



National income from an eco-feminine perspective

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Summary

This is one more paper in the natural resource management papers offered that comes from the Uttarakhand experience. When the state was formed, the expectations were high that women, who had played an instrumental role in lobbying for its formation, would find a voice and play an instrumental role in the state's affairs, especially in relation to forest policy and management.

The importance of forests in the economy of hill states needs no emphasis here and is well recorded in the literature. The importance of women in the management of forests also is well recorded and acknowledged by governments and communities, although this is never corroborated in national statistics, neither are attempts made to engender these statistics put together by both national and state governments, nor do they have an ecological perspective: the combined perspective being termed eco-feminine.

The lack is focused by the author by citing the rise in female foeticide, witnessed by the unfavourable ratio of girls to boys in the zero to 6 age group in the 2001 census: women from the most remote villages who would not travel to the city for the sake of their own health, when subjected to family pressure, travel to hospitals for ultrasound tests. The author blames a society that gives no value to the productivity of women. Hence, the author fixes the role of women in forest management to their status in the community; and the argument is that, if the contribution of women were to be properly recorded in the national income, it would have a positive impact on women's status.

Uttarakhand only has natural resources as a basis for development revenue and approximately 65% of the land is under forest cover. Notwithstanding no

value is given to the intangible services forests provide and the role they play in communal, cultural lore. The fear is always there that the state will plant economic trees for their timber value and ignore the species that provide so much in terms of livelihood and sustainability to farming families; and also that non-timber forest products will be degraded along with a concomitant degradation of soils and water-retaining properties on forest lands. The author finds much to be desired in the commoditisation attitudes of the National Income Committee, which focuses on capital formation, production, and consumption, hence seeing income as the premium sign of economic growth. Hence the parameters devised cater only to the monetised sector and the contribution of women, as well as forests, to national income are always recorded as negligible.

The text continues by arguing for a different method of valuing services from women and forests so that their true contribution to national income can be calculated.

The author bases her argument on the case of child care; for example, when a woman looks after her own child it does not appear in national income statistics as a contribution, but, if the child is admitted to a crèche, the payment to the crèche automatically becomes a part of national income statistics. The author continues by arguing that household farms are normally, due to male outmigration, tended by women, hence if one examined the whole range of women's work, one can logically conclude that women contribute a great deal to national income. The author provides a calendar of agricultural activities that carry through from January to December, and they include the collection of fuelwood and fodder, soil preparation, rice planting, wheat harvest, animal husbandry, weeding, transplantation, rice harvest, and so forth right through until the fields are prepared for wheat planting in November and December. This is indeed an argument that has been put forward since the early 70s and international women's year.

The text then pursues the argument of environmental services for forests, as an example of accounting in the quality (or intangible services) that forests contribute. Normally forests are only valued in terms of standing biomass. Here the author suggests other parameters such as production of oxygen, soil conservation, water recycling, and so forth. Forests cover 65% of land in the state of Uttaranchal, so there is indeed an argument for the kind of accounting that would bring forest contribution on to a more realistic scale, rather than treating the intangible services as free goods, hence producing the almost unbelievable figure of 1% as the contribution of the forestry sector to the gross national product. Services such as grazing, manure, fuel, small timber, lumber, and environmental and recreational benefits are omitted from the accounting process. On the other hand, mining and quarrying are treated separately and their contributions accounted in the industrial sector. There is bound to be a



neglect of the forests when the impression given by national accounting mechanisms is that 65% of the state capital only produces 1% of its product! The same can be argued for women's contributions, many of which are taken for granted and not valued; and therefore treated as free labour.

Conclusion

One can see that within the eco-feminine perspective, forests are female. Like the women of the state who contributed so much to the quest for state autonomy, the forests are sidelined and for women and forests it is left to self-help groups run by women, without legal recognition or proper legal rights, to care for this most productive sector.



