



WOMEN AGROECOLOGY & GENDER EQUALITY

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(A) Introduction

Agroecology is the fast movement around the world today. It is Showing real potential in Solving the multiple crises that our planet and humanity face-hunger, Climate Change, Water Scarcity, Environmental Contamination and Unemployment. It is a true grass roots solution, accessible and affordable for the majority of the world's resource poor rural communities. But, Can it also make sure that bothe men and women benefit equally ? Does it have the Potential to challenge gender - based inequalities in societies ? Can it ensure that women become decision makers at home and leaders in Society just like men ? If so, how what would such agro ecology projects look like ? We start with some very basic concepts about gender, Patriarchy, gender roles, and how all there relate to agriculture. We then look at how Capitalist developments in agriculture have intensified gender inequalities and marginalized women. Following this, we look at the Current Status of women in agriculture in India, Including at their rights and entitlements as Enshrined in the Constitution of India. We then look at agro ecology its contested definitions today, and under what conditions it creates gender equality and when it does not. We look at its impacts at the household level and how it can create more opportunities for women at the Community level.



(B) **Some Basic Concepts about gender.**

(1) **What is Gender.**

Often there is the wrong Idea that gender means women or that gender issues

mean women's issues yes, many gender - oriented programs do focus on women specifically but that is because women tend to have less power in society they face greater inequalities, and face structural and systemic discrimination of course not all women are the same and least of all in India's agricultural societies, where class, caste and religion greatly affect one's place in society.

Everyone has a gender whether man, women or others. Gender is not the same as biological sex, you can be born with male or female sexual characteristics but one's gender is the result of Social Construction. At birth, People are Categorized as man or women, and then face expectations as to how they should wear, what roles they are expected to play in the family and Society, and how much power they have. Gender is therefore not about one's biological Sex, it is more about one's position in Society, it is about power relations, It is about equality or inequality between women and men, and within social, Economic and Political Systems.

Even if they are the most common man and woman are not the only two genders, some people do not identify with the Strict binary division of man or women. for example the Hijra Community in India is a third gender that does not fall into the categories of man or woman and are today legally recognized. The India Supreme Court has Stated that "It is the right of every human being to choose their gender" (Bearak, 2016). Transgender has different names in different areas of India such as "Hijra", "Kothi" "Kinnar", "Shiv-"Shakti" or "Arvani". There is an entire gradient of genders and people who selfidentify with various scales in between man or woman.

While gender is a very Important part of Everyone's identity, it can not be separated from other Categories Such as Caste, religion Class, etc. We must be able to look at all of these impact on one's place in Society.



(2) Gender and Power

Society is full of hierarchical power relationships for example class and caste are just two types of hierarchical power relationship prevalent in India. These are relationships where some are more powerful than others, and exercise power over others. Gender is also one such category. It is one of the most Persistent forms of

Invisible power in the world. Gender Shapes power and gender relations are power relations (koester , 2015). Men exercise power over women not only in the private Share of the house hold but also outside at the highest levels of decision - making. Men and women often consider women's lack of the power as "Natural" and appropriate. This reduces significantly women's access to decision-making as they may lack the self confidence to Participate effectively, or are actively prevented from Speakin up in public meetings. But many challenge the idea that power is mostly viewed as "Power Over" which is getting someone to do something that one Wants by using authority, domination and Control.



(3) What are Gender Roles

The term "Gender role" refers to the traditional ideas of how society thinks men and women should behave. These are learned through socialization. Every society has a certain norms or rule as to how men and women should behave. if someone strays from those rules, they could face punishment from Society for e.g. people may make fun of them or not support them etc.

Traditional gender roles in India for e.g. Could be that women are supposed to stay at home and take care of children, while men are supposed to work outside and bring home money. If a woman from a conservative family tries to work outdoors or stay out late then she may face resistance from the family. Similarly if a man tries to stay at home and take care of the family and children cook and clean instead of being the bread winner then he could be seen as "less manly" and face Stigma.

(4) Gender Roles in Agriculture

In all Societies there is a division of roles in agriculture. Traditionally women performed certain tasks such as seed saving, processing, backyard livestock keeping while men performed others like plough operation. Such division differed across regions depending on their cultural values. for example in certain cultures, the plough

was only used by men and women. were expected to remain at home carrying out others women had their own farming systems and commonly worked outdoors. Today as cultures have changed such roles have also shifted and women's roles in farming are increasign and there is a general understimation and undervaluation of their work in development policies. In some of the farm activities like processing and storage, women predominate so strongly that man wokrers are numerically Insignificant (Das 2015).



There Continue to be differences between regions and cultures. In India there are significant differences across caste and class. A general tendency is that agricultural labourers and agrarian working class women come from particular castes while women from other castes and landed families typically do not work outside the house in the fields but they do play other roles in the agricultural operations with seeds, live stock processing as some examples.

(C) How capitalist Interventions / Conventional agriculture have changed genders relations and dispossessed women.

Ester Boserup's (1970). Seminal work on gender and agriculture looked at women's role in agriculture systems. It challenged the assumption that modernization will improve the position of women and argued that female farming systems, especially from Africa where she conducted research, were getting marginalized. She argued that capitalist penetration of Subsistence agriculture in Africa had led to marginalization of the Subsistence agriculture in which women dominated. Capitalist agriculture recognized only male farming systems.

(D) Women in Agriculture

"In Indian Himalayas a pair of bulls work 1004 hours, a man 1212 hours and a woman 3485 hours in a year on a one hectare farm." (Shiva 1991).

As the Agrarian Crisis deepens and incomes from agriculture drop, many men have started to migrate in order to earn money for their families. In turn, women remain on the farm and farming is increasingly becoming a women's activity. Today 48 Percent of all male workers are in agriculture as against 75 Percent of all female workers, and this gap is rising.

(E) Can Agroecology Create Gender Equality ?

Now that we have established that not all agroecologies are the same, It is also important to note, that Social movements, NGOS, Communities and activists Committed to agroecology making inroads into gender equality unless they purposefully make the commitment to do so. one of the key crigigues of the agroecology / or organic farming movement by the moment is that there needs to be a more concerted effort on the gender front.

(F) Impacts of Agroecology at the Household Level.

A study conducted by La via Campesina and the Asociation Nacional de agricultores pequenos de agricultores pequenos (ANAP) in cuba found that the shift away from traditional monoculture to agroecology challenged power relations inside Peasant families (Rosset et al. 2011). Peasant women reported that system, the crop belonged to the man. He drove the tractors, planted, Applied chemicals harvested and sold the crop. All the money went to him. "The man was king". (Mechin Sosa et al. 2013) But as the farms diversified through the farmer to farmer system, the roles and income earning opportunities for the different members of the nuclear and the extended family also became diversified. Men still managed some row crops but the addition of animals etc. Gave women control over decisions and income in those areas. Even adolescents and old people (grand parents) had a role to play some by children, some fruit trees by the grand parents and so there was a dilution of patriarchy inside peasant families.

(G) References :

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