

BOOK

Gender and Green Governance: The Political Economy of Women's Presence Within and Beyond Community Forestry

Agarwal, Bina. 2010. *Gender and Green Governance: The Political Economy of Women's Presence Within and Beyond Community Forestry*. Oxford University Press, New York. 488p.

This review is by **Harini Kumar** (harini747@gmail.com), independent researcher

From an author who has pioneered work in the area of gender inequality in property, land and environmental issues, is a book which inverts the focus on the gender question. Moving away from existing literature that focuses on why women are absent from forestry governance institutions, Bina Agarwal asks, "what difference would it make if women were *present* in these institutions?" and "how much presence do women need for making a difference?" Accordingly, the book is divided into three parts: 'The Potential of Presence', 'The Impact of Presence' and 'Beyond Presence'.

Agarwal analyzes the impact of women's presence in institutions of governance and policy implementation through extensive empirical investigation using primary data on community forestry institutions in India and Nepal. Importantly, through research spanning over a decade, she also addresses questions of equitable access, whether women's interest in forests is different from men's and whether numbers—the proportion of women present in governing bodies—make a difference.

The first part of her book covers an extensive range of questions and issues, and looks at the implications of women's presence in governance. Agarwal points out that women have historically been excluded from public institutions and decision-making bodies even though they are the primary users of

forests. Women also have to face oppressive cultural norms and biased opinions on their capabilities. Women's invisibility in governing institutions—what Agarwal calls 'participatory exclusions'—is discussed in detail as she traces the history of South Asian women's absence in traditional institutions and the way in which women have negotiated their presence in modern institutions of governance. The second part of the book consists of an empirical analysis of primary data collected over a decade and the third part looks at forging what she calls 'a web of strategic alliances', between institutions of civil society and institutions of 'green governance', thereby highlighting the importance of engaging with different levels of government. Some significant questions are raised. What kind of institutions can help address inefficiencies in existing mechanisms for identifying the needs of poor women? Given the socio-economic heterogeneity of the population, how can the gap between rural and urban women be bridged?

Agarwal emphasizes that all segments of the population, particularly women, need to be represented in democratic institutions of governance. She argues that local institutions of green governance require participatory inclusion more than do other government institutions because these can actually lead to the achievement of two important goals, namely conservation and providing local subsistence. Her research demonstrates the multiple benefits of women's presence in community forest institutions. It also addresses the complex question of the government's accountability to women's needs and their access to common resources. **Y**



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Writers and potential contributors to *YEMAYA*, please note that write-ups should be brief, about 500 words. They could deal with issues that are of direct relevance to women and men of fishing communities. They could also focus on recent research or on meetings and workshops that have raised gender issues in fisheries. Also welcome are life stories of women and men of fishing communities working towards a sustainable

fishery or for a recognition of their work within the fishery. Please also include a one-line biographical note on the writer.

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