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BINA AGARWAL

GENDER AND GREEN GOVERNANCE

The Political and Social Impact of Women's Presence
Within and Through Community Forestry

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*The Political Economy of Women's Presence
Within and Beyond Community Forestry*

BINA AGARWAL

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Economists studying environmental collective action and green governance have paid little attention to gender. Research on gender and green governance in other disciplines has focused mainly on women's near absence from forestry institutions. This interdisciplinary book turns that focus on its head to ask: what if women were present in these institutions? What difference would *that* make?

Would women's inclusion in forest governance—undeniably important for equity—also affect decisions on forest use and outcomes for conservation and subsistence? Are women's interests in forests different from men's? Would women's presence lead to better forests and more equitable access? Does it matter which class of women governs? And how large a presence of women would make an impact? Answers to these questions can prove foundational for effective environmental governance, yet they have been subject to little empirical investigation.

In an analysis that is conceptually sophisticated and statistically rigorous, using primary data on community forestry institutions in India and Nepal, this book is the first major study to comprehensively address these wide-ranging issues. It traces women's history of exclusion from public institutions, the factors which constrain their effective participation, and how those constraints can be overcome. It outlines how strategic partnerships between forestry groups and other civil society institutions could strengthen rural women's bargaining power with community and government. And it examines the complexities of eliciting government accountability in addressing poor rural women's needs, such as for clean domestic fuel and access to the commons.

Located in the interface of environmental studies, political economy and gender analysis, the volume makes significant original contributions to current debates on gender and governance, forest conservation, clean energy policy, critical mass, and social inclusion. Traversing uncharted territory with rare analytical rigor, this lucidly written book will be of interest to scholars and students as well as to policy makers and practitioners.

BINA AGARWAL is Professor of Development Economics and Environment at IDPM in the School of Environment and Development, University of Manchester, UK. Prior to this she was Director and Professor of Economics at the Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi. She has held distinguished positions at many leading universities, including at Harvard, Minnesota, Princeton, Michigan, and New York. She has been Vice-President of the International Economic Association; President of the International Association for Feminist Economics; and on the Board of the Global Development Network. Agarwal is also the first woman President of the International Society for Ecological Economics. In addition she has served on the UN Committee for Development Policy and is on the editorial boards of several international academic journals. An original thinker with many professional papers and eight books, including the multiple award-winning, *A Field of One's Own*, she has contributed to broadening the frontiers of economic thought both theoretically and empirically. An economist with a keen interest in interdisciplinary and inter-country explorations, her pioneering work on gender inequality in property and land, and on environmental issues, has had global impact among academics and policymakers. In 2008 the President of India honoured her with a Padma Shri, and in 2010 she was awarded the Leontief prize by Tufts University.

Praise for *Gender and Green Governance*

'Bina Agarwal has crafted a book of central importance in today's world. Both women and their connections with forests have been under-represented in the field, in academic research, and in policy. With analytical rigour and originality, Agarwal bridges these major gaps in our understanding of the difference women can make, when they are actively involved in forest governance.'

Elinor Ostrom, Nobel Laureate in Economics 2009

'*Gender and Green Governance* will rightly be acknowledged as a classic not just in environmental studies, but in studies of development, governance, public action and public service delivery more broadly... It is a rigorous, engaged and deeply serious exploration of the conditions under which the greater involvement of women in forest management committees improves the quality of environmental (or green) governance... it is a landmark text.'

Stuart Corbridge, *The Journal of Development Studies*

'[A] tour de force... rigorous, insightful and broad-ranging... an extraordinarily rich mine of hypotheses and a model of careful testing. The book is innovative at more levels than one can list.'

Pratap Bhanu Mehta, *The Indian Express*

'An impressive study of women and community forestry in India and Nepal.'

Nancy Folbre, *The New York Times*

'Path-breaking... an immense contribution not only to ecological economics but also to political science, rural sociology, and energy studies... a landmark contribution with depth and insight.'

Joan Martinez-Alier, *Economic and Political Weekly*

'A nuanced analysis that demonstrates the value of mixed-methods approaches. An important book.'

Ruth Meinzein-Dick, *Feminist Economics*

'An immense, novel contribution to the literature and a milestone in the ongoing debate on forest governance, gender, rural energy and political economy... exceptional.'

Kanchana Wickramasinghe, *South Asia Economic Journal*

'Beautifully written and soundly argued, this book makes an outstanding contribution to the fields of both environmental economics and governance. Drawing on over a decade of fieldwork in India and Nepal, and eschewing easy generalizations, Bina Agarwal offers a richly layered and insightful treatment of the effects of women's presence in local bodies governing village forests.'

Jean-Philippe Platteau, University of Namur and co-author of *Halting Degradation of Natural Resources*

GENDER AND GREEN GOVERNANCE

In memory of my mother
An indomitable spirit
(1923–2006)

Abbreviations

AKRSP(I)	Agha Khan Rural Support Programme (India)
CF	Community Forest
CFI	Community Forestry Institution
CPR	Common Pool Resource
DFO	District Forest Officer
EC	Executive Committee
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FECOFUN	Federation of Community Forest Users, Nepal
GB	Governing Body
GoI	Government of India
GoN	Government of Nepal
JFM	Joint Forest Management
ME	Marginal Effects
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NWFP	Non-Wood Forest Products
OLS(r)	Ordinary Least Squares regression (with robust standard errors)
PRI	Panchayati Raj Institutions
SARTHI	Social Action for Rural and Tribal Inhabitants of India
SHG	Self-Help Group
VIKSAT	Vikram Sarabhai Centre for Development Interaction

Preface

I was about 11 years old, as I recall, when hearing the sound of an axe I ran to the inner walled garden of our bungalow in Delhi, located on what was then called Electric Lane. Two men were heavily lopping a tree in the neighbouring house that was occupied by a member of parliament. The branches and blossoms of the tree overhung our shared wall. I called out to the men that it was forbidden to cut trees in Delhi without permission. Startled to see my earnest little face, the men assured me that they were only cutting a dry branch, but seeing my disbelief and realizing that I would not budge until they ceased, they climbed down. The tree still stands, albeit armless, as does another which sprouted from a mango seed I had planted. Long years later, I discovered that numerous other people were also seeking to protect their green spaces, not least the women in South Asia's villages, many of whom had formed informal patrol groups to guard their local forests.

Although my interest in trees and women's causes goes back to childhood, this book brings to these concerns the significant aspect of governance, carrying forward my earlier research. Academically, I first explored the interconnections between forests, institutions, and gender inequality in 1980, when writing a monograph on the woodfuel crisis and social forestry at the Science Policy Research Unit of the University of Sussex. In the 1970s, long before forests were valued as carbon sinks, and far away from the global clamour following the oil crisis, vast numbers in developing countries, dependent primarily on woodfuels for their domestic energy, were facing a less-noticed crisis—one that stemmed from the everyday consequences of depleting forests and shrinking supplies of firewood and charcoal. Women of poor households—the main gatherers of firewood for cooking and heating—were the most adversely affected. Attempts to promote afforestation and improved wood-burning stoves as solutions by governments and international agencies, including the FAO and the World Bank, had had rather limited success. In particular, few of these initiatives had involved or benefited the rural poor. My monograph (later a book, Agarwal 1986a) critiqued the top-down methods of planning and implementing social forestry and improved stove programmes, and made a strong case for following a more democratic and participatory approach that would include the rural poor and especially women. It also stressed the importance of entrusting communities with forest management and ensuring an equitable distribution of benefits.

Throughout the 1980s, in fact, there was an intense debate, both in India and globally, as to who could most effectively manage local forests—the State, village communities, or individual owners. Widespread State failure and emerging stories of community success in forest protection also fuelled the debate. Many argued that communities living near forests and dependent on them for their daily needs would be the best custodians and conservators. Theoretically, there was a growing recognition that Hardin's (1968) model of 'the tragedy of the

commons' had been overextended, as had the idea that free riding would necessarily undermine collective action within communities. Administrative decentralization was also moving apace. These and related factors created a favourable climate for experimenting with community management of natural resources in many parts of the world.

In 1988, India formulated a 'people-friendly' forest policy, which shifted the earlier emphasis on forests for commercial gain to forests for fulfilling local subsistence needs and conserving the environment. The involvement of villagers (including women) was integral to the new approach. The Joint Forest Management (JFM) programme, launched by the government of India in 1990, was founded on this new policy. Similar shifts in thinking and policy took place in Nepal, where the 1993 Forest Act laid the foundation for its community forestry programme.

Since such a change in approach was precisely what many of us had advocated, I decided to see for myself, at first hand, how it was working on the ground—in particular to what extent community forestry provided scope for women and the poor to participate. My field visit to India's Gujarat state in 1995 revealed that despite an impressive improvement in forest canopies under JFM, there had hardly been a dent in the firewood problem; and although women were informally active in forest protection, they were little seen or heard in the formal decision-making bodies. Subsequently, in 1998–99, when I travelled across six states of India and two districts of Nepal, conducting unstructured interviews in some ninety-four villages and community forestry institutions, I found that women's exclusions from decision-making were widespread, as were their complaints (sharper in some regions than others) about firewood shortages. These exclusions meant that the new institutions of forest governance, which had enormous potential for challenging entrenched gender inequalities, were in fact creating new ones. And women who had enjoyed rights as citizens over the commons, prior to the launch of community forestry, now had rather little say in their use.

In an earlier book, *A Field of One's Own* (Agarwal 1994), I had drawn attention to the adverse implications of women's lack of effective rights in agricultural land—a largely private resource—for their economic and social well-being and productivity. My exploratory fieldwork in community forestry indicated that now women were being excluded even from public resources. In the current book I therefore move from field back to forest, to focus on the gender effects of the new institutions of governance. I do so, however, from a rather different angle than that found in the literature so far.

Much of the existing research on gender and local forest governance has focused on women's near *absence* from governance institutions. In this book I invert that focus to ask—what difference would it make if women were *present* in these institutions? And how much presence do women need for making a difference? Although there is a considerable body of work on the difference women's numbers make to governance, almost all of it is concentrated on women in legislatures, especially in western democracies. Yet questions such as

the above are equally relevant for local governance and for women in developing countries. In addition, there are unaddressed dimensions, such as the impact of women's presence on policy implementation, as opposed to simply policy formulation.

In the book I address many of the issues raised in the gender and politics literature, but in the rather different context of forest governance. I also address questions which have been neglected in both contexts. And I deviate from emerging studies on village councils in India, which have focused on the impact of women chairpersons and not on women's proportions in the council. In particular, I empirically test a number of propositions. Some of these have acquired the status of truisms without much verification, such as the idea that women need at least one-third presence to be effective. Others are assumed to be true by default, such as the presumption by many that once women enter governance various benefits will follow automatically. I believe empirical testing—based on a healthy scepticism—is especially important where there are strong stakes in particular arguments, such as those arising from gender, race, religion, or ethnic considerations.

By this approach (which also builds on qualitative and historical evidence), I hope to draw into the discussion several constituencies: environmental and governance analysts who have not gendered their analysis; gender analysts who have neglected environmental concerns; scholars of gender and the environment who have drawn rather little on quantitative evidence; and those studying gender and governance in other contexts (including legislatures in western democracies) who might find in the results some interesting contrasts, or a confirmation of their own insights.

The empirical analysis was, in fact, the most challenging part of this book. In the absence of an appropriate data set, I collected my own, focusing on selected regions of India and Nepal. None of the Indian states, however, had baseline information on the gender composition of community forestry groups from which I could draw a sample. My efforts to persuade the forest departments in several states to field a simple questionnaire for obtaining such data, also proved largely unsuccessful. Three NGOs in Gujarat, however, did have this crucial information. I therefore located my India-related analysis in Gujarat, a region with which I was also familiar through prior visits. In Nepal, the forest department does collect country-wide information on the gender composition of forestry groups on which I could base my sample selection, although subject to the security constraints imposed by the Maoist insurgency, which put several regions out of bounds.

My survey began at a point when community forestry was high on the agenda of several funding agencies, especially the Ford Foundation, and my 2000–01 research was funded by a generous grant from the Foundation's Delhi office. I am immensely grateful to the Foundation for the opportunity to explore this topic in depth, and thank Doris Capistrano, Gowher Rizwi, Vasant Saberwal, Ganesan Balachander, and Jeffery Campbell for their support at various stages of the project's life. Doris, in particular, with her keen interest in India's JFM

programme, always found time for a discussion and I value her intellectual enthusiasm for this research. I am also grateful to the Foundation for a small grant to cover my 1998–99 fieldwork in India. A similar visit to two districts of Nepal in 1999 was sponsored by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). Anupam Bhatia (then at ICIMOD) encouraged me to undertake the trip, and provided invaluable help in making local contacts and organizing my visit. He and his wife, Kiran Bhatia, also sustained me through many a long hotel stay in Kathmandu with their warm hospitality, home food, and conversation. Egbert Pelinck was then Director-General of ICIMOD and Gabriel Campbell succeeded him. I thank them both for extending ICIMOD's support during my many visits and offering me the position of honorary scientist and an office where I could meet my research team.

The success of my field visits in 1998–99 depended greatly on the generous help of many civil society organizations working on community forestry. They provided me with contacts and information, helped chart out my itinerary, took me to their fieldsites, debated their experiences, and even spared a staff member to accompany me as translator and guide. Several forest officials and researchers also generously shared their insights and facilitated my visits. In earlier papers (e.g. Agarwal 2000a) I have named many of the organizations and individuals that helped me, and I thank them all again. I also recall with pleasure my conversations with the Divisional Forest Officer in Harda district of Madhya Pradesh who late one night regaled me with accounts of how he had tackled illegal logging. He had a secret informer, reminiscent of Watergate's 'deep throat', who would tell him on which day and at what time bullock cart loads of illegal logs would pass along the road; and he and his men would wait to nab the culprits, sometimes hiding in the bushes for long hours in the dark.

My 2000–01 survey was more structured, and here again local support was critical. In Gujarat, as noted, my sample was based on the fieldsites of three major NGOs: AKRSP(I), SARTHI, and VIKSAT. I am immensely grateful to Apoorva Oza, Giriraj Singh, and Srinivas Mudrakartha, who headed these NGOs respectively, and to their senior staff, for their unstinting help throughout the survey. They provided me their baseline data for sample selection, introductions to the villagers where needed, and answers to my innumerable background questions before, during, and after the survey. I owe special thanks to Dhan-singhbhai Rathore, senior staff member of SARTHI, who shared many insights, helped organize additional data gathering and map making, and unfailingly responded to my follow-up queries. I am also grateful for valuable inputs from Rughabhai and Kishore Bhai at SARTHI, Vijay Kaushal, Jhalabhai, Hena Bhen, Sujit Kumar and Ramesh Patel at VIKSAT; and Ashok Gupta, Mahendra Bhai, Natwar Singh, and Thakursi Bhai Rathore at AKRSP(I). Nirmal Bhen's warm hospitality sustained me during several field trips to Panchmahals, and I thank her too for sharing her understanding of women's associations in the area.

In Nepal, I am immensely grateful to FECOFUN (the Federation of Community Forest Users, Nepal), which delegated staff members to accompany my

research teams, and provided the researchers with background information and introductions where needed. In particular, I thank Hari Prasad Neupane, Ram Bahadur Kesi, Bhola Bhattari, and the district-level heads of FECOFUN in the regions of my research. I also thank Clare Sakya and Peter Neil of the Nepal UK forestry programme, Krishna Shrestha, Deputy Director General of Community Forestry in Nepal's forest department, and Bhumi Raman Nepali for their help. To Bharat Pokharel (now Project Director with the Nepal Swiss Community Forestry Project) I owe an immense debt of gratitude. As a resource person on the project from the very beginning, he provided me invaluable help, both when I was pilot-testing the questionnaires and later, in tackling any problems the researchers faced, contacting members of the forest department and FECOFUN, locating supplementary data, and with amazing cheerfulness answering my numerous technical and other queries that continued till the book was completed. In Gujarat, I warmly thank Rajesh Kapoor who served as a resource person during the data gathering process.

The quality of any research, however, depends critically on the research team and mine gave of their best in meticulous data collection and documentation. For the Gujarat fieldwork, Ruchi Malhotra, Ramesh Patel, Purvi Vyas, and Umesh Rathod stayed for the full length of the project, while Bina Srinivasan and Mustak Ali Masi participated for a part of the time. In Nepal, Bidya Bhurtel, Bhola Bhattarai, Shambhu Kattel, Radhika Pokharel, and Shyamu Thapa again worked for the full period, while Lok Prasad Bhattarai, Sujata Thapa, and Chuda Mani filled in for shorter spells. I thank all of them for their dedication, hard work, enthusiasm, and the many subtle skills they brought to bear for drawing out the villagers in a free-flowing discussion. Fieldwork in Nepal was especially difficult, both because of the hard physical terrain of the middle hills and the security threat posed by the Maoist insurgency. It is to the courage and credit of my Nepali researchers that they stayed and completed the work, despite personal risks. Most members of my research teams in both Gujarat and Nepal remain in touch with me, and I was pleased to hear from several of them that their association with the project helped in advancing their careers and interests. Several are teaching or working with development NGOs. Bhola Bhattari is now General Secretary of FECOFUN. And Ramesh Patel, who was farming when I met him, is now one of VIKSAT's principal researchers, while Purvi Vyas has moved in the reverse direction—from research to organic farming in Gujarat.

Three people who played a particularly important role in data analysis and served as research analysts at various stages are Manoj Pandey, Ram Ashish Yadav, and Bidya Bhurtel. Manoj and Ram Ashish, in particular, worked with me for an extended period, on diverse aspects of the analysis, continuing to provide valuable assistance even while I was away at Harvard in 2006–07. I thank them for their dedication and excellent work, and for devoting many precious weekends and evenings to see the project through its critical stages. Bidya Bhurtel, who was part of the data gathering team, came to Delhi to help with the coding and initial analysis, leaving the cool Pokhara mountains for Delhi's hot summer. Others who provided valuable inputs in various capacities include Sevinc Rende, Swati Virmani,

Manoranjan Pattnaik, Rajnish Kumar, Advaita Marathe, Vikas Batra, and creative designer Bindia Thapar.

As the book progressed, many friends, colleagues, and associates gave me valuable comments and critical feedback. I am immensely grateful to Jim Boyce, Caroline Elliot, Paul Seabright, Sharad Lele, Vikram Dayal, and OUP's anonymous referee for their detailed comments on the full draft manuscript in one or other of its incarnations. For insightful feedback on individual chapters, I warmly thank Elizabeth Anderson, Amrita Basu, Amita Baviskar, S. Charusheela, William Clark, Ashwini Chhatre, Nancy Fraser, Raghav Gaiha, Arti Garg, Vegard Iversen, Robert Jensen, Sunil Kanwar, K. L. Krishna, Jane Mansbridge, Kay Mansfield, Pratap Bhanu Mehta, Puran Mongia, Pauline Peters, Karen Polenske, Sanjay Reddy, Kay Schlozman, Janet Seiz, Sanjay Srivastava, Patricia Uberoi, and Eliza Willis.

To Robert Jensen and Paul Seabright I owe very special thanks for sparing the time from their crowded academic schedules to painstakingly brainstorm with me on aspects of my econometric analysis, offering suggestions to address particular concerns and responding to my queries on others, although I alone am responsible for the end result. I am also most grateful to Vikram Dayal and Sunil Kanwar for their thoughtful engagement with aspects of the statistical analysis. On specific issues I gained a great deal from discussions with Arun Agrawal, Mani Shankar Aiyar, V. K. Bahuguna, Jean-Marie Baland, Pranab Bardhan, Kaushik Basu, Nina Bhatt, Prabhakar Bhatt, Bhola Bhattarai, Haimanthi Biswas, Sam Bowles, Gabriel Campbell, Jeffrey Campbell, Elizabeth Cecelski, Ram Chhetri, Dilli Dahal, Purnamita Dasgupta, A. P. Dubey, V. B. Eshwaran, Jana Everett, Anne Marie Goetz, Bishwanath Goldar, R. Gopalakrishnan, Ashok Gupta, Indrani Gupta, Shireen Hassim, N. S. Jodha, Jorrit de Jong, Kenneth Keniston, Michael Kollmair, Arup Mitra, Peter Neil, Hemant Ojha, Nabaghan Ojha, Elinor Ostrom, S. N. Pandey, S. C. Pant, Jyoti Parikh, Kirith Parikh, Kedar Paudel, Shirin Rai, Jairam Ramesh, N. H. Ravindranath, Sushil Saigal, Madhu Sarin, N. C. Saxena, Janet Seeley, Govinda Shrestha, Gay Siedman, Wendy Singer, K. Sivaramakrishnan, Kathleen Staudt, C. P. Sujaya, Nandini Sundar, George Verguесе, and Barry Underwood.

Stimulating conversations with many other friends and colleagues over the years, on several of the ideas presented here, enriched the process of my writing and I thank Andrew Barnett, Rajeev Bhargava, Judith Bruce, Kavita Chakravarty, Amrita Chhachhi, Ester Duflo, Diane Elson, Nancy Folbre, Madhav Gadgil, Ann Gold, Ramachander Guha, Anil Gupta, Geoffrey Hawthorn, Ronald Herring, Gail Hershatter, Jane Humphries, Mani Shankar Iyer, Jean Jackson, Sheila Jasanoff, Niraja Jayal, Kumari Jayawardena, Roger Jeffreys, Raphie Kaplinsky, Ashish Kothari, Shiv Kumar, Ranjana Kumari, Pareena Lawrance, Primila Lewis, Rod Macfarquhar, T. N. Madan, Renuka Mishra, Mark Moore, Rukmini Bhayya Nair, Martha Nussbaum, Mahesh Rangarajan, Vijayendra Rao, Ingrid Robeyns, Jeffrey Sachs, Anthony Saich, Ashwani Saith, Amartya Sen, Vikram Seth, the late Anil Shah, Nicolas Stern, Diana Strassmann, Norman Uphoff, and Margaret Woo. To Amartya Sen I owe particular thanks for sparing the time for many challenging

discussions around the issues of cooperative conflict, capabilities, adaptive preferences and public deliberation.

I have presented aspects of my findings at several institutions and events, and I thank the participants for their engaged responses at the School for Natural Resources and Environment (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor); the Center for International Development, Kennedy School of Government (Harvard University); the Santa Fe Institute; the Political Economy Research Institute (University of Massachusetts at Amherst); the University of Minnesota; Michigan State University; The South Asia Program and the Polson Institute (Cornell University); the Environmental Studies Program (University of Chicago); and the Turin conference of the International Association for Feminist Economics. In addition, I held a two-day workshop in Ahmedabad (Gujarat) to present my initial findings to the NGOs in whose field areas I had done the survey. Feedback from the workshop participants, which also included forest officials, researchers, and members of my research team, proved most valuable. Some of the analysis in this book has also appeared in several papers (see e.g. Agarwal 2006, 2009a, 2009b, 2010).

I undertook a part of my analysis at Harvard University at two points in time. First, in 1999, I analysed my 1998–99 fieldwork notes while based there as the first Daniel Ingalls Visiting Professor, affiliated simultaneously with the Harvard Yenching Institute, the Asian Center, the Department of Government, and the Department of Indian and Sanskrit Studies. I especially thank Roderick Macfarquhar and Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp for the invitation. Second, during 2006–07, I spent several months as a research fellow of the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at the Kennedy School of Government. I am most grateful to Gowher Rizwi, then Director of the Ash Institute, for inviting me; to him and his wife, Agnese Borolo, for their warm hospitality and friendship; to the staff of the Institute for its support; and to the Center for Population and Development Studies at Harvard for providing me a most congenial office and work environment.

To my home institution—the Institute of Economic Growth—I owe a substantial debt. Without IEG's administrative support this project could not have been undertaken. In particular, I thank Kanchan Chopra, B. B. Bhattacharya, and the late Pravin Visaria (all of whom served as Directors of the IEG during the project's tenure); Sushil Kumar Sen, our efficient academic programmes officer; P. K. Jain and his excellent team of library staff, especially Shampa Paul, Jasvinder Kaur, and R. Vishwanathan; the hardworking staff (past and current) of the computer unit, in particular K. Lal, Vinod Tyagi, Parag Sharma (who put in many painstaking hours on the maps and sketches), and S. Sreedharan; the former and current finance officers, Shankar Dhar and D. D. Kandpal; Mr Trivedi and his staff in the accounts office; Mr Sher Singh Bisht, now administrative officer; Vikram Chauhan, my personal secretary; Sudha from the photocopying unit; and not least my able and feisty administrative assistant Neeta Bakhru, who is the only person I know who remembers my birthday not just with flowers but also with a flower vase to hold them!

Throughout this long journey from data collection to final completion, the one constant and sustaining feature has been my wide-ranging conversations with my

father, S. M. Agarwal, on many ideas in this book, but especially around public participation, democracy, and women's rights. His responses—both critical and appreciative, both conceptual and practical—were invaluable.

While working on this book, when I was still at Harvard, my mother passed away in November 2006. As I write this preface I imagine her as she was when I last saw her, sitting in her armchair, reminiscing about her childhood spent rebelling against the strictures of a conservative Rajasthani family by climbing trees and swimming in the village stepwell, emboldened by the quiet indulgence of a loving father. Throughout her life she insisted on the importance of women having a voice, both within the home and outside it. Although increasingly fragile in frame, she remained, till the end, a woman of indomitable spirit. This book is dedicated to her and to my father who remains a continuing source of inspiration and strength.

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