

“A SEA OF ONE’S OWN!”- A PERSPECTIVE ON THE GENDERED POLITICAL ECOLOGY IN INDIAN MARICULTURE

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Mariculture is a sunrise enterprise in Indian waters. Mariculture technologies that have attracted the imagination of coastal stakeholders in recent times include mussel farming, sea weed farming and open sea cage culture. While Mussel farming (*Perna viridis*) technology has diffused along the Malabar coast, sea weed farming (*Kappaphycus alvarezii*) is spreading slowly along the Coromandel coast after finding a niche in the Gulf of Mannar. Having proven their potential as empowerment platforms for coastal women, the theaters where these technologies got adopted open up a number of issues in the realm of a gendered political ecology. The aim of this paper is not only to diagnose them but juxtapose them also with some of the epistemological concerns being brought by the “gender lens” scholarship especially in the neo-liberal context of global fisheries.

An interesting paradox brought out by the study is the ambivalence of the State in, on the one hand, manifesting itself as a positive “bargaining” force in the intra-household domestic space (by providing State-sponsored platforms through the Self Help Groups) while, on the other hand, leaving the “common access resource” space, from which these platforms gain sustenance, less amenable to its democratic ambitions. Mariculture technologies are in a state of making a transit from a feminine but subsidy driven experimental phase to a market/profit driven masculine one which, in the absence of exclusive usufructary rights for women, make their position disadvantageous as access to a productive asset is becoming mediated more by men and even leading to “masculine capture’. These along with other issues, like emerging conflicts in the techno-ecological interface in a hitherto common property between the traditional users and the culture-entrepreneurs (for example, issues connected with carrying capacity, bio-invasion, ecosystem threats due to lack of viable hatchery technology, fragmentation in community due to lobbying by other users, and male - dominated privatization of profit) throws new challenges to gender scholars in fisheries.

The study was conducted using a blend of a socio economic household survey done along the two coasts and grounded case studies on different stakeholders on the value chain of mussel as well as sea weed farming. Comparative analyses on the way these technologies affect the gender relations in two different socio-ecological and religious contexts provide new insights on how gender mainstreaming should reconcile livelihood issues with that of bio-conservation.

Key words : mariculture technologies, gendered political ecology, policy