

Not for Women

Land, water and forest are the major sources of livelihood for the rural poor, the majority of whom are women. Of all rural women in the workforce, eighty per cent are in agriculture. Their contribution to agriculture and food production is about sixty per cent.

Women, on basis of their gender, are vital catalysts in food security and agrarian productivity. They interact with the forests on a day-to-day basis. Yet, their involvement in the community-based forest management systems has largely remained invisible.

Gender inequality is most evident when it comes to the question of access to land. What makes things more complex is that along with gender, caste, class, community status determines women's access to and control over resources. Women have used their rights only by proxy and even those rights are precariously placed.

Landless and rural women often depend on common property resources for fuel wood, fodder and food. Though the Hindu Succession Amendment Act 2005 provides for equal rights for women in regard to ownership of land, yet due to the patriarchal socio-economic and political order, ownership rarely translates into control and decision making. Despite their reliance on natural resources, women have less control as compared to their male counterparts. Usually it is men who put land, water and forest to commercial use and women rarely articulate the long term need for conservation of natural resources.

It's said that women are the poorest of the poor. This is true in the case of dalit and tribal women. The communities they come from are extremely poor

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and he only support a woman has in such communities is her own ability to hard physical labour. Even this ability is often undermined by poor nutritional status. Scarcely there is a social support system and even the governments don't make enough monetary provisions.

Providing women the control of land and natural

resources has its advantages. It helps in protecting the environment and secured ownership help in sound land management decisions. The degradation and loss of common natural resource has a direct impact on women's lives, because they are primarily responsible for feeding the family. Contrarily, the governments have remained

insensitive to this and there has been no effort to provide them with long term tenurial rights.

Figures from the Ministry of Environment and Forests reveal that of the total forest land diverted since 1981 over 55% has been after 2001. Similarly in between 1997-2007 over 70% of forest land has been cleared for industrial purposes. The large-scale displacement caused by development projects estimated by the Council for Social Development to be in the order of 60 million. The Planning Commission has estimated that of about 21 million displaced in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Orissa between 1951 and 1990, 40% were tribals.

Displacement and deprivation from common property resources has the harshest effects on women, they being the primary users of the resources. Also, in a post-displacement scenario it's the men folk who assume the role of 'sole' bread earners. This usually has a direct impact on gender dynamics within the tribal families and it's the women who are the ultimate losers.



Youth to usher in change

1st International Youth Forum for Policy, Change and Development



Abhijeet Kumar

"A youth without fire is followed by an old age without experience."

While the country is engaged in heated debate over issues like Lokpal, corruption, terrorism, Naxalism, price hike and poverty, a group of motivated youths has come up with the idea of a quiet, peaceful revolution - a revolution that is aimed at ushering in a positive change in policy making and the development model. The group firmly believes that the time to talk of change is long over: it is now time to act.

The First International Youth Forum (IYF) 2012, is being organised by Alexis Society, which is an International Not-for-Profit & Non-Political Organisation with a passion for excellence. The society has done a tremendous job by providing a platform for youth leadership development in different fields of life, IYF being one of the initiatives. Deliberations at IYF, to take place in New Delhi from 24th to 29th June, 2012, will centre around the theme 'Role of Youth in Indian Renaissance' with discussions, seminars and competitions based on Social Entrepreneurship, Model Governance and Citizens' Participation.

India has faced invasion by many foreign rulers who came with aim of robbing it. It also had to endure about 200 years of colonial rule which ate into the vitals of the country's economy even as the colonial masters maintained a facade of ushering in industrialisation. But Indian civilisation survived many invasions and colonisation attempts by welcoming with open arms people from all over the world: Aryans, non-Aryans, Dravidians, Chinese, Sakas, Hunas, Pathans and Mughals into the great sea of humanity called Bharat or India. The present socio-economic and political status of India must always be read in their proper historical context.

Every time the nation has been in a difficult situation, her sons have come forward to fight for her and make the ultimate sacrifice by laying



Youths are not only leaders of tomorrow, but also partners for today. This forum will work as a stage for youth to participate in the decision making process. Through this forum, we are trying to connect various students groups, youth communities, social organisations and NGOs to work together for a better future. The endeavour is the first of its kind in bringing together motivated and inspired youths and young adults from across the globe to work towards a shared goal.

down their lives in her service. The present time cries out for dedicated service by the youth. I am not talking of waging another war or any kind of violent act, but to bring in change, to build the nation that those who laid down their lives had dreamt of.

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What we will do is to find out grassroots level solutions to these and other problems. An annual action plan will be drawn up by the delegates and organizers which, after working throughout the year, will send its documented report to the Government of India and other International Organisations.

Former President of India, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, said, "Nations are built by the imagination and untiring efforts of generations. One generation transfers the fruit of its toil to another which then takes forward the mission. This process goes on and the nation climbs steps of glory and gains national strength."

If some youths can stand guard at the border posts in Rajasthan when the mercury is touching 50 degrees or at Siachen where temperatures can dip as low as -50 degrees to defend the nation from external aggressions, then why can't we, living in the mainland, under the safety cover provided by them, make the nation a better place to live every day? It's high time our generation made its share of efforts building a new base with strong and determined ideas of youths of today so that the ideas propounded and started now would be carried forward by future generations. After all, even Rome wasn't built in a day.

Several MPs, academicians, economists, civil servants and activists have already agreed to speak at the IYF. Delegates from 71 Countries have already applied for IYF and as the last phase of selection begins more are on their way. This Forum brings you an opportunity to be part of the process of change that the youth in India are determined to bring about.

Visit www.youthforum.in or send an email to info@youthforum.in for detailed information about the Forum and to apply to be selected as a delegate before the opportunity is lost.

The political turmoil in the Maldives

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

The political turmoil the Maldives following the ouster of Mohammed Nasheed as the country's first democratically-elected President has wended down with his key demand for fresh elections accepted by the government headed by Mohammed Waheed Hassan following a compromise brokered by India.

However, this is just the beginning of another tussle for power as well as a challenge for the Indian Ocean island nation to consolidate its democracy restored through 2008 Presidential polls that saw the end of more than three decades of dictatorship of Maumoon Abdul Gayoom and the installation of Nasheed, whom the former had jailed several times.

This is clear from the fact that the session of Maldivian Parliament had to be called off on March 2 without discussion on dates for new elections. Parliament witnessed chaotic scenes and scuffles as Nasheed's Maldivian Democratic Party lawmakers prevented Waheed from addressing the House and signalling the start of the session and the party supporters clashed with police outside.

The fresh trouble had erupted a day after Indian Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai visited the island nation- his sec-

ond visit in a month- to try and hammer out a solution to the political crisis in that country.

The developments since the day Nasheed resigned on February 7 in what he claimed as a coup and till Indian Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai went to Male after more than two weeks clearly brought out key questions as much about democracy in the Maldives as about India's dealing with the events in one of its strategically located neighbour.

A part of the blame for the trouble for Nasheed has to be apportioned to him as he appeared to do too many things too fast like "reforming" the judiciary and taking on his political rivals, particularly deposed dictator Gayoom. Nasheed's gunning for Chief Criminal Court Justice Abdullah Mohd whose arrest by the military at Nasheed's order on January 16 had set off three weeks of opposition-led protests culminating in a mutiny by the country's security forces, was absolutely misconceived.

Nasheed alleged the chief justice, like 200 other criminal court judges, had been illegally sworn in for a life term and was blocking the graft cases. The judge, after his release from military detention, had issued an arrest warrant against Nasheed.

Nasheed's action against the judge reflected his growing frustration with his inability to push through his agenda of reforms aimed at consolidating

his grip on the various power structures in the Maldives - the judiciary, the army and the bureaucracy - because his Maldivian Democratic Party lacked of majority in Parliament. In doing so, there was a perception that Nasheed was over reaching his powers and showing traits of authoritarianism of late.

But to be fair to him as well as democracy in the Maldives, he did not deserve to be shown the door the way he was. It certainly calls for a thorough and impartial probe into the circumstances that led to Nasheed's exit from power.

Having stepped down as President, Nasheed, however, showed correct political posturing by calling for early Presidential elections and refusing to join the "national unity" government. A national unity government is as utopian an idea as a partyless democracy.

After all, it was a political battle that was being fought out in the Maldives. Had Nasheed joined the national unity government, he would have given legitimacy to his ouster and become a party to all acts and decisions of a government that may have been installed as per the constitutional procedure but lacked the people's mandate.

It was politically naive for anyone to expect Nasheed to join the national unity government and refrain from hitting the streets against his ouster. The worry was, however, whether Nasheed's street campaign would trigger violence.

That it did not result in much violence except on one day must have come as a big relief not only for Maldivians but also for India. Political activities, as long as they are peaceful, should not be an anathema in a democracy.

There was no doubt that Nasheed was trying to drum up political support by projecting himself as a martyr figure as a "victim of a coup" and he is seeking to cash in on it through early elections.

There was unease among a section of Maldivian Democratic Party about the style of functioning of Nasheed as President but it speaks volumes of his political skill that he managed to rally the entire party behind him after his ouster. Many, including India, were apparently surprised by the turnout at the rallies he had held after quitting as President.

Did India fail to read the politics that was being played out in the



Maldives initially? Did India show undue haste in recognizing the change of guard following Nasheed's resignation?

When M Ganapathy, Secretary (West) in the External Affairs Ministry, had visited Male and interacted with the political leadership there soon after Nasheed's exit, he had publicly stated that the situation was not conducive for early elections in the country.

But just a few days later, Mathai had to rush to Male and broker a deal that accepted that elections at an early date was the only way out of the political turmoil, reflecting a clear shift of stance. Nasheed was clearly disappointed with India's initial stand of accepting the change of guard and he showed political guile by playing the China card - a red herring to India - when he had told the Indian media that during the fag end of his Presidency he had resisted the army's efforts to sign a defence cooperation agreement with Beijing.

While none can dispute that the transition from Nasheed to Waheed was as per the country's Constitution, the big question, however, remains: did it have the popular mandate? If the answer is an emphatic yes, doesn't it call for elections as early as possible? But to have early elections, the Maldivian Constitution has to be amended and for that all parties in the country need to join hands to muster the necessary arithmetic in the Majlis (Parliament).

The political tug of war is far from over in

the Maldives. The Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) has so far refused to recognise the Waheed government and had at one point threatened mass street protests unless his successor stepped aside and handed power to the Parliament speaker until new elections are held in two months.

The MDP is furious with some of the ministerial appointments made by Waheed including those of Dhunya Mamoon, the daughter of Gayoom, as minister of state for Foreign Affairs, Aishath Azima Shakoora who returns as Attorney General after serving in that position under the Gayoom administration. Shakoora was the defence attorney in a spate of cases brought by Nasheed's government against former Gayoom allies involving multi-million dollar corruption scandals and also defended Chief Criminal Court Justice Abdullah Mohamed.

In fact, the new cabinet of Waheed is crammed with the veterans of Gayoom era. India is clearly at unease with the appointment of Mohd Jameel as the Home Minister for it was he who had campaigned against Indian private company GMR from building the new airport in Male and brought a pamphlet accusing Nasheed of working with Jews and Christians. Waheed also appointed a new police chief who was removed by Nasheed as President.

Through these appointments, Waheed had given an indication of his political agenda.

