Gender, land and resource rights in India

Nitya Rao

Growing inequalities: gender, land and agriculture in India today

India is rapidly emerging as one of the global leaders in terms of economic growth. Recent analyses of growth in India, however, reveal that in terms of its sectoral composition, agriculture’s contribution has steadily declined from close to 26% of GDP in 1996 to about 16.7% in 2005, industry’s contribution has hovered at around 25%, with services increasing to over 50% (Chandrasekhar and Ghosh 2007). Herein lies a major contradiction: 70% of the population continues to live in rural areas, and those dependent on agriculture for making a living have only marginally declined from 61 to 57% over this period. Low agricultural growth rates of a little over 2% per annum over the tenth Five-Year Plan period (2002-7), compared to overall growth rates of over 7.5%, have not led to a process of “de-agrarianisation” or a shift away from agrarian modes of livelihood (Bryceson 1997), but rather have contributed to deepening social inequalities, in terms of rural-urban inequalities, as well as inequalities based on caste, ethnicity and gender. Men who have a social responsibility for household provisioning, in generally marginalised rural areas that offer few opportunities, are unable


to make ends meet locally and move out of agriculture, often migrating to
distant locations in search of alternate employment. Women, as also the
Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), are increasingly confined
to agriculture, and excluded from engagement with the high growth sec-
tors (Rao et al. 2008).

Such feminisation however does not imply an increase in the number
of women workers *per se*, nor in their ownership and control over land.
Rather, feminisation here refers to the rise in the proportion of female
agricultural workers in the female workforce, and a rise in the share of
female to male agricultural workers (Duvvury 1989). Between 83 and 85% of
all rural female workers are currently engaged in agriculture (National
Sample Survey Organisation), when such work is available. Micro-studies
reveal that combine harvesters and other technological developments
have in fact reduced the total availability of work in agriculture in irrigated
areas (Ramachandran et al. 2002; Kapadia 1995). At the same time, the
neglect of irrigation and agricultural support over the last two decades
has led to stagnation in agricultural production in the dryland areas. Dis-
trict Gazetteers, such as of the Santal Parganas in Jharkhand, point to a
decline from annual triple cropping to a single crop over the last century
(Roy Chaudhury 1965). The implication is that while women continue to
cultivate, agriculture is not sufficient to ensure their survival. They have
had to engage also with low paid, informal employment, particularly in the
absence of regular remittances from their men, intensifying their work
burdens for nominal incremental returns (Kapadia 2000).

One of the key pathways mediating the growth impact on gender
equality is asset control; women’s absence of assets contributes to their
exclusion from high-growth sectors, but also to persistent inequalities and
enhanced vulnerabilities (Deere and Doss 2006). The Approach Paper to
the 11th Five Year Plan highlights some of these concerns, drawing attention
to both the rural-urban divide and the gender divide as critical barri-
ers to growth (Government of India 2006, 3). While there is recognition of

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2 For the SCs, much of this is likely to be agricultural wage work as they are
either landless or marginal land-holders. The STs do own land and a large num-
ber of them are cultivators, yet due to poor quality of land, their own poverty
and lack of public investment, they also join the agricultural labour force. Upper
and middle caste women continue to report agricultural work, but with male
out-migration, this is likely to have shifted from an involvement in supportive
activities and post-harvest work to working directly in the fields.
the need to deal with equity issues, and some policy documents do recog-
nise women as farmers, the solutions however are not seen in terms of
refocusing growth priorities, including investing in areas where women are
concentrated such as agriculture, nor strengthening their entitlements to
land and other productive resources (including the quality of their labour).
Rather, these are conceptualised in terms of using some of the returns
from growth for programmes of social protection and targeted support to
those unable to avail of the new opportunities being created in the high
growth sectors³. “Gender balancing” to take care of the needs of women
is then to be achieved through special programmes that deal with
anaemia, maternal mortality, pregnant and lactating women, etc. (Hirway
2006), all reinforcing women’s primary role as mothers. They fail to note
that women face ideological and material constraints to freely participat-
ing in production and markets. It is these dimensions that need to be
urgently addressed.

In this paper, I seek to update my own earlier work on gendered pat-
terns of resource building, particularly in relation to land, and its impact
on women’s status, as well as their achievements in furthering their eco-
nomic agency and productivity (Rao 2005a; Rao 2008). I examine the three
“problematics” of the agrarian question, namely, production, accumulation
(and the recognition of the contribution of agriculture to this process)
and politics (collective action) (Mooij 2000) from a gender perspective.
After a brief look at the existing policy context, I use empirical data from
two sites in India – Varanasi district in Uttar Pradesh and Dumka district
in Jharkhand – to explore the implications of the feminisation of agricul-
ture on production and accumulation. What is the nature of gendered
labour contributions to the household and how far are these recognised
as contributing to household food security, and indeed the accumulation
of resources? Does this allow or constrain women from participating in
and influencing household decision-making on the one hand, or engaging
with collective action to influence state policies on the other, both crucial
to the attainment of gender equity more generally?

³ The 2008 World Development Report entitled “Agriculture for Development”
blames the neglect and underinvestment in agriculture and the rural sectors
over the past twenty years for the persistence of poverty in much of the devel-
oping world, as well as growing political tensions in “transforming” countries
such as India. Yet solutions are more in the nature of enhanced aid and social
protection (World Bank 2007).
Methodology

In writing this paper, I first started by searching databases such as Googlescholar, JSTOR, ScienceDirect and Web of Science for latest research on the theme of gender and land using a combination of keywords. Despite its growing visibility in policy agendas during the last five years, surprisingly little published research was available on this theme in the case of India. I have therefore largely relied on primary data collected as part of my own current and ongoing field research in the states of Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh, being undertaken as part of other research projects. The section on collective action additionally draws on discussions and personal communication with NGO activists, particularly in the state of Gujarat.

In the case of Jharkhand, I have drawn on long-term, qualitative field work in two villages of Dumka and one village of Sahebganj district, Santal Parganas division (1995-2008), on the themes of land, livelihoods, migration and education amongst the indigenous Santals. While a numerically and politically strong group in the new state of Jharkhand, the Santals remain marginalised in relation to most development indicators; literacy levels are low and nutritional status poor. The Santal Pargana Tenancy Act of 1949 has, however, prevented land alienation and ensured that all households own some land. Agriculture is the main occupation, yet being largely rain-fed, with few inputs and low productivity, provides food for barely four to six months of the year. Rice, maize and mustard are the major crops grown, all largely used for consumption. Women are equally engaged in farming operations with men, but due to the prevalence of patrilineal inheritance practices, they are not entitled to inherit land, except for maintenance during their life time, once they are widowed, and in special circumstances, as daughters. In order to make a living, diversifi-

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4 Sundaram and Tendulkar (2003) note that head count poverty amongst the Scheduled Tribes at 48% is much higher than that for the general rural population at 29% in 2000. Rao (2008) also finds literacy rates amongst the STs to be far below that of the general population for India (47 versus 65%), as well as for Jharkhand (41 versus 54%) and Dumka (36 versus 55.5%) in 2001.

5 In the absence of a son, women can get married under the gharjawa system, wherein the husband foregoes his land claims and moves to the wife’s home, and thus inherit land (Rao 2008). Most of the registered title-holders here are indeed gharjawaes, as widows usually have use rights, but no titles.
cation of activity and income sources has become essential. A majority of women seasonally migrate to work in the rice-fields in the neighbouring state of West Bengal, while also engaging with the collection and sale of forest produce in the local markets, while men either stay at home or then undertake longer-term migration further afield (Rao 2008). Though there is some class differentiation, the Santals are relatively homogenous, all primarily small and marginal cultivators, continuing to be exploited by Hindu and Muslim settlers, traders and moneylenders, who control institutions of the state and the markets. In fact, resistance to such “internal colonialism” and an assertion of their collective identity as indigenous people, with a right to control their land, water and forest resources, provided the rationale for the formation of a separate state of Jharkhand in 2000 (carved out of Bihar) (Roy 2003).

Fieldwork in Uttar Pradesh was conducted as part of an ongoing, collaborative ESRC-DFID funded research project on intra-household allocations in 2009-10\(^6\). Here I have drawn on a combination of the household survey of 400 couples in rural Varanasi, spread over a cluster of five villages, as well as in-depth interviews with 40 couples, alongside focus group discussions and key informant interviews. Men and women were interviewed separately so as to gauge their perceptions about the contributions of both themselves and their spouses to the household, as well as their role and influence in household provisioning and decision-making.

While rural Varanasi is still largely dependent on agriculture, cropping patterns reveal a shift towards the production of cash-earning crops such as vegetables, fruits and flowers to meet the tourist and religious demand in Varanasi town. One would assume that this would be sufficient for maintaining livelihoods, given the year-round vibrancy and tourist traffic in Varanasi. Yet this is not the case due to gross inequality in land distribution of land: most of the Scheduled Castes are landless (75%); the middle castes, or OBCs as they are called, are largely marginal or small farmers, but increasingly landless (47%); and only the upper castes own substantial amounts of land (see Table 1). It is worth mentioning that only six women surveyed had land titles in their names, these were equally OBC and upper caste women, and the titles were a way of escaping land ceiling

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legislation by their husband, rather than land inherited from their parents. These women are hardly involved with agricultural work, they observe purdah (seclusion) and are largely confined to domestic duties.

Growing landlessness has meant that a large number of the land-poor, middle caste men are migrant, working in the power-loom and textile sectors. Their wives and other women in the household manage the land, and have additionally taken on low-paid, piece-rate work, to ensure petty cash for everyday expenses. Yet these women are constrained not just by the lack of resource access and control, but also by social taboos on their movement and rigid patriarchal norms guiding what is considered as appropriate behaviour. It is worth noting that Varanasi has historically been renowned for its handloom, and in particular its silk weaving industry; yet with a decline in the industry from 2003-4, many looms have gone dormant. The landless SCs in particular, who were involved in this activity, have had to move to either agricultural labour or casual work such as rickshaw pulling (Ciotti 2010), becoming more food insecure in the process. Though the locality is far from marginal, in contrast to the Santal villages, here too several poor households, mainly SCs, reported having to go to bed hungry several days a week.

Resource rights, law, public policy and social norms in India

The fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution of India grant equal rights to all persons irrespective of religion, caste, sex, race, etc. Yet landed property is largely governed by personal inheritance laws that vary by religion, most of which contain some discriminatory provisions in relation to women. The Hindu Succession Act (HSA) of 1956, which covers about 80% of the Indian people, was amended only in 2005 to remove gender discriminatory provisions, now providing a daughter and son equal entitlements to agricultural land.7

By enlarging a daughter’s rights in inherited property, a major implication of the amendment is to equate the female line of descent with the

7 While this amendment is a step in the right direction, the Lawyer’s Collective (2010) points to the persistence of certain anomalies in the law itself such as the ambiguity regarding self-acquired and ancestral property, no recognition of wife, widow and mother as coparceners, confusion regarding agricultural land, and the continued possibility of willing the land to particular heirs.
male line. Just like a son, a daughter will continue to have interests in her natal family even after marriage. While this can potentially bring significant changes in kinship systems that facilitate gender equality, such as a move towards bilateral inheritance, one does not find many such shifts at present; women continue to see their futures in their marital home, seeking property rights there rather than in their natal home. A study of 403 women owning land in Gujarat found that 48% were widows who had claimed a share in their husband’s property, 41% were wives who had received titles with a view to claiming particular state announced tax benefits, and only less than 5% were women who had inherited a share of their natal property and this primarily because their parents had no male heirs (WGWLO 2004). Based on a survey of 545 ever-widowed women, Agarwal (1998) points out that while 51% of the widows gained a share of their husband’s land, only 13% inherited a share of their parental property as daughters. The preference for claiming a share of marital property rather than staking claims to natal property is also demonstrated by Rao (2008) in the case of the Santals, though women still constituted only 11% of all landholders.

Examining the impact of the HSA Amendment on women’s land claims in two districts of Andhra Pradesh, Rachel Brule found that in the absence of information and mobilisation, the HSA amendment itself had little impact on women’s land claims, irrespective of educational levels. However, mobilisation by the gender thematic group of the Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP), a body linked to the Department of Rural Development of the Government of Andhra Pradesh, and awareness raising about the law, did influence negotiations between husbands and wives concerning the terms on which wealth should be distributed to their children.

Apart from the legal framework, the policy arena has witnessed an expressed commitment towards gender equality from the 6th Five Year Plan onwards (1980-85). India is a signatory to several international commitments including the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW, 1979) and the Beijing Platform for

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8 The Andhra Pradesh amendment was made in 1986, and while elevating the position of a daughter to be on par with a son as far as rights in coparcenary property were concerned, it noted that only a daughter who was unmarried at the time of the amendment would be entitled to be a coparcener.

9 Personal communication, 8/7/10.
Action\(^{10}\) (PFA, 1995). To fulfil the strategic objective of reducing the burden of poverty on women, the government committed to formulate policies and programmes that could “enhance the access of women agricultural and fisheries producers to financial, technical, extension and marketing services, provide access to and control of land, appropriate infrastructure and technology in order to increase women’s incomes and promote household food security, especially in rural areas, and where appropriate, encourage the development of producer-owned and market-based cooperatives” (PFA). Recognising the shifts taking place within agrarian livelihoods in India, both the feminisation of agriculture and the diversification into non-agricultural rural and urban activities, and its gender dimension, the New Agricultural Policy acknowledged the need to strengthen the conditions of female farmers and female labourers. It reiterated the commitment towards joint land titles to husbands and wives, in order to improve food security at the household level. “This is because generally women spend most of their income on household expenditure unlike men and this would help improve the nutrition of the children” (section 4.1.60:39, NAP 2000 quoted in Rao 2006b). Not attending to women’s needs would then create a double crisis of agrarian and social reproduction systems.

These commitments were reiterated in the National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) and detailed by the National Farmers Commission (2006), which further identified five priority areas that needed specific attention\(^{11}\). While one might question the transfer of burden for household food security so completely on to women (in fact in both sites women were insistent on male responsibility and reciprocity), such support is essential at least for facilitating, if not ensuring, material wellbeing. In the absence of such additional support outside the family, women remain entirely dependent on their families for material security, in addition to social and emotional security (Walker 2003; Jackson 2003), and are unlikely to even make land claims.

However, land governance being a state subject, the implementation of these commitments varies by state, with even the concept of joint titles to land hardly practiced, with few exceptions, such as in West Bengal after

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\(^{10}\) http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/declar.htm

\(^{11}\) These included: soil health care, water harvesting and management, credit and insurance, technology and inputs, and assured and remunerative marketing, in order to provide comprehensive support to women as farmers.
Gujarat State enacted a Gender Equity Policy in 2005 with several specific provisions on women’s entitlements to immovable property, both at the individual level and as co-partners in common property resources. Yet not much has moved – land records have not been updated for generations, hence women’s names remain excluded from them; despite Government Resolutions (GRs), land is being acquired by industries bypassing the claims of women’s collectives; and small plots remain unviable in the absence of adequate support (Velayudhan 2008) as detailed by the Farmers Commission. The 2010 national budget announced an allocation of Rs 100 crore towards a women farmer’s empowerment scheme, with four major components: capacity-building, infrastructure development for group activities, extending farmer support services to women farmers and access to financial resources.

While the need to focus on both production and accumulation has been widely acknowledged, with several policy suggestions made, implementation has been tardy, if not non-existent. The reasons for this lie in the underlying power relations at all institutional levels, from the household to the state, that in practice resist policy shifts in favour of the marginalised, and in particular women. Despite advocacy to disconnect the provision of inputs and services from land titles, a strong male bias persists. Institutions of the state and the petty bureaucracy in particular continue to see men as heads of households and farmers, and women as “collaborative spouses”. This patriarchal worldview and the power relations it entails, even taking account of some context-specific and cultural variations, tend to limit women’s resource claims, despite the existence of a favourable policy framework.

Responsibilities for food security and women’s resource entitlements

In this section, I use empirical evidence to examine women’s contributions to household food security, which include not just their actual involvement in food production, but also the host of related activities, both productive and reproductive, that enable access to adequate food of a reasonable quality, that is cooked and ready for consumption. While they contribute substantially in terms of their labour, their ability to fulfil their

\[22.3\text{ million USD or 14 million GBP as on 5/10/10.}\]
responsibilities is severely constrained by their absence of rights and entitlements.

Sen’s (1981) entitlement approach, which distinguishes between endowments and entitlements, provides a useful tool for understanding the constraints and potential opportunities that women face in engaging with land-based activities as independent agents. Endowments represent the different resources that a person owns, including both physical assets (e.g. land) and intangible assets (e.g. labour power), while entitlements are the commodities (goods and services) that a person can legally acquire or claim from the state or other legitimating authority. He highlights a third category, of “exchange entitlements”, that refer to the options available for converting the former into the latter, for instance, converting labour power into income which can then buy essential goods. One however needs to recognise the gendered nature of different resource endowments and question how far they are given equal value in the community, market and state arenas. Why does, for instance, women’s labour attract a lower wage in the market, and in fact, what might be the factors that hinder women’s engagement with labour markets on an equal footing with men in the first place?

In terms of endowments, in agricultural societies land is perhaps the most important resource. It can help reduce the risk of poverty, enhance food security and enable access to secondary resources such as credit and extension services (Agarwal 1994; Lipton 1985). Apart from these material benefits and for women, ownership of land and housing can additionally lower the incidence of violence (ICRW 2006; Panda and Agarwal 2005), but also play a crucial role in providing them with a sense of security, stability and identity as equal citizens in society, as social relations in rural areas continue to be mediated through patterns of ownership and control over land (Rao 2008; Breman 1985).

The major barrier rural women face in terms of endowments is the lack of access to land titles. With a rising population and lack of sufficient alternate opportunities, land holdings continue to be subdivided over generations, and as of 2003, 60% of holdings were either marginal or submarginal, totalling less than one hectare of land\(^\text{13}\). Further, while an estimated 20% of rural households are de facto female headed – due to

widowhood, desertion, or male out-migration – women constitute only approximately 10 to 12% of landholders and the size of their holdings is estimated at around half that of men (Rao 2005a). In a context of land shortages and growing competition amongst men for land and apart from legal constraints, women face a host of socio-cultural constraints in operationalising their land claims. But without land, exchange entitlements also seem to collapse; women are unable to access markets, technology, inputs and even institutional credit, leading at times to lower productivity (Deere and Doss 2006; Udry et al. 1995; Evers and Walters 2000). Lack of land titles further excludes them from membership of and decision-making within farmers’ organisations, irrigation societies and other development schemes including agricultural credit and input cooperatives (as in Varanasi).

The only resource endowment available to women for making a living is their labour power. While the FAO database on gender and land rights recognises that women provide 55 to 66% of the total labour involved in farm production and land management, perceptions on the ground often tend to deny this reality in order to uphold strongly held social norms. Further, as rural women continue to be disadvantaged educationally, this influences the perceptions of their skills and capabilities. Seen as “unskilled” and in addition to agricultural wage work, they also end up engaging with a range of low paid, informal activities, such as making bead necklaces in Varanasi or leaf plates in Dumka. Despite a constitutional commitment to equality, their inability to effectively operationalise their exchange entitlements implies that they are unable to improve their well-being in practice. Making a successful marriage, with a responsible husband providing for their needs, then becomes a crucial strategy for women to gain security. A discussion of gendered contributions to household livelihoods in terms of divisions of work can contribute to a deepening of the understanding of how this strategy is operationalised. But how far these contributions are recognised by their spouse and can be exchanged or translated into the ability to influence key decisions within the household and larger community also needs examination. Given the close match

14 Despite a push to universalise basic education in the last decade, gender gaps persist, especially for rural, low caste and tribal girls (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay 2007).
between land-holding and caste (tables 2a and b), I have undertaken this analysis around land-holding status rather than caste in the case of Varanasi.

Table 2a presents a revealing, though not entirely unexpected picture of work participation as reported by men and women in landed and landless households. In the former, while male migration for non-agricultural paid work tops the list (41%), followed by work on their own farms or paid work in agriculture, women are almost equally divided between work on their farms, paid work in agriculture and paid work in non-agriculture. While there is a general trend towards an increase in female work migration across India, this tends to be more restricted amongst the backward and upper castes, but also amongst landowning families. While Garikipati (2008) found that amongst small farming households in Andhra Pradesh 85% of men were migrants, while this was the case for only 5% for women, I did not find any women migrating out for work in the study site. Rather, amongst these (kurmi patel) households, women were almost single-handedly managing the farms. Mechanisation of ploughing and its marketisation has helped women overcome traditional constraints to ploughing in the absence of their men. Women were aware of the rates and requirements for ploughing. As Kavita said, “hiring a tractor costs Rs 400 for an acre of land, and we need to plough the land at least two to three times”.

While 16.5% of these women are also engaged in paid, non-agricultural work, this is largely local. For women such as Meenu 15, responsible for family provisioning in her husband’s absence, low-paid work can not be turned down, such as for this example bead work to help run their homes (Quisumbing and Pandofelli 2010). “We earn barely Rs 13 for preparing 100 grams of beads. This takes three to four days to complete, as we can only do it after completing all our other work. The beads are made of glass and our fingers often get cut, but at least this brings some petty cash for small everyday purchases. A commission agent from the village brings the beads, sells it in the market and gives us our dues”. The differences in earning between migrant men, able to remit home cash incomes of at least Rs 1,000 each month and farming women, able to earn cash amounting to barely Rs 100 per month through bead work, also reflects the gap in endowments and opportunities for exchange (of their labour) between men and women.

15 All names have been changed to maintain the confidentiality of the respondent.
Amongst landless households, a majority of men are engaged in non-agricultural paid work, some of this involves migration, but a large number of them engage in a range of labouring tasks locally or in Varanasi including working on power-looms on a daily rate, construction work, rickshaw pulling, manual labour as part of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (NREGP) and other odd jobs. In the past, many of them were involved in weaving saris, sufficient for running their homes, but now this work is no longer available. While the NREGP is supposed to provide assured work for 100 days in a year at a wage rate of Rs 100 per day to be deposited straight into their bank accounts, they complained of extensive corruption. While on paper 100 days of work are recorded by the sarpanch (headman), they receive only 25 days’ wages, hardly sufficient in a context where prices are rising and there is little other work available. Evaluations of NREGP in Uttar Pradesh reveal a depressing scenario, with estimates of 7 to 20% of the due wages actually reaching the worker\textsuperscript{16,17}.

Amongst the women, 35% are engaged in some form of paid work, both as agricultural workers and in other jobs including domestic work for the upper castes (like fetching water, fodder, etc.).

Feudal relations continue to be maintained, with payments often made in kind rather than cash. Sarita noted: “Sometimes our employer’s wife asks me to clean the house and gives me a cooked meal in return. She also gives us old clothes to wear”. Yet increasingly, with the move of the upper castes to urban homes, one finds a range of sharecropping arrangements being negotiated with the SCs as well as the peasant castes. The most widespread one is chauthiya (a fourth), where the labourer gets one-fourth of the total output, the remaining 75% going to the landowner. This rather unequal arrangement prevails due to SC women’s assetlessness; while they put in the labour, with occasional assistance from their men (when they fail to get casual labour jobs), their lack of capital implies that the inputs are entirely provided by the landowner. In the absence of land titles, such households cannot access institutional credit, and if obliged to raise resources, end up paying high interest rates of 5% per month to local moneylenders. Chauthiya is hence considered preferable as

\textsuperscript{16} Personal communication Hiranmoy Dhar.
\textsuperscript{17} The official statistics reveal employment provision of a little over 40% of the target, see http://nrega.nic.in/homest.asp?state_code=31&state_name=UTTAR\%20PRADESH
it avoids the everyday interactions and insults which the SC women were
used to facing, and also provides them with food grains that can last
approximately six months of the year. “We can eat”, they said, “but not
save anything”.

Somewhat surprisingly, a larger number of women in landless house-
holds (and SCs) report engagement with unpaid work as their primary
activity compared to landed households. This seeming anomaly can be
explained in at least two ways. First, while it clearly recognises the involve-
ment of women in landed households in agricultural work, for the landless
it points to growing problems in terms of securing work. A common
refrain was the lack of work, and the growing difficulties of everyday life.
As Sarita continued: “We get wage work for hardly two months in a year,
the wage rate is five kilograms of corn for a full day’s work. We are both
engaged in wage work, yet face a lot of difficulty in arranging for two
square meals. Often the two of us go to bed without a meal, scraping
together something for the children”. For them, remaining confined to
unpaid work reflected their lack of choice, rather than a personal choice.
It is interesting to note that women in both landed and landless house-
holds are minimally engaged in trading/business activities, while for the
former this is a result of the restriction on their movement and engage-
ment with public spaces, for the latter it is a reflection of their lack of
resources.

Amongst the Santals, over 85% of both men and women saw them-
selves primarily as cultivators. However, they did recognise that this con-
tributed to only about 35-40% of their needs. For the rest, they depended
equally on the collection and sale of forest produce (25-30%) and other
wage work, both local and migrant (Rao 2002). While their contributions
are similar, they do reflect a gendered pattern. It is interesting to note
here that while women by and large are not allowed to inherit property,
the classification of land as dhani (rice-growing) and bari (homestead) gives
them an entitlement. Bari lands are largely seen as women’s plots and they
use these to cultivate crops of their choice – maize, vegetables and
oilseeds. While men plough this land for them, all other activities are per-
formed by women, who also control the output. Of course they also con-
tribute to rice cultivation in the dhani lands, seen as household plots, but
controlled by men. Apart from the bari land, women here draw their iden-
tity and income from a diverse resource basis that includes forests and
the seasonal sale of forest produce, such as firewood, leaf plates, jackfruit
and *mahua* (for making liquor) in the local markets (*haats*), as well as their own labour. In terms of the sale of forest produce, the lack of infrastructural support especially transport and storage, and time shortages due to domestic work burdens constrain women from seeking the best prices for their output. As Dibri, with three young children, said: “I have started selling leaf plates to a contractor in the next village. He pays me less, but it is better, as with three small children I cannot go to the *haat* ten miles away”. Their skill as rice cultivators is however recognised, as is their capacity for hard work, hence they are preferred as seasonal migrant agricultural labour in the neighbouring state of West Bengal, where they are paid fair wages, but work long hours and receive no compensation if they fall ill (Rao 2006a).

Men on the other hand, priding themselves as cultivators and landowners, hardly migrate for such seasonal work. Their engagement with forest produce is also limited to a few items such as bamboos and poles for construction, though these carry a higher value than women’s products. With the stagnation of the agricultural sector as a whole, however, in the last two decades or so, more and more men have started migrating further from home for longer periods of time, up to eight to nine months a year. They leave home after ploughing the land, returning before the next year's ploughing season. A large number are recruited by the Border Security Force for the construction of roads in the border areas of India; several engage in wheat and sugarcane production labour in the areas of Punjab and Western Uttar Pradesh (Rao 2009b). While away, their remittances are few and their wives are left to manage day-to-day household expenses. However, they try to bring back a lump sum of money that can be used for making agricultural investments, be they fertilisers or improved seeds. Government schemes set on providing free seeds to the poor hardly function; the seeds arrive too late and are usually of poor quality. Some also invest in bullocks for ploughing; tractors are virtually unknown in this region. Their focus on agriculture remains strong, given their primary identity as farmers and landowners.

Apart from productive work, domestic labour is essential for making a living. It is interesting to note that in the Varanasi villages, while men contribute to fuel collection (purchasing kerosene oil for stoves), the tasks of cooking, cleaning and water collection are entirely left to women. Amongst the landed, the wife herself does a smaller proportion of these tasks (40-50%), the rest is shared by other members of the household, be it children,
a daughter-in-law or a sister, or by hired domestic help in a few of the large landowning households (tables 3a and b). Women in landless households largely perform these tasks themselves, with some help from their children, usually girls. Male contribution here does not change significantly, irrespective of women’s work burdens. Only in the case of child-care, men in landless households appear to take greater responsibility for children than men in landed families. For the Santals too, domestic work lies largely in the women’s domain, yet one finds much more sharing of tasks between men and women, especially in the peak agricultural seasons. Given the intensity of female labour in rice production, men will fetch the water during that time period; while women wash and clean the utensils, for example, men will also pound the paddy together and then cook the food. At other times, women perform most of these tasks themselves or with the help of other women. Again when women go to the local market to sell their forest produce or when they migrate to West Bengal for a month at a time, men perform all the household chores (Rao 2008).

In terms of divisions of work, what emerges quite clearly is that close to half of all women in Varanasi and almost all the women in Dumka reported primary engagement with some form of productive work, whether on their own farms, as agricultural workers for others, paid either in cash or kind, or in other forms of informal or forest-based work. Men in Varanasi engage largely with non-farm work, both locally and as migrants, and their earnings are substantially higher than those of women. In Dumka, men saw themselves as cultivators, yet have increasingly started migrating for several months in a year. Women here constantly articulate the need for male responsibility and reciprocity. There is also a taboo on women ploughing, which can be problematic for them during the cultivation process. That being said, women also refuse to take on this activity, as they expressly want men to also contribute to household tasks including ploughing (Rao 2008). This is particularly important in a context where male contributions to joint work have been steadily declining. In her study in Andhra Pradesh, Garikipati (2008, 635) found that while just 6% of male labourers were employed in joint tasks, 54.5% of all female workdays constituted joint work groups. The Government of India’s time use study (1998-99), conducted across six states, and more recent NSSO data (2004-5) also reveal that male contributions to farm work as well as domestic work are declining in both rural and urban areas, with women now performing 53% of total work (Rao et al. 2008).
I turn next to explore how far the division of labour between men and women affects intra-household decision-making over the allocation of resources on the one hand, and community and state recognition and support on the other. As Sen (1990) has pointed out, bargaining power within the household often depends not just on actual contributions made by men and women, but the perception of these contributions. What is important then is the visibility of one’s work and its recognition by others, especially one’s spouse, but also the larger community and state. How far are women’s contributions to the household recognised, and do these entitle them to a say in how decisions are made or resources allocated, or do social norms of male provisioning and female dependence over-ride these claims?

**Recognition of contributions and influence over decisions within the household**

While 17% of women in landed households in Varanasi had claimed that they engaged primarily with work on their farms (table 2), when asked to specifically report on their relative contributions, the responses change negatively. While men perceive women’s participation in farm-related activities in a primary role as insignificant (in fact they acknowledge a larger role for people outside the household), they do acknowledge that women are crucial as secondary actors, particularly in terms of sowing, weeding and harvesting the crop (table 4a). While women too largely echo these perceptions, they perceive men’s contributions to be much lower than that reported by men, especially in terms of sowing (table 4b). The secondary contribution of men is seen as higher, and this often includes the cash contributions of men to farming activities, be it the purchase of inputs, or hiring a tractor or labour for particular activities. As both women and men told us, farming is now expensive, as the cost of inputs has gone up, while prices remain variable; and yet, without inputs, productivity is low.

Despite women’s engagement with farming operations, as table 5 (a and b) reveals, women’s participation in decision-making regarding borrowing money, buying or renting land, the selection of crops for cultivation, or even their engagement with the market in terms of buying inputs such as seeds remains weak. Women saw men as having an almost absolute control over production-related decisions, shared somewhat with other members of the family, often a brother or father, with only 3%
crediting themselves with any voice in these matters. Even in terms of schooling and health-related decisions, they credit men with having ultimate responsibility and control. As one upper caste woman said: “We women obey our men and observe purdah, as then he is obliged to provide for all the needs of the home”. Men, on the contrary, did give women a slightly greater role in terms of decision-making, especially on choice of crops and purchase of inputs.

What these responses reveal is the persistence of strong social norms and ideologies of male provisioning and female dependence, which women in particular and men to some extent feel obliged to reiterate. They also reveal real barriers to women’s engagement with markets (for inputs, credit, as well as for the sale of their produce) and other public spaces, contributing to women’s non-participation in decision-making. Married women are expected to follow norms of seclusion, but as Meenu, a kurmi patel woman, said: “It is only possible to stay at home for two or three years after our gauna [move to the husband’s home which takes place a few years after the marriage], then we go out to the fields to work. Everything is expensive now, so we support out husbands by working in the fields and also taking on any other work that is available, in addition to our household work. We do not however go to the markets.” Apart from the issues of everyday survival, women here seek to improve the terms of cooperation within the marriage through their additional support to men in fulfilling their roles. Men continue to be responsible for market-related tasks and insist that women do not go out of their homes, though here the definition of home has been extended to include the farms. At a more material level, male migration and women’s confinement to the family farms implies that women do not have adequate resources to invest in inputs in a timely manner. As Meenu continued: “My husband works in Surat in Gujarat, he does send some money home every month, Rs 1000-2000, but this goes to my mother-in-law. She doesn’t talk to me properly or treat me well, so I take whatever inputs she buys, then don’t say anything further.” Women’s lack of access to adequate capital for inputs reduces productivity and consequently undervalues women’s (labour) contributions, and this too contributes to women’s reported lack of voice in decision-making.

18 Gladwin (1992) notes that fertiliser application is significantly limited by lack of access to credit and cash, not sex of the farmer.
A word needs to be said here about credit for farming. Several analysts point to the decline in institutional credit for farming and the agricultural sector in general (Ramachandran and Swaminathan 2005). To get over the cumbersome process of crop loans to be negotiated each season, the Government of India introduced the concept of *kisan* (farmer) credit cards (KCC) in 1998-99, which, valid for three years, provide farmers a credit limit on the basis of the size of their land-holding. Long-term fieldwork in Dumka district of Jharkhand revealed that while women and men engaged equally with cultivation, only 4% of KCCs were issued to women; in Gujarat this was only 2% (from amongst 349 women farmers interviewed across nine districts of the state\(^{19}\)). In Varanasi, none of the women interviewed had KCCs\(^{20}\). As one medium farmer (OBC), who cultivates flowers for the Varanasi market, noted: “If one has land, then it is easy to get the *kisan* credit card. A credit limit is set at about Rs 6000 per acre of land, and this is provided 50% in kind, that is, seeds and fertilisers are provided by the cooperative society, and the rest in cash. There is no profit in agriculture, I only live because of the flower trade, this is profitable, but this needs cash”.

He further went on to point out: “The Horticulture Department distributes seeds, which give good yields, but only to those with more than four acres of land. The marginal and small farmers lose out, only big farmers are able to get these benefits”. As well recognised, but further confirmed by this data, not having land titles leads to a vicious circle of resourcelessness, an inability to secure credit, but also no access to other state-given benefits, such as seeds, or subsidised fertilisers. So, even if the landless do lease in and cultivate land, they will never be able to afford any inputs or enhance productivity, thus explaining why apparently exploitative tenancy arrangements persist. Though the rapid expansion of micro-credit over the last two decades has made small loans much more accessible to women, these are largely meant for investment in some form of micro-enterprise, often insufficient for investment in agriculture and allied activities. They are

\(^{19}\) Personal communication, Sejal Dand.

\(^{20}\) While about 53% of households reported having a bank account, 82% of them were in male names (171 out of 209). The remaining 38 bank accounts had women's names, but 40% of them were joint accounts. It is important to note that only 25 men and one woman had accounts valuing over Rs 10,000, none of them belonging to the Scheduled Castes. The rest were low in value, many of them opened to receive earnings from the work secured under the NREGP (table 6).
also not evenly distributed across the country, with women in Dumka, for instance, hardly having any access to micro-credit.

While the survey data reveals a very high level of congruence between men and women on who the primary decision-maker is, observations in the village and in-depth interviews provide a somewhat more differentiated and nuanced account of decision-making within households. While final decisions, at least publicly, were indeed often taken by men, women had various strategies for influencing these decisions. Priti said that she spoke to her husband when serving his evening meal or when they went to bed at night. She also used a range of excuses, such as her own lack of time or the young age and poor health of her children, to help him make a decision. Having completed high school also gives her voice more weight; in cases of disagreement she is able to convince him of her position. In the absence of migrant husbands, in particular, women end up making all the everyday decisions. Even if they do not go to physically purchase seeds, they make a decision on what they want and then get a man from the neighbourhood, often a relative, to do the actual task of going to the market and purchasing the seeds.

In the Santal Parganas, as already described, even though women are technically landless and hence denied access to credit or other state benefits (as are men, due to their ethnicity), their contributions are not only visible, but also recognised. They have a substantial say in decision-making. When her husband once leased land without consulting her, a furious Agnes, already overworked, decided to protest by leaving for her natal home. Without her labour contributions, Sunil could not cultivate the land and it was left fallow that year, but he also learnt his lesson: to not take unilateral decisions. Santal women here make sure to exercise their voice, at home and in the markets, as livelihoods depend on joint effort. Male provisioning is not even a social norm. Unlike in Varanasi, where strict monogamy is practised and remarriage, particularly for women, is impossible, amongst the Santals, women's voices are given weight particularly in regards to relative flexibility in their marital choices and practices, with both men and women able to exit marriages and remarry quite easily if they are unable to ensure a degree of understanding and reciprocity within the marriage.

The credit deposit ratio remains low at around 33% in 2005-6 as opposed to a target of 60% (Rao 2009a).
An important issue raised by the above discussion in terms of recognition revolves around its definition. In economics, recognition and decision-making are often interpreted in terms of levels of autonomy and dependence, where autonomy is understood as an individual attribute rather than as deriving from social relations. What seems to emerge here is that women see their power as deriving from particular sets of social relations rather than in being able to carry out activities independently. As already mentioned, Santal women insisted on reciprocity and the sharing of tasks as a source of power rather than the lack thereof. Women in Varanasi perhaps were somewhat more constrained though they too drew on the norm of male provisioning and responsibility for ensuring that men continued to engage in everyday life irrespective of their physical presence in the village. While ideals of complementarity do disadvantage women, they enter marriage seeking to improve the terms of cooperation, rather than pursuing individual and independent goals.

One needs also to remember that women are not a homogenous, unified category, and their interests vary with their subject positions through their life cycle. Young women farmers in Varanasi have to defer to their mothers-in-law in the absence of their husbands, confronting issues of recognition and fair payments, as in Meenu's case. Unable to spend an extended period of time on the interview due to the need to be back at the farm in a timely manner, one woman told me: "We manage everything in the farm and at home, yet for some things, like purchasing inputs or going to the markets, we need to depend on our husbands, and in their absence, on other men in the family". The fear of conflict in the family and a discontinuation of male support prevent these women from exercising their claims to land or indeed defying social norms around gender roles and restrictions on mobility.

Santal women's freedom of movement, on the contrary, has led to their objectification as promiscuous, making them subject to harassment when they engage with the markets, both in terms of products and labour. Migrant women face physical and sexual insecurity, have no support for child-care or the education of their children; they lack identification and hence social benefits at the worksite, and often end up drawing on the support of their children, especially daughters. Widows are often the only ones who can legally claim land titles or other resources in their own names (though after much struggle) across contexts. In the Dumka villages studied, amongst women who had titles, roughly half were widows and the
other half had inherited as daughters through the practice of gharjawae (Rao 2008). While daughters now have legal rights under the HSA Amendment Act, they lack social legitimacy for their claims, expected as they are to get married and join their husband’s family. In fact, as other studies confirm (WGWLO 2004), there appears to be greater support for joint titles in marital property than for women’s share of inheritance in their natal property.

In the Santal Parganas, agricultural remains a primary occupation for the Santals. While it increasingly feminised, this is not out of choice but rather out of sheer necessity and the need to survive. Also in Varanasi, while farming, especially smallholder cultivation is feminised in practice, in discursive terms it remains under male control. Women are recognised only in a secondary role, even though actual daily schedules may show otherwise. In both instances, the lack of titles poses a challenge for women to improve production, especially in terms of accessing resources from state institutions. Yet, while in the Santal Parganas, this does not affect women’s influence or role in decision-making with regard to resource allocation in the household, in Varanasi, they have to find alternate, more subtle and backstage strategies for influencing male decisions, drawing their power from the performance of roles in line with social expectations and norms.

**Collective action for public recognition**

While today in India the agricultural sector as a whole is clearly disadvantaged, particularly for women who dominate the sector, there have been several efforts to reverse these trends with women claiming their rights and entitlements. Strategies vary from individual struggles in the legal courts and petitions addressed to community decision-making bodies regarding land rights (Rao 2007), to more collective strategies seeking to overcome constraints of resource access (through collectively leasing land, for instance) as well as problems of scale in production and marketing (e.g., watershed management, technology-sharing, etc.). While collectives of different types have a role to play not just in improving incomes and production, but also in enhancing women’s self-confidence and self-esteem, and developing leadership capacities that can be exercised in other settings too (Agarwal 2010), most institutional spaces remain bounded. Collectivities, based on particular identities, tend to exclude
some, often the poorest, who lack the time and resources to contribute equally to the collective enterprise. While Agarwal (2003) has discussed in detail the example of groups of landless women in Andhra Pradesh leasing in land and cultivating it jointly with support from the Deccan Development Society, and the benefits of this enterprise, such joint cultivation has not been successful in other contexts, especially where women also face the pressures of contributing to household farming. With support from a local women’s NGO, women in a few villages in Dumka did try joint cultivation, however, this did not work. Several factors contributed to this failure, most importantly perhaps the issues of labour, work assignment and top-down management (Jain and Coelho 1996, 108). These problems intensify for women, as depending on their stage in the life-cycle, their number of children and family support, their ability to contribute to the collective varies, as does the pressure to cooperate in the household enterprise.

As already mentioned, women are not a unified category; they have different subject-positions, family circumstances and interests (Rao 2005b). When speaking of women’s engagement with collectives, one needs to be aware of an important issue in terms of who sets the agenda, who participates in negotiations, and the mechanisms through which different voices are heard or represented (Fraser 2009). Apart from issues of rights and recognition, the issue of representation becomes crucial.

There has been a rapid expansion of self-help groups in India since the mid-1990s, but this has been connected closely to the delivery of credit and financial services to the poor rather than reversing inequalities in the access to and control over land and other tangible assets. This is because obstacles confronting the latter relate not just to functional literacy, entrepreneurship and political awareness of the women themselves, but also to the persistence of a deeply pervasive patriarchal worldview, which also ignores caste and class distinctions and thus fails to provide adequate and convergent inputs and services (Bilgi 2008). This last element is crucial, but often overlooked. In fact, as Swaminathan and Jeyaranjan (2008, 79) point out in the case of M.V Foundation’s interventions in Ranga Reddy district of Andhra Pradesh, “sourcing resources and technical help from several departments of the government in itself is a huge task apart from being time-consuming”. State institutions are hardly responsive to the needs of small and marginal farmers, far from creating an enabling environment for them to succeed and profit from agriculture, as noted
also by the medium farmer in Varanasi. In Dumka, subsistence production is seen as backward and non-viable, hence the agriculture extension agency, set up with World Bank support, though based on an ideology of convergence, was hardly able to reach women or indeed the tribal groups, who make up the majority in the district. Interest or initiative was judged on the ability to pay user fees, which excluded both most of the tribal groups who are amongst the poorest populations, as well as women who lack resources for such payments (Rao 2005c).

The Working Group for Women and Land Ownership (WGWLO), a network of twenty-two NGOs working with women at the grassroots level in Gujarat, has adopted a dual approach of training and enhancing the legal awareness and capabilities of women on their rights to land (and a range of other legal provisions), as well as sensitising men engaged in the bureaucracy. Women, who have themselves struggled to get land in their names, have emerged as grassroots leaders, organised into sub-committees addressing questions of women and land in the federations, as well as supporting other women during discussions at the village level and negotiating with block officers, if needed, by drawing on a database of land based schemes, policies, GRs and revenue related procedures. While the federations have no formal standing, state institutions are increasingly interested in hearing their voices, mainly in order to improve productivity and enhance growth. A new aspect of the work of the federations has been training *patwaris* (revenue officials), mostly men, sensitising them to women’s roles in agriculture and the legitimacy of their claims. Networks of NGOs in Jharkhand have also been working on similar strategies to help women secure access to land, but in the absence of binding law such as the HSA, progress on the legal front has been limited. Community level mobilisation and the sensitisation of leaders has led to some success in local negotiations, at least over land access and use, though this does not resolve the issue of making legitimate claims at the state level.

Apart from private agricultural land – particularly on account of its social embeddedness, or perhaps even because of it – women have been more active in making claims to both individual and community titles for forest land. In my own work in Jharkhand (Rao 2008), I have pointed to

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22 Personal communication with Shilpa Vasavada, 26/6/10.

23 Under the Indian Constitution, the Scheduled Tribes are permitted to govern themselves based on customary laws.
the continuity between landed resources and the co-dependence of tribal communities on agricultural and forest land for their livelihoods. As Ramdas (2009, 68) so poignantly illustrates in the case of rural Andhra Pradesh, with the passing of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) of 2006, several tribal women filed individual claims for legal titles over land they had been cultivating for generations, alongside community claims to common land. While women were granted titles to hardly 10% of the land they had been cultivating and had claimed, community rights were virtually entirely negated, denying the very basis of these women’s relationship to their land and environment, and indeed their way of life. In many parts of tribal India, rights to forest land are even more important than private land, yet these rights are hardly recognised; on the contrary, they are being rapidly eroded. Women members of Ekta Mahila Manch, a grassroots movement involving poor, landless women, have nevertheless started group plantation or cultivation activities on this land, though without a secure entitlement. They continue to be subjected to harassment by the Forest Department24. Such grassroots groups, however, face problems in strengthening upstream and downstream linkages for production and marketing, as this does not solely involve time and monetary resources. Social biases also come into play. In my own experience in Dumka district, it was much easier for me, a middle-class, educated, urban woman to access information on schemes and projects or even just progress reports from government departments than for the Santal women with whom I worked. Even my educated research assistant, a Santal, was denied access in my absence.

An important lesson here relates to the power of information. As both Brule and Carr-Harris noted, despite the existence of favourable laws such as the HSAA (2005) or the FRA (2006), rural women are not aware of their provisions in terms of their entitlements, nor the mechanisms for operationalising their claims. Grassroots women’s organisations often lack the resources and capacities to systematically analyse their legal and policy entitlements and use these to make claims, as has been done for instance by MV Foundation. An NGO member of WGWLO in Gujarat has helped set up Gender Justice Centres at the block level run by local sanghatan (organisation) leaders, the supporting NGO and elected women representatives of panchayats. Their role is to facilitate the interface with the government to realise entitlements to kisan credit

24 Personal communication with Jill Carr-Harris, 27/6/10
cards, widow benefits, or ration cards, among other benefits, on behalf of the women they represent. While confronted with huge constraints, such grassroots mobilisation has the potential not only for claiming entitlements, but also demanding policy change, as it provides women with an open space, not linked to any programmatic intervention, in which to discuss and prioritise their needs. One finds issues relating to food security, production and accumulation, being systematically highlighted in these fora, not just those around women’s reproductive roles. Struggles are intense, yet success remains elusive.

**Conclusions: operationalising women’s resource rights**

Given the above discussion around the relationship between endowments and entitlements in addressing the agrarian problematic from a gender perspective, one returns to the question of whether the right to land remains the key resource for attaining gender equality goals in rural India.

In terms of progress towards gender equality, what becomes clear from an application of Sen’s model of entitlements, is that when one starts with few endowments – no land and low levels of education – it is increasingly difficult to negotiate a fair price to access them in the markets. While men are able to overcome the problem of devaluation of their labour to a certain extent by migrating further afield, women end up engaging in difficult, extremely low paid, and often harmful work. While they are sometimes almost entirely responsible for family farming with the support of monetary contributions from migrant husbands, their lack of land titles and recognition as farmers in their own right, as well as their small size of holdings, constrains their ability to improve land management, including through accessing benefits from state programmes for farmers. While legal entitlements to a minimum wage and a minimum level of employment have been introduced through the NREGP, widespread corruption and persistent caste-based patronage have served to weaken its influence in enhancing the bargaining power of the landless in general and women in particular. Despite recognition of women’s interests and roles in agriculture, and indeed legal entitlement, in the absence of valued endowments, in this case land ownership titles, as well as secure access to forest resources or educational credentials, women face a failure in terms of their exchange entitlements.
As exchange entitlements remain shaky, one needs to persist with efforts to strengthen women’s access to a diversity of resources on which they depend, in particular to land, forests and other tangible assets (including education), which can then enable access to other entitlements. This is essential for securing their livelihoods in economic terms, but also strengthening their bargaining position at home and in the community. While laws are important, given the social barriers to their practice, it is worth considering entitlements in more nuanced and culturally sensitive ways. In my work in Jharkhand, for instance, it was evident that women’s rights to *bari* or homestead plots were more acceptable to men, than access to *dhani* or rice plots, given the symbolism of the latter in terms of male identities as food producers and providers. It is important to take on board the issue of the social legitimacy of women’s land claims, tied up as they are with relationships of power and identity within the household, and vis-à-vis the community, especially as women are not autonomous individuals, but live in families and communities. They derive their power from the social relations in which they are embedded, hence seek to improve the terms of cooperation through additional effort to support their husbands as in Varanasi. It is therefore important to consider a combination of individual titles (as for homes and homestead plots), joint ownership (of agricultural land, water resources, membership in organisations) and collective rights of groups, especially of women (to forest and common property resources).

An important insight is the role of both material and ideological factors in constraining women’s engagement with production processes on the one hand, but also shaping their engagement with decision-making regarding resource allocation on the other. Women face a host of barriers in engaging with markets and the public realm, including restrictions on their mobility, and lack of access to information on prices as well as resources, in terms of transportation and storage, in addition to reproductive responsibilities that make absence from home for extended periods of time difficult. They hence end up selling their produce and labour at low costs to tradesmen and contractors who come to the village. In terms of decision-making, while confirming the influence of culture and kinship in shaping women’s role in this process (Jejeebhoy 2000; Dyson and Moore 1983), the paper further points to the ways in which the perceptions of relative contributions and their representations tie into social norms that are likely to restrict women’s influence. Thus, even where women are
engaged in wage earning and economic activity, if their contribution is perceived to be insignificant, by both themselves and their spouse, this can limit their power.

Yet in-depth interviews revealed that women do find ways of manipulating social norms around male provisioning to their advantage, making claims of patriarchy that more “autonomous” women are unable to make. Strategies for negotiating with and gaining recognition from the spouse at the household level, however, do vary from those that seek recognition from state institutions and public policy. While at home, women derive power from within the social relations in which they are embedded, often by playing their part well, there is almost no alternative to collective action when it comes to negotiating with the public sphere. These collectives are of many types, with varying access to resources and policy spaces, some striving to overcome technical bottlenecks confronting women farmers, and others seeking to create access for women to policymaking spaces more generally. Multiple strategies are used for this purpose, yet progress remains variable, dependent both on women’s own contexts, but also on the political and policy contexts in different states.

Women in India today are actively involved in the agricultural sector, not often out of choice, but more from a lack of choice, getting little support or recognition for their work. While there has been strong advocacy for policy change to delink land titles from access to other agricultural resources, this is yet to happen in practice. Creating an enabling environment through the provision of support for reproductive work (both child care and domestic tasks) and facilitating a synergy between inputs and services for agricultural production and marketing is perhaps a first step in responding to women’s needs. Such a convergent approach to women’s resource entitlements, addressing both productive and reproductive needs, should be an integral part of the planning process at all levels, especially the local. This is because ultimately women remain responsible for food security at the household level, as well as for social reproduction. Without responding to the needs and priorities articulated by them, inequalities will only continue to widen and social unrest to grow.
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### Table 1: Land ownership by caste (Varanasi)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of holding (in acres)</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>OBC</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>103 (74)</td>
<td>100 (47.5)</td>
<td>6 (14)</td>
<td>209 (53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>23 (17)</td>
<td>30 (14.5)</td>
<td>2 (5)</td>
<td>55 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>4 (3)</td>
<td>32 (15)</td>
<td>1 (2)</td>
<td>37 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>3 (2)</td>
<td>10 (5)</td>
<td>1 (2)</td>
<td>14 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-25</td>
<td>3 (2)</td>
<td>9 (4)</td>
<td>3 (7)</td>
<td>15 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-50</td>
<td>3 (2)</td>
<td>21 (10)</td>
<td>8 (19)</td>
<td>32 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 51</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9 (4)</td>
<td>22 (51)</td>
<td>31 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
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</table>

### Table 2a: Male and female activity in households by landholding status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Landed households</th>
<th>Landless households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work on farm</td>
<td>49 (26.6)</td>
<td>31 (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own business</td>
<td>14 (7.6)</td>
<td>3 (1.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid work agriculture</td>
<td>25 (13.6)</td>
<td>36 (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid work non-agriculture</td>
<td>75 (40.8)</td>
<td>30 (16.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid work</td>
<td>6 (3.3)</td>
<td>83 (45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>15 (8.2)</td>
<td>9 (4.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>184 (100)</td>
<td>183 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2b: Main activity by caste and gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>SC M</th>
<th>SC F</th>
<th>OBC M</th>
<th>OBC F</th>
<th>Other M</th>
<th>Other F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work on farm</td>
<td>10(7)</td>
<td>10(7)</td>
<td>45(21)</td>
<td>29(13.5)</td>
<td>14(32.5)</td>
<td>7(16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own business</td>
<td>11(8)</td>
<td>3(2)</td>
<td>31(15)</td>
<td>3(1.5)</td>
<td>1(2.5)</td>
<td>1(2.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid work agriculture</td>
<td>15(11)</td>
<td>34(24.5)</td>
<td>9(4)</td>
<td>39(18.5)</td>
<td>10(23)</td>
<td>4(9.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid work non-agriculture</td>
<td>94(67.5)</td>
<td>16(11.5)</td>
<td>108(51)</td>
<td>37(17.5)</td>
<td>10(23)</td>
<td>10(23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unpaid work</td>
<td>4(3)</td>
<td>76(55)</td>
<td>4(2)</td>
<td>103(49)</td>
<td>3(7)</td>
<td>21(49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>5(3.5)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14(7)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5(12)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3a: Male perceptions on work and decision-making in landed households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Husband</th>
<th>Wife</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fuel collection</td>
<td>38 (21)</td>
<td>111 (60)</td>
<td>35 (19)</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water collection</td>
<td>11(6)</td>
<td>115 (62.5)</td>
<td>58 (31.5)</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tending joint livestock</td>
<td>28 (26.5)</td>
<td>48 (45)</td>
<td>30 (28.5)</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning and washing clothes/dishes</td>
<td>4 (2)</td>
<td>127 (69)</td>
<td>53 (29)</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking</td>
<td>1 (0.5)</td>
<td>120 (65)</td>
<td>63(34.5)</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare</td>
<td>19 (11)</td>
<td>113 (64)</td>
<td>45 (25)</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3b: Female perceptions on work and decision-making in landed households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Husband</th>
<th>Wife</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fuel collection</strong></td>
<td>42(23)</td>
<td>102(56)</td>
<td>39(21)</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Water collection</strong></td>
<td>9(5)</td>
<td>102(56)</td>
<td>72(39)</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tending joint livestock</strong></td>
<td>13(17)</td>
<td>42(54.5)</td>
<td>22(28.5)</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cleaning and washing clothes/dishes</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>98(54)</td>
<td>85(46)</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cooking</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>97(53)</td>
<td>86(47)</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Childcare</strong></td>
<td>37 (20.5)</td>
<td>106(59)</td>
<td>37 (20.5)</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4a: Male perceptions on relative contributions to farming activities in landed households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Husband</th>
<th>Wife</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary role</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sowing plot</strong></td>
<td>98 (79)</td>
<td>11 (9)</td>
<td>15 (12)</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ploughing land</strong></td>
<td>60 (48.5)</td>
<td>4 (3)</td>
<td>60 (48.5)</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weeding</strong></td>
<td>95(76.5)</td>
<td>8 (6.5)</td>
<td>21 (17)</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Harvesting</strong></td>
<td>95 (76.5)</td>
<td>7 (5.5)</td>
<td>22 (18)</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secondary role:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sowing</strong></td>
<td>6 (5)</td>
<td>74 (61)</td>
<td>41 (34)</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ploughing</strong></td>
<td>9 (9)</td>
<td>35 (34)</td>
<td>58 (57)</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weeding</strong></td>
<td>9 (8)</td>
<td>65 (54)</td>
<td>46 (38)</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Harvesting</strong></td>
<td>9 (7.5)</td>
<td>63 (52.5)</td>
<td>48 (40)</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 4b: Female perceptions on relative contributions to farming activities in landed households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Husband</th>
<th>Wife</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary role</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sowing plot</td>
<td>33(66)</td>
<td>5(10)</td>
<td>12(24)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ploughing land</td>
<td>25(52)</td>
<td>3(6)</td>
<td>20(42)</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weeding</td>
<td>34(71)</td>
<td>4(8)</td>
<td>10(21)</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvesting</td>
<td>60(71)</td>
<td>4(5)</td>
<td>20(24)</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secondary role:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sowing</td>
<td>10(20)</td>
<td>19(40)</td>
<td>19(40)</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ploughing</td>
<td>9(22.5)</td>
<td>13(32.5)</td>
<td>18(45)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weeding</td>
<td>9(19)</td>
<td>21(44)</td>
<td>18(37)</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvesting</td>
<td>9(19)</td>
<td>19(40)</td>
<td>20(41)</td>
<td>48</td>
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</table>

### 5a: Male perceptions on decision-making in landed households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision</th>
<th>Husband</th>
<th>Wife</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decision on which crop to grow</td>
<td>126 (71)</td>
<td>9 (5)</td>
<td>42 (24)</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility for buying seeds</td>
<td>129 (73)</td>
<td>9 (5)</td>
<td>39 (22)</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision to rent / buy land</td>
<td>145 (79)</td>
<td>6 (3)</td>
<td>33 (18)</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision to borrow money</td>
<td>141 (76.5)</td>
<td>3 (1.5)</td>
<td>40 (22)</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision on sending child to school</td>
<td>150 (84)</td>
<td>3 (1.5)</td>
<td>26 (14.5)</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision on taking sick child to hospital</td>
<td>146 (81)</td>
<td>6 (3.5)</td>
<td>28 (15.5)</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5b: Female perceptions on decision-making in landed households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision on which crop to grow</th>
<th>Husband</th>
<th>Wife</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80(73)</td>
<td>3(3)</td>
<td>26(24)</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibility for buying seeds</th>
<th>Husband</th>
<th>Wife</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>81(74)</td>
<td>3(2.5)</td>
<td>26(23.5)</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision to rent / buy land</th>
<th>Husband</th>
<th>Wife</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>142(82)</td>
<td>5(3)</td>
<td>26(15)</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision to borrow money</th>
<th>Husband</th>
<th>Wife</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>154(84)</td>
<td>6(3)</td>
<td>23(13)</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision on sending child to school</th>
<th>Husband</th>
<th>Wife</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>146(86)</td>
<td>4(2)</td>
<td>20(12)</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision on taking sick child to hospital</th>
<th>Husband</th>
<th>Wife</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>151(85)</td>
<td>9(5)</td>
<td>17(10)</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Value of bank accounts by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SC</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100-2000</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2000-5000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5000-10,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Over 10,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No account</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|  | SC | OBC | Other | Total |
|  |    |     |       |       |
|  | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F |
|  | 139 | 139 | 211 | 211 | 43 | 43 | 393 | 393 |