

Women, Earth and Economic Power

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I do not locate the process of women acquiring land rights in each woman's isolated struggle within the family, but in a collective struggle that seeks to build support across multiple tiers of society.

- Bina Agarwal, author, *A Field of One's Own*

Women once enjoyed a special relationship to the land when nomadic tribes shifted to an agricultural way of life. Plants and children were gifts from the gods and woman was the medium for both. Women seemed to have the ability to summon ancestral spirits into her body, and cause fruits and grain to spring from planted fields. In a mystical sense, the earth belonged to the women and they had a religious and legal hold on the land and its fruits.

The human worldview has since moved from an awareness of the interconnectedness of all through the female to the individuality and separateness of individual beings, which is the emphasis of the male principle. The male qualities of force, strength, drive, and individual self-determination led us out of the state of unity with nature that had come to have its own limiting delusions and superstitions.

Land no longer was held in common under the care of the women, but could be acquired by male conquest. Individual landholdings were justified under the Roman law concept of dominium, which gave absolute power to the title-holder to control, use, and abuse.

As women's role in procreation was demystified, so were our ties to the earth cut. Under Roman law women were not generally allowed to own land; currently women own less than 1% of the world's resources.

Ending this age of militarism and environmental rape requires that the male and female forces find a new balance and harmony. Neither nature as the "omnipotent" nor the superiority of individual human beings dominating nature can be a legitimate worldview. We need to affirm the human species as partner with nature.

The biological nature of the mother/infant bond places the responsibilities of childrearing primarily upon women. People now attain less than their full potential

because as children they are not given the right kind of stimuli and guidance at the proper moments in their neurological development. The first five years of a child's life require great amounts of love, attention, and skill.

The majority of mothers are now wage earners as well. They are caught, along with men, in a web of economic injustice in which their wage earnings buy less of the basic needs each year.

This injustice stems from the Western land tenure system that has led to the ownership and control of the earth by a small number of people. This in turn is rooted in a deeply ingrained metaphysical error in Western civilization, which sees human beings and the earth as distinctly separate systems.

The various equal rights movements have yet to affirm the most essential right of all -- the equal right of all people to the earth. This is the "equal right" that furthers human unity and acknowledges our interconnectedness not only with each other but also with the earth from which we come and to which we return.

Equal rights to the earth can be practically attained through a ground rent system whereby the community created value of land and resources is collected in lieu of other taxes.

The German economist Sylvio Gisell proposed that ground rent be the source of payments for the support of women in the role of mothers and homemakers. Thus, ground rent payments would be an equivalent to the use of the soil by primitive women. As he put it:

Every woman could bring up her children without being forced to depend on the financial support of a man. Economic considerations would no longer be able to crush the spirit out of women. A woman would be free to consider the mental, physical, and race-improving qualities and not merely the moneybags of her mate.

Current calculations indicate that such a system would yield \$3500 per year per person, children included, or \$14,000 for a family of four -- well above the poverty line. Ground rent, when not collected for the community as a whole, adds to the concentration of wealth and builds fortunes for a few individuals.

By placing the economic infrastructure on a base of essential fairness, people as wage earners would reap the full rewards of their labor to the advantage of both women and men of all races. This fundamental reform will facilitate the procuring of other rights and advances needed for human and planetary progress and evolution.

The earth is the birthright of all people.