

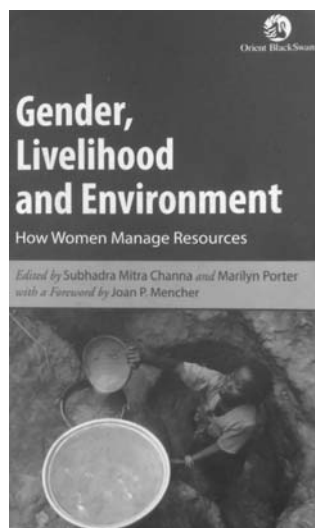
Gendering Natural Resource Management

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GENDER, LIVELIHOOD AND ENVIRONMENT: HOW WOMEN MANAGE RESOURCES

Edited by Subhadra Mitra Channa and Marilyn Porter. Foreword by Joan P. Mencher.

Orient BlackSwan, Hyderabad, 2015, pp. 214, price not stated.



The edited volume under review by anthropologist Subhadra Mitra Channa and sociologist Marilyn Porter focuses on a wide range of case studies from across the world related to ways in which women manage environmental resources. The book is a product of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) meeting held in China in 2009. The contributors to the volume show the connections between increasing poverty and global capitalist exploitation that negatively affects women's access to resources. As recognized by the UN Security Council, since the 1990s, most conflicts around the world are related to disputes over natural resources, whether they are over oil, water, mining or access to land to grow crops. Women have played an important role in the peace processes.

The underlying theme in all the seven chapters points to the need to pay attention to gender in the management of natural resources in the present as well as the uncertain future. In the foreword to the volume, renowned anthropologist Joan P. Mencher points out that in the present uncertain climatic conditions, the relation between gender and natural resources needs to be focused on. She points to the need to understand the new ways in which women are adapting to lack of resources and learning to survive on less.

The ethnographic essays in the book range from women's work in the pastoral communities in the Himalayan mountain environments to women's natural resource management in eastern Kentucky, USA to coastal environments and fishing communities in Tanzania and other African fishing communities, to water management in Gujarat and issues of Global Apartheid and women's activism for sustainable development and well being. The introductory essay by Channa and Porter sets the context for the book by highlighting the fact that the growth and spread of global capitalism has made the earth and its resources vulnerable and put it at risk. Degradation of the environment affects women the most since gender is one of the most pervasive of inequalities and women are the most disad-

vantaged of the disadvantaged groups.

Channa's essay takes off from her earlier long-term engagement with the Jad Bhotiya community who live on the Himalayan borders. Underlining its European origins, she questions the universality of the nature/culture dichotomy as a reflection of western science and medicine. Instead she argues that this dichotomy is a fallacy and not a universal given but a specific cultural construct. Amongst the Jad Bhotiya community, nature, considered superior and pure, is equated with the male and culture which is less prestigious, is equated with the female. She argues that status depends on the cosmological attribution of power to the two realms. The cosmological worldview of the Jad Bhotiya community and the women's management of scarce resources have helped them lead a sustainable life which is now under threat due to the development policies.

The essay by Ann Kingfisher, creatively titled 'Farming the Edges: Women's Natural Resource Management on Small Farms in Eastern Kentucky', looks at the women's knowledge and management of natural resources and their direct contribution to household consumption, especially in times of economic crisis. It tries to understand the concept of marginality in terms of the edge environments being analysed as well as the small farms in the economically marginal region of eastern Kentucky at the edge of the Appalachian Mountains. It tries to provide a US example of the globally documented knowledge that women possess in relation to wild resources that are a significant input into household consumption. It is this work of women in maintaining biodiversity, on the edges of agricultural production and providing for household consumption that usually goes unnoticed. Analysing rural women's roles she uses Patricia Hill Collins's idea of the 'matrix of domination' to point out that rural women do not

constitute a homogeneous group. She also points to the gendered nature of the term farmer that is usually thought of as a male job. It related men to the domain of farms yielding a cash contribution to the household and women to that of gardens yielding a non-cash contribution, ignoring the contribution of the many women and children to farming activities and many of the women who are primary farmers in their households.

This is followed by three essays on the fishing communities across the world. The article by Marilyn Porter looks at fishing amongst the coastal communities of Tanzania through a feminist lens within the context of globalization. She points to the way in which gender stereotypes and discrimination affected women's economic and social capacities. With octopus becoming a valuable commodity and the accompanying rise in its price, there is a marked gender shift in the control of the trade. Whereas earlier women trapped it in the intertidal zone and sold it to local individual buyers, now men dive into deeper waters and dominate the trade with sale to large companies. A similar pattern was seen in seaweed farming with men displacing women. Women are at the bottom of the chain of fishery related activities, both in terms of the species caught as well as its value in the market which is not enough to support the family. With the rise in prices of fish, it is the men who benefit, with larger incomes in their control and very little of it reaching the family. The women manage the family by performing a number of marginal activities that are all small scale and labour intensive along with cooperative groups and some support by the husband which may not be very forthcoming in the polygamous family system. Thus the women of the fishing communities of Tanzania continue to be poor due to the unequal power relations and access to resources.

The essay 'Fish for Sex' by Geraldine Matolla highlights the exploitation of women in the fishing communities of Africa. The industrialization of fishing has had a great impact on women as livelihoods are now unsustainable in the fish producing plants. It has led to the phenomenon of fish for sex and transactional sex. Within the existing gender power imbalance in society, even though women have a bargaining power within the relationship, the fish for sex and transactional aspects of sex have led to the spread of HIV/AIDS in the fishing communities of Africa. For a positive intervention, the first step is to recognize the existing gender imbalance in social and economic aspects, need for a multi-pronged approach which

includes prevention and awareness, skill training for women, providing alternative resources and giving them secure economic rights.

The third essay related to fishing by Siri Gerrard looks at the issue of gender, mobility, place and culture in the fishing communities of Norway. Analysing mobility practices over specific time periods, the author argues that there is an increased mobility among the fishing communities; this has been fostered by the development of the education system and the improvement of the household economy. It has led to mobility, migration of young women away from villages, leading to depopulation and immigrants from the EU countries to come into the small villages. It has created, the author argues, new gender relations where women's influence is increasing in decision making.

In 'Women's Collective Action and Sustainable Water Management SEWA's Water Campaign in Gujarat', Smita Mishra Panda points to the success of the campaign in mobilizing women and strengthening women's collective agency and confidence in negotiating a public domain that was earlier largely dominated by men. It also highlights the successful SEWA strategy of developing a linkage between environmental protection and livelihoods. It highlights the fact that women's collective mobilization can lead to good governance for local water management and 'engendering' of the state. Women's work for the water campaign has given them an increased income that has improved their bargaining power within the household; however, for it to be reflected in changes in gender relations in the household will take some time.

The final chapter in the volume is a conceptual and theoretical essay on 'Global Apartheid, Environmental Injustice and Women's Activism For Sustainable Well Being' by Faye Harrison. It emphasizes the importance of taking cognizance of gender, race, caste, class and identity as important axes of power and inequality that affect human relations within the broader ecological context.

Overall the volume puts together a diverse number of essays on women's collective action for natural resource management and their livelihood from around the world in the changing context. However, the lacuna is that the essays need to analyse development, globalization, and neo-liberal policies in greater depth. Also the articles do not themselves look at the intersections of class, race, caste and gender at great length.

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