, even in post tsunami relief. Whilst building group houses or even schools, for marginalised women there are no toilets attached. Especially to the tribal women who live in the hill area, there is no provision of the health facilities. The remote villagers are not able to get into the service from the doctors, and no proper transportation. Whilst rural women are suffering in simple but basic problems in health, the new reproductive technologies making marginalised women surrogate mother, which is the commercialisation of reproductive rights. In the globalisation and commercialisation of the livelihoods, women's economic rights are eroded physically and psychologically.

Women, however, are not just waiting for being sacrificed in the situation explained above. Rural women, particularly minority women who are marginalised, nowadays, are taking action locally, nationally, and internationally. Dalit women flew to Hong Kong to take an action at the 6 ministerial meeting of WTO. The campaign against Genetically Modified Foods, Trans National Cooperation, Pesticides and Agribusiness are continuing. Dalit women's movements are joining other movements to reach to the goal of social movements as a whole and fighting for genuine agrarian reform.

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