Examination of Adivasi women’s perspectives on gender theories and ecosystem values associated with human-forest interactions

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Women’s vulnerability is closely related to their natural resource dependency.
Research focus

1) From Adivasi women’s perspectives, are existing gender theories useful to explain their association with nature and natural resources?
2) Examine the gendered characteristics of ecosystem values among the Adivasis?
Literature review

Gender theories and Natural Resource Management

- **Ecofeminism**
  - Inherent closeness of women to nature
  - *Dualisms* and *essentialisms*

- **Ecological Feminism**
  - Natural resource dependency
  - *De-homogenizing* women

- **Feminist Political Ecology (FPE)**
  - Gendered *knowledge, rights and access*

(Siva, 1988; Agarwal, 1992; Nigtingale, 2006; Rocheleau et al., 1996)
Literature review

Values

- Everyday
  - Worth of something

- Social and Psychological
  - Bio-centrism and Anthropocentrism
  - Intrinsic and Instrumental Values
  - Self-Interest
    - Humanistic Altruism
    - Biospheric Altruism

- Ecosystem Services
  - Objective and Subjective values

(Dietz et al., 2005; Schultz et al., 2000; Stern et al., 2000)
Literature review

Ecosystem Services Value Approach

Ecosystem Services

- Provisoning Services
  - Products obtained from ecosystems
    - Food
    - Fresh water
    - Fuelwood
    - Fiber
    - Bio-chemicals
    - Genetic resources

- Regulating Services
  - Benefits obtained from regulation of ecosystem processes
    - Climate regulation
    - Disease regulation
    - Water regulation
    - Water purification
    - Pollination

- Cultural Services
  - Non material benefits obtained from ecosystems
    - Spiritual and religious
    - Recreation and ecotourism
    - Aesthetic
    - Inspirational
    - Educational
    - Sense of Place
    - Cultural heritage

- Supporting Services
  - Services for the production of all other ecosystem services
    - Soil formation
    - Nutrient cycling
    - Primary production

Ecosystem Services Values

- Total Economic Value
  - Use Value
    - Provisioning services - Food, raw materials, water etc.
    - Cultural services- spiritual, recreation etc.
  - Option Value
    - Regulation services like air and water purification, soil erosion prevention etc.
  - Non Use Value
    - Satisfaction from possible future use of provisioning, regulating and cultural services
  - Bequest Value
    - Satisfaction of knowing that future generations will have access
  - Existence Value
    - Satisfaction of knowing that a species or ecosystem exists

Figure 1 - Ecosystem services

Figure 2 - Total Economic Value

(MA, 2005; TEEB, 2010)
Research Methodology

Study Area

Map of India and location of Kerala (state) and Wayanad (district); Source MSSRF office
Research Methodology

Focus Community
Conceptual and scoping review of existing studies on gender theories, ecosystem services and values, Adivasi (Indigenous) forest associations
Research Methodology

Field assessment

**Expert interviews** - Forest officials, Adivasi experts, historians, other Adivasi community members, MS Swaminathan Research Foundation scientists, villagers

**Community interactions** and **field observations**
Results and observations

Feminist Political Ecology (FPE)

Ecofeminism

Ecological Feminism
Predominance of intrinsic value - “Forests are sondam (our own). We and other animals came from forests. We cannot measure value of forests. They are more valuable than us [people].” - [Kattunayakar man]

Resilient biospheric altruism - “We are not sad about elephant raiding our crops. They [elephants] do not have food in forests. What will the poor animals do. If we don’t disturb them, they will eat food and go away. We are not sad.” [Kattunayakar man]

Elicitation of memories and sense of place - “We prefer living next to forests. Our ancestors live here [pointing towards the forest that joins the paddy field]. We were given settlement homes but we came back to forests since our ancestors refused to come with us” [Kuruma woman]

Coexistence - “Our ancestors lived with forests and wildlife. We are not afraid of anna (elephant) or puli (tiger/leopard). We sing songs and communicate with them. Elephants are scared of our sounds. We have some strategies to identify animals. Forest belongs to all of us and animals also care for forest as much as we do.” [Kattunayakar woman]
Results and observations

Anthropocentric position
*Instrumental values, Weak sustainability, Value monism*

Bi – directional status
*Mutualistic, Supporting, Contributing*

Co – construction paradigm
*Community perception, Disservices, Negative human impacts*

Romanticize indigeneity
*Cultural values, Intangible, Non-use values*

Unaccustomed markets
*Unfamiliarity, Poor and subsistence societies, Socio-cultural impacts*

Dietz et al., 2005; Comberti et al., 2015; Asah et al., 2012; Luck et al., 2012; Christie et al., 2012; Chan et al., 2012
Results and observations

Fundamental values and perceptions towards Adivasi-forest relationship of women in the communities were similar to men.

There is a need for gender-sensitive approaches to understand how displacement from forests impacted women distinctly
- Livelihood activities (daily wage labourers)
- Proximity to forest areas and natural resources (fuelwood, food and water)
- Forest degradation (timber, forest fires)
Discussions and way forward

Reimagining PhD

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