

Cambridge University Press

0521429269 - A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia - Bina Agarwal
Frontmatter[More information](#)

Economic analysis and policies concerning women have long been preoccupied with employment. In a radical shift of focus, Professor Agarwal argues that the single most important economic factor affecting women's situation is the gender gap in command over property.

In rural South Asia, the most significant form of property is arable land, a critical determinant of economic well-being, social status, and empowerment. However, few South Asian women own land, and even fewer control it. In a comprehensive and rigorous analysis that draws upon a wide range of historical, economic, legal, and ethnographic sources and her own field research, the author investigates the complex reasons for this gender gap, and examines how existing barriers to women's land ownership and control might be overcome. Regional variations on these counts across India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka are also identified. The study extends the boundaries of economic analysis to explore the interface of economics, culture, and gender politics through an interdisciplinary approach. It examines women's covert and overt resistance to gender inequality, especially in the context of land struggles. And it offers new theoretical insights by extending the 'bargaining approach' to illuminate how gender relations get constituted and contested, both within and outside the household.

A field of one's own is the first major study on gender and property in South Asia. It makes significant contributions to current debates on land reform, women's status, and the nature of resistance. Its compelling and original argument will interest scholars, students, policy makers, and activists.

BINA AGARWAL is Professor of Economics at the Institute of Economic Growth, University of Delhi. Educated at the Universities of Cambridge and Delhi, she has taught at Harvard University as visiting professor, and been a fellow of the Bunting Institute (Radcliffe College) and the Institute of Development Studies (University of Sussex). She has published extensively on poverty and inequality, rural development, environmental issues, and technological change, from a political economy and gender perspective. Her books include: *Cold Hearths and Barren Slopes: The Woodfuel Crisis in the Third World* (1986), *Mechanization in Indian Agriculture* (1983), and *Structures of Patriarchy: State, Community and Household in Modernising Asia*, ed (1988).

Cambridge University Press
0521429269 - A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia - Bina Agarwal
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Cambridge South Asian Studies

A field of one's own

Cambridge University Press

0521429269 - A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia - Bina Agarwal
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge South Asian Studies

Editorial Board

C. A. Bayly, G. P. Hawthorn, Gordon Johnson, S. J. Tambiah

A list of the books in the series will be found at the end of the volume

Cambridge University Press

0521429269 - A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia - Bina Agarwal
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

A field of one's own

Gender and land rights in South Asia

Bina Agarwal



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

0521429269 - A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia - Bina Agarwal
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Bina Agarwal

First published 1994

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data

Agarwal, Bina

A field of one's own: gender and land rights in South Asia/Bina
Agarwal

p. cm. – (Cambridge South Asian studies)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-521-41868-2 – ISBN 0-521-42926-9 (pbk.)

1. Land tenure–South Asia. 2. Land reform–South Asia. 3. Right
to property–South Asia. 4. Women's rights–South Asia. 5. Rural
women–South Asia. 6. Rural women–South Asia. 7. South Asia–
Social policy. I. Title. II. Series.

HD860.3.Z63A35 1994

323.4'6'0959–dc20 93-37621 CIP

ISBN 0 521 41868 2 hardback

ISBN 0 521 42926 9 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2003

Cambridge University Press

0521429269 - A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia - Bina Agarwal
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

To my father for his wisdom and optimism
To my mother for her generosity and vigour

Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> xii
<i>List of tables</i>	xiii
<i>Preface</i>	xv
1 Land rights for women: making the case	1
I The backdrop	2
II Gender, property, and land: some conceptual links	11
(1) Household property and women's property	12
(2) The significance of land as property	17
(3) What do we mean by rights in land?	19
(4) Prospects for non-land-based livelihoods	24
III Why do women need independent rights in land?	27
(1) The welfare argument	27
(2) The efficiency argument	33
(3) The equality and empowerment arguments	38
IV Questions addressed, information base, and the book's structure	45
2 Conceptualizing gender relations	51
I Gender relations within the household/family	53
(1) The bargaining approach	54
(2) What determines intra-family bargaining power?	60
II Gender relations outside the household/family: the market, the community, and the State	71
III Interactions: the household/family, the community, and the State	80
3 Customary rights and associated practices	82
I Which communities customarily recognized women's rights in land?	83
II Women's land rights in traditionally matrilineal and bilateral communities	100
(1) Northeast India: The Garos, Khasis, and Jaintias	101
(2) South India: The Nayars, Tiyars, Bants, Mappilas, Nangudi Vellalars, and others	109
(3) Sri Lanka: The Sinhalese, Hindu Tamils, and matrilineal Muslims	120
(4) Some cross-regional comparisons	132
III Women's land rights, structural conditionalities, and gender relations	133
(1) Women's land rights and associated practices	133
(2) Land rights and gender relations	146

x	Contents	
4	Erosion and disinheritance: traditionally matrilineal and bilateral communities	153
I	India	154
	(1) The Garos	154
	(2) The Nayers of central Kerala	168
	(3) Matriliney and development	179
II	Sri Lanka	180
	The Sinhalese	180
III	In conclusion	192
	Appendix 4.1: A marriage proposal among the Christian Garos	194
5	Contemporary laws: contestation and content	198
I	India	199
	(1) The formulation of contemporary Hindu law	199
	(2) Anomalies resulting from existing land legislation	215
	(3) Laws governing Christians and Parsis in India	223
II	Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Muslims in India	227
	(1) From custom to the Shariat	227
	(2) Devolution under Islamic law	233
III	Sri Lanka	237
IV	Nepal	242
V	Summary comments on women's legal rights in landed property in South Asia	246
6	Whose share? Who claims? The gap between law and practice	249
I	The gap between law and practice in traditionally patrilineal communities	249
II	Barriers to women inheriting land in traditionally patrilineal communities	260
	(1) 'Voluntary' giving up of claims	260
	(2) The necessity of male mediation	268
	(3) Hostility from male kin: pre-emptive steps to direct violence	271
	(4) Responses of village bodies and government officials	276
III	Glimmer of change: women claim inheritance shares in some traditionally patrilineal communities	282
IV	A look at traditionally matrilineal and bilateral communities	285
V	Some hypotheses	291
7	Whose land? Who commands? The gap between ownership and control	292
I	Women's ability to retain their land	292
II	Control over the transfer and use of land	294
III	Barriers to women self-managing land	298
	(1) The physical and social confinement of women	298
	(2) Post-marital residence: village exogamy and patrilocality	311
	(3) Male control over labour and technology	311
8	Tracing cross-regional diversities	316
I	Some hypotheses	317
II	Information sources	321

Contents	xi
III The cross-regional patterns	325
(1) Marriage location and post-marital residence	325
(2) Close-kin marriages, especially between cross-cousins	336
(3) Purdah practices	344
(4) Sexual control over women	345
(5) Rural female labour force participation rates	355
(6) Rural female literacy rates	358
(7) Total fertility rates	359
(8) Land scarcity	361
IV An overview of regional patterns	368
9 Struggles over resources, struggles over meanings	421
I On women's consciousness and individual resistance	422
II Group resistance: struggles over privatized land	438
(1) The Tebhaga struggle	438
(2) The Telangana struggle	441
(3) The Bodhgaya struggle	444
III Group resistance: claiming rights in public land	454
IV Further observations on gender construction and group contestation	458
10 The long march ahead	467
I Recapitulation	468
II Some suggestions, some dilemmas	478
(1) Reforming the laws	478
(2) Dowry v. inheritance	480
(3) Establishing <i>de facto</i> inheritance rights in land	483
(4) Strengthening land claims through channels other than inheritance	486
(5) Exploring joint management and promoting infrastructural support	488
(6) Building group support among and for women	490
III The macro-scenario	493
(1) Interlinking diverse concerns	493
(2) Bargaining with the State	496
(3) Increasing women's presence in public decision-making forums	499
(4) Some recent developments and the road ahead	502
<i>Definitions</i>	505
<i>Glossary</i>	507
<i>References</i>	510
<i>Index</i>	553

Illustrations

Diagram 4.1 Garos in transition: causes and effects page 166

Maps

1.1	South Asia: provincial/state divisions	xxii
3.1	Traditional forms of land inheritance	100
3.2	Sri Lanka: provincial divisions	121
8.1	Village endogamy norms	329
8.2	Close-kin marriage norms	342
8.3	Purdah practices	348
8.4	Rural female labour force participation rates (1981)	357
8.5	Rural female literacy rates (1981)	359
8.6	Total fertility rates	361
8.7	Population density (1981) (persons per sq km)	365
8.8	Per cent landless to total rural households	366
8.9	Per cent geographic area under forest	367
8.10	A comparative perspective	372

Tables

A1.1	Village common lands in India by State: 1987–88	<i>page</i>	49
A1.2	Selected development indicators for South Asia		50
3.1	Some characteristic features of matrilineal and bilateral communities in South Asia		141
4.1	Changes among the Garos of northeast India: a summary		167
4.2	Women in selected occupations: Sri Lanka, 1901–21		183
4.3	Ownership of paddy land and highland by gender among the Kandyan Sinhalese		189
4.4	Post-marital residence among the Kandyan Sinhalese		190
5.1	Summary of oral and written opinions on the Draft Hindu Code received by the Second Rau Committee, 1945		209
6.1	Widows in India who inherited land as daughters		253
6.2	Dowry land by type among the Jaffna Tamils		287
6.3	Landownership in three Jaffna villages by source of acquisition		287
8.1	Village endogamy norms in South Asia		326
8.2	Marriage distance from a woman's natal home in South Asia		332
8.3	Close-kin marriage norms in South Asia		338
8.4	Purdah practices in South Asia		346
8.5	Rural female labour force participation rates and rural female literacy rates in South Asia (1981)		356
8.6	Total fertility rates in South Asia (1988)		360
8.7	Population density, landlessness, land concentration, and forest area in South Asia		362
8.8	Distribution of ownership holdings in South Asia among rural landowning households		364
8.9	Summary for cross-regional comparisons		370
A8.1	Women's post-marital location and distance from the natal home: detailed evidence from South Asia		379
A8.2	Close-kin marriage norms and practice: detailed evidence from South Asia		390

xiv	Tables	
A8.3a	Sexual control over women in South Asia: norms of pre-marital sex and adultery	403
A8.3b	Sexual control over women in South Asia: norms and practice of divorce and divorcee remarriage	407
A8.3c	Sexual control over women in South Asia: norms and practice of widow remarriage	414

Cambridge University Press

0521429269 - A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia - Bina Agarwal
Frontmatter[More information](#)

Preface

This book has grown out of two long-standing involvements. One is my decade and a half of research on rural poverty, agrarian change, and the political economy of gender. The other is my association with the women's movement in South Asia, and my interaction over the years with peasant women from across the region, and with the few grassroots activists who were beginning to raise the issue of women's independent land rights within mass-based peasant movements in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Both my academic analysis and these interactions led me to investigate, and in that process recognize the central importance of women's lack of effective rights in property, especially land, in explaining their economic, social, and political subordination in South Asia. It became increasingly clear that it was critical for women to win those rights for establishing more equal gender relations, both within and outside the household. Indeed while the link between property and *class* relations has been well established in political economy, the link between property and *gender* relations has remained largely unexamined.

Land has been and continues to be the most significant form of property in rural South Asia. It is a critical determinant of economic well-being, social status, and political power. However, there is substantial evidence that economic resources in the hands of male household members often do not benefit female members in equal degree. Independent ownership of such resources, especially land, can thus be of crucial importance in promoting the well-being and empowerment of women. But as the present analysis shows, the issue is not just one of property ownership; it is also that of property control. Historically, even in matrilineal communities where formal ownership of property (including land) was vested in women, its effective control was often vested in men, as was jural authority. And this scenario of women's virtual exclusion, in most regions, from control over property and from most public decision-making bodies, continues to be a familiar one today.

Although economic surveys typically do not give a gender breakdown of land distribution, the ethnographic evidence examined here indicates that

Cambridge University Press

0521429269 - A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia - Bina Agarwal
Frontmatter[More information](#)

xvi Preface

despite gender-progressive legislation, in practice few South Asian women inherit landed property, and even fewer control it. This book probes what underlies the vast gap between law and its implementation, and identifies a number of factors constraining women in exercising their legal claims, including patrilocal post-marital residence and village exogamy, strong opposition from male kin, the social construction of gender needs and roles, low levels of female education, and male bias and dominance in administrative, judicial, and other public decision-making bodies at all levels. The analysis here points to the interactive effects of economic factors, cultural norms, and gender ideologies and politics, in determining women's property position, an interaction that has received little attention from most economists or other social scientists, each typically operating in a separate disciplinary domain. The constraints identified indicate that rural women's struggle for effective land rights will not be an easy one. At the same time, the considerable regional differences within and between South Asian countries in the nature and degree of these constraints, suggests that they are subject to contestation and change. More generally, the framework of contestation and bargaining between actors with differential access to economic and political power illuminates the process by which the hierarchical character of gender relations is maintained and changed. In this context, the *process* of acquiring land rights is likely to be as important in empowering women, as the end result. And it is precisely the formidable nature of the obstacles to be overcome that gives the struggle for land rights a strategic importance and transformative potential which perhaps no other gender-related issue singly possesses. As peasant women in Bodhgaya (Bihar, east India) said on first receiving land in their own names in 1982:

We had tongues but could not speak.
We had feet but could not walk.
Now that we have the land
we have the strength to speak and walk!

I first began exploring the issue of gender and land rights in 1985, as part of a larger project on this subject (covering several parts of the Third World) launched by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Geneva. This issue had also emerged as significant in my own research on the gender dimensions of agrarian change, and I welcomed the chance of focusing on it in depth when Zubeida Ahmed invited me to participate in the project. In that year I visited Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka; talked with villagers, grassroots activists, lawyers, government officials and academics; and attempted to locate written material on the subject. There was hardly any material to be found. Indeed my explorations revealed how little attention had been paid to this subject in South Asia,

Cambridge University Press

0521429269 - A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia - Bina Agarwal
Frontmatter[More information](#)

Preface

xvii

either in research or in policy; researchers, policy makers, and most non-governmental (including women's) groups seemed preoccupied with employment as *the* indicator of women's economic status, to the neglect of property rights. In 1986–87, for a separate project, I spent several weeks doing fieldwork on the survival strategies of poor, low caste women in a village in Rajasthan (northwest India). During the course of that work, the importance for rural women of having even a small field of their own as a security against poverty emerged clearly. In addition, I spent a few weeks visiting Khasi and Garo villages in Meghalaya, drawn by the need to get a first-hand feel of how women's situations and self-perceptions in matrilineal communities differed from those in the strongly patrilineal north-western states with which I had greater familiarity. A number of research papers followed (Agarwal 1988, 1989, 1990b, 1990c), but I began work on the book itself only in the winter of 1989 at Harvard University.

My travels, both within India and to other South Asian countries, were financed by the ILO, and I am very grateful to them for this support. The success of my field visits depended greatly on the generous help and hospitality of many friends and colleagues. In particular, for my trip to Sri Lanka I thank Kumari Jayawardena, Charles and Sunila Obeyesekera, Newton Gunasinghe (a dear friend who is no more), and Radhika Coomaraswamy. Newton accompanied me to Kandy, and with his help I was able to talk to a number of villagers and tea plantation workers in the stunningly beautiful Kandyan Highlands. It was already a period of severe ethnic strife in Sri Lanka, which has escalated tragically since. What I have to say in the book about Sri Lanka's social and economic relations must be read against this backdrop. There is no easy way of predicting the long-term effects of these conflicts on the norms that govern rural life there. I therefore make no attempt to speculate about future trends, and hope that much of what I have said continues to be valid. In Pakistan, I especially thank Farida Shaheed, Khawar Mumtaz, Nighat Khan, Akmal Hussain, Nigar Ahmed, Samina and Anjum Altaf, and Akbar Zaidi for their hospitality, for useful discussions on women's position in the country, and for helping me make contact with others (lawyers, academics, activists) and locate research material. During that trip, meeting with members of the Women's Action Forum in Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad was particularly illuminating. In Bangladesh, I owe special thanks to Khushi Kabir, Mahmuda Islam, Jahan Ara Huq, B. K. Jehangir, Shireen Huq, Muhammad Yunus (founder of the Grameen Bank), F. H. Abed (founder) and the staff members of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), Zafarullah Choudhury (founder) and staff members of Gonoshastheya Kendra, and the faculty of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, for useful discussions, sharing with me their field experiences, and

Cambridge University Press

0521429269 - A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia - Bina Agarwal
Frontmatter[More information](#)

xviii Preface

facilitating my travel to rural areas near Dhaka. For my Nepal trip, I am especially grateful to Bina Pradhan, Shilu Singh, Chandini Joshi, and Deepak Bajracharya for helping me to locate research material and organize my visits to villages on the outskirts of Kathmandu. I also thank Mr and Mrs Narendra Agarwal for their warm hospitality during my stay in Nepal.

My exposure to village life in Rajasthan extends over many years and numerous visits: initially during childhood and adolescence to see my maternal grandparents in Jhunjhunu district; subsequently in the mid-1980s to meet with activists of the Social Work and Research Center (Tilonia, Madanganj district) and to participate in a large festive gathering (*mela*) of village women that they had organized; and later still in 1986–87 to undertake a spell of systematic fieldwork in a village (in Alwar district) which the anthropologist Miriam Sharma and her research assistant Urmila Vijnani were also researching, and whose help in facilitating my entry into the lives of the villagers I gratefully acknowledge. Finally, I am extremely grateful to Yogeshwar Kumar, without whose help my 1989 field visit to the Khasi and Garo Hills in Meghalaya would not have been possible. On that trip I benefited greatly from discussions with D. N. Majumdar, Gilbert Shullai, and R. T. Rymbai; and my visits to the Khasi villages with Helen Giri and to the Garo villages with Debila Marak were most illuminating. Although most of the village visits in various parts of South Asia were not long enough to permit a systematic collection of information, they were invaluable in giving me a broad sense of the perceptions of rural women and men, village leaders, and local bureaucrats on the question of women and land. And I have drawn upon these field trips in various parts of the book.

My two and a half years at Harvard University (September 1989–March 1992) were critical in the shaping and writing of this book. Harvard's superb library facilities and its inter-library loan services gave me access to a vast body of historical and contemporary material including many unpublished social science doctoral dissertations on South Asia, submitted to American universities. Also invaluable were several rounds of stimulating discussions on parts of my work with faculty members at Harvard and other US universities, many of whom had done detailed fieldwork in South Asia. My stay at Harvard was made possible through the support of several institutions: the Mary Ingraham Bunting Institute (Radcliffe College), which awarded me a Bunting Fellowship for 1989–90 and affiliation as a Fellow for 1990–91; the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies, of which Lincoln Chen kindly invited me to be a member during 1990–91; the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and the Committee of Women's Studies, Harvard University, where I taught as visiting professor in 1991–

Cambridge University Press

0521429269 - A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia - Bina Agarwal
Frontmatter[More information](#)

Preface

xix

92; the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, which awarded me a Research and Writing Grant for Individuals for 1990–91; and the Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation (NORAD, Delhi), which provided supplementary financial assistance and a travel grant to the USA for my first year at Harvard. I am most grateful to all these institutions. In particular the Bunting Institute – its fellows, staff and Director, Florence Ladd – provided an atmosphere which was wonderfully conducive to discussion, reflection, and writing. I thank the administrative staff of the Harvard Committee on Women's Studies for their warmth and helpfulness, Barbara Johnson for generously lending me use of her office in Pusey library during my teaching term, and my students for their lively and challenging discussions on parts of my work.

I have presented some aspects of my research at several invited lectures and seminars both in India and abroad, including the Ninth European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies (Heidelberg) in 1986; the Center for Development Studies (Kerala) in 1988; the National Seminar on Women and Access to Land and Productive Resources (University of Delhi) in 1988; the Planning Commission of India (Delhi) in 1989; the Association for Women in Development International Conference (Washington) in 1989; the International Food Policy Research Institute (Washington) in 1989; the Bunting Institute Public Colloquium Series in 1990; and the Distinguished Lecture Series of the Center for Advanced Study of International Development, Michigan State University, in 1990. The responses of the audiences following these presentations, and Amartya Sen's comments as a discussant on my Bunting Colloquium presentation at Harvard, were encouraging, stimulating, and helpful.

Comments from and discussions with many other friends, colleagues, and associates provided essential feedback as the book progressed. It is not possible to name them all, but a few need particular mention. One person whose meticulous comments on several drafts of the book were invaluable is Janet Seiz – friend and fellow-economist at the Bunting Institute. I am deeply indebted to her for so generously sparing time to read the manuscript and brainstorm over parts of it, and for her unflagging interest and belief in the value of this research. I also greatly value Geoffrey Hawthorn's keen support for this study since its inception; and owe a very special thanks to him, Nancy Folbre, Gail Hershatter, Primila Lewis, and the reviewer of Cambridge University Press, all of whom read the manuscript in its entirety, in one or other of its incarnations, and offered most useful, detailed and encouraging comments. Gail found time to do this while settling into a new teaching job and parenting two young children. To Amartya Sen and S. J. Tambiah I am most grateful for sparing time from their extremely busy schedules during the teaching terms at Harvard to

Cambridge University Press

0521429269 - A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia - Bina Agarwal
Frontmatter[More information](#)

xx Preface

comment on and discuss some of my chapters over several tasty lunches at the Harvard Faculty Club. Discussions with Nur Yalman on some aspects of his earlier research on Sri Lanka were also most helpful. Joan Mencher offered a number of valuable suggestions and insights on the Nayars of Kerala along with a sumptuous south Indian dinner in New York; and with my friend and colleague, Gillian Hart, I shared many an evening of challenging discussions on my work and hers. I also greatly appreciate the comments on selected chapters by Michael Lipton, Lourdes Beneria, Pauline Peters, Gunanath Obeyesekere, John Mansfield, Paul Seabright, Uday Mehta, Christopher Fuller, Raghav Gaiha, Kate Gilbert, and Patricia Uberoi. I thank Alice Thorner, Jean Dreze, Terry Byres, and Veena Das for their responses to an earlier paper on the theme of the book. And I am grateful to Marty Chen for sharing with me some results from her ongoing study on widows in India; to Hilary Standing for digging out some of her unpublished fieldwork findings on Bihar; and to Victor de Munck, Dennis McGilvray, Hamza Alavi, Hanna Papanek, Savitri Goonesekere, and Jack Goody for discussions which helped clarify specific points relating to their own research findings. I would also like to thank Nick Stern at STICERD (London School of Economics) for offering me STICERD's hospitality for discussions and library work at the LSE over two summers. In Delhi, I am immensely grateful to B. Sivaramayya for the care with which he went over the legal sections of my manuscript, helping to correct several subtle shifts in meaning resulting from my attempts as a social scientist to translate legalese into simple English, and for drawing upon his prodigious knowledge of inheritance laws to point out a number of important cases and recent changes in legislation. I am also very thankful to Lotika Sarkar for discussions on a number of legal aspects and for directing my attention to some landmark judgements. Vina Mazumdar's descriptions of her interactions with various government departments over issues of gender, and of her fieldwork experience in West Bengal, added in important ways to my understanding of government policy responses to the gender question in the late 1970s and early 1980s. With Manimala I had several illuminating discussions on developments in the Bodhgaya movement over the last decade, and I am most grateful to her for sparing the time. I also thank the staff of the Institute of Economic Growth for facilitating my research on this book in various ways.

To my parents I owe very special thanks for their unending generosity, patience, and interest in my work. I am especially grateful to my father, S. M. Agarwal, for reading through a draft of the manuscript on trains and planes and late into the night, and offering many valuable suggestions for clarifying my arguments for the non-specialist reader. Finally, to my friends in Cambridge (Massachusetts) and Delhi goes my gratitude for their

Cambridge University Press

0521429269 - A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia - Bina Agarwal
Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

xxi

forbearance while I closeted myself over long stretches of time to reflect on and write the book.

It is my hope not only that this book will provoke serious academic and policy debate, but that the issue of women's land rights will be given the centrality it justly deserves by government policy makers, by political parties and, most of all, by gender-progressive grassroots groups. For it is on collective action by the women peasants of South Asia that change is ultimately likely to depend.



Map 1.1 South Asia: provincial/state divisions