



idea of what ownership of land means to women.

Let's be clear on one front: without confronting existing patriarchal structures, any intervention only serves to continue existing imbalances. In the area of resources too, land rights and a pro-women land redistributive policy are considered too radical or not an option, even as we loudly proclaim our commitment to women's progress. Excuses of cultural practices, traditions and taboos are conveniently brought up when women's, and particularly excluded and marginalised women's, access and rights are in question. The only place where women's access to land is mentioned is in case of inheritance rights,

household level of production have further exacerbated women's alienation from the means of production. The process of transforming fertile agriculture land into a barren saline desert through the promotion of a deliberately created global market for shrimp aquaculture industry—forcibly grabbing land from local agriculture producers and fishers dependent on the existing natural resources for their livelihoods—is a prime example of the negative consequences of an export-led market economy where women get demoted to lowly paid insecure labour, from being a main actor in agriculture or related processes. Additionally, since this industry enjoys the protection of the powers that be—within

HER LOST LAND

Women's relationship with land, within family, religion and culture

KHUSHI KABIR

I do not usually write very easily. As someone working mostly with people with little or no literacy, my forte, as I would like to call it, is the oral tradition. I speak, I talk, I converse. I write today based on my perceptions from my work with rural women with whom I have lived and learnt from over the last four decades.

Women come from different backgrounds, in terms of class, religion, ethnicity, ability and so on. Yet, where land is considered, we tend to see similarities. What is the relationship between women and land? Is she simply a passive and submissive recipient of the benefits she receives as a family member? Is she an unpaid and unrecognised pair of hands needed for fulfilling family chores? Does she feel the same ownership and entitlement over the land of her family, as the men do? Does ownership have the same connotation as entitlement? These are questions that often come to my mind as I work with both men and women, when I try to promote or introduce the

as determined by religious, traditional or social constructs, but not as an entitlement, not as a right as an equal citizen and not as part of a redistributive policy.

Given the changes in the current agriculture production systems, the peasant no longer produces for the family or for the local market; the system is now a market-led production system, in which the women, too, are being employed or engaged simply as labour. Previously, the woman in the peasant family had a crucial role to play post-harvest, in seed preservation, growing of vegetables, and tending of poultry and cattle for her family. Even though her role as the carer and in many cases the provider was never given the value it deserved, at least it allowed her to demarcate a space of her own.

The commercialisation of production processes which were traditionally the domain of women and the intrusion of a market-led economy even at the lowest

the government, political bigwigs, donors and business interest groups—women living in shrimp cultivation areas face the added fear of violence and rape without having access to any kind of recourse.

Another example of a destructive market-led intervention would be the conversion of indigenous lands for tobacco plantations and other forms of cash crops or pulp forests for profit. These types of exploitation of natural resources in the name of development have most severe impacts on indigenous and rural populations. Yes, women do find employment opportunities as a result of these changes, but at what cost? Low paid employment in which they have no agency, as opposed to what they were in control of, even if it did not provide them with cash. We should learn to calculate and put an economic value to what has been lost, and compare it to the meagre amount she is now forced to work for.

Continued to page 4



**RELENTLESS RESEARCH,
ENDLESS INNOVATION – JUST FOR YOU**

So build your home with your hard-earned money by using BSRM

BSRM
building a safer nation