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Gender Relations & Food Security: Coping with Seasonality, Drought, & Famine in South Asia

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Rooted in public policies and programs directed at ensuring food security in Third World countries are certain assumptions about the family: the responsibility of its members toward each other's well-being, and their capability and willingness to fulfill that responsibility. For instance, government programs that direct resources and employment at male household heads assume implicitly that the associated benefits will be shared equitably with women and children. Are such assumptions valid in practice? Even more important, are they valid in food crisis situations?

To answer this question, we need to examine how poor agricultural families in South Asia themselves respond to the problem of food insecurity associated with seasonal troughs in the agricultural production cycle and with calamities such as drought and famine. How, for instance, is the burden of coping shared between male and female family members, and what does this reveal about intrafamily gender relations?

An understanding of these dimensions is important for designing public policy interventions for food security, whether by the State[1] or by non-State agencies, to ensure their appropriateness on at least two counts: (1) in strengthening the survival mechanisms not only of the most vulnerable families but also of their most vulnerable members by explicitly focusing on any intrafamily inequalities in the impact of contingencies; and (2) in complementing rather than undermining people's own efforts at dealing with contingencies, with people being seen as

actors in the process of change rather than as passive recipients of aid and relief.

I consider the issue of food security here in the sense of ensuring maintenance of food consumption levels in the context of specific contingencies rather than in the sense of providing adequate food intake for all. Broadly, a household is seen as effectively coping with seasonality and calamity where, as a result, it suffers no irreversible damage to the productive capacity of its members or to its net asset position. The terms "household" and "family" have been used here interchangeably to connote commensal units.

The chapter is divided into five sections. Section 1 outlines an analytical approach for conceptualizing the family: the bargaining approach, which would be useful for examining not merely these concerns but a range of concerns that stem from or impinge on intrafamily gender relations. Sections 2 and 3 examine how poor rural families cope with seasonality, drought, and famine. Section 4 focuses on some regional variations in women's position as they impinge on the gender consequences of food crises, and Section 5 discusses policy implications.

Although the illustrative examples are drawn from South Asia, especially India, the analytical framework suggested here has wider relevance, both geographically and in terms of issues.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE FAMILY: THE BARGAINING APPROACH

In an examination of the relationship between seasonality, calamity, and the family, a critical question is: How do we conceptualize the family? This is a question that much of standard economic theory either ignores, or sees as unproblematic, treating the family as an undifferentiated unit. Indeed, as some recent feminist critiques have pointed out, there is a noteworthy similarity between neoclassical and Marxist economic theories on this count (Folbre 1988; Hart 1990). Yet the growing evidence of persistent intrafamily inequalities in the distribution of resources and tasks as well as cross-cultural anthropological descriptions of intrafamily interactions and decisionmaking indicate the need for a very different conceptualization of the household: one that takes account of multiple actors, with varying preferences and interests, and differential abilities to pursue and fulfill those interests.[2]

In the context of the present discussion, I would like to suggest here that it is useful to conceptualize the family as a complex mesh of relationships across which there is ongoing (often implicit) negotiation, subject to the constraints set by gender, age, type of relationship (kinship

association), and what could be termed "undisputed tradition" (elaborated later).

The nature of this intrafamily negotiation could then usefully be described as one of cooperative conflict, as A. K. Sen (1983, 1990) has done in his critique and extension of standard economic bargaining approaches. Many cooperative outcomes are possible in relation to who does what, who gets what goods and services, and how different family members are treated—outcomes that are beneficial to the negotiating members relative to noncooperation. But among the set of such possible cooperative outcomes, some are more favorable to one party than others, hence the underlying conflict of interests between those cooperating. Which outcome emerges depends on the relative bargaining power of the different family members, and a member's bargaining power within the family would depend especially on the strength of the person's fall-back position, should cooperation fail.

A person's fall-back position (and associated bargaining strength within the family vis-à-vis, say, subsistence needs) would depend, in turn, on a range of factors, of which I would like to highlight four:[3]

- ownership and control over assets, especially land
- access to employment and other income-earning means
- access to communal resources (village commons, forests)
- access to external social support systems (such as of patronage, kinship, and friendship) embodying relationships in which factors other than the mere economic take precedence, that is, they fall under the rubric of what has been termed by some as the "moral economy" (e.g., Scott 1976; Greenough 1982)

These four factors impinge directly on a person's ability to fulfill subsistence needs outside the family. The premise here is that the greater a person's ability to physically survive outside the family, the greater would be his/her bargaining power (at least in relation to resource sharing for subsistence) within the family.[4] (A fifth factor could be access to support from state or nonstate organizations, but this is discussed toward the end of the paper.) Inequalities among family members in respect of these factors would place some members in a weaker bargaining position relative to others. Gender is one such basis of inequality, age another.

Crises of seasonality and calamity can negatively affect asset ownership, income-earning opportunities, and the strength of external support systems for both sexes, but insofar as men and women are affected *unequally*, it would alter their relative intrafamily bargaining strengths as well. A collapse of the wife's fall-back position (as could happen, for instance, in a famine) while that of the husband is sustained (in relative

terms) could weaken her bargaining position even to a point where noncooperation is found more beneficial by the man, creating a tendency toward his abandoning of his spouse and the disintegration of the family.

Whether or not an actual breakdown occurs would be subject, of course, to other considerations as well, such as the ties of love and affection holding a family together and the structural placement of the family (stemming from its class, caste, and ethnic position) within the larger society.

In addition, I may add that not all family decisions are explicitly bargained over. At any given time, for a given society, some decisions would fall in the realm of what the French sociologist Bourdieu (1977) terms "doxa"—that which is accepted as natural and self-evident, as part of undisputed tradition. In the context of the present discussion, this could include practices that favor group over individual interests (such as strategic marriage alliances) or favor some groups over others (such as a given gender division of labor or women eating last and eating the least nutritious foods in many regions of South Asia). Such practices also reflect the dominant perceptions of the needs and rights of people (say of women in relation to men) prevailing in a society,[5] perceptions that may well be internalized through a socialization process by the disadvantaged persons/groups themselves, or to which the persons/groups may submit because of a lack of choice.[6] But, over time, what constitutes doxa may itself be subject to challenge and change, with processes of politicization (of the disadvantaged), shifts in cultural meanings, and structural changes in the economy.

When we examine actual responses of families to food crises in the context of South Asia, and especially India, we find that seasonality reveals the face of the family as one of unequal cooperation, and famine mirrors one of disintegration. Consider first the issue of seasonality.

COPING WITH SEASONALITY

Typically, poor agricultural households are found to cope with seasonal variations in the crop cycle, and associated variations in food availability, employment, wages, prices, and so on, in five main ways: (1) diversifying income sources, including by seasonal migration; (2) drawing upon communal resources—village common lands, forests; (3) drawing upon social relationships—patronage, kinship, friendship—or informal credit sources such as moneylenders; (4) adjusting consumption patterns; and (5) mortgaging or selling assets. These are not mutually exclusive and are typically adopted in combination, although selling productive assets is usually a last resort.

Although the particular mix of measures adopted can vary by region according to the prevailing economic, technological, ecological, and social possibilities, the implications are mediated by some common underlying features. When we examine these mechanisms three aspects, in particular, emerge as noteworthy:

1. Intrahousehold cooperation between men, women, and children is critical in enabling poor households to tide over seasonal troughs.
2. Women of poor households cooperate within the family from a weaker bargaining position than men in several respects:
   - They have virtually no direct access to productive resources such as land, and limited access to personal assets such as cash and jewelry (Agarwal 1988).
   - Their access to incomes is circumscribed by fewer employment opportunities, lesser occupational mobility, lower levels of training, and lower payments for the same or similar work.[7] They also face much greater seasonal fluctuations in employment and earnings than do men due to the greater task specificity of their work, have sharper peaks and longer slack periods in many regions, and have less chance of finding employment in the slack seasons.[8]
   - Moreover, there are noteworthy inequalities in the allocation of tasks and of resources for basic needs within the household: typically women work longer hours, have poorer health care, and in several regions have lower food intakes relative to needs than men in the same families.[9]
3. There are differences in the roles played and burdens borne by male and female family members in relation to these coping mechanisms, with women on balance bearing the major load.

Consider some examples. Landless and land-poor families seek to reduce the subsistence risk that traditional farming systems entail by diversifying income sources, such as by seeking employment where available, multiple cropping and intercropping where the household has some land, keeping a variety of livestock and poultry, trading, and seasonally migrating either individually or as families.[10] (This last could be seen as a kind of spatial diversification.) In all these coping mechanisms, the labor of women is critical, along with that of men and children, for the following reasons:

- Women's absolute contributions to household subsistence from their wage earnings in poor households are typically significant, often equal to men's, and sometimes greater than those of men.[11]

- Livestock, poultry, etc., which significantly help the household diversify incomes, are usually cared for by women and children.[12]
- Although individual male out-migration is the most common pattern of seasonal migration, women also sometimes migrate as individuals or in families,[13] and when they stay behind they assume additional workloads and responsibilities as de facto female heads, which facilitates male migration.[14]

Women's contribution is apparent again when households draw upon village commons (VCs) and State forests to obtain food and other essential items for daily use. All rural households use VCs in some degree, but the dependence of the poor is especially high. A study covering semiarid regions in seven states of India found that among the rural landless and land-poor households, VCs accounted for up to 20 percent or more of total income, over 90 percent of their firewood, and over 65 percent of their grazing (Jodha 1986; Dasgupta 1987; and Ryan et al., 1984). Forests serve a similar function.[15] The dependence on communal sources for firewood is especially critical because firewood is the single most important source of domestic fuel in rural South Asia and is largely gathered, not purchased.[16] This dependence on gathered food and fuel gets accentuated seasonally. To the extent that periods of slack in crop production do not entirely coincide with lean periods of VCs and forest output, this helps sustain the poor during troughs in agricultural employment (Jodha 1986). Tribal populations in particular depend critically on gathered food during certain seasons (Pingle 1975; Banerjee 1988).

Typically, it is women and children who play the primary role in the collection of produce from VCs and forests (Dasgupta 1987; Brara 1987; Agarwal 1987, 1989). Also, as the main foragers and gatherers, they often have a valuable reserve knowledge of edible forest produce, which can help tide poor families over prolonged seasonal shortages.[17]

What is of particular note here is that VCs and forests provide women, children, and even the aged with an independent source of subsistence *unmediated* by dependency relationships on young male adults. For instance, women have rights to use the VCs by virtue of their membership (through birth or marriage) in the village community, whereas their access to the cash economy, to markets, and (in areas of strong female seclusion) to the marketplace itself is constrained and usually dependent on the mediation of male relatives.[18]

However, the rapid decline in forests and VCs, especially in semiarid areas, is effectively eroding this significant source of protection against food shortages for the poor. In much of Pakistan and Bangladesh less than 10 percent of the geo-area is under forest (Table 8.1). In India, by the 1985–1987 satellite survey, only 64 mha (million hectares) or 19.5 percent of the geographic area is today under forests, and this is estimated to be declining at the rate of 1.3 mha a year (Table 8.2).

Ironically, State policy, first under colonial rule and subsequently in the postindependence period, has been a major contributor to this decline: The commercial logging of forests and the clearing of land for large hydroelectric-cum-irrigation projects are two of the principal causes of deforestation in India.[19] Likewise, as Jodha's (1986) study indicates,

TABLE 8.1 Percent of Geo-Area Under Forest in South Asia

Country	*Reference Year*	*Percent Geo-Area Under Forest*
Bangladesh	1985–1986	15.7[a]
India	1985–1987	19.5
Nepal	1978–1979	37.6
Pakistan	1986–1987	5.4[b]
Sri Lanka	1982–1985	39.0

[a]The figures are over 10.0 in only four districts: Noakhali, Chittagong, Chittagong (hill tracts), and Khulna.

[b]The figures are over 10.0 in only one province: North West Frontier Province.

Sources: Bangladesh 1988; India 1990; Nepal 1988; Pakistan figures compiled by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, Karachi, 1990; Sri Lanka/World Bank 1986.

TABLE 8.2 India: Percent of Geo-Area Under Forest, by State, 1985–1987

State	*Percent Geo-Area Under Forest[a]*	*State*	*Percent Geo-Area Under Forest[a]*
Andhra Pradesh	17.3	Manipur	80.0
Arunachal Pradesh	82.3	Meghalaya	69.8
Assam	33.2	Mizoram	86.2
Bihar	15.5	Nagaland	86.8
Gujarat	6.0	Orissa	30.3
Haryana	1.3	Punjab	2.3
Himachal Pradesh	24.0	Rajasthan	3.8
Jammu and Kashmir	9.1	Sikkim	42.8
Karnataka	16.7	Tamil Nadu	13.6
Kerala	26.1	Tripura	50.1
Madhya Pradesh	30.1	Uttar Pradesh	11.5
Maharashtra	14.3	West Bengal	9.6
		All India	19.5

[a]Based on 1985–1987 satellite imagery.

Source: India 1990.

the most significant cause of the decline in VCs has been land privatization as a result of State policy. For instance, large tracts of VCs have been distributed to individuals by the government since the 1950s, under various land reform and antipoverty schemes, ostensibly to benefit the landless but effectively endowing the already landed. In some parts of India, as in Jalore District of Rajasthan, as much as 86 percent of VC land so distributed has gone to those already owning land. *The poor have thus lost out collectively while very few of them have gained individually.* Parts of VCs have also been auctioned by the government to private contractors for commercial exploitation. Illegal encroachments by larger farmers, subsequently made legal, have compounded the decline in VCs (Jodha 1986; Cernea 1981). The gender implications of this loss are particularly adverse, given the noted greater dependency of women on these resources and their responsibility for fetching fuel, fodder, and water. Ironically, many new tree-planting schemes have often worsened matters by promoting largely commercial varieties such as eucalyptus, sometimes at the cost of species used by the poor (Agarwal 1986b, 1987, 1991).

Apart from the loss of communal resources, erosion is also apparent in social support systems of patronage, kinship, caste groupings, and even friendships built up in different ways by male and female family members, which have traditionally helped tide families over periods of shortage.[20] The decline in kin support is especially apparent among communities and groups that have become poorer over time, making it increasingly difficult for families to support kin. As a result, widows and the aged are left the worst off (Dreze 1990; Fernandes and Menon 1987; Jansen 1986). This erosion is especially dramatic in tribal communities traditionally characterized by a high degree of communal and cross-gender cooperation in work and social life. It is linked partly to the shift from communal, swidden cultivation to settled individual farming (a shift to which State policies toward land use and forests have contributed in critical ways)[21] and partly to the growing impoverishment of these tribal populations.[22]

The decline in customary systems of patronage, however, is associated particularly with the growth of capitalist farming, and it needs to be distinguished from emerging interlinked credit-labor systems that do not provide any of the subsistence guarantees and rights associated with the old, while often being just as exploitative (Breman 1985; Bhalla 1977; Banerjee 1988).

In this scenario of eroding traditional support systems, strategies of borrowing between families as well as free collection are becoming less viable. This situation has some specific gender implications: (a) because women's dependence on these support systems is greater than that of men, given their lesser access to the cash economy, this erosion means a weakening of women's fall-back position over time; (b) to the extent that earnings, borrowings, free collection, and the running down of inventories prove inadequate, families seasonally adjust consumption by changing the content of the diet and reducing total intake. A disproportionate burden of reducing consumption falls on women and female children. This is because, even in normal times (as noted), in several parts of the subcontinent (and especially in the northwest), there is an antifemale bias in food distribution and health care within the family. This bias often gets accentuated during food shortages.[23] Pregnant and lactating women and preschool children are especially vulnerable to body weight changes and seasonal malnutrition.[24]

Finally, usually as a last resort, a household may be forced to draw upon productive assets. The sale of land and draft animals affects its long-term productive capacity and can lead to what Chambers (1981) terms "poverty ratchets," where seasonal troughs leave the household worse off each year in relation to the previous one.

In overview then, three dimensions have been highlighted in our examination of seasonal coping mechanisms:

1. There are specific gender implications in the ways families cope: Although the inputs of all family members are critical for tiding the family over the troughs, the burden of coping appears to fall disproportionately on women, be it in terms of the work adjustments needed to diversify incomes and to draw upon communal resources or in terms of consumption adjustments (see the summary in Table 8.3). Hence, although it is beneficial for wives to cooperate with husbands because cooperation leaves them better off than noncooperation, in relative terms they get the worse deal.
2. There is also a class, caste, and regional dimension to the effects of seasonality. While some households may suffer only temporary hardships, others face a downward slide with each sharp trough. These are more likely to be the assetless, belonging to low castes or tribes and located in semiarid regions.
3. Communal resources such as VCs and forests are particularly important in reducing the vulnerability of poor households and especially of women in such households. These resources thus need to be protected (through institutional and legal means) to ensure their communal control and access rather than being privatized.

COPING WITH DROUGHT AND FAMINE

Household responses to contingencies such as drought and famine are not dissimilar to those noted for seasonality in their *content*.

TABLE 8.3 Seasonal Coping Mechanisms in South Asia: Relative Gender Contributions (summary)[a]

Coping Mechanism	Relative Gender Contributions (F=female; M=male)
1. Diversifying income sources	
• seasonal migration	F < M
• keeping livestock, vegetable gardens, and so on	F > M
• adjusting workloads accordingly	F > M
2. Drawing on communal resources	F > M
3. Drawing on social relationships	
• patronage	F < M
• husband's kin	F < M
• wife's kin	F > M
• neighbors/friends	Equally
4. Adjusting consumption	F > M
5. Drawing on assets: mortgaging or selling	Unclear

[a]This summary should be taken as only a very rough assessment based on the discussion in the text.

Indeed, seasonality, drought, and famine may appear as three points in a continuum. But there is a significant difference in *context:* (a) in the relative *predictability* of seasonality as versus calamity, and (b) in the relative *intensity* of the food shortages experienced in the three situations. Hence, despite the noted weakening of traditional social security arrangements, they still work in some degree during seasonal troughs. This is not so during severe calamities such as drought and famine, when most such arrangements begin to collapse.

Indeed, what calamities bring into sharp focus is the critical limitations of arrangements that may work during seasonal troughs. Conflicts over access to village commons intensify;[25] help from relatives, friends, and neighbors (especially if they are similarly afflicted) begins to dry up,[26] as does credit from moneylenders;[27] patron-client relationships, already weak, may virtually snap;[28] families shift to famine foods and cut back on consumption[29]—women, children, and the old usually bearing the brunt of the cuts;[30] and assets are often sold.[31]

In this context, three aspects in particular are noteworthy: (1) in areas of recurrent droughts, families may make long-term work and demographic adjustments as a protective measure; (2) there is a pattern in family asset disposal with specific implications for women; and (3) families may themselves begin to break up. The form and extent of these responses and especially their gender consequences vary cross-regionally, as I will discuss shortly, but there are overall commonalities in the directions of these responses. Let us consider each of these in turn.

On Long-Term Adjustments

The most common method for farming families, in agriculturally risk-prone contexts, is to undertake income diversification. The nature and content of this diversification can vary by region, depending on available economic opportunities as well as cultural contexts. But broadly, two types of responses stand out. First, diversification into urban, less risk-prone contexts, such as by educating children for urban jobs, choosing city-based sons-in-law, or forming other strategic marriage alliances. This may also lead to fertility decline, as families begin to invest less in numbers of children and more in their education (Caldwell, Reddy, and Caldwell 1986). Second, diversification in the rural context, including by marrying daughters into more distant, environmentally less risk-prone villages, and by building up joint families (Maclachlan 1983).

The last case is especially interesting and needs some elaboration. In a village of Karnataka state in South India, Maclachlan (1983) compared the severe drought of 1965 when no deaths occurred with that of 1976 when a large number died and asked: Why didn't they starve in the 1960s? His answer: agricultural intensification, which was made possible by deploying large amounts of family labor to dig open surface wells, tend the fields, and cultivate gardens.

The strategy included building up large joint families with a careful selection of brides (especially cross-cousins and first daughters) from poorer hardworking families, and a strong ideological emphasis on the joint family as the ideal and most productive family form, with the concept of *dharma* (duty) being used to order a certain gender and age division of labor and behavior.

Maclachlan found that joint families (defined as those with more than one male adult), relative to others, indeed had higher yields per acre and per capita; they were favored by landlords when seeking tenants, derived economies in the division of farm tasks, had higher savings, used equipment more intensively, and had the advantages of interactive decision-making and the advice of the elders. Again, households with more than one woman had distinct advantages in terms of diversification into livestock, dairy, and sericulture handled by women and saved time through work sharing in domestic tasks.

However, the typical family in South Asia today is no longer joint but nuclear, especially among the poor and low castes (Kolenda 1987; A. Chowdhury 1987). The question this raises is: Are there institutional arrangements that can re-create cooperative labor deployment networks or other advantages of extended families successfully *outside the context of the family*? (a point to which I will return). Also, would other institutional arrangements change the form and nature of intrafamily relations?

The Sequence of Asset Disposal

It has been noted that under extreme food-shortage situations, rural households first reduce current consumption and deplete inventories of food, and so on; then they sell nonproductive assets such as utensils and jewelry, protecting draft animals and (particularly) land to the last (Jodha 1978; Borkar and Nadkarni 1975). The sale of draft animals, and especially land, thus becomes a barometer of the degree of distress.

Holding onto productive assets to the last makes economic sense because it affects the household's long-term survival capacity. However, in the noted sequencing of asset sales, what appears to have passed without comment in the discussion is that the first casualties are typically assets owned and controlled by women, namely, utensils and jewelry (Jodha 1978; Borkar and Nadkarni 1975; Singh 1975; Greenough 1982; Currey 1978). The sale of jewelry is perhaps not surprising as it is a much more liquid asset than land, serves as a store of value for a crisis, and, unlike cattle, is less prone to price plummeting (Jodha 1978; Borkar and Nadkarni 1975). However, utensils and jewelry, and possibly small animals, are usually the *only* assets possessed by women, who rarely own land. Once these are disposed of, even if the household is able to protect its productive assets, women would be left with nothing to fall back on, leaving them especially vulnerable during a severe calamity such as famine, when families may themselves begin to fragment and disintegrate.

Indeed, as noted earlier, while seasonality reveals a face of the family that is essentially one of (unequal) cooperation, famine often reflects one of disintegration. We come then to the third major aspect of calamity response, namely, the break-up of families.

The Disintegrating Family

Famine poses in the most stark terms the economic and moral dilemmas relating to intrahousehold food sharing and mirrors intrafamily relations that few other contexts can.

For illustrative purposes consider the Bengal famine of 1943, which serves as an especially poignant case study in this respect. This famine was characterized by the virtual absence of government employment relief works and, as is now well accepted, it was a result of entitlement failure rather than of overall food shortages (Sen 1981). In occupational terms those most severely affected were agricultural laborers, paddy huskers, fisherfolk, and transport and craft workers. However, my focus here is on the relatively lesser examined *gender dimensions* of this

entitlement failure, which calls for a reinterpretation of some of the existing facts about the famine from a gender perspective.

A variety of evidence points to some of the specific disadvantages and deprivations suffered by women and children of poor households during this famine. First, estimates by Mahalanobis, Mokerjee, and Ghosh (1946) reveal a predominance of young and middle-aged females among those made destitute by famine in rural Bengal. In January 1943, 55 percent of all destitute and 66 percent of the destitute in the 15–50 age group were female. Women of this age group also constituted the largest number of *new* additions to the destitute between January 1943 and May 1944, the worst period of the famine, and were twice the number of new male destitutes of this age group.[32] Children of both sexes in the 5–15 age category were next largest in number.

Second, most of those who came to the government relief centers during the most intense months of the famine and were able to pay cash for food tended to be male adults. In contrast, most of those who were absolutely destitute and dependent entirely on gratis relief tended to be females (mostly adult): 84 percent of the female destitutes needed gratis aid at the relief centers compared to 43 percent of the male destitutes.[33]

Third, consider the famine mortality figures.[34] The general pattern appears to have been one of relative female advantage, in that for all ages taken together the excess mortality due to famine was greater for males than females (as measured both in terms of the absolute and proportionate increases in mortality rates attributable to the famine). However, this was not true of the 20–40 age grouping. For this age grouping, the estimated absolute number of famine deaths during the critical year of 1943, as well as the absolute increase in mortality rates, were higher for women than men. In fact, men of this age group showed the least excess mortality (in absolute terms) of all age groups of either sex. The greater mortality disadvantage in absolute terms suffered by women compared with the men in the 20–40 age grouping is particularly noteworthy, as this is despite the reduction in childbirth and childbearing-associated risk due to famine-induced reduction in birthrates. Also the majority of women in this age grouping would have been within marital relationships at that time, women who would normally be expected to have the support of husbands and families (on which more later).

Fourth, a survey of some 2,500 destitute living on the pavements of Calcutta in September 1943 found that 53 percent were females, and among the married destitute 64 percent were female. The pavement dwellers had earlier belonged to 820 families, of whom half had recently broken up, 70 percent as a result of husbands and wives separating. The women, on being asked why they had left the village for Calcutta, said that their husbands had been unable to maintain them and had either

deserted them or asked them to go elsewhere in search of food (Greenough 1982).

Fifth, there is a variety of anecdotal evidence of women being abandoned by husbands, including where the husband had migrated for work elsewhere or had decided to use the family's subsistence plot of land solely for himself; of women being forced into begging or prostitution; of parents selling children into bondage, especially girl children, even 2–13-year-olds, into prostitution, and so on (Greenough 1982). The evidence of familial disintegration and of the abandonment of women and children, while largely indirect (and from which the scale of it cannot be assessed) is a sufficient indication that this was not an isolated phenomenon but fairly widespread. (Accounts of several other famines in Asia and Africa also describe the abandonment of women and children, such as in Bangladesh in 1974 and Malawi in the 1970s.)[35]

What does this indicate about intrafamily relations? Paul Greenough (1982) argues that this disintegration of families in the 1943 Bengal famine did not occur randomly but was the result of a deliberate decision by the male head of household to exclude the less valued family members (women and children) from domestic subsistence, and further that this decision was in keeping with the powerful Bengali ideal of family continuity, equated with the continuity of the patriline through the adult male, whose survival thus counts over that of women and children. In other words, no contradiction is seen here between male self-interest and the culture-specific moral order.

I would like to suggest that an alternative way of viewing this process of female victimization would be in terms of shifts in the relative male/female entitlements and fall-back positions, and so in their relative bargaining strengths within the family, along the lines discussed in Section 1 of this chapter. The decision of the man to abandon his wife and children appears to occur at a point when the wife's entitlements have collapsed completely, while those of the husband are weakened but not entirely gone. For instance, first, it is a telling point that, during the worst months of the calamity, 57 percent of the men compared with only 16 percent of the women chief recipients of relief at the government relief centers were able to pay cash for food. Second, the least excess mortality (in absolute terms) occurred among men of 20–40 years of age. Third, one of the traditionally few fall-back occupations of women in Bengal—paddy husking—was not sustained. Paddy huskers ranked among the first four categories of those hardest hit. Fourth, there is the noted anecdotal evidence on the circumstances under which the women and children were abandoned.

On average, men's fall-back position appears to have been stronger than women's on at least two counts: one, their greater mobility and ability to migrate over longer distances for a job, without the burden of children or the fear of sexual exploitation that women faced; and two, the possibility of leftover assets after women's jewelry, and so on, had already been disposed of. Basically, therefore, during the Bengal famine, women of affected households would have been left with virtually no economic bargaining strength within the family ***at a much earlier stage*** in the process of famine impoverishment than the men.

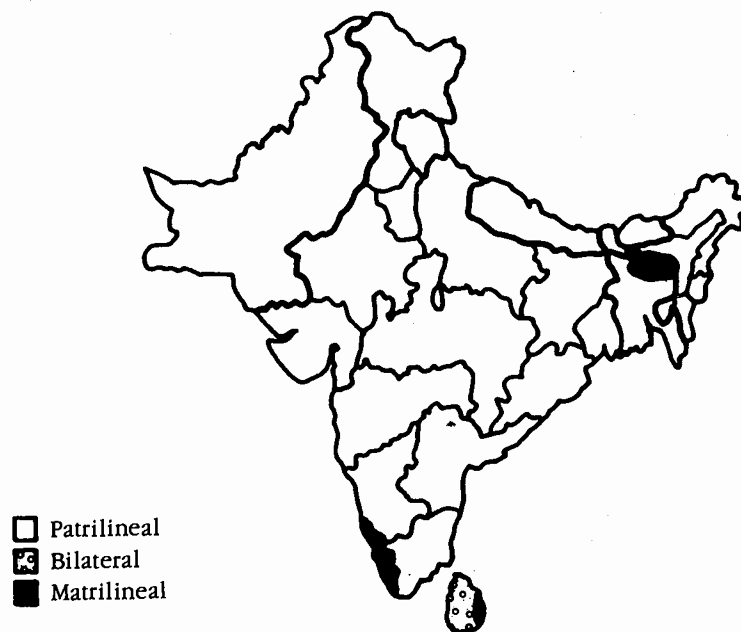
Within the bargaining view of the family, at this point noncooperation by the husband would make sense in the interest of his individual physical survival and do him no harm in terms of his social survival (he could marry again). If additionally he had an ideological justification that this was in keeping with the moral code it would merely have eased the decision.

Essentially, Greenough's view of the family comes close to what A. K. Sen (1983) has described as the "despotic" family, in which the male family head makes all decisions and others just obey (indeed, "acquiesce even as victims"), although Greenough sees the male head as essentially a benevolent despot, guided by moral considerations. What I am suggesting here is that the victimization process could be equally, indeed better, explained by the bargaining view of the family.

The point, however, is that what view we take of the family—the despotic one or the bargaining one—could point to different policy conclusions. Under the former, we could, for instance, make a case for strengthening the economic position of the benevolent male head of household to better support his wife and children (the passive recipients of his bounty or rejection). Under the latter view, where women are seen as active (if disadvantaged) agents in the arrangements of reciprocity within the family, we would make a case for strengthening their fall-back positions and bargaining power. The present analysis points to the importance of strengthening women's bargaining power to improve both intrahousehold gender allocations and the family's coping ability. The question then is: How can this be done?

To answer this, it is useful to recall the four factors emphasized at the beginning of the chapter as likely to affect a person's bargaining power within the family and his/her overall ability to fulfill subsistence needs. These were: ownership and control of assets, especially land; access to employment and other income-earning means; access to communal resources such as VCs and forests; and access to social, especially kin, support networks.

Map 8.1 Traditional Practices of Land Inheritance



I have sought below to map these factors (or proxies for them) as they vary regionally across South Asia.

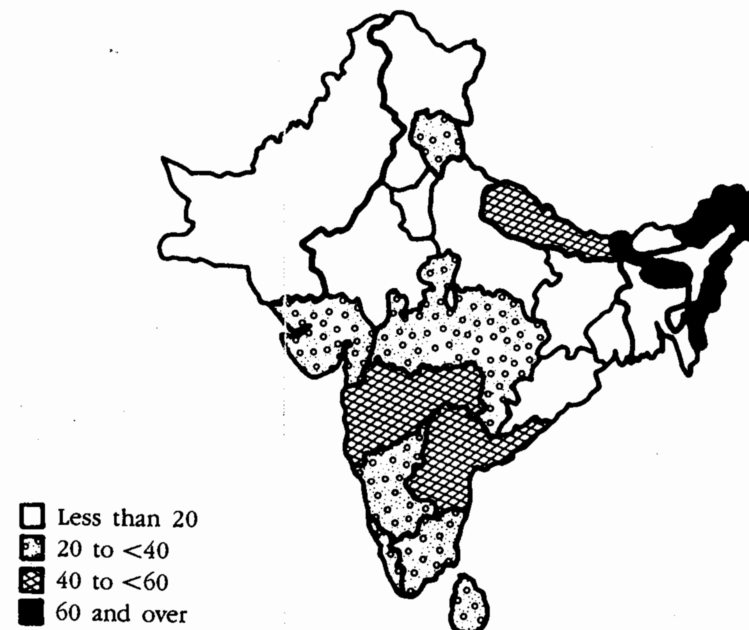
REGIONAL DIMENSIONS

Women's position in relation to these four factors varies strikingly both across regions within India and between countries across South Asia (see Maps 8.1 to 8.4).

Land Inheritance (Map 8.1)

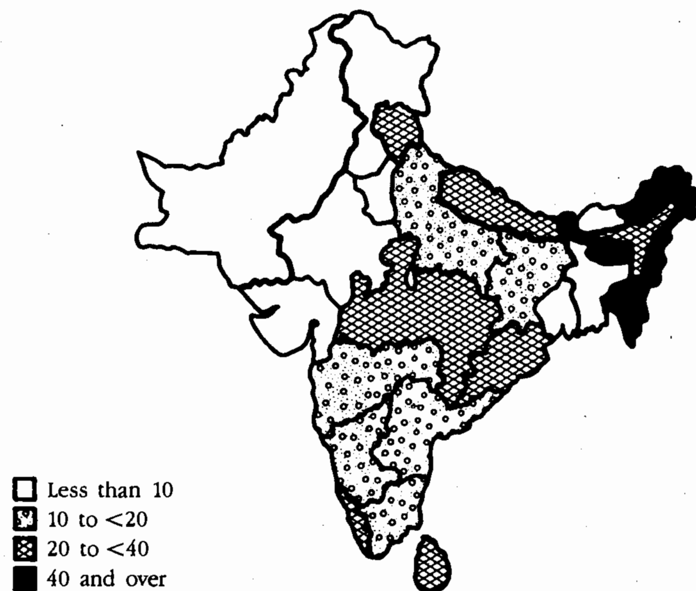
Traditionally the pattern of land inheritance in India (legally and in practice) was overwhelmingly patrilineal (inheritance through the male line). The exceptions were a few pockets of matriliny (only daughters inheriting) or of bilaterality (both daughters and sons inheriting) among some tribal and Hindu communities located in southwest and northeast India. Among Muslim communities scattered across India, and in Pakistan and Bangladesh, although women were legally entitled

Map 8.2 Female Labor-Force Participation Rates



to half their brothers' shares under Islamic law (and could therefore be termed weakly bilateral), in practice these rights were seldom realized. Sri Lanka, however, has always been strongly bilateral (by customary law *and* practice) among both the Buddhist Sinhalese and the Hindu Tamils, with Muslim Moors in the Eastern Province inheriting matrilineally (Agarwal 1990c). Today women have legal rights to inherit parental land among most communities and regions of South Asia. However, these largely remain rights on paper. In practice they are seldom realized for a complex set of reasons. These include the reluctance of male kin to voluntarily part with the land and their intimidation of women who seek to assert their claims;[36] patrilocal postmarital residence (especially in northern India, women generally move to a distant village on marriage, which makes it difficult for them both to claim their rights and to self-manage any land they may inherit); norms of seclusion, which constrain their mobility and ability to self-manage land, and so on. Hence they usually waive their claims (or are compelled to do so) in favor of brothers (Agarwal 1988 and forthcoming).

Map 8.3 Percent of Geo-Area Under Forests



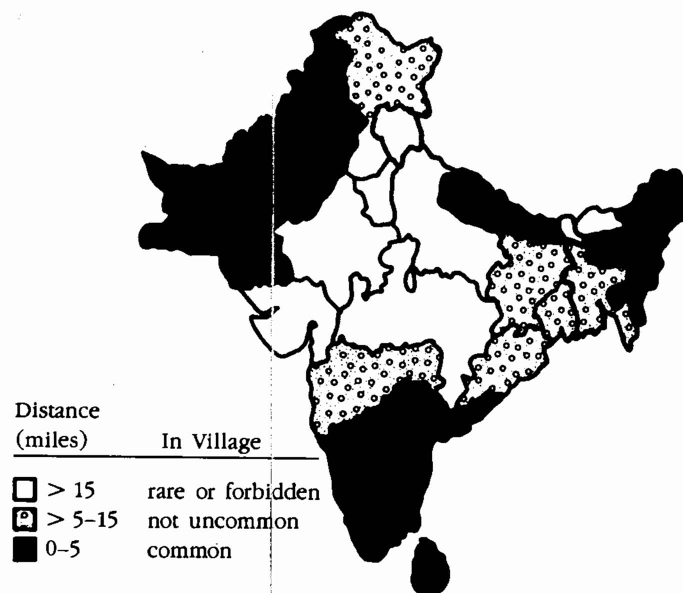
Income-Earning Means (Map 8.2)

Female labor-force participation rates (FLPRs) have been used here as a crude proxy for this—crude because these do not capture the intensity of work effort or actual earnings. However, in the absence of more direct cross-regional information on women earners, these are illustrative (Tables 8.4 and 8.5).[37] As seen in Map 8.2, FLPRs also reveal noteworthy variations across regions; the rates are significantly higher in the southern (South India and Sri Lanka) and northeastern parts of the subcontinent than in the northwest.

Access to Communal Resources (Map 8.3)

The percentage area under forests has been used as a proxy for this, in the absence of adequate information on the regional distribution of VCs. Again we note a regional pattern, with the northeast, south, and central regions being more favorably placed than the northwest (Tables 8.1 and 8.2).

Map 8.4 Distance (in miles) of Woman's Postmarital Residence from Her Natal Village



Source: Agarwal (forthcoming).

Access to Kin Support Systems (Map 8.4)

Postmarital residence could be used as a proxy for the degree to which women can draw upon kin support. Where women marry within or close to their natal villages, their ability to draw upon such support is greater than where they marry into distant villages. Women in northwest India are the most disadvantaged in this respect. The prevalence of close-kin marriages also strengthens the likelihood of kin support. In this respect too, in northern India, and especially in the northwest where close-kin marriages are typically forbidden, women are in a disadvantaged position (see also Agarwal 1988 and forthcoming).

The four factors mapped do not always overlap regionally, but the strength of some can compensate for the weakness of others, and vice versa. In particular, because communal resources and kin support systems are noted to be eroding, access to land and income-earning opportunities acquires particular importance.

Map 8.5 Sex Ratios: Number of Females per 100 Males

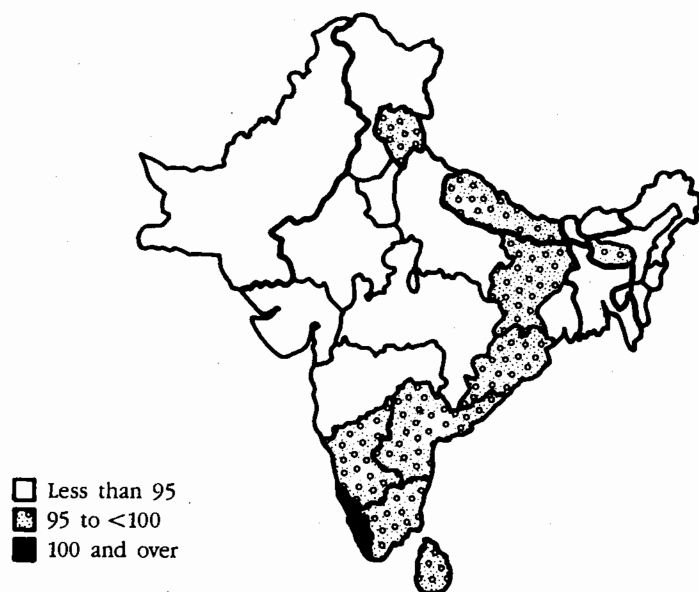


TABLE 8.4 Rural Female Labor-Force Participation Rates in South Asia (percentages)

Country	Age Group (in years)	Reference Year	Rates[a]
Bangladesh	10 and above	1981 census	4.2
India	15 and above	1981 census	24.4
Nepal	10 and above	1981 census	47.2
Pakistan	10 and above	1981 census	3.0
	10 and above	1985–86 LFS[b]	11.5
Sri Lanka	10 and above	1981 census	23.7

[a]Economically active population in a given age group as a percent of total population in that age group. For India the figures relate to "main workers" only.
[b]LFS = *Labour Force Survey 1985–86*. For Map 8.2 it was assumed that the figure would be somewhere between the census and the LFS figures.

Sources: Bangladesh 1988:97; India 1987:134–135; Nepal 1987:210; for Pakistan, see World Bank 1989a:28; Sri Lanka 1986:164.

TABLE 8.5 India: Rural Female Labor-Force Participation Rates (FLPRs) by State, 1981

State	FLPRs[a]	State	FLPRs[a]
Andhra Pradesh	46.6	Manipur	61.4
Arunachal Pradesh	67.7	Meghalaya	60.8
Assam	NA[b]	Mizoram	60.9
Bihar	15.3	Nagaland	72.3
Gujarat	20.2	Orissa	16.7
Haryana	7.6	Punjab	2.6
Himachal Pradesh	29.2	Rajasthan	16.1
Jammu and Kashmir	8.5	Sikkim	61.4
Karnataka	33.4	Tamil Nadu	39.8
Kerala	20.2	Tripura	14.2
Madhya Pradesh	39.7	Uttar Pradesh	9.4
Maharashtra	47.3	West Bengal	10.0
		All India	24.4

[a]Main workers only; 15 years and above.
[b]NA = not available.

Source: India 1987:134–195.

In very broad terms, at the intercountry level, these maps suggest that rural women would have a much greater bargaining strength in Sri Lanka, on all four counts, than elsewhere in South Asia. Within countries, say in India, the bargaining strength of women in Kerala, and more generally of women in the south and northeast, would be higher than in the northwest. The implications of these interregional differences in women's bargaining strength, on intrafamily resource sharing for subsistence, need more probing than possible in this chapter. But that such implications are likely to exist is suggested by the emerging empirical evidence quoted earlier in Note 4. It is also suggested, although in very broad terms, by a comparison of Map 8.5 (which regionally maps sex ratios: females/100 males)[38] with Maps 8.1 to 8.4. As seen from Map 8.5 (and Table 8.6), northwest India, which performs poorly in terms of women's bargaining strength by all the indicators, also has among the most female-adverse sex ratios.[39] And sex ratios are only an extreme indicator of intrafamily gender differentials in the distribution of subsistence resources (especially for food and health care); such inequalities need not necessarily manifest themselves in higher female to male mortality.

In the context of the present discussion on food crises situations, it is important to recognize, of course, that the possibility of drought and famine itself varies across regions. Hence, to draw broad inferences about the regions where food security interventions, to reduce gender vulnerabilities, may be *most* acutely needed, we would require, among other

TABLE 8.6 Sex Ratios (Females/100 Males) in South Asia

Country	*Sex Ratio*[a] *(1985)*
Bangladesh	94
India	93
Nepal	95
Pakistan	91
Sri Lanka	98

India, by State, 1981

State	*Sex Ratio*	*State*	*Sex Ratio*
Andhra Pradesh	9	Manipur	97
Arunachal Pradesh	86	Meghalaya	95
Assam	NA[b]	Mizoram	92
Bihar	95	Nagaland	86
Gujarat	94	Orissa	98
Haryana	87	Punjab	88
Himachal Pradesh	97	Rajasthan	92
Jammu and Kashmir	89	Sikkim	83
Karnataka	96	Tamil Nadu	98
Kerala	103	Tripura	95
Madhya Pradesh	94	Uttar Pradesh	88
Maharashtra	94	West Bengal	91

[a]Sex ratios relate to total population. Province-wise computation of sex ratios for Pakistan showed very little variation between provinces.
[b]NA = not available.

Sources: World Bank 1989b; India 1987.

things, a regional mapping of poor women's relative bargaining strength laid over a mapping of environmentally high-risk areas. That is clearly the task for a separate paper.

In any case, even though such a cross-mapping of environmental risk and gender vulnerability would clearly be useful for fine-tuning policy, the broad directions of such a policy remain unambiguous because irrespective of the relative regional position of women vis-à-vis one another, *in all regions* women of poor households are more vulnerable to destitution than the men of those households. This, then, brings us to the final question: What can be done to improve the situation?

ON POLICY AND EXTERNAL INTERVENTIONS

Given the range and complexity of factors that impinge on female food security within the family, not all are conducive to change via outside intervention. Cultural practices defining the gender division of labor within and outside the home, female seclusion, and patrilocal

residence, all of which impinge on women's independent access to subsistence income, are likely to be particularly resistant. However, it is possible to act on women's economic circumstances to some extent by a better enforcement of their legal property rights, the expansion of their income-earning opportunities, and a strengthening of their communal control over the village commons and forest land. Such economic change could, in turn, induce changes in some of the cultural parameters over time. The question then is: What should be the forms and agencies for such interventions?

In much of the existing discussion on seasonality and calamity there is a strong emphasis on direct State intervention, especially in the form of public works, and relatively little on interventionist forms that do not depend directly on the State.

State success in preventing the 1970–1973 drought in Maharashtra (India) from escalating into large-scale famine and in significantly containing productive-asset depletion, nutritional distress, and excess mortality through guaranteed employment on a large scale via public works appears to have been particularly influential in pointing policy in this direction (Dreze 1988). The Maharashtra example is also significant in that up to half the labor force in the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) has been female (Dandekar 1983). By providing women with direct (and not male-mediated) entitlements in the form of guaranteed employment, protection was given both to poor households and to the more vulnerable persons within those households.

In the present discussion, however, several factors caution against depending on the State alone for providing food security in contingencies. First, the State has a poor record of dealing with food deprivation situations less acute than famine, although it has been fairly effective in dealing with threats of large-scale famine, especially in India since independence. (Indeed, in situations verging on famine there may be few alternatives to government public works.)

Second, there are contradictions in State policies themselves. For instance, those relating to VCs and forests are noted to have systematically *weakened* the ability of the poor, and especially of women, to themselves cope with food crisis situations.

Third, the degree to which the State responds to the demands of the vulnerable sections depends not the least on the degree to which these sections can make their demands heard. The critical issue here is not only of being *entitled,* but of being able to enforce these entitlements effectively, through *empowerment.*

The term "empowerment" has been used variously in recent years by social action groups in South Asia, and in the present context may be defined as the ability of an individual or group to successfully challenge

existing economic and political power relations and so ensure that decisions relating to entitlement are made in its favor (be it within the family, or of the family vis-à-vis the community or the State).

In South Asia, group organizing has been one of the significant means of empowering the vulnerable sections—the poor, the low caste, the women—not only to better enforce their legal entitlements within the community and family, but also to expand the scope of these through agitating for changes in the laws themselves.[40] Group approaches have been effective also in the provision of credit to the rural poor. Credit, in fact, is a good example because, as noted, it plays an important role in a family's coping mechanisms and has received considerable emphasis in State policies for poverty alleviation. Typically, however, government policies, pitched at the individual, have had little success in reaching the poorest.

In contrast are initiatives such as the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. This was launched as an experiment by an individual in 1976 and, after its proven success, institutionalized by the Bangladesh government in 1983 as a specialized credit agency for the rural poor. Today it has 250 branches spread across five districts and a membership of 200,000 in 3,700 villages (Siddiqui 1984; Chandler 1986; Hossain 1988). Among its noteworthy features are:

- The *class homogeneous* nature of its clientele—it caters exclusively to the landless and near-landless (that is, those owning less than 0.5 acres)
- Its *group approach* to loan disbursement—borrowers form groups of five, and although loans are given to individuals there is implicit group pressure and responsibility for repayment
- Lending *without collateral*
- A special focus on loans for *women* (women borrowers form separate groups from male borrowers)
- *Convenience of repayment*—this is collected weekly by a bank worker from the village itself; this especially helps women, who have limited mobility because of the strictness of female seclusion in Bangladesh and because of women's primary responsibility for child care
- Various *social security* schemes

By all evaluations, the Grameen Bank reaches the target group (92 percent of the borrowers are landless or near-landless) and has more than a 97-percent recovery rate; it has substantially improved the incomes of the borrowers, particularly of women, who constitute 70 percent of the members. It has also improved the family's bargaining power vis-à-

vis landlords and employers, and of women vis-à-vis men within the family, by strengthening their fall-back positions. Women say they are now treated with greater consideration at home (Hossain 1984, 1988; Siddiqui 1984; Rahman 1986; Rahaman 1986; Ahmed 1985; Chandler 1986).

The Self-Employed Women's Association in western India and the Working Women's Forum in south India, catering entirely to poor women, are additional examples of initiatives (Sebstad 1982; Noponen 1987; Kalpagam 1987).

All of these are also potentially effective substitutes for the declining traditional arrangements based on feudal patronage and exploitation. And where joint ventures are undertaken, these offer the potential advantages and economies of labor deployment and teamwork that joint families are noted to have in the Maclachlan example. We clearly need a more detailed review and evaluation of such initiatives from the point of view of social security for the poor and a comparison with existing State attempts at providing similar services.

Underlying such ventures is a recognition that the effective implementation of existing State laws, programs, and even relief measures can be contingent on group initiative and pressure from below. And they have an explicit thrust toward building group solidarity among those who are more homogeneous economically and often also socially (by caste, gender).[41]

Finally, whether interventions take the form of government programs and/or of nongovernmental group initiatives, the most general policy principle that emerges from our examination of coping mechanisms among poor rural families is the need for measures that would strengthen women's bargaining position within the household. This is likely to decrease intrafamily gender bias in subsistence resource allocations as well as strengthen the ability of the whole family to cope with calamity.

NOTES

This chapter was presented in the PEW/Cornell lecture series on Food and Nutrition Policy, Cornell University, November 13, 1990. It draws especially upon two earlier articles: "Social Security and the Family: Coping with Seasonality and Calamity in Rural India," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* (U.K.), April 1990; "Who Sows? Who Reaps? Women and Land Rights in India," *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, July 1988; and upon my ongoing work on a book on *Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*. I am grateful to Nancy Folbre, Janet Seiz, and Gail Hershatter for some useful suggestions on this version.

1. In India the term "state" relates to administrative divisions within the country and is not to be confused with "State" used in the chapter in the political economy sense of the word.

2. For an interesting discussion on some of the problems associated with a unitary conceptualization of the household, see Guyer and Peters (1987) and Hart (1990).

3. A. K. Sen (1981), in his entitlement approach to famine, highlights two factors as significant in determining a person's (or a family's) ability to command goods (including food) and services: his/her endowments (ownership of land, labor, etc.) and exchange entitlement mapping (that is, the exchange possibilities that exist through production and trade and that determine the consumption set available to a person with a given endowment). These would be covered broadly by the first two factors listed here. However, the approach can usefully be extended to cover two types of entitlements that neither fall within the purview of ownership nor are specifically exchange entitlements, namely, those stemming from traditional rights in communal resources and external social support systems. The last concerns relationships between social groups or persons in which considerations other than the solely economic take precedence. These typically relate to nonmarket exchanges such as relatives providing informal credit without interest during a drought.

4. Relative bargaining power is revealed, among other things, in who participates in decisionmaking in relation to what as well as whose interests prevail in the decisions finally made. Hence, in South Asia, communities in which women participate in decisionmaking relating to, say, agricultural production, may be said to have greater bargaining strength than those who are excluded from such decisionmaking altogether. But relative bargaining strength is also revealed in terms of final outcomes: for instance, in terms of intrafamily distribution of goods, services, and tasks as well as the nature of treatment received. These outcomes may or may not be the result of an explicit, *observable* process of discussion and negotiation. Nonetheless, they could be seen to result implicitly from relative bargaining strengths.

Empirically, although much more research is needed on this question, several recent studies indicate a positive correlation between women's access to independent income and their intrafamily bargaining power. See examples in Acharya and Bennett (1982) for Nepal, Bhatty (1980) for India, Islam (1981) for Bangladesh, and Roldán (1988) for Mexico.

5. On how discourses about women's needs tend to be structured by the power relations between women and men, see Fraser (1989).

6. For instance, Bourdieu (1977:164–165) notes: "As we have seen in the case of domestic conflicts to which marriages often give rise, social categories disadvantaged by the symbolic order, such as women and the young, cannot but recognize the legitimacy of the dominant classification in the very fact that their only chance of neutralizing those of its effects most contrary to their own interests lies in submitting to them in order to make use of them. . . ."

7. For India, see discussions in Agarwal (1986a), K. Bardhan (1977, 1985), Duvvury (1989), and Ryan and Wallace (1985); for Bangladesh, see Islam (1981).

8. See, for example, Agarwal 1984; J. Harriss 1977; and Ryan and Ghodake 1980, quoted in Lipton 1983.

9. On relative male-female workloads see Agarwal (1985a), Dasgupta and Maiti (1987), Acharya and Bennett (1981), and Nag, White, and Peet (1977). On gender biases in the intrafamily distribution of food and health care, see Agarwal (1986a), B. Harriss (1986), Dreze and Sen (1990), Kynch and Sen (1983), Sen and Sengupta (1983), Behrman (1986), Rosenzweig and Schultz (1982), and Chen, Huq, and D'Sousa (1981).

10. See, for example, Caldwell, Reddy, and Caldwell 1986; M. Chen 1988; Jodha 1979; Majumdar 1978; Hossain 1987; K. Bardhan 1977.

11. See Gulati (1978), Kumar (1978), Mencher and Saradamoni (1982), Mencher (1987), and Dasgupta and Maiti (1987). Other microstudies that have examined male and female expenditure patterns within poor households that have earners of both sexes also find that, typically, female earnings are spent on the family's basic needs of food, fuel, and so on, but a not insignificant percent of males earnings goes towards tobacco and liquor (see Gulati 1978; Sharma 1980; Mencher and Saradamoni 1982; and Mies 1983).

12. See, for example, Mitra 1985, Banerjee 1988, George 1988, and Acharya and Bennett 1981.

13. See, for example, K. Bardhan 1977, Banerjee 1988, and Breman 1979, 1985.

14. See, for example, R. Desai 1982, Jetly 1987, and Naveed-I-Rahat 1980.

15. In India, nontimber forest produce is estimated to account for 14–38 percent (varying by region) of total tribal income in Madhya Pradesh, 10–55 percent in Andhra Pradesh, and 35 percent in parts of Gujarat (India 1982). Roughly 30 million people in the country are estimated to depend on nontimber forest produce for a livelihood (Kulkarni 1983).

16. See Agarwal (1987) for a discussion and figures on the percentage of domestic energy that comes from fuelwood in various parts of South Asia.

17. See Burling (1963) on the Garos of the northeast; also my personal observation during fieldwork in Meghalaya state (northeast India).

18. The prevalence of "territorial purdah"—the effective segregation of village space by gender, whereby there are clearly identifiable spaces that essentially constitute male spaces, such as the marketplace, that women are expected to avoid—strongly disadvantages women in their search for employment and in managing land independently. Of course, seniority, age, whether she is a daughter or daughter-in-law, her class/caste all affect a woman's freedom of movement; hence, older women with grown-up sons, village daughters, and women of poor and low-caste families enjoy greater liberty. But even for them, spaces of predominantly male presence are to be avoided. These restrictions are apparent in northern India and are especially great in countries such as Bangladesh and Pakistan. For a more detailed discussion on India, see especially Afshar and Agarwal (1989) and Sharma (1980); for Bangladesh, see Ellickson (1972) and Arens and Van Beurden (1977); and for Pakistan, see Shaheed (1989).

19. For a detailed discussion on the causes of deforestation in the subcontinent, and especially in India, see Agarwal (1986b, 1991).

20. For a discussion on the erosion of patron-client relationships, see Breman (1985), M. Dasgupta (1987), and Commander (1983). For declining support from kin, see Fernandes and Menon (1987) and Dreze (1990) for India; and Cain, Khanam, and Nahar (1979) and Jansen (1986) for Bangladesh.

21. For a case study of the effects and causes of the shifts from swidden to settled farming among the Garo tribe in northeast India, see Agarwal (1990b).

22. For a graphic and poignant description of the adverse effects (especially on women) of growing impoverishment and associated erosion of intracommunity support among the tribal groups in Orissa, see Fernandes and Menon (1987).

23. See A. K. Sen (1981), Kynch and Maguire (1988), and Behrman (1986). Behrman, on the basis of an econometric exercise using data on child nutrition for South India, concludes that "parents display male preference, at least during the lean season, particularly in lower caste households" and that "the nutritionally most vulnerable—especially females—may be at considerable risk when food is scarcest."

24. See Rajgopalan, Kymal, and Pei (1981), Ryan et al. (1984), Brown, Black, and Becker (1982). For a more detailed discussion and evidence on the relationship between food intakes, body weights, and seasonality, also see Agarwal (1990a).

25. Chen 1987 and Reddy 1988.

26. Help from a woman's natal kin (where they are in a position to help) can be critical during such periods. See Caldwell, Reddy, and Caldwell (1986) or Prindle (1979) for Nepal.

27. See, for example, Borkar and Nadkarni 1975; Caldwell, Reddy, and Caldwell 1986; Singh 1975; and Jodha 1978.

28. See Lewis 1958; Reddy 1988; Jodha 1978; Caldwell, Reddy, and Caldwell 1986; Rao 1974; Borkar and Nadkarni 1975; Singh 1975; Epstein 1967; and Greenough 1982.

29. See Caldwell, Reddy, and Caldwell 1986; Reddy 1988; Jodha 1975, 1978; Currey 1978; Rangaswami 1985; Chowdhury and Bapat 1975; Desai, Singh, and Sah 1979; and Gangrade and Dhadda 1973; Maclachlan 1983; and Greenough 1982.

30. See Caldwell, Reddy, and Caldwell (1986); also see Campbell and Trechter (1982), who explicitly examined differences in gender responses to varying degrees of food shortages in North Cameroon. They found that under severe food shortages, while women's actions commonly included going hungry for the whole day, men's more typically included migration.

31. See Mahalanobis, Mokerjee, and Ghosh (1946); Jodha (1975, 1978); Singh (1975); Borkar and Nadkarni (1975); Greenough (1982); and Currey (1978). The types of assets sold, however, depend on the severity of the crisis, as discussed further on in the text.

32. For a disaggregation by occupation and gender, see Chattopadhyay and Mukerjee (1946).

33. This is taken from Greenough's (1982) construction, based on the Bengal Famine Committee's records of the social profile of those who came to the State relief centers.

34. See the figures in Greenough (1982:311) and also Agarwal's (1990a) calculations.

35. See, for example, Alamgir (1980:135) on the Bangladesh famine of 1974. He notes: "Besides, there were many cases of desertion. In Rangpur, special homes for deserted children were set up. In Dacca, there were many women who were deserted by their husbands among the inmates of vagrant homes." Likewise, Vaughan (1987:123) observes in her reconstruction of the 1949 famine in Malawi: "Women stress how frequently they were abandoned by men, how harrowing it was to be left responsible for their suffering and dying children."

36. Forms of intimidation include threats by brothers to break off all links with sisters who asserts their rights as well as direct violence (the last occurs especially where the interests of male relatives other than brothers are involved).

37. Typically, FLPRs based on data collected through national censuses underestimate women's productive contribution in the household, especially in South Asia (Agarwal 1985b; Sen and Sen 1985). This is due to several reasons, including the perception in most parts of South Asia that because much of women's productive work is unwaged (being done on the family farm) it is part of domestic work, a perception sometimes shared by the women themselves. This is compounded by cultural biases where women's involvement in work outside the home is seen as lowering family prestige, and by definitional biases that tend to explicitly or implicitly associate working with doing paid work. Hence, much of the productive work that women do is not reported as work by the male respondents, and often not even when the respondents are women.

However, our concern here is with capturing that component of a woman's work that brings her some income, since it is her access to earnings rather than her doing productive work *per se* (especially if that is not *perceived* as such) that is likely to impinge on women's bargaining strength in the family (on this also see A. K. Sen 1990). For this purpose the figures provided by national censuses are, in fact, quite useful because this is the very component of women's work they are most likely to capture. In Map 8.2 therefore I have used the FLPR figures provided by the censuses of the different countries. For Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka the figures relate to female workers aged 10 and above as a percent of female population of the same age group. For India, the figures relate to female ("main") workers aged 15 and over as a percent of female population of that age group because data for female workers between ages 10–15 were not available. All figures relate to censuses undertaken in 1981.

38. In the absence of high-quality mortality statistics, sex ratios serve as a proxy for sex differential mortality. *Juvenile* sex ratios (that is, sex ratios of children under 10) are sometimes used for more refined cross-regional analysis. This is especially to reduce the possibility of biases attributable to sex-selective interstate migration. However, my purpose here is merely to illustrate the point in very broad terms. For a discussion based on interregional variations in juvenile sex ratios, see especially Miller (1981, 1983) and P. Bardhan (1982).

39. There is now a growing literature on factors underlying female-adverse sex ratios: see especially Miller (1981), P. Bardhan (1982), and A. K. Sen (1983, 1990). Sen and Miller both place a great deal of emphasis on FLPRs in this

regard. Miller's work suggests a close positive correlation between sex ratios and FLPRs across regions. The incidence of dowry is another factor she finds is linked (negatively) to sex ratios. However, for a cross-South Asia mapping, dowry incidence per se is less helpful because in Sri Lanka, among communities such as the Jaffna Tamils and the Muslim Moors, dowry has traditionally served to transfer inheritance (including land) to the daughter, has been typically in her control, and has not had the coercive aspect that characterizes the practice in northwest India. Here, the dowry has no apparent link with inheritance, is never in the form of land, usually passes from the bride's family to the groom and his family, with the woman herself exercising little control over it, and often (implicitly or explicitly) the marriage is made conditional on the dowry settlement. The giving of dowry in these conditions places a considerable burden on parents and would sharpen tendencies toward female child neglect. Also in northwest India, dowry (being outside her control) would not add to a woman's assets and so to her bargaining strength, but in Sri Lanka (and even in parts of South India) it usually would.

However, in my view, to understand regional differentials in sex ratios across South Asia, it does appear important to examine not only FLPRs but also other independent means of subsistence available to women, including those considered in this chapter, such as the ownership of land, access to communal resources, and access to social support systems.

In any case, female-adverse sex ratios may be one and by no means a necessary manifestation of intrafamily inequalities in subsistence distribution.

40. See especially Dhagamvar (1987) and various issues of *The Lawyer's Collective* (Bombay).

41. Social and economic homogeneity is typically found to be important in ensuring the successful functioning of such initiatives. See Dixon (1979), PIDT (1982), and particularly Wade (1987), whose examples of successful collective action by villagers for regulating the use of common property resources are of special interest in the present context. In addition, gender homogeneity becomes important, especially but not only in contexts where female seclusion norms are strong, to ensure that women speak out in group meetings without feeling intimidated.

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9

Women's Paid & Unpaid Work in Times of Economic Crisis

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The complex concepts of women's work, household strategies, and economic crisis have been subject to a great deal of debate and often confusion. For purposes of this chapter, I will deal with women's work as the work of wives and/or mothers, paid and unpaid, in the formal as well as in the informal economy, as part of household strategies in situations of economic stress in Italy. My focus will be on the different degrees of choice, or on the variety of alternatives, open to individuals, particularly adult women with family responsibilities in one of the world's ten most industrialized countries. I will also focus on households on the basis of individual history, life cycle stage, local labor-market options, and access to social security provisions. Therefore, I will try to analyze how various mixes of resources and constraints give rise to specific crises and how they not only open the way to differing strategies, but also reveal different degrees of ability to direct one's own life.

In order to do this I will sketch various circumstances in contemporary Italy that create economic pressure on households. On the basis of available data, I will indicate which strategies are open to households in different situations, and when, in particular, and with which kind of work, wives' and mothers' contributions are called for, expected, offered, or possible. To illustrate, I will present a case study dealing with the experience of a structural economic crisis in an area relatively well protected by social security measures. This will allow me to briefly conclude with an analysis of how social policy measures, together with more general social-service provisions, might influence both the way in which households face an experience of economic stress and the way in