

Chapter 7

CONCLUSIONS

The struggles against the SEZ in Raigad and the nuclear plant in Jaitapur reveal the complex interconnections between issues related to the environment; and those related to people's well-being. Concerns over loss of livelihood and precarity of employment, displacement from land and uncertainty over rehabilitation strategies loom large in people's minds. These two struggles with multiple objectives can be looked upon as subaltern struggles or new social movements. In this study, an attempt has been made to undertake a feminist reading of women's participation in the two struggles within the contemporary neoliberal contexts of development.

With the advent of economic liberalisation in 1991, the role of the State in economic and social development has declined and the role of the market has assumed immense importance (Desai 2011). However what is often overlooked is that the State still controls common property resources, especially land, which under the present economic regime is liable to be sold at highly subsidised rates to private agencies and also corporations.

The spaces of the struggle against such moves, as exemplified by the two struggles discussed in this thesis, is a gendered sphere, with women's and men's presence and absence vividly marked. The significant participation of women is illustrated by the two movements studied here. Both struggles broadly address issues of livelihood and show sensitivity to ecological balance. Also, both the struggles are against the State's neoliberal developmental projects. Women's voices are heard to the extent that the issues they raise are connected to the spheres of 'tradition', socio-cultural practices and religious conventions. To a limited extent, their contribution to the family economy is also acknowledged. But decision-making domains are still dominated by men's voices. At the same time, within the rural sector, male out-migration in search of occupations in the urban informal sector leads to a feminisation of agriculture. Consequently, women have a high stake in the struggles around livelihood; this was evident in the case of the anti-SEZ struggle in Raigad in which women outnumbered men.

Both struggles were supported by struggles from other parts of the state and also from, around the country. The anti-SEZ struggle in Raigad was supported by similar struggles against SEZs from other parts of Maharashtra and from West Bengal. The anti-JNPP struggle is also supported by project affected people from Tarapur and other protests against nuclear power from Mithivirdi in Gujarat, Rawatbhatain Rajasthan and Koodankulam in Tamil Nadu. In the discourse on social movements, such support is called as trans-local field of protest. The protestors also get support from lawyers, doctors, academicians, NGOs, journalists and retired judges. Thus one can clearly see the consolidated linkages between different subaltern groups as well as civil society.

In analysing the relationship between the State, social movements and democracy most scholars have not addressed the place of gender. In both the struggle spaces, women were found to be active. They were present for meetings, *jail bharo*, *rasta roko* and *uposhan* but it becomes clear that they were not present in decision-making spheres. Three NGOs were represented by women leaders in the case of the anti-SEZ movement. However, by and large village women did not figure in decision-making. Exploring this, the study does not reveal women's unhappiness over them not being a part of the leadership. Nor do they have the feeling that they were kept away deliberately: They may not have been present in the struggle as leaders, but were, and saw themselves as prominent, in the forefront. As Sen (1990:16) points out, the leadership uses the mass of struggling women in the forefront of the struggle. This may arouse disapproval among feminist scholars, but there is no disjunction between the two, says Sen (*ibid*). She reiterates that we often fail to find a correspondence between this leading role of women and their real representation in the leadership. Though women are not much seen in the decision-making processes of the two struggles, in my opinion the forefront draws its power and resources from the masses.

Women have largely not questioned their absence from the decision-making sphere. The decision to have a specific protest action was itself collective. In case of the anti-SEZ struggle, where local level male leaders and female leaders from NGOs and the male as well as female sarpanch were consulted for total planning and execution of the actions. Similar is the case with JNPP. Women Sarpanch and male leaders of the struggle decide the strategies and communicate to all.

Analysing the several factors determining women's absence in the decision-making sphere of struggle, one may attribute it to the traditional image of women as home makers. Taking care of domestic chores appears first in their priority list. If the situation demands, they do appear in public spheres of struggle as participants but rarely as leaders. Their presence is determined to certain extent by the need of the time. The decision to participate though conscious and spontaneous, active and voluntary involvement in the mainstream political processes is still lacking. In case of both the struggles under study, women were happy to join the struggle, but the desire to become a leader and lead the struggle is hardly shared by one or two. Those women who want to become a part of the larger political processes of change and development, want to do that after their children grow up and settle down. So they wish to fulfill their duties as mother and wife first and then they are interested in doing the work of social change. While not necessarily challenging gender ideologies, women were vocal, assertive and shared their views. This may be seen as a process of change, individually and collectively. The impact of struggle participation can be counted as their articulation and expression of what they want and what they do not want, individually and collectively. The instances of their being part of the struggle and being articulate at times, are not necessarily indicative of challenging patriarchy. As Sen asserts, "By conventional definitions of feminism, not all movement ideologies appear to include frontal attacks on patriarchy" (Sen 1990: 13). Some movements may be addressing the patriarchal oppressions as

concerns, others need not be. But an appeal to women to break these traditional hierarchies is certainly done by movements.

Thus, women's role as well as the spontaneity and consciousness of them took them beyond personal spaces and marked an entry into the public sphere, an achievement in itself. I think they are mapping their own journey and without challenging their traditional roles, they are exploring their new identities. These identities are getting acknowledged and accepted by the communities and the families they belong to. On exploring support from society and family, all women were affirmative that they were well-supported. The serious incidents at the family level also did not obstruct them being a part of the struggle. Adopting new roles and preparing themselves for a social cause is in itself an achievement.

They may be lacking in analytical and conceptual clarity regarding patriarchy or in this case, the global economics determining the choices of SEZ and choice of a nuclear power; but their determination to fight against *anuurja* and SEZ demonstrates their ability to come out of their routine concerns. Their understanding of the damage SEZ and nuclear power will bring to their land and sea, is itself knowledge, though not acknowledged. Women's role as tillers and fisherwomen are not accidental in these cases. Their identities are constructed with these natural assets. They have not gone to any formal schools to learn how fish is sorted or how land is tilled. They have learnt all these in informal yet adequate ways from their families and mothers especially in the case of fishing. So the immediate and larger concerns pertaining to land and sea are visible to them.

These two struggles cannot be conventionally associated with the women's movement. Women in these two struggles are not striving for autonomy or women specific demands. At the same time, their concerns and demands for environment or progeny or uprooting from one place and settling in some other remote unknown place, might have influenced the struggles. These were the larger concerns and were equally shared by male participants. Was there any strategic use of women in struggle? Several male leaders disagree with this. They said women come for the protest actions and at times are more aggressive than men. Strategically it can be seen that when women are in the front, police do not initiate the action of beating the protestors immediately.

Was there gendering of the struggle? The answer is both yes and no. Women's concerns, such as health of children, loss of land, etc. were centred on issues traditionally considered as those occupying women's minds. In addition, women's participation in the struggles did not lead to sharing of household chores by the men in the family. On the contrary, participation was an additional burden on their time and energy. In the two struggles studied, women's issues related to the domestic sphere were not addressed.

As ecofeminist scholars point out, the nature of rural women's labour is such that there is an organic connection to nature. The exploitation of nature under capitalist development, particularly in the current phase of neoliberal economic policies, is critically related to the exploitation of women. When the

natural resources are degraded or destroyed, women's lives also get affected. Their hardships increase. Here, the parameter of productive and unproductive work or labour is not counted separately. In the case of fisherwomen, the selling operations may be looked upon as unproductive whereas fishing, which comes in the men's domain, may be looked upon as productive work. But the vital point is that of destruction of nature and increased level of difficulties of women resulting in their loss in terms of health, time, and in a way leisure and relaxation as well. The difficulties also put them under economic pressure as dwindling of the natural resources impact their work and income. Possibly all this leads to low social status and lack of ownership rights and control. In the case of agriculture, the fragmentation of land, excess use of fertilizers and pesticides had led to low productivity. Women may end up owning unproductive farms.

As this study shows, mediating this relationship between women and nature, a relationship that is by no means linear and marked by complexities of history and political economy in different contexts, is the sexual division of labour. These realities are indicative of the close associations of women and natural resources, either in the form of sea or productive land. The basic premise of ecofeminist viewpoint gets justified here as in both the struggles, the close association between women and nature is found. At the same time, considering that essentialist viewpoint of closeness between the two comes from their reproductive roles, in these struggles as well one can see that an 'inherent connection' based on a naturalisation of women's roles cannot be inferred, and that historical shifts are continuing to impact the sexual division of labour in these areas.

This study also shows that there is growing recognition of women's activism in the movements or struggles against neoliberal development. At both sites of struggle, women engaged, through their participation, with the core issues underlying these two projects, even as their absence from decision making, except when in leadership positions, was striking. This is an area that warrants greater inquiry through ethnographic research at such sites of struggle. Further possibilities of research also exist in the form of documentation of oral histories and testimonies of youth and children in such struggles.

To understand the processes embedded in women's journey from personal struggles to public struggles can be the scope for future study. The current study does not claim to offer a complete and comprehensive viewpoint on women as participating individuals. It does not offer a totality of women's experiences. Some of the experiences and expressions are shared, but still many more said and unsaid can be captured through various lenses of academic research. Nor does it claim to have the complete documentation on women-nature connectedness. These struggles and women's participation certainly are one step ahead towards creating alternatives for the communities under study and women specifically.

Here and in almost all the social struggles, the organisations or local level collectives become instrumental in directing women's efforts towards their own struggle for social justice (Sen 1990:11).

‘A space within the struggle’ (Sen 1990) is charted by women’s participation. The anti-SEZ struggle culminated in a victory. The fears women shared of losing land and identity and livelihood are not the same now but the sky is still gloomy as new projects like Mumbai-Delhi corridor and the proposed airport at New Mumbai are future threats. In case of JNPP, there is a hope and determination to continue the fight against the State and its neoliberal development.

The larger questions of sustainable development that women express can be considered from the ecofeminists’ subsistence perspective, as proposed by Maria Mies and her co-authors, Veronica Bennholdt-Thomsen and Vandana Shiva. Mies states that subsistence perspective is not totally new. This viewpoint has been an important point of reference for ecological struggles under study and women’s views on development. Mies and other ecofeminists are concerned with ecological sustainability and oppression and exploitation of women. In both the struggle sites, women are mostly involved in a small-scale non-commodified production. The ecofeminist view includes all those who are involved in such small-scale, non-commodified production. Hence, it includes production by women, the unemployed, peasants and tribals. They are not waged labourers in the capitalist economy. They produce their means of subsistence outside of or despite capitalist social relations (Keefer 2005). Ecofeminists consider the struggles against capitalist economy all over the world as struggles for subsistence. They envision these struggles as having potential to transform the world into a fundamentally just and emancipatory social order. From this position, we may say that the views on development shared by women in the anti-SEZ and anti-JNPP struggles also articulate such a vision.