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**An Intersectional Analysis of Caste and Gender in Organic Cotton in Madhya
Pradesh, India**

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Abstract

This study delves into the often-overlooked dimensions of gender equity and labour within organic cotton farming, explicitly focusing on the intersectionalities of caste and gender in India. The study centres on a long-term System comparison project (SysCom) that has been ongoing since 2007 in the Khargone district of Madhya Pradesh. This project compares organic and conventional cotton farming systems. The main collaboration of the SysCom project is a local NGO called bioRe association. bioRe association is an NGO joint with Remei India Limited. Farmers registered with Remei India have access to non-GMO seeds and botanicals on a credit basis and training. The NGO provides services for the local community, including primary and secondary school education for children, technical school programmes, sanitary facilities, and mobile healthcare facilities.

Drawing from analytical frameworks intersectionality and agrarian political economy, this study aimed to understand differences in cotton production systems concerning caste and gender.

A mixed-method approach was employed using both quantitative and qualitative research methods during three-month fieldwork in 2022/23. Data collection started with five focus group discussions conducted separately with higher and lower-caste men and women from organic households, followed by 30 in-depth interviews with organic cotton households and 20 in-depth interviews with conventional cotton households. In the later stage, I conducted two focus group discussions with labourers, followed by in-depth interviews with project staff and a labourer contractor. Data collection measures included participatory social network mapping, gendered seasonal calendars, in-depth interviews and participant observation in training. Field interviews were conducted in the local language Nimadi, and Hindi and translated by the on-site translator into English. All interviews were recorded and transcribed in the English language for content analysis. I used the MAXQDA 2022 software version for analysing the data. Both inductive and deductive codes were used in the analysis.

A significant positive development observed in this study is creating a space within organic cotton farming where labourers can negotiate for higher wages. Non-marginalised women, previously not involved in farming activities, now engage in cotton picking due to labour shortages; labour-sharing arrangements for cotton harvesting have resented among wealthier, higher-caste farmers. Results underscore that while traditional norms assign specific roles based on gender and caste, practical necessities can challenge and transform the established social dynamics.

Key words: Organic cotton, caste and gender intersectionality, labour