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**Gender and Green Governance: The Political Economy of
Women's Presence in Community Forestry and Beyond by Bina
Agarwal; Reviewed by Bimbika Sijapati Basnett**

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does valuable work distinguishing between belonging and identity in theory. But over the course of the subsequent chapters, that distinction, as well as the conceptual acuity of belonging itself, blurs considerably. We are offered numerous definitions along the way: belonging is a matter of affinity to spaces, institutions, practices, and people (77); belongings can be material objects (133-143) or affective feelings (102) (note here the English double entendre); belonging may be formally delineated through legal renderings of citizenship (102) or informally reproduced through the micro-politics of social interaction (291). All of these definitions seem apt, but with so many definitions in play, one wonders whether we are headed down an epistemologically slippery slope wherein belonging, by becoming a convenient catch-all, comes to look an awful lot like its multifarious other, identity. This would be a shame because we, indeed, are in need of more refined optics.

In breaking new ground, this volume thus provides, at once, cautionary lessons and promising leads for the future study of belonging and its politics in the Himalayas. Going forward, it will be worth emphasizing belonging's patently relational nature. Belonging's ontology, in Heideggerian terms (1962), is always a matter of being-in, being-of, or being-with. Conversely, more attention can be devoted to the politics and experiences of non-belonging. Surveying the turbulent politics of the Himalayas today, belonging's *lack* appears as much a political force as its presence. Crucially, belonging and non-belonging are best considered in tandem. After all, not being-in and of the nation-state may well be predicated on being-in and of a particular minority, place, or legal status. Figured accordingly, the question of non/belonging goes beyond simple lateral "us" vs. "them" relationalities. It also obtains in more vertical or nested frames. As a scalar phenomenon, belonging at one level may mean not-belonging at another level. Such a scalar approach promises new ways of understanding the varying orders and politics of inclusion and exclusion that define belonging in the Himalayas of India and Nepal.

As we have seen in the sub-nationalist movements of India and the acrimonious struggles for a "new Nepal," the interplays of belonging and non-belonging breed exceptionally volatile, often violent, political forms. Belonging—understood as an affective and scalar phenomenon—provides ways of rethinking the forms and intensities of politics in these charged contexts. In this regard, *The Politics of Belonging in the Himalayas* is best read as the beginning of a longer—and promising—conversation within Himalayan Studies about the definition and analytic utility of belonging. Along these lines, readers can look forward to the forthcoming second volume of this project, titled *Facing Globalization in the Himalayas: Belonging and the Politics of Self*. For now, we may thank the contributors for initiating a well-timed discussion of belonging as an analytic concept—and an undeniable force in the Himalayas and beyond.

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GENDER AND GREEN GOVERNANCE: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF WOMEN'S PRESENCE IN COMMUNITY FORESTRY AND BEYOND

BY BINA AGARWAL

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Gender and Green Governance by Bina Agarwal examines whether, and how, women's presence in forest governance initiatives matter for conservation, livelihoods and women's empowerment in India and Nepal. Both countries have witnessed the formation of thousands of community forestry institutions since the management of forests were devolved from the central government to local communities in the early 1990s. The general idea behind community forestry is a partnership between the state and local communities. Under this partnership, the local people accept the responsibility for the protection, management and sustainable utilization of their community forests. The government becomes an extension agent, providing advice and support to the local communities, whilst simultaneously retaining ownership of the forests being handed over.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I examines

the potential impact of women's presence in green governance both conceptually and historically. Part II empirically tests the impact of the gender composition of the executive committee (the decision-making body of community forestry institutions) on women's participation and institutional outcomes. Part III proposes different ways in which rural women can translate nominal representation in community forestry institutions into effective participation by forging alliances with civil society organizations and ensuring that the institutions of the state are responsive and accountable to women.

Agarwal's conceptualization of the relationship between gender and environment is complex and rooted in the social and economic inequalities of rural South Asia. She argues that division of labor and material inequalities between men and women have produced gendered differences in the nature and extent of dependence on communal forest resources. Women in rural areas are primarily responsible for cooking and feeding livestock, whereas men are responsible for repairing agricultural implements or houses. Because women have lesser access to private property and income earning opportunities, women are more dependent on access to forest products from non-privatized sources than men are. Furthermore, women's interests in firewood and fodder are everyday, putting them under persistent pressure to secure these products on a regular basis. Men's interests in timber are occasional, allowing them greater flexibility. Agarwal argues that there is a disjuncture between women's interests in environmental conservation for the purposes of securing access to firewood and fodder, and their ability to act on those interests. Although women tend to be more cooperative than men, their presence and influence are marginal in most formal community forestry institutions, which are dominated by men. Women's effective participation in community forestry institutions is constrained by a wide range of inequalities emanating from the intra-household and community levels. Examples include membership criteria determining who can join the community forestry institutions, and social norms that define appropriate gendered roles and behavior.

Furthermore, Agarwal provides considerable context and analysis for how and why it is important to examine the intrinsic and instrumental implications of women's presence in community forestry institutions. In doing so, she also attempts to rectify the invisibility of women and of gender issues in the literature on the history of environmental governance in South Asia. She discusses how women's presence in local governance, albeit still limited, is a recent phenomenon and has been negotiated through a range of processes including quotas and reservations. These historical processes have also had a bearing on forest governance. Both the Joint Forest Management Orders in India as well as Community Forestry Guidelines in Nepal specify the inclusion of a

certain percentage of women in the executive committee of community forestry institutions. Executive committees are the main decision-making bodies of community forestry institutions. However, Agarwal argues that there has been limited consideration at the policy level of the potential impact of women's presence. More significantly, how can women's greater participation in local governance be accompanied with a built-in institutional mechanism to ensure that women representatives understand women's issues and are accountable to their women constituents?

This book addresses an important lacuna in the scholarship on collective action and environmental governance, while simultaneously overcoming the disciplinary divide that characterize the scholarship. Rational choice theorists (such as the Nobel Prize winning economist Elinor Ostrom) focus on how and why local communities are best situated to govern resources collectively rather than the government and private sector, and the institutions that are required to ensure optimal outcomes. While social relations are increasingly seen as playing a critical role in either facilitating or thwarting collective action, very few scholars have been concerned with the question of gender. In comparison, anthropologists and sociologists (such as David Mosse and Frances Cleaver) advocating a more embedded approach to institutional analysis, have considered the inter-relationship between pre-existing gender relations and environmental governance, and documented the absence of women from collective action efforts at the local level. However, the implications of women's presence for gender equity and resource sustainability are largely ignored. Drawing on quantitative and qualitative research carried out in 2000 and 2001 in 135 community forestry institutions (65 in Gujarat in western India and 70 in selected districts in the mid-hills of Nepal), Agarwal studies the impact of women's presence in the executive committee of community forestry institutions on empowerment, rules formulated, compliance with rules, and the sustainability of the resource base.

Her research findings point to the clear benefits of increasing women's participation in community forestry institutions. Increasing women's participation is not only fair but also makes sense for ensuring sustainable outcomes. For instance, Agarwal finds that the greater the number of women in the executive committee, the greater the likelihood of women participating effectively in governing forests, such as by attending executive committee meetings, speaking up, and being office bearers within the executive committee. In this regard, prior equality between men and women does not predetermine effective participation. If compliance with rules to protect forest products can be viewed as a proxy to measure their sustainable management, gender plays out in both incidence and patterns of violation. Women tend to violate rules regulating fodder and fuelwood,

whereas men violate rules regulating timber. However, there were notable differences in perceptions and actual cases of reported violations. While women were viewed as the most likely offenders, actual violators tended to be men who were cutting timber.

At the same time, Agarwal recognizes that simply increasing women's presence in community forestry institutions does not guarantee gender equalitarian rules and outcomes. For instance, her research findings suggest that in spite of women's greater concern for meeting every day requirements for firewood and fodder, women committee members tended to be more conservation oriented. In other words, having more women does not secure favorable rules for women in terms of more lenient rules for accessing firewood and fodder. In many ways, this is reflective of the broader problems plaguing women's representation in political governance. As Agarwal points out in the final chapter, women representatives in village councils tend to be more concerned with strengthening their political position by taking up general constituency interests than those that are interpreted as "women's issues." Forest policies are often framed and implemented by multiple levels of government with limited built-in mechanisms to identify and address women's needs. In the last two chapters, Agarwal discusses the importance of forging "a web of strategic alliances" so as to increase women's bargaining power at the local level, and ensure that institutions of the government are interactively and democratically engaged with local women.

Notwithstanding the hugely important contribution that this book makes to gender and collective action theory and policy, there are a number of shortcomings that are worth mentioning. Agarwal's discussion in the final two chapters of the book focuses on how civil society organizations can monitor and hold accountable governments for ensuring gender egalitarian presence in community forestry institutions. Such an oppositional view of civil society and government is problematic, especially in Nepal, where many of the roles and responsibilities of state are being delegated to civil society organizations. Agarwal's analysis of the relationship between the state and local people in the governance of forest resources is prescriptive (i.e. how the state can better engage with local women), and not sufficiently reflective of politics that inevitably characterize these relations. As the celebrated sociologist Norman Long has pointed out, development agents rarely function as messengers who carry government policy to the local population, and local people, in turn, are far from passive beneficiaries of these policies. The outcomes of policies are crucially dependent

on the process of development intervention between development agents and local level actors, each with competing and overlapping values, interests, and frames of reference. Agarwal does not engage with prominent environmental historians, such as Kalyanakrishnan Sivaramakrishnan, who have studied these complexities that characterize and influence state-society relations in the context of forest governance in South Asia.

Furthermore, the book is about gender and collective action in India, and risks not only downplaying but also undermining gender issues in Nepal. For instance, Chapter Three is meant to be on the history of gender and environmental governance in South Asia. However, Nepal is rarely mentioned in the chapter, and the ways in which the discussion on India relates to or departs from the experiences of Nepal is not acknowledged. The Maoist movement in Nepal, for instance, is only considered to the extent that it impinged on the practicalities of doing field research, but does not consider the implications of the Maoist movement in politicizing caste, class, and gender-based inequalities, and in shaping policy directives such as the 2009 Guidelines for Community Forestry. Agarwal also implies that gender relations are fairly egalitarian in the mid hills of Nepal, and that caste, class, and ethnic differences do not have a major bearing on women's social and physical freedom (see page 122). Such a view not only lacks empirical basis but also risks undermining the growing movement for inclusive change in the country. While one could argue that providing an in-depth discussion of Nepal in addition to that of India is beyond the scope of the book, assuming that a discussion of India is sufficient and reflective of experiences of the other countries in South Asia may also be unwarranted.

In conclusion, this book makes an outstanding theoretical and empirical contribution to both the academic and policy scholarship on gender and environmental governance in South Asia and beyond. Nevertheless, the book would have benefitted from greater engagement with the rich and burgeoning literature on state-society relations in the context of environmental governance in South Asia as well as that of community forestry and gendered politics in Nepal.

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