

Reconstructing Connections Among Women, Agriculture and Food in India



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Abstract: *The significant participation of women in the food production process can never be denied. Studies say that women play an important role in agricultural process and its related actions like producing crops, horticulture, seeds collection and crop preservations. Women perform around 70 percentage of farming work using their expertise knowledge of biodiversity adding nutrition and value to food than the engineering and non-organic farms. But, from last few decades the participation of women in agriculture is being devalued due to the patriarch developmental projects in agriculture that aims at profit maximisation only. The international agri-business and dominant economics have projected feminine works invisible as female provide food to their household, not to the market. Due to the failure of statistical data, women's contribution goes unrecorded and unnoticed. This leads not only a violation in women's economic independence but also it destroys the women's expertise in the renewability of the nature causing an ecological crisis. The Green revolution, which replaced the traditional method of crop rotation with monoculture, have extracted the energy and nutrition from the food. Hence, in order to retrieve food from this techno-conspiracy, it is very essential to redevelop feminine knowledge of biodiversity in farming. The present paper analyses three things. First, how women, agriculture and food production are interrelated. Secondly, why the devaluation of women's knowledge and participation from the farm have given birth a hunger game. Finally, how involving women's knowledge in sustainable agriculture can save the Earth from the hunger crisis.*

Key words: Women, agriculture, food production, biodiversity.

I. INTRODUCTION

Women in any culture are considered as the real food makers as they continued to be an integral part of agricultural economy by contributing their participation in every activity, they perform in the food chain. Women's activities include crop-production, animal cleaning, food preparation, engaging in rural trade and selling, cooking food for family, preserving food and seeds for future and above all maintaining household chores.

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'In rural India, the percentage of women who depend on agriculture for their livelihood is as high as 84%. Women make up about 33% of cultivators and about 47% percent of agricultural laborers.' (Rao, E. Krishna .2006).

The traditional women's principle of producing food is grounded on the close links between the animals, nature and crops and above all how women work to maintain these associations. As Vandana Shiva states, "Agriculture modelled on nature and based on women's participation with nature has been self-producing and sustainable because the internally recycled resources provide the necessary seeds, soil moisture, soil nutrients and pest control." (Shiva.2010) Basically, the women farmers from the Third World are considered as the small agriculturalists who offer the origin of food security and most importantly, they do it through a cooperation with additional species.

Women working with nature made the cropland productive by adding the fertility from the jungles and the animals of the farm. This cooperation or well-defined partnership with the diversity has made the women to feed the world's hunger in the past. This nature friendly agriculture is purely women centric that relates agriculture with diversity. But, in last few decades, the post-colonial agricultural inventions have successfully destroyed this female knowledge of farming by making women either invisible on field or wiping them out from the dominant engineering agriculture. Modern economics that dependent on science and technology, has devalued women's participation in agriculture as they are food providers to their family only which adds nothing to the global market. This phenomenon has led women's knowledge of agriculture invisible and devalued nature's partnership with farming. Thus, the ecological degradation and the economic instability of women with the other poorer people of the rural sectors go hand in hand. Thus, the patriarch modelled agriculture has dominated both women and nature that raised the concern of food crisis world-wide.

II. OBJECTIVE

- To analyse the inter connections among women, agriculture and food.
- To understand the reason behind economic instability of women farmers in the Third World.
- To find out the reason behind the food crisis and to bring a possible solution.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Patriarch model of science and technology have devalued the knowledge of women in agriculture by ignoring and replacing the dimension of varieties in the farming production.



Most of the farmers in the world are women farmers who are continuously showing their strength in diversity in bringing food from field to the kitchen, still they are dominated by the industrial agriculture.

When agriculture is industrialised, the pattern of internal contribution of farming shifted to the external output of profit and the ecological connection with soil shifted to chemical connection with food. This breaks the link among nature, food and farming. Diversity is the features of women's agricultural knowledge of working that can be found the way they plant seeds, sow food crops and the pattern they process food. Women farmers generally use more species of plant varieties, both un-cultivated and cultivated, than any agricultural specialist recognize about it. But unfortunately, women are being not accepted as potential food makers and expert in biodiversity which lead to destruction of food safety, particularly the deprived households in poor sections.

According to the ecofeminists, both nature and women's degradation go hand in hand by the patriarchal monopoly of industrialisation and modernisation in every sector. According to ecofeminists, for man 'nature' is just a resource which can be commercialised to earn maximum profit, while women see 'nature' as something that satisfy the daily needs which should never be destroyed. The earth has not only gone through the biological crisis for the masculinised thoughts of industrial farming, but also the healthy practices of traditional farming ended with hunger crisis and food politics.

The separation of human from nature made human to separate from human themselves creating a big gap of haves and have nots. Vandana Shiva says this 'Separation is violence' which permits few people to imagine that they are the only masters on the earth and have the capabilities to conquer, twist and reshape the nature as well as the under privileged sections just the way they wish. (Shiva 2018) In this study, the relationship between women and agriculture is aptly analysed.

IV. ANALYSIS

Women, with the partnership with nature, are providing food to the next generation by the natural farming which grounded on the sustainable flow of productiveness in form of fertility, from farm animals and jungle to the farming land. This is how women have always included nature in the food producing system. Shiva narrated the importance of women in agriculture in her book *Staying Alive* (2010) through the examples of women peasant and their struggle in the Chipko movement. Shiva narrates, "The women of Chipko fight for their forests primarily as peasants whose productivity in agriculture depends centrally on inputs from the forest, either directly as fertilizer to the soil, or indirectly as fodder for their cattle, which in turn produce fertilizer for fields. The feminine principle of food production is based on the intimate links between trees, animals and crops, and on the work of women in maintaining these links." (Shiva. 2010) Female contribution in agriculture has conventionally in assimilating forest and animals with the cropland. In this way farming based on the ecology around as well as feminine sharing with nature has proved to be sustainable as the process of internal recycled offer the most necessary

efforts in growing seeds, maintaining moisture to soil and also controlling the pests.

Alfred Howard, the famous botanist and agriculturalist of London, had done his research wok in Indian traditional style of organic farming and advocated for the sustainable agriculture found in India. In his seminal works *An Agricultural Testament* he mentioned the most necessary natural way of producing food from farming lands of South Asian countries and named it as the best practice of agriculture. The women's knowledge of keeping equilibrium amid live-stocks and harvests was the best way to preserve the cycle of food as well as upholding the organic matter to the soil. In India, the process of mixed crops in agriculture is one of the traditional ways of farming which not only provide nourishment to each other, but also a way to deliver a balance diet on people's plate. Shiva always mentions that "Women's productive work on the farm has therefore been crucial to sustainable food production." (Shiva.2010) Women have always played an important role in sustainable agriculture by continuing the fertility and richness of the soil, by maintaining balanced diet through mixed crop farming and also through keeping equal partnership among nature, animals and soil.

Preserving seeds for the next term cultivation is one of the primary responsibility of women farmers, which bound the soil with the tree or crop naturally. Apart from grain and food storage, women are skilled in conserving seeds which adds extra benefit in their finance and also a freedom to choose their own crops. Seeds are the primary source of life and the very first connection to the food and nourishment chain. In a lecture at the California University by Vandana Shiva, she discussed the expertise of women in preserving seeds. Again, she states, "Women have been seed experts, the seed breeders, seed selectors, the biodiversity conservers of the world. And if today we have seeds that we can save, if today we have communities that can tell us the unique properties of different crops and different seeds, it's because we've had generations of women not recognized as agronomists, not recognized as breeders, not recognized in any way as having knowledge. The 10,000 years of human expertise in feeding us is a women's expertise." (Shiva. 2004)

The industrial farming which evolved as a post-colonial development, crashed not only the relationship among agriculture, nature and animal, but also it destroyed the traditional knowledge of agriculture of women by applying the masculine monopoly. The increase use of chemicals created a biological crisis through destroying the fertility of soil and nutrition in the food we intake. The technological invasion on agriculture have ignored the feminine knowledge on framing, hit directly to the production process, and hence devalued women by making them invisible on farming. The economy strategy of the market stated women as non-participant as their work is not judged on wages. Another major problem of women farmers in India is the nonexistence of property right , that included the rights to use land, and other common resources like biodiversity and water .The new 'intellectual property rights' have alienated the rights of women and forced them to live isolated from their knowledge on biodiversity and the use of it in agriculture.

The masculinisation of the dominant industrial agriculture has spread the myth that generic engineering is the only way to feed the entire world.

The Green Revolution ended the links among agriculture, animals and forests. Vandana Shiva states: "Agricultural 'development' or modernisation has spilt the activity into two sectors – the highly visible, globally planned and controlled and state subsidised production for profits and markets, and the less visible, sometimes invisible, decentred self-provisioning of food through what is commonly called subsistence farming." (Shiva 2010) The marginalisation of women started as soon as farming opportunities are driven away from them by the masculinised sectors and women's image have shifted from food producers and conservers to mere food consumers. This invisibility factor from the farming land devalued their positions in the social sectors making them helpless and poor.

The violence of green revolution which based on single crop agriculture and the maximum production of agricultural products not only created an ecological crisis due to massive use of pesticides and chemicals, but also causing the death of the soil. The monoculture is the sole responsible for soil erosion as stated by IITG or International Institute for Tropical Agriculture. The monoculture, that based on high nutrition intake give low nutrition output to soil and also based on less water preservation policies, is just the opposite of feminine led agriculture system. The masculine calculation of commercial value creates a gap between the man led profitable economy and the women led survival economy. This strategy increased the loads on women for producing existence tricks at the same time devalued their works in the market. As a result, the devaluation that combined with other work loads at home made the women to have little scope to produce food and nutrition to the family. Food commoditisation declined the actual productivity of feminine world, turning them into a valueless and invisible being in the society.

The technological advancement in agriculture not doubt added social assistances in term of producing more crops, but at the same time it turned the women producers as labourer on the land occupied by capitalists. Bina Agarwal has narrated, "Between 1961 and 1981, the percentage of women agricultural labours rose from 25.6 percentage to 49.6 percentage." (Agwarwal.1988) Thus, from past few decades women worked as labour in someone's field because they lost the access to use land and other natural resources. Secondly, it displaced the income opportunities of women through the establishment of machines. Thirdly, the globalisation in farming privatised the seeds and succeeded in keeping control over the genetic properties which was under the control of peasant women. This privatisation of seeds adversely effect on the cycle of crop production. According to D. Morgan, "The peasant women of India have carefully maintained the generic base of food production over thousand of years. This common wealth, which had evolved over millennia, was defined as 'primitive cultivars' by the masculinist view of seeds, which saw its own new products as 'advanced verities.'" (Morgan.1979) Fourthly, the disappearance of organic farming due to women's less participation in faming gave birth to malnutrition and obviously in the poor sections women and girls became the worst victims. Thus, the uprooting of feminine knowledge from farm, not only created an ecological crisis, but also it

created a massive world hunger which may be invisible but its effect is out of control.

V. CONCLUSION

The diversity adopted in the biodiverse agricultural farms is considered not just as a basis of food, but as a huge source of liveliness in form of energy. But with a massive spread of monoculture in farming and withdrawing feminine principle of knowledge in food production, the world is now eating unhealthy and non-nutritious food. The increasing hunger game through out the world is primarily due to destruction of small farms regulated by women peasants and the secondly the peasants are forced to grow the export- oriented crops not food for their survival. Thus, the desertion of women from the farm caused vanishing of biodiversity from the land causing a separation of human from nature and from themselves. Food security, food safety and farming are deeply inter- linked. Shiva states, "Feeding the world requires producing more food with fewer resources, i.e, producing more with less. Women are experts in this and their expertise needs to filter into our institutions of agricultural research and development." (Shiva 2010) Women's prolific works in the agricultural land is very crucial to produce sustainable food . Feminine knowledge focussed on what to be contributed to the soil, to the nature while farming on it, not on exploitation of the nature by killing its naturalness. The well-known ecofeminist and naturalist maria Mies has stated : " Women's work in producing sustenance the production of life and views it as a truly productive relationship to nature , because women not only collected and consumed what grew in nature but made things grow."(Mies.1986)

The productive work of women on the farming land has consequently been vital to produce sustainable food, because it is grounded on contribution to the soil, not in a way to extract and exploit mere benefit from it. Women's process of organic farming cares and supports the work of decomposers in the soil adding fertility to it naturally. Feeling the consequences of food crisis, women all over the world are resisting against the patriarchal policies that continuously destroying their control on food, nutrition and livelihood. Understanding human as a part of diversity, the food security only can be maintained when it reclaimed, shaped and controlled by the women farmers, ultimately securing both women and food.

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Dr. Itishri Sarangi is a well known feminist-turned -professor turned author. She is a poet, editor, and critic rolled into one. She is an independent warm-hearted visionary who believes in the beauty of her dreams and full of life 24x7. The basic aim of her creations is its analytical aspect is to reach the truth, which is both vital and universal. Dr. Sarangi has served as an honorary member of the Juvenile Justice Board. She had presented a paper at Harvard University, USA. PhD's have been awarded under her guidance. She is invited as the resource person to several Universities and Colleges. At present, she is working as an Associate Professor of English at Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology, Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India.